

Buried Treasure in Ancient Stories.

Suppose that you lived in a time period in which there were no movies, no TV, no forms of electronic entertainment, and no generally available books. And suppose that you had some exciting ideas that you thought were really important, and you wanted to make sure these ideas survived you. What would you do? You might put them into songs that people could sing, or poems that people could recite, or you might put these ideas into the form of a story that people could pass down from one generation to another. In fact, these were the ways in which information and knowledge of all kinds was transmitted in ancient times.

Zarathushtra, had some ideas he was excited about. And he used all of these devices. Today, it's not so easy for us to relate to his songs and poems, because we no longer know the music to which they were sung and the language of his poems is not generally known. But we still have some stories in translation ~ both from the Gathas, and some later texts. And I would like to show you a few of these stories.¹

With the passage of time, people sometimes forget the ideas behind stories. So we tend to take the stories literally. But I would like to show you a different way of looking at a few of these stories. I'd like you to discover the ideas, the buried treasure, behind the images ~ the ideas that Zarathushtra and other ancient Zoroastrians were so keen to have us remember.

For example, in Zarathushtra's society bondage, cruelty, violence, were not exceptions. They were the rule ~ inflicted by the secular and religious establishments of that time period, under the authority of their deities (as described by their priests). In Zarathushtra's view, deities who were perceived as having a mix of good and bad qualities were not worth worshipping. He uses a story ~ a mini-drama (Y29) ~ to express key elements of his new envisionment of the Divine as a being who is wholly good, truth personified, and his solution for the sufferings of existence. This has been detailed in another chapter,² so here I will just summarize.

Among the cast of characters in this mini-drama is Wisdom and three of the qualities He personifies as allegorical entities ~ the true, wholly good order of existence ('truth' for short), its comprehension good thinking, and His beneficial way of being. Naturally, one wonders: Why? Why does Zarathushtra portray truth, good thinking and a beneficial way of being as separate allegorical entities if they are qualities of Wisdom's nature?

The answer has to do with Zarathushtra's attempt to project, in dramatic form, the message he wishes to convey. As you get into this story, look past the allegories to the ideas they represent, and you will see the ideas that Zarathushtra wants to express.

This mini drama opens with a cry for help, to Wisdom and His allegorical qualities, about the suffering that was ravaging Zarathushtra's world.

["... the cruelty of fury and violence, of bondage and might, holds me in captivity. I have no pastor other than you ..." Y29.1, Insler 1975.](#)

Wisdom's beneficial way of being is troubled by this and asks truth if this is a true, correct way for existence to be ordered. But truth replies that there is no solution free of enmity. In other words, truth, by itself, has no way of solving the problem. Since man is a mix of good and harmful preferences, and has the freedom to choose, evil cannot be destroyed or abolished ~ by Divine decree as it were ~ as long as the existence of evil continues in the mixed preferences of living beings.

Wisdom acknowledges that this state of affairs is not one that "... befits truth..." Y29.6, (Insler 1975), but offers assurance that there is indeed a beneficial, nurturing design at work, and turns to good thinking for the solution.

The moral of this drama, the ideas that Zarathushtra conveys to us through this story, are that:

- It is not suffering alone that is contrary to the true order of existence ~ our sufferings (the refiner's fire) are part of the beneficial design that eliminates our wrongful preferences, and enables spiritual growth, enlightenment. It is suffering without help, without nurture, that is not in accord with the true, good order of existence.
- There always will be help to see us through our sufferings ~ from the Divine, from each other, from all the living.
- There is no one perfected being who will come and save us; we ourselves ~ unperfected mortals ~ have to provide the solutions to our problems.
- And solutions begin with good thinking, (the comprehension of truth).

In the concluding verses of this mini-drama, the qualities that make a being divine, and the solutions to our problems are the same ~ a beneficial way of being, truth, its comprehension, its good rule ~ the way we govern ourselves, which necessarily affects the ways in which we relate to each other, and govern our societies, a good rule that eliminates the wrongdoings that cause suffering.

Let's move along in time to a period around the 9th century CE, perhaps more than 1,000 years after Zarathushtra,³ to a Pahlavi text in which a teacher of the religion (a High Priest), called Zadsparam, tells a story.⁴ The translation I give you was made by E.W. West in about 1871, but it is a good translation (and the only one I have). This time, I will quote excerpts from the story instead of summarizing it. Words in square brackets are explanations inserted by me. I'll start at the part where Zarathushtra who has been bathing, comes out of the Daitih river. I think there is an idea behind the use of the Daitih river, but I haven't figured it out yet. The story mentions (in West's translation) 'spirits' and 'archangels' which, later in the story are shown to be qualities of the Divine (amesha spenta). Originally (in the Gathas) and perhaps here as well, these characteristics of the Divine are allegorical beings.

Now, as you read the story, see if you can look past the images to the ideas behind them. And see if you recognize in this Zad-sparam story any ideas we just came across in Yasna 29.

"8. When he [Zarathushtra] came up from the water, and put on his clothes, he then saw the archangel Vohumano [good thinking] in the form of a man, handsome, brilliant, and elegant, who wore his hair curve-tailed, because the curved tail is an indication of duality; who had put on and wore a dress like silk, than which there was no making anything superior, for it was light itself; and his height was nine times as much as that of Zaratusht.

9. He also inquired of Zaratusht thus: 'Who may thou be, and from whom of them mayst thou be? also what is mostly thy desire, and the endeavour of thy existence?' 10. And he replied thus: 'I am Zaratusht of the Spitamas; among the existences, righteousness is more my desire and my wish is that I may become aware of the will of the sacred beings, [the amesha spenta], and may practice so much righteousness as they exhibit to me in the pure existence.'

