

A Practical Mystic.¹

At the end of the last session, I left you with the following question(s):

If (as Zarathushtra teaches) originally there were two ways of being ~ the more good and the bad (Y30:3), the more beneficial and the harmful (Y45:2), and if (as he says) we are capable of attaining all 7 qualities of the Divine completely, through an evolutionary process that requires making choices, how did the Divine acquire these 7 qualities? Did Wisdom choose too? Was Wisdom a part of this evolutionary process?

Well, we all know that Zarathushtra's main focus is on how we should live our lives, day to day, in practical ways that are truthful, rational, kind, good, generous et cetera.

But there is another aspect of his thought ~ his reason based mysticism (a paradox!) which oddly enough is inseparable from his practical teachings (another paradox). So, let us first shake off centuries of mental conditioning, and look at the evidence with fresh eyes.

For more than 1,000 years, we have been raised with the mind-set, that 'God' is a being who is inherently separate from other living things; who has always been perfect; and who created all that exists. This gives rise to some troubling questions ~ which are not intended as a put-down of any other belief system. These questions have troubled the mind of man for millennia. For example:

If 'God' is an inherently separate being who is all good, did He create evil? If not, where then did evil come from?

On the other hand, can an all good being create 'evil'? So if 'God' created evil, could He be all good? And, more to the point, would the creator of evil be worth worshipping?

The Divine that I see in the Gathas is not a being who is inherently separate from the rest of existence. Does Zarathushtra specifically say so? No, he does not. But, connecting the dots of what he does say, this is the conclusion I have come to.²

However, by the time of the Pahlavi texts, (around the 800s CE and later), the dominant religious paradigm under which Zoroastrians then lived (in which the perception of the Divine as a being inherently separate from other beings), had taken over the mind-set of the Zoroastrians who wrote those texts (with a few noble exceptions).

I will not at this time, go into how ancient Zoroastrians attempted to resolve the resulting troublesome questions ~ including their idea of Cosmic Dualism ~ the reasoning of which is (on the surface) brilliant, but which is nowhere near as logical, as beautiful, as satisfying, as Zarathushtra's ideas in the Gathas.³ In fact, in the Gathas there is no all-evil entity ~ the "Devil" ~ who created the evil in creation, other than interpretations that have been read into its verses.⁴

The "Devil" and his subordinate demons first appear in later Avestan texts in which the Chief Devil is *Angra Mainyu* (in Pahlavi texts *Ahriman*). Both names mean the same thing ~ 'a hate-filled, inimical, harmful, pain-causing (*angra*- an adj.), way of being' (*mainyu*). And the names of subordinate demons (so also shown in Pahlavi texts) are various human vices, as you can see.

The name of the demon <i>Aeshma</i>	means 'anger, fury, rage',
The name of the demon <i>Mitokht</i>	means 'false word',
The name of the demon <i>Arashk</i>	means 'malice',
The name of the demon <i>Aaz</i>	means 'greed',
The name of the demon <i>Frištaar</i>	means 'deceiver',

The name of the demon *Spazhg* means 'slander',
The name of the demon *Araast* means 'untrue' et cetera.

I think the Chief Devil and its demons started out in Avestan texts (so also in certain Pahlavi texts) as a story-telling way of demonstrating that in our selves, a harmful, wrongful, way of being (the Chief Devil) generates all our other vices (the subordinate demons). But, with the passage of centuries, and military invasions in which much knowledge was lost, these allegories came to be thought of by certain schools of Zoroastrian thought, as real entities ~ a real Chief Devil and his subordinate demons.

Zarathushtra's perception of the Divine.

To understand Zarathushtra's perception of the Divine, we have to start with the mind-set of his culture, (because that was the mind-set in which he grew up), and then see to what extent he departed from that mind-set (based on the evidence of the Gathas).

In his culture, deities were the spiritual essences of material things. To give you just 2 examples (there are many more),

Haoma- (Vedic *soma*-) was the material plant, the drink made from that plant, and the spiritual essence of that plant ~ the 'deity' Haoma.

Mithra- (Vedic *mitra*-) means 'contract' (a material concept). In that ancient culture survival often depended on alliances or contracts for mutual protection, trade, economic transactions, between families, clans, tribes. And the spiritual essence of the material contract was the 'deity' Mithra ~ who personified keeping one's word (keeping the contract), not telling lies (not breaking the contract). But in the Avestan texts, Mithra is also shown as a deity ~ the spiritual essence of the contract ~ a deity who could be helpful, and also very cruel (perhaps intended to inhibit breaking the contract).⁵

In short: In the mind-set of Zarathushtra's culture, material things had spiritual essences. So in that culture, there was no inherent separation, or disconnect, between the material and the spiritual, such as we have in many of today's religious paradigms. And these spiritual essences were a mix of qualities that were good and bad, beneficial and harmful.

Zarathushtra departed from the perceptions of his culture in certain key ways.

He does not see the Divine as multiple spiritual essences of multiple material things. From the evidence of the Gathas, I conclude that he sees the Divine as one spiritual essence of all that exists ~ but one spiritual essence that is wholly good, and therefore worthy of worship.⁶

Now you may object: If living beings are a mix of good and evil, and if the Divine is the spiritual essence of all that exists, why isn't the Divine a mix of good and evil? How did It become wholly good, wholly beneficial? To understand Zarathushtra's answer, we have to connect some dots.

Let's start with the notion of 'creation'.⁷ Unlike the Pahlavi texts (which include more than one creation myth), the Gathas do not give us any creation stories. Nor does Zarathushtra specifically state his ideas on creation. But he says things, from which we can draw conclusions (connect the dots). He says,

"Yes, there are two fundamental⁸ [*mainyu*- 'ways of being'], twins which are renowned to be in conflict. In thought and in word, in action they are two: the [*vahyah*- 'more good'] and the bad [*aka*-] ..." Gathas, Yasna 30, verse 3, Insler translation 1975.

