

The Search for Truth.

"(There is) one path, that of truth; all others (are) non-paths".

As a general rule, one expects the founder of a religion to give us fact-specific 'answers' which he has obtained from a celestial or supernatural source which the rest of us cannot access. Zarathushtra is an exception to this general rule. He does not give fact-specific 'answers'. Instead, he gives us a system ~ a way to find the answers. He tells us (in a nutshell) to use our own good thinking (as he defines 'good thinking'),¹ to search for truth, with each choice in thought, word and action.

In short, the search for truth with an inquiring mind is a fundament of Zarathushtra's thought,² – truth for truth's own sake.³ A search from which he does not exempt himself. He says:

"... as long as I shall be able and be strong, so long shall I look in quest of truth [aṣa-]" Y28:4, Insler 1975.

" Truth, shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire both good thinking and the way to the Lord..." Y28:5, Insler 1975.

And what is the 'way to the Lord'?⁴ In other verses, Zarathushtra calls it "the path(s) of truth..." and its comprehension, "the path(s) of good thinking".⁵ Which brings us to the question:

What does this search for truth entail? Well, let us recall that in Zarathushtra's Avestan mind-set, truth (aṣa-) applies to the existences of matter and mind.⁶

In the existence of matter, the search for truth (the true order of existence) includes all that is factually accurate, correct, which includes knowledge of all kinds including the natural laws that order the physical universe. Zarathushtra's quest for truth applies to these natural laws. In Yasna 44, Zarathushtra demonstrates a hunger for such knowledge.

"Which man did fix the course of the sun and of the stars? Through whom does the moon wax (now) wane later? These things indeed and others I wish to know, Wise One." Y44:3. Insler 1975.

"Which craftsman created the luminous bodies and the dark spaces? Which craftsman created both sleep and activity? Through whom does dawn exist, along with midday and evening... ?" Y44:5. Insler 1975.

Zarathushtra does not have the Divine give fact-specific answers to these questions. This absence of authoritative, fact-specific answers from the Divine is consistent with his teaching that life (including religion) is an on-going search for truth.

Unfortunately, the history of religions (including later Zoroastrianism) shows that religious establishments (wanting to control human thought and behavior) often have mandated fact-specific articles of belief pertaining to the natural order of the material existence. We see this very clearly in later Zoroastrian texts which classified as 'evil' any part of the material existence that might cause harm or damage to man, such as wolves, drought, et cetera.⁷ Similarly (for example) in the Middle Ages in Europe it was mandated as an article of religious belief, that the earth was the center of the universe (as Galileo discovered to his sorrow). Zarathushtra gives no such fact-specific mandates. Instead, he requires us to use our minds to search for truth (aṣa-) in all aspects of the existence of matter.

So his teaching enables, and indeed requires, on-going discoveries about the ways in which our physical existence is ordered ~ the laws of biology, chemistry, mathematics, physics, astronomy ~ all the laws that govern the natural order of our universe(s).

In the existence of mind, the search for truth includes the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ all that is good, and right. Now 'good' and 'right' are general concepts which mean different things to different people even in one culture and generation, let alone different cultures and different generations.⁸ The later texts are full of fact-specific mandates as to what is 'good' and 'right' ~ mandates which, with the passage of time, have become obsolete. On the other hand, except for condemning fact-specific things that are intrinsically wrong (such as murder, theft, deceit, cruelty, tyranny, bondage et cetera) Zarathushtra's teachings contain no fact-specific mandates embalmed in the perceptions of a thousand-plus years BCE as to what is true in the sense of what is 'good', 'right'. He requires us to use our minds to search for the truths of mind/heart/spirit in an on-going way.

Many years ago, there was a popular radio show in the United States called Amos and Andy. And on one occasion, one of them wanted to know of the other how it was that the other had such good judgment. "Experience" the other said. "But where did you get this experience from?" the one wanted to know. "From bad judgment," the other replied.

As with the factual truths that order our universe, Zarathushtra's requirement that we search for the truths of mind/heart/spirit, enables an experience based evolution of understanding as to what is 'good' and 'right', which will doubtless change from one culture to another, from one generation to another, as our understanding increases.

That the search for truth in both existences (the existences of matter and mind) is corroborated in a later text, the Old Av. *Yasna Haptanghaiti* (composed long after the Gathas but before the Younger Av. texts), which says,

'To anyone among living beings (who has) the desire to win the most good,
He has said, for both existences
(it is) in the association of truth,
then in the union of truth.' YHapt. 35:8, my translation.⁹

And even in Younger Avestan texts, we see that the search for truth is a core feature of Zarathushtra's teachings. The following statement appears more than once.

'(There is) one path, that of truth, all others (are) non-paths.' My translation.¹⁰

aēvō pantā yō ašahe vīspe anyaēšqm apantqm••

It is interesting that Zarathushtra sees the search for truth as a 'friendly' one, "... Someone like Thee, [*mazdā*- 'Wisdom'], should declare to me, his friend, ... how friendly associations with truth are to be established by us, in order that it shall come to us together with good thinking." Y44:1, Insler 1975. Perhaps his intent is to convey the thought that we should search for truth with a friendly, questioning mind ~ not with passive acceptance, and not with destructive hostility either.