11. And Vohumano directed Zaratusht thus: 'Do thou proceed to an assembly of the spirits!'

12. As much as Vohumano walked on in nine steps, Zarathust did in ninety steps, and when he had gone ninety steps farther than him, he saw the assembly of the seven archangels [the amesha spenta]. 13. When he came within twenty-four feet of the archangels, he then did not see his own shadow on the ground, on account of the great brilliancy of the archangels; the position of the assembly was in Iran, and in the direction of the districts on the bank of the water of the Daitih.

14. Zaratusst offered homage, and spoke thus: 'Homage to Auharmazd [Av. Ahura Mazda], and homage to the archangels!' and he went forward and sat down in the seat of the enquirers.

15. As to the asking of questions by Zaratusst, he enquired of Auharmazd thus: 'In the embodied world [the material world] which is the first of the perfect ones, which the second, and which the third?' 16. And Auharmazd replied thus: 'The first perfection is good thoughts, the second good words, and the third good deeds.'

17. Zaratusst also enquired thus: 'Which thing is good, which is better, and which is the best of all habits?' 18. And Auharmazd replied thus: 'The title of the archangels is good, the sight of them is better, and the carrying out their commands is the best of all habits.' ...⁵

Let us break off here and look for some of the buried treasure ~ the ideas behind the images. Let's start at the end, instead of the beginning.

Zarathushtra asks the Lord Wisdom "Which thing is good, which is better, and which is the best of all habits?"

And Wisdom replies: "The title of the archangels is good".

Now, we know from later in the story that the archangels referred to here are Wisdom's qualities or characteristics (amesha spenta). But what does Wisdom mean by "the title of the archangels is good"? I think by "title" He means their names, which identify their nature ~

asha the true, wholly **good**, order of existence,

vohu manah its comprehension, **good** thinking,

spenta armaiti its **beneficial** embodiment in thought, word and action,

vohu xshathra its **good** rule,

haurvatat ameretat its complete attainment, which results in an existence that is not bound by mortality ~ all of which comprise

spenta mainyu a **beneficial** way of being ~ not specifically mentioned in this story because it is Wisdom's beneficial way of being, (comprising all the other attributes of the Divine), and so is Wisdom Itself.

So the story tells us that the names ~ the nature ~ of these divine qualities are intrinsic goodness.⁶

Then Wisdom says "The sight of them is better".

What does He mean by that? I think by "the sight of them" He means to perceive (or understand) what their names mean, what these concepts are. Even in the Gathas, the verb 'to see' is sometimes used for 'to understand, to know'. For example, Zarathushtra says "**Truth, shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire ... good thinking...**" Y28.5. Returning to our story, Wisdom in effect says that the nature of these concepts is (intrinsic) good. Understanding these concepts is better ~ more good.

And finally, He says "And carrying out their commands is the best [most good] of all habits." What are the commands of these divine qualities?

Well, the command of the true, good order of existence is to be truthful, to be good, do what is right.

The command of good thinking is good thinking ~ using our minds to discover and advance what is true, good, right ~ in our physical existence (acquiring knowledge) and in our abstract existence (ascertaining what is good and right).

The command of beneficial embodied truth is to embody all that is true, good, right with our beneficial thoughts, words, and actions.

The command of good rule, is to use whatever power we have for good, ~ ruling ourselves and our social units in a good way, ~ nurturing, taking care of, friends, strangers, the family, the community, the nation, the world itself.

This is how we perfect ourselves and our world. This is how we nurture, heal, existence.

This idea of how we perfect ourselves ties in to the first question Zarathushtra asks Wisdom: He asks: "In the embodied world [the material world] which is the first of the perfect ones, which the second, and which the third?"

And Wisdom answers: "The first perfection is good thoughts, the second good words, and the third good deeds."

This conveys a significant idea. It tells us that we attain spiritual perfection by being involved in our world (not withdrawing from it), by thinking, speaking and acting in a way that promotes truth and what is right ~ the true order of existence (*asha*-) ~ with each good thought, word and action, thereby perfecting existence ~ our selves, and our world.

Let's move to the start of the story ~ the description of 'Vohumano' (Av. *vohu manah*). In the story, Zarathushtra sees him in the form of a man ~ that's the image. What is the idea behind the image, what does Vohumano mean? It means good thinking, a good mind. So the story uses the form of a man to represent an idea ~ good thinking. And we are told that this Good Thinking is "handsome, brilliant and elegant," indicating that good thinking is something desirable, beautiful. The story then says that this Good Thinking "wore his hair curve-tailed, because the curved tail is an indication of duality;" What do you suppose the author meant by that? The Gathas speak of the existences of matter and mind, and in this story, the author may have been referring the duality of the material and the spiritual because good thinking operates in both the material and spiritual existences. The author could not have meant the duality of good and evil, because good thinking is, by definition, all good. It is possible that the author meant *knowledge* of good and evil ~ there being a difference between innocence and ignorance. We can speculate, but we cannot say for sure what the author may have intended by this statement.

Then we are told that Good Thinking's dress was not only "like silk," but that "it was light itself". What idea was the author trying to convey by telling us that Good Thinking was clothed in light? The expression *I'm in the dark* means *I don't understand*, or *I don't know*. When a cartoon character has a thought balloon with a light bulb in it, that conveys to us that he sees the light ~ he understands, he knows. Similarly, when Zadsparam says Good Thinking was clothed in light, he is telling us that Good Thinking illuminates.⁷ It makes things clear to us.

Now we come to one of the most important parts of the message or idea this story was intended to convey. What was it that led Zarathushtra to the Divine and Its qualities? It was good thinking.

