

## The Significant Seven.

Our spiritual philosophies and religions provide us with different frameworks through which to look at ourselves, each other, other life forms, our environment, our lives, our fears, and the questions which have puzzled the minds of mankind (and possibly other life forms) for millennia ~ the purpose of life, why 'bad' things happen to 'good' people, whether the Divine exists and if so Its nature, Its identity, whether there is life after death, whether there are rewards and punishments for our behavior in this life or the next, and other such questions.

So the framework of a given religion tends to form our mind-sets, regarding how we view 'God', and how we live our lives and relate to the rest of existence.

Zarathushtra does not dictate in fact-specific ways how we must live our lives. Instead, he gives us a system. In a nutshell, his system is that we should use our minds / hearts /spirits, to search for truth and what is right (*asha*) and think it, speak it and do it, thereby fulfilling the two-fold purpose of life which is evolving spiritually ourselves, and at the same time, making our world a better place. But Zarathushtra's teaching regarding the nature and especially the identity of the Divine have long been forgotten because for more than 1,000 years, the grammar and vocabulary of his language (today called Avestan) had become unknown, so the meanings of his own words were lost to us.

We do not know for certain when Zarathushtra lived.<sup>1</sup> But there is no dispute that he lived in a very ancient time period, in a tribal culture which descended from an ancestral Indo-Iranian tribe, which itself descended from an ancestral Indo-European tribe, the deities of which had human like forms, and natures that were mixes of good and bad qualities.

Was Zarathushtra's envisionment something new? Or did he just reform the religion(s) of his culture?

The evidence of the Gathas tells us that Zarathushtra lived in a society in which the religious authorities and secular rulers teamed up to advance their own wealth and power in cruel, oppressive, greed-driven ways that resulted in great suffering for those who were not part of the power structure. The second song of the Gathas, Y29, (which some people think was the first) starts out with an allegorical cry to the Divine for help.

" ... (For) the cruelty of fury and violence, of bondage and might, holds me in captivity. I have no pastor other than you. ..." Y29:1, Insler 1975 translation.

Zarathushtra was deeply troubled by this state of affairs.

According to (much later) traditional knowledge he went into the mountains to try to figure things out, make sense of things.

Is there such a thing as the Divine? If so, what is Its nature, its identity? What kind of Divine being(s) would bring about (or allow) so much suffering and injustice? Is existence ordered in a haphazard way? Or in an arbitrary, capricious way? Why did people act in such cruel greed-driven ways? Why was there so much injustice in the world? Was goodness impotent in the face of evil? Were there solutions to the sufferings of mortals?<sup>2</sup>

When he came back down to the 'real world', he had some answers ~ a new envisionment,<sup>3</sup> ~ some of which we have long forgotten under the influence of other religious paradigms. Were these answers just the fruit of his own high intelligence? Did the Divine convey these answers to Zarathushtra's mind? I don't know. I can only say that they provide us with a beautiful way to live our lives, and relate to existence as a whole. They also provide answers for questions that have puzzled us for millennia ~ answers that may satisfy a reasoning mind, and the soul of all that is good in existence.<sup>4</sup>

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A kaleidoscope is a tube through which we can look at a fixed number of beads of different colors. As we turn the tube, the beads fall into many different patterns. So with each turn of the kaleidoscope, the patterns are different. The beads are the same.

In the kaleidoscope of Zarathushtra's new envisionment, there are 7 beads. Each bead has a color of its own, but the design of each bead includes the colors of the other 6 beads in varying degrees. And (with each turn of the kaleidoscope) these 7 beads (of variagated colors) create beautiful designs that include his entire teachings.

It is a mark of Zarathushtra's genius, that with just seven concepts (the seven beads of his kaleidoscope), he expresses the many patterns of his entire spiritual envisionment,<sup>5</sup> such as:

The nature of the Divine,

The nature of mankind (and perhaps all the living), and their relationship with the Divine,

How 'good' and 'evil' are defined.

The object of worship, and the way to worship.

The purpose of life, and how it is defined and fulfilled.

How evil is defeated (and its defeat assured ! ).