'Yes I shall speak out (about) the two primeval ways of being [*mainyu*-] of existence [*angheush*], of which the more-beneficial [*spanyah*-] would thus have spoken to the harmful [*angra*-], not our thoughts, nor teachings,

nor reasonings [*xratu-*], neither our choices, nor words, neither (our) actions, nor envisionments, nor selves [*urvan-*],⁹ are in accord.' Gathas, Yasna 45, verse 2, my translation.

Now, in the first of these quotations, calling these 2 ways of being "twins" evokes the image of these 2 ways of being in one container ~ one entity containing 2 ways of being. And these 2 ways of being are "in conflict" ~ they are opposites. Let us recall, that in the Gathas, Zarathushtra equates the wholly beneficial way of being (*spenta mainyu-*) with the Divine ~ whom he calls Wisdom (*mazda-*).¹⁰ So I infer from these 2 verses (and many others), that life started out as a mix of imperfect divine qualities and their opposites.¹¹ He does not say *how* life started. That is still an unanswered question (so far as I am aware).

Now, imagine to yourself this original being, wondering how it could change, get rid of, the harmful, cruel, wrongful qualities within the being, so that the being could become wholly good, completely beneficial. In the Gathas (in Y44:7), the material existence was made through the beneficial way of being,¹² ~ to accomplish this beneficial purpose because in the Gathas, the material existence enables the perfecting process (Y31: 11, 12).

In connecting the dots, let me first tell you the conclusions I have drawn ~ mostly from the Gathas, supplemented by certain later texts. Then I will show you some highlights of the evidence from which I have drawn these conclusions, so you can decide for yourself whether you think these conclusions are persuasive.

I conclude that the original life force infused itself into every aspect of the material existence, ~ temporarily fragmenting itself into material shells to enable the experiences necessary for spiritual evolution to a state of being that is wholly good, wholly beneficial, truth personified. This accounts for the evil in existence, because the original life force was a mix of imperfect divine qualities and their evil opposites.

By the time of the Pahlavi texts, the Divine had become an authority figure ~ inherently separate from the rest of existence. They tried faithfully to record earlier traditional knowledge, but they expressed it through this later mind-set. One of these texts says,

"...and Auharmazd [Av. *ahura- mazda-*] produced the creatures bodily for the world; first, the sky; the second, water; the third, earth; the fourth, plants; the fifth, animals; the sixth, mankind. Fire was in all, diffused originally through the six substances ..." *Selections of Zadsparam*, Chap. 1, §§ 20 - 21, E. W. West translation.¹³

Which raises the questions: *How* was the material existence produced? From the generating being? From something else? And what does the diffusion of fire into all, have to do with anything?

Well, the Gatha verse Y44:7 implies that the material existence was 'made, produced, established' (Zarathushtra uses a *dā-* word) through a beneficial way of being which is consistent with the fact that in the Gathas there is no mention of anything in the material existence being intrinsically 'evil' or 'bad' (unlike later texts). But although we may arrive at tentative conclusions, there is insufficient evidence to arrive at a conclusion ~ one way or the other ~ regarding what the originating substance of the material existence may have been.¹⁴

Next, (in the quotation from the Pahlavi text above) what does the High Priest *Zadsparam* mean when he speaks of the diffusion of fire into everything? (Parenthetically, other Av. and Pahl. texts also speak of the fire in all things). Well, in the Gathas, 'fire' is a symbol and metaphor for truth and its comprehension, which Wisdom personifies ~ a wholly enlightened existence, truth personified. But at the beginning of the evolutionary process, this fire in all things would not have been completely enlightened, because the

divine qualities in us ~ truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule, ~ the beneficial way of being ~ would still be imperfect.

I conclude that the diffusion of the original life being (with its two conflicting ways of being ~ truth (fire) and untruth) into every fragment of the material existence, was done to enable the experiences necessary to change the original being's wrongful preferences, so that, over a long, long period of time, through an experience-based process of spiritual evolution, each fragment of existence, eventually becomes wholly good ~ personifying the true, wholly good, order of existence (*asha- vahishta*).

And a reunion of these wholly good fragments, personifying truth, is Zarathushtra's perception of the Divine.¹⁵

In other words, think of 'existence' as a continuum. At the beginning of the continuum, existence is a mix of qualities that are bad and more good, harmful and more-beneficial. And all along the course of the continuum, fragments of existence are evolving towards a wholly good, wholly enlightened End ~ Wisdom (*mazda-*) ~ the perfected part of existence. As I understand Zarathushtra's thought, the Divine comprises a re-uniting of all the many fragments of existence that have evolved, progressed, to the perfected end of the continuum.

There are many bits and pieces of evidence in the Gathas which have generated, and corroborate, these conclusions. Here are a few highlights.

Avestan 'creation' words.

In describing the creative act, Zarathushtra uses Avestan *zatha-* words, which (linguists agree) literally means 'to give birth, to generate from oneself'. Thus, a creation by emanation. He also uses Avestan *dā-* words which (linguists agree) means 'to produce, make, give, establish' etc. But eminent linguists have homogenized the translation of all these flavors of meaning into 'create' and 'creation' which carries a biblical mind-set that is different from the actual meanings of these words.

The Divine grows.

Next, there is a Gatha verse which puzzled me for a long time.

Here, after referring to truth (*asha-*) and its comprehension, good thinking (*vohu- manah-*),¹⁶ ~ Zarathushtra says,

"... Through that [*mainyu-* 'way of being'] Wise One [*mazda-* 'Wisdom'], Thou art to grow, ..." Gathas, Yasna 31, verse 7, Insler translation 1975.

Does Wisdom (*mazda-*) ~ grow as more and more fragments of existence personify truth (*asha-*) and its comprehension (*vohu- manah-*) ~ which is wisdom ~ thus forming a union (of fragments) that grows, comprising the Divine, Wisdom?¹⁷

The singular and the plural Divine.

This understanding ~ that the Divine is a union of the perfected fragments of existence ~ also solves another Gatha puzzle ~ the way Zarathushtra alternates between the singular and the plural, when referring to the Divine. Here are 2 examples (there are many, many more).¹⁸

"... By your [*xshma* pl.]¹⁹ rule, Lord [*ahura* sg.]²⁰ Thou shalt truly heal [*ferashem ... dau* sg.]²¹ this world in accord with our wish." Gathas, Yasna 34, verse 15, Insler translation 1975.

