

## Death.

The focus of Zarathushtra's teaching is on the here and now ~ on how we live our lives. His focus is not on death and the afterlife. Indeed, there are students of Zarathushtra's thought who contend that he probably did not believe in an afterlife. Well, it is true that he does not specifically say, *there is an afterlife*, but from many of the things he does specifically say, the inference is compelling (in my view) that he did indeed believe in an afterlife. Let us consider just one piece of evidence (among many).

There is no dispute that *amərətāt-* 'non-deathness' is a quality of the Divine, that man does not presently have, but is capable of attaining.<sup>1</sup> For a state of non-deathness to exist, there would have to be an existence that is not bound by mortality (death). It has been argued that in using 'non-deathness' Zarathushtra intended that when man attains non-deathness, he ceases to exist. But 'non-deathness' is a present attribute of Wisdom, and it would not be reasonable to conclude that in Zarathushtra's thought, Wisdom has ceased to exist.<sup>2</sup>

In Pahlavi Zoroastrianism ~ several centuries after Zarathushtra's time, Zoroastrians came to believe in cosmic dualism ~ two uncreated Entities, one all good and one all evil.<sup>3</sup> The Pahlavi texts were composed (after 200 + years of textual silence) after the Arab invasion of Iran. They had absorbed (perhaps unconsciously) and their mind-set reflected the idea of the dominant religion, that the Divine is a being separate and apart from Its creation. So (remembering Zarathushtra's teaching that the nature of the Divine is wholly good) those later Zoroastrians surmised an all-good god could not create evil, and therefore concluded that all the 'good' things in creation were created by the all-good god, and all the 'bad' things in creation (i.e. 'bad' for man, naturally) were created by the all evil god. Death (which was considered 'bad' for man) was associated with the all evil god.<sup>4</sup>

It is not difficult to understand how the Devil of the later texts ~ Angra Mainyu ~ became associated with death, and later Zoroastrians may indeed have mistakenly derived this conclusion from the Gathas. In the Gathas, the state of non-deathness (*amərətāt-*) occurs when a wholly truthful (*ašavan-*), wholly beneficial (*spənta-*) way of being has been attained ~ a way of being that is wholeness, completeness *haurvatāt-* (no longer a mix of bad and more-good qualities). In other words, when the wholeness, the perfection, that is *haurvatāt-* is attained, the reason for mortality ceases to exist, and a state of being that is no longer mortal (non-deathness, *amərətāt-*) is attained. And this non-deathness (*amərətāt-*) is an attribute of the Divine, an amesha spenta. Therefore, many centuries after Zarathushtra, when later Zoroastrians came to believe in the notion of cosmic dualism ~ two uncreated beings, one all good and one all evil ~ it is easy to see why they concluded (mistakenly) that if non-deathness (*amərətāt-*) is an attribute of the all-good Entity, then 'death' must be an attribute of the all-evil Entity ~ the 'Devil' ~ not stopping to consider that if death was his attribute the all-evil god would not exist. On the other hand, it may have been that these authorities regarded death, not as an attribute, but as a creation of the all-evil Entity, perhaps because it caused grief in the survivors, or perhaps because they regarded the prospect of their own demise as evil, (making death one of the creations of the all-evil Entity). It is difficult to know for certain what motivated their belief that 'death' was 'evil'.

But of the following things we can be sure. In the Gathas, there is no concept of cosmic dualism,<sup>5</sup> ~ there is no Devil or all-evil Entity who is the uncreated co-equal (or even the inferior) of Wisdom (except for interpretive translations personal to a given translator).<sup>6</sup> Nor does Zarathushtra divide the *material* existence into 'good' (created by an all-good 'god') and 'evil' (created by an all-evil god). In the Gathas, there is no concept of any part of the material existence being 'evil'. The only things described as 'evil, hurtful, harmful,

inimical' (*angra-*) or 'bad' (*aka-*) in the Gathas, are the products of wrongful choices.<sup>7</sup> And 'death' is not described as a wrongful choice of the Divine (or any other entity).

