

The Eco-System & Zarathushtra.

The people of Zarathushtra's society lived in a rural environment,¹ ~ in tune with nature and the seasons. Their lifestyle made them intimately familiar with the plant and animal life that surrounded them and formed an integral (and essential) part of their existence. Today, most of us live urban lives, in very different circumstances. Yet Zarathushtra's teachings provide solutions for our current social and environmental problems. How so? Well, let me show you, with a starting point that may surprise you.

You may think that his perception of the Divine is 'just philosophy' ~ up in the stratosphere. But actually, his perception of the Divine is his blueprint for living. It includes 7 inter-related qualities.²

1. A beneficial way of being (*spenta- mainyu-*), which is
2. The true wholly good order in the existences of matter and mind³ ~ factual truths, as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit, all that is right, wholly good (*asha- vahishta-*) ~ 'truth' for short,
3. Its comprehension, good thinking (*vohu- manah-*),
4. Its beneficial embodiment in thought, word, and action (*spenta- aramaiti-*),
5. Its good rule, (*vohu- xshathra-*),
6. Its complete attainment (*haurvatat-*), resulting in
7. Non-deathness (*ameretat-*), a state of being not bound by mortality;

So *Wisdom (mazda-)*⁴ is truth personified. An enlightened state of being. One who is 'Lord' (*ahura-*) of the foregoing qualities that make a being Divine.⁵

Now, it is readily apparent that mortals (in varying degrees) have the first 5 divine qualities (although incompletely, imperfectly); and Zarathushtra says we can attain all 7 completely,⁶ by following the path of these qualities, with our choices in thought, word and action ~ the path of truth, its good comprehension, its beneficial embodiment, its good rule, which is the beneficial way of being.

So each time we think, speak, act, in a way that is honest, beneficial, generous, loving, friendly, compassionate, caring, just (as in being fair), ~ all the good qualities implicit in the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ we create something of the divine, in ourselves and in our world. In Zarathushtra's thought, the material existence is the arena for spiritual growth. So when we think, speak, act in a good way, we benefit ourselves spiritually, and at the same time we benefit the people, other life forms, the environment, that are impacted by our choices that are true, good, right, in thought, word and action.

Which of course raises the question: How do we know what is true, good, right? By searching for truth, on-going. The search for truth is a fundament of Zarathushtra's thought. He says, "[Truth, shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire both good thinking \[*vohu- manah-*\] and the way to the Lord](#)" Y28:5.

And what is the "[way to the Lord](#)" which we "[continue to acquire](#)"? In the Gathas, it is the '[path\(s\) of truth](#)' (Y51:13; Y33:5) and its comprehension, the '[path/road of good thinking](#)' (Y51:16; Y34:12 and 13). So the objective is truth, and the way to achieve that objective is truth. The means and the end are the same ~ except imperfect in the path; perfected in the end.

As later Avestan texts state,

"(There is) one path, that of truth, all others are non-paths" my translation;
Yasna 72:11; *Visperad* 24:3.

So Zarathushtra's [path of truth](#) includes an on-going search for truth in (what he calls), [both existences ~ the existences of matter and mind](#).⁷ This search for truth includes all the many faces of truth ~ scientific truths, factual truths, ecological truths, social truths, emotional truth, spiritual truths. A seamless, evolving, perennially relevant blueprint for living, through which our understanding increases, as each generation continues to discover what is true, good, right, in its own time period.

And since the Divine (in Zarathushtra's thought) is truth personified, the search for truth also enables us to (incrementally) become aware of how foolish we are when we project on to the Divine, our own wrongful ways of thinking, speaking, acting.

Now, it is apparent (is it not?) that the possession of these divine qualities ~ truth, its comprehension, its embodiment in thought, word and action, its rule, the beneficial way of being ~ are not restricted to any one race, tribe, or group of mortals. These divine qualities exist (imperfectly) in *all* mortals. Just as in the Gathas, the 'enemy' is not another tribe or race. The 'enemy' is untruth ~ all that is false, ignorant, wrong.

In searching for the Divine, Zarathushtra transcended a tribal mind-set, and discovered the family of mankind, which is probably why his teachings eventually became so popular, spreading over large areas of the ancient world.

