

The Identity of the Divine

A belief in 'God' is a highly personal thing. On our present state of knowledge, the existence of 'God' cannot be proved or disproved. A person might think that the existence of 'God' is, or is not, more likely, based on reason, on the factual evidence of the way in which existence has been ordered (or not), and perhaps on personal experiences and feelings, or on emotional needs. But in the final analysis, it comes down to a matter of belief. Either you believe that 'God' exists, or you are uncertain of His existence, or you believe He does not exist.

Let me be up front with my own 'bias' on the subject. I believe in the Divine, although (after getting to know Zarathushtra's thought) not in the conventional notion of 'God'. True, to think is to doubt. Yet, while I like to consider myself a (somewhat fallible) thinker, I have to admit that I have always believed in 'God'. There have been times when I have wondered if He knew what He was doing. I have given Him the benefit of my advice on many occasions. I have been angry with Him. I have argued with Him. But (all His perceived shortcomings notwithstanding), I have never doubted his existence. Why, I do not know. With me, the feeling goes very deep and pre-dates any childhood conditioning. But the conventional notion of 'God' left me with a lot of troubling and unanswered questions.

And before we continue, let us be aware of, and resist, the silliness of the competitive attitude that underlies the kind of religious rivalries exemplified in the notion that "My God is better than your God," because (assuming for the sake of argument that 'God' exists), how we perceive Him (or It) is a function of human understanding ~ even religions which believe in 'revelation' are limited by human understanding, because the mind receiving the revelation is a (fallible) human mind, of limited understanding.

Before I discovered Zarathushtra's ideas I assumed (based on the conditioning of my cultural environment) that 'God' is a being who is inherently separate from the His creation, and who is, and always has been, all-perfect. And that He is responsible for the creation of all that exists, (most probably through the process of evolution). Unfortunately this paradigm of 'God' raises some awkward questions.

The age old question: If 'God' is perfect, and all good, and if He created all things, where then did 'evil' come from? There are those who contend that man is free to choose, and if he chooses wrongfully, then such wrongdoing comes from man, not 'God'. But that does not answer the question. Where did 'evil' as an alternative available to be chosen, come from? Where does man's capability, and sometimes his preference, for evil (before he chooses to translate such preferences and capabilities into thoughts, words and actions) come from? It cannot be doubted that man's nature (which contains both good and evil preferences) is a part of man. So if 'God' created man, then it follows (as the day the night) that He would have had to create man's nature, which includes both such capabilities. And if so, could 'God' be all good, if He created a being who has some 'evil' preferences? On the other hand, if He did create man's evil preferences, would a 'God' who creates evil be worth worshipping (other than out of fear)?

There are those who contend that man's evil preferences and capabilities were created (by an all-good 'God') so that man could strive to overcome them, and so become all good. But if it is a good thing for man to strive to overcome his evil preferences, why is 'God' exempt from this beneficial process? Why isn't it good for 'God' to so strive and overcome? If the answer is that He does not need to because He is perfect, then why did He not create man perfect as well?

Besides, is there any merit to 'God' being always perfect if He could never be anything else? Is an unearned perfection superior to one that is earned?

Then too, if 'God' is perfect, and (setting aside for a moment other life forms), if He created man imperfect and fallible, why would He damn him ~ punish him in hell (whether eternal or otherwise) ~ for behaving in the very way in which he was created ~ fallible? Is this just? Is this even intelligent? let alone Wisdom personified? And in any event, is it possible for a 'perfect' being to create something that is not perfect? The conventional perception of 'God' leaves a lot of unanswered questions.

There are those who see the conventional notion of 'hell' in the Gathas. I think (with respect) that such people are reading into the Gathas, their own pre-conceived ideas, based on a few later Pahlavi texts and the paradigms of today's dominant religions ~ none of which existed when the Gathas were composed. I do not see the conventional 'hell' (as a place of damnation, torture and punishment, eternal or temporary) in the Gathas, nor even in other Avestan texts.¹ The creation of such a 'hell' (in the afterlife) as part of religious belief, may, or may not, have existed in Zarathushtra's culture, but the notion of painful and severe punishment (in this life) by 'gods' for 'wrongdoing' (as defined by the religious establishment naturally) certainly did exist in his day.² An effective control mechanism for priestly authority.

Did Zarathushtra buy into this control mechanism ~ whether human or Divine? There is not a shred of evidence that he did so. In fact, the evidence is to the contrary.

The freedom to choose is a fundament of his thought. It is an essential ingredient of the search for truth ~ also a fundament of his thought. And for fallible beings, the freedom to choose necessarily includes the freedom to make mistakes (without being damned in hell for them, if one should be caught in the awkward position of dying before saying 'I am sorry' ~ in itself an arbitrary damnation, not worthy of a just, beneficial, intelligence).

We have already seen (in discussing the nature of the Divine),³ that Zarathushtra rejected the notion that 'gods' who were cruel, violent, tyrannical, et cetera, (as the gods of his culture were portrayed by the practices and teachings of their priests) could be worthy of worship. In re-thinking the nature of the Divine, he concluded that only a being who is completely beneficial, wholly good, who comprehends and embodies the true (correct) order of existence completely and thus is wisdom personified, could be divine, worthy of worship.

But in this process of re-thinking the *nature* of the Divine, did Zarathushtra also re-think the *identity* of the Divine? And if so, how did he perceive it?