In the entire corpus of the Gathas, the specific word 'death' appears in only one verse, Y53:8.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the Avestan language has not yet been 100% decoded, and translations of this verse Y53:8 differ so widely that it is not possible to arrive at any clear idea of what Zarathushtra's views on 'death' may have been, based on this one verse. Some translators have opted to translate the phrase in which it appears as 'the bondage of death' (as a consequence for killing and injuring others), while others have translated the applicable words as 'lord of death' or 'master of death'.<sup>9</sup>

Translations of the immediately following verse (Y53:9), also differ materially. Some translators see in Y53:9 an oblique reference to death (i.e. 'expelling' wrongdoers from 'life', or 'depriving' them of 'life'). Humbach/Faiss (2010) see the deprivation as being of 'livelihood' instead of 'life'. And Taraporewala sees Wisdom the Lord as 'opposing' the wrongdoers with his *life-force* (not depriving them of life).<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, the differences in translations ~ some more bloodthirsty than others<sup>11</sup> ~ and indeed the differences in the forms of words in the manuscripts themselves<sup>12</sup> are so great, that these two verses (Y53:8 and 9), do not materially assist us in understanding how Zarathushtra regarded this phenomenon, death.

Nevertheless, I think we can reasonably ascertain Zarathushtra's views on death, by considering it (death) in the context of his over-all teachings.

There can be no dispute that all living things die. So there can be no dispute that death is a part of the natural life cycle. As such, it is part of the true order (*aša-*) in the existence of matter. In Zarathushtra's thought, this true order, as we have already seen, is a beneficial order.<sup>13</sup> It is an order that enables spiritual growth.<sup>14</sup> As part of this true order, therefore, death would have to be beneficial, and an instrument that enables spiritual growth, in Zarathushtra's thought.

The instinct to live is strong in most living things. But beyond instinct, it is human nature to be afraid of the unknown. And death is the ultimate unknown. Perhaps that is why so many people fear it.

As a species, we try to ease such fears by hedging death around with religious dogma and prayers and rituals. But Zarathushtra teaches a religion without fear. In his thought, 'hell' is not a place of damnation and torture (whether temporary or eternal) from which one is 'saved' by religion or ritual. 'Hell' is a wrong-headed state of being, "the worst existence" (Y30:4), "the House of Worst Thinking" (Y32:13), "the House of Deceit" (Y49:11); and 'heaven' is an intrinsically all-good state of being that is a joyful wisdom personified, "the best thinking" (Y30:4), "the House of Good Thinking" (Y32:15), "the House of Song" (Y45:8), 'the most-good existence' (Y44:2). Zarathushtra's paradise is an existence that is Divine ~ an on-going (and growing) re-union of the units of existence that have attained the qualities of that comprise divinity.<sup>15</sup> Referring to truth and good thinking, he says "... Through this spirit [*mainyu-* 'way of being'], Wise One [*mazdā* 'Wisdom'], Thou art to grow ..." Y31:7, Insler 1975.

We tend to use the advances of medical knowledge to forestall death at all costs. In the framework of Zarathushtra's thought, all choices should be made, not out of fear, not with a view that 'death' is the enemy, but with good thinking.

When death threatens a person who has her life ahead of her, ~ things to do, loved ones to live with and for, young children whom she very much wants to raise ~ it surely is good thinking to use whatever medical advances are available to forestall death.

On the other hand, is it good thinking to use artificial medical aids to keep alive a person who is in a vegetative condition? Or one who has reached a venerable age and is ready to depart this life and move on when nature provides an exit strategy? In making such decisions, as in all things in the framework of Zarathushtra's teachings, each person must be free to make his own choices, with good thinking (Y30:3). And if a given decision is the 'wrong' one, the law of consequences will doubtless educate us, beneficially, with mutual loving help, (in some other segment of the perfecting process).

