

# The Gathas and Translation, Explanation, Interpretation, and Imagination

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## A Promise

The late Dr. Maneck Pithawalla, Principal of B. V. S. Parsi High School, Karachi (Pakistan) taught me Avesta and Pahlavi from 1938 to 1941, and then introduced me to the celebrated Dasturji Dr. Maneckji N. Dhalla. The first day I faced Dasturji's divine face, he affectionately advised me, more or less, in these words: "When you think you have learned enough of the Avestan language, do not start by translating the Gathas first. They are the guide. One wrong interpretation would be enough to mislead the people on that point. Engage yourself with other parts of the Avesta. Wait for five years, master the language, and then embark on translating the Gathas." I made a promise, a promise that made me turn to the desired translation full thirty-five years later.

From 1938, when my esteemed friend Eruch P. Bulsara, later the Principal of the Bulsara Commercial Institute, Karachi gave me my first copy of the Gathas, translated into Sanskrit, English, and Gujarati by the late Jotindra Mohan Chatterji, to this day, I have read renderings of the Gathas in Pahlavi, Sanskrit (both the older and the recent ones by Chatterji and Khabardar despite my elementary knowledge of Sanskrit), English, Persian, and Gujarati. My French and German are too rudimentary to be of any subtle comprehension but translation of some French and German renderings of the Gathas into English have been of great help. A Turkish rendition by the late Prof. Tarlan of the Persian translation of Pourdâvoud was only pleasing to see. I could not enjoy reading it because I do not know Turkish.

All these and my own studies and subsequent knowledge of the Avestan, Pahlavi, Persian (prose, open verse and poetry), and several living Indo-Iranian languages as well as the Indo-Iranian literature and lore and my experiences in anthropological fields and acquaintance with archeological works encouraged me to render the Gathas and other texts in the Gathic dialect in Persian in 1981 under the title "*Stot Yasn, dêrâyê Gâthâ, sorûdhâyê pâk-e zartosht-e espantamân va haft-hât va dîgar goftehâyê yârân be pârsi-ye ravân.*" It has had several informal editions in the past eleven years and now a formal second edition printed in Los Angeles this year. Its English edition was published in 1989.

## Confusion

The Gathas were composed by one person, Zarathushtra Spitama. They have been translated by many—Zoroastrian and non-Zoroastrian priests, philologists, professors, litterateurs, "translators", adventurers, and sheer admirers. The resulting translations are so diverse that one has to imagine as many Zarathushtras as there are translators of his songs. The translations range from verbatim renderings through moderate explanations and odd interpretations to queer imaginations. A few are not, in fact, translations but paraphrases of other renditions. Going through various translations and the Zoroastrian lore has made me realize the truth in the advice of Dasturji. I fully see what translation, explanation, interpretation, and imagination by persons of diverse backgrounds, schools, and interests, each working for his or herself, can do.

There is but one sure outcome of these diversities. These translations have confused the small yet highly literate Zoroastrian community. That is why I suggested at the 1964 World Zoroastrian Congress and read a paper at the 1976 Congress—both held in Bombay, India—advocating that a team of Avesta and Indo-Iranian scholars, Zoroastrians and friends, cooperate to render, what we may term, a standard version of the Gathas. Then I wrote this paper, now revised to suit the occasion, for the 8th North American Zoroastrian Congress held in Montreal, Canada, in 1987. I could not attend the congress because of my travel difficulty. So, the essay was published in the California Zoroastrian Center's bulletin, *The Zoroastrian*, No. 6-5, October-November 1987.

I have been all along advocating my point. So far, in spite of all the nodding approvals and a very affectionate answer from a colleague in Iran who rushed his translation before we could sit together and discuss our plan to present it jointly, no one has come forward to even give it a serious thought. The recent move in North America by three physicians to publish a "master" translation in pure Persian is a welcome move. It was initiated by the late Dr. Rostam Sarfeh of the Rostam Guiv Trust fame. It is supported by many Iranian admirers of the Gathas and has a moderate fund for the project. But since none of the sponsors knows Avesta and the implications of translation, it is, in my opinion, more of an emotional movement than a scholarly undertaking. Nevertheless, it is encouraging.

