

Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds.

An Old Avestan text, one of the closest in time to the Gathas, describes the Divine as,

"... O Lord Wisdom, beautiful through truth [*asha*],¹ ..." *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, 35:3, my translation.

What makes a being beautiful through truth [*asha*]?

Well, in English, **truth** usually means factual truths. But in Avestan, *asha* (which is translated as 'truth') means **an order that is true in the existence of matter and mind**. It includes factual truths (all that is correct/accurate), as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit (all that is correct/right), which in the Gathas includes such qualities as honesty, lovingkindness, generosity, friendship, compassion, being just (as in being fair) etc., and above all, intrinsic goodness in the superlative degree ~ 'most-good' (*vahishta*).² In fact *asha-vahishta* became a standard term in later Avestan texts.

So in Zarathushtra's thought, the true order of existence is equated with complete goodness.³

We live in difficult times, when the good values we cherish are under siege. But Zarathushtra lived in even more difficult times, as did many ancient Zoroastrians. So let's take a look at how *they* thought we could make life beautiful through truth, starting with how we govern ourselves, which impacts our families, our communities, other living beings, our world.

Good rule (*vohu-xshathra*) is a rule that **serves**. The Gathas say,

"... One chooses that rule of good thinking allied with truth in order to **serve**..."
Gathas, Yasna 51, verse 18, Insler translation, 1975;

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

Now, truth, good thinking, and their rule are divine qualities that we also have, although incompletely, imperfectly. So how do we translate these divine qualities into reality? With another divine quality, which is also a component of good rule (Y51:4),⁴ and which we also have ~ incompletely, imperfectly. Speaking of these divine qualities (in the Divine and in mortals ~ Avestan script has no capital letters), Zarathushtra says,

'But to this (mortal existence) One/one comes,
with (good) rule, with good thinking, and with the true order of existence',
'and enduring [*armaiti*] gives form, breath (to them). ...' Gathas Y30:7 my translation.⁵

How does *armaiti* give **form, breath** to good rule, good thinking, the true order of existence? It can only do so with thoughts, words and actions that bring truth to life, give it substance.⁶

As Zarathushtra says,

"...Through its **actions**, [*armaiti*] gives substance to the truth ..."
Gathas, Yasna 44:6, Insler 1975.

Referring to this divine quality ~ *armaiti* ~ in mortals, he says,

"[*spenta* 'beneficial'] is the man of [*armaiti* 'embodied truth'].
He is so by reason of his **understanding, his words, his actions,**
his [*daena* 'envisionment']..." Gathas Y51:21, Insler 1975.

" ... the beneficent man ...
He serves truth, during his rule,
with good word and good action. ..." Gathas Y31:22, Insler 1975.

So each time we make a choice that brings truth to life, gives it **form, breath, substance**, with our good choices in thought, word and action, we help to make life, our world, beautiful through truth.

These ideas from the Gathas were turned into a famous sound byte which has defined the religion since (or close to) Zarathushtra's time ~ 'good thoughts, good words, good deeds'.

The *Yasna Haptanghaiti* (composed in Old Avestan, but not part of the Gathas) says,

'We are praisers in song, not deriders,
of good thoughts, of good words, of good actions
~ here and elsewhere ~
of (those that) are being produced, and of (those that) have been produced.
Through effort, in taking a stand, we are of the good'.
Yasna Haptanhaiti, 35:2 (my translation).

And we find the same commitment in the much later *Jasa Me Avanghe Mazda* prayer quoting from Yy12, which was composed in an archaic form of Younger Avestan.

