

What is Asha?

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Asha is one of the most important concepts in Zoroastrianism, holding a place of utmost importance for the practical application of the religion as a whole as well as Zarathushtra's teachings. While the concept is well understood among Zoroastrians, it is difficult to translate into a single word in English, with meanings ranging from Truth or Righteousness to Cosmic Order, all of which describe it well. Asha, deriving from the term Arta, literally means 'how things have been fit together or set in place'. It is cognate with Sanskrit Rita which has the same meaning. Most fundamentally, it refers to the wholly good, perfect order which governs existence, precisely determining each and every minute movement of the universe. In this way, it is comparable to our modern idea of 'the laws of physics'; however, Asha goes beyond this, encompassing both the concepts of Truth and righteousness in its totality.

In this way, Asha is literally the 'order of existence' and can be understood as the prime determiner of reality, the source of all goodness and precision in the universe. It operates at every level of existence, from the interactions between molecules and atoms to the movements of stars and galaxies. Moreover, it also determines the emergent principles of more complex systems, such as the human mind or societies. As it is the very order which governs and determines reality, Asha is the source of all truth, knowledge, and goodness that can be found.

It should be noted that in Zoroastrianism, Asha is considered to be wholly good and perfect, the very model of what would be ideal; within it is contained no wrongness, deceit, or mistruths. In fact, it is ultimately the vision of a perfect, ideal reality as foreseen by the Supreme Intelligence which created the universe, Ahura Mazda. Within this vision, Ahura Mazda embedded its very nature, ultimate truth and goodness. As such, Asha is both the very laws which order existence and the blueprint for an ideal reality, both in the abstract and in the concrete, at the scale of the individual and existence as a whole. It is therefore the principle of harmony and precision, the source of everything good, and the epitome of perfection and ideality.

However, while Asha is this ultimate principle which governs reality, it has not been fully, holistically realized throughout existence. Indeed, existence itself is a progressive unfolding or outgrowth of Asha, a continuous act of creation which has not been completed. Because of this, there exists a wrongness and evil which arises from the fact that Asha has not yet been fully realized. This is called Druj 'the deception' or 'the lie', and it exists as a shadowy set of untruths and wrongs which obscures one from the real Truth. However, this deception is only temporary, only having existence as the obscuring or twisting of the perfect nature of reality. Ultimately, Asha will be fully actualized throughout all existence in a process called Frashokereti, leading to the full realization of perfection, truth, and goodness throughout every aspect and level of existence (see Haurvatat).