"... Grant ye [*data pl.*]²² ... that wish for the desirable condition which is said to exist under thy [*thwahmi sg.*]²³ rule." Gathas, Yasna 43, verse 13, Insler translation 1975.

Do the many alternating pl. and sg. references to the Divine ~ for which there is no reasonable explanation ~ reflect a plurality of the perfected fragments of existence, which have re~united to form One Divine?

*Individual and collective completeness.*²⁴

Next let us recall, that eminent linguists have translated *haurvatat-* as 'wholeness, completeness, perfection'. In the Gathas, this is a divine quality that mortals are capable of attaining. And there are Gatha verses which imply that we achieve completeness, wholeness (*haurvatat-*), and the resulting non~deathness (*ameretat-*), individually (a wholeness of quality), and also, collectively (a wholeness of being). For example,

First: We earn completeness and non~deathness individually (a wholeness of quality). Speaking of Wisdom's Word (the path of truth), Zarathushtra says,

"...Those of you who shall give [*seraosha-* 'listening'] and regard to this ...²⁵ they shall reach completeness [*haurvatat-*] and [*ameretat-* non~deathness] ..." Gathas Y45:5, Insler 1975. The word *seraosha-* 'listening' means both 'hearing and implementing' the path of truth ~ its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule ~ the beneficial way of being.²⁶

Second: The Divine gives non~deathness and completeness to us,

"... grant Thou to me [*ameretat-* 'non~deathness'] and completeness [*haurvatat-*], ..." Gathas, Y51:7, Insler 1975.

And third: We give completeness and non~deathness to the Divine (!),

"Through a [*spenta- mainyu-* 'beneficial way of being'] and [*vahishta- manah-* 'most~good thinking'], through both action and the word befitting truth, they shall grant completeness [*haurvatat-*] and [*ameretat-* 'non~deathness'] to Him. ..." Gathas, Y47:1, Insler 1975.

If the Divine completes us; and if we complete the Divine; would we not be parts, (fragments), of one completed whole?

The path and its end.

This understanding of the Divine ~ as a union of the perfected parts of existence ~ is corroborated in another Gatha teaching. We have seen some evidence of this in previous Sessions.²⁷ So here I will just summarize: The Divine personifies 7 qualities. And these 7 qualities that make a being divine are also our path, and the end result of taking that path: The 7 qualities that make a being divine are:

1. The beneficial way of being (*spenta- mainyu-*), which is,
2. The true (correct), wholly good order of existence (*asha- vahishta-*) ~ 'truth' for short,
3. Its comprehension, good thinking (*vohu- manah-*),
4. Its beneficial embodiment in thought, word, and action (*spenta- aramaiti-*),
5. Its good rule, (*vohu- xshathra-*), over one's self as well and other units of existence,
6. Its complete attainment (*haurvatat-*), which brings about
7. Non~deathness (*ameretat-*), a state of being no longer bound by mortality, because the perfecting process is complete.

Now, if we can attain the 7 qualities of the Divine completely, then only one of two conclusions is possible.

1. If each being is an inherently separate entity, then when each being attains completely (*haurvatat-*) the qualities that make a being divine, we would have billions of 'gods' running around, or
2. If existence is one unit (one being), temporarily fragmented and infused into each part of the material existence to enable the perfecting process, then when everyone eventually attains these divine qualities completely, we will have one re-united, perfected Being.

In the Gathas, there is no evidence that Zarathushtra looked forward to a population explosion of 'gods' (the first alternative above). But we do have a great deal of implied evidence that he favors the second alternative. Some of this evidence has been touched on above. In addition, he uses 2 beautiful metaphors.

The first is the material metaphor for completeness, wholeness (*haurvatat-*), which is water.²⁸ Water may exist in many separate bodies ~ raindrops, lakes, rivers, oceans. But when separate bodies of water are joined, the separateness no longer exists. They become one body of water. So the choice of this metaphor for wholeness, completeness (*haurvatat-*) suggests a union.

Similarly, in the Gathas (and later texts), light, fire, is used as a metaphor for truth, an enlightened existence, (which is the existence of the Divine who is truth personified). When separate units of light/fire are joined, they become one light/fire. The separateness no longer exists. So light/fire also suggests a union (although before we become perfected, the fire within us might be quite small, and perhaps not as bright).

Which brings us to the next question: This perfected Divine union: Is it only for human beings, or is all of existence a part of this evolutionary process? Well, many applicable Gatha verses do indeed apply to humans. But there are also many hints in the Gathas that this evolutionary process, and its resulting perfected good End ~ the Divine union ~ does indeed include all of existence.²⁹ Here is just one.

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra creates ~ in kaleidoscopic, multidimensioned ways ~ an elaborate network linking the Divine Itself, and each of its 7 qualities, with various material metaphors, including animals, plants, and various natural elements, in kaleidoscopic ways. And we have to wonder: Why?

We see the answer in later texts. Let me give you 2 examples.

First example: Both later Avestan and Pahlavi texts describe the fire that exists in all things ~ in man, in animals, in plants, in the earth, in all of existence. And we already know that fire is a metaphor for an enlightened existence ~ the existence of the Divine.

I wish I were an artist. I would love to paint a visual image of that idea. Imagine to yourself, each part of existence ~ trees, waterfalls, lakes, grass, flowers, leaves, animals, birds, fish, man, the earth, the sky, everything in existence ~ each with glimmers of light within it, expressing the idea of the Divine in all that exists.

Second example: The word *fravashi* appears only in later Avestan texts. It is thought to mean the Divine within (although not everyone agrees).³⁰ And each element of existence has a *fravashi*.

A Younger Avestan text celebrates the *fravashis* ~ not just of humans, but also of other life forms as well as natural elements,

"... tame animals, wild animals, animals that live in the water [probably includes fish], animals that live under the ground, the flying ones, ... the running ones, the grazing ones ... [*yazamaide* 'we celebrate']³¹ their Fravashis." *Farvardin Yasht*, § 74, Darmesteter translation, SBE Vol 23, pp 197-198.

