

Ahura Mazda's Kids ? Dispelling Myths.

Did God create man in God's image and likeness? (In which case God's form would be human-like).

Or did man create God in man's image and likeness? (In which case God's form would be human-like).

Ancient deities known to history, like those of Greece, Rome, Scandanavia, etc., were human-like in form, but more powerful, and (like humans) were a mix of beneficial and harmful qualities. Their chief deities often were male, Zeus, Jupiter, Odin, etc. And many had multiple children a number of which had human mothers.

It gave elevated status to a person who could say they had a God for a parent.

I have been informed that postings have been circulating on the internet that *spənta- armaiti-* as well as "Ashishwang", are Ahura Mazda's daughters. And even so eminent a scholar as Skjaervo, in his Old Avestan Index (updated to May 2022) describes *armaiti-* as "genius/goddess of the earth and Ahura Mazda's daughter (and wife)."

So what's going on here? Did Zarathushtra himself say so? Or are all such ideas based on later myths? I will show you the evidence and you can decide for yourself.

Like other ancient Indo-European cultures, the deities of the culture into which Zarathushtra was born, were also human-like in form, and a mix of beneficial and harmful qualities.

Zarathushtra rejected this conception of the Divine. He did not envision the Divine in man's image and likeness, with a mix of 'good' and 'bad' qualities.

In his envisionment (*vañuhī- daēnā-*), the Divine is a Being who is wholly beneficial (without any harmful qualities); and in and of itself, has no physical body -- human or otherwise (and therefore no gender).¹

Herodotus (484 - 425 BCE) writing even as late as mid-Achaemenian times, stated that the Persians "have no images of the gods, no temples, nor altars, and consider the use of them a sign of folly...". Rawlinson translation, 1942.²

Professor Thieme (Insler's teacher) stated that in a religion such as Zarathushtra's, which knows no images or idols, the name given to a deity is of decisive importance. It is the means of revealing the personality, the nature, of the deity. A profound insight. He also explained (with evidence) that *mazdā-* is a noun 'wisdom', not an adjective 'wise'.³

Professor Moulton (Oxford) stated that "Genuine Parsism was, indeed, without images to the last."⁴

This envisionment of the Divine by Zarathushtra was so new, so different, that it captured the thought of ancient Greeks, like Pythagoras (570 BCE - 495 BCE). Old Persian Achaemenian

stone inscriptions wrote the name of the Divine as *auramazdah-* (written as one word),⁵ which more than one Greek writer turned into 'Oromazes'.

Porphry in his *Life of Pythagoras* said (referring to Pythagoras),

"These are the things he taught; but above all, to observe the truth; for this was the only thing in which humans could come close to God. For, as he learned from the Magi, God himself, whom they call Oromazes, **resembles light** with regard to his body and truth with regard to his soul." Vasunia 2007 translation, p. 144, translating from Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* 41.

A 'body' that **'resembles light'** is not a human like form.

But why **light**? Well, we humans are hardwired for the visual. We remember pictures and stories long after we might forget abstract words. Saying Wisdom's body **'resembles light'** is simply a word picture to evoke the idea of an **enlightened** Being who of itself has no physical human-like body.

Although centuries after the Gathas, in YAv. texts, *Ahura Mazda* became the standard name for the Divine, Zarathushtra himself (in the Gathas) most often calls the Divine 'Wisdom' (*mazdā-*),⁶ -- an enlightened being -- personifying the truths of mind/heart/spirit -- all that is true, good, right (*aša-* 'truth' for short). And throughout the Gathas and later texts, various forms of light, (sunlight, fire, glory, etc.) are used as word pictures (metaphors, allegories, and similes) for truth (*aša-*), its comprehension good thinking (*vohu- manah-*), and Wisdom, (who personifies these qualities).⁷

There are no conventional creation stories in the Gathas. But Zarathushtra has certain unconventional ideas, and he uses word pictures (usually metaphors/allegories),⁸ to express them.⁹