<i>aastuye humatem mano</i>	I commit to the good/true-conceived thought ,
<i>aastuye huxtem vaco</i>	I commit to the good/true-spoken word ,
<i>aastuye hvarshitem shyaothanem</i>	I commit to the good/true-performed action , ⁷
<i>aastuye daenam vanguhim</i> ⁸ <i>mazdayasnim</i>	I commit to the wisdom-worshipping, good envisionment,
<i>fraspayaoxedhram nidhasnaithishem, xvaetvadatham, ashaonim</i> , ⁹	
(which is) quarrel-removing, laying down weapons, giving (one's) own, truth-possessing ,	

... ..

mazishtacha, vahishtacha, sraeshtacha **most great, most good, most beautiful.**" my translation.

'Most great' *mazishhta* is not used in a competitive sense.

It is a greatness of quality (the greatness of **truth** which the Divine personifies, the greatness of wisdom/Wisdom).

And it is **truth**, personified in thought, word, and action, that is **most good, most beautiful** ~ the wisdom/Wisdom worshipping envisionment brought to life, given **form, breath, substance**.

By the way, '**laying down weapons**' is simply a figure of speech, for '**creating a peaceful existence**'. I have seen no evidence ~ neither in the Gathas, nor in any later text ~ of buying peace at the cost of surrendering to evil in Zarathushtra's teachings.¹⁰ In the Gathas, among the problems that caused suffering in Zarathushtra's society, were predatory violence, cruelty, bondage, (Y29, Y32). And in later Avestan texts, we see much evidence that tribal wars were endemic in that ancient culture. So to make everyone '**lay down weapons**', stop predatory violence, predatory tribal wars, would have helped to bring about peace, lessen cruelty and suffering.

And '**giving (one's) own**' means **being generous with what we have**. In fact, Zarathushtra describes a person who makes the correct choice ~ not as 'just', not even as 'righteous', but as '**beneficent**'. Speaking of the two

ways of being (more-good/bad), he says "... And between these two, the beneficent have correctly chosen ..." Y30:3, Insler 1975. 'Beneficence' means a bountiful, good, loving generosity that is both:

- ~ material, giving material help to those in need, and
- ~ non-material, being generous with our time, our thoughts, words, actions, being there for each other, including (but not limited to) helping each other through the difficult experiences that sculpt our souls, being generous with all the living and our world, in a thousand and one ways (without being controlling!), making existence better.

A bountiful generosity is one of Zarathushtra's core teachings.

But this little triad ~ good thoughts, good words, good deeds ~ has an added dimension.

In Zarathushtra's thought, paradise is not a place of reward in the afterlife. It is a state of being that we become ~ starting, (and eventually reaching completeness), in mortal existence ~ which enables the transition (crossing the bridge) to an existence no longer bound by mortality.

One of the names for paradise, in the Gathas and later texts, is a way of being, an existence, that is the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness 'most-good existence' (*ahu vahishta*). And a later Avestan text tells us how a person attains this most-good existence that is paradise (in metaphoric steps). In this later Avestan text, the term that Darmesteter translates as "Paradise" is *ahu vahishta* 'most-good existence'. This later Avestan text says,

"The first step ... placed him in the Good-Thought Paradise [*ahu vahishta*];
The second step ... placed him in the Good-Word Paradise [*ahu vahishta*];
The third step ... placed him in the Good-Deed Paradise [*ahu vahishta*];
The fourth step ... placed him in the Endless Lights." Avestan Fragment 22, § 15 Darmesteter translation.¹¹

Endless Light(s) is the paradise (most good existence) of an enlightened state of being.

And in the Pahlavi *Bundahishn* the Divine is named, 'Endless Light'.¹²

Interestingly, later Avestan texts describe the Endless Light(s) as 'self-made' *xvadhata*. I have footnoted a few examples.¹³ In other words, we have to create, make, the enlightened state of being that is Endless Light ~ paradise ~ with our thoughts, words and actions that embody truth ~ factual truths, and the truths of mind/heart/spirit. Which leads to the question: Was (what is now) the Divine a part of this process of 'self-making' 'Endless Light'? The answer to this question (as I see it in the Gathas) is yes, and is discussed in other chapters.¹⁴

To summarize:

- (1) Our good thoughts, good words, good actions, are how we serve, how we make existence ~ our world ~ beautiful, through the integrity, the goodness, of truth (*asha vahishta*); and
- (2) Our good thoughts, good words, good actions, help us to become (in thought, word and action) the paradise of a most-good existence (*ahu vahishta*) ~ truth personified, an enlightened state of being (Endless Light), which is wisdom/Wisdom (*mazda* ~ Zarathushtra's most used name for the Divine).¹⁵

So each time we choose a good thought, a good word, a good action, we bring to life a little bit of the Divine, a touch of paradise, in our world and in ourselves. We help to make life beautiful through truth, which is how we heal existence from all that is false, ignorant, wrong, harming, cruel, predatory, destructive.

"... Therefore, may we be those who shall heal this world ..." Gathas, Y30:9, Insler 1975.

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¹ For ease of reading, in this short piece, I show Avestan words in stem form, and without transliteration (except in footnotes). And all references to *Parts One* through *Six*, are to the *Parts* on this website.

² As the *Ashem Vohu* prayer also states: *ashem vohu vahisstem asti* 'The true order of existence (is) good; the most good (existence) it is,' my translation. In Avestan, the superlative degree is often used as a crescendo of expression. And this first line of the *Ashem Vohu* mirrors a style that we see in other Avestan texts (e.g. the *Hormazd (Ormazd) Yasht*) ~ in which a description goes from the positive (good), to the crescendo of the superlative (most good) in the same line. Discussed in *Part One: The Manthra Of Truth*, with examples given.

³ In Zarathushtra's thought, existence has been ordered in a true (correct) wholly good way, and this includes the material existence which is the arena for the perfecting process, detailed in *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*. Of course, Earth is just one planet in our solar system, which is an insignificant solar system in the Milky Way Galaxy, which is a small galaxy in the (known) universe (which universe may be just a part of many universes!). So we cannot reasonably conclude (or speculate) that the entire material universe(s) provides an arena for our perfecting process. We simply do not have sufficient knowledge to even speculate (reasonably) what the purposes of the entire universe(s) might be. (As Mr. Spock would say 'Insufficient data Captain').

But Zarathushtra's teachings ~ truth for truth's own sake as a process of growth (material and spiritual) ~ provides a beneficial framework for (a) viewing existence, (b) living on our own planet, and (c) at least viewing and learning about less known aspects of what else exists ~ other life forms, the environment, here on Earth, and in other universe(s).

⁴ There is a lovely description of good rule in the *Vohu Xshathra Gatha* (the 'Good Rule Gatha'). It says,

"Where shall there be protection instead of injury?
Where shall mercy [*mərəždikā* 'compassion'] take place?
Where truth [*aša-*] which attains glory?
Where [*spənta- armaiti-* 'beneficial embodied truth']?
Where the very best thinking [*vahišta- manah-* 'thinking (that is) most-good']?
Where, Wise One [*mazdā-*], through Thy rule?" Y51:4, Insler 1975.

Words in square brackets and black font are my translation choices because they are linguistically defensible (based on the views of professional linguists), and because (in my view) they are more consistent with Zarathushtra's thought in the Gathas. The notion of 'mercy' as a reprieve from punishment is not relevant to Zarathushtra's thought, in which there is no notion of damnation in a hell of tortures. There is the law of consequences ~ that we reap what we sow. But our difficult experiences ~ earned and unearned ~ are not for punishment. They are for enlightenment ~ an essential part of the process of spiritual growth, which would be defeated if we were reprieved from experiencing them (detailed in *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*). And 'compassion' for *mərəždikā* (instead of 'mercy') is one of several translation options suggested by Bartholomae. This Gatha verse, Y51:4, and Zarathushtra's teaching of good rule is discussed in more detail in *Part One: Good Rule, Vohu Xshathra, & Power*.

