

A Friendly Universe.

Is our universe a friendly place? Why do 'bad' things happen to 'good' people?

Do Zarathushtra's teachings answer these questions?

In studying the Gathas, I try (diligently) to be objective, so that I can ascertain Zarathushtra's own thoughts as accurately as possible. However, to me the value of his thought lies in the way it helps me to make sense of my life. Any ideas of why 'bad' things happen to 'good' people, must of necessity fit the realities of our existence. So in this chapter, in addition to considering Zarathushtra's teachings, I also consider how the reality of our experiences fit (or do not fit) these teachings.

By "universe" I refer, not to inter-stellar and inter-galactic space, but to the universe of our lives ~ the realm which encompasses our day to day existence. So what I say is necessarily something of limited perspective. But even in areas of science, our knowledge always has been, and continues to be, limited, incomplete. If, just because our knowledge is limited, we did not think about our existence based on the information available to us, the search for truth would have no beginning or continuation.

So we return to the question: Is our universe a friendly place?

Zarathushtra does not give us fact-specific answers. He gives us a framework, a system, to help us find our own answers in an on-going search for truth. So let us apply this framework to the evidence of the Gathas, to ascertain whether, in his thought, the universe is a friendly place, and if it is, whether this conclusion is validated by experience.

Now we know from the evidence of the Gathas, that in the existence of matter, *aša-* means the true (correct, factually accurate) way in which existence has been ordered, and that in the existence of mind, *aša-* means an order of existence that is true (correct) in the sense of all that is 'right', 'good', and is indeed equated with what is beneficial (*spənta-*).¹

But in the Gathas, most of the time when Zarathushtra speaks of *aša-* he does not speak of two different orders of existence, but just of the true order of existence ~ which applies to both the material and abstract existences. In Yasna 44, in which he asks questions about the natural order of the universe, the word he uses is *aša-* ~ he does not qualify it by adding 'in the material existence'. Indeed, throughout the Gathas he speaks of *aša-* numerous times ~ it is one of the central features of his thought ~ but he speaks of *aša-* in the existences of matter and mind only twice. Why?

For the longest time, when I spoke or wrote about the abstract good, beneficial, generous, compassionate qualities associated with *aša-*, I was strongly tempted to add 'in the existence of mind' in each such instance, because I was used to thinking of the factual laws that order the universe as being ethically neutral ~ neither 'good' nor 'bad' although generating effects that are felt or thought of as 'good' or 'bad'. (Thus do we allow our pre-conditioned mind-sets to influence our perceptions of Zarathushtra's thought).

It was only my passionate commitment for accuracy that made me (with difficulty) resist this temptation to so qualify *aša-* ~ because Zarathushtra does not ~ and I am glad that I did (resist the temptation). As so often happens, when I think he has made a mistake, I now appreciate that he had a good reason, indeed a foundational reason, for speaking of one *aša-* ~ one order of existence that is wholly 'good' which operates in the existences of both matter and mind.

If *aša-* the existences of matter and mind are just two aspects of the same true (correct, good, right) order of existence, then logically, it needs must follow (as the day the night) that since this order in the existence of mind is beneficial, good, friendly, loving, compassionate, just, etc. then the existence of matter would have to be ordered in the same way.²

But when we consider all the pain and grief caused by natural phenomena such as earthquakes, hurricanes and other natural calamities; the need to kill to eat; to say nothing of the pain and grief caused by wrongful choices, such as cruelty, prejudice, hatred, violence, greed, injustice, tyranny, can we reasonably conclude that the universe has been ordered in a beneficial way? Does the existence of all such pain and grief causing phenomena, mean that they are the wrongful choices of the Divine? In times past, I was more inclined to Omar Khayam's view that sometimes it is not so much a question of 'God' forgiving man, as of man forgiving 'God'!³

But after many years of living, and thinking about Zarathushtra's thought, I have come to the view that his idea that the universe has been ordered in a beneficial way is indeed validated, both by reason and by experience. This applies to all the so-called 'bad' things that happen to us ~ earned and unearned ~ whether caused by natural forces or by the wrongful choices of others (or ourselves). I don't like the fact that this ordering of the universe includes so much suffering and pain. I have informed the Divine of my opinion many times, in no uncertain terms. But in between giving the Divine a piece of my mind (which may account for the fact that I have so little left), I have to admit that I do not see any other way in which the desired end, which is the elimination of evil, could be brought about. Another paradox? Ah well, the Gathas are full of interesting paradoxes. Let us consider this one.