So far, every translator (now with the exception of Prof. Helmut Humbach and Dr. Pallan Ichaporia who have come out with a joint rendering) has done it alone, some with the knowledge that such a move would grant them the full freedom to interpret "a very difficult and evasive text in a very archaic language." A few translators have come out with the suggestion that this was purposely done by Zarathushtra, as if he did not really want his message to get across.

### **Defining the title**

With the above as a prologue, I am sure the scholars present here fully realize what I mean by the title: *The Gathas and Translation, Explanation, Interpretation, and Imagination*. But, for the sake of those among the audience who may not fully understand, please bear with me and let us see what the words in the title mean. Webster's Dictionary defines them: Translate is to turn into one's own or another language. Translation is an art that involves the re-creation of a work in another language for readers with a different background. Explain is to clarify or make acceptable to the understanding some thing that it finds mysterious, causeless, or inconsistent. Explanation consists in successfully comparing new phenomena with older and familiar ones. Interpret is to understand and appreciate in the light of individual belief, judgment, interest, or circumstances. Interpretation is an explanation of what is not immediately plain or explicit, or unmistakable. Imagine may imply the process of free mental visualization or pictorialization that is often vivid, relatively unguided, and unchecked by rationality. It is to form an idea, to create a mental image, to fabricate. Imagination is an act or process of forming a conscious idea or mental image of something never before wholly perceived in reality by the imaginer.

### **Many motives**

The background, school, and interests of a translator play a part, sometimes insignificant, sometimes substantive, in his or her rendering. One sees Zarathushtra in these perspectives and the result of the rendering has glimpses and glimmers of them. The backgrounds, schools, and

interests of translators are wide and diverse—Vedic Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hellenism, Westernism, Iranianism, Mysticism, nationalism, patriotism, prejudice, bigotry, anthropology, archeology, mythology, philosophy, fun, fame, challenge, hobby, money, admiration, and love may be counted as some of the motives.

Judaic, Christian and Muslim thoughts and interests have lime-lighted, in their own terminology, God, lord, archangels, angels, spirits, Satan, prophet, savior, shepherd, sheep, flock, fold, holy, merit, sin, reward, punishment, purgatory, resurrection, paradise, and hell. Of course, strict Judaic and Muslim monotheism and trinitarian Christian monotheism each have their relative hues, and so does the idea of the “awaited” Savior—Saoshyant. Baha’ism is also interested in the Savior idea, Baha’u’llah being the awaited one. Vedic schools have mostly linked Zarathushtra with the Rig Veda and have either seen in him a “rishi” or even an “atharvan” priest, or have emphasized his role in prayers and sacrifices aimed at invigorating his favorite god. Although racehorses and chariots have not been specifically mentioned, for some the terms connected, directly or farfetched, with chariot racing are of importance. Others have discussed terms for justice and ordeals. Some see him as a busy ritualistic priest and some as a shaman. Men of Hinduism have found divine incarnation, human re-incarnation, and other subtleties of the Hindu religion. Alien religious bigotry and prejudices have belittled him and his songs. Zoroastrian feelings have aggrandized him. The “traditionalists” tend to see the Gathas as a part of elaborate rituals. Mystics have mystified the Gathic teachings and have written about mystic powers in the vibrations produced by Gathic verses when recited aloud. Occult commentators have written pages to “illuminate” a single word of great potency. Poetic persons have been charmed by the Gathic eloquence, a fact that has made some to “explain” the Gathas through the *Masnavi of Jalal al-Din Rumi* and other famous works of Muslim Sufis and Iranian mystics. Patriotic Iranians have lauded Zarathushtra as the only “Prophet of Iran”, and the Gathas as his message for a resurrected greater Iran. Racists monopolize the Gathic teachings for a particular stock of people. Anthropologists see cows and horses and an early Bronze Age animal husbandry in the songs. Mythologists find, with their equations, ancient gods in new garbs in their verses. And lastly, the Gathic dualism has its own charms, charts, and churns in translation, explanation, interpretation, and imagination.

