

Worship & Prayer.

We have already seen the evidence that in Zarathushtra's thought, love is the foundation of prayer and worship.¹ Zarathushtra's notion of worship may be summarized as follows,

We worship Wisdom (*mazdā-*) by using our minds to search for, and understand, the true order of existence ~ the factual truths of our universe as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit (all that is good and right).²

We worship Wisdom by bringing all that is true, good, right, to life ~ giving it substance, with each good choice in thought, word and action ~ prayers that in our day to day lives beneficially embody the true order of existence (*spənta- ārmaiti-*).

We worship Wisdom by governing ourselves and our social units in ways that are good and right, ways that nurture, protect, ways that accord with, and bring about, the wholly good true order of existence.

We worship Wisdom by evolving from a conflicted mix of harmful preferences and good ones, to a way of being that is completely good, wholly in accord with the true order of existence ~ the completely beneficial way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*) which is the essence of the sacred, at which time the reason for mortality ceases to exist, and we cross over (the metaphoric bridge) from an existence that is mortal, to one that is bound no longer by mortality ~ non-deathness (*aməratāt-*).

According to Zarathushtra, the form of worship that Wisdom (*mazdā-*) wants, is not self abnegation, but a joyful self realization ~ fulfilling our best potential by searching for truth and helping ourselves, each other, and existence as a whole, to attain it.

In Zarathushtra's thought, there is no notion of a 'God' who is pleased by our kneeling, or groveling, or humiliating ourselves, or wailing and weeping, or beating ourselves, and calling ourselves derogatory names, (as though it might be pleasing to 'God' to reinforce His superiority by requiring us to acknowledge our inferiority). That is not the nature of the Divine in Zarathushtra's thought. And that type of worship is not found in the Gathas. The only physical attitude of worship mentioned in the Gathas is a 'hand [sg.]³ outstretched ...' Y28:1, Y50:8, and Y29:5).

In ancient times, the outstretched, or open, hand was a gesture of friendship, intended to show that the person did not have a weapon in his hand. So the only gesture of worship mentioned in the Gathas, is this ancient gesture of friendship, which corroborates Zarathushtra's thought that relationship between man and the Divine is that of a friend to a friend.⁴

The Gathas do not mention any rituals, although certain elements of Indo-Iranian rituals ~ fire, butter, milk, bread ~ are mentioned, and form the bases for some of Zarathushtra's metaphors for worshipping Wisdom with His own divine attributes (the amesha spenta).⁵

But the Gathas are indeed full of prayer and worship. In fact, it is impossible to study them without being struck by the intensity of Zarathushtra's relationship with the Divine ~ a relationship that he expresses in his own words, in the language of his day.⁶

Songs.

Many other religions have beautiful music, as part of their worship. When the mind is inspired, when the heart is full, we create music to express what we feel. And such music in turn uplifts and enhances the worship of those who hear or sing it.

In Zarathushtra's day, music was so important a part of people's lives, and spirituality, that he uses the name "House of Song" for paradise. A state of being,⁷ that houses the high we experience when we sing or hear beautiful music, ~ an indication of the rich tradition of music that must have existed in Zarathushtra's time. In fact, he expresses his spiritual philosophy (or theology) in the form of seventeen songs ~ the Gathas ~ and he speaks of worshipping Wisdom with "...songs of praise (sung) in universal glory of your kind, Wise One [*mazdā*]-." Y34:2, Insler 1975.

Devotional songs were (and still are) an Indo-Iranian tradition. The people of the Vedas had songs that involved the skilled use of poetry and meter, similar to Zarathushtra's Gathas. Indeed, the poetic skill of the Gathas is so close to the highly skilled poetic techniques used in Vedic times, that it has led some scholars to conclude that Zarathushtra was a priest. Whether he was or not, we cannot say with certainty. Those who think he was, point to Y33:6 (discussed in the next chapter). But in that verse he describes his view of a good priest. He does not specifically say that he himself is one, although the last line might suggest that conclusion.

I do not know if, in Zarathushtra's Indo-Iranian culture, the priesthood was hereditary. I do know that in the Gathas, and even in later Avestan texts, there was no hereditary priesthood, as we see even in the very late Avestan *Vishtasp Yasht*, (composed in faulty Avestan as Darmesteter's Introduction to this *Yasht* makes clear). I am indebted to Dr. Farhang Mehr for bringing this example to my attention. In this *Yasht*, King Vishtaspa is (purportedly) blessed by Zarathushtra with many blessings one of which is in the following words.

"May ten sons be born of thy own body! three as Athravans [fire priests], three as warriors, three as tillers of the ground! ..." *Vishtasp Yasht* section 3, Darmesteter translation.⁸

During Avestan times, the social occupations were warriors, farmers/artisans and priests. This quotation from the *Vishtasp Yasht* makes it clear that these were not hereditary occupations, (although by the time the Pahlavi *Bundahishn* was written ~ 200 + years after the Arab invasion of Iran, the priesthood was indeed hereditary, and may have been so during Sasanian times as well).⁹

Returning to whether Zarathushtra was a priest, I am inclined to think that he may have studied to be a priest ~ thereby acquiring knowledge of the poetic techniques of devotional songs. But his ideas of the Divine, and how we should worship It were so different from the ritual priestly duties of his time, that he was persecuted and cast out from his clan, which simply is not consistent with his being a practicing priest.

I speculate that Zarathushtra may have crafted his Gathas, using ancient poetic techniques for ritual hymns, with tongue in cheek, to suggest his new way to worship ~ not with ritual offerings, but with our good choices in thought, word and action in the temple of life ~ making them songs that anyone and everyone could sing, songs about his new ideas of the Divine and how life should be lived ~ which was his idea of worship.

