

Differences in the Spirit of Friendship.

The *Yenghe Haatam* manthra teaches (among other things) that we celebrate, revere, all good beings ~ not just good Zoroastrians.¹ A YAv. text says

"And we worship the former religions of the world devoted to Righteousness, ...". Yy16:3, Mills translation.²

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight some differences (and a few similarities) between Zarathushtra's teachings in the Gathas, and other religious beliefs. This is problematic, because in all religions, certain beliefs change from time to time, and indeed, even at any given time, no religion is a monolithic belief system ~ they all have different sects, or denominations, which have differences of belief. Nevertheless, I think the comparison is needed, and worthwhile, because in certain essential respects, our various religions provide us with different frameworks through which to look at ourselves, each other, other life forms, our environment, our fears, our lives, and the questions which have puzzled the mind of humans for millennia ~ the purpose of life, whether the Divine exists and if so Its nature, whether there is life after death and if so its nature, 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, and how we live our lives and relate to the rest of existence.

There are many similarities between Zarathushtra's teachings in the Gathas and the beliefs of other religions today. There are also some fundamental, material, differences.

Looking for similarities with other religions, as we do with inter-faith activities increases our appreciation for other religions, helps to dissolve prejudices caused by ignorance and fear, and increases friendship, as well as a tolerance for differences. In fact, I am not really comfortable pointing out differences between Zarathushtra's teachings, and other religions. I would much prefer to look for, and dwell on, similarities.

Why then have I written this chapter?

Well, for more than a 1,000 years, Zoroastrians have been raised in societies dominated by certain major proselytizing religions, and as minorities we have unconsciously absorbed into our thinking, some of the teachings and mind-sets of the dominant religions under which we have lived for so long. To truly understand Zarathushtra's teachings, and make informed decisions about whether it fills our spiritual needs, it is important to understand his teachings ~ free from such influences. So it is important to know how his teachings differ from those of other religions.

I am not a student of comparative religions. And what follows is far from an complete study. It simply highlights a few key differences. Having been educated in Christian schools (Protestant and Catholic), I am more familiar with those religions (especially as they existed 75 or so years ago, and in some instances, as they exist today in parts of the United States, where I live), which is why there may be more comparisons in this piece with Christianity than with other religions. I am not as familiar with Judaism except to the extent it is taught as part of the Old Testament in Christian bibles (which may not be the same as in its Jewish versions).

The Tree of Knowledge.

In a dynamic and gripping lecture many years ago in Chicago, Dr. Farhang Mehr pointed out a basic difference between Zarathushtra's teachings and that of Christianity (and possibly Judaism). It pertains to the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" and the first "sin". According to the Old Testament of the

(Christian) Bible, when God created the first man and woman and placed them in the Garden of Eden, He commanded them not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The Book of Genesis says:

"And the Lord God commanded the man saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Genesis Ch. 2, §§ 16 -17.³

Accordingly, when the first man and woman ate that fruit, according to Christian dogma they committed original sin, and were banished from the Garden of Eden.

By contrast, in Zarathushtra's thought, Wisdom does not prohibit us from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. On the contrary, we are required to do so. Wisdom's teaching that we should use our minds to search for truth (*aša-*) ~ the physical truths of our universe, and also the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ generates the necessary corollary that we attempt to ascertain what is not true, inaccurate, false, wrong. Knowledge of good and evil is a pre-requisite to acquiring wisdom ~ there being a difference between ignorance and innocence.

Obedience versus informed independent judgment, and the freedom to choose.

In the Garden of Eden story, the mandate laid on man by God was unquestioning, unthinking, obedience. The same requirement is expressed (in the Old Testament of the Christian bible) in the story of Abraham and his willingness to kill his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God, in response to God's command that he do so. Abraham was being tested to see if he would obey God unquestioningly, even if obedience required such a horrific and difficult act.

In contrast, the freedom to choose is a fundament of Zarathushtra's teachings, and he tells us that we should make our choices independently, each person for himself, after listening and reflecting with a clear mind.⁴ In other words, we should think, and make informed, independent, choices. There is no concept in Zarathushtra's thought of obedience to a Divine command that appears to be 'wrong' ~ such as killing one's son as a blood sacrifice to God.