So as I understand Zarathushtra's thought, death (being a natural phenomenon) is part of the beneficial order that governs existence (*aša-*). It is nothing to fear. Death is simply a doorway to another existence, to other adventures.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, it is a necessary part of the perfecting process, the process of spiritual growth.<sup>17</sup> For all its griefs and pains, in balance, there are so many interesting and wonderful things in our lives here. Based on such evidence, and on Zarathushtra's thought that the nature of the Divine is beneficial, generous, loving,<sup>18</sup> it is reasonable to conclude that when we go through the doorway (that is death), we will find existence on the other side as interesting ... as wonderful ... as useful a part of the perfecting process. A conclusion that is consistent with Zarathushtra's ideas on spiritual evolution.<sup>19</sup>

The idea of being afraid of death puts me in mind of a child who, when the time comes, does not want to go to bed, and does everything he can to avoid it ~ not understanding that sleep is not only beneficial, but essential to continued well being. So too is death essential to non-deathness (*amərətāt-*), another neat Gatha paradox.

As a component of Zarathushtra's teaching, death is just another (and necessary) step towards reaching the ultimate objective ~ a wholeness that is the true (correct) order of existence,<sup>20</sup> the most-good state of being (*ahu vahišta-*) ~ a state of being that is Zarathushtra's paradise.<sup>21</sup>

As Rabindranath Tagore (a great admirer of Zarathushtra) has said:

"Death is putting out the candle because the dawn has come."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Part One: Completeness and Non-Deathness, Haurvatat / Ameretat*.

<sup>2</sup> See *Part One: The Identity of the Divine*.

<sup>3</sup> As evidenced in such Pahlavi works as the *Denkard* (written in about the 9th century CE), and *Sikand Gumanig Vijar* (written shortly thereafter).

<sup>4</sup> To illustrate, the *Videvdāt* (*Vendidad*), a very late (and grammatically corrupt) YAv. text, describes the "Evil One" Angra Mainyu (which literally means 'inimical way of being'), as having death as one of his demons.

"From the region of the north, ... forth rushed Angra Mainyu, the deadly, the Daeva of the Daevas [ftn. 2 "'The fiend of fiends,' the arch-fiend"]. And thus spake the guileful one, he the evil-doer Angra Mainyu, the deadly: 'Druj, rush down upon him! destroy the holy Zarathushtra!' The Druj came rushing along, the demon Buiti, the unseen death, ..." *Vendidad*, Ch. 19, § 1, Darmesteter translation, SBE 4, p. 204.

In the Gathas *druj-* is used in its literal meaning, as what is false, wrong ~ the opposite of the true (correct) good order of existence (detailed in a ft. in *Part Two: The Houses Of Paradise & Hell*). In the later texts, it was used as the 'lie', as 'evil' the opposite of 'good', and was used for 'evil ones', i.e. the demons associated with Angra Mainyu. See *Part One: Does the Devil Exist?* As Darmesteter states in his Introduction to the *Vendidad* "... death is the triumph of the demon." SBE 4, p. lxxxvi. But that is far removed from Zarathushtra's thought in the Gathas, in which there are

no 'demons' and in which the defeat of evil is inevitable (because of the freedom to choose!) as discussed in *Part Two: Asha & the Checkmate Solution*).

<sup>5</sup> Discussed briefly in *Part One: The Beneficial-Sacred Way Of Being, Spenta Mainyu*.

<sup>6</sup> See *Part One: Does the Devil Exist?*

<sup>7</sup> See *Part One: Good and Evil*.

<sup>8</sup> In Y53:8 we have the word *mārəθyaos̥* which Insler (1975) has translated as "of death's". Skjaervo's Old Av. Index shows the stem as *mārəθyu-* 'death'.

In Y30:4 Insler 1975 translates *ajyāitīmca* as "and death", but (with respect) that is an interpretive translation. The word *ajyāitīmca* literally means 'and non-life', *a* is a negative prefix (as in *amərətāt-*). And the root *jyātu-* means 'life' (Beekes 1988 p. 126).

Bartholomae, Taraporewala and Moulton translate *ajyāitīmca* as 'and Not-Life' ~ acc. sg. (Taraporewala 1951 pp. 140, 141, 143; Moulton 1912 p. 349);

Mills translates *ajyāitīmca* in Y30:4 as 'and life's absence' (SBE 31, p. 30); Mills (after giving the Pahlavi translation, and the Skt. translation of Neriosangh Dhaval) comments:

"...Observe the singular abstract *ajyāitīmca* which is not lightly to be passed over. Why not a more ordinary expression? Have we not here an unusual antithesis [*ajyāitīmca* 'non-life']? The danger is great that by aiming to reduce all to commonplace for the sake of safety, we may demolish many an interesting conception of antiquity." Mills, ft. 2, p. 30.