The idea that music and songs were ways for everyone to relate to the Divine, has for centuries been prevalent in Indo-Iranian cultures. The Buddhists have gathas. The Hindus have bhajans (devotional songs in which, like jazz, the singer or player can improvise on the original theme of a song). Wandering minstrels used to travel all over northern India, singing devotional songs in poetry. Rabindranath Tagore described the first such minstrel he came across in India, as follows:

"...one day I chanced to hear a song from a beggar belonging to the Baul sect of Bengal ... it was alive with an emotional sincerity. It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the divine which is in Man and not in the temple, or scriptures, in images and symbols ... Since then I have often tried to meet

these people and sought to understand them through their songs, which are their only form of worship ... these verses are spontaneously individual in their expressions."¹⁰

This is so very close to Zarathushtra's thought ~ both the singing and the ideas that were sung.

The music of the Gathas, as songs, survived for many centuries. In a later YAv. text, the *Aerpatistan and Nirangistan*, we are told that if you hear someone singing the Gathas, whether along an aqueduct, or by a river, or in the wilderness, or on the highways of commerce, you may join in.¹¹

Sadly, we no longer know the music to which the Gathas were sung. We no longer know any of the "[...songs of praise \(sung\) in universal glory of your kind, Wise One](#)" Y34:2 which ancient Zoroastrians sang. And music, which so pervaded Avestan life and Zarathushtra's worship, is absent from the forms of worship engaged in by Zoroastrians today.

You well may wonder: Why? How could this have happened?

It probably happened because of devastating wars in which the learned were killed, books were burned, and religious expressions other than those of the conqueror were banned or discouraged. Music cannot be kept just in the mind. It has to be expressed ~ and therefore heard. Its existence could not be kept secret. After the Arab invasion, Zoroastrians endured frequent periods of persecution of varying severity, and were hard pressed to stay alive. Their's was not an environment in which devotional music and joyful songs could survive. One can only wonder at the severity of the persecution that resulted in eliminating all traces of music from the Zarathushti religion. Even those who fled to India carried with them a religion bereft of its rich, ancient musical tradition. Thus, with the passage of time, and devastating wars, many of Zarathushtra's beautiful ideas became lost to Zoroastrians.

But perhaps, as the Avestan language continues to be decoded, and his ideas are re-discovered, and they inspire the love and devotion they once did in ancient times, creative people ~ with inspired minds and full hearts ~ will once again express the love they feel for Zarathushtra's teachings, in music and songs. Indeed such things have already started to happen in Canada and in Europe.¹²

Prayer.

The Gathas are full of many types of prayer. Zarathushtra does not dictate any specific prayers that must be recited. Instead, he talks (sings) to the Divine, one to one, about anything and everything:

About his hunger for 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;

About his mistreatment at the hands of others, "[Yes, throughout my lifetime I have been condemned as the greatest defiler, I who try to satisfy the poorly protected \(creatures\) with truth, Wise One...](#)" Y49:1, Insler 1975;

About his rejection by his community, "[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;

His grief, "[... I lament to Thee. Take notice of it, Lord, offering the support which a friend should grant to a friend ...](#)" Y46:2, Insler 1975;

His anxieties about whether he will ever be able to persuade others of the validity of his teachings "...How shall I bring to life that vision of mine, ..." Y44:9; "...how shall I, with your accord, impassion your following,..." Y44:17; "...How might I deliver deceit into the hands of truth, ..." Y44:14, Insler 1975;

And he prays for guidance. "...do Thou, Wise Lord, instruct me ... through the eloquence befitting Thy spirit ..." Y28:11, Insler 1975.

But even when asking for guidance from the Divine, he does not surrender his ability to think for himself. He asks for guidance through good thinking, "...instruct through good thinking (the course) of my direction, in order to be the charioteer of my will and my tongue." Y50:6, Insler 1975. I translate this verse somewhat differently,¹³ but the underlying idea is the same.

The Gathas also contain prayers of intercession.

Some of us are inclined to regard such prayers with contempt, or at least with disfavor. But that is neither reasonable, nor supported by the evidence. If someone we love needed help, wouldn't we want to help? Wouldn't we want that person to ask us for help? Don't we often help even strangers who are in a difficult situation? Is the Divine less generous than we humans are? A generous, bountiful, lovingkindness is the nature of the Divine, in Zarathushtra's thought.¹⁴ Throughout the Gathas, Divine assistance is described as a gift ~ it does not have to be earned.¹⁵ If the Divine and all the living are part of one existence, help from the Divine is just the perfected part of ourselves helping the unperfected part of ourselves.

I fully agree that if we regard the Divine as only a supplier of goods and services, that is a somewhat limited vision of the relationship. However, I am not persuaded that in Zarathushtra's view, it is either wrong or futile to ask Wisdom (*mazdā-*) for help. Mutual, loving help between man and the Divine, (and all the living), is at the heart of Zarathushtra's teachings.¹⁶ I don't think any prayer, however foolish, is ever wasted. The Divine (perfected existence) is so generous, that even when we pray in foolish ways, asking for foolish things, the opportunity is used to help us acquire understanding and solutions.

Zarathushtra expresses the belief that the Divine always answers – one way or another – if a prayer has two ingredients – good purpose and love. "...For I know that words deriving from good purpose and from love, are not to be left wanting by you." Y28:10, Insler 1975. He does not say we will get what we ask for. He says that the request will not be left wanting.

Zarathushtra frequently asks the Divine for help, for support, for protection, for himself and for others, but (as usual) with a difference. Let me show you a few examples, and see if you can pick up on the difference.

In Y28:8, he says: "Thee ... do I lovingly entreat for the best [*vahišta-* 'most-good']¹⁷ for Frashaoshtra ... and for me ... and (for those others) ... for a whole life time of good thinking." Y28:8, Insler 1975. The word *vahišta-* 'most-good' is intrinsic goodness in the superlative degree. So here, what is he asking for? And for what purpose?

