

For Love of Wisdom.¹

One of the unique things about Zarathushtra's teachings is that he does not give us fact specific lists of do-s and dont-s. Instead, he gives us a system, a way of living and solving our problems. His system is that we use our minds/hearts/spirits to search for truth ~ truth for truth's own sake ~ and choose truth, with each choice in thought, word and action, in all aspects of our lives.² He says:

"... as long as I shall be able and be strong, so long shall I look in quest of truth [*asha*]."

Gathas Yasna 28:4, Insler 1975;

"Truth (*asha*), shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire ... good thinking ...".

Gathas Y28:5, Insler 1975.

In this verse, the translator has chosen the word 'truth' as the object of the search. However, the word in Avestan is *asha* which has been translated as 'truth', 'righteousness', 'order' (among other things). And you well may question: How could one word possibly have such different meanings. The answer lies in understanding Zarathushtra's world view.

To Zarathushtra, the material/physical world, and the mental/abstract world, are two complementary parts of one overall design (in our present reality). The material or physical world is neither illusory, nor is it intrinsically evil, to be rejected. The exquisite order of the universe (of which even disorder is a part) – from the awesome splendor of galaxies, to the workings of a tiny cell, to the many material things that delight and comfort us in our day to day lives – are all as much a celebration of life, existence, as a loving heart, a truthful mind, a luminous soul. And the meaning of *asha* includes the truths of existence as a whole ~ material and abstract.³

In the material existence, *asha* includes factual truths (what is factually correct, accurate) ~ in our day to day lives, and also the truths that govern the natural order of existence ~ the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy etc.

In the abstract existence, *asha* includes the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ all that is right (correct), which in the Gathas includes such qualities as honesty, reason, good judgment, lovingkindness, generosity, friendship, compassion, solicitude, justice (as in being fair) etc. All the true, good, right qualities we cherish are implicit in the notion of the true order in the existence of mind/heart/spirit.

And in Zarathushtra's view, all the qualities of *asha* (all that is true) share a common denominator ~ intrinsic goodness. In the Gathas, (and in the *Ashem Vohu* manthra and later texts), *asha* ~ the true order in the existence of matter and mind ~ is equated with intrinsic goodness. In fact, it is described, not only as 'good (*vohu*)', but as the superlative degree of goodness 'most good' (*vahishta*). And in later texts, *asha vahishta* became a standard term.

Now you well may object that the factual truths of our universe are neither 'good' nor 'bad'. And that may (or may not) be true (depending on a number of factors including how we define 'good' and 'bad'). I can only give you my opinion (which I got from Zarathushtra and his ancient followers).

To me, truth is beautiful. Truth is intrinsically good ~ regardless of how adversely (or indifferently) it may affect us at any given time. Truth is certainly preferable to falsehood in all spheres of existence! In this, I find Zarathushtra persuasive.

Zarathushtra's system ~ the on-going search for truth in the material and abstract existences provides us with a seamless, evolving, perennially relevant blueprint for living, through which our understanding

incrementally increases, as each culture and each generation continues to discover what is true, good, right, in its own time period.

But we cannot pretend to have 'all' the answers regarding the purpose(s) (if any) for which the entire material existence has been ordered ~ an existence of which our planet, and human lives, are less than a miniscule part! This is one reason why Zarathushtra's teaching of the on-going search for truth is so valuable. We don't have even a small fraction of 'all' the answers. So any ideas regarding whether the material existence has been ordered in a way that is intrinsically 'good', is limited to what sense we can make of our own lives here on our small planet. Zarathushtra has ideas regarding the purpose of (such) existence (with all its delights and calamities ~ earned and unearned) which I find both logical, beneficial, and persuasive,⁴ a part of my love of wisdom/Wisdom. We will get into such ideas shortly. Let us return to *asha* and summarize its meaning.

In essence, in the Gathas, *asha* means an order of existence that is true, wholly good, in all aspects of our present reality ~ factual truths, as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit (all that is good, right).

And Zarathushtra tells us to engage in an on-going quest for truth in all aspects of existence ~ factual truths, scientific truths, philosophic truths, social truths, emotional truths, spiritual truths, all that is true, right, good ~ in ourselves, in our relationships with each other, with other life forms, with our environment, with existence as a whole ~ which (although not mentioned in the Gathas), would include other star systems, the universe(s), because the search for truth is on-going, and therefore, of necessity, it expands as it stretches our knowledge, our horizons, enabling continued relevance.