The path to the Divine and the reward for taking that path.

The states of being that are 'salvation' and 'paradise'.

And the many other patterns and designs of his new envisionment.

Are you skeptical? Zarathushtra's entire spiritual philosophy in 7 concepts?

Well, if what I say is true, then at least you can see the importance of understanding the meanings that Zarathushtra has in mind for each of these 7 concepts that are so central to his thought.

But he did not speak or think in English. His language is a very ancient one. And knowledge of its grammar and vocabulary became lost for more than 1,000 years following 2 destructive wars, in both of which texts were burned and the learned killed. In an age when most people were not literate, this resulted in a huge loss of knowledge.

It was only a little over 200 years ago, that professional linguists started to decode the Avestan language. The Avestan words for some of these 7 concepts have not yet been decoded ~ linguists are in disagreement regarding their meanings. The meanings I give you here are linguistically defensible, and fit the contexts of all verses in which these 7 terms appear, as well as the context of the Gathas as a whole. The evidence is detailed in chapters that follow.<sup>6</sup>

Here are these 7 concepts ~ the 7 beads in the kaleidoscope of Zarathushtra's teachings.

1. 'Truth' (*aṣa-* pronounced *asha* with both a-s short as in 'fun').<sup>7</sup>

*aṣa-* has been translated as 'truth', 'righteousness' and 'order'. You might object: How could one word have 3 such different meanings? Well, in English, 'truth' is usually associated with factual truths. A more accurate English translation is '*an order of existence that is true/right (correct), in the existences of matter and mind*' (which in our reality are integrated).

In the existence of matter (the material existence) the true order of existence comprises factual truths, including the laws that order the universe ~ the laws of biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy ~ factual knowledge of all kinds (which may have been why knowledge was so highly valued by ancient Iranians who were w/Wisdom-worshippers ~ the original name of Zarathushtra's religion.

In the existence of mind (the abstract existence) the true order of existence includes the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ all that is 'right', which includes all the good values we cherish. In the Gathas these include qualities as honesty, integrity, intrinsic goodness, a bountiful generosity, loving care/concern, compassion, friendship, justice (as in being fair), being constructive, not harming, not injuring, protecting others from harm and injury, et cetera ~ all aspects of a beneficial way of being, all aspects of the true order of existence.

In the Gathas, the 'true order of existence' (*aša-*) is equated with a beneficial way of being (*spənta-mainyu-*). As such, the true order of existence includes the law of consequences (i.e. an order that delivers 'what fits' for each action ~ that we reap what we sow, that everything we do comes back to us) ~ the purpose of which is beneficial (not punitive) to increase understanding, to enlighten, to enable our spiritual evolution from a mixed (more-good/bad) state of being to one that is wholly good.<sup>8</sup> In Zarathushtra's thought, evil is defeated ~ not by punishment but by changing minds, changing preferences.

Most important of all, the true order of existence is equated with the quality of intrinsic goodness (*vohu-* 'good', and its superlative degree 'most-good' *vahišta-*).

You well may question: Isn't the material existence ethically neutral ~ neither 'good' nor 'bad'? How can the material existence be an order of existence that is 'wholly good'? This puzzled me as well. It took a long time for me to understand what Zarathushtra means when he says that the existence has been ordered in a wholly good way. I have detailed a part of (my understanding of) his ideas on this point in other chapters.<sup>9</sup> And indeed my understanding of this aspect of his teachings continues to evolve.

To summarize: *aša-*, means the true, wholly good order in the existences of matter and mind. In the existence of matter, the true order comprises factual truths, including the natural laws that order our universe. In the existence of mind, the true order comprises the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ all that is 'right', which includes such qualities as 'straightness, correctness, honesty, integrity' (*ərəš-*); intrinsic 'goodness' (*vohu-/vahišta-*); all that is 'beneficial' (*spənta-/spəništa-*); a bountiful, loving, generosity (*hudāh-*), having compassion (*mərəždika-*), being a friend (*frya-*), not harming, not injuring, protecting others, and existence as a whole from harm and injury (Y51:4), and all the other qualities that are 'true', 'good', 'right'.