In Zarathushtra's teachings, the purpose of life is to evolve or grow from a conflicted state of being (*mainyu-*) that is a mixture of 'more-good' and 'bad' (Y30.3), more beneficial and harmful (Y45.2), to a state of being that is completely, wholly, good, beneficial ~ a state of being that personifies completely (*haurvatāt-*), the true order of existence ~ all that is true, good, right (*aša-*).⁴

How can this evolution (both individual and societal) be brought about? Well, let us approach the answer from a different perspective.

No matter how old we may be chronologically, we all have a child inside us. To pray, "Please don't let this bad thing happen to me" or "Please make this bad thing go away" is the prayer of the child inside. Reacting to difficulties by getting angry (screaming and kicking the furniture in our minds) is also the reaction of the child inside (and heaven knows, that is exactly the way in which I tend to react to calamities that seem senseless ~ rebellion, anger at the senselessness of such 'bad' things). Yet Zarathushtra teaches that the Divine is Wisdom personified. If Zarathushtra is correct, then the Divine cannot be arbitrary or capricious because Wisdom, by definition, is not arbitrary. Wisdom is not capricious.

We know from the Gathas that Zarathushtra himself experienced persecution and life-threatening difficulties generated by the wrongful choices of others. In Y46:1 he says, *"To what land to flee? Where shall I go to flee? They exclude (me) from my family and from my clan ..."* Y46:1, Insler 1975.

But when he prays, he does not pray that the 'bad' event be taken away, or not happen. Nor does he pray that his persecutors be blown up in a satisfying bang! He prays for help through solutions that are in accord with what is true, good, right (*aša-*). He prays for help through good thinking (*vohu- manah-*) which in the Gathas is the comprehension of truth ~ factual truths, and the truths of mind/heart/spirit.⁵ He says,

"What help by truth [*aša-*] hast Thou for Zarathushtra who calls? What help by good thinking [*vohu-manah-*] hast Thou for me ... ? ..." Y49:12, Insler 1975.

"Throughout my lifetime I have been condemned as the greatest defiler, I who try to satisfy the poorly protected (creatures) with truth, Wise One ... come to me and give support to me. Through good thinking [*vohu- manah-*], find a means of destruction of this." Y49:1, Insler 1975.

"Wise One, where are those sincere ones who, through their possession of good thinking [*vohu- manah-*], make even immoral decrees and painful legacies disappear? I know none other than you. Therefore, protect us in accord with truth [*aša-*]." Y34:7, Insler 1975.

So Zarathushtra's way of handling crises and difficult situations is to ask for help in using his mind to solve problems in a way that is in sync with the true (correct), good order of existence (*aša-*).

Does this work in the 'real world'? I think it does. If we react to hatred with hatred, or to prejudice with prejudice, or to injustice with injustice (to name just three 'evils'), we don't solve the problems caused by hatred, prejudice and injustice. We just create more hatred, prejudice and injustice. But if we can use our minds (the way Zarathushtra defines 'mind'),⁶ to try to solve the problems that generate the hatred, prejudice or injustice, we have a better chance of changing minds and dissolving these evils and the suffering they cause. One of the reasons why Zarathushtra's words are timeless, is that he usually does not express his thoughts in ways that relate to specific cultural or factual situations. But in seeing whether his system of thought works, in our 'real world', we have to do so. So let us consider a real life situation in our own times.

On September 11, 2001, hijackers flew two planes full of passengers into two sky-scrapers full of people in New York City. More than 3,000 people from all over the world died, and many thousands more were badly injured ~ both victims, and first responders. What those hijackers did was surely wrong (in my view). And it generated immense suffering.