I think Mills is absolutely right in making this observation. He has hit the nail on the head. This perception of his applies not only to Y30:4, but to the entire corpus of the Gathas. All too often, even in the most scholarly translations, we see this interpretive phenomenon of homogenizing ideas ~ 'reducing all to commonplace' as Mills says ~ based on the pre-conceived mind-set of the translator. This is one of the reasons why I (so often) say that with an interpretive translation, we are stuck at the level of understanding of the interpreter (which may or may not reflect Zarathushtra's thought). Whereas with a more literal translation, we begin to glimpse Zarathushtra's own thinking.

Humbach/Faiss 2010, translate *gaēmca ajyāitīmca* as 'vitality and lack of it'; Skjaervo's Old Av. Index translates the stem *ajyāiti-* as 'lack of livelihood'.

For a detailed discussion of this verse, including this word 'non-life' in the context of the verse is discussed in *Part Six: Yasna 30:3 and 4*, with other translations given for comparative purposes.

<sup>9</sup> There seems to be general agreement that in Y53:8d, the word *mārəθyaos̥* means 'of-death' (i.e. the gen. sg. case form of the stem word *mārəθyu-* Skjaervo's Old Av. Index 2022). It is not the word itself, but translations of the context in which it appears that vary so widely. For example, here are some of the ways in which some translators (all first class linguists, and all thoroughly familiar with the Vedic language, Vedic texts, and other ancient Indo-European languages) have translated Y53:8. Words in round parentheses ( ) in a given translation indicate words that are not in the Avestan text, but that have been inserted as (what the translator thinks are) implied, or as interpretive aids by the translator. Words in square brackets [ ] have been inserted by me to show the applicable Gatha word from Geldner. The word 'risible' in this quotation means 'such as to provoke laughter'.

Insler 1975: "By reason of these things, let those of evil effects become trickable and risible. Let them all scream out. But in alliance with those who have good mastery [*hux šaθrāiš*] over the men-killing [*jənərqm*], men-violating [*xrūnərqmca*] (deceitful persons), let a man create tranquility for the peacefully dwelling settlements. Let that affliction most mighty with death's [*mārəθyaos̥*] bondage [*dərəzā*] come to these (deceitful), and let it come quickly." Y53.8.

Humbach 1991: "Let the wrong-doers be shattered by those (present), and let them all, exhausted, howl upwards (to the sky). Through good rulers [*hux šaθrāiš*], among the killers and injurers of men [*jānārqm x rūnārqmcā*], let one establish peace with them for the settling clans, and let that ill come upon them (which is) the greatest [*mazištō*], (coming) with the bondage [*dārəzā*] of death [*mārəθyaoš*], and let (it) be soon." Y53:8. Vol. 1, p. 194. Humbach construes the word *jānārqm* as gen. pl. of *jēn.nar* 'killer of men' (Humbach 1991 Vol. 2, p. 247).

In these two translations (Insler 1975, and Humbach 1991), so far as *dārəzā mārəθyaoš* 'the bondage of death' is concerned, Zarathushtra hopes that this bondage of death will come quickly to those who kill and injure others. This view is consistent with the law of consequences, that we reap what we sow. These two translations also seem to show that Zarathushtra thinks that the deaths of such people will put an end to their killing and injuring, thereby securing the peace of the communities, and hopes that this will happen soon. We do not know who these men-killing, men-injuring persons were. They may have been the warring hordes who swept down on settled communities, and killed, destroyed and looted. Or they may have been members of the community who worshipped cruel, violent deities. Killing such persons may have been the only option to survival, and securing a peaceful society. As a general proposition, Zarathushtra's way to overcome evil is through truth, its comprehension, its beneficial-sacred embodiment in thought, word and action, its good rule, the beneficial-sacred way of being. But he also teaches that we have an obligation to protect, to stop evil. How, in a given situation, that would be done would have to be decided, case by case.