And the weapon of choice in this search for truth, has been translated into English as a 'good mind', 'good thinking', 'good thought' (*vohu-manah*),⁵ which in the Gathas is not limited to intellectual functions. Mind, thinking, thought, includes the full spectrum of all our (awake) conscious capabilities ~ reason, intellect, judgment, emotions, creativity, insight etc.⁶

And of course, if truth (*asha*) is wholly good, then the comprehension of truth would (of necessity) also be wholly good ~ hence a 'good mind', 'good thinking', 'good thought' (*vohu-manah*).

Now, searching for and comprehending truth is a necessary first step. But it is not enough. We have to bring truth to life, make it part of our reality, experience it, with our good choices in thought, word and action.

Zarathushtra teaches, that over and over in the events and circumstances of our lives we are confronted by choices. With each choice, we either advance the truth, or retard it. Even failing to choose, is a choice. Zarathushtra suggests how we should make our choices.⁷ He says, we should:

- * listen to what others have to say that is good (wisdom acquired by the ear),
- * reflect on the matter with a clear mind, and independent judgment - each person for himself (consulting the wisdom within), and then
- * make choices that are in accord with truth (*asha*).

"Listen with your ears to the best [*vahishta* - 'most-good'] things. Reflect with a clear mind - man by man for himself - upon the two choices of decision....." Gathas, Yasna 30, verse 2, Insler translation 1975.

The two choices are between truth (*asha*) and its opposite (untruth). And in the verse that follows, he describes the person who makes the correct choice as 'beneficent.'

"... the beneficent have correctly chosen..." Gathas Yasna 30, verse 3, Insler translation 1975;

'Beneficence' means a bountiful generosity, springing from lovingkindness, from goodness, ~ from the true (correct) wholly good order of existence (*asha*).

What do you suppose Zarathushtra is trying to tell us, when ~ of all the qualities implicit in the notion of the truths of mind/heart/spirit (*asha*) ~ he chooses 'beneficence' to describe the 'correct' choice?

It tells me, that on the path of spiritual growth, such qualities as righteousness, justice, are indispensable steps, but an even higher step is generosity, goodness, lovingkindness ~ which is the meaning of 'beneficence' (*hudah* literally, 'good-giving' ~ the kind of generosity that stems from goodness, lovingkindness).⁸

Zarathushtra does not require unthinking, blind obedience.⁹ Even when he prays for guidance from the Divine Itself, it is through good thinking that he asks the Divine to instruct him.

'... May the Giver of reason instruct through good thinking (the course) of my direction (so as) to be the charioteer of (my) tongue." Gathas Yasna 50, verse 6, my translation.¹⁰

Good thinking is a quality of the Divine (whom he names 'Wisdom' *mazda*), which mortals also have (imperfectly). In mortals, good thinking is the incremental and eventually the complete comprehension of truth ("Truth (*asha*), shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire ... good thinking ..." Gathas Y28:5, Insler 1975).

According to Zarathushtra, it is only when we listen to what is true, good, from others, think for ourselves, make independent choices, and learn from our choices (including our mistakes), that we get closer to comprehending truth ~ factual truths, as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ all that is good, right. The acquisition of wisdom is experience based.

But with the freedom to choose comes the responsibility of living with the consequences of our choices. In Zarathushtra's teaching, there is no hell in the conventional sense.¹¹

He teaches that the way our reality is ordered, (*asha*) includes the law of consequences – that we reap what we sow, that the good and the bad we do comes back to us. However, the purpose of the law of consequences is not punishment. It is enlightenment. When we are on the receiving end of wrongful choices,¹² it increases our understanding, our compassion, so that we do not make such choices again, not out of fear of punishment, but because our new understanding informs our preferences – we don't want to make such choices again, because that is not the way we want things to be. This fits Zarathushtra's thought that the law of consequences is part of *asha* ~ an order of existence that is wholly good, that operates for a good purpose to achieve a good end.¹³

Of course not all of the hardships and difficulties we experience are the consequences of past wrongful conduct. If life is a spiritual evolution towards truth personified (wisdom/Wisdom), as Zarathushtra teaches, then it stands to reason that we will have to experience many different experiences for this learning and perfecting process to be realized. The difficulties we experience – earned and unearned – sculpt our souls. They are the refiner's fire, without which pure gold would not be possible.¹⁴

In short, in addressing the problem of evil, Zarathushtra's thought does not focus on punishment or forgiveness. There is no notion of damnation in his thought. Rather, Zarathushtra's focus is on eliminating evil by changing minds from within, as part of an evolutionary process that is experience based. The factors that bring about such change are:

- (1) the ability to think, to reason, to feel,
- (2) considering what others have to say that is good (acquired wisdom),
- (3) consulting the wisdom within, and then making choices ~ each person for himself,

- (4) experiencing the illuminating effects of the law of consequences and unearned experiences, and
- (5) one other very important factor – mutual, loving help, between all the living, including the Divine (which helps to break cycles of hatred, revenge, and the abused becoming abusers).

