

Joy, Happiness, Prosperity.

Fear is a powerful tool in religious paradigms that are controlling ~ fear of natural calamities, fear of failure, fear of deprivation, fear of unhappiness, fear of suffering, fear of punishment in this life and the next; even fear of what brings us enjoyment ~ attributing to the notion of 'god', the very human characteristic of being jealous of another's good fortune.

These fear-based religious paradigms are not a part of Zarathushtra's thought. His objective is not control or domination. In his view, happiness, joy, are part of the nature of the Divine, His teachings (His path), and the reward for taking that path ~ ideas that survived in the YAv. texts.

Zarathushtra's conception of the Divine ~ Wisdom ~ is not a 'God' of wrath or vengeance.¹ In the Gathas, *vahišta-* 'most good' (the highest degree of intrinsic goodness) is used for Wisdom, for His qualities (amesha spenta), for the path to the Divine (the path of the amesha spenta) and for the reward for taking that path (the attainment of the amesha spenta).² And we are told that this quality of being 'most-good' *vahišta-* brings happiness.

"...(I wish) for this person the best [*vahišta-* 'most-good'] of all things, that by which a man might place a person of good purpose in happiness: to be understanding all his days... understanding through Thy [*spāništa- mainyu-* 'most-beneficial way of being] Wise One..." Y43.2, Insler 1975.

In the later YAv. *Hormuzd Yasht* (Yt. 1) the author has the Lord Wisdom reciting his names (which reveal His nature) which include,

'... all-happiness I am named; *vīspa.xʷāθra nāma ahmi*
full of happiness I am named; *pouru.xʷāθra nāma ahmi* ...' Yt. 1.14, my translation.³

And this 'all happiness' is also used to describe paradise, in many YAv. texts, which describe 'heaven' as

... *vahištəm ahūm aṣaonqm yazamaide raōcaṅhəm vīspō.xʷāθrəm* ...

'...the most-good existence of the truthful, we worship/celebrate, light-filled, all-happiness.' *Visperad*, Ch. 23, § 1, my translation.⁴

Many religions teach that in order to achieve spiritual growth, we must control, reject, material things which gives us pleasure and therefore are 'sinful', or a distraction. This mind-set has so conditioned us that even some (well intentioned) Zoroastrian priests have expressed similar ideas.

But this mind-set is alien to Zarathushtra's teachings, which require us to search for truth ~ a path of discovery ~ in all aspects of existence, the material and the spiritual. A path which he says brings joy. "Yes, to those (of you) seeking, I shall speak of those things which are to be borne in mind ... which things are to be looked upon in joy throughout your days." Y30.1, Insler 1975.

Zarathushtra's notion of worship is also a happy worship, "...I shall very happily approach ... you as I worship and praise." Y34.6. We worship with thoughts, words and actions that are beneficial, that heal existence, bringing joy to others and to ourselves. And we see the same idea in the YAv. *Visperad*, in which worship is joyful. In certain YAv. texts the concept of *yazamaide* 'we worship' is a worship that is a joyful celebration.⁵ It is easy to understand *yazamaide* 'we worship' when applied to the Divine. But in many other instances, *yazamaide* 'we worship' is also applied to other things that are *aṣavan-* 'having the quality of the true (good) order of existence' ~ an existence that is divine. In such instances, I think *yazamaide* means we celebrate/worship, the divine within other living things. Here are some excerpts from *Visperad* 18.1 ~ 2 which

show that this worship / celebration is done with joy, happiness. The YAv. words are from Geldner 2P p. 26; the translation is mine.

§ 1 *ušta ahurəm mazdqm yazamaide* ∴

'With happiness, we celebrate/worship the Lord, Wisdom;'

ušta aməšē spəntē yazamaide ∴

'With happiness, we celebrate/worship (what is) beneficial-sacred, undying;⁶

ušta narəm ašavanəm yazamaide ∴

'With happiness, we celebrate/worship the truthful man;' ...

§ 2 ... *uštātāityaca vīspəm ašavanəm həntəmca bavan̄təmca būšyāntəmca yazamaide* ∴

'And in a state of happiness we celebrate/worship every truthful living being now existing and (who) will come into being (in the future).'

A YAv. Yasna speaks of,

"... Ahura Mazda ... who sends his joy-creating grace afar ..." Yy1.1, Mills' translation.⁷

And in the YAv. *Hormezd Yasht*,

"... I will come unto thee for help and joy, I, Ahura Mazda ..." Yt. 1.9, Darmesteter translation.⁸

As Dastur Dhalla has pointed out, "... Zarathushtra's joyful outlook on life pervades the Younger Avesta..."⁹

How do his teachings bring joy? In many ways.