So (as a first step), Zarathushtra's path ~ the path of truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule, the beneficial way of being ~ is inclusive, including all mankind, without discrimination or prejudices based on color of one's skin, race, ethnicity, gender, or any of the prejudices (and tribal mind-sets) to which we are prone.⁸

In fact the on-going search for scientific truths have made us aware (with our minds, if not with our emotions!) that we share genetic and molecular connections, not only with other humans, but also with other forms of existence.

Zarathushtra may never have known about genes, or molecules or atoms, but interestingly, he takes us a step beyond the family of mankind.

In the Gathas, he links the 7 qualities of the Divine (in kaleidoscopic ways ~ implied and expressed) with various aspects of the natural world. For example, truth (*asha-*), its comprehension good thinking (*vohu-manah*), and Wisdom (*mazda-*), are linked with light/fire. This is easy to understand. Truth enlightens. Wisdom (*mazda-*) is truth personified ~ the complete comprehension of truth ~ an enlightened state of being.

In those ancient times, other than the sun, moon and stars (over which man had no control), fire was the only source of light that man could make at will. So fire (which is self-made, and gives light) became a material metaphor for truth, its comprehension, and its personification ~ Wisdom (*mazda*).

Later Avestan and Pahlavi texts speak of the fire in all things ~ in man, animals, plants, the sky, the world itself. What does that tell us ... ?

For me, this was a "Eureka!" moment, (but one which at first I had a lot of trouble accepting: Other human beings? No problem. But other life forms? ... the environment? ... well ...). Yet, if we can free ourselves from the mental conditioning that dominates our societies today, this ancient teaching helps us to see the rest of existence, not as something separate from us, and inferior to us, to be used and exploited for our purposes (or condescended to), but as something of which we are an integral part ~ cogs in the amazing clockwork of existence ~ an interdependent eco-system. As scientist tell us, *We all are made of star stuff*.

And Zarathushtra tells us to be healers ~ not just of ourselves, not just of other human beings, but of existence itself (*ahum.bish* literally 'existence-healer' which Insler translates as 'world-healer'). How do we become 'world healers'? How do we 'heal' existence? We do so by implementing Wisdom's rule.

"... By your rule, Lord, Thou shalt truly heal this world in accord with our wish." Y34:15, Insler 1975.

Wisdom's rule is the rule of truth (*asha*), its comprehension (*vohu manah*), its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (*spenta armaiti*) ~ a rule that protects against injury, a rule that is compassionate. And Wisdom's rule applies to existence as a whole. Zarathushtra describes Wisdom's rule (through rhetorical questions) as follows.

"Where shall there be protection instead of injury?
Where shall [*merzhdika* 'compassion'] take place?
Where truth [*asha*] which attains glory?
Where [*spenta armaiti* 'beneficial embodied truth']?
Where the very best thinking [*vahishta manah* '(the) most-good thinking']?
Where, [*mazda* 'Wisdom'], through Thy rule?" Y51.4, Insler 1975.

Wisdom's rule of truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, the beneficial way of being, is our path ~ the path of truth ~ starting with the way we govern ourselves (in thought, word and action).

Which brings us to the question: If Zarathushtra's path is the path of these divine qualities, do the elements of the natural world that are linked to these divine qualities play any role in defining this path? They do.

In the Gathas, the metaphors linking the Divine Itself, and its qualities, with various aspects of the natural world are multi-dimensional, kaleidoscopic.⁹ In later texts, these qualities of the Divine came to be thought of as living beings (*amesha spenta*), and the links between these (personified) divine qualities and the material existence became rigid, one to one ~ with each such entity (*amesha spenta*) responsible for caring for the part of nature with which it was linked,¹⁰ and we in turn are required to do so as well. Here are four of these later links which demonstrate how ancient Zoroastrians thought these material links were included in Zarathushtra's path ~ the way we should live our lives.

~ good thinking (*vohu manah*) is linked with the material symbol **cow**, (which in the Pahlavi *Bundahishn* is mythically associated with being the progenitor of other life forms ~ **animals, birds, fish, plants etc.**). In some later texts, good thinking is linked more restrictively with '**useful four legged animals**' ~ a somewhat homocentric view, but ... a step in the right direction;¹¹

~ beneficial embodied truth, (*spenta- aramaiti-*), is linked with the material symbol **earth** (the arena for the perfecting process);

~ completeness (*haurvatat-*) is linked with the material symbol **water**; and

~ non-deathness (*ameretat-*), is linked with the material symbol **plants**.

