

The Angels Among Us.

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra says something ~ twice ~ that presents a mini-puzzle which ties into one of his most basic ideas ~ that of mutual, loving help.¹ But this mini puzzle shows us the idea from a slightly different perspective which I think you may like. The ideas in this chapter are given in more detail (with references) in another chapter,² but here I will keep it simple.

He speaks of **ruling at will over reward**, and **ruling at will over life**.

What does he mean by that? What is he trying to tell us? Well, let's take a look. He says,

"... When I could **rule at will over my reward**, then I would, **exercising such power**, be in the stride of the blessed one [*hudānaoš* the 'good-giving one']." Y50:9 Insler 1975.

Let us first consider what he means by **reward**.

We know that the path he teaches is the path of the beneficial-sacred way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*), which is the path of truth (*aša-* factual truths, as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit), its comprehension, good thinking, (*vohu- manah-*), its beneficial-sacred embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its good rule (*vohu- xšaθra-*), its complete attainment (*haurvatāt-*) ~ the path of the qualities that make a being Divine (later called amesha spenta) ~ an incremental path of spiritual evolution, which is enabled through our experiences in mortal (material) existence. In his thought, the acquisition of w/Wisdom is experience based.

And in his thought the end result, the good **reward** for following this path is the attainment of these divine qualities completely (*haurvatāt-*), resulting in a state of being that is no longer bound by mortality ~ non-deathness (*amərətāt-*), because the perfecting process is complete.³ So the ultimate good **reward** is a state of being that is 'non-deathness' (*amərətāt-*). Hold that thought.

In another verse (Y32:15), he interchanges '**life**' for '**reward**' (in Y50:9 above) when speaking of what is ruled over at will. He says (referring to previously mentioned harmful, destructive conduct as "**these things**"),

"Because of these things, the class of Karpans [evil priests] is disappearing, and the Kavis [princes] along with those they ensnare. They shall not be brought to those who rule over life at will in the House of Good Thinking." Y32:15,

"This is equal to the best indeed [*vahištaci*] '(the) most good indeed' ..." Y32:16. Insler 1975.

vahišta- 'most good' is intrinsic goodness in the superlative degree.

Now in the Gathas, the **house of good thinking**, and the **most good existence** [*vahišta- ahu-*] are 2 ways of describing the state of being which is the ultimate 'good' **reward**. A state of being that 'houses' good thinking, **is** a most-good existence ~ a state of enlightenment. And "**life**" is another (flip-side) way of saying 'non-deathness'.

So in both these instances, he speaks of the **power to rule at will over reward/life** ~ both of which include the idea of a perfected (wholly good) state of being ~ one that personifies completely, the true (correct), wholly good order of existence (*aša- vahišta-*); one that is no longer being bound by mortality (non-deathness *amərətāt-*).

Which brings us to the question: What does he mean by this phrase **rule at will over reward/life**?

Well, he does not specifically explain it. But he gives us a hint. He says that a person who exercises the **power to rule at will over reward** will be "**in the stride of the blessed one** [*hudānaoš* 'of the good-giving

one']." Y50:9. The stem word *hudānu-* which Insler translates as "blessed", is translated as "generous" by Humbach 2010, and Skjaervo in his Old Avestan Index.

hudānu- (from *hudāh-* ~ *hu-* 'good' and *dā-* 'to give' etc.) means 'good giving' when used as an adjective, and 'good giving (one)' when used as a noun. Based on the ways in which *hudāh-* is used in the Gathas, it means a loving, bountiful generosity that gives what is good.

Now ask yourself: Who is the ultimate good giving (one) [*hudānu-*]? It is the Divine, Wisdom (*mazdā-*) whose way of being is beneficial (*spənta-/spəništa-*), who personifies the true (correct) good order of existence, (*aša-*).

And what is the 'good' reward? It is the complete attainment of truth (the true (correct) good order of existence *aša-*), an order of existence that includes being beneficial, beneficent ~ generous, loving, good-giving ~ a wholly good existence, one that is no longer bound by mortality (non-deathness *amərətāt-*).

Following this line of reasoning, we see that in Y50:9, exercising the power to rule at will over reward is equated with being 'in the stride of the blessed-good-giving-one [*hudānaoš*]' ~ a perfected (wholly good) state of being that is no longer bound by mortality (life/non-deathness *amərətāt-*).

