

Asho Zarathushtra The Foremost Advocate of Definite Democracy

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This is how ‘democracy’ is defined by Merriam Webster’s Dictionary: “[MF *democratie*, fr. LL *democratia*, fr. Gk *dēmokratia*, fr. *dēmos* (people) + *-kratia* -cracy (rule)] (1576) a: government by the people; *esp*: rule of the majority b: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.”

The history of democracy, as presented by Western scholars, only goes back to the people of Greek cities of the pre-Christian era, 508 BCE. This is just a part of the story; the full truth is that regional elected councils are well documented in Indo-European societies, particularly the Indo-Iranian, as well as other peoples in greater antiquity. A point to note about the Greek and later Roman city democracies is that “ancient democracies did not presuppose equality of all individuals; the majority of the populace, notably slaves and women, had no political rights. Athens, the greatest of the city democracies, limited the franchise to native-born citizens.”¹ Nothing surprising! Women have been granted the right to vote and hold government office in most of the democracies only in the first half of the 20th century.

What did the Guiding Gathas of Asho Zarathushtra say 3700+ years ago? The very first song begins with *Yatha Ahu*, the ‘Principle of Choice’. In order to bring peace, prosperity, stability, progress and happiness to the living world, people are to elect only the competent persons who are able to free the world from mental and physical wrongs, and lead it to truth, precision, progress, wholeness, and immortality.

Song 16 (Yasna 51), the second to last song of the Gathas, is particularly dedicated to *Vohû Khshathra Vairyâ*, literally the ‘Good Domain Worthy-of-Choice’. It elaborates that a good government must be an elected one. It is then the best gain one can have. To serve an elected government means to serve it best with devotion based on righteous deeds. It is for such a dominion, a world order, that Asho Zarathushtra strove to enact for us, for mankind. He founded the foremost “definite” democracy—mental and physical, spiritual and material.

Contrary to a pyramidal structure which organizes society into professions/casts, with a superior singular ruling top and a massive inferior bottom of serfs and slaves, which can be seen in the history of many doctrines, the Gathas present a profound doctrine supposing the individual freedom of will and choice for all men and women, equally. The Gathic division of the human society is unique. It begins with the family, living in a house, that multiplies consequentially into settlements, districts, lands, and finally the Earth—all based on good thinking and precise procedure. This makes one realize the true democracy Asho Zarathushtra expounded. The guiding leaders of all these divisions must be elected only on account of their competence and, also, by people with the ‘good mind—*Vohu Manah*’ and in the ‘right—*Asha*’ procedure.

In today’s definition, it would mean that each and every person elected to the office must be fully qualified for the office he/she is elected to. It would, in a simpler term, mean competent persons leading the house, settlement, district, land and the globe. On the governmental level, it would mean that all the candidates for the offices of presidency, home affairs, foreign relations, commerce, council, cabinet and all others must prove their competence, quality, and experience

¹ Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, Vol.8, “Democracy.”

in order to be elected to their particular positions. Every position would be filled by a person elected due to his or her competence. On the global level, there would be a “United Nations” organization that would lead the free, friendly, peaceful, prosperous, healthy, happy, and lovingly united peoples of the globe.

A close look at all the democracies in the world would show that mankind has still to work wisely in order to reach the Gathic principle of “*Vohu Khshathra Vairya*.”

To comprehend how this may be done, we should contemplate the *Yathâ Ahû* prayer:

“Both the lord and the leader are to be chosen
because of their righteousness.
These two appointments are made with Good Mind
so that the acts of life are done for the Wise One,
and the dominion of the Lord is well established,
in which the chosen person becomes the rehabilitator of the oppressed.”

The *Ahuna Vairya*, or, as commonly called by the two words in the beginning, the *Yatha Ahu*, is the Principle of Choice; it is the Zoroastrian master formula for a spiritual and material democratic system in which one is free to choose a person as his or her lord (*ahu*—literally ‘the Being’) and leader (*ratu*—literally ‘proper guide’). A ‘lord’, as defined in the Gathas, is a person who is able to free the world from mental and physical wrongs, and a ‘leader’ is a person who can lead the world to truth, precision, progress, wholeness, and immortality. In other words, one is the remover of ills and evils in the living world, particularly human society, and the other is the promoter and the developer of the now clean and free-from-evil world. It may be noted that the term ‘lord’ used here to denote *ahu* does not convey the usual English meaning of one who holds a position of arbitrary authority but “the being” who is democratically chosen to a position of trust because of his or her proven righteous record.