This article is not aimed at commending a rendering and commenting on another, nor a review of the Gatha translations. It is meant to point out what the four words in the title—translation, explanation, interpretation, and imagination—have done—and still do—to the Gathas. It may also serve to show what these words have done and are doing to any literary piece, religious, social, national, or artistic.

While the holy scriptures of other religions have been, or are being, translated mostly by their own devoted scholars; some scriptures, and Zoroastrian books being prominent among them, are dealt with generally by philologists and linguists of either alien faiths or “no faiths”. Many scholars are devoted more to their profession than the piece of literature with which they are working. The hair-splitting methods used by some surgeons of translation simply mar the very beauty and sublimity of the poetical works composed exclusively for guiding people in mind and body, spirit and matter. The result is that some translations look more like postmortem mutilated bodies than pieces of priceless art. They lack the spirit with which a religious scripture is filled. Some of the “postmortem” translations appear as though they are not meant for the faithful but are in fact “counter-translations”, duels, debates or dialogues between various scholars within a small circle, and yet they are published in sufficient number of copies to find their way into

personal and public libraries of Zoroastrians. Mystic expounders, occult interpreters, and imaginative persons stand on the other extreme. They make the reader left dazed to admire and esteem a work beyond his or her mental grasp, and then blindly follow the “master”. And there are moderate, sincere, devoted, concerned, responsible, and scholarly persons who have done their best to present a good translation and explanation. But again, their backgrounds, schools, and interests place disparities between their translations.

The translations can be motivating, convincing, sweet, insipid, incomprehensible, or even misguiding, and if one reads several of them, they are collectively confusing, even confounding. The reason: The archaic language of the Gathas, distances of time and differences of culture between Zarathushtra and the translators, diverse backgrounds of translators, their individual motives, their relations with Zarathushtra, and their limitations.

### **Polarizing Patterns**

There are compelling reasons for referring to the background, school, and interest of a translator. Let me give an example by way of explanation. When I was 14 or 15 years of age, I read an Urdu book authored by the son of the famous Indian Muslim reformer, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. He quoted an anecdote about an oriented British official in India who was supposed to have a good command of both the “vernacular” and Indian lore. The official often heard his servants reciting poetic couplets in their conversation with each other. One day he asked them to teach him a couplet. One of them presented him with one. It runs:

*Ham huay, tum huay, keh mîr huay  
Unkizulfonmensabasîrhuay*

The verbatim translation is: “Be it we, be it you, be it Mir; in her locks, all became prisoners.” The official memorized it. After a week or so, the servants asked him about the couplet. He recited in good Urdu: “*Hum tum aur Khânsâmân Amîr ke hâth bâl ki rassi se bândh kar jel-khâne men dâl detâ hai.*” It means: “I take you and our cook Amir, tie your hands with hair ropes and throw you in prison.” Evidently, he had forgotten the couplet and interpreted it as he had understood it. He left the servants stunned!

To comprehend the couplet, one has to know that in Persian, Urdu and allied languages, the heart of the lover gets entangled in the curly hair of the beloved. This means falling in love. Mir, the proper name used in the poem, is the name of the poet who composed it and not a third person, certainly not the cook who worked for the British official and whose name happened to be Amir, not Mir. The couplet is not in the usual prose syntax. This makes the word-to-word rendering depart further from its own syntax. The words “we and you” denote “all” but the poet. A deeper study would require one to know the poet and his age to determine to whom the “*zulf*”, or the curls, belong and who the beloved is, a girl, a boy, God, or the Prophet. One should read not only the poem that contains the couplet but the entire collection, the *divân*. Above all, one should have a fair knowledge of the relevant culture. Then what appear as inconsistencies in a poem with each couplet seemingly saying something new, would appear consistent, relevant and revealing a profound message. And now let us render the couplet into English so that we comprehend and enjoy it. It reads: “She is so beautiful that all, including Poet Mir, who see her, fall in love with her.”

With the above as a rudimentary example and many more in mind, let us look at one instance from the Gathas. Scholars differ as to who composed Ahuna Vairya (also known as the Ahunavar or Yatha Ahu) Zarathushtra or some other person. Nevertheless, it was and is considered the most important stanza in the Gathic texts. Of the five metrical parts of the Gathas, the first and longest gets its name Ahunavaiti from this stanza, and this is enough to express its importance. Yet most scholars have excluded it from their translations. Some have written separate essays to link it with the Gathas, particularly Song 2 (Yasna 29).