But (at an individual level) look at the many, many, stories of the ways in which the individuals caught up in this crisis reacted to help each other ~ stories of heroism, kindness, generosity, courage, and sheer goodness ~ even between people of different races, religions, and national origins. The stories are legion. Each such person's good actions made things better for someone else, and in so doing, made both individuals better souls. But it does not end there.

At a societal level, the phenomenon of terrorism is a wrong that causes immense suffering world-wide. How do we fight it? How do we stop it?

According to Zarathushtra, the ultimate way to defeat evil or what is wrong, is to change minds, change preferences,⁷ so that people will stop choosing it, stop giving it life and substance with their actions.

We might never be able to change the minds of some fanatics. With some people, we just have to make sure we render them incapable of harming, bless them in our minds, and leave the changing of their preferences to the Divine and the way in which existence has been ordered (including the law of consequences ~ that we reap what we sow).⁸ However, there are many thousands of ordinary people who are not fanatics, but who have been influenced by fanatics. To succeed in eliminating terrorism, we need to change the minds of these thousands of ordinary people. Because if we fail, such people will continue to be the resource pool from which fanatics will recruit ~ increasing the numbers and succeeding generations of terrorists.

How do we do this? How do we increase understanding – ours and theirs? How do we change hatred into friendship? How do we change prejudice into tolerance? How do we (as Zarathushtra poetically puts it) "deliver deceit [*druj-* 'untruth'] into the hands of truth [*aša-*]" Y30:8, Y44:14? By using our minds in a good way (*vohu- manah-*), and translating this good thinking into beneficial words and actions (*spənta-ārmaiti-*).⁹

We need to use our minds/hearts to understand the reasons that enable fanatics to recruit ordinary people into terrorists, and then act to eliminate these reasons on all fronts. Such actions might include stopping oppression and injustice – both fertile breeding grounds for terrorism. Such actions might include making accurate information available to people, so that they are not misled, or conditioned, into believing the misinformation of fanatics. Such actions might include building the kinds of educational and market forces that give people a chance at life, instead of having nothing to lose by blowing themselves up. Such actions might involve not assisting the misuse of religion to justify oppressive policies. Effective actions can only be determined after we have a clear understanding of the causes of a problem, and think about solutions. But unless we understand and act to eliminate the causes that enable terrorists to recruit ordinary people, our diplomatic, economic, law enforcement and military initiatives will not bring about a lasting solution.

So this dreadful wrong that is terrorism can be turned into an opportunity to advance the good ~ individually and socially ~ helping to enable the individual and social evolution which is the purpose of life.

Of course one might question: Why would an all-good 'God' allow terrorism and other choices that inflict harm and grief to exist in the first place?

Well, Zarathushtra has a unique idea regarding the origin of 'evil', as we discuss in another chapter.¹⁰ And he teaches not only that the Divine does not interfere with our freedom to choose, but that indeed, the freedom to choose is absolutely necessary for the ultimate defeat of 'evil'.¹¹ So it is not a question of why the Divine would allow anyone to choose evil (that is the question of the child within). It is a question of what we do about it, when wrongful choices are made that cause suffering. Such situations are opportunities for transformation ~ for "deliver[ing] deceit [*druj-* 'untruth'] into the hands of truth [*aša-*]" Y30:8, Y44:14, Insler 1975.¹²

And the same is true of suffering caused by natural calamities. These are not described as 'evil' in the Gathas. So apparently, Zarathushtra did not consider them to be the wrongful choices of the Divine. How then can the existence of natural calamities, and the suffering they cause, be reconciled with the notion of an all-good Divine? Once again, let us start from a different perspective.

In the 19th century, in Europe and the United States, anesthesia was not normally available for medical procedures. Surgery was frequently done without anesthesia, especially in theaters of war. When a man's leg was shattered by a cannon ball, it had to be cut off to prevent the onset of gangrene, which would have been fatal. So to save the man's life, surgeons amputated without anesthesia ~ causing enormous pain, but giving the man a chance to live. Was the surgeon evil for inflicting such pain? I think we would agree that he was not, because it was necessary to save life ~ a good purpose.

Is the suffering inflicted by natural calamities necessary to accomplish a good purpose in the overall scheme of things?