They generate a mind-set in which the material world is seen as something to be used for good, and in the process, enjoyed, celebrated. Wisdom (*mazdā-*) does not require that we deprive or chastise ourselves, to gain His approval, but instead, that we enjoy our material existence (without harming others or ourselves), ~ use it to benefit, care for, and bring joy to, all the living.

Does that mean if we act in a good, right, way we will always be happy? Of course not. At one time or another, we all have experienced adverse consequences and unhappiness when we tried to do what was good, right. But generally (in the long run) it brings happiness. Take a family. If family members understand what is true and right, if they care for each other, are friendly, treat each other in good ways, the family will be happier than if they are rude, insulting, cruel, unjust, or deceitful to each other. The same is true for a work place, a community, a nation, the community of nations, our world.

I think that one of the significant (and profound) ideas which Zarathushtra has given us is that true, lasting, happiness is achieved only when we are in sync with the true (good, right) order of existence (*aša-*). We cannot be happy (long term) if we are out of sync with *aša-*, "...happiness has been lost to the deceitful who violate truth [*aša-*]..." Y53.6, Insler 1975.

In Zarathushtra's thought wealth and prosperity are not equated with 'evil'.¹⁰ In a Pazand text, a soul after death is praised because during life he acquired wealth honorably (and was generous to those in need ~ giving them not only essentials but "entertainment").¹¹ In Zarathushtra's thought, the true (good) order of existence, and the good governance (*vohu- xšaθra-*) which implements this order, bring prosperity.

"... truth [*aša-*] which prospers the creatures,..." Y33.11, Insler 1975;

"...the blessed one who shall be eager to prosper the rule of the house or of the district or of the land with truth [*aša-*],..."Y31.16, Insler 1975;

"...the rule of good thinking, through the actions of which the creatures allied with truth [*aša-*] do prosper..." Y43.6, Insler 1975.

Does experience validate Zarathushtra's idea that the true (good) order of existence (*aša-*) brings prosperity? Well, in business, (as in other endeavors) honesty and goodness alone will not bring success. But, in addition to such things as having good products, good management practices, etc., if you want to prosper, you have to deal fairly with your customers or they will not keep coming back. You have to deal fairly with your suppliers if you want them to keep supplying you with quality products. You have to deal fairly with your distributors if you want them to keep distributing your goods effectively. Dishonest business practices may provide short term gains, but in the long run, (if all other things are equal) a business that is run in a dishonest way will not be as successful as a business that is run in a way that is honest, right.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, in the United States and Europe, we have seen undisputed examples of the validity of Zarathushtra's teaching on this issue, in the demise of powerful corporations whose officers and directors acted in dishonest ways, bringing on the collapse of such businesses, and enormous damage and unhappiness to shareholders, employees, customers, and the economy itself,¹² ~ i.e. the very opposite of prosperity and happiness.

Of course, good social order requires that a society protect itself from the wrongful choices of its members. That too is a part of 'good rule' ~ a rule that is not predatory, which in our reality involves our best efforts to govern in accordance with the true (good, right) order of existence ~ using whatever power we have justly, fairly ~ even to enemies! In the *Ashirwad* part of the Zoroastrian wedding ceremony, the priest giving (a lot of!) advice to brides and grooms on how to live their lives according to Zoroastrian teachings, says "...Deal with your enemies according to justice...".¹³ How cool is that?!

Zarathushtra teaches the freedom to choose. Is happiness generated by this teaching? Well, freedom is not a guaranty of happiness. And unthinking obedience may sometimes provide the comforting certainty of a security blanket (which brings short-term happiness). But in the long run, a person who is required to obey without question, is not going to be as happy,¹⁴ as a person who is free to make his own life choices (and learn from them).

Zarathushtra teaches that the more we search for, discover, and choose the true (good) order of existence *aša-*, the more truth-filled (*ašavan-*) we become. And if we make wrong choices, we experience the consequences of such choices and learn from our mistakes. So in the long run, (with mutual, loving help) we grow spiritually, from both our 'good' and 'wrongful' choices.¹⁵ In the Gathas, this process of spiritual growth (of incrementally changing into a state of being that is closer and closer to the true (good) order of existence) brings happiness.