The Ahunavar has as many as four dozen renditions—enough to confuse the clearest mind. We will look at two of them. The Ahunavar has, more or less, five keywords: *ahu*, *ratu*, *vairyô*, *vâstâr*, and *drigû*. One translator takes the five words respectively to mean “sovereign lord, spiritual leader, all-powerful, shepherd and meek.” As a result, the translation makes the temporal lord (of the ruling class) and the spiritual leader (of the priestly class) all-powerful in their sphere of actions. Furthermore, God blesses the person who becomes a shepherd to lead the meek in spirit and matter. Another translator comes to the conclusion that *ahu* means “a lord who removes evils”, *ratu* is a “righteous leader”, *vairyô* means “worthy of being chosen”, *vâstâr* is “rehabilitator”, and *drigû* stands for the “oppressed”. To this translator the Ahunavar formula is the cornerstone of the mental and physical, and spiritual and material democracy in the Zarathushtrian Doctrine. He sees that even Zarathushtra, the divine founder of the religion, is to be chosen and elected as the spiritual and material leader on the basis of his qualifications as a righteous person in order to establish a divine dominion in which wisdom rules to rehabilitate every person whom injustice has oppressed and uprooted. To him Zarathushtra is not a God-sent or God-imposed prophet but one who, in his search for Truth, realized God, comprehended the divine message, and set out to spread it to others.

Here we have two schools of thought. One translation finds a totalitarian socio-religious order, a theocracy in which the poor, led by their all-powerful leaders, are informed that they would enjoy charitable institutions to survive. The other stands for an ideal democracy in mind and matter and a secure and just life for all. They present two opposite interpretations of a single stanza. One explanation may please the powerful rulers, religious leaders, and the charitable rich. The other may appeal to modern minds. But then which is the correct rendering? Did Zarathushtra advocate a physical theocracy or a spiritual democracy? Other translations take us to judge, judgment, protector, shepherd, shelter, pasture, the dervish, and more.

As a second example, the well-known Gathic term *gav*, from the second song of the Gathas also speaks about *ahu* and *ratu* and is linked to the Ahunavar. Literally the word means “cow” or “bull”. The Gathas speak about the plight of *gav* and the complaint made by its soul—*urvan*. For those searching for cows and bulls, the message is clear. Zarathushtra rose to protect the dumb, poor, and useful animal from the cruelties wrought by sacrificing priests and epicurean princes. In fact, the whole message boils down to introducing a reform in cattle breeding. Zarathushtra wanted his people to care for cattle. The paradox with some of the cattle-theory translators is that they themselves belong to a religion which has God and kings as shepherds or speaks about a Shepherd Messiah, his juniors as pastors, their followers as sheep, and their community as a human flock! However, in their own case, the words are not to be taken literally but as subtle allegories. Others, scrutinizing the contexts, find it much a poetic allegory as the divine Cattleman takes his spiritual cattle to celestial pastures.

## Rewarding search

If not cow and bull, then what does the word *gav* mean? Some are content with the secondary meaning in the Vedas. There, among other things, it means “the Earth”. These scholars, therefore, praise Zarathushtra for his guidance in leading a good life on this good earth. For others the earth is too small. They enlarge it to include the entire creation, the universe. One says that it represents mankind. Another states that it is an allegorical figure for “the good vision—a view of the world governed by truth and good thinking”. The mystics compare it with the Vedantic, Babylonian, and Mithraic *purusha* and bull sacrifices to create the world. While the Pahlavi rendering also speaks about cattle in general, the Bundahishn, the imaginative Pahlavi book of “genesis” of the 10th century C.E. has all the imagination one needs to create, out of the second and thirds songs (Yasna 29 & 30), a universe in which Ahriman, the Evil Spirit, is on the offensive and Ahurmazd, the good spirit, is defending the very territory he created for himself. It links the story to the Primal Bull of the myth of Kayomars, (the legendary Gaya Marethan of the Avesta), both of whom were killed by Ahriman, only to find to his surprise that the double murder gave birth to the teeming world. *Geush urvan* laments in the Gathas, but in the Bundahishn, it shouts as loud as one thousand men bawling together! Then we have the scholars of synchronism who would place the Gathas and Bundahishn—separated by 2,800 years—together to prove their theories of his (Zarathushtra) adherence to the primitive Aryan myth, legends, and traditions. These are but a few examples of how the word *gav* is translated, explained, interpreted, and imagined from a docile animal on a farm to the cosmic bull of creation, or as a metaphor for mankind, the earth or the universe.