In Y46:2 after complaining about being driven away from his family and his clan,¹⁸ he says: "...Take notice of it, Lord, offering the support which a friend should grant to a friend. Let me see the power of good thinking allied with truth !" Y46:2, Insler 1975. What kind of powerful help is he asking for, from his Friend?¹⁹

In Y49:1, he says: "Yes, throughout my lifetime I have been condemned as the greatest defiler, I who try to satisfy the poorly protected (creatures) with truth [*aṣa-*], Wise One... come to me ... give support to me. Through good thinking, find a means of destruction of this." Y49:1, Insler 1975. With what weapon does

he ask Wisdom (*mazdā-*) to destroy the persecution and slanders against him? And parenthetically, how does Zarathushtra himself help the poorly protected in this verse?

In Y34:7, he says: "Wise One, where are those sincere ones who, through their possession of good thinking, make even immoral decrees and painful legacies disappear? I know of none other than you [plural].²⁰ Therefore protect us in accord with truth [*aša-*]." Y34:7, Insler 1975. His reference to immoral decrees and painful legacies sounds like what we have to contend with in our own times. But again, what is it that makes these immoral and painful things disappear? And with what does he ask Wisdom to protect him?²¹

In Y49:12, he asks: "What help by truth hast Thou for Zarathushtra who calls? What help by good thinking hast Thou for me, ..." Y49:12, Insler 1975. With what tools is he asking Wisdom to help him?²²

In each of these instances, it is some variation of truth ~ the true order of existence *aša-* ~ and its comprehension good thinking (*vohu- manah-*) which are the means through which support, protection and help are given. It is possible that Zarathushtra, being practical, also asks for the material wherewithal to enable him to advance his vision (although the opinions of translators differ in this respect).²³ But the things that generate the solution, the protection, the help, are always the wholly good true order of existence (*aša-vahišta-*) and its comprehension (*vohu- manah-*). It would then be up to the person praying, to implement solutions by translating his increased understanding into beneficial words and actions that embody the true (correct) good order of existence (*spənta- ārmaiti-*).

We can see from the above illustrations, that Zarathushtra prays by talking with Wisdom in a very intense and personal way – asking Him questions, complaining to Him, confiding in Him, expressing his concerns to Him, asking for guidance, and asking for help, protection, and support (through truth and good thinking).

These are examples of what I call 'asking prayers'.

Most of us however are aware through experience, that it is impossible to teach without learning. It is impossible to give without receiving. And a similar paradox exists in prayer. It is impossible to experience Wisdom's generosity in response to prayer, without being generous in return. In addition to the 'asking prayers', the Gathas reveal a form of worship that I call 'giving prayers'.

The Worship of 'Giving' Prayers.

To Zarathushtra, Wisdom and the qualities that make a being Divine, (truth, its comprehension, its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action, its good rule), are objects of worship. This is detailed in another chapter,²⁴ but here are a few examples.

"... As long as I shall be able, I shall respect that truth [*aša-*] is to have a gift of reverence." Y43:9, Insler 1975;

"Therefore, let us reverently give an offering [*myazdām*] to Thee, Lord, and to truth [*aša-*]..." Y34:3, Insler 1975; the Avestan word *myazdām* 'offering' is a ritual offering, and thus an act of worship.

"...Thou, Wise One, along with truth [*aša-*] and good thinking [*vohu- manah-*] ... I shall very happily approach all of you, as I worship and praise." Y34:6, Insler 1975.

And these qualities are also the way to worship. He tells us to worship Wisdom with the qualities that make a being Divine (the amesha spenta). In the Gathas there are many verses which address this form of worship. They are detailed in another chapter,²⁵ but here are a few examples.

"Yes, praising, I shall always worship ... you, Wise Lord, with truth and the very best thinking and with their

rule..." Y50:4,²⁶ Insler 1975;

"I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers of [*ārmaiti*-], ..." Y45:10, Insler 1975. Prayers of *ārmaiti*- are prayers of thoughts, words and actions which embody the true order of existence.

"...Your enduring worshipful offering has been established to be [*aməratāt*- 'non-deathness'] and completeness [*haurvatāt*-]." Y33:8, Insler 1975. A few more examples are footnoted.²⁷

In this last verse, Y33:8, the worship offering desired and established by Wisdom, is our complete attainment of the true order of existence (*haurvatāt*-), resulting in an existence no longer bound by mortality (*aməratāt*-).²⁸ In other words, our self-realization is the worship that Wisdom wants.

We also see this beautiful form of worship ~ worshipping the Divine with its own qualities, implied in the enigmatic Y51:22 where Zarathushtra says:

"I know in whose worship there exists for me the best [*vahišta*- 'most-good'],²⁹
in accordance with truth.
It is the Wise Lord as well as
those who have existed and (still) exist
[which Insler interprets to be the Divine attributes, later called the amesha spenta].³⁰
Them all shall I worship with their own names
And I shall serve them with love." Y51:22, Insler 1975.

How do we worship the attributes of the Divine "with their own names"?

We worship truth with truth ~ by being truthful.

We worship good thinking with good thinking ~ by using our minds/hearts to search for and understand truth ~ factual truths as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit.

We worship beneficial embodied (or personified) truth (*spənta ārmaiti*-) by embodying, personifying truth ~ bringing to life the true order of existence with our beneficial thoughts, words and actions ~ giving truth substance, making it real. This idea is corroborated in later texts.³¹

We worship good rule with good rule ~ by using whatever power we have to govern ourselves, our social units, our world, in accordance with the true order of existence (*aša*-).

We worship *haurvatāt*- / *aməratāt*- ~ by attaining and personifying the true order of existence completely, perfectly (*haurvatāt*-), thereby attaining an existence no longer bound by mortality (*aməratāt*- 'non-deathness').

We worship a beneficial-sacred way of being (*spənta mainyu*-) by being beneficial ~ good, generous, loving ~ which to Zarathushtra is the essence of the sacred.

In short, in an age when men worshipped gods by slaughtering animals (and possibly each other) in stone temples, Zarathushtra introduces the idea of worshipping the Divine with thoughts, words and actions in the temple of life ~ the ultimate 'giving prayer'.³²

I love this form of worship. It warms the heart and delights the mind. To think that one's actions in the hustle and bustle of the 'real world' can be acts of worship if governed by truth and good thinking, gives meaning and beauty to the everyday things we do, and to the notion of 'worship'.