The Gathas are full of interesting paradoxes. One of these is that on the one hand, Zarathushtra teaches individual judgment, individual choice, individual responsibility. On the other hand, he also teaches that none of us can make it on our own. Each of us, to make it, must both give and receive loving help (without impairing anyone's freedom to choose!).¹⁵

In Zarathushtra's thought, 'salvation' is not being saved from a punitive hell of tortures. Salvation is being saved from untruth ~ from all that is false, ignorant, wrong, "... let that salvation of yours be granted to us: truth allied with good thinking! ..." Gathas, Y51:20, Insler 1975.

Salvation is attaining (incrementally and eventually completely) the qualities of the Divine ~ the true wholly good order of existence (*asha- vahishta*), its good comprehension (*vohu- manah*), its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (*spenta- aramaiti*), its good rule (*vohu- xshathra*), the beneficial way of being (*spenta- mainyu*), which (when attained completely) results in an existence that no longer is bound by mortality (the material existence being the arena for the perfecting process) ~ a long, long process of spiritual evolution, the ultimate end of which is the attainment of truth completely ~ truth personified ~ an enlightened state of being, (which is wisdom/Wisdom).¹⁶

This brings us to another unique aspect of Zarathushtra's thought ~ one that was so fundamental that it was remembered down through the centuries ~ surviving the burning of texts, the killing of the learned, and persecution ~ yet a teaching that many of us today have forgotten (influenced by the pervasive mind-set of dominant religions). In Zarathushtra's thought, the process of spiritual evolution (described above) delivers an ultimate good end (truth personified) ~ which is certain ~ for every living thing having within it, capabilities that are a mix of 'good' and 'bad' ways of being.

In Zarathushtra's thought, there are no rejects. Everyone eventually will make it. This is not a pollyanna like, 'feel good' sound byte. According to Zarathushtra, it is a rational, logical certainty *because* of the freedom to choose, and the way existence has been ordered (*asha*), which through a huge variety of experiences (earned and unearned) incrementally, and eventually completely, causes us to eliminate our wrongful ways of being (freely, from within). In the later Avestan texts this ultimate good end is called *frasho.kereiti*, which essentially means healing existence by forwarding it to truth (*frasho*), making it happen (*kereiti*).¹⁷ In Pahlavi texts it is called *frashgard/frashkart*, as Zaehner so eloquently described it,

"... 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'." Zaehner 1961.¹⁸

With respect, Zaehner's idea of 'God' as a separate entity is somewhat different from that of Zarathushtra.¹⁹ And I think the word "Rehabilitation" is not quite an accurate description of the incremental and ultimate good end in Zarathushtra's thought. "Rehabilitation" implies that we once were perfect, and have degenerated, and that the process of spiritual evolution rehabilitates us ~ makes us perfect again. That is contrary to the teachings of the Gathas which say that originally there were two ways of being ~ the bad and more good (Y30:3) ways of being, the harmful and more-beneficial (Y45:2) ways of being, and that through our choices and experiences, we eliminate our wrongful preferences, and evolve to a state of being that is wholly, completely, good (truth personified) ~ which is Zarathushtra's understanding of the Divine.²⁰

Let us consider for a moment, Zarathushtra's idea of the Divine. Today, we are used to thinking (sometimes inconsistently) in terms of a benevolent monotheism. But things were very different in his time. He lived in an age when men worshipped deities who were a mix of good and evil qualities. We know from the Gathas, that the priests and princes of his day, joined forces in a greed-driven, corrupt, oppressive alliance, to control people through fear ~ and that the resulting cruelty, violence, bondage, tyranny created great suffering, but (purportedly) was approved of, and indeed engaged in, by their tribal deities (as described by their priests).²¹

Zarathushtra viewed this pantheon of fierce and cruel deities, whose authority was used to oppress, harm, and in his search for truth, using his own good thinking, he concluded that they were not worthy of worship. He demoted them from "godhood". Imagine the courage that took!