To those who take it to be allegorical, I put this question. How many of them have sought an explanation from the Avesta first and then have let their interpretations and imaginations work wonders? The second song, Yasna 29, is a drama, perhaps the oldest drama in poetry and by the author-player in world literature. It explains the Ahunavar and so do the following five songs—Yasna 30 to 34. It says that Zarathushtra is accepted by *gav* as its *ahu* and *ratu*. The Avesta, in its prose form, substitutes *gaêthâ* for *gav* and states that Ahura Mazda is *ahu* and *ratu* of the “mental existence”, and Zarathushtra is *ahu* and *ratu* of the *gaêthâic* existence. (Vispered 2. 4, see also Yasht 13.94 and Yasht 8.1 & 44). The aforesaid deliberately short treatise should supply us with its true meaning—the physical existence of living beings in which we, human beings, live. Further Gathic contexts would give *gav* a wider sense of the living world and *gaêthâ* a narrower circle, the creatures, particularly human beings. It is in this later sense that the Tir Yasht replaces *gaêthâ* with *nar*, men, and says that Zarathushtra is the *ratu* of men. (Yt 8.44). This shows a shrinking domain of the term *gav*. The Avestan term *gêush-pancho*, “five (categories) of *gav*” is explained as aquatic, subterranean, aerial, roaming, and grazing animals (Vispered 1.1, 2.1, Yasht 10.38). Furthermore, we have Yasna 19, ignored by many as incomprehensible, to provide us with certain clues to a better rendering of the Ahunavar and consequently Song 2.

One may cite further instances of translation, explanation, interpretation, and imagination about dualism, free will, freedom of choice, conversion, *mânthra*, *feresho-kereti*, *chinvato-peretu*, heaven, hell, and social virtues and vices. They are all confusing.

## Damaging and harmful

Such confusing renderings of the Holy Scriptures of other religions go unnoticed, just because of the sheer numbers of their followers. These renderings are read only by a handful of professors and their students of comparative religion and leave millions completely unconcerned and ignorant about them. This is not the case with the Zoroastrian community. The community and its friends total, more or less, in the lower six digits. All of them are literate and educated, and fairly interested in knowing their religion. The relative number of the scholars of Zoroastrianism, compared to the scholars of other religions, is significantly quite large. And these scholars of diverse backgrounds, schools, and interests are in close contact with Zoroastrians. The impact is obvious, rather damaging for an educated, concerned, and possibly endangered community.

Let us imagine, what would happen to Christianity if there were as many as 30,000 scholars with their diverse interpretations of Trinity, virginity, nativity, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, return, and other fundamentals as given in the New testament and other Christian writings, who enjoy an easy access to 50 percent of the influential members of the Christian church for almost a century and that too against a dwindling number of the clergy? Would it be able to survive? The same would hold true about other major religions of the world. It is, therefore, gratifying to note that in spite of all diversities, renderings of the Gathas, with the exception of a very few, project the Good Religion of Zarathushtra, pastoral or principled, as a highly ethical religion.

The Good Religion of Zarathushtra has withstood the impact well. It does not matter whether a translation has been done by a Christian priest, a patriot Iranian, a devout Zoroastrian, an occultistic interpreter, an atheist scholar, a Sanskrit expert, a philologist of Indo-Iranian languages, or a simple admirer of Zarathushtra; the main features are the same lofty teachings for knowing the Wise Lord and promoting the world in spirit and matter. No translation, even done with the express purpose of outdating or outcasting the Gathas, has ever succeeded in suppressing or perverting the sublime theme of the Wise God and the divine man. Nevertheless, the confusion discourages many a faithful from turning to the Gathas as the source of inspiration. It makes many content with the daily prayers, understood or not, outside the pale of the Gathas. It also helps the growing indifference to the religion among some, particularly the youth, in alien environments. It is harmful, and harmful situations require resolution.