The moral of this story in a nutshell, is that good thinking, leads us to the Divine. It helps us to understand the nature, the qualities that make a being divine. It helps us to access the solution for defeating evil, which is understanding and embodying the qualities of the Divine (their 'commands') ~ path of the true order of

existence, its comprehension, its embodiment with each good thought, word and action, its rule, its complete attainment, a state of being that is no longer bound by mortality.

These qualities comprise a wholly beneficial way of being (*spenta-mainyu-*), which is the essence of the sacred, the divine ~ Wisdom personified (*mazdā-*).

So we see that the message of this story from Zad-Sparam echoes the message of the Gathas in Yasna 29, which says that the key to solving the problem of evil and the suffering it causes is good thinking, which enables understanding the nature of the Divine ~ the qualities that make a being Divine. And good thinking enables the path of truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule, which is the solution to the sufferings of existence. The qualities of the Divine are also the path to the Divine and the reward for taking that path.

We are used to thinking of angels or archangels as fluffy messengers with wings. But the Zad-sparam story shows us angels in a new light. It tells us that Wisdom communicates with us, not through people with wings who fly through the air, but through good thinking. His angels are His thoughts. His angels are His own divine qualities ~ and perhaps those who bring these qualities to life with their thoughts, words and actions ~ part time angels, but all moving towards full time.

Before we move on, I would like you to consider one more thing. When good thinking takes Zarathushtra to the assembly of the archangels, where does good thinking place him? In the "seat of the enquirers". What does this tell us?

It tells us that not only is it O.K. to ask questions, but that we need to ask questions. Asking questions is a part of the search for truth which is a fundament of Zarathushtra's thought. It is the opposite of an authoritarian religion. It is interesting that in the YAv. *Hormezd (Ormazd) Yasht*, the composer of this *Yasht* has Wisdom enumerating His names (which reveal His nature) and one of these names (a favorite of mine) is

"... I am named One of whom questions may be asked, ..." Yt. 1.7, my translation.⁸

Unfortunately, this encouragement of asking questions as part of the search for truth, was subsequently misused by the religious establishment, and turned into a propaganda machine in some later Avestan texts (and the post-Avestan *Videvdāt/Vendidad*), which used Zarathushtra's name to (purportedly) ask questions, and used the Lord Wisdom's name to (purportedly) give answers that are devoid of spirituality, that reflected the power-hungry, greed-driven rules of that religious establishment ~ using the popularity of Zarathushtra and the authority of the Divine, to give credibility to such rules ~ which in fact are nowhere to be found in the Gathas, and reflect the very kind of religious tyranny that Zarathushtra rebelled against.

Our last story is taken from a Pazand work called the *Mainyo-i-khard*,⁹ as translated into English by E. W. West in about 1871. This Pazand story echoes roughly the same story told in earlier YAv. texts.¹⁰ I do not know Pazand (I am sad to say). But my generous friend Farrokh Vajifdar was kind enough to translate for me some of the Pazand words which West left untranslated. In addition, West translates the word "asho" as "pious". However, "asho" derives from Av. *asha-*, which means the true, good order of existence ('truth' for short), and it is used here as an adjective. So wherever the word "asho" appears, I have substituted the word "truthful" (Av. *ašavan-*) in square brackets, in place of "pious". Finally, I must tell you that, based on the resources available to me, there are some words I will not be able to translate, but I'll do the best I can.

The *Mainyo-i-khard* is an interesting work. Quite apart from the story which I am going to tell you, it has some neat proverbs or sayings. For example, it says:

"102 Be not reliant on much treasure and wealth; 103 since in the end, it is necessary for thee to leave all.

104 Be not reliant on monarchy; 105 since in the end, it is necessary for thee to be without a king."¹¹

This last maxim has a haunting quality and probably reflects the sorrow of being a persecuted minority ~ without the protection of the king ~ after the Arab invasion of Iran. But at another level, it also applies to any authority figure ~ parents, teachers, priests, ~ in the end, we have to think for ourselves, and be responsible for our choices. Another interesting saying in the *Mainyo-i-Khard* is:

"108. Be not reliant on kindred and great ancestry; 109 since in the end, dependence is on one's own deeds."¹²

But let us leave the interesting sayings, and get back to our story. This is a story about what happens to the soul after death. Like most stories, it contains some local ideas of that time, but it also contains some universal ideas which you may find worthwhile. Once again, as you read the story, look past the images to the ideas behind them.

The story takes place at the Chandor bridge. In Avestan, it is called the Chinvat bridge.¹³ Chandor is the Pazand word. This bridge is said to stretch from the material existence to the spiritual existence. Now, if you look behind the image, what idea does the bridge convey to you? To me, it conveys the idea of transition from the mixed (good/bad) material existence to the wholly good spiritual (no longer mortal) existence. In making this transition, we are told, the soul is evaluated, and that certain things aid the transition, and other things oppose or retard the transition. This is how the story goes.

"115 In the dawn of the fourth day, with the assistance of Srosh the [truthful], and Vae the good, and Vahram the powerful,

and [with] the opposition of Ast-vahad, and Vaê the bad, and Frehzist the demon, and Nizist the demon, and the evil-disposed action of Anger, the evil-doing destroyer,

it [the soul] proceeds up to the dreadful, lofty Chandor bridge, to which everyone, [truthful] and wicked, is coming.

116 And many antagonists arise there;

117 in ill will, Anger, the destroyer, and Ast-vahad who devours every creature, and knows no satiety;

118 and in mediation, Mihir, and Srosh and Rashn,

119 and in weighing, Rashn the just,

120 who makes no unjust balance of the spirits on either side, neither for the [truthful] nor yet the wicked, neither for lords nor yet rulers,

121 as much as a hair's breadth he will not vary, and he shows no favor; 122 and that one who is a lord and ruler, with that one who is the humblest man, he considers alike with impartiality.