He reasoned that only a Being of pure goodness ~ truthful, reasoning, loving, intelligent, generous, just (as in being fair), etc. with no taint of evil or wrongdoing in It, could be considered divine, worthy of worship,²² - a significant step in man's conception of the Divine. Zarathushtra envisioned the Divine as having seven qualities, all of which include the quality of goodness, all of which are aspects of (or equated with) truth.²³ In his thought the nature of the Divine is:

1. The wholly beneficial way of being (*spenta- mainyu-*),²⁴ which is,
2. The true (correct) wholly good order of existence (*asha- vahishta-*) ~ 'truth' for short,²⁵
3. Its comprehension, good thinking (*vohu- manah-*),²⁶
4. Its beneficial embodiment in thought, word, and action (*spenta- aramaiti-*),²⁷
5. Its good rule, (*vohu- xshathra-*),²⁸
6. Its complete attainment (*haurvatat-*), and the resulting
7. Non-deathness (*ameretat-*),²⁹ a state of being not bound by mortality.

A Being who is Lord (*ahura-*), ~ in the sense of One who has 'lordship' over these 7 qualities.³⁰
A Being who personifies truth, (which is *Wisdom mazda-*). An enlightened state of being.

And Zarathushtra sees the first five of these divine qualities in mortals (albeit imperfectly). So in his thought, mortals are not born evil, corrupt, incapable of redeeming themselves. Mortals are a mix of divine qualities, and their opposites. And he states that mortals will attain all seven divine qualities completely (through a process of spiritual evolution).³¹

His formula for attaining the divine is simple, (but profound). According to him, the objective, and the path to the objective is the same (in nature, although not in degree). In the Gathas, in kaleidoscopic variations, he shows that these qualities of the Divine (each of which is an aspect of truth, or equated with it) are both the path, and its reward ~ a complementary and incremental process. The reward for truth, (incrementally, and then completely) is truth itself.³²

So Zarathushtra's path to the Divine (who is truth personified) is the path of truth. And truth is also his currency of worship. He says,

"I ... shall serve ...³³ you, Wise Lord, with good thinking ..." Gathas Y28:2, Insler 1975 (good thinking is the comprehension of truth).

"...I shall always worship ... you, Wise Lord, with truth [*asha-*] and the very best thinking, and with their rule..." Gathas Y50:4, Insler 1975.

"I shall try to glorify Him for us,³⁴ with prayers of [*aramaiti-*], ..." Gathas Y45:10, Insler 1975.

Prayers of *armaiti*,³⁵ are prayers of thoughts, words and actions that embody the true (correct) wholly good order of existence in the temple of life.

In short, Zarathushtra teaches us to worship Wisdom by infusing Its divine qualities into every aspect of our material reality, with each thought, word and action – at home, on the job, in our treatment of each other, of other life forms, of the environment, of existence as a whole. When we express divine values through our material thoughts, words and actions, it is impossible to advance ourselves spiritually, without at the same time making existence better, being existence-healers (*ahum.bish-*) – a teaching that reveals the interdependence of all things, and the need to care for, nurture, each part of this inter-connected whole.³⁶

To Zarathushtra, the purpose of life is for each fragment of existence to grow spiritually, creating and re-creating with our choices, Wisdom's divine qualities, until we attain them completely, and in so doing, benefit each other, helping to perfect existence as a whole (without impairing anyone's freedom to choose). (This ties into his idea of the Divine ~ as a union of the perfected fragments of existence).³⁷ And in his thought, the arena, the matrix, for this perfecting process is the material existence. One of his paradoxes ~ that we attain spirituality through the medium of the material existence. But he has another interesting thought.

In his thought, (in the long run), we cannot be happy, we cannot prosper, we cannot succeed in our *material* existence if we are out of sync with truth (the true (correct) good order of existence). And conversely (in the long run), being in sync with truth in thought, word and action, is the key to happiness, prosperity.

"...happiness has been lost to the deceitful who violate truth [*asha-*]..." Gathas, Y53:6, Insler 1975.

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

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

"...fame is to serve Thee and the truth, [*mazda-* 'Wisdom'], under Thy rule." Gathas Y32:6, Insler 1975.

Does experience validate Zarathushtra's idea that we cannot be happy, we cannot prosper, if we are out of sync with the true (correct) good order of existence (*asha-*)? Well, we have been brainwashed into thinking the opposite ~ that evil is strong, that 'good' is somehow weaker, less effective. But let us cut through that kind of mental conditioning and think for ourselves, taking a few 'real life' examples.

Consider a family. If its members choose what is true, good, right, if they watch out for each other, care for each other in good ways, they will be happier than if they are rude, insulting, cruel, unjust, deceitful with each other. The same is true for a work place, a community, a nation, the community of nations, our world.