The examples given to shed some light on the term *gav* are, in my opinion, and experience, a sounder method of explaining many other Gathic terms—*Daênâ*, *varana*, *spentâ*, *mainyu*, *manah*, *aka*, *angra*, *âramaiti*, *chinvato-peretu*, *vahishta ahu*, *achishta ahu*, *parâhu*, *garo demâna*, *ahu*, *ratu*, *vâstâr*, *vâstra*, *vâstrya*, *drigu*, and many more. It will save us from myth, mysticism, occultism, shamanism, farm economics, riddling rituals, and surface reformation. One must take pains to search for the meaning from the Gathas first, then other parts of the extant Avesta, then turn to Sanskrit instances, Pahlavi renderings, Iranian studies, the rich literature in Persian, particularly the poetic tradition, the geographical position of the Iranian plateau, and the people who live on this plateau in almost the same conditions as did those during Zarathushtrian times as well as Indo-European linguistics.

### **Collective efforts**

Though the Gathas are in a dead language, the Pahlavi and Sanskrit renderings of the past, and modern studies of philology have paved the way for a still better understanding of their

message. All this cannot be undertaken and done by a single scholar, however competent he or she may be. We need scholars of Avesta, Old Persian, Sanskrit, Middle Persian languages, living Iranian languages and dialects, and Indo-Aryan languages. Persian poetry, rich in figures of speech and varied in syntax, has its *do-beitis*, *rubâis*, and *ghazals* (quatrains and lyrics). They would make it easier to understand how personification of certain objects or use of plural instead of singular and third person singular or plural for first person singular are poetic ways to emphasize and highlight those objects. Persian hemistiches and stiches will lead to a better understanding of Gathic lines. Persian poetry will show how a stanza is always like a pearl with its independent value, but when strung in a cord along with other pearls, it becomes a part of a greater value, and if a number of cords are joined in a necklace, all of them, retaining their independent value, become an integrated part of a precious ornament.

The Gathic lines, each a partial sense, make complete sense in a stanza with a message of its own. Stanzas join in to compose a song on a specific subject. Several songs, making a Gatha, deliver a more complete message. Finally, seventeen songs in five Gathas, a complete necklace, a coherent text, give us the master message of Zarathushtra.

We need scholars who have studied books in Arabic and Persian written by Iranians of the early Islamic period. Commentaries of the Quran in Arabic and Persian and its renditions in pure Persian of the 10th century CE are fully patterned on the Pahlavi translation and commentaries of the Avesta. They would throw more light on how to decipher the Pahlavi rendering better. Both are word-to-word translations. The Pahlavi rendition of the Gathas, because of its artificial syntax, is difficult to grasp, and the same holds true about earlier Quranic renditions. Iranian scholars, well versed in this, could prove a great help.

We direly need, in addition to “room-scholars”, who are confined to their respective study-rooms, libraries, universities and have their limitations; men and women who have worked and are working in fields of Persian and other Iranian literature, anthropology and archeology. Among the best-qualified persons in this group are native Iranians, many of whom are now residing in Western countries. Most, if not all, of them admire Zarathushtra and are proud of their ancient Iranian heritage. In Iran, ancient Iranian studies are highly commendable. Iran still has the largest number of scholars and students in this field, and most of them would only be glad to be of any service.

The collective translation of the Gathas does not mean a totally new beginning. The existing translations, no matter done by one lauded into publicity or one ignored into neglect, are the result of the efforts of a chain of scholars. They do help to illuminate many points. They would serve as the basis. The result of a joint venture will provide the community with hitherto the best rendering it has had. As an approved rendering, it will greatly help the helplessly confused to clear their mind.