Some of my (dear) friends, who are atheists, and also fans of Zarathushtra's thought, are of the opinion that the object of Zarathushtra's worship, *mazdā-*, is not a living being, not a 'God' at all, but rather a concept ~ wisdom.⁴ They point to the facts (all true) that truth (*aša-*), good thinking (*vohu- manah-*) and beneficial-sacred embodied truth (*spənta- armaiti-*) ~ which are concepts ~ often are portrayed as allegorical entities, and they conclude that Zarathushtra's references to 'wisdom' as an entity (*mazdā-*) is likewise allegorical. Bear in mind, there are no capital letters in the Avestan script, such as might help identify when 'wisdom' is a concept or the name of a Being. And it is also true that sometimes in Gatha verses, when Zarathushtra's most used name for the Divine (*mazdā-*) is translated into English, 'Wisdom', we often see a double entendre ~ Wisdom as a name and 'wisdom' as a concept ~ in understanding such verses, which is exactly what his contemporaries would have seen. So these friends of mine have concluded that there is no 'God' in the Gathas, only the worship of wisdom, which is consistent with the original name of this religion ~ mazdayasna, 'wisdom-worship' (or 'wisdom-celebration').

Was Zarathushtra an atheist? An agnostic? Did he believe in the Divine as Being?

The evidence of the Gathas is conclusive that he does indeed believe in the Divine as Being ~ as having an identity. In the Gathas, there are many references to *mazdā-* and *ahura-* (his most used names for the Divine) that are not consistent with the conclusion that these are merely references to the concept ~ wisdom and lordship ~ in allegorical form. For example, Zarathushtra describes Wisdom in the following ways:

"...Him who is beneficent through His [*spənta- mainyu-* 'beneficial way of being'] to those who exist." Y45:6, Insler 1975. As a concept, 'wisdom' may include within it the notion of beneficence (goodness, generosity, lovingkindness), but a concept cannot *be* beneficent to those who exist. Nor can a concept have a 'way of being' which is the meaning of *mainyu-*,⁵ (or a 'spirit' or 'mentality' or 'nature' as others have translated *mainyu-*). A way of being, (or a spirit, or mentality, or nature), can only belong to a living entity.

"Him, the One who offers solicitude..." Y45:7, Insler 1975. The same argument applies. The concept, 'wisdom', may include within it, the notion of solicitude (loving care, concern), but it cannot engage in the act of offering solicitude to others.

"... Him who left to our will (to choose between) the [*spāncā* 'beneficial'] and the [*aspāncā* 'non-beneficial']..." Y45:9, Insler 1975. The same argument applies. 'Wisdom', as a concept, may include the notion of tolerance. But it takes a being to engage in the act of not interfering with the freedom to choose.

"...Him, the Lord, who is famed to be wise in His soul [*urvan-*] ..." Y45:10, Insler 1975. However we choose to translate *urvan-*, it is some form of being ~ whether as 'self' or as 'soul' (the non-material aspect of being), which a concept is not.⁶

"...the truthful Lord, [*spənta-* 'beneficial~sacred'] in His actions..." Y46:9, Insler 1975. A concept cannot perform actions.

"...I realized Thee to be (ever) young in mind..." Y31:8, Insler 1975. While a concept might be 'ever young', it cannot have a 'mind' ~ the existence of 'mind' and 'thinking' as a part of wisdom (*mazdā-*) indicates that *mazdā-* is something more than a concept to Zarathushtra. But (to my delight) his notion of Divine Being is not one who is fossilized in Its thinking. It is "... (ever) young in mind..."

And Zarathushtra says to the Lord, Wisdom: "...I lament to Thee. Take notice of it, Lord, offering the support which a friend should grant to a friend..." Y46:2, Insler 1975. While a concept might be deemed friendly, and even (at a stretch) supportive, it cannot *take notice*, nor can it *be* a friend who *offers* support.

The examples are legion. These are just a few. To me at least, the evidence is compelling, that to Zarathushtra, Wisdom (*mazdā-*) is a living entity.⁷

Which leads us to the question: what kind of an entity is the Divine in Zarathushtra's thought?

Zarathushtra's understanding of the identity of the Divine springs out of his culture, but is nevertheless different from it. And his understanding of the identity of the Divine is also radically different from the perception of 'God' that governs most of the dominant religions of today, which did not exist in Zarathushtra's day, but which have conditioned the thinking of many scholars who have translated the Gathas, and, (with noble exceptions), have also conditioned the thinking of many Zoroastrians today ~ heirs of generations who have lived for centuries in such dominant religious environments ~ Islam in Iran after the Arab conquest of Iran, and Christianity in India, during the British occupation of India, during (or shortly after) which times so many eminent Zoroastrian scholars penned their thoughts.

The One God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are all thought of as a Being, separate and apart from other life forms ~ except for certain minority views, such as the Sufis in Islam and some mystics in

Christianity, (I am not familiar enough with the Kabbala to venture an opinion on its mysticism and perception of the Divine in this school of Jewish thought).

The 'God' that I see in the Gathas is not a being who is separate and apart from the rest of existence.