As you can see, English has no one-word definition for *aša-*.

The closest one-word English definition for *aša-* is 'truth', in the sense of an order of existence which includes factual truths, social truths, spiritual truths, emotional truths ~ truth in all its many splended aspects ~ which in Zarathushtra's thought is a wholly good order of existence (*aša- vahišta-*).

In Zarathushtra's envisionment, truth is a quality that the Divine has (completely, perfectly), and that mortals also have, (imperfectly, incompletely, incrementally).

And in Zarathushtra's poetry, truth is a concept, a quality, which fewer times is expressed as an allegory (using a form or image, to stand for a concept, quality, or idea. For example, the Statue of Liberty is an allegory ~ the form of a woman holding a torch standing for the idea of a bright future of liberty).

2. 'Good mind/thinking/thought' (*vohu- manah-*).<sup>10</sup>

There is no dispute that *vohu-* means intrinsic goodness. And thanks to Insler's insight, we know that Avestan *manah-* is used for English 'mind' (the faculty), *thinking* (its process), and *thought* (its object). In the Gathas, this Avestan word is used most often for a dynamic process, which is why I agree with Insler in using 'good thinking' as a general translation.

In English, 'mind/thinking/thought', are usually associated with intellectual functions. But the evidence of the Gathas shows that in Zarathushtra's Avestan mind-set, these words are used in contexts that include the full spectrum of conscious capabilities ~ intellectual, emotional, spiritual, creative, insightful, et cetera.

The meaning of 'good thinking' includes (incrementally) comprehending truth, ~ factual truths, scientific truths, philosophical truths, emotional truths, social truths, spiritual truths) an incremental, and ultimately a complete, state of enlightenment (which is w/Wisdom), sometimes referred to in later texts as the paradise that is 'endless light(s)'.<sup>11</sup>

In Zarathushtra's envisionment, 'good mind/thinking/thought' is a quality that the Divine (who is Wisdom) has (completely, perfectly), and that mortals also have, (imperfectly, incompletely, incrementally).

And in Zarathushtra's poetry, this term is a concept, a quality, which fewer times, is expressed as an allegory.

3. 'Beneficial-sacred embodied truth' (*spənta- armaiti-*).<sup>12</sup>

This Avestan term has not yet been decoded.

*spənta-*: I translate this word as 'beneficial' (discussed below). In the Gathas and all later texts, *spənta-* is the essence of the sacred, the essence of the Divine.

*armaiti-*: This Avestan word has not yet been decoded. It has been translated as right-mindedness; divine wisdom; piety or respect; faith and devotion; satisfying intention; fittingness, submission and humility; and serenity, stability and tranquility. But as Thieme (Insler's teacher) has pointed out, *armaiti-* is a quality of the Divine, and many of these meanings have no relevance to the Divine.

Based on *all* of the ways in which Zarathushtra uses this word, I think we can arrive at a reasonably accurate translation for *spənta- armaiti-*, which is 'beneficial thoughts, words and actions which embody truth', or for short, 'beneficial embodied truth'. And yes, I agree that this is not an elegant translation. But it has the value of being accurate. It is linguistically defensible, and fits all of the ways in which Zarathushtra uses this word. But I realize that this definition may not seem credible to you ~ until you see the all the evidence.

And as you can see, *truth (aša-)* and its comprehension *good thinking* are included in the meaning of *spənta- armaiti-*.

In Zarathushtra's envisionment, 'beneficial-sacred embodied (or personified) truth' is a quality that the Divine (Who is Wisdom ~ enlightenment personified) has completely, perfectly, and that mortals also have, (imperfectly, incompletely, incrementally).

And in Zarathushtra's poetry, 'beneficial-sacred embodied truth' is a concept, a quality, which fewer times is also expressed as an allegory.

4. Good Rule, (*vohu- xšaθra-*).<sup>13</sup>

Good rule is the rule of *truth (aša-)*, its beneficial-sacred embodiment (*spənta- armaiti-*), its most good comprehension, (*vohu-/vahišta- manah-*) Y51:4.