Implicit in this framework of worship is the idea that the good end can be reached only by good means. The mind-set that, *the end justifies the means*, is not a part of Zarathushtra's thought.

Implicit in this framework of worship is the idea of a unity of endeavor between the Divine and all the living, required to bring about the desired end. What the Wise Lord requires of us, He delivers of Himself,³³ ~ the true (correct), good order of existence, its comprehension, its embodiment in thought word and action, its rule, its complete attainment.

Implicit in this framework of worship is the unique idea that even such divine characteristics as truth and good thinking, to be worth anything, must be expressed, given life, in the material reality of good thoughts, words and actions. "But to this world He came with the rule of good thinking and of truth [*aša-*] and ... enduring [*armaiti-*] gave body and breath (to it)..." Y30:7, Insler 1975.

This idea is corroborated in other verses: "...May truth be embodied and strong with breath..." Y43:16; "...Through its actions [*armaiti-*] gives substance to the truth..." Y44:6, Insler 1975.

In short, he teaches us to worship the Divine by infusing the qualities of the Divine into every aspect of our material existence, into each thought, word and action – in our families, in our relationships with each other ~ at home, in the business world, in academia, in government, in the practice of our professions, in our treatment of other life forms, in our treatment of the environment. A 'living' worship, in every sense of the word.

Most religious traditions teach that to advance ourselves spiritually, we must reject the material. Zarathushtra's teaching is so uniquely and beautifully different.³⁴ Under his formula for worship, the material world is an indispensable matrix, through which we worship with thoughts, words and actions. We attain the spiritual through the material. A paradox.

His formula for worship makes us aware of how inextricably interconnected we are, because when we so worship with the material reality of thoughts, words and actions, it is impossible to advance ourselves, spiritually, without at the same time benefiting each other and our world.

So to Zarathushtra, the fragrance of a life well lived, is the incense of worship ~ the loveliest prayer of all. The ultimate 'giving prayer'.

Of course, it is one thing to articulate the concept of this beautiful form of worship. It is another thing entirely to implement it. What, in a given situation, is consistent with the true good order of existence (*aša-*)? What is not? The answers are seldom clear cut. But then, that is part of the fun, is it not? Figuring out these questions for ourselves, case by case, with good thinking (*vohu- manah-*)? Will we make mistakes? Of course we will. But with good thinking (and mutual, loving help ~ not to be confused with thinking that we know what's best for others) we learn from our mistakes – a necessary part of the growth process.

There is an old song called *The Lonesome Train*. It was sung many years ago by Paul Robeson, about the train that carried Abraham Lincoln back to Illinois after he had been assassinated. In one part of the song, Robeson sings (to the best of my recollection):

"Freedom's a thing that has no ending.
It needs to be cared for. It needs defending.
It's a great big job for many hands,
Carrying freedom 'cross the lands."

All of the values that we cherish – the freedom to speak, to think for ourselves, to make choices, values such as honesty, justice, generosity, goodness, lovingkindness, friendship, compassion, truth, what's right – all of these values are implicit in the notion of the true (correct) good order of existence *aša-*. These are not things that we can take for granted. These are not things that are handed to us automatically, free of commitment. These are qualities of existence that we have to create, and re-create, give life to, give substance to, over and over, with our choices in thought, word and action, as long as we have life. Because if we don't, we lose them. They cease to have reality in our societies and in our beings. It's that simple.

Since this chapter is about prayer and worship, I would like to close it with a blessing. I originally crafted this blessing (to accompany the actions of the *sés ritual*),³⁵ for my children's weddings. Later, I modified it as a blessing to welcome new initiates into the Zoroastrian religion. But here, with some changes, I offer it as a blessing for everyone, because it reminds us of an essential teaching of Zarathushtra ~ that it is not enough to ask blessings from the Divine for ourselves. We in turn have to bless each other and our world with our 'giving prayers'. The last 3 paragraphs paraphrase the Gathas.

May Wisdom bless us,
May we bless each other,
May we bless the world in which we live.

May He be generous with us,
May we be generous with each other,
May we be generous with all living things.

May He sweeten our lives,
May we sweeten each other's lives,
May we sweeten the lives of all whom we touch.

May He instruct through good thinking
The course of our direction (from Y50:6),
May He give enduring strength to uphold truth and right (from Y43:1).

Let each of us try to win the other with all that is true, and good, and right (*aša-*),
and we will all be winners (from Y53:5).

* * * * *

¹ See *Part One: Love*.

² For the notion that to Zarathushtra, what is 'good' and 'right' ~ qualities of the true (correct) order of existence ~ also apply to the natural laws that govern physical existence, see *Part One: A Friendly Universe*.

³ In Y28:1 and Y50:8, where one person is doing the worshipping, the word 'hand' is sg. although almost all translators have translated it as plural (if both hands of one person had been intended, the dual number would have been used for the Avestan word).

In Y29:5 the word 'hand' is plural because it includes the 'hand' of more than one person. *Part Six: Yasna 28:1* has a detailed discussion on [ustānazastō 'with outstretched hand \[sg.\]'](#).

⁴ The evidence supporting this conclusion is in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

⁵ Discussed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*.

⁶ It has been argued that Avestan was not a language for everyday use, but was created solely for ritual purposes. This argument does not accord with the evidence. Linguistic evidence has established beyond doubt that Avestan is in the Indo-European family of languages (would you believe, the English word 'star' ~ in the sky ~ is Avestan *star-* but pronounced with a short *a*), and Avestan is very similar to Vedic Sanskrit. One has only to study the Av. texts to see that the language was for everyday use (and was also used for rituals). In the *Introduction*, I have given some examples from the Gathas. And the YAv. texts describes many, many, non-ritual things ~ the ringlets of a bludgeon bearing warrior; the square earrings and fur clothing of a 'goddess' (just 2 examples). However, once Avestan became extinct as an everyday language, its use was limited to the sacred ~ the rituals which chanted the Avestan texts. The same thing happened to ancient Sumerian (discussed in a ft. in *Overview: The Avestan Script, Pronunciation & Genesis*).