"... When I could rule at will over my reward, then I would, exercising such power, be in the stride of the blessed one [*hudānaoš* the 'good-giving one']." Y50:9, Insler 1975.

"... those who rule over life at will in the House of Good Thinking. This is equal to the best indeed [*vahištaci*] '(the) most good indeed' ..." Y32:15 ~16, Insler 1975.

Being in the stride of the blessed-good-giving-one, ties into a fundamental part of Zarathushtra's teachings ~ mutual, loving help (good giving) between the Divine and man and all the living ~ so fundamental indeed, that it was remembered across the millennia even into Pahlavi times. The Pahlavi High Priest Zadsparam wrote that 'mutual assistance' is one of the three requirements for perfecting existence.⁴

Following this line of reasoning, I speculate that in times of need, when mortal existence ~ individual or collective ~ seems overwhelmed by difficulties, and needs help, perfected (wholly good) souls who are part of the Divine (a plurality that is a union), have the power to rule over their non-deathness (reward/life) at will ~ they are not bound by their non-deathness. They have the power at will to assume ordinary mortal existence (not as Superman!) to help us when we cannot see our way, or are paralyzed by fear, or (for whatever reasons) cannot break the stranglehold of what is false, wrong, harmful.

And I speculate that such help may occur in many ways. It may occur once in a thousand or more years in ways that influence millions of people (as with the founders of many good religions), and it also occurs continuously, millions of times, in small ways that may help only a few, or even just one person who is going through a dark night of the soul and needs a hand.

The poet Francis Thompson, expressed the idea that there is a continuous traffic of 'angels' between earth and 'heaven', to help in times of need ~ their "ancient places" are not in some stratosphere isolated from the rest of existence. These angels are fragments of the Divine. Their "ancient places" are right where they are needed. In his poem *No Strange Land*, he says,

"... The angels keep their ancient places ~
Turn but a stone and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.
But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry ~ and upon thy so sore loss

Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross. ...".

If we set aside Francis Thompson's terminology, his imagery captures what I am trying to express (and what I see in the Gathas) ~ a continuous traffic of (fragments of) perfected, light filled Being who ~ **ruling at will** over non-deathness (**reward/life**) take on ordinary mortal form, with all its limitations, in order to continue to help those of us who are drowning in difficulties, and need a hand to make it ~ whether the need is that of nations, or communities, or a family, or one individual soul. The continuous traffic of help is all around us (even though we often are unaware of this 'many-splendoured thing').

If this is so, then the end of the evolutionary process for a soul ~ a perfected (wholly good) state of being ~ is not an end. Enlightened (perfected) being(s) continue to be involved in the work of perfecting existence as a whole, through loving help.

As I understand Zarathushtra's thought, we all ~ perfected and unperfected ~ are still part of one existence. In the Gathas, achieving completeness, wholeness, (*haurvatāt*-) occurs at both an individual and a collective level.⁵ No one makes it until everyone makes it. So each of us ~ the perfected and unperfected parts of existence ~ continue to give and receive mutual, loving help in 1,001 ways, large and small, until everyone makes it.

But the key word here is 'help'. The angels among us do not deprive us of the freedom to choose. Nor can they act for us. We still have to think, speak, act, ourselves. The freedom to choose (and make mistakes through which we learn) is as essential to spiritual growth as mutual, loving help.⁶

For us unperfected beings, making good choices is sometimes difficult. It sometimes requires a lot of courage, and sometimes results in grief, hardship, loss, difficulties (short term). But each good choice helps to bring about truth (the true (correct), good order of existence *aša*-) ~ a quality of the Divine. Each truthful, good, loving choice brings the Divine to life in ourselves and in our world. That is how we (incrementally) heal existence ~ ourselves, other life forms, the environment.

In so doing we join the angels among us. As part time angels? Well ... yes. But all on the way to full time!

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¹ Zarathushtra's notion of mutual, loving help is detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*; and *A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*; and other chapters.

² Detailed in *Part Three: Chinvat, The Bridge of Discerning*.

³ Detailed in *Part Two: A Question Of Reward & The Path*.

⁴ Referenced and quoted in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*.

⁵ Detailed in *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*.

⁶ Detailed in *Part One: The Freedom To Choose*; and *A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*.