In the centuries following the Arab invasion of Iran (which occurred in about 647 CE), Zoroastrian texts were burned and the learned killed, resulting in great loss of knowledge.⁸ And Islam was established as the one and only true religion in that society with no tolerance for other points of view. In that pervasive and domineering environment, it is not surprising that the mind-set of Zoroastrians regarding the nature and identity of 'God' became conditioned in succeeding generations to reflect in large measure the view of 'God' as a separate being, as some surviving Pahlavi texts (written a few centuries after the Arab invasion of Iran) demonstrate. It is true that some Pahlavi texts (like the *Bundahishn*, and the writings of *Zadsparam*) were motivated by the sincere desire to record faithfully, bits and pieces of ancient knowledge, such as the idea that there is a 'fire' in all things.⁹ But the authors of these texts did not understand the ancient symbolism they were recording as their comments indicate.¹⁰ Or if some of them did, having lived under Islam for many centuries, they may have been afraid to talk about and teach it openly ~ as a teaching for the Zoroastrian community ~ even though they faithfully recorded it. But it is important to remember that by this time, knowledge of Avestan as a language, had died out, and therefore the Gathas as a source of spiritual knowledge were no longer available to Zoroastrians.

Long before the British occupation of India, Zoroastrians in India lived in a religious environment that was predominantly Hindu (a tolerant environment). But by the time Zoroastrians arrived in India, they had already lived for a few hundred years in Iran, under Muslim rule, and they brought with them to India, a mind-set of the Divine that had been conditioned for centuries by that dominating environment. In India, the tolerant Hindus did not impose their religious mind-set on others. The conditioning of Zoroastrian minds that occurred during those times in India under Hindu rule, was more subtle, and occurred more through association and adoption, rather than imposition, as evidenced, for example, by the Indic elements in certain Zoroastrian religious practices, such as the 'teelee', the coconut, the paan leaves, etc., and also in the writings of certain Zoroastrian priests in India.¹¹

In attempting to understand Zarathushtra's thought, we first need to understand the mind-set of his culture regarding the identity of the divine. No contemporary Avestan texts or inscriptions have survived from Zarathushtra's day which describe the religion(s) that existed in his society, but the Vedic texts provide us with information about the deities that were worshipped by the Aryas (the Indo-Iranians) when they were one tribe, before some of them migrated to the Indian sub-continent, and others to regions in ancient Iran.¹² And some of these deities were the deities of Zarathushtra's society. We know this is so because, centuries after Zarathushtra's time, a few of the deities mentioned in the Vedas were brought into Zarathushtra's religion ~ appearing in the YAv. texts, to form a syncretized religion.¹³

A word about gender. The masc. gender used in pronouns and nouns for the Divine is sometimes a grammatical masc., and sometimes is used generically (the way in English we use 'mankind' to include all genders).¹⁴

Zarathushtra's re-thinking of the *identity* of the Divine came from the mind-set of his Indo-Iranian culture, but was different from it, and is also so different from conventional modern Zoroastrian thought, that to have credibility, one needs to see the evidence detailed in many of the puzzles in *Part Two*. First, I will summarize here the Indo-Iranian mind-set regarding the identity of deities they worshipped, and Zarathushtra's re-thinking of that mind-set, as seen in the Gathas.

'Deities' is not an adequate English equivalent. I use it for want of a better word. The deities of the Avestan culture were the spiritual essences of important material things or concepts ~ a mind-set which the Avestan people derived from their Indo-Iranian heritage. To give a few examples,

Fire (Av. *ātar-* Ved. *agni*) was both the material fire, and also its spiritual essence, a 'deity'.

The haoma plants (Av. *haoma* Ved. *soma*) were both the material plants (from which the drink was made), and also their spiritual essence, the 'deity' Haoma.

Avestan *miθra-* (Ved. *mitrā-*) means 'contract'. Contracts were an important aspect of life in a time when survival often depended on the alliances or contracts between families or clans. And the contract (a material concept) generated the idea of its spiritual essence, the 'deity' Mithra who personified the contract, who stood for being true to one's word (contract) and was opposed to the lie (breaking one's contract). So Mithra ~ the spiritual essence of the contract ~ keeping one's word, not telling lies ~ was worshipped as a deity, "lord of the wide pastures, who is truth-speaking".¹⁵

The spiritual essence of the Arya tribe was Airyaman, whose qualities were not only friendship, but also healing and good physical health ~ reflecting the ideals of a friendly, healthy, happy tribe.

Avestan Ardi Sura Anahita was a great river and she was also the spiritual essence of the waters, including springs and other bodies of water.¹⁶ Av. *ap-* 'water' is a grammatically fem. noun (Skjaervo Old Av. Index) which may have been why the spiritual essence of the waters was seen as female, ~ illustrating the same perception ~ the spiritual essence ('deity') of a material thing that was important for survival (water).

This Avestan mind-set, this perception of the divine as spiritual essences of material things, existed before, during, and long after Zarathushtra's time. In YAv. texts, some of the 'deities' representing concepts originally may have been allegories, but came to be thought of as living entities. To name a few examples, Ashi Vanguhi (which in the Gathas means 'good reward'); Chisti (in the Gathas 'understanding'); the Amesha Spenta (a collective term not used in the Gathas, but comprising the qualities that make a being divine which individual qualities are indeed in the Gathas); Sraosha (in the Gathas 'hearing and implementing' the Word of Wisdom) ~ all were concepts that later came to be thought of as the spiritual essences of these concepts ~ 'deities' to be worshipped. The natures of some of these deities (like Mithra, Vayu etc.) were both 'good' and 'bad' ~ they could help and harm, benefit and destroy.