The Gathic term *ratu* is derived from *eret-*, ‘to do right, to act properly, to go straight, to reach successfully’. It is a righteous **leader** who guides people, with his/her constructive plans and programs, to peace, prosperity, happiness, and bliss. The term is used eight times in the Gathas. These instances describe the position and the functions of a *ratu* as understood by Asho Zarathushtra. “The leader of the living world ... offer(s) civilization, nourishment, and strength,” and “acts with righteousness.”² “According to the Primal Principles of Life, the leader, with his actions, does full justice to the wrongful and to the righteous, as well as to the person whose falsity is combined with his probity.”³ He guides “all to live in accordance with righteousness.”⁴ A leader is a life-healer who inspires one “through good mind” and protects [him or her] with[in] the divine dominion.”⁵ A “true leader of the lawful ... is a humble intellectual” and as a “settler, strengthens the world with righteousness by his proper actions.”⁶ He is chosen by a world groaning under “fury, rapine, outrage, and aggression” to render it rehabilitated and led to “true civilization.”⁷ He is to be chosen and elected on his rightful record and competence only.⁸

² Song 2.2, 6 (Yasna 29.2, 6)

³ Song 6.1 (Yasna 33.1)

⁴ Song 4.2 (Yasna 31.2)

⁵ Song 9.16 (Yasna 44.16)

⁶ Song 16.5 (Yasna 51.5)

⁷ The entirety of Song 2 (Yasna 29)

⁸ *Yathâ Ahû* (i.e. Yasna 27.13)

To sum up the Gathic concept of a leader (*ratu*), he or she, as an *elected* person, is a humble, inspiring, qualified, and competent intellectual who justly leads the righteousness and the wrongful, as well as those in-between, to advance the living world toward greater peace and prosperity and, ultimately, toward wholeness and immortality.

Asho Zarathushtra was the first to come to mankind “as the leader of the two [righteous and wrongful] parties so that ... all live in accordance with righteousness.”⁹ And, as stated in *Yathâ Ahû*, he is the chosen lord (*ahu*), leader (*ratu*), and rehabilitator (*vâstar*) of the living world—**all three in one person, which makes Asho Zarathushtra a unique personality.**

In a eulogy honoring Asho Zarathushtra, found in the Farvardin Yasht, it is poetically said that the very Primal Principles of Life he expounded in his songs wished him to be lord and leader.¹⁰ Other parts of the Avesta acknowledge Asho Zarathushtra as the “first and foremost lord and leader of the material world”—particularly human beings—because it was he who conveyed “the entire thought-provoking message, the righteous teaching” to humanity.¹¹ In fact, “Asho Zarathushtra is the lord and leader” of all the people whom “Ahura Mazda knows better for their veneration done in accordance with righteousness.”¹² The Later Avesta forgets that the leader is to be “chosen” by the people and considers his leadership as an appointment by God.¹³ It is a slight deviation from the Gathic concept of free will and choice.

After Asho Zarathushtra, Avestan and Pahlavi records do not state that any other person was chosen as the lord (*ahu*). Perhaps, with the world well on its path of righteousness and the causes of evil and disorder expounded, there was no need to have one. As a chosen **Ahu**, Asho Zarathushtra had shown the way to eliminating the evil.