Consider a business venture. Truth generates trust. If all else is equal (such as good products, good management, good marketing, etc.), in the long run, a business cannot succeed if it does not deal truthfully, fairly, with its suppliers, its distributors, its employees, its customers etc. Dishonest business practices may provide short term gains, but in the long run, (if all else is equal) a business that is run in a dishonest way will not be as successful as a business that is run in a way that generates trust ~ dependably honest, right, good. The failure of Enron and its auditors provide an excellent example of the validity of this point.³⁸ So too do the business successes of J. N. Tata.³⁹

Consider a government. When a country's legislature makes laws for the good of people and the country (rather than for corrupt purposes), when (subject to human limitations), the rule of law is enforced impartially, with truth, integrity, by the government's judicial system, then the rights of individuals, in life, liberty, property, and equal opportunities are protected, justice becomes the norm, and the pursuit of

happiness is enhanced. The rule of Cyrus II (the Great) who in 559 ~ 529 BCE ruled a highly successful 22 nation empire which promoted and protected religious, racial, ethnic, and gender equality, and the rule of law, provides a validating example.⁴⁰ When the opposite occurs, when the powers of government and the rule of law are used corruptly, untruthfully, unjustly, for greed, a lust for power, self-agrandisement, the feeding of prejudices, it creates an environment in which injustice and tyranny flourish, and unhappiness increases, as history so often has demonstrated.

In short, human experience (in the long run) has repeatedly validated Zarathushtra's thought that the search for, and personification of, truth (the true, good order of existence, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule), brings happiness, prosperity, in our material existence, and also enables spiritual growth to the ultimate good end.

Which brings us to Zarathushtra's idea of 'heaven'. To Zarathushtra, heaven is not a place of reward. Heaven is a state of being that we become, when we have attained completely Wisdom's divine qualities, when we become wholly good, when we personify the true order of existence.⁴¹ In the Gathas, one of the metaphors for truth, its comprehension (good thinking), and the Divine (who personifies truth), is light, glory, fire. (In that ancient time, fire was the only form of 'light' that man could make!). So the more we evolve spiritually, the more light-filled we become, and the more light-filled we make our world. In later Avestan texts, one of the terms for 'heaven' is 'Endless Light(s)'. An enlightened state of being. The Endless Light(s) are repeatedly described as 'self-made' (*xvadhata*). And Endless Light is a name of the Divine.⁴²

So with one concept ~ the true (correct) wholly good order in the existences of matter and mind ('truth' for short) ~ Zarathushtra encapsulates the core of his teachings.

Truth is the nature of the Divine, the path to the Divine, the currency of worship, and the reward for taking that path and so worshipping.

Truth is the wholly good order that enables happiness, prosperity, in our material existence.

Truth is the wholly good order that governs the material existence as a whole ~ including its calamities, its sorrows, its joys, and mutual, loving help, ~ all of which enable the long, long, soul refining process of earned and unearned experiences which (incrementally) help to increase understanding, eliminate wrongful preferences ~ so that *every* fragment of existence eventually will make it to the ultimate good end, ~ a state of being that houses a complete understanding of truth (the 'house of good thinking'), a state of being that houses the bliss, the harmony, of beautiful music (the 'house of song'), an existence that is wholly good (*ahuvahishta*),⁴³ that is truth personified, an enlightened existence, wisdom/Wisdom, (the Endless Lights).

The reward for truth is truth itself.

To summarize:

Zarathushtra's spiritual philosophy (for love of wisdom/Wisdom) embraces existence as a whole. It is a system, a way of living and looking at our reality, that is timeless. I hope you will forgive an oversimplification. In essence, he teaches:

- that throughout our lives, we are confronted by choices (between truth and untruth);
- that we should use our minds/hearts/spirits to search for truth in all aspects of our reality ~ the factual truths of our universe(s), as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit, all that is good, right;
- that we should choose truth, with each thought, word, and action ~ in the existences of matter and mind,
- thereby perfecting our world and ourselves,

~ until we personify truth completely, become one with the Divine, become the (self-made) Endless Lights.

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¹ This is an updated version of a piece that I wrote for a (short) lecture I gave more than 20 years ago, at a university in Venezuela, after which it was placed on the vohuman.org website, which now appears on zoroastrian.org.uk. I was surprised at how popular the original piece became, so I thought readers in general might find it a short, useful overview, and I decided to place it on the home page of this web-book.

² Detailed in these chapters in *Part One*:
The Search For Truth;
Good & Evil; and
The Freedom To Choose.

³ Detailed in *Part One: Truth, Asha*.

⁴ Detailed in *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*. We should avoid the arrogance (and illogic) of thinking that the entire universe was made for the benefit of the spiritual evolution of mankind, or even all life on earth ~ a miniscule and insignificant part of even the known universe, let alone that scientists speculate that their might be other universes. Why the material existence of one or more universes exists is something we simply do not know ~ but can (perhaps) incrementally begin to understand through the search for truth.