Well, when the immediacy of such suffering is brought home to us through personal experience, or through visual news media, all explanations and generalizations seem inadequate (or Pollyanna-ish, or trite, or

extremely annoying, or worse ~ pompous). But at the risk of sounding inadequate and other sorry things, let us consider the matter.

If existence were ordered in such a way that we never suffered any pain, or any disappointments, or any loss, or any challenges, we would be in a state of perpetual status quo ~ we would never grow. Do natural calamities enable growth, (just as operating without anesthesia during battles in times past enabled a chance at life)? Well, once again, let us look at 'real life' experiences.

Consider the hurricanes and earthquakes that have occurred in recent times. They caused enormous amounts of grief and suffering. They also generated huge outpourings of individual acts of courage, heroism, generosity, neighbor helping neighbor, and sheer goodness, in the many and varied ways in which individuals responded to them (with good thoughts, words and actions). In South-East Asia, rebel forces and the government set aside their hostilities and co-operated to bring relief to the victims of a tsunami. In other areas, homes and buildings were rebuilt in a way to better withstand earthquakes and make communities safer. It sounds trite to say that each good action in response to these calamities made things better for someone else, (and in the process, made the doer a better person). Such generalizations can never capture or express the infinite variety of experiences learned, benefits reaped, and good done. But none of these infinite varieties of experiences, benefits, and good, would have occurred without the calamities that generated so much suffering, and thus were indeed opportunities to advance the good ~ small steps in the process of personal and societal transformation.

This is not a question of 'accepting the will of God', with dumb suffering. Quite the contrary. This is a question of defying the calamities that are a part of the natural order of existence, that bring us grief. It is a question of not being defeated by them ~ of wresting something good out of them. A foundational aspect of Zarathushtra's thought. We should not accept the 'bad' things that happen to us as 'the will of God'. (What an insult to 'God!'). We should think and act to change what is 'bad' or 'wrong', and bring about something good ~ large or small.

I think that is one purpose of the many 'problems' that we encounter ~ whether they are problems generated by the limitations of our physical shells,¹³ or problems generated by the natural order of existence, or by the wrongful choices of others. We need to defy them, not succumb to them. We need to use them as opportunities for change, for betterment.

It is through a huge variety of experiences ~ the good ones, and also the adversities ~ that we grow (individually and collectively) depending on how we handle them. As my friend, Shahriar Shahriari says: when many people work together towards a good end, it creates a synergy which is greater than the sum of its parts. That is so true. It is like a symphony orchestra, with each instrument playing a part to collectively make beautiful music.

In Zarathushtra's thought, we need to help each other make it. That too is part of the true (good) order of existence (*aša-*). A kind word, a joke to make someone laugh, helping a loved one cope with a mutual loss, having the courage to take action (in a good way) to correct an injustice, devising ways to minimize the devastation of current or future natural disasters, volunteering for the clean up, sending a financial contribution ~ the ways to help each other are as boundless as human imagination, and are limited only by human limitations (for which we should not feel guilty). We grow by both giving and receiving help, and in the process we change existence. We make things 'more good' (the *vahyah-* of Y30:3), 'more beneficial' (the *spanyah-* of Y45:2) for ourselves, for each other, for our world.¹⁴

So we return to the question: Is the natural order of existence (*aṣa-*) 'evil' because of the suffering it causes to us, and to other life forms when it generates hurricanes and other natural calamities, and ~ let us not forget ~ because it requires us to kill to eat,¹⁵? Well, let me suggest an answer which, like other such generalities, sounds repulsively callous, but is nevertheless true. In many instances, a life form who has suffered greatly, will better understand, and empathize with, the suffering that someone else is going through, because he knows what it is like. Is it a worthwhile objective to enlarge the understanding of a life form (through suffering and its alleviation), in order to change the mind-sets, the inherent preferences, which generate the wrongful choices that cause others suffering?