"... That of the sky, that of the waters, that of the earth, that of the plants," *Farvardin Yasht*, § 86, Darmesteter translation, SBE Vol. 23, p. 200.

When I first discovered in the Gathas, this perception of the Divine (as a union of the perfected parts of existence), my immediate reaction was negative. The idea that 'God' (my Security Blanket!) had to make choices too, had to go through the perfecting process to become wholly good, shocked me!

But if we think about it, is there any merit to being perfect if one cannot ever be anything else? Is perfection worth anything, if it is not earned?

Once I got over my shock and discomfort, I have come to appreciate that Zarathushtra's notion of the Divine is so much more meaningful. It means the Divine Itself has gone through, and done, what the rest of us have to go through, and do. It means that until everyone makes it, no one makes it. It helps me to understand that differences of culture, language, skin color, appearances, are simply the differences of our temporary material shells. There is no 'us' and 'them'. There are no 'others'.

And it helps me to understand that I can hate and oppose the lies, and the wrongful conduct of a person, but I must not allow myself to hate the person. For me, that's really hard. But if I can do it, it helps to break the cycles of hatred and division that we so often get caught up in. If the Divine is the perfected part of existence as a whole, we cannot trash any part of existence without trashing ourselves and the Divine.

Is all this really true? Well, we cannot *prove* it is. But this teaching strikes a chord in me.

Zarathushtra's reason based mysticism is more satisfying (to me) than any other paradigm of existence that I have come across. It provides a holistic, reason based, constructive, framework through which to view existence, while being a part of it, so that we mutually benefit, help, each part of existence, while we all evolve towards the perfected end ~ the object being not just to perfect ourselves, but also to help each other make it. And it explains the existence of 'evil' in our world in a logical way that I (now) find quite meaningful.

True, it still leaves some unanswered questions. And it is not completely practical. We still have to kill to eat. Even vegetarians kill plants to eat. But at least we can be as humane as possible.

If you do not find it persuasive that the Divine is a part of all that exists, don't worry about it.

Zarathushtra does not tell us that the reason why we should be truthful, be good to each other, heal existence, is because the Divine is a part of all that exists. He tell us ~ more than once ~ to be truthful for truth's own sake, to do what is beneficial, right, good, for its own sake. And he tells us to think for ourselves, decide for ourselves, so that each of us can grow spiritually in our own way, in our own time, to the certain good End that is the Endless Lights.

When I first discovered these ideas of Zarathushtra, I thought they were unique. It was only much later that I discovered that many other spiritual philosophies/religions also include schools of mystical thought, but with differences.

Some include a mysticism that requires renouncing the material existence; whereas in Zarathushtra's thought, the material existence is the necessary matrix, the necessary arena, for the perfecting process (a paradox) ~ a perfecting process that (with generosity) includes moments of enjoyment, joy, comfort, in what is material.

Some include a perfecting process that centers on one's self. In Zarathushtra's thought, perfecting ourselves is necessary indeed, but it is not enough. We have to help each other make it. Until everyone makes it, no one makes it.

Some require submission, obedience, to a guru or spiritual master. In Zarathushtra's thought, we not only are allowed to think for ourselves and have the freedom to make choices, we are required to do so. Both are indispensable to spiritual growth. The (eventual) perfected end is a (logical, reason based) certainty³² for everyone *because* of our freedom to choose, our experiences (earned and unearned) and mutual, loving help from the Divine and all the living.

Some include only humans, whereas others include the whole of existence; I think the latter is Zarathushtra's view.

I am not an expert in comparative religions. So let me simply offer you what I have found to be beautiful, in the things that have come my way.

In England in the 16th century (with no electronic means of communication), when someone died, the church bells were rung, and people would send to find out who had died. John Donne who lived in that time period, wrote some words (which Ernest Hemmingway later made famous). Donne said,

"... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; and therefore never send to know *for whom the bell tolls*; It tolls for thee." John Donne, *Devotions*.

We find mysticism in Hindu and Buddhist spiritual philosophies, (a mysticism which includes more than just humans). Rabindranath Tagore expressed the idea,

"...we all belong to a divine unity...". Tagore 1931 *The Religion of Man*, p. 55.

The Persian Sufi poet Jami said,

"Each essence is a separate glass
Through which the sun of being's light is passed,
Each tinted fragment sparkles in the sun,
A thousand colors, but the light is one." *Jami*,
Translation by Dr. S. H. Nasr; provided to me by Dr. Daryoush Jahanian.

And indeed, a Native American wise man of the Sioux nation called Black Elk, is reputed to have said, (in a rather lovely way):

"We should understand well
that all things are the work of the Great Spirit.
We should know that He is within all things:
the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains,
and all the four legged animals,
and the winged peoples..." *Black Elk*, (Quoted in an Oglala Sioux greeting card).

I have come to the opinion that this idea of the Divine in all that exists, is one of those eternal truths that independently arise in different minds/hearts/spirits, in different time periods, different geographic areas, different spiritual philosophies.

I would like to leave you with a question. Put it on the back burner of your mind, and let your mind play over it. In this, and past Sessions, I have already given you a lot of information from the Gathas and later

texts, which may assist you in answering this question. But I would like you to experience the joy of an "AHA !" moment. A "Eureka !" moment ~ when you put it all together. The question is:

If you had to capture the whole of Zarathushtra's spiritual philosophy in one sound byte, what, in your view, would it be?³³

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¹ In all these 7 pieces, I have used the stem forms of Avestan words (mostly without transliteration), because most people are not familiar with their grammatical forms. But in this and other sessions (in this collection, *Liberating Zarathushtra's Relevance*), I have used the grammatical forms of a given word, where its grammatical value (like *sg.* and *pl.*) are key to the argument. If you are interested in transliterated symbols and how they should be pronounced, see (in the *General Introduction & Orientation* Part), the chapter *Avestan Script: Pronunciation & Genesis*.

² Detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*.

You may recall, in Session 4, I explained why (in my view) Zarathushtra does not come right out and openly express his idea that the certain good End is being one with the Divine. If you feel frustrated (or skeptical) because none of the authenticated ancient texts (of which I am aware) specifically state this conclusion, bear in mind the huge loss of knowledge that occurred after the fall of the Achaemenian Empire, and later, after the Arab invasion of Iran. The texts that were lost may have helped to dispel some of this uncertainty.