Even when Zarathushtra asks Wisdom to instruct him, he does not ask for dictates, or decrees, or (the security blanket of) fact-specific prescriptions. He asks that Wisdom instruct him through good thinking,⁵ (the comprehension of truth), "... instruct through good thinking (the course) of my direction..." Y50:6, Insler 1975.

My knowledge of Sufism is superficial, but according to Idries Shah, a basic tenet of the Sufi way is that the student must secure a master, and must submit unconditionally to the master's authority. Indeed, of the ten elements of Sufism, surrender of choice is the fifth.⁶ We see the same requirement expressed in the poetry of the Sufi poet Hafiz:

"...When one can surrender the illusion, the crutch, of free will, ..."⁷

By contrast, Zarathushtra teaches individual responsibility. He says we have the freedom to choose; that we should listen to others, but then each person should decide "...man by man for himself..." Y30:2 (in Avestan as in English, *man* is also used generically to include all genders). True, we are bound to make mistakes. But there's nothing wrong with that. Mistakes are a great way to learn. Besides "masters" or "gurus" are human. And no human being is exempt from making mistakes. It is better to live our own mistakes and learn from them, than to blindly live the mistakes of others. Unquestioning obedience does not generate growth or wisdom.

Zarathushtra does not see himself as a guru or a master ~ someone who has all the answers. He describes himself as a 'manthran' which means one who composes, sings or recites manthra ~ words of reason, words that make us think, the precepts of Wisdom.⁸ To him, life is an on-going search, an on-going quest, for truth (*aša-*), a quest from which he does not exempt himself.

"...as long as I shall be able and be strong, so long shall I look in quest of truth [*aša-*].

Truth, shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire both good thinking and the way to the Lord..." Y28:4 - 5, Insler 1975.

The "way to the Lord" is the [the path of truth](#) (Y51:13, Y33:5), the [path of good thinking](#) (Y51:16, Y34:12, 13), the path of the qualities that comprise the nature of the Divine ~ truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule, and eventually its complete attainment, the beneficial-sacred way of being.⁹

The Mind

Many religions disparage the mind and its 'chatter' ~ teaching that it must be disregarded or subjugated for true spiritual growth. The Sufi way teaches that spiritual growth is powered only by love ~ rejecting both asceticism and the intellect. Like the Sufi way, Zarathushtra does not advocate asceticism. And like the Sufi way, love is indeed at the core of his teachings.¹⁰ But Zarathushtra does not reject knowledge and the intellectual aspects of the mind. On the contrary, he teaches that good thinking (*vohu- manah-*) includes the full spectrum of conscious capabilities committed to goodness ~ intellect, reason, emotions, creativity, intuition, insight, et cetera.¹¹ He calls paradise, the '[House of Good Thinking](#)' and the '[House of Song](#)' ~ one paradise, a state of being that includes both intellect, creativity and joy (like the high we feel when we hear or sing beautiful music), in a seamless integration, which to me more accurately reflects our reality, because it is impossible for our thoughts, words and actions, to be purely intellectual, or purely emotional, or purely creative. The process of thinking is a blend of many such capabilities. And 'good mind', and its process 'good thinking', is a divine quality which includes all these qualities ~ good reasoning, good intellect, good creativity, good emotions, good insight etc. We grow spiritually, and heal our world by using the total universe of our minds for good.

The Sufi way and Zarathushtra's teachings agree that to truly learn something, you have to experience it.¹² And the Sufis have other beautiful ideas that are close to Zarathushtra's thought. They believe in the immanence of the Divine in all things, and they address the Divine as Friend (as do the Quakers). In the Gathas, the relationship between man and the Divine is more than once described as that of a friend to a friend, or a beloved to a beloved, and the Gathas (and even more clearly some later texts) imply that the Divine is immanent in all things.¹³