"I who shall serve ... you, Wise Lord, with good thinking, to me are to be granted the attainments of both existences ~ yes of matter as well as of mind ~ those attainments befitting truth [*aša-*] through which one might set Thy supporters in happiness." Y28.2, Insler 1975. Notice, serving the Divine here is serving through good thinking, which brings attainments of truth which bring happiness ~ in both existences.

"Do Thou grant the most happy alliance [*sarēm* 'union']¹⁶ of truth [*aša-*] to Frashaoshtra ... and to me..." Y49.8, Insler 1975.

"Lord, let wisdom [*mazdā-*] come in the company of truth [*aša-*] across the earth! Yes if ye shall be pleased with your [*mąθrān-*],¹⁷ reveal Thyself with visible help, ... through which he might set us in happiness." Y50.5, Insler 1975. In Avestan script there are no capital letters. In the first sentence I think 'wisdom/Wisdom' is

used with double entendre as the concept (the comprehension of truth *aša-*) 'wisdom', and as the concept personified, **Wisdom** - the Divine - the advent of which, **in the company of truth [*aša-*]**, across the earth brings about what the later texts call *frašō.kərəiti-*,¹⁸ which is the healing of existence - when all of existence becomes the true (good) order of existence and all the good qualities inherent in that order of existence - goodness, honesty, integrity, friendship, compassion, generosity, lovingkindness, justice (as in 'being fair') etc. The phrase '**reveal Thyself with visible help**', gives us another double entendre. Elsewhere in the Gathas, **Wisdom helps** with His divine qualities,¹⁹ - which also **reveal** His nature.²⁰ So this verse (Y50.5) tells us that the advent of '**wisdom/Wisdom in the company of truth [*aša-*]**' (and its components, the amesha spenta) across the earth, together with understanding the nature of the Divine (comprising its qualities, later called the amesha spenta), and concrete help (through the amesha spenta) bring happiness.²¹ A small glimpse into the multi-dimensional craftsmanship of Zarathushtra's poetry.

The path of truth is not free of difficulties. Handling difficulties is the way we grow, as individuals and as societies. Unlike fatalistic religious paradigms, Zarathushtra teaches us to be pro-active, to find ways to improve a bad situation. Lies by persons in positions of power and public trust teach us the value of truth. An earthquake teaches us to care for each other, and also to build better 'earthquake proof' buildings, improve early warning detection systems et cetera. Illnesses and injuries motivate us to find cures, invent prosthetic devices for lost limbs, take preventative measures, relieve pain. Examples are endless. The difficulties we experience are Wisdom's 'heavy blessings' - opportunities for growth, material and spiritual, which bring happiness.

True, when we speak in such generalities, it all sounds very trite, and one-dimensional - as generalities usually do. It is only when we see how these generalities apply in our own lives - in the infinite variety of our experiences - that we appreciate how true Zarathushtra's teachings are, and how they do indeed make life happier, and more prosperous. Sometimes in the short run. Always in the long run.

Centuries after Zarathushtra, even after his religion (as originally taught by him) was syncretized with the (competing) pre-existing religion(s) of his culture (which he rejected), his mind-set that religion is a joyful way of living and celebrating life, permeates some of the YAv. texts (with some unfortunate exceptions). We see this joy in the *Tir Yasht*,

"... **Happiness** for me, O Ahura Mazda! **happiness** O waters and plants! **happiness** O Wisdom-worshipping religion! **happiness** is here O lands!" *Tir Yasht*, Yt.8.29, my translation;

"... *ušta.mē ahura mazda ušta āpō urvarāšca ušta daēne māzdayasne ušta ā.bavaṭ daiñhavō* ..." *Tir Yasht*, Yt.8.29, Geldner 2P p. 112.²²

The religion(s) of Zarathushtra's culture which he rejected were fear-based theologies.²³ I think that the popularity and success of his teachings in the centuries immediately following his time period resulted, at least in part, from his rejection of fear as a way for priests to control the lives of kings, warriors, herdsman, and craftsmen - all occupations which require, and value, independence and courage. His teachings celebrate the freedom of each person to think for himself, make his own choices and experience their consequences in a socially responsible way - a way that created material prosperity, and spiritual growth for the people of his time, as indeed they do for all cultures and all time periods.

Finally, one of the most important aspects of Zarathushtra's teachings which brings happiness, is that in his thought there are no rejects. Eventually everyone will make it. Evil is defeated, not by damnation and punishment in hell, but by changing minds/hearts/preferences through the law of consequences and other

life experiences. The process is a long one. It includes experiences that are painful ~ earned and unearned. But with mutual, loving help ~ from the Divine, from each other (and other life forms) ~ we make it through the refiner's fire. Our evil preferences are eliminated by changing them.