Indeed, in addressing how we should listen to what we are told, he says, "... Let him listen with truth [*aša*-] ..." Y49:7. Insler 1975.

In other words, when we are told something, we should consider how it measures up to truth. We should not believe what is not in accord with truth. And we cannot know what is in accord with truth, except by searching for it, and (incrementally) and understanding it ~ which necessarily will include making mistakes.

The challenge of course is trying to figure out how to apply these qualities in our day to day lives ~ an on-going search.

We sometimes question whether there is a difference between truth (*aša-*), and the 'most-good truth' (*aša-vahišta-*). It has been argued that 'truth' (*aša-*) is used for man and the 'most good truth' (*aša-vahišta-*) is used for the Divine. But (with respect) this is not borne out by the evidence of the Gathas,¹¹ nor by the *Asha Vahishta* (*Ashem Vohu*) manthra.¹² In using 'good' (*vohu-*) and 'most-good' (*vahišta-*) with truth, Zarathushtra is simply expressing his view that the true order of existence, is intrinsically 'good' (*vohu-*), and indeed (in a crescendo of expression) is the epitome of goodness, the superlative *vahišta-*.¹³

We sometimes question whether truth (*aša-*) is subjective or objective. I don't think, in Zarathushtra's thought, the true order of existence is subjective ~ not in the existences of matter or mind. It is our attempts at understanding truth that are subjective, that vary from culture to culture, and from generation to generation. But through experience, as we grow in understanding, our perceptions become more accurate until finally, truth, and our understanding of it, will be the same.

Until then, figuring out how to bring truth to life with our thoughts, words and actions is sometimes fun, and sometimes painful, but always a creative challenge.

In conclusion: Zarathushtra requires that we search for truth ~ truth for truth's own sake ~ in all aspects of our existence on an on-going basis ~ scientific truth, social truth, philosophical truth, spiritual truth ~ a search that enables the growth of knowledge and understanding, until we attain "[the House of Good Thinking](#)" ~ a state of being that houses the complete comprehension of truth ~ which is w/Wisdom personified (*mazdā-*) ~ Zarathushtra's most used name for the Divine.

Let me leave you with some questions.

Zarathushtra expresses a base line understanding of the nature of the Divine as being wholly good, wholly beneficial, wholly knowing, a personification of the true wholly good order of existence ~ Wisdom ~ and therefore worthy of worship. So if (according to him) we must continue to search for the true order of existence, does this of necessity include an on-going search for the nature of the Divine reflected in his base line perceptions?

A clue. I cannot presume to speak for other life forms, but throughout man's long history (and pre-history), man has extrapolated on to the Divine many different (and inconsistent) characteristics ~ some quite horrendous. How many of these characteristics are no longer believed in? How many continue to be believed in, or are newly invented? One has only to look at the history of individual religions (including Zoroastrianism) to appreciate how the conception of the nature of the Divine in many of them has changed over time. It would seem that, as long as man is a thinking animal, Zarathushtra's teaching of an on-going search for the true order of existence (which includes the existence of the Divine) is a fact of life.

So: Is the Divine invented (and re-invented) by man? Does the Divine have a being and nature independent of man's extrapolations? I think Zarathushtra's answer to both questions would be 'yes'. As you navigate the puzzles in Part Two, see what conclusions you come to (about Zarathushtra's thought, and also your own).

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¹ See *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*.

² That an inquiring mind is a fundament of Z's thought, is corroborated in a later (Younger Avestan) text, the *Hormezd* (*Ormazd*) *Yasht*, in which one of my favorite names of the Lord (who is) Wisdom is,

"My name is the One of whom questions are asked..." Yt. 1:7, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, p. 24.

A perception that survived into Pahlavi times, which tells an (allegorical) story of Zarathushtra being led to the "seat of inquirers" by "good thinking", as we see in *Selections from Zadsparam*, described in *Part One: Buried Treasure in Ancient Texts*. In my view, this particular name for the Divine reflects the many questions asked by Zarathushtra in the Gathas (many of them rhetorical, and containing their own answers) and the fact that the on-going quest for the true (correct) good order of existence, spiritual and factual ~ is a fundament of his thought. And indeed, the YAv. *Visperad* recognizes and praises this feature of the Gathas as "... with its questions and counter-questions, with its words and its metric feet..." Ch. 14 § 1, Mills translation, SBE 31, p. 356.

As the centuries went by however, and the religion became institutionalized, religious authorities ~ wanting to give the authority of the Divine to their own, narrow, controlling, fact-specific rules ~ modified this technique to one in which Zarathushtra (purportedly) asked questions, and Ahura Mazda (purportedly) answered them in many fact specific ways pertaining mostly to rules and mandates which had nothing to do with intrinsic 'right' or 'wrong', 'good' or 'evil', to make it seem that the Lord Wisdom was the source of the religious establishment's own, fact-specific man-made rules. This technique appears in many Younger Avestan (YAv.) texts composed many centuries after Zarathushtra. But it reached its most fearsome culmination in the *Videvdāt* (known amongst Zoroastrians today as the *Vendidad*) which is full of such supposed questions by Zarathushtra and supposed answers by Ahura Mazda ~ most of which are cruel and quite horrible ~ and diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Gathas (highlighted in *Part Five: The Paradigm of the Vendidad and its Lessons for Today*).