⁷ Discussed in *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise and Hell*.

⁸ SBE Vol. 23, p. 329. The *Afrin Paighambar Zartusht*, section 5, says something similar. "May ten sons be born of you! In three of them mayest thou be an Athravan! [fire priest] In three of them mayest thou be a warrior ! In three of them mayest thou be a tiller of the ground! And may one be like thyself, O Vistaspa!" SBE Vol. 23, p. 327.

⁹ Detailed in *Part Four: Absence Of Castes*.

¹⁰ Tagore, in his book *The Religion of Man*, (Hibbert Lectures delivered in Oxford at Manchester College, 1930, AMS Press reprint), describes his own experience of hearing such songs (pp. 108 - 109), and he quotes from a Baul song that gives their ideas about worship (which sounds almost like Sufi thought):

"I would not go, my heart, to Mecca or Medina,
For behold, I ever abide by the side of my Friend.
Mad would I become, had I dwelt afar, not knowing Him.
There's no worship in Mosque or Temple or special holy day.
At every step I have my Mecca and Kashi; sacred is every moment." p. 214.

This is so very close to Zarathushtra's thought ~ even to calling the Divine 'Friend', and seeing every step, every moment, as sacred. In Zarathushtra's thought, each time we think, speak or act in accordance with truth, its comprehension, its beneficial embodiment, its good rule ~ a beneficial way of being (all qualities of the Divine) it is not only an act of worship, we bring the divine to life in each such thought, word and action.

¹¹ *Aerpatistan and Nirangastan*, Chapter VIII, pages 83 -84 translated by S. J. Bulsara, 1915 ~ a text that was written many centuries years after Zarathushtra's time.

¹² In Vancouver, Canada, the Gatha Group Choir ~ a choral group of men and women, accompanied by Persian instruments ~ has for some years now been singing verses from the Gathas (and other prayers) in Avestan and in English translation. The recording I have starts with birdsong! Some of these pieces are harmoniously chanted by Mobeds. Some are beautifully sung by the choir (with an exquisite solo of Y31:8). And all are complemented by instrumental music that is so lovely, so haunting, so moving, it gave me goose bumps. I love the way the music combines birdsong with human voices (reminding us that we are a part of the natural order of existence), and uses male and female voices. This endeavor was sponsored in part by the Morvarid Guiv Trust, and its CDs have been produced by the O'Shihan Cultural Organization. I am grateful to the late Mr. F Demehri, who was a part of this group, for providing me with this information.

At a North American Gatha Congress some years ago, a Gatha verse was sung to music composed by a young Zoroastrian from France, which started with a haunting beat of drums, which the composer explained represented the heartbeat of humanity. Very moving!

In 2010 in Europe, a Belgian composer, the late Janpieter Biesemans put to music 13 stanzas of the Gathas that had been translated into Dutch by Ann Van Sevenant, Doctor of Philosophy (University of Brussels). In Biesemans' musical rendition of the Gatha stanzas, a soprano solo is accompanied by a lute, with a violin interlude between the stanzas. The music is an exquisite blending of flavors ~ echoes of the east and the west ~ resulting in a new, integrated contemporary whole, with beautiful harmony. Biesemans was a teacher at the Conservatory of Antwerp and Director of the Music Academy in his hometown Meise. He was the founder of *Consortium Antiquum*, an ensemble with whom he performed 149 concerts in 24 countries from east to west. With regard to Zarathushtra, Biesemans declares he has always been a fervent admirer of this great spirit (Zarathushtra), who inspired him since the age of 16. Dr. Ann Van Sevenant believes that a golden thread links Zarathushtra's thought all through the history of philosophy to the present time. She has published her book on the Gathas *Zarathoustra. Une philosophie avant la lettre*, Paris, Editions Non Lieu) and is preparing a translation into English.

¹³ I translate this part of Y50:6 somewhat differently as follows, '[...May the Giver of reason \[x ratu-\] instruct through good thinking \(the course of\) my direction \(so as\) to be \(the\) charioteer of \(my\) tongue.](#)'

Good thinking is also a necessary ingredient of *səraoša-* which often is translated as 'obedience' but which literally means 'listening' ~ as in 'to hear and implement' (the English 'listen' is also used in the same two ways). See *Part Three: Seraoša*. In the Gathas, this is a thinking 'obedience', freely chosen. In the later texts, it is said that when a soul departs this life, it is the angel srosh (Av. *səraoša-*), who brings the soul to Wisdom after death. If we look past the image (of an angel) to the idea it stands for, we see that this is a metaphoric way of saying that hearing and implementing the path of truth brings the soul to w/Wisdom ~ the Divine. See *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*.

¹⁴ See in *Part One: Truth, Asha; The Nature of the Divine; and Love*.

¹⁵ See for example, *Part Two: The Solution Of Yasna 29* (towards the end); and see also, "[Come Thou together with good thinking. Along with truth, grant ... Wise One, the long-lived gift of strong support ... Y28:6](#), Insler 1975.

¹⁶ See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

¹⁷ To truly appreciate this verse Y28:8), see how Zarathushtra uses *vahišta-* almost as a code word, a word of art, detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*, and then re-read this verse with that understanding of *vahišta-*.

¹⁸ "[To what land to flee? Where shall I go to flee? They exclude \(me\) from my family and from my clan. The community with which I have associated has not satisfied me, nor those who are the deceitful rulers of the land. How, then, shall I satisfy Thee, Wise Lord?](#)" Y46:1, Insler 1975.