In a break from the perceptions of his culture, Zarathushtra's new vision of the qualities that make a being Divine (amesha spenta) are the wholly good true order of existence ~ (*aša- vahišta-*), an order of existence that is kind, loving, compassionate, truthful, friendly; its comprehension good thinking (*vohu- manah-*) reason, intelligence committed to goodness; its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*) the proverbial good thoughts, words, and actions, that make life better; its good rule (*vohu- xšaθra-*) a rule that uses its power to nurture, help, protect, benefit; its complete, attainment (*haurvatāt-*), the wholly beneficial way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*) ~ the essence of the sacred ~ a state of being not bound by mortality (*amərətāt-*).

These qualities are also his path to the Divine, and the reward for taking that path, a state of being which he calls (among other names) the 'healed existence' (*fəraša- ahu-*), the 'most good existence' (*vahišta- ahu-*), the 'house of good thinking', the 'house of song' ~ the joyful bliss of enlightenment, which is Wisdom personified (*mazdā-*).²⁴

In conclusion, Zarathushtra's conception of the Divine is a joyful enlightened Being who teaches a beneficial, way of living, which (in the long run) brings prosperity and happiness in the existences of matter and of mind, and results in the ultimate reward ~ paradise, a joyful state of enlightenment, a state of being that is wholly good (*vahišta-*).

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¹ The evidence that underlies this conclusion is detailed in *Part Three: Is Wisdom a God of Wrath, Enmity?*

² *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*, shows the multi-dimensioned ways in which Zarathushtra uses *vahišta-* 'most-good', the superlative degree of *vohu-* 'good'.

³ Avestan words from Geldner 2P p. 63.

Darmesteter has translated these *xšaθra-* words as 'weal' (Yt. 1.14, SBE 23, p. 28) which means 'well-being, happiness'. *xšaθra-* (in its various inflected forms) appears many times in the Gathas, where Insler translates it as 'happiness' (Y28.2c, Y31.7a, Y33.9b, Y43.2b, Y50.5d, Y53.6c). It has also been translated as 'light', and according to Taraporewala derives from the more ancient 'fire' words *sū-āθra* and *hu-āθra*. Fire is a metaphor for the true (good) order of existence, an enlightened existence in the Gathas and later texts. If Taraporewala is correct, and if we look past the metaphor of 'fire' to what it stands for, then *xšaθra-* would mean the goodness/well-being/happiness (*hu-*) of enlightenment (*āθra*). The multi-dimensioned meanings of the words *xšaθra-* and *aša.xšaθra-* are beautiful, and are discussed in more detail in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.

⁴ The many other YAv. texts which have this description of 'heaven' ~ *ahu- vahišta-* 'the most good existence' ~ are discussed and detailed in *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*.

⁵ The Avestan notion of 'worship' as a celebration is detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*, and a ft. therein.

⁶ The words *amāša-* and *spənta-* are both adjectives which in Avestan can also be used as nouns ~ nouns that are concepts, or activities, or people. The collective term *amāša- spənta-* does not appear in the Gathas, but each of the component qualities that comprise this term ~ qualities of the divine ~ do indeed appear in the Gathas

numerous times, and most often as concepts and activities. I therefore translate the term in this passage of the *Visperad*, as qualities, because I think this passage is close to the thought of the Gathas (as are other golden strands in the *Visperad*).

⁷ SBE 31, p. 196.

⁸ SBE 23, p. 26.

⁹ Dhalla 1963, *History*, p. 196. Then too, we have the traditional words with which the Pahlavi writers ended, or signed off, their manuscripts, the short version of which is,

"Completed in peace, pleasure and joy." E. W. West translation, SBE 5, p. 379, ft. 1.

¹⁰ See *Part One: The Paradox of the Material and the Spiritual*.

¹¹ The Pazand text, *The Book of Mainyo-i-Khard*, §§ 133 ~ 134, E. W. West translation 1871; quoted and discussed in *Part One: Buried Treasure in Zoroastrian Stories*.