⁵ Insler 1975 states that in Avestan, *manah-* is used for 'mind' (faculty), 'thinking' (its process), and 'thought' (its object), p. 118. His insight helps to reconcile these 3 translation differences for the one word *manah-*.

⁶ Evidence from the Gathas is detailed in *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*.

⁷ Detailed in *Part One: The Freedom To Choose*; and in *Part Six: Yasna 30:3 and 4*.

⁸ Skjaervo (2006) states that *hudāh-* means "who gives good gifts, generous."
hu- is a prefix, and there is no dispute that it means 'good' (e.g. *hucisti-* 'good understanding' Y34.14c, Y46.4e; *hušyaoθana-* 'good action'; *hujūti-* 'good (way of) life' Y33.10a, 32.5a; *hušana-* 'good gain' Y53.5; *hux šaθra-* 'good rule', Y44.20a, Y48.5a).

And according to Skjaervo 2006 *dāh-* means 'gift', deriving from *dā-* which means 'to give' (among other things).

Insler 1975 sees a flavor of meaning for *hudāh-* which goes a step beyond simple generosity. He thinks Av. *hudāh-* is not cognate with Vedic *sudās*, 'of good gifts', but with Ved. *sudhā* 'good basis, welfare' (p. 166, commenting under Y30:3). He therefore translates *hudāh-* words as 'beneficent' (and sometimes 'blessed'). The meaning of 'beneficence' includes a bountiful generosity stemming from goodness, lovingkindness.

⁹ A hallmark of Zarathushtra's thought is the freedom to choose, without which the search for truth (as well as spiritual evolution) would not be possible. Unfortunately, many fine linguists, translating the Gathas through the mind-set of some dominant religions, have translated Avestan *seraosha-* words as 'obedience'. But they agree that the word comes from a root *srao-/sru* which means 'to listen'. In Avestan (as in English) 'to listen' means 'to hear and also to implement what is heard'. Zarathushtra does not require us to 'obey', but to listen, think for ourselves, and make choices. The meaning of *seraosha-* words used in the Gathas is detailed in *Part Three: Seraosha*.

¹⁰ I have not used Insler's translation for this verse, because he translates *xratu-* words as 'determination, will, intention' without any linguistic explanation. I prefer the translation of H.P. Schmidt (and other linguists) who translate *xratu-* words as 'reason'. Detailed in *Part Three: Xratu* where you can see translations by eminent linguists for comparative purposes, including Insler's 1975 translation.

¹¹ The idea of a punitive hell of tortures is absent from the Gathas and all Avestan texts that were composed during Avestan times, (detailed in *Part Two: The Houses Of Paradise & Hell*; and in *Part Three: The Absence Of Damnation &*

Hell In Other Avestan Texts). Hell as a punitive place of tortures first appears in certain Pahlavi/Pazand texts ~ written 1,000 or more years after Zarathushtra (detailed in *Part Three: Heaven & Hell In Pazand & Pahlavi Texts*). One of these texts candidly states,

"... men go to hell for this *reason*, when they do not submit *their* persons to priestly control (aerpatistan), and do not become acquainted with duties and good works." *Pahlavi Fragment Text*, E. W. West translation, *Sacred Books Of The East* (SBE) Vol. 5, p. 385. (West places in italics, words not in the text which he thinks are implied, and he shows applicable Pahlavi words in round parentheses).

Naturally, "duties and good works" ~ even in second place ~ would be as defined by that priestly establishment.

¹² We sometimes learn more effectively when we do not recall our past wrongful choices which set in motion the law of consequences (that we reap what we sow); explained in *Part One: Reincarnation*.

¹³ Detailed in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*, with many quotations from the Gathas on this issue.

¹⁴ Detailed in the following chapters:

In *Part One: A Friendly Universe*;

In *Part Two*:

Asha & The Checkmate Solution; and

Molten, Glowing Metal.

¹⁵ If (as Zarathushtra teaches) the freedom to think and make choices is a necessary part of the perfecting process, it stands to reason that we have to exercise a friendly tolerance of differing views (that do not harm) for the perfecting process to be realized. These ideas were expressed in a prayer that was composed during Sasanian times (or later), which calls the Divine the 'all knowing Tolerant One', and describes the religion as promoting friendship and wisdom. It says,

Homage to the all knowing tolerator ['Tolerant One'], who sent through Zarathushtra ... teachings of religion for the people of the world so that they may have friendship, inculcate faith and inner wisdom and knowledge gained from hearing. For the information and guidance of all men who are, who were, and who will be hereafter ..." *Doa Nam Setayeshne*, translated by T. R. Sethna, in his *Khordeh Avesta* (1980 reprint), p. 63.