Bartholomae's translation (as it appears in Taraporewala 1951) is as follows: "So they whose deeds are evil, let them be deceived, and let them all howl, abandoned to ruin. Through good rulers [*hux šaθrāiš*] let him bring death [*jānārqm*] and bloodshed [*x rūnārqmcā*] upon them and peace from these (their assaults) unto the happy villagers. Grief let him bring on those, he that is the greatest with the lord of death [*mārəθyaoš*?]; and soon let it be." (p. 853). In this translation, Bartholomae uses the word 'death' twice ~ the first time for *jānārqm* which Bartholomae (according to Taraporewala) thinks means 'death' or 'killing', deriving it from *gan-*, *jan-* 'to kill'; and the second time for *mārəθyaoš* 'of-death', p. 851. Taraporewala comments that Bartholomae construes *dārəzā* as instr. sg. of *dārəz-* 'to fix, to bind' hence 'controller'. Bartholomae's translation, if accurate, poses some puzzles. First, who is the "him" and "he" who "through good rulers" brings about death and bloodshed? At first glance one might conclude that "him" and "he" refer to Wisdom, (who operates the law of consequence), especially since he is described as "he that is the greatest", but that does not accord with the fact that "he" acts "with the lord of death". And who is this "lord of death"? Is it Wisdom, one of whose attributes is 'non-deathness' (*amərətāt-*)? I cannot tell what Bartholomae had in mind. But according to his translation, it is "good rulers" along with a person (perhaps a generic 'one' as in Insler 1975, and Humbach 1991) who bring killing and bloodshed on evil persons (which may, or may not, be consistent with Zarathushtra's thought, see for example in *Part Two: The Paradox of Bad for the Bad*). Bartholomae's translation leaves me with many unanswered questions.

Taraporewala 1951 translates the applicable part of Y53:8 as follows: "Thus indeed workers-of-evil shall-inevitably-be deceived, and (stung) by ridicule they-all shall-chide-themselves; (but) upon-(our)-maidens-and-men [*jānārqm*] may-He bestow Peace through-these (Truths); may tribulation disappear from-(our)-happy people ~ He-indeed (is) Master [*dārəzā*] of Death [*mārəθyaoš*], and soon may (He), the Greatest [*mazištō*], come (again amongst us)." Y53:8. (Tarap. p. 850).

On *jānārqm*, while recognizing the different opinions of various translators, Taraporewala prefers Darmesteter's suggestion that the word stands for an original *jāni-nārqm* meaning 'women and men', stating that a very corrupt form *jān-nāirīm* is also found in a later YAv. text (Yt.24.23 called the *Vishtaspa Yasht*) which he thinks came from this Gatha form (*jānārqm*). He explains that the original compound was *jān-nar*, but that the final *n* of *jān* was dropped (in Y53:8) because of the well-known rule in Av. which does not permit double consonants, and concludes that this would make *jānārqm* a gen. pl. of a dvandva compound. He notes that this translation of *jānārqm* is consistent with the idea of previous verses which speak of 'maids and men'. (Tarap. pp. 851 - 852). In Tarap.'s (and Darmesteter's) defense, this song was composed for the wedding of Zarathushtra's daughter and other brides and grooms. Verse 5 specifically mentions these women and men. And verse 6 specifically says: "These things are exactly true, men [*narō*],

exactly, women [jānayō]..." Insler 1975. Geldner shows the following mss. variations in Avestan script: *jānarqm* (9 mss.); *jānarqmcā* (1 ms.); *jānarqm* (4 mss.); *jā narqm* (3 mss.); *jā narqm cā* (1 ms.); *jānirqm* (4 mss.); *jā nirqmcā* (1 ms.); *zi narqm* (1 ms.). Geldner 1P Y53.8 ft. 4, p. 190.

As for *x rūnarqmcā*, while agreeing that the word means 'bloodshed, or bloody deeds', Taraporewala agrees with Mills that this word is a later addition, because (according to Taraporewala) it upsets the meter and the sense of the verse (Tarap. (1951) p. 852).