If you were given the job of designing an order of existence which would enable individual and communal growth from a conflicted, mixed (more~good/bad Y30.3; more~beneficial/harmful Y45.2) way of being to a completely good, wholly beneficial way of being, can you think of any way to accomplish this objective without the experiences and sufferings that enlarge understanding, and result in change from within? I really dislike this solution that entails so much suffering. But I have to admit, I cannot think of any alternative that would accomplish the desired end. To leave the status quo unchanged would also leave unchanged the mixed preferences (more~good/bad, more~beneficial/harmful) of living things, and the suffering caused by their wrongful choices ~ sufferings with no prospect of changing minds, changing preferences, and therefore sufferings with no prospect of ending.

Conclusion

For all that they are painful ~ no, *because* they are painful ~ all 'bad' experiences (whether brought about by the limitations of our material shells, or accidents, or natural calamities or the wrongful choices of others, or ourselves), have the capacity for enlarging our understanding, being our teachers, sculpting our souls. They are opportunities for change, for growth. With mutual, loving help, they are agents of transformation, transforming us into something better, depending on how we handle them ~ a transformation which could not occur without experiencing such 'bad' happenings. As such, even though difficult experiences may bring grief, or pain, they are not 'bad' for that reason alone. As agents of transformation, they are beneficial ~ heavy blessings, but blessings nevertheless.

One of the things I love about Zarathushtra's thought is that it gives us a way of looking at existence, a way of living, that is without fear. The religions of Zarathushtra's society were fear based (as are many religions today). One either obeyed or was punished. One either worshipped through extravagant gifts to the gods (through their priests, naturally), or one was punished. Natural calamities, sickness, poverty, suffering ~ all were supposedly 'punishments' from the god(s). It was precisely this fear-based paradigm that Zarathushtra rejected ~ seeing the Divine as wholly good, wholly beneficial, a Friend, whose existence is the true order of existence (*aṣa-*) ~ a wholly good (*vahišta-*), beneficial (*spənta-*), generous, loving, beneficent (*hudāh-*), order of existence.

In Zarathushtra's thought, 'bad' things are not instruments of Divine vengeance (or worse, Divine 'justice'). Nor are they the arbitrary, capricious, acts of an uncaring universe. They are part of a beneficial order of existence that requires our involvement to bring about the desired end ~ overcoming 'evil' by changing preferences, changing minds, in ourselves and in our world.

In the book *Ideas and Opinions* by Albert Einstein,¹⁶ there is an interesting section on religion, in which Einstein says:

"With primitive man it is above all fear that evokes religious notions ~ fear of hunger, wild beasts, sickness, death. Since at this state of existence, understanding of causal connections is usually poorly developed, the human mind creates illusory beings more or less analogous to itself on whose wills and actions these fearful happenings depend. Thus one tries to secure the favor of these beings by carrying out actions and offering sacrifices which, ... propitiates them or makes them well disposed toward a mortal. In this sense, I am speaking of a religion of fear."¹⁷

As Einstein sees it, from a religion of fear, man's thinking progresses to a moral conception of God, and then, to a third conception, which he describes as follows:

"But there is a third stage of religious experience which belongs to all of them, even though it is rarely found in a pure form: I shall call it cosmic religious feeling. It is very difficult to elucidate this feeling to anyone who is entirely without it, especially as there is no anthropomorphic conception of God corresponding to it. The individual feels the futility of human desires and aims and the sublimity and marvelous order which reveal themselves both in nature and in the world of thought. Individual existence impresses him as a sort of prison and he wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole."¹⁸

I find Einstein's "cosmic religious feeling" very close to Zarathushtra's thought. Although he may never have heard of *aša-*, his perception of "the sublimity and marvelous order which reveal themselves both in nature and in the world of thought" is an eloquent and accurate way of describing the concept of the true (correct), good, order in the existences of matter and mind (*aša-*). And his yearning to experience the universe as a single significant whole (*haurvatāt-*) is very Zarathushtrian.