¹⁶ See *Part One: A Question of Salvation*, and *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*.

¹⁷ The meaning (and linguistics) of *frasho.kereiti* are explained by Insler, whose explanation is detailed in *Part Three: Heaven In Other Avestan Texts*.

¹⁸ Zaehner 1961, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, (Phoenix Press reprint 2003), p. 308.

¹⁹ Detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*.

²⁰ Detailed in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*; and in *Part One: A Friendly Universe*.

²¹²¹ The generic words for pre-Zarathushtrian Indo-Iranian deities used in the Gathas are Avestan *daeva*, (used many times), and Av. *bagha*- (used once), which has cognates in many Indo-European languages. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra rejects the deities of his society ~ never mentioning them by name, but referring to them generically only in a pejorative way. But by the time of the Younger Avestan (YAv.) texts, the worship of some of these pre-Zarathushtrian deities ~ such as *mithra*-, (Ved. *mitra*-), *haoma* (Ved. *soma*) was syncretized with the worship of Wisdom *mazda*- (as Insler's teacher Thieme has pointed out, there was no Ved. deity named 'wisdom'; references are provided in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*). The YAv. *Yasht* honoring the Indo-Iranian deity *mithra*- details (in an approving way!) some of the incredibly cruel, angry, vengeful, ways in which he kills or otherwise punishes those who offend him, or lie to him. A footnote in *Part One: Truth, Asha*; has some quotations from this *Yasht*, which demonstrate this quality of Mithra, if you are interested.

²² Detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of the Divine*; and *The Identity Of The Divine*.

²³ Because the Avestan language has been only approx. 80 % decoded (according to verbal advice given to me by the late Professor Insler of Yale University), there are differences of opinion regarding meanings ascribed to these 7 divine qualities. But the meanings given here are linguistically sound, and also fit all of the ways in which Zarathushtra uses these words in the Gathas.

²⁴ Detailed in *Part One: The Beneficial Way Of Being, Spenta Mainyu*.

²⁵ Detailed in *Part One: Truth, Asha*.

²⁶ Detailed in *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*.

²⁷ Detailed in *Part One: Embodied Truth, Aramaiti*.

²⁸ Detailed in *Part One: Good Rule, Vohu Xshathra*.

²⁹ Detailed in *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*.

³⁰ In the Gathas, 'Lord' is one of the names of the Divine which reveals the nature of the Divine, in that Zarathushtra uses 'Lord' as One who has lordship over the qualities which make a being Divine ~ possessing them (and being possessed by them) completely ~ indicating a quality of existence. Detailed with quotations from the Gathas in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*.

³¹ You may wonder: Is this capability for attaining the divine available only to mankind, or to all that exists? Well, in expressing his ideas on the evolutionary process, Zarathushtra most often refers to human beings, ~ probably because the human condition is what he knew best. But Zarathushtra often uses 'mortals' in expressing his ideas. All life (on earth) is mortal. And indeed, in many subtle, indirect, ways he implies the idea of the immanence of the divine/Divine (in quality and being) in all things. And we see this idea even more clearly in later texts. In the Gathas, these ideas are detailed:

In *Part One*:

The Identity Of The Divine; and
The Fire In All Things;

In *Part Two*:

The Puzzle Of Creation;
A Question Of Immanence;
Light, Glory, Fire;
The Puzzle Of The Singular & The Plural
Did Wisdom Choose Too? and other chapters in *Part Two*.

In *Part Three*:

The Puzzle Of The Sincere Ones & Others.

³² In beautiful kaleidoscopic ways, Zarathushtra demonstrates in the Gathas that the reward for truth is truth itself; detailed in one of my favorite chapters ~ *Part Two: A Question Of Reward & The Path*.

³³ In these verses, I have omitted Insler's words 'all of' which are not in the Avestan text, and which Insler added ~ probably to indicate that 'you' is pl. Throughout the Gathas, Zarathushtra alternates between the sg. and the pl. in referring to the Divine, (detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Singular & The Plural*), which is consistent with his ideas regarding the identity of the Divine, (detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*).