However, the Avesta shows that the Gathic tradition of choosing the leader was kept alive for some time and that, for practical reasons, the office was given five grades: The *ratu* of the house, *ratu* of the settlement, *ratu* of the district, *ratu* of the country and *ratu* of the world. It, thus, covered all the basic units of the Zoroastrian assembly. The *ratu* was the most competent and learned of the respective unit. The post warranted a love for learning, practicing and teaching knowledge at all levels of the society.¹⁴

The Pahlavi rendering simply uses *rad*, the Middle Persian form of the term, and the contexts in which it has been used, shows it means “leader, chief.” In its description, it goes further than the Avesta in assigning “leadership” of **man, woman**, animals, plants and certain geological subjects. The rich and vast Persian literature, especially the Shahnameh of Ferdowsi, has *rad* (plural *radân*) used as frequently as necessary, sometimes as *radân va mobedân* and *rad va bekhrad*, to mean the intellectual and religious leaders of Iranians or Zoroastrians. The Shahnameh alone uses the word *rad* for, more or less, 115 times. In modern Persian it means ‘intellectual, wise, knowledgeable, brave, courageous, chief, leader’.

According to *Yathâ Ahû* and other parts of the Gathas, the only criterion for the choice of such a person is his or her righteous record of competent service. The choice for the appointments is based on good mind, sound judgment, and discretion. Such a righteous selection leads the people to work for God alone—an act that transforms the world into a divine dominion, chosen and established by the people themselves. It is, in fact, a spiritual and material dominion

⁹ Song 4.5 (Yasna 31.5)

¹⁰ Yasht 13.92

¹¹ Yasht 13.41, 90-92, 152; Yasna 70.1; Vispered 2.4, 11.21, 16.3

¹² Vispered 16.3

¹³ Yasht 5.89, 8.44

¹⁴ Yasna 19 (verse 18, also known as Bag Nask 1.18, where *ratu* should not be translated as ‘chief’ – CG)

of the people, by the people, for the people, yet selflessly and devotedly established in the name of God, the Sovereign. It is the order in which no one is wrongly oppressed. In it, the chosen lord and leader would ensure that all those who have been wrongfully oppressed and had their rights taken away are fully rehabilitated. The divine dominion has no oppression and therefore, no one would be oppressed or impoverished.

The short *Yathâ Ahû* stanza of 20 words and two particles encapsulates the spirit of the entire Gathas, the sublime songs of Asho Zarathushtra. It is a unique formula for a divinely inspired, sound democracy which ensures mental and physical peace and prosperity for all the living beings, including mankind.

That is the reason the Avesta, the collection of writings which follows and sometimes explains the Gathas, lays the highest emphasis on the Ahuna Vairya formula. According to the Avesta, the *Yathâ Ahû* concerns the principles which lead to salvation—“the best life, the best righteousness, the best enlightenment... Should the material world understand it, memorize it, Ahuna Vairya would lead to immortality...”¹⁵

As a conclusion, let us follow Asho Zarathushtra in praying for it, in the concluding stanza, *Airyema Ishya* (Yasna 54.1) of his Sublime Songs:

“May the desired Fellowship come
for the support of the men and women of Zarathushtra,
for the support of good mind,
so that the conscience of every person earns
the choice reward, the reward of righteousness,
a wish regarded by the Wise Lord.”

And earnestly work to bring the *Definite Democracy* to the United Nations of our world.

Timeline of Ancient Iranian Democracy:

- **Iranian Arrival on the Iranian Plateau:** Around 1,000 BCE
- **Median Democratic Rule:** 678–550 BCE=128 years
- **Achaemenian Democratic Rule:** 550–330 BC=220 years
- **Greek Democracy:** 508–460 BCE=48 years
- **Iranian Democratic Rule:** 678–330 BCE=348 years
- **Median Democratic Rule preceded Greek Democracy:** by 170 years
- **Achaemenian Democratic Rule preceded Greek Democracy:** by 42 years

¹⁵ Yasna 19, an Avestan commentary on Ahuna Vairya

Dr. Jafarey, was born in Kerman, Iran. He received his schooling up to the University level in Karachi, Pakistan. He received a doctorate in Persian Language and Literature, and has self-studied thirteen living and ancient languages, and also studied linguistics, anthropology, Indo-Iranian literature, history, geology and research methods. In Saudi Arabia, he worked as a translator/anthropologist in the Arabian Research Division of Aramco. In 1991, Dr. Jafarey, with seven other co-founders, established the Zarathushtrian Assembly in Los Angeles