Here are some excerpts from the *Ashirwad* part of the Zoroastrian wedding ceremony, translated into English by Shahin Bekhradnia,¹² which show that Wisdom's path includes both the qualities implicit in each personified divine quality (*amesha spenta*), as well as caring for their material symbols. The priest says,

"... Here is some advice fundamental to our religion. Hear it and in your own lives practice it so that it may be the source of happiness to Ahura Mazda and of good fortune (to you). ...

The law and custom of Holy **Vahman** [Avestan *vohu manah* ~ linked with **animals**] is good thinking and peace. Do not be revengeful nor malicious. Be of good mind and positive. ... Pursue knowledge and

advance learning ... **overcome prejudice**. Deal with your enemies according to justice. With your friends behave well. Look after **useful four legged animals** well and do not give them excessive work to do. ...

The law and custom of Holy **Sepandarmad** [Avestan *spenta- aramaiti-* 'beneficial embodied truth' linked with **earth**] ... Be kind and friendly towards each other ... and like the **earth**, be productive and bountiful. Keep the **earth** clean and well watered ...

The law and custom of Holy **Khordod** [Avestan *haurvatat-* 'completeness' ~ linked with **water**] ... Out of barrenness create fertility and produce happiness. Since **water** is the source of fertility and prosperity, keep **water** clean ...

The law and custom of Holy **Amordod** [Avestan *ameretat-* 'non-deathness' ~ linked with **plants**] ... create cultivated land. Plant **trees** and **plants**. Do not cut down young **trees**. ... Give **herbs** and medicines to the needy ..."

So here we see that (despite a somewhat homocentric view) ancient Zoroastrians understood that the governance of Wisdom's path of truth (its comprehension, its embodiment, its complete attainment) includes taking care of other life forms, keeping the earth and waters clean, free of pollutants, planting trees and useful plants.

The pollutants which concerned ancient Zoroastrians are different from the pollutants that concern us today which damage other species, pollute our oceans, the earth, our atmosphere. But the principle is the same, and equally relevant to us today (if we transcend the homocentric view of the Pahlavi texts). Ancient Zoroastrians may never have heard of climate change. But they understood that keeping the waters and earth clean, planting trees, orchards, and plants, were beneficial to the environment (and also to them) ~ a practice that has been abundantly confirmed by archeological evidence.¹³

So healing existence is not done by the Divine alone. It is a collective effort that involves us as well. The genesis of the process is good thinking,¹⁴ ~ the (incremental) comprehension of truth ~ factual truths, and the truths of mind/heart/spirit, all that is right, good.

But good thinking alone is not enough. Our thoughts, our understanding, our knowledge, have to inform our words and actions. We have to actively partner with the Divine in healing existence. Describing one who does so as a **loving** person (the word 'man' is not in the Avestan text), Zarathushtra says,

"...the loving man [*kathe* 'loving (one)'], ...
[*spenta-* 'beneficial'] through truth [*asha-*],
watching over the heritage for all,
is a world~healer [*ahum.bish* '(an) existence~healer']
and Thy ally [*urvatho*]
in [*mainyu-* '(his) way of being], [*mazda* 'Wisdom']."
Gathas, Y44:2, Insler 1975.

"... Therefore, may we be those who shall heal this world [*ferashem ... ahum* 'heal existence'] ..."
Gathas, Y30:9, Insler 1975.

Let us apply this teaching in ways that are relevant to our own times, with our choices in thought, word and action. I celebrate those who have the courage to oppose (in non-violent ways) prejudices and injustice of all kinds ~ racial prejudices (which lead to injustice), gender inequality (which leads to injustice), prejudices

against different sexual orientations (which leads to so much suffering and injustice) unequal opportunities in education, housing, jobs, and other social wrongs (which are unjust). I celebrate those who work to understand, nurture and protect other life forms and the environment. I celebrate those who recognize that we are contributing to climate change in destructive ways, and who try to do something about it (in 1,001 individual acts, as well as large scale business, national and international policies). Each such person is an ally, a partner, of the Divine in implementing the many faces of truth in action.

The saviors (*saoshyants*), in Zarathushtra's view, are those who translate knowledge into actions.