Zarathushtra's teachings pre-date Sufism (which also originated in Iran) by at least a millennium, possibly more. It is interesting that according to Graves, "The characteristic Sufic signature is found in widely dispersed literature from at least the second millennium BC. ..." ¹⁴ He does not identify what this "widely dispersed literature" consists of, that (he says) existed around the second millennium BCE. Possibly his word "millennium" may be a typographical error for 'century'. (Heaven knows, I make plenty of typographical errors despite of my best intentions and proof-reading!). But even if Graves intended 'century', his statement requires the conclusion that Sufic thought predated the advent of Islam (which did not exist until roughly 610 + CE). Some of the similarities between the Sufi way and Zarathushtra's way are so striking, that I cannot help but wonder if the original Sufis may have been an off-shoot of (or derived some of their beliefs from) Zarathushtra's teachings.¹⁵

Original Sin, Damnation and Redemption.

According to early Christian dogma (and still an article of belief in some Christian denominations today), Adam's and Eve's act of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, was Original Sin. And from that time onwards, their Original Sin taints all their descendants.¹⁶ According to this dogma, man is born sinful, corrupt, incapable of redeeming himself, so it was necessary for God to send His own son to earth, to suffer and be killed, in order to pay for man's original and on-going sins, so that man could be redeemed from damnation but only if he acknowledges Christ as his savior.¹⁷

Today, some Christian denominations still believe that all others are damned in eternal hell regardless of how good a life they may have led, although many denominations have now moved away from that dogma.¹⁸ This view of God's 'justice' includes painful punishment for inherited and on-going sins, and permits the wrongful conduct of one person (each sinner) to be expiated by inflicting punishment on an innocent person (Christ). It is true, they teach that Christ, out of love, accepted the punishment for us. But that does not explain why God's 'justice' includes the idea that wrongdoing is inherited, condemns man to eternal hell for behaving in the very way in which he was created (fallible), requires punishment of the innocent (Christ) for the redemption of the 'guilty', and offers escape from punishment in return for giving allegiance, regardless of what kind of life a man may have lived.

In the Gathas, there is no inherited sin. There is no concept of a punitive hell (such as there is in certain later Pahlavi texts) ~ neither for making mistakes, nor for making wrongful choices, nor for failing to give allegiance.¹⁹ The laws that order existence (*aša-*) include the law of consequences ~ that whatever we do comes back to us, the good and the bad. But this is not for punishment. It is for enlightenment ~ to increase understanding, experience by experience, which (with mutual, loving help between all the living, including the Divine) helps to change our wrongful preferences to good ones.²⁰ Zarathushtra's solution for defeating evil is changing minds, changing preferences, from within. In his thought, there is no damnation; no concept of man being born sinful, incapable of redeeming himself. True, he is born with the capacity for evil, but also with a capacity for the divine (truth, good thinking, embodied truth, good rule, a beneficial way of being). Fire in his thought is not used to punish and torture people in the 'hell' of an afterlife (by being continuously burned). In the Gathas, fire (and other forms of light) are used as symbols and metaphors for truth, enlightenment.

In Zarathushtra's thought, 'salvation' is being redeemed ~ not from damnation but from untruth "[... let that salvation of yours be granted to us: truth allied with good thinking ...](#)" Y51:20, Insler 1975.

'Salvation' is obtained by leading a life that is beneficent ~ good, loving, generous,²¹ "[...let salvation be granted to the beneficent man...](#)"Y34:3, Insler 1975.

'Salvation' is attaining incrementally, and ultimately completely ~ the true (correct) good order of existence, its comprehension, its beneficial-sacred embodiment in thought, word and action, its good rule, its complete attainment, the wholly beneficial-sacred way of being, which results in an existence that is no longer bound by mortality ~ a long process of spiritual evolution which ultimately is an enlightened existence, Wisdom.²²

There is no silver bullet for 'salvation' in Zarathushtra's thought. It is something we must do for ourselves, for each other, and for our world, with our choices in thought, word and action, including mutual, loving, help from all the living. "[Yes, those men shall be the saviors \[*saošyānt-*\] of the lands, namely, those who follow their knowledge of Thy teachings with actions in harmony with good thinking and with truth, Wise One...](#)" Y48:12, Insler 1975.