⁵ The Gatha verse Y30:7 contains beautiful, multi-dimensional thoughts, which we can see in a more literal translation, detailed in *Part Six: Yasna 30:7*, which also contains translations of this verse by eminent linguists, including Insler's 1975 translation.

⁶ Linguists (and also practicing Zoroastrians) are in substantial disagreement regarding the meaning of *armaiti*. The only meaning that fits each use of this word in the Gathas, is *truth embodied in thought, word and action* (or *embodied*

(*personified*) truth for short), detailed in *Part One: Embodied Truth, Aramaiti*. Although written in 3 syllables ~ *ar-mai-ti* ~ many scholars agree that, based on the meters of the Gathas in which this word appears, it originally was pronounced in four syllables ~ *ar-a-mai-ti* ~ the 1st 'a' pronounced long (as in 'far'), the 2d 'a' pronounced short (as in 'fur').

⁷ The prefix *hu-* in these words *humatəm*, *hūxtəm*, and *hvarštəm* (*hu-varštəm*) literally means 'good', with a secondary meaning 'well being, happiness', but there are no fluent literal English equivalents for these three words which describe a commitment to thinking, speaking and acting in a good (truth-possessing) way. For example, a literal translation of the term *aastuye humatem mano* would be **I commit to mind/thinking/thought [mano] (that is) good/true-conceived [humatem]**. Awkward, and it does not convey the underlying idea effectively. Nor do the one word English equivalents for *humatem mano* 'well-thought, thought', *huxtem* 'well-spoken word', *hvarshitem* 'well-done deed' do so, because 'well' does not convey the idea of 'intrinsic goodness' which is the essence of the nature of such thinking, speaking and doing, and in the Gathas is equated with the true order of existence (*asha vahishta*), 'truth' for short.

Taraporewala's translation, 'true-conceived' although not literal, captures more closely the meaning of *humata*, *huxta*, *hvrsheta*, in that goodness is an order of existence that is 'true (correct)'. But his translation also does not specifically translate the prefix *hu-* as 'good'. Taraporewala's translation reads,

"... I ... dedicate myself to the true-conceived thought; ... to the true-spoken word; ... to the true-performed act..."
I. J. S. Taraporewala translation, in *A Few Daily Prayers from the Zoroastrian Scriptures* (Hukhta Foundation 1986 reprint of the 1939 original) p. 17.

My take? Well, since good thinking is the comprehension of truth, I think to capture the original (archaic YAv.) intent, we need to use both 'good' and 'true', which is a bit awkward, but more accurate. Thus:

<i>aastuye humatem mano</i>	I commit to the good/true-conceived [humatem] thought [mano],
<i>aastuye huxtem vaco</i>	I commit to the good/true-spoken [huxtem] word [vaco],
<i>aastuye hvarshitem shyaothanem</i>	I commit to the good/true-performed [hvarshitem] action [shyaothanem].

⁸ These words of the *Jasa Me Avanghe Mazda* prayer are quoted from the Archaic Younger Avestan Yasna (Yy12). And according to Geldner, the word *vanguhim* here appears in only 2 surviving manuscripts, ~ P14 and M26 (Geldner 1P p. 62, ft. 1 of paragraph 9). But during Sasanian times, when the *Khordeh Avesta* prayers were crafted, this quotation from Yy12 may have included *vanguhim* here, because the 'good envisionment' (*daenam vanguhim*) of the Gathas evolved into the *din* (religion) of the Pahlavi texts, which also was routinely called 'good' ~ *din-i-behi* 'the religion of goodness' (see *Part Three: Daena*).

Parenthetically, the word *vanguhim* is simply a grammatical form (accusative sg. fem.) of the conjectured stem *vohu-* 'good'. The adj. *vanguhim* is acc. sg. fem. because the noun it describes ~ *daenam* ~ is acc. sg. fem. ~ the fem. gender in both instances being purely grammatical ~ both men and women can have 'good envisionment'.