In Taraporewala's translation, it would be consistent to conclude that "the Greatest" and "the Master of Death" both refer to Wisdom. However, Taraporewala comments that he thinks "the Master of Death" refers to the Zarathushtra, which I do not find persuasive. It is true that Zarathushtra sometimes refers to himself in the 3d person (as composers do in many eastern languages, especially in their poetry), but I just don't see that in this verse ~ if Zarathushtra is the author of this Gatha. (My friend Farrokh Vajifdar, in an interesting paper, delivered at the first Gatha Colloquium in London, was of the opinion that Y53 was not composed by Zarathushtra. See Vajifdar, *Have we Reached the Turning-Point?* in *Proceedings of the First Gatha Colloquium*, 1993, (WZO, 1998), p. 225).

As you can see, the translation differences (and the mss. differences) are too great to enable us to gather anything useful from this verse about Zarathushtra's views on death.

<sup>10</sup> Here is Y53:9 in Avestan, transliterated from Geldner 1P p. 191, and some different translations for comparative purposes,

*dužvarənāiš vaēšō rāstī tōi narəpīš rajīš*  
*aēšasā dājt.arətā pəšō.tanvō*  
*kū ašavā ahurō yə tš jyātəuš hāmiθyāt vasə.itōišcā*  
*taṭ mazdā tavā xšaθram yā ərəžəjyōi dāhī driguovē vahyō* • Y53:9.

Insler 1975, "Poison adheres to those of evil preferences [*dužvarənāiš*]. They are decline and darkness, these furious violators of truth whose persons have been condemned. Where is the truthful Lord [*ašavā ahurō*] who would expel them from life [*jyātəuš*] and liberty [*vasə.itōišcā*]?"

(to the Wise Lord). Such is Thy rule, Wise One, through which Thou shalt grant what is very good to Thy needy dependent who lives honestly." Y53:9;

Here, 'expulsion from life' could be another way of saying 'death'. If so interpreted, it would mean depriving evil-doers of their lives, and hence their liberty to keep harming. In this translation, it is the Lord who expels such persons from life and the liberty of continuing to harm. But I am somewhat skeptical of this interpretation. Zarathushtra was too intelligent to expect that criminal activity could be stopped by asking Wisdom the Lord to strike criminals dead. And indeed, in his many other pleas for help against harmful persons, he asks for help through truth and good thinking, which is quite different from, and inconsistent with, such an interpretation of Y53:9. I am more inclined to think that 'life' (in the phrase *who would expel them from life* [*jyātəuš*]) is another way of saying that Wisdom expel them from non-deathness (*aməratāt-*) ~ turn them away at the (metaphoric) Chinvat Bridge, because those of evil preferences need to continue evolving spiritually in the mortal existence. But that is just speculation on my part.

Bartholomae, "To men of evil creed [*dužvarənāiš*] belongs the place of corruption. They that set themselves to condemn the worthy, despising righteousness ... Where is the Righteous Lord who shall rob them of life and freedom? Thine Mazdah is the Dominion, whereby thou canst give to the right-living poor man the better portion." Y53:9, (as translated into English (from Barth.'s German) in Taraporewala 1951 p. 857).

Regarding his translation of *dužvarənāiš* as "To men of evil creed"; it is true that *duž-* (*duš-*) is a prefix meaning 'evil, bad, wrong' (see for e.g. Y49:11, *dušəx šaθrəng* 'bad-rule'; *duš.šyaoθānəng* 'bad-actions'; *dužvacanəhō* 'bad-words'; *duždaēnəng* 'bad-envisionment'; *dužmananəhō* 'bad-thoughts' Y49:11, the *-əng* inflection being acc. pl. for *a-* stems). But to translate *varənāiš* as 'creed' (as Bartholomae has done) is interpretive. The root word *var-* (in means 'choice' or 'preference' (Insler 1975 p. 163, 167; Skjaervo's Old Av. Index 2022). In this verse, Bartholomae (like Insler) thinks it is the Lord who deprives such people of life (i.e. bringing about their death), an interpretation of which I am skeptical for the reasons given above (under the Insler translation). As for *vasə.itōišcā*, if it does mean *and from liberty* (Insler), or *and from freedom* (Bartholomae), I think this means removing from them the freedom to keep harming (which the law of consequences and unearned adversities would accomplish ~ over time).