123 And when the soul of the [truthful] passes over that bridge, the width of that bridge becomes about one league;

124 and that which is a soul of the [truthful] will pass over, with the assistance of Srosh the [truthful];

125 and that which is his own good deeds, comes to a meeting with him in the form of a damsel,

126 who is more beautiful and good than every damsel who is in the world; 127 and that which is a soul of the [truthful] speaks

128 thus: 'Who mayst thou be? that a damsel who is more beautiful and good than thee, was never seen by me in the world?'

129 In reply, that damsel's form answers

130 thus: 'I am not a damsel, but I am thy good deeds, O youth who are well-thinking, well-speaking, well-doing, of good religion.

'131 Since when thou sawest in the world the performance of idolatry, then thou hast abstained, and thy performance was the worship of God;

'132 and when by thee it was seen, that there was anyone who was causing oppression and violence, and distressing and overbearing a good man, and acquiring wealth by crime, then thou keptest back from creatures their own affliction and injury;

133 and by thee the good man was cared for, and lodging and entertainment¹⁴ provided, and by thee alms were given to him

134 who came up from near and who was also from far; and likewise thy wealth was acquired through honesty.

'135 And when thou sawest that there was the practice of false justice, and also of bribe-taking, and the giving of false evidence for it, then thou hast abstained, and thy speaking was true and proper discourse.

'136 Lo! I am this of thee, the good thoughts, and good words, and good deeds, that were thought, and spoken and done by thee;

137 for if I have become honored, then by thee I shall be made more honored;

138 and if I have become excellent, then by thee I shall be made more excellent;

139 and if I have become splendid, then by thee I shall be made more splendid.' ".¹⁵

The story goes on to say that an evil soul is met by a damsel who is vile and hideous who insults and abuses him, and tells him that she is not a damsel but his own evil deeds. This evil damsel is absent from the two YAv. Fragment texts which tell this story (with some differences) and which speak only of the beautiful damsel.¹⁶ Let's break off at this point and look for the ideas that this story was created to transmit.

We start with the image of the Bridge, where a decision is made as to whether the soul can make the transition from the material existence to the good spiritual existence. What opposes this transition? We are told, *Ast-vahad*, *Vaê the bad*, the demons *Frehzist* and *Nizist*, and *Anger / Rage* the destroyer.

Anger, or *Rage*, *the destroyer*, is a well known demon (the image),¹⁷ which is destructive of spiritual well-being in many Zoroastrian texts. In YAv. texts this demon is called *Aeshma*.¹⁸ In Pahlavi, it is called *Khashm*.¹⁹

Frehzist and *Nizist*: Farrokh Vajifdar says that *Frehzist* means the opposite of moderation, it means extremes, like greed, and *Nizist* means that which retards progress.²⁰

Ast-vahad, according to West, was the demon of death who strives to obtain souls for hell,²¹ (bear in mind, there is no 'hell' in the Gathas or YAv. texts which were composed during YAv. times).²²

Vaê the bad, West tells us that *Vaê* means a bird.²³ He says that *Vaê-i-vatar* means "... 'the evil flyer', the name of a demon who, like *Ast-Vahad*, is considered a demon of death...".²⁴

By Pahlavi times, cosmic dualism was an article of faith for many (but not all)²⁵ Zoroastrians, and death was considered an 'evil' creation by Ahriman, the Devil entity (who is absent in the Gathas).²⁶

However, in this story, the soul has already died, and has already committed the good and bad actions for which he is being assessed, so I am not sure what significance *Ast-vahad* and *Vaê the bad* have in opposing the transition of the soul to the good spiritual existence ~ unless of course their opposition means continued mortality (death). In other words, the soul which has vices ~ which has not attained completely, the true, good order of existence ~ cannot 'cross the bridge'. Its ability to make the transition to non-deathness, *amərətāt-* is blocked by continued mortality ~ death in that sense ~ because it needs to continue the perfecting process in mortal existence.

In essence, if we look past the images of these 'demons' to the meanings of their names, we see that our transition from the material (mortal) to the good spiritual (non-mortal) existence is opposed by evil, such as destructive anger; extremes or a lack of moderation (*Frehzist*); actions that retard progress (*Nizist*); and that these vices require continued mortality (*Ast-Vahad* and *Vaê the bad*), so that the perfecting process can continue.

Next, what speaks in favor of the soul? What assists a soul to make this transition from the material to the good spiritual existence? We are told that it is assisted by *Srosh*, *Vaê the good* and *Vahram*, and that *Mihir*, *Srosh* and *Rashn* speak in mediation, or in favor of the soul's transition.

Srosh (Av. *seraosha/sraosha*) means listening ~ hearing and implementing Wisdom's teachings,²⁷

Vaê the good is a symbol of something good (a good bird, according to West).²⁸

Vahram means the victory of goodness.²⁹

Mihir, (Av. *mithra*) originally meant contract, keeping one's word, and later came to mean 'good relationship', then 'friendship'.³⁰

Rashn, means right judgment ~ in the sense of mental conclusions that are true, right, (of which 'justice' is a part).³¹

So if you look past the images to the meanings of their names, the idea comes through that if the soul has been good (*Vaê*), if it has been victorious over wrongdoing (*Vahram*), if it has kept its word, been truthful, friendly, (*Mihir*), if it has heard and implemented Wisdom's teachings (*Srosh*), and has used right judgment, or has been a right thinking person (*Rashn*), these virtues assist and favor the soul's transition to the good spiritual existence.

Next we come to what happens at the bridge. We are told that the soul is weighed by *Rashn*. *Rashn* means 'justice' in the sense of 'right judgment'. If we look past the image of the person doing the weighing, to the meaning of his name, you get the idea that the soul is evaluated, or weighed, with a mental process that is true, right (*judgment* in that sense). Regardless of whether the soul is that of someone who is rich and powerful, or poor and humble, the determination is made without favoritism of any kind.