⁹ In the phrase *fraspāyaox ədrqm niḍāsnaiθiṣəm x'aētvadaθqm aṣaonīm* the **first** and **third** words are problematic to translate. The context of these four words indicates that they are a string of adjectives describing the immediately preceding good envisionment (*daēnqm*) which is the worship of wisdom/Wisdom (*māzdayasnīm*) there are no capital letters in Avestan script. And the inflections (grammatical endings) of these four words indicate that they are accusative sg. fem (which matches the acc. sg. fem. gender of the noun *daēnqm* 'envisionment' ~ the gender of both the noun and its adjs. being purely grammatical). The words *niḍāsnaiθiṣəm* and *aṣaonīm* can be translated without much difficulty. So let us start with those two.

niḍāsnaiθiṣəm. Skjaervo's definition (in his YAv. Index updated to Aug. 2022) for the stem *niḍā.snaiθiṣ-* is 'laying down (his/her) weapon(s)', but his YAv. Glossary gives no grammatical explanations. Jackson 1892 shows that the *əm* inflection is acc. sg. for masc., fem., and ntr. noun and adj. stems ending in consonants (like *viṣ-* fem. 'village'), (§279, p. 82). So the *-əm* inflection of *niḍāsnaiθiṣəm* fits the acc. sg. fem. declensions of the string of adjs. with which it appears, all of which describe fem. *daēnqm* 'envisionment'.

ašaonīm 'truth-possessing' (sometimes less literally translated as 'truthful') is the adjective of *aša-* 'truth', a ntr. noun. But although *aša-* is a ntr. noun, its adj. ('truth-possessing' or 'truth-filled') has both a masc./ntr. form *ašavan-*; and a fem. form *ašaonī-* (Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index updated to May 2022). In Avestan each adjective has masc., ntr., and fem. forms because an Avestan adj. has to be in the same grammatical gender as the noun it describes; so the masc./ntr. adj. *ašavan-* 'truth-possessing' would be used to describe a (grammatically) masc. or ntr. noun, and the fem. adj. *ašaonī-* 'truth-possessing' would be used to describe a (grammatically) fem. noun. And according to Jackson 1892, the *-īm* inflection (in *ašaonīm*) is acc. sg. for fem. *ašaonī-* (§ 257, p. 76).

Which brings us to the two problematic words:

fraspāyaox ədrəm 'quarrel-removing'. This is Taraporewala's definition (from his short book of prayers, which offers no linguistic explanation). I am inclined to think this word originally consisted of more than one word, which through frequent use together became a compound word, and then one word. But I was not able to find this word, or any component parts of this word, in Avestan glossaries available to me, except that the prefix *fra* means 'forwarding'.

We can surmise that *fraspāyaox ədrəm* would have to be an acc. sg. fem. adj. because it describes the immediately preceding acc. sg. fem. noun *daēnəm* 'envisionment'. Jackson 1892 shows the *-əm* inflection is acc. sg. for fem. *ā-* stem nouns and adjectives, §243, p. 72. So although no Indo-Iranian philologist has identified the stem of *fraspāyaox ədrəm* (in any glossary or index available to me), we can surmise that this is an *ā-* stem adj. and that its grammatical value is acc. sg. fem.

**x^oaētvā.dāθəm* literally 'giving (one's) own'. What is given that is one's own is not specified or even implied ~ I think for a good reason ~ because one of Zarathushtra's foundational teachings is generosity in thought word and action which includes being generous in material and non-material ways.

Unfortunately, the word *x^oaētvadaθa-* has been translated as 'next of kin marriage', by some professional linguists, although such translations (with respect) are not supported by either the linguistics on which they rely, or by the contexts in which *x^oaētvadaθa-* words are used in YAv. texts (detailed in *Part Four: Next Of Kin Marriages & Younger Avestan Texts*).

¹⁰ The pros and cons of whether or not Zarathushtra believed in unconditional non-violence, is discussed in *Part One: Love*.