¹² Zarathushtra's teachings are brought to life, made more real, when we see their relevance in the light of concrete, contemporary examples. The problem with such examples is that within 10 or 20 years, most people no longer know about them ~ especially the younger generation. Witness the collapse and demise of the multi-billion dollar Enron Corporation in 2001, whose senior officers were convicted of multiple counts of fraud. Young people today have no knowledge of these events. So also the severe economic collapse and world-wide recession in 2008 and following years, brought about in large part by the greedy and dishonest practices of many corporate giants in the financial sector of the economy. Twenty years from now, how many people will remember it as an experience through which they lived? It will be remembered only by economists and historians. One of the reasons why Zarathushtra's teachings are so timeless is that they are not expressed in terms of culture-bound and time-bound facts. But that also makes them less easy to relate to ~ unless we illustrate them with examples from our own times (which in turn makes our teaching of them time-bound and culture-bound!). I hope that future teachers of the religion will omit my (time-bound) examples, and look for examples that are then current, to illustrate Zarathushtra's timeless principles.

¹³ Translation by Shahin Bekhradnia, used with her kind permission.

¹⁴ One has only to read the *Vendidad*, a later text, to appreciate how very unhappy life could be when enslaved by religious mandates which sought to control every aspect of a person's life. See *Part Five: The Vendidad and its Lessons for Today*.

¹⁵ See *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

¹⁶ The word which Insler has translated as "alliance" is *sarēm* which Hintze (and others) translate as 'union'. In this verse, Y49.8, Zarathushtra suggests that to be in union with truth (order of existence) brings the superlative degree of happiness *urvāzišta-*. For those who are interested in the GAv. words, the phrase is *ƒərəšaōštrāi urvāzištəm ašahyā dā sarēm ...* 'Grant Thou [*dā*] the most happy [*urvāzištəm*] union [*sarēm*] of truth [*ašahyā* gen. sg.] to Frashaoshtra [*ƒərəšaōštrāi* dat. sg.]' Y49.8.

Naturally how the words in this Avestan phrase are put together, affects its meaning, and you may wonder, does *urvāzištəm* 'most happy' describe Frashaoshtra's personality or 'the union of truth' *sarēm ašahyā*. Well, the stem *sar-* is a fem. noun (*sarēm* being its acc. sg. form), and *urvāzištəm* 'most happy' is the acc. sg. fem. form of the adj. *urvāzišta-* (Skjaervo 2006). In Avestan an adjective has to match the case, number and gender of the noun it describes.

We therefore know that *urvāzištəm* describes *sarēm* and not *frašaoštrāi* 'to Frashaoshtra' (which is dat. sg. masc.). So here, it is not Frashaoshtra's personality that is 'most happy' (which would require the adj. to be dat. sg. masc. *urvāzištāi*) but the 'union [*sarēm*] of truth [*ašahyā*]...!'

¹⁷ The word *mąθrān-* means one who composes, or recites, or sings, the precepts (*mąθra-* / *mąθrā-*) of the Divine, see *Part One: Manthra, An Introduction*. The word is often translated as 'prophet', but that is an interpretive English choice for *mąθrān-*, which is based on other religious paradigms, and does not fit the Avestan meaning of the word.

¹⁸ The multi-dimensioned meaning (and linguistics) of *frašō.kərāiti-* is quite beautiful and is discussed in *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*.

¹⁹ For how Wisdom helps, see *Part One: Worship & Prayer*, and *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*.

²⁰ See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

²¹ See also Y31.7 where Zarathushtra says that truth and its comprehension, good thinking, are to be joined in happiness, and it is through this way of being ~ truth and good thinking ~ that wisdom/Wisdom grows (how cool is that!). "He who first thought thus, 'They are to be joined with happiness throughout their days', He created truth in accordance with this very intention, by reason of which He has (also) upheld the very best thinking...Through this [*mainyu-* 'way of being'] Wise One [*mazdā-* 'wisdom/Wisdom'], Thou art to grow..." Y31.7, Insler 1975. Some thoughts on how the Divine 'grows' are discussed in *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*; and in *Part Two: A Question of Immanence* and *Did Wisdom Choose Too?*

²² This section of *Tir Yasht*, given in YAv. with my translation and with Humbach's 1991 translation for comparative purposes, is described in more detail under the discussion on *uštā* in *Part Three: The Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu), An Analysis*.

²³ Fear-based theologies are reflected in some of the Yashts dedicated to pre-Zarathushtrian deities, a few examples of which are detailed in *Part One: Truth, Asha*; and *The Nature of the Divine*.

²⁴ See the chapters in *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*; *A Question of Reward and the Path*; *The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*; *The Houses of Paradise and Hell*; and *Molten, Glowing Metal*; and in *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*.