To us Zarathushtrians, the Gathas are the Guide to a sublime, progressive, and productive life on this earth and beyond. They are thought-provokers and mind-stimulators. They are the Divine Message supreme. They cannot be in a puzzling language or a “mystifying” mysticism. They are not a misguiding map to confuse treasure hunters. They are a message for humanity, conveyed by a human, Zarathushtra Spitama. This message has to be straight and clear. The Gathas deserve the best and clearest rendition, one as authentic as it can be—a standard or approved edition. The Gathas of Zarathushtra are divinely inspired to inspire and convert “all the living”. As a living message, they must be rendered into living languages to achieve that objective.



It is neither too late nor too early to undertake the task. The Bible was translated, for example into English in 16th century CE. Although the Quran is in a living language, the Islamic world is awaiting an authorized or even an approved rendition in a non-Arabic language. Baha'ism, comparatively an infant religion in age, has come up with the authorized translation of its most sacred scripture Kitab-i-Aqdas, "the Charter of the future world civilization", in 1993, full one hundred years after the death of its founder Baha'ullah, the author of the "Holiest Book". The English rendition, and not the original Arabic, is to form the basis of turning it into other languages.

Good, standard, authorized or approved translations of other sacred scriptures, particularly the Bible, are results of teamwork by the expert and the devout. I repeat, the Gathas deserve to be rendered in a standard version by a collective effort of outstanding scholars, scholars who are sincerely devoted to Zarathushtra and his sublime songs. Scholars who are not individualists or self-centered. Sincerity, cooperation, reason, and conviction are needed to achieve the desired rendition. Even the works of those who make a shepherd or a shaman of him may prove helpful.

This does not mean that critical studies of the Gathas be given up. Far from it. Scholars should be encouraged to continue their research to improve future editions of their own works and/or the standard translation. However, I would not recommend their works to enjoy a wide circulation among the faithful. They would serve the cause better if they were fairly confined, just as the critical studies of other religious scriptures are, within a circle as dialogues between the relevant scholars, their students and admirers.

I, therefore, propose to this unique gathering of scholars, the first Gatha Colloquium of its kind ever held in history, to lay the foundation of rendering the songs by a collective effort. I propose that a Gatha Translation Committee be formed under the auspices of the World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO), first to explore the feasibility of such a project and then find means to execute it. No doubt, it is a great task, and a difficult one too. The project warrants a good consideration by the WZO or whatever organization which undertakes the project, to see what to do, how to proceed, whom to consult, and whom to invite to collective work for it. It would need time, perhaps one to two years to prepare the plan and to invite qualified scholars, not only those who are, to quote Prof. Ilya Geshevitch, "Gathologists", but all those who can help us understand the divine songs better.

If approved and established, I offer my humble services on voluntary and honorary basis to do my utmost in humata, hûkhta and huvarshta to serve the noble cause.

That version, if earnestly undertaken and completed by the cooperation of competent scholars and institutions—Zoroastrian and friends—will yield a more accurate translation with a better explanation, greatly reduce the possibility of a wrong interpretation, and eliminate imagination altogether. It will definitely play a great part in saving, shaping, and spreading Daênâ Vañguhi, the religion of Good Conscience and vision. It will surely restore it to its pristine purity and dynamic domain.

It has been my recurring dream since I had, in my early Avestan days, the sad discovery of diversities in Gatha renditions. It is the goal of the Zarathushtrian Assembly, a religious organization dedicated to spreading the universal message, of which I am a founding member. May it become the goal of all those who want to "hear to the best..., ponder with a bright mind,

and choose, each man and woman, for his or herself...” the Divine Doctrine of Zarathushtra. May my dream come true. *Atha jamyât yatha âfrinâmi!*<sup>1</sup>

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The above paper was read at the Gatha Colloquium, sponsored by the World Zoroastrian Organization, held in London from 5th, 6th & 7th November 1993. It was published in SPENTA, bulletin of the Zarathushtrian Assembly, in its issue Vol. 4. No. , April/May, 1994. It is reproduced here, devoid of its diacritics, as a welcoming response to Mr. Albert Bailey for his “Thoughts on Translation of Basic Gathic Terminology.”

Ali A. Jafarey  
February 6, 1996

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<sup>1</sup> \*As it may come, so do I wish! - Caleb Goodfellow