But Einstein's perceptions are also different from those of Zarathushtra in some ways. Zarathushtra does not see the material existence as "the futility of human desires and aims". On the contrary, he sees the material existence as a matrix, an arena, through which we can embody the true order of existence with our beneficial thoughts, words and actions (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), thereby enabling the evolution from a better/bad way of being to one that allows us to "experience the universe as a single significant whole." And Zarathushtra's notion of the Divine is not impersonal. He sees, rather, a cosmic whole (as Einstein seems to suggest), but with each part of the whole assisting each other part to make it, so that as each part of the whole makes it, that part reunites with other parts that have made it, comprising the Divine as a single union of (perfected) life force, which also helps those of us who have not yet made it.¹⁹

In conclusion: I think that in Zarathushtra's thought, the so-called 'bad' things that happen to us, are necessary agents of transformation ~ with help ever at hand from all the living ~ the Divine, each other, and other life forms, to help us make it. In his view, existence has been ordered in such a way that there is nothing 'bad' from which 'good' does not flow. So we see that for all its griefs and pains, our existence has indeed been ordered in a friendly, beneficial way, a way that eventually brings about the desired end for all ~ the true wholly good order of existence (*aša- vahišta-*), which is the nature and identity of the Divine.²⁰

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¹ See in Part One, *The Beneficial-Sacred Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu; and Truth, Asha.*

² See Part One: *Truth, Asha.* There is a hint of corroboration for this conclusion that existence has been ordered in a 'right' way in later Younger Avestan texts, which refer to the Lord, Wisdom, and his attributes (*amesha spenta*) the core of which is *aša-*, as ruling 'aright'. For example:

"We worship the Creator Ahura Mazda ... and the Bountiful Immortals [*aməša- spənta-*] who rule aright, and who dispose of all aright" Yy6:6, Mills translation, SBE 31, p. 219.

In Yy12:4, only the amesha spenta (*aša-* refracted into its component parts) are mentioned. "... O Ye Bountiful Immortals! [*aməša- spənta-*] Ye who rule aright, and dispose (of all) aright,..." Yy12:4, Mills translation, SBE 31, page 252.

This description of Wisdom and Its attributes the amesha spenta as ruling aright and disposing of all aright is repeated in many other Avestan texts as well.

³ "Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And who with Eden didst devise the Snake;
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd, Man's Forgiveness give ~ and take!"
The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, as translated by Edward Fitzgerald (William Godwin, Inc. New York 1933), verse LVIII (this work has no page numbers).

⁴ See *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

⁵ Detailed in *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*.

⁶ In English we tend to think of 'mind' as pertaining to only intellectual functions. But Zarathushtra uses mind to include all of our abstract capabilities ~ intellectual, emotional, creative, insightful, et cetera, detailed in *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*.

⁷ See *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

⁸ See *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

⁹ "Yes, those men shall be the saviors [*saošyant-*] of the lands, namely, those who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and with truth, Wise One. These indeed have been fated to be the expellers of fury." Y48:12, Insler 1975.

¹⁰ See *Part Two: The Puzzle of Creation*.

¹¹ See *Part One: The Freedom to Choose*, and *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

¹² Using 'bad' situations as transformative opportunities ~ "teaching moments" ~ is a favorite theme of a certain public figure who held the highest public office in the US from 2008 through 2016 (whom I admire) who has now retired from public office. I can only assure you that I saw this idea in Zarathushtra's thought, long before I had even heard of such a person, and long before I heard such an idea expressed by him. To me, it simply validates the universal truth of Zarathushtra's ideas, to see them spring independently in the minds of different persons in different time periods.

¹³ Such as personal shortcomings or qualities that may have a genetic basis. To give just one example, if a person has a quick temper, it is not enough to shrug and say "Well, that's the way I am. I was born that way." The person would need to work at controlling his temper, so that he does not inflict pain and grief on others by hurtful words spoken in the heat of the moment (or worse, hurtful actions).

¹⁴ It is (perhaps) worth being aware that Zarathushtra's thoughts on how to deal with suffering are quite different from the solutions of some other religious beliefs.

The Buddhist solution for pain and grief, is detachment. If you experience grief at the death of a loved one, according to Buddhism, it is because you are too attached to that person. You should detach yourself from your feelings for that person, so that you do not feel the pain of his / her loss. If you suffer pain brought about by illness or a natural

calamity (such as an earthquake, or a tsunami), that is because you are too attached to the affected material things. The solution is to detach yourself from such things, in order to not feel such pain. I have the highest respect for Buddhists. I love their gentle, non-harming way of life. But their solution of detachment for dealing with the pain and grief of life does not work for me. I would rather feel love for a loved one, and pain at his loss, than detach myself from all such feelings, so that I experience neither love nor grief. That solution seems more like anaesthesia, rather than attaining wisdom and compassion through experience (even though, when one is in the midst of an overwhelming grief, a little anaesthesia might seem attractive).