¹⁹ Here are some other verses which show how Wisdom supports,

["Come Thou together with good thinking. Along with truth, grant ... Wise One, the long-lived gift of strong support to Zarathushtra and to us, Lord, through which we shall overcome the enmities of the enemy."](#) Y28:6, Insler 1975. The "enemy" is untruth, which is overcome by the support of truth and its comprehension, good thinking.

["Therefore may we be those who shall heal this world! Wise One and ye other lords, be present to me with support and with truth, so that one shall become convinced even where his understanding shall be false."](#) Y30:9, Insler 1975. Here, truth is the support through which minds are changed, and the world is healed. For the identity of the "other lords" see *Part Two: The Lords and the Equations of Y31:4* (which also discusses this verse Y30:9).

["Lord of broad vision, disclose to me for support the safeguards of your rule,..."](#) Y33:13, Insler 1975. Divine rule is the rule of truth, its embodiment and its most good comprehension (Y51:4). These are the safeguards which support us. Zarathushtra's ideas on 'good rule' are discussed in *Part One: Good Rule, Vohu Xshathra, & Power*.

"Yes, Wise One, (grant) to me Thy proper support, which an able man, possessing such, should give to his friend and which has been obtained through Thy rule that is in accord with truth [aša-]..." Y43:14, Insler 1975. Here again, rule which accords with the true order of existence (aša-) is Wisdom's way of supporting.

"... therefore did the Wise Lord unite them with good thinking, in order to announce Himself to them for their support." Y46:12, Insler 1975. Here, support is the union (of people) with good thinking, which at one level helps to create a good social environment, and at another level enables the Divine to disclose His nature ("announce Himself to them") which is Wisdom (mazdā-) ~ personifying the true order of existence and its component parts (later called the amesha spenta).

²⁰ Zarathushtra's use of the singular and the plural in references to the Divine is discussed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Singular and the Plural*.

²¹ Here are some other examples of how Wisdom protects,

"... have ye the power, Wise One, ... to protect your needy dependent ~ as I indeed am ~ with truth and with good thinking? ..." Y34:5, Insler 1975.

"... Who has been found to be the protector of my cattle? Who of me? Who other than truth and Thee, Wise Lord, and best thinking, ..." Y50:1, Insler 1975. Here, truth, its comprehension and the Lord, Wisdom, are the protectors of Zarathushtra and his followers ~ I think "cattle" is a metaphor which in my view stands for those who are committed to the beneficial-sacred in mortal existence (the allegorical cow). In Christianity, 'sheep' are used as a metaphor for the followers of Christ. In Zarathushtra's ancient Iranian society, people raised horses and cattle, rather than sheep (although centuries later, in YAv. texts, sheep are mentioned), so he chose a metaphor that was meaningful to them; discussed in *Part Four: Ancient Origins and Homelands*; and *Zarathushtra's Date and Place*; and *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Cow and Its Network*.

"Where shall there be protection instead of injury? Where shall mercy [marəzdikā 'compassion'] take place? Where truth [aša-] which attains glory? Where [spənta- ārmaiti- 'beneficial embodied truth']? Where the very best thinking [vahištām manō]? Where, Wise One, through Thy rule?" Y51:4, Insler 1975. Here, through rhetorical questions, Zarathushtra shows that protection is afforded through Wisdom's rule, which is the rule of the true order of existence, its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (spənta- ārmaiti-), and its ultimate comprehension ('most good thinking').

²² Here are some other verses which show how the Lord (who is) Wisdom helps,

"Now, we wish Thy fire, Lord, which possesses strength through truth and which is the swiftest, forceful thing, to be of clear help to Thy supporter but of visible harm, with the powers in its hands, to Thy enemy, Wise One." Y34:4, Insler 1975. Zarathushtra uses fire as the material metaphor for truth (aša-), detailed in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*. So here, the metaphoric fire (which is truth) helps those who follow Wisdom's teachings, but harms the enemy, which is what all that is false, wrong, the opposite of truth.

"... To which person shall one come with good thinking to (give) help? To me? I choose (only) Thy teachings, Lord." Y46:3, Insler 1975. Here (using a rhetorical question) Zarathushtra shows that help is given through good thinking ~ the comprehension of the true order of existence. And to choose the Lord's teachings is to choose "the path of truth" which is the path of the qualities that make a being Divine (amesha spenta), each of which is some aspect of the true order of existence, as discussed in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*; and *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*.

²³ There is a verse (Y43:12) in which the GAv. words ašr̥ mazdā.rayā have been translated by Insler 1975 as "wealth-granting [mazdā.rayā] reward [ašr̥]" which suggests material wealth, although opinions differ about the translation and interpretation of these words. (Y43:1 has similar words "... By reason of my [ārmaiti- 'embodied truth'], grant this to

me: the rewards [ašr̥] of wealth [rāyō] and a life of good thinking." Y43:1, Insler 1975). The word *rāyō* (in its various declensions) has been translated as 'wealth' by Insler, Bartholomae, Humbach, and other linguists, as 'bright' by Darmesteter, as 'splendour' by Mills, and as 'Divine Light' by Taraporewala, who notes that the Pahlavi translation says *raye-hōmand*, thus Taraporewala translates the word as 'divine light' or 'divine splendour'.

In the Gathas and YAv. texts, 'light' in its various forms is the material metaphor for truth (detailed *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*). And in 2 YAv. passages, the YAv. *mqza.raya* is associated with truth (*aša-*). So in the Gatha verse Y43:12, Zarathushtra could have used the words *ašr̥ mqzā.rayā* with double entendre, meaning the rewards of both material wealth and spiritual wealth (truth/light) ~ a conclusion that is entirely consistent with his thought, in that following the true (correct) good order of existence, brings prosperity (in the long run) as well as enlightenment (see *Part One: Truth, Asha*). This verse Y43:12 and the meanings of *mqzā.rayā* have been discussed in detail with translations by professional linguists given for comparative purposes in *Part Six: Yasna 43:12*. And two Gatha verses (Y43:1 and Y43:12) as well as the two YAv. verses in which *mqzā.rayā* is associated with truth (*aša-*) are detailed and discussed in *Part Three: Rae, Rayah*.