³⁴ Why does Zarathushtra say "I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers of [armaiti], ..." Gathas Y45:10, Insler 1975? Well, Zarathushtra expresses in the Gathas another teaching that many of us today no longer remember. There is nothing wrong with praying for one's self. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra frequently asks Wisdom for help for himself. These are what I call 'asking prayers'. But in the Gathas, we also have what I call 'giving prayers'. And prayers of *armaiti* (thoughts, words and actions that embody truth) are 'giving prayers' (detailed in *Part One: Worship & Prayer*). This (in my view) was the genesis of the idea that appears in some later texts (as J. J. Mody has pointed out, and

Herodotus also mentions), that in praying to the Divine, ancient followers of Zarathushtra did not pray just for themselves. They prayed for others, for all the living. There is a beautiful example of this idea in the *Dibache* of the *Afrigan*, in which the Divine is asked to take our prayers into Its treasury, so that they can be distributed to all those who need (the benefits of) such prayers; quoted and discussed in *Part One: Seven Gems From The Later Texts*.

³⁵ The Avestan word *armaiti-* has been translated very differently (in totally irreconcilable ways) by eminent linguists. And individual Zoroastrians cling to a translation which they prefer, with heart-felt intensity. But if we want to understand what Zarathushtra has in mind, when he uses *armaiti-* in the Gathas, we need to look at more than ancient Indo-Iranian cognates ~ although that is an indispensable first step. We also have to look at the ways in which he uses the word in the Gathas. The only meaning of *spenta- armaiti-* that fits *all* of the ways in which it is used in the Gathas, is 'beneficial thoughts, words and actions which embody truth'; (detailed in *Part One: Embodied Truth, Aramaiti*. (The manuscripts write the word *ārmaiti-* which has in 3 syllables *aarmaiti-* and that is how it is pronounced today. But the meter of the Gatha verses in which the word appears requires the conclusion that in Zarathushtra's time, it was pronounced in 4 syllables *aaramaiti*, with less emphasis on the 2d *a*, which is pronounced short, as in 'fur'. That is why I often write the word *aramaiti* (when not transliterated).

³⁶ See the chapters in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*; and *The Paradox Of The Material & The Spiritual*. The hermit, the spiritual recluse, is not Zarathushtra's path to an enlightened state of being (although it may sometimes be a needed step in the evolutionary process ~ a way to re-charge our batteries, help clarify our thinking; touched upon in *Part One: Meditation & Contemplation*).

³⁷ Detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*.

³⁸ Enron Corporation was at one time one of the world's largest companies, headquartered in the United States, with revenues of nearly 101 billion, the year before its collapse. At the end of 2001, it was discovered that its allegedly healthy financial condition had in fact been misreported for some time by institutional and systemic fraud, which its auditor, Arthur Anderson had failed to report. Arthur Anderson at that time was then one of the largest auditing and accounting companies in the United States. As a result, Enron itself went bankrupt at the end of 2001, some of its top executives were convicted of fraud and went to prison, and its auditor Arthur Anderson went out of business. It was big news at that time (which I well remember!), but to ensure accuracy, I have relied on Wikipedia for specifics (its article contains more details, if you are interested).

³⁹ In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, J. N. Tata and his family, starting small with limited resources, developed a highly successful industrial empire, (which today is world wide). In building a steel company (then called the Tata Iron & Steel Company, today called Tata Steel) and carving it out of a jungle (then called *Saakchi*), J. N. Tata (with his two sons) planned and built a town (Jamshedpur) which provided their employees with affordable housing, free health care, and other benefits ~ long before any such employee benefits were even thought of in developed countries. His building plans for the town also required that streets be tree lined on both sides (to provide shade) and that space be set aside for Hindu temples, Muslim mosques, and Christian churches ~ religions which his diverse employees practiced. His management practices resulted in a high degree of profitability, as well as well-being for the employees of his companies, and the cities/towns/villages in which his companies were located, demonstrating (subject to human fallibility) a modern perspective on Zarathushtra's notions of 'good rule' and the happiness and prosperity it brings.

⁴⁰ I hope to include in *Part Four*, a chapter on *Cyrus & Zarathushtra*, but until I get it uploaded, you may read it on the website of the Zoroastrian Assn. of Sacramento at:
<http://sacza.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Dina-Mcintyre.Cyrus-Zarathushtra.pdf>

⁴¹ Detailed in *Part Two: The Houses Of Paradise & Hell*; and in *Part Three: Heaven In Other Avestan Texts*.

⁴² References are detailed in *Home Page: Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds*.

⁴³ The terms 'house of good thinking', 'house of song' and the 'most good existence' are 3 of the many terms Zarathushtra uses to describe the ultimate good end (a state of being) - what in other religious paradigms is called 'heaven' or 'paradise' (a place).

Detailed in *Part Two: The Houses Of Paradise & Hell*; and

In *Part Three*:

Heaven In Other Avestan Texts, and

Chinuat, The Bridge Of Discerning.

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