Then we are told that for a good soul, the bridge becomes very wide, and the soul passes over with the assistance of *Srosh*. The wideness means that it is easy for a good soul to make this transition ~ a transition

which is enabled by the soul having listened to, and implemented, Wisdom's teachings (*Srosh*) ~ the search for truth, the path of truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule.

And now we come to one of the most interesting parts of the story. When the soul is at the bridge, or at the point of transition, he is confronted by his own conduct, which appears beautiful or ugly to him, depending on whether his conduct has been good or bad. And this is what is so interesting. To whom does the person's conduct appear beautiful or ugly? Not to a third party. The story does not say that the damsel representing the person's conduct, appears beautiful or ugly to *Rashn*, or to some other person ~ whether allegorical or actual. No, it appears beautiful or ugly to the soul itself. I could be wrong, but to me, the idea that comes through is the idea of self-judgment. The soul judges itself.³²

If so, this concept of self-judgment is a most unusual idea. And I immediately searched through the Gathas to see if there is any hint of it there. And indeed there is ~ in more than one verse which corroborates the idea of self-judgment though in a slightly different way. For example, Zarathushtra says:

"During their regimes, the Karpans [a type of priest] and the Kavis [secular rulers] yoked (us) with evil actions ... But their own soul and their own conception [*daēna*-] did vex them when they reached the Bridge of the Judge, (there) to become guests in the House of Deceit..." Y46.11, Insler 1975; (*daēna*- means 'envisionment' ~ the paradigm through which they viewed and lived their lives).³³

"... the conception [*daēna*- 'envisionment'] of the deceitful person misses the true (conception) of the honest man. His soul shall vex him at the Bridge of the Judge surely, in that he has disappeared from the path of truth by reason of his own actions and (the words) of his tongue." Y51.13, Insler 1975.

So we see that the Gathas do indeed contain the notion of self-judgment.

Now, you may reasonably object: If the soul is not perfect, how can it judge itself so perfectly. Well, the Gathas and some later texts imply that the Divine is immanent (present) in all things³⁴ ~ the fire within, the wisdom that is 'innate' as expressed in the later texts. I speculate that it is the presence of the Divine within, that does the self-judging. This explanation also reconciles the fact that in the Gathas, the soul judges itself (Y46.11, Y51.13 above), and Wisdom is also involved in the process of judging (Y32.8, Y46.17, Y43.6).³⁵

And we see a hint of this concept of self-judgment also in a Pahlavi text, *Bundahishn* which was written in about the 9th Century C.E. ~ although by the time of that text, it had become an end of times judgment. But even so, it is significant that the concept of self-judgment survived the loss of knowledge that occurred not only after Alexander destroyed the Achaemenian empire, but also after the Arab conquest of Iran. The *Bundahishn* says:

"...Then is the assembly ... where all mankind will stand at this time; in that assembly everyone sees his own good deeds and his own evil deeds; ...", E. W. West translation.³⁶

The concept of one final judgment at the end of times does not appear in the Gathas (except in interpretations personal to a translator).³⁷ It is a later belief. But the concept of self judgment does, as we have seen.

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra also says, using the metaphor of the Chinvat Bridge, that the transition to the good spiritual existence is made by those people who have brought about truth for truth's own sake, and the rule of good thinking, and that the crossing is made in the glory of Wisdom's kind which I believe refers to Wisdom's qualities (each of which is an aspect of truth, or is equated with truth), and to those who have attained these qualities (glory being one of the 'light' metaphors for truth).³⁸ "Wise Lord, whoever ~ be it

man or woman ~ would grant to me those things which Thou dost know to be [*vahišta*- 'most-good'] for existence, namely, the truth for the truth and the rule of good thinking, (with that person) as well as those whom I shall accompany in the glory of your kind ~ with all these I shall cross over the Bridge of the Judge." Y46.10, Insler 1975.

Does this mean that the story in the *Mainyo-i-Khard* is wrong when it says that it is friendship, listening to and implementing Wisdom's teachings, and the victory of good, which help a person to make the transition? Not at all. They are just different ways of saying the same thing.

The true order of existence includes all that is good, and right. So "[truth for the truth and the rule of good thinking](#)," includes all the 'good' qualities described in the *Mainyo-i-Khard* story which help the soul's transition. Goodness, Victory over evil are also another way of saying "[truth for the truth and the rule of good thinking](#)." Wisdom's teachings, are the path of truth, the path of Wisdom's divine attributes, (*amesha spenta*),³⁹ so making the transition by listening to and implementing His teachings (*Srosh*) as we are told in the *Mainyo-i-khard*, is just another way of saying that we make the transition through "[Truth for the truth, and the rule of good thinking](#)" as the Gathas tell us.

The *Mainyo-i-khard* also tells us that *Mihir* (friendship) helps us to make the transition. In the Gathas, the relationship between man and the Divine is described, more than once, as that of a friend to a friend, or a beloved to a beloved. Friendship is a reflection of the mutual, loving help between all the living that we see throughout the Gathas, in which both the Divine and good people are 'pastors', nurturers of all the living. So friendship, being loving, nurturing towards all the living, helps us to make the transition from an existence that is bound by mortality, to one that is no longer so bound.

In short, both the Gathas and the *Mainyo-i-Khard* story tell us that we have to acquire the qualities of Wisdom (*amesha spenta*), in order to make the transition from the material (mortal) to the wholly good spiritual (non-mortal) state of being ~ which is Zarathushtra's paradise.