According the Pahlavi *Dinkard* Vol. 8, (written after the Arab invasion) there were 3 volumes of Avestan commentary on the Gathas (E. W. West comment, *Dinkard* 8, SBE Vol. 37, p. 4, ft. 2). None of these 3 volumes of Avestan commentary has survived.

A Pahlavi text records the following tradition,

"... By asking questions (of him) and by listening (to his answers), the first pupils of this (Zarduxsht) of revered Fravahr (obtained) manifest knowledge and information of the good religion regarding all subjects, in the same way as splendour (is emanated) from a basic light. The sagacious Kay Vishtasp, the exalted ruler, arranged for a basic (text) of those questions (and answers) to be written down. Then he arranged that all the basic (texts) be laid down in the Royal Treasury. Then he gave the order to disseminate properly (written) copies of it. Thereafter he sent a copy to the National Archives in order to store the information there." *Dinkard* Vol. 4, Humbach 1991 translation, Vol. 1, p. 51.

If these writings did indeed exist, no copy has survived. We are immensely lucky that at least some of Zarathushtra's own words have survived, (thanks to the devotion of the priests, who continued to chant the Gathas as part of the ritual, down through the centuries). From what Zarathushtra does say in the Gathas, we can at least connect the dots and draw (reasonable) conclusions, especially where such conclusions are corroborated by what we find in later Avestan and Pahlavi texts which speak of the fire in all things, (detailed in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*).

³ For evidence that Cosmic Dualism is not in the Gathas, see *Part One: The Beneficial Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu*;

⁴ Detailed in *Part One: Does The Devil Exist?*

⁵ Examples of the cruelty of *Mithra* in YAv. texts are quoted (from the YAv. Yasht in his honor) in a footnote in *Part One: Truth, Asha*.

None of the deities of Zarathushtra's culture are mentioned by name in the Gathas. Zarathushtra speaks of them collectively (with disapproval) multiple times as *daeva*- which in his culture was one of the words for 'deity' (Vedic *deva*), and once as *bagha*- also a generic word for 'deity' with cognates in many Indo-European languages. We know that *haoma* (Ved. *soma*), *mithra* (Ved. *mitra*), and certain other deities mentioned in YAv. texts were the deities of Zarathushtra's culture because they also appear in Vedic texts, and so would have been the deities of the Avestan and

Vedic peoples when they were one tribe (Indo-Iranian), before they first split up into two tribes ~ Iranian and Indic ~ migrating to different locations. The word *arya-* appears only in (surviving) Avestan and ancient Indic texts (referenced in *Part Four: Ancient Origins & Homelands*). In the Gathas, the word *arya-* (in its various grammatical forms) is a generic word for 'tribe', detailed in *Part Six: Yasna 54:1, A Airyema Ishyo*.

And what I find so fascinating is that the spiritual philosophy of certain Vedas and later texts, also have this idea of the Divine within all things. In fact, in 1993, when I attended the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, I came across a quotation from the Vedanta about the Divine within all things, which took my breath away. It captured exactly what I saw in the Gathas about the Divine in all that exists.

In short, both the Iranian and Indic descendants of the ancestral Indo-Iranian tribe (whose religion was highly ritualistic), came up with a spiritual philosophy that sees the Divine in all that exists ~ even though there are some significant differences between the two.

⁶ Detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*.

⁷ Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of Creation*.

⁸ In both these Gatha verses (Y30:3, and Y45:2), the same Avestan word (*paourvya-*) has been translated as 'fundamental' by Insler, and as 'primeval' and 'in the beginning' by other linguists. Linguists agree that the stem *paourvya-* literally means 'first'. But in Avestan (as in English) 'first' can have more than one flavor of meaning ~ first in time, first in quality, first as in foundational, etc. In these 2 verses, Insler translates *paourvya-* words as 'fundamental' ('first' as in foundational), although in other verses he translates *paourvya-* words with other flavors of meaning. Other linguists translate the *paourvya-* words in these 2 verses as first in time 'in the beginning', 'primeval' etc. (detailed in a chapter in *Part Six: Yasna 30:2 and 3*). But I do not think these differences are irreconcilable ~ both convey a valid meaning, and indeed, in Zarathushtra's typical multi-dimensioned technique, he may have intended both meanings ~ *paourvya-* 'first' as in foundational ('fundamental'), as well as *paourvya-* 'first' as first in time ('in the beginning', 'primeval').

⁹ In this Gatha verse, (Y45:2) Insler 1975 translates *urvan-* as 'soul'; but he comments (under another verse ~ Y28:4) that *urvan-* in the Gathas is used for both 'self' and 'soul' ~ a usage which he says parallels the Vedic *atman-*. Insler 1975 p. 123). I have been told (but by people who are not Sanskrit scholars) that certain Vedic (or possibly Vedanta) texts speak of an individual soul that is part of a universal soul. I do not know if this accurately represents what is in those texts. However, this is exactly what I see in the Gathas. Based on the evidence of the Gathas, I think the 'soul' is the non-material part of the original life force that was fragmented and infused into each part of the material existence to enable its perfecting. So each (non-material) 'soul' is also each (non-material) 'fragment-self' that still is a mix of 'good' and 'evil' qualities, evolving to a wholly good, perfected existence, at which time 'self' (the fragment) becomes irrelevant, because the fragment (self/soul) is necessary only for the perfecting process. So once the perfecting process is complete, there is no need for such fragments (souls/selves) ~ which re-unite with other perfected fragments/souls/selves to form the Divine union (the universal perfected soul ~ continually growing as more and more perfected fragments join the union). This conclusion reconciles the fact that in the Gathas, man has 'soul', the (allegorical) cow has 'soul', and indeed the Divine has 'soul'. I take the soul of the Divine to be the union of perfected (individual) souls.