Parenthetically, one cannot help but wonder if *raye-hōmand* is the genesis of the Parsi name *Rayomand*, and if that in turn is the genesis of the English / European name 'Raymond'. Similarly, the Parsi name 'Jehan' is found in exactly that form in the medieval English name 'Jehan'.

²⁴ *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*, discusses with more evidence that the qualities that make a being divine (*amesha spenta*) are objects of worship, praise, esteem, service.

²⁵ *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*, discusses with more evidence that the qualities that make a being divine (*amesha spenta*) are the way to worship.

²⁶ In GAv. this phrase includes the word *hadā* which Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index says means 'together with'. So it could mean that truth, good thinking and their rule are *objects* of worship 'together with' Wisdom the Lord, giving us: 'Yes, praising, I shall worship ... you, Wise Lord, 'together with' truth and the very best thinking and with their rule ..." Y50:4. I think that Zarathushtra intended both meanings (as the *objects* of worship and also the *way* to worship), with the double entendre for which he is famous ~ especially in light of the fact that a few verses later, he clearly shows that the way to worship Wisdom is indeed with truth, good thinking, and actions which embody these divine qualities (which is the concept of *ārmaiti-*),

"...Wise One, I shall serve [*pairi.jasāi*] ... you ... with truth [*aša-*] and with the reverence (worthy) of a sincere person. You, moreover, with the skillfulness of good thinking [*vohu- manah-*]. Praising, I shall encounter you with such worship, Wise One, and with actions stemming from good thinking [*vohu- manah-*] allied with truth [*aša-*] ..." Y50:8 – 9, Insler 1975.

²⁷ Here are a few more examples (from the Gathas) of worshipping the Divine with Its own attributes) ~ all in Insler 1975.

"I who shall serve ... you, Wise Lord, with good thinking..." Y28:2;

"... One chooses that rule of good thinking allied with truth in order to serve..." Y51:18;

"... praising with truth Him who is beneficent ..." Y45:6.

"...fame is to serve Thee and the truth, Wise One, under Thy rule." Y32:6.

"...the beneficent man... He serves truth [*aša-*] during his rule, with good word and good action..." Y31:22; good word and good action is the concept of *ārmaiti-* ~ truth embodied in word and action; so here truth is both the object of worship and the way to worship.

²⁸ In an unpublished lecture *Abstract Levels of Ritual in the Gathas of Zarathushtra*, given at a meeting of the American Academy of Religions, Nov. 20, 1988, Insler demonstrates that certain elements of the ritual ~ fire, the milk offering (*īzā-*), the oblation of butter (*āzūiti-*), and the ritual cake or bread (*draonah-* later *drōn*), are indeed mentioned in the Gathas, and are metaphorically associated with truth (fire), good thinking (milk and butter) and completeness and non-deathness (the bread or cake). As Insler insightfully points out, the cake or bread (*draonah*) is made from plants and water which are the material metaphors for *amərətāt-* (non-deathness) and *haurvatāt-* (completeness) respectively. Thus Zarathushtra conveys through metaphors what he also states explicitly, that the way to worship Wisdom is with His own divine qualities (the amesha spenta), as discussed in more detail in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*.

²⁹ The multi-dimensioned ways in which Zarathushtra uses *vahišta-* 'most-good', should be borne in mind here, if we wish to understand his thinking in this beautiful verse Y51:22. See *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most-Good Vahishta*; and *Part Six: Yasna 51:22*.

³⁰ Insler 1975 so interprets the words "[those who have existed and \(still\) exist](#)" which he footnotes as follows: "Namely, those who are immortal; specifically, the good and enduring values of the lord." p. 109, ft. 26. This interpretation is corroborated in some later YAv. texts which echo Y51:22, detailed in *Part Six: Yasna 51:22*. But I think Zarathushtra intended us to go a step further, as detailed in that chapter.

³¹ This idea of worshipping the Divine with our good thoughts, words and actions, was so well understood and important that it is also reflected in later Avestan and Pahlavi texts, even though by the time many of these texts were composed, the religion had become syncretized with pre-existing (and later) Indo-Iranian religion(s) and worship was centered on rituals. Here are a few examples in which good thoughts, words and actions are associated (in different flavors) as the way to worship, the offerings of worship, the objects of worship/praise, or the purpose of worship.

The Old Avestan (GAv.) *Yasna Haptanghaiti* says, "We shall serve Thee with good thinking, Thee with truth, Thee with actions and words stemming from good understanding" YHapt. 36:4, Insler 1975 translation in his comment on Y28:2, p. 119 - 120.

The GAv. *Yasna Haptanghaiti* says, "We therefore ... direct our prayers to Thee...with all the good thoughts...with all the words well said, and the deeds well done, with these would we approach Thee." YHapt.36:5, Mills translation, SBE 31, p. 285.

The archaic YAv. Yy11:18 (composed a long time after Zarathushtra, but before the other Younger Av. Yasnas), says, "Here I give to you, O Bountiful Immortals [*aməša spəntā*] sacrifice and homage with the mind, with words, deeds, and my entire person..." Mills translation in SBE 31, p. 247; Avestan words in square brackets from Geldner 1P p. 59.

The archaic YAv. Yy58:6, (the *Fshusho Manthra*) "And we offer hereby our thoughts, and words and actions, ... to the Bountiful Spirit ..." [a reference to *spənta- mainyu-* '(the) beneficial-sacred way of being' of the Lord Wisdom in this passage]; Mills' translation, SBE 31, p. 308.

Yy68:3 (in YAv.) "... and we worship, O Ahura, ... for the enlightenment of the thoughts, and words, and actions, for the preparation of the soul..." Mills translation in SBE 31 p. 321.

Yy3:4 (in YAv.), "And I desire to approach this Baresman (ritual item) with the Zaothra with my praise... And I desire with my voice the thoughts well thought, and the words well spoken, and the deeds well done, and the recital of the Gathas..." Mills translation in SBE 31 p. 208.