The idea that a person is redeemed only if he acknowledges Christ as savior, presupposes a God to whom allegiance is a higher priority than the way a person lives his life. Zarathushtra's view is the opposite. Allegiance is irrelevant, except for allegiance to the qualities that make a being divine (*amesha spenta*). We are to revere all good men and women, not just good Zoroastrian men and women, although sadly that requirement has long been forgotten by some Zoroastrians. But then again, that comes from the human condition, rather than from a given teaching.

The material world.

Almost all the major religions require a rejection of, or a withdrawal from, the material world in order to achieve spiritual growth ~ even those, that do not advocate asceticism, such as Buddhism.

Zarathushtra's vision is uniquely and beautifully different. He teaches that the material world is the matrix, the medium, the arena, through which we create, experience, and attain divine qualities. We use the material existence to give form, shape, substance, to spiritual values, the way an artist uses paints and canvas to express his ideas, or a musician uses material instruments to express the music in his soul. The material existence is not 'evil'. It is to be used for good, and in the process, enjoyed, celebrated.

The path.

I love the gentle non-harming qualities of the Buddhist religion. Not harming is one of the qualities of the true (correct) good order of existence (*aṣa-*).²³ In this respect, Buddhism is very similar to Zarathushtra's thought. And the Buddha's Noble Eightfold path which he calls *aryamarga*, teaches,

"... right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration...",²⁴

This Eightfold path is very close to Zarathushtra's [path of truth](#) ~ the path of the true order of existence (*aṣa-*), which includes all that is 'good' and 'right' (and also values the acquisition of knowledge). In the Gathas, Zarathushtra also calls his path [the straight path](#),²⁵ a term that, more than a millennium later was used to self-describe Islam.²⁶

However, there are also some differences between Buddhism and Zarathushtra's teachings, one of which is how to deal with difficulties and suffering. Buddhism attempts to deal with suffering and unhappiness by teaching that we should detach ourselves from wants and desires. To me (with great respect, and affection) this is essentially a negative solution (assuming I have correctly understood this Buddhist teaching). To give some (simplistic) examples: if unhappiness is caused by poverty, the Buddhist solution is: Do not desire to be wealthy. Do not be so 'attached' to wealth. If unhappiness is caused by the loss of a loved one, the Buddhist solution is: 'Do not be so attached to those whom you love.'

The Gathas address such problems in a different way. Suffering and unhappiness (whether resulting from the wrongful choices of others, or our own wrongful choices, or 'natural' causes) are opportunities to bring about good by engaging them in a pro-active way. Zarathushtra's solution, in essence, is: If you see a problem, or experience one, use your mind/heart/spirit, and all the tools at your disposal, to try to solve it, make things better. Sometimes we'll succeed. Sometimes we won't. From what I see in the Gathas, suffering is as necessary as joy in sculpting our souls ~ increasing our empathy, our understanding, changing our preferences. But always, if we look, if we think (using all our conscious capabilities ~ intellectual, emotional, creative, insightful), we will learn from the situation, and in the long run, good will come of it ~ even from horrific problems (especially from horrific problems ~ the heavy blessings).²⁷ And always, there will be loving

help at hand ~ from the Divine, from each other, from other life forms ~ to help us through the refiner's fire. It may not be the help we ask for. We may not even be aware (at that time) that we are being helped. But it will be there, and it will help. ("... For I know that words deriving from good purpose and from love will not be left wanting by you." Y29:10, Insler 1975). A material difference from Buddhist teachings.

Heaven.

The descriptions of heaven in Christianity and Islam may be metaphoric. I don't know. But the implication is that heaven is a location or place of reward to which we go after death. And often it is said to be filled with delights that one usually associates with the material senses (as we also find in some Pahlavi Zoroastrian texts).²⁸ The Buddhist heaven is sometimes said to be a state of nothingness. It also is sometimes said to be a state of pure, enlightened mind (which is close to Zarathushtra's thought). This reflects an inconsistency (in my view), because a pure enlightened mind is something. Therefore, if 'heaven' is a pure enlightened mind, it cannot be a state of nothingness. But perhaps I just have not understood this Buddhist belief accurately, or perhaps the difference reflects two different schools of Buddhist thought.