Therefore, (returning to the mind-set of Zarathushtra's culture), the material had a spiritual essence. The material and the spiritual were not two separate things as they are in the mind-set of today's way of thinking and today's dominant religions.

Although Zarathushtra's re-thinking of the identity of the Divine evolved from the mind-set of his culture, it differed in both number and nature. He does not see the divine as multiple spiritual essences of multiple material things. In his thought, there is one spiritual essence of all existence which (to be worthy of worship Divine) is wholly beneficial, wholly good ~ one that comprehends and embodies completely, the wholly good true order of existence (*aša- vahišta-*) ~ the wholly beneficial way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*), a way of being that is the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness (*vahišta-*), that is wisdom personified (*mazdā-* ~ his most used name for the divine). In that sense, Zarathushtra was a monotheist. But his monotheism was the wholly good spiritual essence of the whole of existence.

This of course raises a puzzling question. All aspects of the material existence (and therefore its spiritual essence) can be both beneficial and harmful, constructive and destructive. How then could this spiritual essence or any part of it, be all good, and therefore worthy of worship? Well, I will give you my conclusions

regarding what I see in the Gathas, which may not sound credible until you see the evidence on which they are based ~ detailed in the puzzles and paradigms in *Part Two*, and other *Parts*, which I will summarize here. So I ask that you keep an open mind.

In the Gathas (and some later texts), there is evidence that Zarathushtra believed that the life force that existed primordially was a mix of more-good and bad (Y30:3), more-beneficial and harmful (Y45:2) ~ a conflicted existence with which the beneficial part of its nature was not satisfied. The beneficial part of its nature (to enable the transformation or evolution of its being to one that is completely good, completely beneficial, completely in accord with the true order of existence, created the material existence (Y44:7), so that the primordial being (a mix of good and bad) could temporarily fragment and infuse itself into material shells to enable the experiences necessary to achieve this spiritual evolution or transformation.¹⁷ Let us consider an outline of the evidence on which this conclusion is based, limiting ourselves, in this chapter, to man and 'God', and setting aside (for now) other life forms.

We start with the proposition that in the Gathas, man possesses (although imperfectly, incompletely), the first five attributes of the divine (amesha spenta) ~ the true (correct) good order of existence (*aša-*), its comprehension (good thinking *vohu- manah-*), its beneficial-sacred embodiment in thought word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its good rule (*vohu- xšaθra-*), comprising (albeit imperfectly) a beneficial-sacred way of being (*spənta- mainyu-* the meaning of which includes a good, generous, bountiful, reasoning, intelligent, loving way of being that is the essence of the true order of existence (*aša-*), the essence of what is sacred, Divine.¹⁸ And man is capable of attaining all of these attributes that make a being divine, completely, (*haurvatāt-*), at which time the reason for continued mortality no longer exists, and the being attains an existence that is no longer bound by mortality ~ non-deathness (*amərətāt-*).¹⁹ This evidence, together with Zarathushtra's notions of 'reward', 'heaven', 'wisdom' and 'lordship' are relevant to our inquiry.

Reward: In the Gathas, the attributes of the Divine (the amesha spenta) are both the way to earn the reward, and they also are the reward itself,²⁰ indicating once again, man's capacity to act in a divine way, and to attain (incrementally, and eventually completely) the qualities that make a being Divine.

Heaven: To Zarathushtra, heaven is not a location to which the 'good' go after death. 'Heaven' is a state of being that is the complete attainment (or personification) of the true order of existence and its component parts ~ the beneficial-sacred way of being ~ the qualities that make a being divine.²¹

Wisdom: No place in the (extant) Gathas is any human being presently called *mazdā-*. However, it is a quality that man can attain ("[Lord, let wisdom \[*mazdā*\] come in the company of truth across the earth...](#)" Y50:5). And one of Zarathushtra's names for paradise is "[the House of Good Thinking](#)",²² which is a metaphor for a state of being that comprehends the true order of existence (which is Wisdom personified), indicating (since man has the ability to attain this state of being which is paradise), that he is capable of attaining wisdom personified (which is *mazdā-*).

Lordship: We have already seen that one of Zarathushtra's names for the Divine is *ahura-* 'Lord' which in the Gathas is used in a way that means acquiring lordship over (possessing completely, and being possessed completely by) the qualities that make a being divine (the amesha spenta) ~ personifying these attributes.²³ In the Gathas, *ahura-* and *ahu-* (both meaning 'lord') are also used to (impliedly) refer to human beings who have acquired such lordship.²⁴

If man is capable of attaining these qualities that make a being the Divine (the amesha spenta) completely, then only one of two conclusions is possible.

1. If each life force is an inherently separate entity, then, when each person attains these divine qualities completely (*haurvatāt-*), we would have billions of 'gods' running around, or
2. If existence is one unit (one being), and if each life force in the material existence is a fragment of this whole, then when everyone attains these divine characteristics completely (*haurvatāt-* at an individual level ~ a wholeness of quality), we will have one re-united, whole, complete, Being (*haurvatāt-* at a collective level ~ a wholeness of being, of identity). So at the end of this process of an evolution in quality, existence will have evolved into a Being that is wholly good, wholly in accord with the true (correct) order of existence.

Which of these two is Zarathushtra's view?