In Zarathushtra's envisionment, [good rule](#) is a quality that the Divine has (completely, perfectly), and that mortals also have, (imperfectly, incompletely, incrementally).

Thus, good rule is first how One/one governs Oneself/oneself, and also how One/one governs all aspects of existence. As it applies to us, that includes our many social units ~ the family, the community, the nation, our world, other life forms, the environment ~ all of existence ~ incrementally, and ultimately completely.

In the Gathas, this concept (less frequently) is also called the 'rule to be chosen' (Y51:1 *x šaθra- vairya-*).

In the Gathas, [rulership](#) is a trust. It is the use of power, not for self-aggrandizement or control, but to benefit, care for, all of existence. A governance that nurtures, cares for, what is ruled. And indeed, in the Gathas, 'power' is associated, not with the ability to control, coerce, punish, but with the qualities that make a being Divine.<sup>14</sup>

And in Zarathushtra's poetry, [good rule](#) is a concept, a quality, and (perhaps only twice) is also expressed as an allegory.

#### 5. & 6. [Completeness](#) (*haurvatāt-*) and [Non-deathness](#) (*amərətāt-*).<sup>15</sup>

[Completeness](#), [wholeness](#) (*haurvatāt-*) is state of being which is no longer a mix of good qualities and their opposites. A state of being in which the [true order of existence](#), its [comprehension](#) [good thinking](#), its [beneficial-sacred embodiment](#), its rule ~ the wholly beneficial-sacred way of being, is attained [completely](#), [wholly](#).

This term is used by Zarathushtra in two ways:

- ~ at an individual level, a wholeness that is the complete attainment of the true order of existence, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule (the beneficial way of being) by each unit or fragment of existence (which ties into Zarathushtra's new envisionment of the *nature* of the Divine),<sup>16</sup> and also
- ~ at a collective level, as a reuniting of each such (perfected) fragment of existence into a union that is whole, complete ~ a wholeness of being that (incrementally) includes the Divine and all the living, as each fragment of existence attains the true order of existence completely (which ties into Zarathushtra's new envisionment of the *identity* of the Divine).<sup>17</sup>

[non-deathness](#) (*amərətāt-*) is used in the sense of an existence that is no longer bound by mortality. It is the state of being that results when the [true order of existence](#) has been attained [completely](#) (*haurvatāt-*), because mortal existence is the matrix for the material experiences that are necessary for a spiritual evolution to w/Wisdom, an enlightened state of being. So when that process is complete, the reason for mortality ceases to exist, and a non-mortal state of being is attained ('[non-deathness](#)' *amərətāt-*). I think this is why these two terms '[completeness](#)' (*haurvatāt-*) and '[non-deathness](#)' (*amərətāt-*) are almost always used together in the Gathas.

Most linguists translate *amərətāt-* as 'immortality', but (with respect) that does not fit the ways in which Zarathushtra uses the word. Immortality is an inherent quality. No matter how 'good' or 'bad' a person may be, s/he has an immortal soul. But in the Gathas, this quality is not inherent. We have to earn it. The Divine gives non-deathness to us. And (most surprising of all) we give non-deathness to the Divine (which ties into Zarathushtra's new envisionment of the *identity* of the Divine).

In Zarathushtra's envisionment, '[completeness](#)' and '[non-deathness](#)' are qualities of the Divine which mortals do not currently have, but will eventually attain ~ with certainty (*because* of the freedom to choose ~ one of the Gathas' many paradoxes).<sup>18</sup>

And in Zarathushtra's poetry, these 2 are concepts, qualities. There is no clear instance of their use as allegories (although in my view, there may be one implied instance, in which they are referred to as "[these two companions](#)" Y33:9).

#### 7. The 'beneficial-sacred way of being' (*spənta- mainyu-*).<sup>19</sup>

This term should really have been listed first (and indeed, it is the first of the 7 to appear in the Gathas, if Y28 is the first song). But to understand what Zarathushtra has in mind, in using this term, we need to first understand the meanings of the other 6 qualities that make a being Divine, which is why I here discuss it last.