Zarathushtra's heaven, by contrast, is not a place to which we go. It is a state of being that we become ~ a state of being in which we have attained completely, the qualities that make a being divine (amesha spenta).²⁹ One of its names is 'the house of good thinking' ~ 'house' is used as a metaphor for a state of being that 'houses' the comprehension of truth (which is w/Wisdom). Like at least one school of Buddhist thought, Zarathushtra's paradise is a state of enlightenment.

Understanding 'God'.

Many years ago, at a lecture I gave in the San Francisco area, one of my favorite questions from the audience was: "Did God create Zarathushtra, or did Zarathushtra create 'God'? Substitute 'man' for 'Zarathushtra' and we have a universally applicable question.

Figuring out, (or constructing?), the nature of 'God' is something that has exercised the mind of man from times immemorial. Islam (except for the Sufis) see God as Master, and man as His slave. Christianity and Judaism have on occasion described God as a God of vengeance – wrathful and punitive; and sometimes as a Father, loving but authoritarian. Sometimes man is His servant, sometimes His child. But always, He is One who is perfect from the start, separate and apart from His creation ~ from man, from all the living, from the environment. These perceptions of the Divine are quite different from Zarathushtra's envisionment.

In the Gathas (as in Sufi and Quaker thought), the relationship between man and Wisdom (*mazdā-*) is described as that of a friend to a friend ("...Take notice ... Lord, offering the support which a friend should grant to a friend..." Y46:2, Insler 1975).³⁰ And man is Wisdom's ally, partner, not his slave ("...the loving man ... [*spənta-*'beneficial-sacred'] through truth, watching over the heritage for all, is a world-healer and Thy ally in [*mainyu-*'(his) way of being'], Wise One." Y44:2, Insler 1975). In Zarathushtra's thought, there is no anger or vengeance in the Divine, whose way of being is wholly good (*vahišta-*), wholly beneficial-sacred (*spəništa-*).³¹ Wisdom personified. Nor is the Divine a being separate and apart from us.³² Zarathushtra implies (and the later texts even more so) that the Divine is immanent in all things³³ (as do the Sufis). The Divine is the fire within ~ in us, a part of us, a part of all things, and therefore, of necessity, a part of the perfecting process (!).³⁴ When and as each fragment of existence becomes perfected, complete, (*haurvatāt-* at an individual level) it rejoins each other fragment that has

done so in a union that is the Divine (*haurvatāt*- at a collective level), incrementally, and eventually making one perfected whole.³⁵

If you visualize 'existence' as a continuum, at one end ~ the original, primeval end ~ existence was/is a mix of qualities that are 'more-good' and 'bad' (Y30:3), 'more-beneficial' and 'harmful' (Y45:2), and the other end is perfected existence ~ wholly good, the Divine. And all along the way (from one end of the continuum to the other) are the rest of us fragments of existence, at various stages of spiritual evolution, evolving towards the perfected end. That is what I see in the Gathas. An inference, true. But supported by evidence.³⁶

In the spirit of Yenghe Haatam.

For all that I cannot relate to much of later Christian dogma, (just as I cannot relate to much of later Zoroastrian dogma created many centuries after Zarathushtra) I find many poignant and beautiful lessons in the life of Christ – an illumined soul – which lessons I find to be very Zarathushtrian ~ perhaps an indication of the universality of such things. I would like to touch upon them here to show at least these similarities between Christianity and Zarathushtra's teachings (there are many others) ~ especially since I have pointed out so many differences.

Christ taught by stories and words, with which we all are familiar. But he also taught without words – by how he lived – a very Zarathushtrian thing. In the spirit of *Yenghe Haatam* (which teaches us to revere, celebrate all good men and women and the divine within them),³⁷ here are a few of Christ's silent lessons that I particularly love and respect.

First, I think of his birth. He did not choose to be born into a wealthy or noble Roman family ~ the cream of society in his day. He was born into poverty, and to a racial minority having (at that time) little power (as the world defines power), demonstrating that self worth is not defined by wealth, or power, or race. An important lesson.