¹⁰ Some people (Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians) do not see *spenta-mainyu-* as a quality of the Divine (amesha spenta). However, in the Gathas, there are many verses in which the Divine (Wisdom) is specifically called *spenta-* 'beneficial' (and also '*spenishta-* 'most beneficial'); and Its way of being is specifically called *spenta-mainyu-* '(the) beneficial way of being'. Here are a few examples:

Wisdom is *spenta-*

In Y43, verse 5, Zarathushtra says, "But, I have already realized Thee to be [spenta-], Wise Lord [mazda- ... ahura- 'Wisdom, Lord,] ..." Gathas Y43:5, Insler 1975. This phrase is repeated at the start of verses 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15 of Yasna 43, indicating perhaps (in addition to poetic alliteration) that Zarathushtra really wants us to get the point that the nature of the Divine (the essence of the sacred) is *spenta-* 'beneficial'. And the Divine is described as *spenta-* in other verses as well. Here are a few examples. There are many more.

"...He is [spenta- 'beneficial'] to the needy..." Gathas Y29:7, Insler 1975.

"...the truthful Lord, [spenta- 'beneficial'] in His action..." Gathas Y46:9, Insler 1975. Notice, here Zarathushtra equates being truthful (*ashavan-*) with being beneficial (*spenta-*) ~ and he does so throughout the Gathas in lovely alternating equations. This is easy to understand, because *asha-* the true order of existence is a most-good, beneficial, order of existence (detailed in *Part One: Truth, Asha*, and in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Most Good, Vahishta*).

spenta-mainyu is Wisdom's beneficial way of being.

"...Him who is beneficent through His [spenta-mainyu 'beneficial way of being'] to those who exist..." Gathas Y45:6, Insler 1975,

"And through this [spenta-mainyu 'beneficial way of being'], Wise Lord, Thou hast promised..." Y47:5;

"... Thy [spenta-mainyu] ..." Gathas Y44:7, Insler 1975;

"...Thy [spenishta-mainyu]..." Gathas Y33:12, Insler 1975. *Spenishta-* is the superlative degree of *spenta-*, thus 'most beneficial'. In Avestan, the superlative often functions as a crescendo of expression.

And man too is (imperfectly) *spenta-* 'beneficial', and has (an imperfect) *spenta-mainyu-* 'beneficial way of being.' Additional examples (for both the Divine and man) are given in *Part One: The Beneficial Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu*.

¹¹ Parenthetically we know that these 2 Gatha verses (Y30:3 and Y45:2) do not express the idea of Cosmic Dualism because, even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that the 2 *mainyu-* are two separate entities (instead of 2 ways of being) we would have one entity that is bad (*aka-* Y30:3), harmful (*angra-* Y45:2) and one that is only comparatively good (*vahyah-* Y30:3 ~ a small crescendo, not the superlative *vahishta-*), and only comparatively beneficial (*spanyah-* Y45:2 ~ a small crescendo, not the superlative *spenishta-*), ~ hardly consistent with the all-good and all-bad uncreated entities of Cosmic Dualism in the later texts.

However, these 2 verses do raise a puzzling question. In these 2 verses, the opposite of the 'bad', 'harmful', way of being is not described as 'good' (*vohu-*), or 'beneficial' (*spenta-*). It is described as the comparative degrees of these two words ~ *vahyah-* 'more-good'; and *spanyah-* 'more beneficial'. Yet in other verses, Zarathushtra specifically shows that (imperfect) man has a beneficial (*spenta-*) way of being ~ without using the comparative degree (*spanyah-*). To give you just one example, (there are many, many more), he says,

"...by the action of the [spenta- 'beneficial'] man whose soul is in alliance with truth [asha-],..." Y34:2, Insler 1975.

In the same way, other qualities of the Divine ~ truth (*asha-*), its comprehension good thinking (*vohu-manah-*), its embodiment in thought, word and action (*aramaiti-*), its rule (*xshathra-*) ~ are not stated in their comparative degrees when they are mentioned as qualities of imperfect man. In fact, the comparative degrees of truth, good thinking, embodied truth and good rule do not appear in the Gathas (see Beekes, *A Grammar of Gatha Avestan*, para. 35, pp. 135 ~ 136).

So we have to wonder: Why? Why does Zarathushtra use the comparative degrees of *vohu-* and *spenta-* in the Gatha verses Y30:3, and Y45:2, but does not (consistently) do so in other verses referring to divine qualities in imperfect beings.

Zarathushtra does not specifically say why. I speculate that he does so in the Gatha verses Y30:3 and Y45:2 because these verses express his ideas about the beginning of the process of spiritual evolution ~ an incremental process that culminates in complete goodness. And I think, in other verses, he does not always, consistently, use the comparative degrees of *spenta-* 'beneficial' as well as other divine qualities (*amesha spenta*) in connection with man ~ even though man has such qualities imperfectly ~ because he wants to make it clear that these divine qualities are not restricted

to one Being ('God'), but are found in, (and can be attained completely by) man, and each part of existence (detailed in the many chapters in *Part Two* of this website).

In Avestan (as in English), the comparative and superlative degrees can be used also as a crescendo of expression, rather than as a difference in kind. For example, in the YAv. *Hormezd Yasht*, the names of the Divine are given in their positive and superlative degrees.

... *baeshazya nama ahmi* *baeshazyotema nama ahmi*
'...healing by name am I, most-healing by name am I';

... *ashava nama ahmi* *ashavastema nama ahmi*
'... truthful by name am I, most-truthful by name am I';
Yt. 1.12, my translation; Avestan words from Geldner 2dPart p. 62.

And we see this same use of the positive and superlative (as a crescendo) in the beginning of the Old Avestan *Asha Vahishta* (*Ashem Vohu*) manthra believed to have been composed by Zarathushtra himself, detailed in *Part One: The Manthra Of Truth*.

But in the extant Gathas, I have not found *spenishta-* ~ the superlative degree of *spenta-* used to describe mortals. I could have missed it (because of translation differences) but I don't think so. The superlative of *spenta-* is used to describe what Zarathushtra's daughter, Pouruchista, can achieve. But not her present state of being.