Christian beliefs about suffering vary. And there seems to be a difference between dogma and practice. In dogma, a few Christian denominations view pain and grief as punishments from God. Others view it as the incomprehensible will of God ~ to be borne with submission, or offered up for the benefit of others, or for the greater glory of God. I find it difficult to understand the idea that the glory of the Divine can be increased by the suffering of any life form. Nor do I understand how the Divine would see suffering as a pleasing offering, (although the motive ~ to benefit others ~ is indeed a good one). I have the highest respect (and affection) for the goodness of many Christians, but their dogma regarding pain and suffering does not work for me. However, in practice (as distinguished from church dogma), Christians are very pro-active ~ often at the forefront in doing what they can to alleviate suffering ~ setting an example from which all of us can benefit.

Zarathushtra's solution is not detachment. Nor is it acceptance (either as punishment, or as submission to the will of God, or as an offering for the benefit of others or the greater glory of the Divine). His solution is to see suffering is a catalyst for transformation, which requires a positive, pro-active, approach that addresses pain, grief, and all the other 'bad' things that happen to us, in a way that helps to make things better ~ for ourselves, for others, for our societies, for other life forms, for our environment ~ thereby using such events to perfect existence ~ ourselves, and our world.

¹⁵ Even vegetarians (and vegans) kill plants or seeds, to eat. This necessity of killing to eat has long bothered me. I do not like the idea that I must kill another life form ~ even a plant ~ in order to survive. In reading the later texts, I was deeply touched to find that other (ancient) Zoroastrian souls perhaps may also have been troubled by this question, and as a result, they reasoned out an interesting (but perhaps fictional) way of addressing it, which is recorded in the *Bundahishn*, a Pahlavi text the original name of which was Zand-akas 'knowing the tradition', according to which text, there will come a the millennium in which good will prevail, we will no longer kill, (or steal the nourishment of other life forms like milk) to live. In the following quotation, Mashya and Mashyoi are the first man and woman according to one post-Zarathushtrian creation story (not in the Gathas), and words in round parentheses are from the original text, which the translator, E. W. West has inserted, to show us the Pahlavi word he has translated. Chapter 30:1 - 3 of the *Bundahishn* states:

- "1. On the nature of the resurrection and future existence, it says in revelation, that whereas Mashya and Mashyoi, who grew up from the earth, first fed upon water, then plants, then milk, and then meat, men also, when their time of death has come, first desist from eating meat, then milk, then from bread, till when they shall die they always feed upon water.
2. So, likewise, in the millennium of Hushedar-mah, the strength of appetite (az) will thus diminish, when men will remain three days and nights in superabundance (sirih) through one taste of consecrated food.
3. Then they will desist from meat food, and eat vegetables and milk; and for ten years before Soshyans comes, they remain without food, and do not die." SBE 5, pp. 120 - 121.

While this part of the *Bundahishn* proposes a (future ~ possibly hoped for) solution of sorts, it does not explain why existence is ordered in such a way that we have to kill to eat in the first place.

¹⁶ Based on *Mein Weltbild*, edited by Carl Seelig, and other sources, with new translations and revisions by Sonja Bergmann, (Bonanza Books, NY 1954).

¹⁷ *Ideas and Opinions by Albert Einstein*, pp. 36 - 37.

¹⁸ *Ideas and Opinions by Albert Einstein*, p. 38.

¹⁹ See in *Part One: Completeness and Non-Deathness, Haurvatat-Ameretat*; and *The Identity of the Divine*;
And see in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Singular and the Plural*; *The Lords and the Equations of Y31:4*; *The Puzzle of the Sincere Ones and Others*; *The Puzzle of Creation*; *A Question of Immanence*, and *The Houses of Heaven and Hell*.

²⁰ See in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*; and *The Identity Of The Divine*.
And in *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.