Second, I think of how he lived his life. He was not a powerful priest or king, controlling the lives of others. He lived simply, generously, lovingly, (beneficently, *hudāh*- to use Zarathushtra's word), serving his fellow man, alleviating pain and suffering, healing bodies and souls, spreading truths that are food for the soul, thus advancing the forward progress of existence – a beneficial way of being that is the essence of the sacred (*spənta- mainyu*-).

Finally, I think of his death – alone, betrayed, tortured, in great pain and suffering. And yet, this did not cause him to hate or reject those who harmed and rejected him. A very powerful (and very difficult) lesson, showing us by example (instead of just telling us) how to react to betrayal, pain, torture and death – with courage, without hate, indeed with beneficence.

Confronted by wrongful conduct, it serves no good purpose to imitate it. In my view, there is nothing wrong with using force if necessary to stop someone from harming others (or perhaps even me!). But if someone hates me, and I hate back, that just creates more hatred. If someone harms me, and I harm back, take revenge ~ that just creates more harm, more pain.

I hope my many (and very dear) Christian friends will forgive me for viewing Christ's life and death through Zarathushtrian spectacles, but to me it exemplifies many core teachings of Zarathushtra – not the least of which is that we cannot achieve a good end with wrongful means.

In the Gathas the desired end is a perfected existence ~ a re-union of the fragments of existence which have become Divine (as Zarathushtra defines divinity). And we get there by following the path of the

qualities that make a being divine, ~ the true order of existence; an order that is factually true, and also includes the truths of mind/heart/spirit; a loving, generous, order that is intrinsically most good (*aša-vahišta-*), its comprehension (*vohu manah-*), its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its good rule, in our selves and in our many social units, ruling ourselves and our various social units in accordance with it (*vohu xšaθra-*), ~ the beneficial way of being (*spənta-mainyu-*), which when attained completely (*haurvatāt-*) is the essence of the sacred, Wisdom personified (*mazdā-*) ~ a state of being that is no longer bound by mortality (*amərətāt-*), because the perfecting process is complete.

As stated in one of my favorite YAv. prayers, the beautiful Yy60:12,³⁸ (which I hope you will forgive me for quoting more than once).

"Through the true order of existence (which is) most good, (*aša vahišta*),
Through the true order of existence (which is) most beautiful, (*aša sraēšta*),
May we see Thee,
[understand Divine]
May we serve Thee,
[worship the Divine, with Its own qualities],³⁹
May your following be the same with Thee."
[become one with the Divine]
Y60:12,⁴⁰
My translation.
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¹ See *Part One: The Manthra of the Human and the Divine*, Yenghe Haatam; and *Part Three: Yenghe Haatam, an Analysis*.

² SBE 31, p. 255.

³ Authorized King James Version, (World Bible Publishers, Iowa, 1986).

⁴ "Listen with your ears to the best things [*vahišta-* 'most-good (things)']. Reflect with a clear mind – man by man for himself – upon the two choices of decision,..." Y30:2, Insler 1975. The two choices of decision are between truth and untruth.

⁵ Many scholars translate the word *səraoša-* as 'obedience'. But the selection of that English word is not linguistically sound, nor is it consistent with other ideas expressed in the Gathas. The word *səraoša-* (YAv. *sraoša-*) literally means 'listening' ~ the meaning of which includes 'hearing and implementing' (as it does in English). In the context of the Gathas, *səraoša-* means listening to and implementing Wisdom's teachings through free and informed choices. The linguistics, meaning(s), and textual uses of *səraoša-* are detailed in *Part Three: Seroasha*.

⁶ Idries Shah, *The Sufis*, (Anchor Books 1971 reprint of the Doubleday original published in 1964). p. 423.

⁷ Translation by Ladinsky (1999), in *The Gift, Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master*, p. 114.

⁸ Detailed in *Part One: Manthras, An Introduction*.

⁹ Detailed in *Part One: Worship and Prayer*; and in *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*; and *The Puzzle of the Amesha Spenta*.

¹⁰ Detailed in *Part One: Love*.