These 2 Avestan words have not yet been decoded. Many translators translate *spənta- mainyu-* (through the mind-set of Christianity) as 'holy spirit'. Others prefer 'incremental', 'progressive', 'prosperous' et cetera for *spənta-*; and 'mentality' instead of 'spirit' for *mainyu-*. But these meanings do not fit all of the ways in which this term is used in the Gathas. For example:

*spənta-*: Zarathushtra says that the Divine "... is [*spənta*] to the needy ..." Y29:7, Insler 1975; '... holy to the needy' does not fit, neither do the other meanings for *spənta-* mentioned above. I find Thieme's reasons persuasive in translating *spənta-* as 'beneficial'.

*mainyu-*: The only English term that fits all of the ways in which Zarathushtra uses *mainyu-* is the totality of a 'way of being', including thought, word and action (Y30:3).

A 'beneficial way of being' (*spənta- mainyu-*) in Zarathushtra's thought is the essence of the sacred, the Divine. It is a way of being that generates good thinking, enabling the comprehension of the true order of existence ('truth' for short). It is a way of being that chooses the [truth](#); a way of being that is in accord with [truth](#); a way of being that is equated with [truth](#) (the true order of existence). Indeed, the [beneficial way of being](#) is the [true order of existence](#) and its component parts, [its comprehension](#), [its embodiment in thought, word and action](#), [its rule](#).

In Zarathushtra's envisionment, the beneficial way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*) is a quality which the Divine has (completely, perfectly), and which mortals also have, (imperfectly, incompletely).

And in Zarathushtra's poetry, this term is concept, a quality, and in one clear, unambiguous instance is expressed as an allegory (Y45:2).

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To summarize: The significant (magnificent) seven are:

1. The beneficial-sacred way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*), which is
2. The true wholly good order of existence (*aša- vahišta-*, 'truth' for short),
3. Its comprehension, good thinking (*vohu- manah-*),
4. Its beneficial-sacred embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*),
5. Its good rule (*vohu- xšaθra-*),
6. Its complete attainment (*haurvatāt-*), resulting in
7. Non-deathness (*amərətāt-*), a way of being not bound by mortality (because the perfecting process is complete).

Now, in discussing these qualities of the Divine, that mankind possesses (imperfectly) Zarathushtra frequently uses the Avestan word for 'mortal' (*marəta-*). But all life forms (on our planet) are also 'mortal'.

So let me leave you with a question: If mankind (and perhaps other life forms) can attain all of these 7 divine qualities completely, perfectly, what does this tell us about Zarathushtra's understanding of the nature and identity of the Divine?<sup>20</sup>

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In later texts, these 7 qualities that make a being Divine were collectively called *amesha spenta* and came to be thought of as living, angel-like entities to be worshipped, (although some later Avestan texts did indeed remember that they are concepts, qualities). And there is some dispute regarding whether these qualities are 6 or 7, but that is easily explained.<sup>21</sup>

The collective term *amesha spenta* does not appear in the Gathas, but I use it as a convenient short-hand way to refer to these seven concepts. The term literally means non-dying (*aməša-*) beneficial-sacred (*spənta-*) (ones).

These 7 divine concepts/qualities, and Zarathushtra's new envisionment of the nature and identity of the Divine are discussed in detail, with evidence, in the chapters that immediately follow: From *The Beneficial-Sacred Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu*; through *The Identity Of The Divine*.

If you want to understand Zarathushtra's teachings as accurately as possible, you should read these 8 chapters.

If you want just a bird's eye view of his teachings, you may prefer to skip these 8 chapters for now (or at least read *The Identity Of The Divine*), and go straight to *The Search For Truth*, and the rest of the chapters in *Part One*.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a great deal of conflicting evidence on Zarathushtra's date. Based on archeological and textual evidence I think that Zarathushtra could not have lived earlier than 2,000 BCE nor later than 1,700 BCE. This evidence is detailed and discussed in *Part Four: Zarathushtra's Date & Place*.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional knowledge does not specify the questions that Zarathushtra wanted to figure out when he went up into the mountains to think things through. But based on the solutions we see in the Gathas, I surmise that the questions identify were probably among those to which he sought solutions.