There is no evidence to suggest that Zarathushtra looked forward to a population explosion of 'gods' (the first alternative above). On the other hand, we do have implied evidence that he favors the second alternative (above). We have evidence of the way in which he uses the notion of completeness, both individually and collectively,²⁵ and the ways in which he uses the singular and the plural in his references to the Divine.²⁶ And we also have Zarathushtra's use of two beautiful metaphors ~ all of which suggest that Zarathushtra favored the second conclusion ~ that man and the Divine are parts of one being ~ existence as a whole.

The first metaphor is the material metaphor for completeness, wholeness, *haurvatāt-* which is water.²⁷ Water may exist in many separate bodies ~ springs, pools, raindrops, lakes, rivers, the ocean. But when separate bodies of water are joined, the separateness ceases to exist. They become one body of water. Thus the choice of this metaphor for *haurvatāt-* completeness suggests a unity of identity, rather than just a similarity of characteristics.

In the same way, in the Gathas and in certain later texts, fire is used as a metaphor for the true (correct), good order of existence (*aša-*) ~ which is the existence of the Divine. And certain later texts speak of the fire in all things ~ in man, in animals, in trees, in plants, in clouds, in the world itself.²⁸ Like water, fire may exist in many separate units. But when these separate fires are joined together, the separateness no longer exists. They become one fire (as two Pahlavi texts so eloquently describe).²⁹ Thus, the metaphor fire (like water) suggests a unity of identity, not just a similarity of characteristics. As Rabindranath Tagore (an admirer of Zarathushtra) said: "...we all belong to a divine unity...".³⁰

The conclusion that to Zarathushtra man and 'God' are parts of one being is corroborated (implied) by ample other evidence in the Gathas.³¹ Each standing alone might be nothing more than suggestive. But taken together, the evidence is compelling.

In my view, the evidence of the Gathas, and certain later texts requires the conclusion that to Zarathushtra, the Divine is One Being that comprises all the living who have attained completely (*haurvatāt-*), the qualities that make a being divine ~ a personification of the true order of existence (*aša-*), its good comprehension (*vohu- manah-*), its beneficial-sacred embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its good rule (*vohu- x šaθra-*), comprising the wholly beneficial-sacred way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*), all of which comprise Wisdom personified (*mazdā-*), at which time the reason for mortality ceases to exist and existence is no longer bound by mortality ~ a state of non-deathness occurs (*amərətāt-*).

If this is so, then the difference between the Divine and the rest of the living is not a difference of identity, but one of quality ~ a conclusion that is corroborated by Zarathushtra's rejection of the deities of his culture who were a mix of good and bad qualities.³² In Zarathushtra's thought (as I understand it), the Divine comprises the spiritual essence those parts of existence that have made it. Whereas the rest of us have not,

(yet!). But as each unit of existence attains completely, wholly, the qualities that make a being divine, it reunites with the other parts that have done so as well, so that the one (singular) who achieves completeness (*haurvatāt-*) includes the many (plural) who have done so, but like water (and fire), in union, the many are again one,³³ indicating that at the collective level, 'God', man (and all the living) complete each other, which is evidenced by the ways in which Zarathushtra uses 'completeness' (*haurvatāt-*) in the Gathas.³⁴

If we think of 'existence' as one continuum, at the beginning of the continuum, existence is a mix of good and bad qualities. And all along the course of the continuum fragments of existence are evolving towards a wholly good, enlightened end ~ which is Wisdom ~ the perfected part of the continuum of existence.³⁵ This is what I see in the Gathas regarding the identity of the Divine. Of course, this means that the enlightened end (the Divine) would have had to be part of this process of spiritual evolution also. Could that have been part of Zarathushtra's thinking? I think it was. I have detailed the supporting evidence in another chapter.³⁶

When this conclusion first hit me, my immediate reaction was negative (so strong was my past conditioning in seeing 'God' as a being, separate and apart from all other life forms). Besides, the idea of an invincible, all-perfect 'God' was to me like the Rock of Gibraltar. Or perhaps a Security Blanket. I was not at all inclined to give it up

But when I come across ideas in the Gathas, I like to see how they play out in the world in which we live. In our world, we have some wonderful people, and we also have some jerks ~ megajerks and minor jerks. There was no way I could imagine my completeness having anything to do with theirs ~ to say nothing of the unfairness of the situation. If sanctimonious little me makes all those tough choices, and attains perfection or completeness at an individual level, why should I be denied ultimate completeness with 'God' just because some other jerk can't make it? But the more I thought about this idea, the more I appreciated its validity in a number of ways. I'll give you three examples,

First example: Take a look at the savage hatreds that exist in our world, and the violence they generate ~ reflecting the prejudices of people who perceive others as somehow 'different' from themselves for whatever reason, or because they are caught up in a cycle of revenge and recrimination. If each of these opposing factions were to come to the understanding that if everyone doesn't make it, no one makes it, the futility of what they are doing to each other might become clear to them.

A second example: If we cannot achieve ultimate completeness unless everyone achieves it, it becomes clear to us that we cannot be smug and self-satisfied with our own individual accomplishments, although they are a necessary first step. We have to help each other make it. No one can make it on his own. To make it, we all have to both give and receive help. It sometimes seems that there is no limit to the problems that chain our souls ~ crimes of violence, drugs, the greed for power and wealth that translates into destructive corporate policies and scandals, to name a few. But there is also no limit to the ingenuity of the human mind in breaking these chains for all of us. This might be done by finding global solutions to global problems, or by simple acts of friendship, one-to-one.