Unfortunately, some scholars see this name of the Divine in the *Hormezd (Ormazd) Yasht*, "My name is the One of whom questions are asked..." Yt. 1:7, as reflecting the fact-specific questions and answers of the *Videvdāt* (*Vendidad*). A mistaken conclusion. Such scholars have overlooked the fact that linguists generally agree that the Avestan *Videvdāt* (*Vendidad*) is so full of grammatical errors that it could not have been composed until long after Avestan times, when our priests were no longer fluent in Avestan. As Zaehner 1961 says,

"... we can feel tolerably certain that in the *Vidēvdāt* what appear to be gross grammatical blunders are genuinely so. Indeed in the *Vidēvdāt* we have the impression that the authors are not only writing in a language that is not their own, but are doing so in one, the rudiments of whose grammar they had quite failed to master." p. 26.

And he speaks of "the appalling grammatical confusion that characterizes that ... work." p. 162.

In my view, the text we have today called the *Videvdāt* (*Vendidad*) is a collection of disparate texts from different authors ~ some quite horrible, and some really good, including the story of Yima (Jamshid) (quoted in part in a ft. in *Part One: The Freedom to Choose*) as well as a satire on what a dog is like, (quoted verbatim in *Part Five: A Funny Satirical Sketch*).

³ This idea of truth for truth's own sake also appears in Y27:14, the *Asha Vahishta* (*Ashem Vohu*) manthra, believed to have been authored by Zarathushtra himself, (see *Part One: The Mantra of Truth, the Asha Vahishta* (*Ashem Vohu*). And the idea also appears in the Gathas, *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path; The Puzzle of the Most Good, Vahishta*; and *The Houses of Paradise & Hell*.

And in Y46:6, Zarathushtra states that this idea (truth for its own sake) is the foremost idea that the Divine has given (detailed in *Part Six: Yasna 46:6*; a verse which itself is a bit of a puzzle).

⁴ 'Lord' is the 2d most frequently used name for the Divine in the Gathas (detailed in *Part Three: Evolution Of The Name(s) Wisdom, Lord*, which shows that 'Wisdom' alone is the first most frequently used name). But Zarathushtra uses 'Lord' in an unusual way ~ as one who has attained lordship over the qualities that make a being Divine, detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*.

⁵ In the Gathas (Insler 1975), "...the path of truth..." Y51:13, "...the paths straight in accord with truth wherein the Wise Lord dwells." Y33:5; "... the straight paths of the Mighty One..." Y43:3; and the path of good thinking (which is the comprehension of truth), "... the paths of good thinking easy to travel in alliance with truth," Y34:12; "... the paths of good thinking..." Y51:16. For more details see *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*.

⁶ See *Part One: Truth, Asha*.

⁷ See *Part One: Good and Evil*.

⁸ Discussed in *Part One: Good & Evil*.

⁹ See the chapter in *Part Six: YHapt 35:8* for a discussion and linguistic analysis of this verse, along with other translations for comparative purposes. Most scholars have stated that the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* is in prose, not in verses of poetry. But that is to impose our narrow definition of what is poetry on an ancient civilization, where the music and rhythm of alliteration and other poetic techniques may not fit our narrow definitions ~ which is why I call the sections of the *YHapt*. 'verses'.

¹⁰ This statement is found in more than one YAv. text as follows. Here it is with my literal translation:

aēvō pantā yō ašahe vīspe anyaešqm apantqm••

'(There is) one path [*aēvō pantā*], that of truth [*yō ašahe*], all others [*vīspe anyaešqm*] (are) non-paths [*apantqm*].

The word *apantqm* has the negative prefix *a-*, hence 'non-paths'. This popular statement is often quoted by Zoroastrians (sometimes substituting 'honesty' in place of 'truth').

I am grateful to Dr. Jafarey for generously taking the time and trouble to provide me with information regarding where precisely in the ancient texts this statement is to be found.

It appears at Yy72:11, and also in *Visperad* 24:3. Mills did not include this sentence in his translations of the Yasnas and the *Visperad* in SBE 31, but they appear (in Avestan script), in identical form, in Geldner 1P p. 239 (for Yy72:11), and 2P p. 31 (for *Visperad* 24:3). Geldner calls this sentence in these texts, a "colophon", but he identifies them with section numbers.

This statement is also quoted as part of an un-numbered concluding paragraph at the end of the *Videvdat* (*Vendidad*) a text written in grammatically faulty Avestan, in post-Avestan times.

¹¹ See *Part One: Truth, Asha*.

¹² See *Part One: The Manthra Of Truth, Ashem Vohu*.

¹³ In Avestan, the superlative is often used as a crescendo of expression, rather than as a difference in kind (or quantity); examples are given in a ft. in *Part One: The Manthra of Truth, Asha Vahishta* (*Ashem Vohu*).