<sup>3</sup> My conclusion that Zarathushtra's envisionment was 'new' is based (in large part) on how it differs from the deities of his ancestral Indo-European culture. We know that the deities of the ancient Greeks, the ancient Scandinavians, et cetera, were human like in form, a mix of good and bad qualities. Zarathushtra rejected the idea that a being, human like in form, who is a mix of 'beneficial' and 'harmful' qualities is worthy of worship, is worthy of being Divine. His envisionment of the Divine is a Being that has no human-like form, and is wholly good, wholly beneficial, with no taint of evil in It. And as Professor Thieme (Insler's teacher) stated, the name Zarathushtra gives the Divine ~ Wisdom ~ was new. There was no Indo-Iranian or Indo-European deity called 'Wisdom' (although the adjective 'wise' may have been used to describe some of them).

But I am not knowledgeable about Vedic texts ~ neither their linguistics, nor their theology (or theologies). So I do not know if Zarathushtra's ideas about the nature and identity of the Divine derived from a strand of belief that existed in his ancestral Indo-Iranian tribe, or whether it occurred independently (and perhaps in different forms) in the Vedic tribes and in Zarathushtra's Gathas. I do know that today's Hindu belief includes a belief in the in-dwelling Divine; but I do not know if it is the same as what I see in the Gathas.

There is at least one respect in which today's Hindu and Buddhist beliefs are very different from what we see in the Gathas. In both those beliefs, the *path* to the Divine requires a rejection of the material existence, and concentrates on individual self-realization. By contrast, in the Gathas, our experiences in the material existence are essential to the path of spiritual evolution ~ the acquisition of w/Wisdom is experience based. And although we do indeed have to



perfect ourselves, individually, ultimate completeness is not attained until everyone makes it (*fraṣō.karaiti*), ~ collective completeness. It is possible that rejection of the material existence, and a concentration on individual self-realization, may be a segment of the overall process of spiritual evolution. But I see no evidence of it in the Gathas where Zarathushtra's path is a joyful path in which we celebrate all that is good in the material and spiritual existences (as he says 'in the existences of matter and mind'), and if we think about it, it seems clear (to me at least) that we cannot advance or benefit ourselves without advancing and benefiting existence as a whole.

<sup>4</sup> See *Part Four: Yasna 28:1*. This verse mentions "soul of the cow". I think that "cow" here is an allegory for all that is beneficial in existence (however imperfect). The evidence on which my conclusion is based is detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Cow & Its Network*. And I hope to write a simpler chapter in *Part One* which discusses Zarathushtra's use of the 'cow' as an allegory.

<sup>5</sup> See *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Amesha Spenta*.

<sup>6</sup> Detailed in the following chapters in *Part One*:  
*The Beneficial-Sacred Way Of Being, Spenta Mainyu*;  
*Truth, Asha*;  
*Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*;  
*Beneficial-Sacred Embodied Truth, Spenta Aramaiti*;  
*Good Rule, Vohu Xshathra, & Power*;  
*Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*;  
*The Nature Of The Divine*;  
*The Identity Of The Divine*.

<sup>7</sup> Detailed in *Part One: Truth, Asha*.

<sup>8</sup> Detailed in *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>9</sup> See *Part One: A Friendly Universe*, and *Part Two: Asha & the Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>10</sup> Detailed in *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*.

<sup>11</sup> See on the Home Page: *Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds*.

<sup>12</sup> Detailed in *Part One: Beneficial-Sacred Embodied Truth, Spenta Aramaiti*.

<sup>13</sup> Detailed in *Part One: Good Rule, Vohu Xshathra, & Power*.

<sup>14</sup> Detailed in *Part Two: A Question Of Power*.

<sup>15</sup> Detailed in *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*.

<sup>16</sup> Detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*.

<sup>17</sup> Detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*.

<sup>18</sup> Detailed in *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>19</sup> Detailed in *Part One: The Beneficial-Sacred Way Of Being*.

<sup>20</sup> Detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*; and *The Identity Of The Divine*; and several chapters in *Part Two*: ending in *Did Wisdom Choose Too?*

<sup>21</sup> Discussed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Amesha Spenta*.