"Do thou persevere, Pouruchista, ... To thee shall He grant the firm foundation of good thinking, and the alliance of truth and of wisdom. Therefore come to terms with thy will, [*thwa xrathwa* 'with thy reasoning'], and bring to realization the [*spenishta* 'most beneficial'] and blessed (acts) of [*armaiti-* 'embodied truth']." Gathas, Y53:3, Insler 1975.

¹² In Yasna 44, Zarathushtra asks many questions about which craftsman/artist (*hwapah*) made, produced (*dā-*), birthed (*zqθa-*), fashioned (*taš-*) various parts of the material existence, (as well as the true order of existence *asha-*, its comprehension good thinking *vohu- manah-*, its beneficial embodiment (*spenta- aramaiti-*), its good rule (*vohu- xshathra-*), and in verse 7 he gives his conclusion (which I give you here in 2 translations ~ Insler's and also mine).

Insler translation: "... By these (questions), Wise One, I am helping to discern Thee to be the creator [*datarem*] of everything by reason of Thy [*spenta- mainyu-*]." Gathas Y44:7.

My translation: "... I, through these (questions) am helping to discern you, Wisdom, (to be) the producer [*datarem*] of all [*vispanam*] through (the) beneficial way of being [*spenta mainyu-*]." Gathas Y44:7.

Some scholars have used this verse to argue that Wisdom 'created' evil. But the word *vispanam* 'all' or 'everything' has to be understood in context, and refers to the questions in the preceding verses of this Yasna ~ none of which mentions 'evil'. For example, if I were going on a short trip, I might say *I have packed everything*. In this context, *everything* would mean everything I need for the trip. It would not mean everything I own (or everything in the world!). So (in the context of Yasna 44) it would not be reasonable to interpret 'all' or 'everything' [*vispanam*] to include the idea that Wisdom created 'evil' (discussed in more detail in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of Creation*).

One might (reasonably) object, that in this verse (Y44:7) and throughout this Yasna, the being who in the beginning did all this birthing, producing, establishing and fashioning is consistently addressed by Zarathushtra's two names for the Divine ~ Wisdom (*mazda-*), and Lord (*ahura-*), and in Zarathushtra's thought, the Divine is a being who is wholly good, completely in accord with the true (correct) order of things, one who has 'lordship' over the qualities that make a being divine (detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*). So how can these facts be squared with the notion that the original creative act of infusing itself into the material existence was done by a primeval being who was a mix of more good and bad (Y30:3), more beneficial and harmful (Y45.2)? Well, consider the following:

If we were addressing the saintly Mother Theresa, (who at the beginning of her career when she entered the convent, was just an ordinary girl ~ whose name then was not Mother Theresa, and whose way of being then may have been more of a mix of not-so-saintly and saintly qualities), we might say, 'I saw you, Mother Theresa, when you entered the

convent...'. In other words, we would address her by the name she had at the time we addressed her ~ the name which reflected her present saintly nature ~ even though that was not her name or saintly nature when you saw her at the beginning (when she entered the convent), when she was not yet a saint.

¹³ SBE Vol. 5, p. 159. This Pahlavi creation paradigm appears to have been written a couple of centuries after the Arab invasion of Iran.

There is no mention in the Gathas (or later Avestan texts) of the sequence in producing the material creation stated in the Pahlavi *Zadspāram* text. So for this part of the Pahlavi quotation, it is possible that we see the influence of another religious paradigm, including a perception of the Divine who is an inherently separate authority figure ~ creating the material existence in a specified sequence.

But I think in the last sentence of this Pahlavi quotation ("... Fire was in all, diffused originally through the six substances...") the author was trying to transmit (and so preserve) traditional Zoroastrian knowledge that is consistent with the Gathas and later Av. and other Pahl. texts ~ the infusion of the original being, (whose nature included the imperfect enlightenment of truth, for which fire is the metaphor) into the material existence.

¹⁴ Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of Creation*.

¹⁵ Detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*; and *The Identity Of The Divine*.

¹⁶ Here is my translation of this quotation together with its preceding phrase, so that you can see the context of Zarathushtra's statement that the Divine is to **grow**. In the preceding phrase, which mentions truth and good thinking, Insler has translated the verb *dqmiš* (a form of the verb stem *dā-*) as "he created". But 'creation' words have connotations from certain dominant religions today, which are quite different from Zarathushtra's ideas, whereas "he produced, made", is linguistically defensible. In addition, Insler translates *x raθwā* (instrumental sg. of the stem *x ratu-*) as 'with this very intention'; whereas I follow H. P. Schmidt (and other professional linguists) who see completely different flavors of meaning in *x ratu-* words one of which is 'reason'. So I have translated the instr. sg. *x raθwā* as 'through reason'. I therefore give you my translation (instead of Insler's) as follows.

'... *hvō x raθwā dqmiš ašəm*

"That one [*hvō*] through reason [*x raθwā*], (is the) truth establisher [*dqmiš ašəm*],

yā dāyaraṭ vahištəm manō

through which [*yā*] one upholds [*dāyaraṭ*] (the) most good thinking [*vahištəm manō*]

tā mazdā mainyū ux šyō

through that [*tā*] way of being [*mainyū*], Wisdom [*mazdā*], You grow [*ux šyō*] ..." Gathas, Y31:7 my translation.

It is worth noting that in the Gathas, not only the perfected part of existence ~ the Divine (Wisdom) ~ produces/makes/establishes truth (*asha*). The rest of existence does so as well. Each time we think, speak, act, in a way that is beneficial, truthful, right, good, we produce, we make, we create, we establish, the true (correct, good) order of existence (*asha*). In that instance, we become truth establishers ~ even though we do so sporadically, imperfectly.

¹⁷ This verse has been discussed in detail in *Part Six: Yasna 31:6 and 7*; And this idea (that the Divine grows) is detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*.

¹⁸ Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Singular & The Plural*.

¹⁹ *x šmākā* 'your' is a possessive pronoun, 2d person pl. Skjaervo, 2006, Glossary.

²⁰ *ahurā* is the vocative. *sg.* form of the noun stem *ahura-*. Skjaervo, 2006, Glossary.