A third example of the significance of this idea ~ that we cannot achieve ultimate completeness unless everyone achieves it ~ is that it requires us to separate the person from what s/he does. It suggests to me that I can hate and oppose the wrongful conduct of a person, but that I must not hate the person. That's hard. At least it's hard for me. But if I can do it, it helps to break the cycle of hatred and recrimination that we so often get caught up in.

Do I believe that 'God' is not complete without man, nor man without 'God'? Or that man is not complete without his fellow man (and all the living) ? I don't know. I can only say that (not being a student of comparative religions) before I studied Zarathushtra's thought, I had no notion of such a paradigm (although I have since discovered, it exists in many religions). But I find it more reasonable than any other notion of the Divine that I have come across. And it strikes a responsive chord in me. This paradigm has influenced me in ways that a Security Blanket could not do. It has materially changed my life, and could materially change each unit of existence,

~ *In the way we look at ourselves*: If there is a unity of identity between the fragment that is each of us (however imperfect) and the Divine, then self-hatred, a feeling of worthlessness, are not compatible with loving the Divine;

~ *In our relations with other people*: If we all are part of the same life-form, there are no 'others'. If you are diminished, I am diminished; if I don't make it, you don't make it; if the Divine is my beloved Friend, and exists in you, how can I be anything less than a friend to you?

~ *In our relations with other life forms, and with the environment*: If there is a unity of identity between all things, then when we trash other life forms, or our earth, the air, the waters, we trash ourselves.

But the question is not what I might believe. If we wish to study Zarathushtra's thought with integrity, the question we must ask is: what did Zarathushtra believe. I have attempted to lay before you a summary of the evidence on which my conclusions are based, supported in more detail by the evidence described in the other chapters in *Part One*, and in the various puzzles and paradigms in *Part Two*, and other *Parts*.

You and I, we can agree or disagree about what Zarathushtra said, or what he meant. But fortunately, he has given us an excellent formula for winning out ~ the quest, by each person individually, to search for the true, good order of existence (*aša-*) with good thinking (*vohu- manah-*), and embody it with each beneficial thought, word and action (*spənta- armaiti-*), governing ourselves and our social units in accordance with it (*vohu- xšaθra-*), an order of existence that is the beneficial way of being ~ a divine formula that, of necessity, requires tolerance for a diversity of views ~ a tolerance that (sometimes) is reflected so beautifully in some later texts. For example, a later prayer, composed during Sasanian times (or later) ~ perhaps 1,000 years or more after Zarathushtra ~ calls the Divine 'the all-knowing Tolerant One', whose teachings promote friendship ~ a tolerant way to be. It says,

"Homage to the all knowing tolerator ['Tolerant-One'], who sent through Zarathushtra Spitman ... teachings of religion for the people of the world so that they may have friendship, ...". Sethna translation.³⁷

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¹ For the evidence on which this conclusion is based, see *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise and Hell*; and *Part Three: The Absence of Damnation in Other Avestan Texts*.

² Some examples of the punishments meted out by pre-Zarathushtrian Indo-Iranian deities are given in footnotes in *Part One: Truth, Asha*, and in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

³ See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

⁴ In Gathic Avestan, an adjective or noun can be used as a concept and also as a person who possesses the qualities of that adjective or concept. Thus *mazdā-* is used for a concept 'wisdom' "Lord, let wisdom [*mazdā-*] come in the

company of truth across the earth!..." Y50:5, Insler 1975. And it is also is Zarathushtra's most frequently used name for the Divine ~ Wisdom (*mazdā-*), detailed in *Part Three: Evolution Of The Names Ahura, Mazda*.

⁵ See *Part One: The Beneficial-Sacred Way Of Being Spenta Mainyu*.

⁶ Insler comments that *urvan-* appears in the Gathas, meaning both 'self' and 'soul' ~ a usage which he says parallels the Vedic *ātman-*. Insler (1975) p. 123, commenting under Y28:4. I have been told by others that the Vedic texts speak of an individual soul that is part of a universal soul. I do not know if this accurately represents what is in Vedic texts. However, that is indeed what I see in the Gathas. See for example the evidence in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Cow and its Network; Light, Glory, Fire; A Question of Immanence; The Puzzle of Creation; The Puzzle Of The Singular & The Plural*, and *Did Wisdom Choose Too?*

⁷ We also have the possible double entendre in Zarathushtra's choice of *ahura-* as one of the names of the Divine, in that the stem *ahu-* has two meanings ~ 'life, existence', as well as 'lord', as discussed in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*. Even though 'life, existence' does not fit all of the ways in which Zarathushtra uses *ahu-/ahura-* the double entendre in some verses would not have been lost on Zarathushtra's contemporaries, indicating perhaps Zarathushtra's idea of the Divine as an integral part of existence (which would have fitted their cultural belief of the spiritual essences of material things).

⁸ Evidence regarding the loss of knowledge following both Alexander's invasion, and the Arab invasion of Iran, is detailed in *Part Four: Next Of Kin Marriage & The Pahlavi Texts*. I hope to write a separate chapter on this subject in *Part Four*.