"... the saviors [*saoshyant*] of the lands, namely, those who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and truth, [*mazda*- 'Wisdom']. ..." Gathas, Y48:12, Insler 1975.

If we wish to follow Zarathushtra's teachings, we need to shake off the inconsistent mind-sets we have acquired over many centuries (millennia!) during which Zoroastrians have lived as minorities in dominant (often intolerant) societies. Some of the mind-sets we acquired were survival mechanisms; but we also have absorbed different dominant norms which consider man to be the center of the universe, with other life forms and the environment as having been made for man's use and benefit. This is alien to the truth, as anyone realizes, who has seen pictures of space, and the galaxies and star systems that inhabit it. Mankind is not the center of the universe. And any such mind-set is alien to Zarathushtra's thought as well (even though he may never have seen such pictures of space).

In his teachings (which are so beautiful) 'existence' comprises human beings, other life forms, the environment. To be an existence-healer (*ahum.bish*), it is not enough for us to advance ourselves spiritually and materially ~ neither as individuals, nor as communities, nor even as the family of man.

It is enough (with each choice in thought, word and action) to follow the beneficial path, the path of truth for truth's own sake; to partner with Wisdom/wisdom in healing all that exists.

In so doing, we heal ourselves.

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¹ The Gathas speak of cattle, horses, camels, pastures, plants and waters. Unlike later Avestan texts, the Gathas do not speak of planting crops. They do speak of the "[pastures of truth and good thinking](#)" (Y33:3, Insler 1975, which nourish the good in mortal existence (the allegorical cow). They do mention a ritual 'bread' or 'cake' which would have been made from grain. But we do not know if this was wild grain, or cultivated grain. The Gathas also mention molten, glowing metal ~ which was part of the process of making refined metal from ore, detailed in:

Part Two:

The Puzzle Of The Cow & Its Network;

Molten, Glowing Metal;

Earth, Water & Plants.

But we should not confuse living simple lives (in Zarathushtra's society), with being simple minded, or incapable of complex thought. We know that in Zarathushtra's society, riddles and mind-games were a form of entertainment. We see this in a Younger Avestan text in which a legendary figure named Yoishta prays to the spirit of the waters for help

"... To her did Yoista, one of the Fryanas, offer up a sacrifice with a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, and ten thousand lambs... He begged of her a boon, saying: 'Grant me this, ...that I may overcome the evil-doing Akhtya, ... that I may answer the ninety-nine hard riddles that he asks me maliciously...'..." *Aban Yasht*, §§ 82 - 82, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, pp. 72 - 73. This must have been a famous story, because even a Pahlavi

text contains (a version of) the story of Avestan Yoishta (Pahlavi Yosht), and the riddles of his adversary Akhtya (Pahlavi Akht).

And in the pre-historic legends of ancient Iran, later recorded in the Shahnamah, Zal (who was raised by a mythical bird ~ the Simurgh) had to answer certain riddles before he was allowed to enter their society.

² The Avestan language has only been approximately 80 + % decoded, so there are disagreements about the meanings of the terms that comprise the qualities of the Divine. But the meanings I have given are linguistically sound, and fit every use of these Avestan terms in the Gathas.

³ We well might object that the truths of the material existence ~ the laws that order the universe ~ are ethically neutral ~ neither 'good' nor 'bad'. But Zarathushtra's understanding that 'truth' is 'good' does not distinguish between the truths of matter and mind. He has an unusual take on this issue, which is discussed:

In *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and

In *Part Two:*

Asha & The Checkmate Solution;

The Puzzle Of Creation; and

In *Part Three: Chinvat, The Bridge Of Discerning*.

⁴ The meaning of *mazda-* is detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*. Zarathushtra's most used name for the Divine is *mazda-*. The two-word name *ahura- mazda-* became a standard term only in the later Avestan texts. In the Gathas, *ahura- mazda-* is Zarathushtra's least used name for the Divine, detailed in *Part Three: Evolution of the Name(s) Ahura, Mazda*.

⁵ In the Gathas, Zarathushtra uses 'Lord' (*ahura-*), in an unusual way ~ as one who has lordship over (complete possession of) the qualities that make a being Divine; demonstrated with quotations from the Gathas, in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*.

⁶ Detailed in *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*.

⁷ Zarathushtra mentions truth in the existences of matter and mind, in the following Gatha verses, Y28:2 and Y43:3.