There is one respect in which other parts of the *Mainyo-i-Khard* and some other Pahlavi texts are very different from the Gathas, and that is in their ideas of heaven (as a place of good reward) and hell (as a place of punitive torment). In the Gathas and many (but not all) YAv. texts, what today we call heaven is not a place. It is a state of being which personifies truth completely, a wholly good, beneficial state of being. And hell as a place of torment in which the 'wicked' are punished in an afterlife, is absent from both the Gathas and all other Avestan texts (that were composed during Avestan times).⁴⁰ That kind of 'hell' makes a specific appearance more than 1,000 years after Zarathushtra in some Pahlavi and Pazand texts.⁴¹

In the Gathas, 'heaven' and 'hell' are states of being, not places of reward or punishment. The 'hell' of the Gathas is a wrong-headed state of being in *mortal* existence. The paradise of the Gathas is not a place to which we go when we die. It is an incremental, and eventually complete, state of enlightenment, in *mortal* existence ~ what we become as we (incrementally and eventually completely) personify the true order of existence and its components ~ qualities of the Divine (*amesha spenta*), which enables transition (crossing the bridge) to a state of being no longer bound by mortality.⁴²

* * * * *

¹ The stories in the later texts are written in ways that tend to reflect the mind-set, and way of speaking, of the period of time in which they were written. In addition, these stories were intended to perpetuate beliefs that were then current ~ parts of which are found in the Gathas, and parts of which came into the religion much later and are not

found in the Gathas. So if you choose to read in the later texts the entire stories that I mention in this chapter, large portions of these stories may seem obsolete to you, and a turn-off. But I have endeavored to quote from those parts that reflect Zarathushtra's thought in the Gathas. These parts are timeless, and yet reflect a style of story-telling that is flavored with antiquity, which I find quite lovely.

² Detailed in *Part Two: The Solution Of Yasna 29*.

³ See *Part Four: Zarathushtra's Date and Place*.

⁴ The story appears in a Pahlavi text which E. W. West called *Selections of Zad-sparam*. West notes that Zad-sparam was Dastur (High Priest) of Sirkan, south of Kirman, in about 881 C.E., SBE 47, p. 133, ft. 1, a little more than 200 years after the Arab invasion of Iran.

⁵ SBE 47, pp. 156 - 157.

⁶ In the Gathas, *vahišta-* ~ the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness ~ is used to describe Wisdom, His attributes (the amesha spenta), the path to Wisdom (which is the path of the amesha spenta) and the reward for taking that path ~ paradise ~ (which is the attainment of the amesha spenta); detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most Good Vahishta*.

⁷ In the same way, in the *Farvardin Yasht*, the fravashis of the truthful are said to be clothed in light, when fighting for victory. This makes good sense if victory is over ignorance, wrong-thinking ~ everything that is the opposite of knowledge, enlightenment.

"We worship the good, strong, beneficent Fravashis of the faithful [*ašāunam* 'of the truthful']; ... who struggle in the fights for victory in garments of light, ... " *Farvardin Yasht*, § 45, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, p. 191; Avestan word from Geldner 2P p. 178.

⁸ This section in the *Hormezd (Ormazd) Yasht*, with my translation and that of Darmesteter, is given in *Part One: Truth, Asha*.

⁹ According to West, the term "mainyo-i-khard" means "the spirit of wisdom" or "the spiritual (existence) which (is) wisdom." The term "mino-khirad" is the later Persian form of the Pazand term "mainyo-i-khard". West 1871 *The Book of the Mainyo-i-Khard*, Introduction, page ii.

¹⁰ The story in the Pazand *Mainyo-i-khard* derives from two YAv. Fragments (each in somewhat different form, but with essential similarities) which are called by Darmesteter Ch. 1 of *Yasht 22* (SBE 23, pp. 314 - 318), and Ch. 8 of *Yasht 24 a/k/a the Vishtasp Yasht* (SBE 23, pp. 342 - 345), although these "Yashts" are not really Yashts in that they are not in praise or worship of any deity.

¹¹ West 1871, *ibid.* p. 133.

¹² West 1871 *ibid.*, p. 133.

¹³ Translators are not in agreement regarding their translations of the term *Chinvat Bridge*.

Skjaervo 2006 thinks the (conjectured) stem is *cinvant-* which he thinks derives from *caē* 'to pick, sort out, make the accounts', and he shows *cinvatō* as present participle, gen. sg. masc.

Inslar 1975 comments (under Y46.10) that he agrees with Bartholomae (1904) in taking the stem to be *cīnvant-* as the present participle of *cī-* 'to decide, to discern', (p. 271), which more literally would make it the bridge of 'discerning', 'deciding'. But he (interpretively) translates *cīnvatō ... pərətūm* as "[Bridge of the Judge](#)", although neither of the Gatha verses which speak of Chinvat Bridge describe any kind of Judge.

Bartholomae translates the term as "Bridge of the Separator" (Taraporewala 1951 p. 608), as does Moulton 1912 (pp. 164 - 165, 374 et seq.).

Taraporewala 1951 (like Insler 1975) also translates the term as "Bridge of the Judge". He comments that in the Gathas, the two words are separate. In the later Avestan, the words became a compound term *cīnvaṭ.pərətū* which became a proper name. He thinks that *cīnvaṭ* originally was the present participle of *ci-*, *kī* (Skt. *ci-*) 'to sort out, to separate', and concludes (interpretively) that the word indicates a sorting out of the righteous and the unrighteous after death. He cites Vedic parallels where the Dasa are separated from the Arya. (p. 607). But the Gatha verses which mention Chinvat Bridge do not support this interpretation.

Humbach/Faiss 2010 translates *cīnvaṭō pərətūm* in Y46.10 as "the accountant's bridge" (p. 136) without comment. Humbach 1991 translates the term as "the account-keeper's bridge" but does not explain his translation choice in his commentary (Vol. 1, p. 170, Vol. 2, p. 184).