¹¹ SBE 23, p. 317.

¹² *Bundahishn*, Ch. 1, § 5; E. W. West translation SBE 5, p. 4.

¹³ Here are a few examples of the endless lights being "self made" [*x^oadāta-*].

Bear in mind that in the Gathas and throughout the ancient texts, 'light' is used as a metaphor for 'truth', its comprehension 'good thinking', its personification 'Wisdom' ~ the Divine ~ an enlightened state of being.

x^oa- means '(one's) own' used the sense of what belongs to a person. In Younger Avestan, *x^oa-* is sometimes used as a reflexive pronoun '(one's) oneself.

The verb *dā-* (from which *x^oadāta-* is derived) means 'to give, produce, make, establish'.

Therefore in Younger Avestan texts, *x^oadāta-* (an adjective), would have all these flavors of meaning ~ 'self-given, self-produced, self-made, self-established'.

There is no one-word English equivalent that has all these flavors of meaning.

But in the quotations that follow, if you read all the Avestan flavors of meaning into the *x^oadāta-* words, you will see the lovely dimensions of meaning that would have been obvious to ancient Zoroastrians, as they sang (or chanted) the quotations below:

- ~ that we **make, produce** light (truth, the true order of existence) from (imperfect) divine qualities within us, in thought, word and action;
- ~ that we do not just make light for ourselves, but also **give** light to all the living (helping each other make it, being generous ~ but not controlling!);

- that we help to **establish** light in our world (by ruling ourselves with truth, its comprehension, its embodiment in thought, word and action, which in turn impacts the ways in which we govern our many social units);
- thus each of us - each person's 'own' self - **creates** an enlightened state of being, the ultimate good end, truth personified, with our good choices in thought, word and action.

Here are 2 examples from YAv. texts of the endless lights being *xʷadāta-* 'self-given, self-produced, self-made, self-established'. The necessities of translation require that I pick one. So I have picked 'self-made'. But if you think of each flavor of meaning based on its derivation from *dā-* ('to give, produce, make, establish) you will see the richness of the Avestan original.

" The endless lights, **self-made**, we celebrate [*anayra raocā xʷadātā yazamaide*] ...' *Sirozah* 2:30 my translation, Av. words from Geldner, Part 2 p. 267.

'Whenever, O truth-possessing Right Judgment [*rašnvō ašāum*], you (are) the **self-made** [*xʷadātā*] endless lights [*anayra raocā*]. ...' *Rashn Yasht*, Yt. 12.35, my translation, Av. words from Geldner, Part 2, p. 167.

'Right Judgment' - judgment that is true, right - would, when attained completely, perfectly, be a quality of an enlightened state of being (endless lights).

If you are interested in the linguistics of *xʷadāta-*, the following may be of use.

Skjaervo's updated YAv. Index seems unsure of the meaning of *xʷadāta-* - placing a question mark after his definition "set in place by oneself (itself, themselves)?"

Darmesteter (who translated when the decoding of Avestan was at an earlier stage) translates *xʷadāta-* as 'sovereign' in the *Rashn Yasht* and in the *Sirozah*. But, with respect, I disagree. The Av. words related to 'rule' or 'sovereignty' do not derive from *xʷa-*, but from *xšā-* 'to have command, middle voice 'to rule (over: gen.)' Skjaervo's updated Old Avestan Index; and *xšā-* has generated *xšāθra-* 'rule', and also 'ruler' (*dāstū mazdā xšayācā* "And do Thou give, Wise Ruler ..." *Gathas*, Y28:7 Insler 1975).

¹⁴ Discussed and detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*, and in *Part Two:*

The Puzzle Of Creation,

The Puzzle Of The Singular & The Plural, and

Did Wisdom Choose Too?

¹⁵ Detailed in *Part Three: Evolution Of The Name(s) Ahura, Mazda*.