⁹ See *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*. We know that the *Bundahishn*'s detailing of the fire and the glory (Av. *x'arənah-*) in all things was an attempt to record ancient knowledge, because we find the same idea in a YAv. Yasna (pertaining to the fire in all things), and the YAv. *Sirozah* pertaining to the 'glory' in all (Arya) peoples, and their kings, although not stated in the same words as in the *Bundahishn* (which describes the fire and the Divine 'glory' which exists in all things ~ not limited to the Aryas). These Avestan metaphors of fire and glory, are so close to Zarathushtra's metaphors and thought in the Gathas, that I think these later texts were recording an ancient teaching (and the metaphors used to teach these ideas) which originated with Zarathushtra. By the time these YAv. Yasnas and the YAv. *Sirozah* were composed, Zarathushtra's teachings were already described in such texts as ancient, (see *Part Four: Zarathushtra's Date and Place*).

It is not without interest, that although the *Bundahishn* recounted such ancient knowledge, as the fire and the glory in all things, it also contains other sections which reflect the notion of 'God' as a being, separate and apart from other living things, and indeed speaks of the 'Devil' as a separate entity, the competitor of the Wise Lord. Thus we see the recording of different (sometimes inconsistent) strands of belief, reflecting different time periods, from very ancient down to the contemporaries of the composer of the Pahlavi *Bundahishn* (and also the Pahlavi *Selections of Zadsparam*).

¹⁰ For example, the comments in *Selections of Zadsparam*, detailed in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.

¹¹ The writings of certain Zoroastrian priests in India have advocated almost a type of asceticism, ~ a renunciation, and control, of the enjoyments of the flesh as a way to spiritual growth ~ an idea that is totally at odds with Zarathushtra's thought in the Gathas. He does not teach asceticism. He does not teach that material enjoyments are sinful and must be rigidly controlled or eliminated to achieve spiritual growth. He teaches us to use both the material and the spiritual aspects of existence in ways that bring about the true (correct), good order of existence ~ in ourselves and in our world ~ and in the process, enjoy, celebrate, the many aspects of the material existence in ways that do not harm others or ourselves.

¹² By 'ancient Iran' I refer to all of the countries around that area which shared a common ancestral Iranian language, and which included the territories bounded in the south, by the Persian Gulf, in the West by Mesopotamia, Armenia, and the Caucasus Mountains, and lands to the east of the Caspian Sea. These lands also extended far north of the present boundaries of Iran and Afghanistan, into the Pamir plateau of Turkestan, and thence approximately along

the course of the Indus River to the Indian ocean, detailed in Kent 1950 *Old Persian*, § 2, pp. 6, 55 - 56. But Kent's lists reflect only what is mentioned in the Achaemenian Old Persian inscriptions ~ capturing a moment in time. Many other tribes over long periods of time, both before and after the Achaemenians, have been identified (mostly by their language) as Arya (Indo-Iranian). For example, the Mittanis have been called an Arya tribe. Their deities had names similar to Indic deities, (Dhalla, *History of Zoroastrianism* 1963, p. 9; and also detailed in *Part Four: Zarathushtra's Date & Place*). But with the passage of time, they came to speak the indigenous language(s). Only their deities retained their Arya names. H. Frankfort 1965, *Cylinder Seals*, (London 1939, reprinted Gregg Press); and Anthony 2007, *The Horse, The Wheel, & Language*.

¹³ The people of Iran and its vicinities, and the people of Northern India shared a common tribal ancestry. See *Part Four: Ancient Origins and Homelands*. And the names of some of the Vedic deities appear in YAv. texts, especially in the Yashts. Thus, although these later YAv. texts were composed centuries after the Gathas, many of them are addressed to (and reflect the worship of) some pre-Zarathushtrian deities (see *Part Four: The Syncretization*). So we see that the worship of some (but not all) of these ancient pre-Zarathushtrian gods were brought into, and syncretized with, the religion of Zarathushtra which was founded on their rejection. Life is full of ironies. But there is a double irony here. The rituals of the syncretized Zoroastrianism included verbatim recitations of the Gathas. Had that not occurred, the Gathas would not have survived to the present time. So in effect, the post-Zarathushtrian syncretized religion which substantially changed the original teachings of Zarathushtra, was in fact the instrument of preserving them. I have often thought that the Divine has a mischievous sense of humor.

¹⁴ See *Part One: Gender Equality*; and *Part Five: Avestan Genders, Grammatical & Actual*.

¹⁵ For example the *Mihir Yasht*, (Yt. 10) says,

"Mithra, lord of the wide pastures who is truth-speaking [*miθrō yō vouru.gaoyaoitiš ... arš.vacaṇhəm*]..." Yt. 10:7,

"... Break not the contract O Spitama! [*miθrām mā janyā spitama*] neither the one that thou hadst entered into with one of the unfaithful [*drvataṭ* 'the untruthful'], nor the one that thou hadst entered into with one of the faithful [*ašaonaṭ* 'the truth-possessing']..." Yt. 10:2; Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, p. 120; Geldner 2P p. 125; Darmesteter translates *aša-* and *ašavan-* words as 'holy', 'saints', 'the faithful' instead of as 'truth' and 'truthful'.