I follow Insler's linguistic reasoning, but not his interpretation. I translate Chinvat Bridge as 'Bridge of Discerning, Deciding' (taking *ci-* to mean 'to decide, to discern', its present participle being *cīnvant-* 'discerning, deciding'; *cīnvaṭō* is genitive sg. of *cīnvant-* and therefore means 'of deciding, of discerning').

Based on Zarathushtra's thought in the Gathas (the macro context), I think that the bridge is a metaphor for transition. The process at the 'bridge' is to discern and decide whether a soul has achieved completely (*haurvatāt-*) the wholly good true (correct) order of existence and therefore can make the transition from mortal existence to an existence that is no longer bound by mortality (*amərətāt-*) ~ a determination which is based on the qualities of the soul's being (as the story in the Mainyo-i-khard states). The translation choices of other translators ~ "Bridge of the Judge" or "Bridge of the Separator" or "account-keeper's bridge" are different ways of looking at, and expressing, the same process. But their interpretation suggests an end of life judgment prior to rewarding or punishing the soul ~ which is absent from the Gathas and even the later Avestan texts (that were composed during Avestan times).

The evidence underlying these conclusions are discussed in *Part Three: Chinvat, The Bridge of Discerning; The Absence of Damnation in Other Avestan Texts*; and *Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*.

¹⁴ The inclusion of 'entertainment' here has always touched me. It indicates a higher level of generosity in caring for those in need, ~ providing not only for necessities, but also extending a courteous hospitality, a lack of condescension, by providing entertainment, which I really like.

¹⁵ West 1871, *Mainyo-i-Khard*, pp. 133 - 134.

¹⁶ See in *Part Three: The Absence of Damnation & Hell in Other Avestan Texts*, and *Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*.

¹⁷ See *Part One: Does The Devil Exist?*

¹⁸ For example, the YAv. Yy57.25 (which Mills calls the Srosh Yasht) speaks of the "Wrath-demon [*ažšmō*]" Mills' translation SBE 31, p. 304; Av. word from Geldner 1P p. 202.

¹⁹ E. W. West's translation of Chapter XXVIII of the *Bundahishn* describes various demons, most of which are vices. In ft. 10, he explains that the demon *Khashm* is 'wrath' i.e. anger, rage, fury. The Pahlavi writers often used a form of the Avestan names of these demons, so the 'Wrath-demon' is also called *Aeshm* in the *Bundahishn*. SBE 5, p. 107, and West's ft. 10. See also *Part One: Does the Devil Exist?* for other examples of demons being the demons within ~ our vices.

²⁰ West, *Mainyo-i-Khard*, Glossary and Index simply identifies these as 'demons', pp. 80, 147. It does not give meanings for these words.

²¹ E. W. West *Mainyo-i-Khard*, Glossary and Index, p. 19.

²² See in *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise & Hell*, and in *Part Three: The Absence of Damnation & Hell in Other Avestan Texts*.

²³ In his Glossary and Index (the pages of which start again with p. 1), West note that *Vaé* means "a flying creature, a bird" p. 203, (not to be confused with *vâé* which means 'to cry out, to shout'). In YAv. *vaē-* also means 'bird' (Skjaervo 2003).

²⁴ West *Mainyo-i-Khard*, Glossary and Index, p. 203.

²⁵ See *Part One: Does the Devil Exist?* for an opposing view in Pahlavi and more ancient times that the Devil does not exist.

²⁶ See *Part One: Does The Devil Exist?*

²⁷ See *Part Three: Seraosha*.

²⁸ West's Glossary and Index *ibid.* identifies *Vaê-i-veh* as "...the good flyer' a name of the Yazad Ram, the *vayu* of the *Yasht* which Spiegel translates 'air'; ..." West, *ibid.*, pp. 203 - 204. According to Skjaervo 2006, the GAv. word *rāmā* is the nom./acc. sg. case form of the stem *rāman-* meaning 'peace'. In the *Bahram Yasht*, which is devoted to *Verethraghna*, 'victory' (of good over evil), one of the forms this 'Victory' takes is that of a bird (*vārəγna-*). *Bahram Yasht*, Yt.14, §§ 19 - 21, SBE 23, p. 236; Darmesteter translates *vārəγnahe* as 'of a raven'; but some of the uses of this bird's feathers are reminiscent of the *Simurgh*, in the *Shah Namah* (Yt. 14.35 - 36, SBE 23, p. 341); and Skjaervo 2003 translates the stem *vārəγna-* as "name of a bird of prey, *falcon." So there is some uncertainty as to the kind of bird a *vārəγna-* might be, except that it is powerful, and a symbol of the victory of good over evil.

²⁹ The evolution of the meaning of *vahrām* demonstrates the validity of Mr. Justice Holmes' statement that in understanding the law, a page of history is worth a volume of logic (*New York Trust Co. v. Eisner*, 256 U.S. 345, 349; 1921). The same can be said of the evolution in the meaning of words in general, and of *vahrām* in particular. It has come to mean 'victory' (over evil).

West in his Glossary and Index to *The Book of the Mainyo-i-Khard* does not give a linguistic analysis of *vahrām*, but associates it with the Sasanian *Varahrân* (p. 205).

Taraporewala says that the genesis of the Pahlavi *varhrân* is the Avestan *vərəθra-jan* 'victorious', and *vərəθra-γna* 'victory', (which he says is Pahlavi *varhrân*, Persian *bahrām*), which ultimately became the name of a yazata who was the guardian spirit of the Sasanian Dynasty. (Needless to say, victory was a high priority with the monarchs of that time period, which was beset by wars). A detailed explanation of the evolution of this word which is related to Av. *vərəθra-jan* 'victorious', and *vərəθra-γna* 'victory', is given in a footnote in *Part Six: Yasna 44.16*.