Yy7:4 (in YAv.) "...I offer with my voice the thoughts well-thought, the words well-spoken, the deeds well-done, ..." Mills translation in SBE 31, p. 223.

The YAv. *Khorshed Nyaish* and *Mihir Nyaish* (both in § 1) repeat the statement, "Hail unto thee, Oh Ahura Mazda in the threefold way ..." Darmesteter translation SBE 23, pp. 350, 353, which Darmesteter states is interpreted by the Skt. and Persian texts as "In thought, speech, and deed". p. 350, ft. 1.

These two *Nyaishes* also repeat in each respective § 3 "I praise well-thought, well-spoken, and well-done thoughts, words, and deeds. I embrace all good thoughts, good words, and good deeds;" Darmesteter translation, SBE 23 pp. 350, 353.

As the religion became more ritualized, the 'good word' and the 'good deed' were sometimes interpreted by a given priest to be the words and actions of the ritual, but this interpretation is not consistent with other mentions of good thought, word and action, including those which, in context, apply to everyone, not just to the priests officiating at the ritual. For example, in a YAv. Fragment text it is written

"All good thoughts, and all good words and all good deeds are thought, and spoken, and done with intelligence, and all evil thoughts, and words, and deeds are thought, spoken, and done with folly..." Fragment III, § 1, SBE 31, p. 390.

The Khordeh Avesta prayer, *Jasa Me Avanghe Mazda* (which derives from the Archaic Younger Avestan Yy12:8 - 9) demonstrates the importance of good thoughts, words and actions. It is not quite 'worship' related, it is an act of commitment ~ a statement of choice in belief (*fravarane*) ~ which is prayed by Zoroastrians (adults and children). It contains the following (although I wonder how many of them understand its beautiful meanings:

"... I ... dedicate myself to the true-conceived thought; I ... dedicate myself to the true-spoken word; I ... dedicate myself to the true-performed act..." as translated by I. J. S. Taraporewala in *A Few Daily Prayers from the Zoroastrian Scriptures* (Hukhta Foundation 1986 reprint of the 1939 original) p. 17. I translate this somewhat differently, as detailed in *Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds*, on the Home Page of this website.

In the YAv. *Ardibehesht Yasht* Yt. 3:3,

"... if I proclaim Asha Vahishta [the most-good truth], then easy is the way to the abode of the other Amesha-Spentas, which Ahura Mazda keeps with Good Thoughts, which Ahura Mazda keeps with Good Words, which Ahura Mazda keeps with Good Deeds [ftn. 3]." SBE 23, p. 43; Darmesteter's ft. 3 states "An allusion to the three Paradises of Humat, Hukht, Hvarsht, through which the souls of the blessed pass to Garothman (Yt. XXII, 15)." p. 43.

If Darmesteter's interpretation is correct, then here (Yt.3:3), good thoughts, words and actions are both the way to worship, and the reward for such worship. For the 'good thought paradise', the 'good word paradise', and the 'good deed paradise' in a YAv. and a Pazand texts, see in *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*, and *Heaven & Hell in Pahlavi Texts*. The word 'paradise' does not occur in these texts, the Avestan words are ~ *ahu- vahišta-* 'the most good existence', which is one of Zarathushtra's terms for (what we call) 'paradise', which in his thought is not a place to which we go, but a state of being that we become (also detailed in *Part Two: The Houses Of Paradise & Hell*).

³² We see many examples in other Avestan texts ~ some very lovely ~ where sometimes the form of worship, and sometimes the object of worship, is good thoughts, words and actions. Here are a few examples. Except for YHapt.36:4, they do not duplicate examples given in a preceding footnote in this chapter:

The GAv. *Yasna Haptanghaiti* (YHapt.36:4) reflects the way to worship. Its translation by Insler 1975 has been given in a preceding footnote. But I love the cadence of the original, reflected in a more literal translation, which I cannot resist giving ~ so forgive me for the duplication.

vohū θwā manāṇhā

vohū θwā ašā

vanhuyā θwā cistōiš šyaoθanāišcā vacēbišcā

pairijasāmaidē YHapt.36.4, Geldner 1P p. 132.

Thee with good thinking [*vohū θwā manāṇhā*],

Thee with good truth [*vohū θwā ašā*],

Thee with actions and words of good understanding [*vanhuyā θwā cistōiš šyaoθanāišcā vacēbišcā*],
do we serve [*pairijasāmaidē*]." YHapt.36:4 my translation.

In *Archaic YAv. Yasnas*, Mills' translation in SBE 31. In these quotations, 'praise' is an Avestan worship word.

Yy11:17 "... I celebrate my praises for good thoughts, good words, and good deeds [object of worship] ... With chanting praises I present all good thoughts, good words, and good deeds [way to worship] ..." p. 247;

Yy12:8 "... I therefore praise aloud the well-thought thought, the word well spoken, and the deed well done." p. 250 [object of worship];

³³ See also *Part Two: Did Wisdom Choose Too?*

³⁴ This is not to say that a contemplative life and meditation are not a part of Zarathushtra's thought. See *Part One: Meditation and Contemplation*. Worshiping with good thinking includes meditation and contemplation ~ accessing the wisdom within, contemplating wisdom acquired by the ear.

³⁵ The sés ritual is a popular Parsi-Zoroastrian ritual which is performed by family members or friends on many auspicious occasions. It contains some symbols which Zoroastrians brought with them from Iran when they fled to India to avoid persecution (the yoghurt, the rock-candy, the rose water sprinkler, and a few other items), and it also contains some symbols which Zoroastrians borrowed from their hospitable and tolerant Hindu neighbors in India, to whom we owe our survival (the teelee, coconut, paan leaves et cetera). And the sés ritual has been adapted yet again by Zoroastrians in diaspora in the United States and other countries. When I did the sés for my children on the occasion of their weddings, instead of paan leaves, I used oak leaves (for strength) and maple leaves (for sweetness).