¹⁶ That Ardvī Sura Anahita was both a great river which formed other bodies of water, and also the spiritual essence of the waters is seen in the *Aban Yasht* which is dedicated to her. The speaker of each quotation that follows other than the first one is (purportedly) Ahura Mazda (a common technique in YAv. texts, in which the composer had Ahura Mazda (purportedly) uttering the composer's own ideas and words, to give them authority and credibility). All of the following are from Darmesteter's translation in SBE 23:

Here are some sections from this Yasht in which Ardvī Sura Anahita is in fact the waters,

"...unto the holy water-spring, Ardvī Anahita" Yt. 5 Introductory invocation, p. 53;

"3. The large river, known afar, that is as large as the whole of the waters that run along the earth; that runs powerfully from the height of Hukairyā down to the sea Vouru-Kasha.

4. All the shores of the sea Vouru-Kasha are boiling over, all the middle of it is boiling over, when she runs down there, when she streams down there, she, Ardvī Sura Anahita, who has a thousand cells, and a thousand channels; the extent ... of each of those channels is as much as a man can ride in forty days, riding on a good horse."

5. From this river of mine alone flow all the waters that spread all over the seven Karshvares; this river of mine alone goes on bringing waters both in summer and in winter..." pp. 54 - 55;

"96. ... the height Hukairyā of the deep precipices ... wherefrom this mine Ardvī Sura Anahita leaps from a hundred times the height of a man ... and she runs powerfully." Yt. 5:96 Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, p. 76.

Here are a few sections in which Ardvi Sura Anahita is the spiritual essence of the waters, in the form of a female deity.

§§ 7 - 8. "Then Ardvi Sura Anahita ... proceeded forth from the Maker Mazda. Beautiful were her white arms... thinking thus, 8. 'Who will praise me? Who will offer me a sacrifice ...' p. 55.

§ 15. "Strong and bright, tall and beautiful of form, who sends down by day and by night a flow of ... waters as large as the whole of the waters that run along the earth, and who runs powerfully." p. 57;

§ 78. [In response to a plea from a worshipper] "Ardvi Sura Anahita hastened unto him in the shape of a maid, fair of body, most strong, tall-formed, high-girded, ... wearing shoes up to the ankle with all sorts of ornaments, and radiant. A part of the waters she made stand still, a part of the waters she made flow forward, and she left him a dry passage to pass over..." Yt. 5:78 p. 72; (strangely similar to the later parting of the Red Sea by Moses, to enable the Israelites' escape from Egypt).

¹⁷ See in *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Creation*; and *Asha and the Checkmate Solution*; and *A Question Of Power*.

¹⁸ The meaning of *spənta-* is detailed in *Part One: The Beneficial-Sacred Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu*.

¹⁹ As detailed in the chapters in *Part One* which deal with each attribute of the Divine (amesha spenta).

²⁰ See in *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*; and *The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*.

²¹ See in *Part Two, A Question of Reward and the Path*; *The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*; and *The Houses of Paradise & Hell*.

²² See *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise & Hell*.

²³ See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

²⁴ See *Part Two: The Lords and the Equations of Y31:4*.

²⁵ See *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*.

²⁶ See *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Singular & the Plural*.

²⁷ See *Part Two: Earth, Water, Plants*.

²⁸ See *Part Two: Light, Fire, Glory*.

²⁹ See quotations from the *Bundahishn* and *Selections of Zad-spāram*, regarding fire and glory in *Part Two: Light, Fire, Glory*.

³⁰ Tagore 1931 *The Religion of Man*, p. 55. This unity of identity between man and the Divine is also suggested in the beautiful YAv. Yy60:12, discussed in *Part One: Seven Gems from the Later Texts* (and applicable footnotes), and in *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*; and *Light, Glory, Fire*.

³¹ The conclusion that man and 'God' are parts of one being is supported by evidence in many of the chapters in *Parts One, Two, Three, and Six*.

³² See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

³³ See *Part Two: A Question of Immanence*.

³⁴ See *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*.

³⁵ Since making this word picture of a continuum with the Divine at its apex, and the rest of us fragments of existence evolving towards a wholly good, enlightened end ~ which is Wisdom ~ the perfected part of the continuum of

existence, I was surprised (and delighted) to see the exact same word picture in Shaked's Introduction to his work *Wisdom Of The Sasanian Sages*. Corroboration by a renowned academic expert! But although I value this Pahlavi text (which is a translation of Dēnkard 6), I cannot for the life of me see how Shaked arrived at this conclusion based on this Pahlavi text. But I am happy he did. In some respects his conclusions reflect what I see in the Gathas, in other respects they are materially different from the Gathas.

"Gods and good people are here seen to be, as it were, one continuum. What separates them is a question of degree, not of substance. The same applies to the relationship between the wicked and the demons. This is not surprising, in view of the conception that the soul is itself a deity; the soul of the righteous person would certainly be divine." p. xxix, Shaked 1979 *Introduction in Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*.

In the Gathas, it is not only 'good' people who are on the continuum the Divine, it is all the living ~ existence as a whole ~ with the Divine at the apex, and the rest of us fragments of existence, still a mix of (imperfect) divine qualities and their opposites, strung along at various stages of the continuum (but I agree that in the Gathas what separates them is a question of degree, not of substance). Shaked seems to see a parallel continuum with the 'wicked' and the demons. There is nothing like that in the Gathas, in which there is no Devil or demons. Nor is the (unperfected) soul, however good, a deity or divine in the Gathas. See *Part One: Does The Devil Exist?*

³⁶ See *Part Two: Did Wisdom Choose Too?*

³⁷ Sethna (1980), *Khordeh Avesta*, p. 63, from the *Doa Nam Setayeshne* prayer.