Moulton 1912 notes Bartholomae's opinion that Avestan *vrtrahan-verethrajan* means "assault-repelling, victorious". Moulton identifies *verethraghna-* as the "Avestan genius of Victory" and states that earlier *verethraghna-* was the name of one of the "old Aryan gods". He explains that *Vrtrahan*, a name of the Indic deity *Indra* "is assumed to mean 'slayer of *Vrtra*'"; that the Indo-Aryans invented a demon to explain *Vrtra*, but that "the true meaning of *Vrtra* was lost." (pp. 427, 103, 69). Malandra 1983, on the other hand, states that in a famous Vedic myth, the God *Indra* casts the anticomic demon *Vrtra* down into "long darkness" after having separated the cosmos (*sat*) from chaos (*asat*). Malandra 1983, p. 12.

Thus *Vrtra* may have been associated with the opposite of order (Ved. *rta*, GAv. *aša-*).

In the *Gathas* the word *verethraghna-* came to be used for the victory of good over evil. And in the later texts, *varhran/bahram* is used in the same way.

³⁰ Mihir is the Pahlavi word for the Avestan *miθra-* which has been translated by various translators as 'contract' and also 'friendship', as Taraporewala 1951 discusses (p. 588). At first thought, these meanings may seem inconsistent, but they are in fact related. Keeping our agreements (whether as individuals or as tribes) would result in good relationships, and in many instances agreements or pacts between two tribes might be alliances resulting in ties of friendship. The word *miθra-* appears once in the Gathas (in Y46.5) where Insler translates it as "[of ... pacts \[miθrōibyō\]](#)". Skjaervo in his *Old Avestan Glossary* identifies *miθrōibyō* as the abl. pl. case form of *miθra-* 'contract'. Keeping one's word (i.e. not lying) was one of the key characteristics of the pre-Zarathushtrian Indo-Iranian deity Mithra, at a time period when a deity's name identified his nature ~ what he stood for. (See Professor Thieme's comments, discussed in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*).

³¹ West in his Glossary and Index, under *Rashn* shows its meaning as 'just' ~ its other forms are shown as *Rashna* and *Rashnu* (ibid. p. 174).

In *An Introduction to the Gathas*, (1989 - 90) # 2, p. 12, ft. 1, Insler gives the following explanation.

"The Avestan word for 'justice' is *rašnu*. ... In the language there is an important set of related terms, all of which ultimately derive from a root *raz* 'be straight, honest':

arəzu 'straight' originally, then 'true, right, honest' (like a straight line, or to speak straight etc.).

ārəzva 'honesty, righteousness'

arštāt 'honesty, righteousness'

rašnu 'justice'."

In my view, based on Zarathushtra's teachings in the Gathas (the macro context), the 'justice' that is *rašnu* is not a vengence based 'justice'. Deriving as it does from *raz* 'be straight, honest', *rašnu* means 'justice' in the sense of 'right judgment' (true, correct judgment ~ which is another way of saying 'good thinking' *vohu- manah-*, see the chapters on the Ahuna Vairya (Yatha Ahu Vairyo) in *Parts One* and *Three*.

³² Iranian Zoroastrians, include a mirror on the New Year's Haft Seen Table. I have often wondered if this was originally intended to represent the notion of self-evaluation or self-judgment (in a non-destructive way), which is one of the profound concepts in the Gathas.

³³ See *Part Three: Daena*.

³⁴ See *Part Two: A Question of Immanence*.

³⁵ Here are some examples of Wisdom judging the soul:

"... If I, too, am guilty of these sins, [Wise One](#), lies in Thy judgment." Y32.8, Insler 1975.

"... the glories of Him who offers solicitude (to us), the [Wise Lord](#) who, together with His clever advisor, truth, has judged the just and the unjust." Y46.17, Insler 1975. If we look past the image of 'truth' to the meaning of this sentence, we see that the Lord (who is) Wisdom judges what is just and what is unjust in accordance with the true (correct, good) order of existence ~ the standard by which the judgment is made.

"... To them does [\[ārmaiti-\]](#) announce the judgments of Thy will [[θwahyā x ratəuš](#) 'of Thy reasoning'], Thou, whom no one is able to deceive." Y43.6., Insler 1975. The concept of *ārmaiti-* means the true (correct, good) order embodied in thought, word and action, so if Wisdom's judgments are made through reason, (a component of good thinking, which is the comprehension of truth), and announced through Wisdom's *ārmaiti-*, we see again that the judgment is made with thoughts, words and actions that embody the true (correct, good) order of existence ~ the same standard as is used in Y46.17 (quoted above) but just expressed in a different way. Parenthetically, the word *x ratəuš* is the gen. sg. case form of the stem *x ratu-* which is translated by Insler as 'will, determination, intention', and by other excellent linguists as 'reason, intellect', which I think is more accurate (see *Part Three: Xratu*). So I would translate this phrase '[...To them does embodied truth announce the judgments of Thy reasoning...!](#)'

³⁶ West translation, *Bundahishn* Chapter XXX, § 10, SBE 5, p. 123. However, this text then goes on to describe the final judgment in ways that are consistent with later dominant religious paradigms, but inconsistent with (and absent from) the Gathas and YAv. texts (that were composed during Avestan times).

³⁷ Discussed in *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise & Hell*; and in *Part Three: Apema, One of Many Ends*.

³⁸ Detailed in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.

³⁹ See *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*.

⁴⁰ Detailed in *Part Three*:

Heaven In Other Avestan Texts; and

The Absence of Hell and Damnation in Other Avestan Texts.

⁴¹ See *Heaven & Hell in Pahlavi Texts*.

⁴² See in *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*; and *The Houses of Paradise and Hell*.