Taraporewala 1951, "With-evil-believers [*dužvarənāiš*] hatred leads to-the-condemnation of-worthies, (they are) slaves-of-desire, despisers-of-Truth... who (is) the righteous Lord, who shall-oppose them with-(all)-his-Life-Force and with-full-freedom?... "Y53.9. (Tarap. p. 854). Taraporewala translates the applicable verb as 'oppose' rather than 'expel' (Insler 1975), 'rob' (Bartholomae), or 'deprive' (Humbach 1991), and the 'life' and 'freedom' are the Lord's ~ not what evil doers are deprived of.

Humbach 1991. All words in round parentheses and square brackets are his: "Through those of bad preferences poison spreads. They (are personified) obscurity [pl.] (and) darkness [pl.], (those) greedy violators of truth, with their bodies forfeit. Where is the truthful Ahura who might deprive them of (their) livelihood and liberty? That power (is) Thine, O Wise One, through which Thou mayest grant the better (part) to the poor person who lives decently." Y53:9. (Vol. 1, p. 194).

Humbach/Faiss 2010. "By/over the disbelieving venom flows; they (mean) waning (and) darkness, greedy violators of truth of forfeited bodies. Where is the truthful Lord who would deprive them of their livelihood and their freedom of movement? It is your power, O Wise One, through which you will grant what is better to the poor person living decently." (p. 162). According to Humbach and Faiss, it is only of their livelihood and freedom of movement (both of which would affect their ability to harm) of which the truthful Lord would deprive them.

As you can see, the disagreements in translations of Y53:9 materially affect the meaning of this verse, and therefore make it ineffective to any understanding of Zarathushtra's thoughts on 'death' in Y53:8. Moreover, the interpretive choices of the translators is inconsistent with other Gatha verses in which Wisdom helps, protects, with truth and good thinking ~ not killing the wrongdoer.

<sup>11</sup> The ferocious quality of so many translations of these two verses (Y53:8 and 9) do not seem entirely credible in light of the fact that this song was composed as a wedding song. I think linguists need to re-visit, re-examine, re-analyze, the vocabulary and syntax of these two verses ~ from scratch (comparing such vocabulary and syntax to other parts of the Gathas, to the contexts of these two verses, the song in which it appears (Y53) and the Gathas as a whole, and also to the vocabulary, grammar, and idioms, of later Avestan texts, Vedic, Vedic texts, and other ancient Indo-European languages). A tall order. And something that I am not qualified to do.

<sup>12</sup> Geldner shows numerous manuscript variations for many of the words of Y53:8 and 9. (Geldner 1P pp. 190 - 191).

<sup>13</sup> See in *Part One: Truth, Asha*.

<sup>14</sup> See *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>15</sup> See in *Part One: Completeness and Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*; and *The Identity of the Divine*. And see in *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*; *The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*; *The Houses of Paradise and Hell*, and *Did Wisdom Choose Too?*

<sup>16</sup> I was delighted to discover that J. K. Rowling has arrived at exactly the same conclusion (doubtless an affirmation of the proverb "great minds think alike" ... although there is another proverb "fools seldom differ" ...). In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the ever wonderful Professor Dumbledore expresses the opinion,

"...to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." p. 297.

Three cheers! My sentiments exactly! (although my mind is not always 'well organized').

<sup>17</sup> See *Part One: Reincarnation*, and *Part Two: Asha & the Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>18</sup> See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

<sup>19</sup> See *Part One: Reincarnation*; and in *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>20</sup> See in *Part One: Completeness and Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*; and *The Identity of the Divine*.

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

<sup>22</sup> I regret that I cannot recall in what work of Tagore I read this thought. At the time I was deeply touched by it, and therefore remembered it ~ never thinking that at some future time, I would need to reference it.