²¹ The word *dā* is a 2p *sg.* form of the verb stem *dā-* one of the meanings of which is 'to make' (Skjaervo 2006); About the phrase *fərašəm ... dā ahūm* in Y34:15 (literally 'Thou shalt make existence healed'): Linguists differ. In his commentary (on this verse Y34:15, p. 228) Insler translates *fərašəm ... dā ahūm* as "Thou shalt heal this world", referring the reader to his comment under Y30:9, in which he translates *fərašəm kərənaon ahūm* as "may we ... make this world healed", and explains, (pointing to a Vedic parallel) that in the Gathas *ahum fərašəm kar-* or *dā-* is an idiom that means 'to heal, repair the world' (p. 172).

ahum literally means 'existence'. In other verses, Insler translates this word, sometimes as 'world' and sometimes as 'existence'.

dā- means 'to make' (among other flavors of meaning, detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of Creation*).

kar- / *car-* means 'to make' (Beekes 1988, p. 168), or 'to do' (Skjaervo 2006); *-* in this context, 'doing (it)', 'making it happen'.

fərašəm is a grammatical form of the suffix *fra-* and *aša-*;

fra- is used as a suffix in many Avestan words, to indicate 'forwarding';

Thus Gatha Avestan *fəraša-* (Younger Av. *fraša-*) literally means 'forwarding truth' or 'forwarding (existence to) truth';

Giving us in Younger Avestan texts *frašō.kərəiti-* 'forwarding (existence) to truth, making it happen.'

²² Skjaervo's 2006, Glossary, shows *dātā* as a 2d person *pl.* form of the verb stem *dā-*, thus Insler's translation "Grant ye". In Avestan, the *form* of the verb indicates the *person* and *number* (I/we; thou/you/ye; him/her/it/they), so Avestan verb forms do not normally have a separate pronoun (unless the author wishes to accomplish a specific purpose ~ for example, emphasizing the pronoun). To illustrate: the verb *ah-* 'to be' would be conjugated as follows in the present tense (indicative) ~ as you can see, the pronouns are included in the verb form:

1st person:	<i>sg. ahmī</i>	I am	<i>pl. mahī</i>	we are
2d person:	<i>sg. ahī</i>	thou art	<i>pl. stā</i>	you (pl.) are
3d person:	<i>sg. astī</i>	he/she/it is	<i>pl. həntī</i>	they are

²³ *θwahnī* 'thy' is a possessive pronoun, 2d person *sg.* Skjaervo, 2006, Glossary.

²⁴ Detailed in *Part One: Completeness & Non-deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*.

²⁵ In this Gatha verse, Y45:5, following the pronoun 'this' Insler has added the word '(Lord)' in round parentheses, indicating that he thinks 'this' stands for the Lord (*ahura-*), and he translates the *seraoshem* as 'obedience' expressing the mind-set (of other religious paradigms) of obedience to the deity being required to obtain the reward. Here is the full verse in his translation,

"Now I shall speak of what the [*spento.temo* 'Most Beneficial One'] told me, that word which is to be heard as [*vahisstem* 'most good] for men [*maretaeibyō* 'for mortals']. Those of you who shall give 'obedience' [*seraoshem* 'listening'] and regard to this (Lord) of mine, they shall reach completeness [*haurvatat-*] and [*ameretat-* non-deathness] ..." Gathas, Y45:5, Insler translation, 1975.

I think 'this' stands for the previously mentioned 'word' of the Most Beneficial One ~ the Divine. But interestingly, there is no real difference because the Word of the Divine is the path of truth, which the Divine personifies. So the Divine is a personification of Its Word (in later Av. texts, the Word is called *tanu.mathra-* (*Sirozah* 1:17; and Yy57.1); *tanu-* means 'body'; *mathra-* means 'precept, Word'; thus *tanu.mathra-* '(the) embodied Word'.

²⁶ Detailed in *Part Three: Seraosha*.

²⁷ Discussed with highlights of evidence in sessions 2, 3, 4, and 5 of this collection *Liberating Zarathushtra's Relevance*.

²⁸ See *Part Two: Earth, Water, Plants*.

²⁹ This unity of identity is discussed in many chapters (from different perspectives), and particularly in the following:

Between the Divine and man:

~ In the beautiful Younger Avestan text Yy60:12 discussed in *Part One: Seven Gems from the Later Texts* (and applicable footnotes), which was so beloved by later Zoroastrians, that it is quoted as part of the *Hoshbam* prayer in the Khordeh Avesta, and

~ In *Part Two*:

A Question of Reward and the Path;

The Puzzle of the Parallels;

The Puzzle of the Singular & The Plural; and

Did Wisdom Choose Too?

Between the Divine and all existence

~ In *Part Two*:

Light, Glory, Fire;

A Question Of Immanence;

The Puzzle of the Cow & Its Network;

Earth, Waters, Plants;

The Puzzle of Creation.

³⁰ Detailed in *Part Three: Fravashi*, which examines the meaning(s) ascribed to the word, how it has been used in the ancient texts, and why I think it means the divine/Divine within ~ in quality and being.

³¹ The Avestan word *yazamaide* in this section of the *Farvardin Yasht*, is quoted from Geldner's *Avesta* (p. 184, which Geldner writes in Avestan script). Avestan *yaz-* words (like *yazamaide*) routinely have been translated as "worship". But in Avestan, *yaz-* words are worship in the sense of a celebration (as Humbach/Faiss 2010 agree), detailed in a footnote in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*, (on my website).

³² Zaehner 1961 describes the idea of the certain good end (in Pahlavi texts) as follows,

"... The last ~ the *Frashkart* or 'Making Excellent' ~ is the end to which the whole of creation looks forward; it is regarded as being the **inevitable consummation of a rational process** initiated by God, and it is never supposed for one moment that there is any doubt that it will come to pass. The phrase used for this process is *patvandishn i o Frashkart*, which can be translated as the '**continuous evolution towards the Rehabilitation**!'." *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, (Phoenix Press reprint 2003), p. 308.

³³ These seven sessions in *Liberating Zarathushtra's Relevance*, originally were given as seven talks ~ each followed by a discussion period ~ in seven monthly seminars sponsored by the California Zoroastrian Center. Various members of the audience emailed their opinions to me, which answers I have given in the next (and last) session.