¹¹ The evidence supporting this definition of *vohu- manah-* is detailed in *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*.

¹² Robert Graves' *Introduction*, to Idries Shah (1964), *The Sufis*, p. viii.

¹³ Detailed in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*; and *Part Two: A Question of Immanence*.

¹⁴ Graves' *Introduction*, to Idries Shah (1964), *The Sufis*, p. viii. Unfortunately, Graves does not specify the original sources on which he bases this conclusion.

¹⁵ I am inclined to think that Sufism may have been an off-shoot of (or derived some of their beliefs from) Zarathushtra's teachings, but not always as set forth in Corbin's book, *The Man of Light*, which sometimes accurately, and sometimes very inaccurately, states what he thinks are in Zoroastrian texts.

¹⁶ Today, even the (less than perfect) 'justice' of human beings has rejected the injustice of inherited crime. However, in ancient Europe (closer in time to when these Christian dogmas were formed) certain 'sins' of the father were indeed visited on his descendents by some secular rulers, most often political 'sins' ~ possibly as a way of removing from the heirs the means of revenge or continued disloyalty against the king who had beheaded or exiled their parent or ancestor.

Similarly (but for different reasons), in ancient Iran, in the very late YAv. text, *Videvdāt* (*Vendidad*), six kinds of contracts are identified, and if a man should break his contract, in addition to the man being held responsible his next of kin to the ninth degree were held answerable for his breach of contract. (Vd. 4:2 - 16). Darmesteter translation, SBE 4, pp. 34 - 39, and Darmesteter's ft. 2 on p. 36. But this liability of the next of kin was limited to contracts (not to all wrongdoings), and likely was a way of bringing about the pressure and influence of the family/clan, on one of its members to ensure that his contractual undertakings would be kept.

¹⁷ Unfortunately, we see something similar in the very late YAv. *Videvdāt* (*Vendidad*), which states that the law of Mazda takes away all sin that is confessed. The *Vendidad* is in grammatically flawed YAv. and thus would have been written not only more than 1,000 years after Zarathushtra, but even long after Avestan times ~ when our priests were no longer fluent in the Avestan language (see *Part Five: The Vendidad, An Overview*). But this text nevertheless repeatedly engages in the fiction of Zarathushtra (purportedly) asking questions, and Ahura Mazda (purportedly) giving answers which announced the rules and ideas that the author(s) wanted to establish as unquestionable ~ giving to their own ideas the (purported) authorship and authority of Ahura Mazda (and the popularity of Zarathushtra). In Ch. 8, § 29 the author(s) have Ahura Mazda (purportedly) articulating both confession and absolution,

"The law of Mazda indeed, O Spitama Zarathushtra! takes away from him who confesses it the bonds of his sin; it takes away (the sin of) breach of trust; it takes away (the sin of) murdering one of the faithful; it takes away (the sin of) burying a corpse; it takes away (the sin of) deeds for which there is no atonement; it takes away the heaviest penalties of sin; it takes away any sin that may be sinned." *Vendidad* 8:29, Darmesteter translation, SBE 4, p. 101. Words in round parentheses are in Darmesteter's translation and indicate his interpretive aids.

But this teaching is quite the opposite of Zarathushtra's thought in the Gathas, which teaches that each person is responsible for his own conduct. Moreover, the remission of wrongdoing would defeat the process and purpose of spiritual evolution through both 'good' and adverse experiences, including the law of consequences, (that we reap what we sow) and mutual, loving help, as discussed in *Part Two: Asha & the Checkmate Solution*.

¹⁸ While there are quite a few sects of (fundamentalist) Christians in the United States who still believe today that anyone who does not acknowledge Christ as his savior is condemned to hell, many Christians denominations today ~ in the US and worldwide especially those who engage in interfaith activities ~ no longer teach this dogma (which once was universally believed). And I doubt that this was Christ's original teaching. I am inclined to think this idea was what later Church authorities came up with ~ perhaps to control behavior through fear, and/or perhaps to justify how it could be that the Son of God came to be tortured and killed. In so doing they missed (in my view) some of the most meaningful, beautiful and essential lessons of Christ's horrific death (as discussed in the last paragraphs of this chapter).