⁸ This inclusivity is evidenced in accounts of the reign of Cyrus the Great (559 ~ 529 BCE) who created a vast multi-nation, multi-tribe, multi-ethnic multi-lingual empire, which he ruled in ways that actively befriended and assisted the various religions, cultures, and peoples of his empire ~ a step that went beyond mere tolerance, to active friendship. And archeological evidence from the reign of Darius the Great establishes that he built his palace (Persepolis), not with slave labor, but with paid labor, and that there was no discrimination against women or other 'races' in societal norms including owning property, running businesses, hiring policies, supervisory jobs and rates of pay in the workplace. These great kings governed the many peoples in their vast empire, in ways that did not discriminate on the basis of gender, skin color, racial, religious, ethnic, cultural or other differences. Detailed in the chapters in *Part Four*, dealing with early Achaemenian kings.

⁹ There is a Table in *Part Two: A Question Of Immanence*, which shows the kaleidoscopic ways in which the Divine Itself, and It's qualities are linked in the Gathas, with metaphors that are elements of the natural world.

¹⁰ There is a Table in *Part Two: A Question Of Immanence*, which shows the rigid, one-to-one ways in which the Divine Itself, and It's qualities ~ by then thought to be personified beings ~ are linked with elements of the natural world, in a later Pahlavi text.

¹¹ An example that is homocentric, ~ but a good first step ~ is in a Pahlavi Fragment text (*Sacred Books of the East* (SBE) Vol. 5, pp. 374 - 379) which says,

"Whoever wishes to propitiate Vohuman [Av. *vohu manah*] ... is *he* who wishes to promote the things of Vohuman; the well-yielding (hudhak) cattle, ... and should act for *their* happiness ... He should not give *them* as a bribe to a man who is a wicked tyrant, *but* should keep *them* in a pleasant and warm locality ... and he should not drive them apart from *their* young, and should not put the young apart from their milk..." *Pahlavi Fragment*, §§ 9 - 10, E. W. West translation (West places in *italics*, words that are not in the Pahlavi text, but which he thinks are implied, or necessary to make an English translation fluent).

You may notice, this text uses a word which West has translated as "propitiate" ~ which means an act of worship (consisting usually of offerings or gifts) to make a deity well disposed to the worshipper. But the author of this *Pahlavi Fragment* has the Lord Wisdom (purportedly) saying that one "propitiates" each of these beings (personified divine qualities) by caring for, and bringing happiness to, that aspect of the material existence which is under its care (§§ 1 - 6). For those who do not have access to SBE, this *Pahlavi Fragment* text is discussed in more detail in *Part Two: A Question Of Immanence*.

¹² In an unpublished piece, Shahin Bekhradnia has translated into English, the *Ashirwad* portion of a Farsi translation of the Pazand wedding ceremony, and she has generously allowed me to quote from it. Pazand is essentially Middle Persian (Pahlavi) written in Avestan script (with the addition of some ideograms etc.).

¹³ The Persepolis Fortification & Treasury Archives, consist of clay tablets discovered in Persepolis, which recorded various administrative details during the reign of Darius the Great. Most of these clay texts are in Elamite (the administrative language of the Achaemenian Court). One of these tablets, PFa33, (in Elamite), records a total of 6,166 tree seedlings which were divided between (and given to) 3 persons "to keep" and included apple, mulberry, pear, quince, olive, date, and pomegranate tree seedlings, as well as a number of other tree seedlings identified in Elamite words for which English equivalents are still unknown. As Henkleman notes, the total of 6,166 tree seedlings identified in a single text, gives some idea of the scale of Achaemenid tree cultivation and fruit production. Wouter Henkleman 2013, Introduction to Ch. 27, *Administrative Realities: The Persepolis Archives, And The Archeology Of The Achaemenid Heartland*, p. 528 from academia.edu. See also Brosius 2000, *The Persian Empire From Cyrus II to Artaxerxes I*, § 110, p. 69. It is worth noting that in Stronach's wonderful book (1978 pp. 107 ~ 112), on *Pasargadae* the palace complex of Cyrus the Great, there is archeological evidence of extensive gardens, with watercourses ~ valued for their own sake (i.e. not just for their economic value in the marketplace, such as orchards would be).

¹⁴ Detailed in *Part Two: The Solution Of Yasna 29*.