¹⁹ Zarathushtra's ideas on what is generally called 'heaven' and 'hell' are discussed in *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise & Hell*, which discusses Zarathushtra's notion of what are the results of wrongful choices; and for the later texts on this question, see in *Part Three: The Absence of Damnation & Hell in Other Avestan Texts*; *Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*; and *Heaven & Hell in Pahlavi Texts*.

²⁰ This is necessarily a simplistic description of the law of consequences, and how it changes minds, preferences. For a more detailed discussion with evidence from the Gathas, see *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*.

²¹ See *Part One: A Question of Salvation*.

²² See *Part One: A Question of Salvation*, and *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*.

²³ See *Part One: Truth, Asha*.

²⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh 1991, *Old Path White Clouds*, p. 121, a very lovely book about one school of Buddhism.

²⁵ See *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*.

²⁶ Esposito 1991, *Islam, The Straight Path*, (Oxford University Press).

²⁷ See *Part One: A Friendly Universe*, and *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

²⁸ The notion of 'heaven' and 'hell' changed over the long history of Zoroastrianism, discussed *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*, and *Heaven & Hell In Pahlavi Texts*.

There are some rather profound descriptions of 'heaven' in a Pahlavi Fragment which are very close to the Gathas, and are quoted in *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise & Hell*.

However, the later Pahlavi text, *Arda Viraf Nama*, does indeed describe 'heaven' as a place of many material delights such as gold-embroidered and silver-embroidered clothes, crowns, jewels, thrones, carpets, rankings of some souls as higher than others, and the perfume of sweet basil, (Haug & E. W. West 1872 *The Story of Arda Viraf*, pp. 160 - 165). It also mentions (but briefly) some non-material aspects reflecting a state of being such as light, joy, pleasure, the four heavens of good thoughts (the star track), good words (the moon track), good deeds (the sun track) and the House of Song (Garodman) "all-glorious", (Haug & E. W. West (1872), *ibid.* pp. 157 - 159), demonstrating a mix of ideas ~ a few that are consistent with the Gathas, and many that are not.

²⁹ As detailed in the following chapters in *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*, *The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*, and *The Houses of Paradise and Hell*.

³⁰ Other examples of the Divine being described as a Friend are shown in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

³¹ As a Pahlavi text tells us, the first thing necessary to bring about the renovation of existence is to understand that the Divine is wholly good, *Selections of Zadsparam*, Chap. I:16 - 17, E. W. West translation, SBE 5, p. 158 (discussed in more detail in *Part Three: The Ahuna Vairya (Yatha Ahu Vairyo)*, *Ancient Commentaries*. All 3 requirements (in this Pahlavi text) are set forth in a ft. in *Part Two: Asha & the Checkmate Solution*.

³² See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

³³ See in *Part One: The Identity of the Divine*; and *Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*;

In *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*; and *A Question of Immanence*.

³⁴ See in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*; and *Did Wisdom Choose Too?*

³⁵ See *Part One: Completeness and Non-Deathness, Haurvatat/Ameretat*.

³⁶ See in *Part One: The Identity of the Divine*; and in *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*; *Asha & the Checkmate Solution*; *The Puzzle of the Singular & the Plural*; *A Question of Immanence*; *The Puzzle of Creation*; and *Did Wisdom Choose Too?*

³⁷ See *Part One: The Manthra of the Divine and the Human*, Yenghe Haatam.

³⁸ This prayer, Yy60:12, is not a part of the Gathas. It is in YAv. but must have been composed by someone who understood the Gathas well ~ encapsulating Zarathushtra's teaching of the true (correct) good order of existence (the existence of the Divine) which is 'most-good' and is his perception of the Divine, the path to the Divine, and the reward for taking that path.

³⁹ In the Gathas, the way to serve, worship, the Divine is with Its own attributes, as detailed in *Part One: Worship & Prayer*, and *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*.

⁴⁰ A discussion of the linguistics of this section (Yy60:12) as well as the translations of Taraporewala 1951 and Humbach 1991 for comparative purposes are footnoted in *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*.