In Y44:3 he asks Wisdom (rhetorically) about who **"...was the father of truth [*aša-*] during the creation [*zqθa-* 'birthing']..."** Y44.3, Insler 1975. Avestan has no articles **'the', 'a'**. And Insler's translation of *zqθa-* words as **"creation"** is interpretive (revealing a biblical mind-set). Professional linguists including Insler agree that *zqθa-* literally means **'to birth'**.¹⁰

But **fathers** do not give **birth**. So we know that both **'father'** and **'birthing'** are word pictures (an allegory and a metaphor), which are used to evoke an idea -- Wisdom generates truth (continuously -- not in a one-shot event suggested by using **"creation"** and **'the'**).

Similarly, Zarathushtra says **"...I know [*mazdā-* 'Wisdom']...to be the Father of effective good thinking (*vohu- manah-*). And His daughter is [*ārmaiti-* 'embodied truth'] of good actions..."** Y45:4, Insler 1975.

If the Divine is a being with no physical body (as Zarathushtra envisioned), It could not father literal, physical children. And in these verses, Wisdom fathers qualities -- truth, its comprehension good thinking, its embodiment in thought, word and action. So we know that in both these verses, Zarathushtra uses **"father"** and **"birthing"** as a word pictures (an allegory and a metaphor) to express the idea that Wisdom generates truth (Y44:3) as well as an

understanding of truth (good thinking *vohu- manah-*) and its embodiment in action *ārmaiti-* (Y45:4).

In the Gathas, these three qualities truth (*aša-*), good thinking (*vohu- manah-*), and beneficial-sacred embodied truth (*spənta- ārmaiti-*) are described numerous times as concepts, and as qualities of the Divine which Wisdom possesses (completely), and mortals possess (incompletely). So it is easy to see that when (a few times) Zarathushtra addresses these three qualities as persons, they are not living beings, but allegories -- images that stand for concepts, qualities.¹¹

The Statue of Liberty is an allegory -- the image of a lady with a torch standing for the idea of liberty. The statue of Justice is an allegory -- the image of a blindfolded woman holding a perfectly balanced pair of scales, standing for Justice, which is impartial (the balanced scales), and does not give special favors to anyone (the blindfold). Ancient stories and poetry are full of such word pictures (allegories), and the Gathas are ancient poems. Here is an example of Zarathushtra addressing truth and *ārmaiti-* as (allegorical) persons (and here, good thinking is a quality/concept).

"Give, o truth, this reward, namely, the attainments of good thinking. Give thou o [*ārmaiti-* 'embodied truth'], power to Vishtaspa and to me..." Y28:7, Insler 1975.

If we look past the image of truth and *ārmaiti-* as persons, what does this quotation tell us? What ideas do these images stand for?

Well, for truth, the idea is that when we search for truth (the path), we incrementally understand truth, comprehend truth -- an understanding that is good thinking, (the reward); so the reward for truth is truth itself.

For *ārmaiti-* 'embodied truth', the idea is that embodying (or personifying) truth in thought, word and action, gives a person power in both existences -- material and spiritual. In the Gathas, real power is not physical, coercive, dominating. Real power comes from attaining the qualities of the Divine, one of which is *spənta- ārmaiti-* 'beneficial-sacred embodied (or personified) truth'.¹²

So it is easy to understand that when Zarathushtra uses word pictures (images) about the 'fatherhood' of Wisdom, and Its 'children', he is simply expressing the idea that the Divine (Wisdom) generates (births) these divine qualities (truth, its comprehension, its embodiment).

However, no place in the Gathas does Zarathushtra mention any 'wife' of Wisdom (*mazdā-*) -- not even metaphorically.

Centuries after Zarathushtra, the composers of many Younger Avestan (YAv.) texts combined the worship of Ahura Mazda and many pre-Zarathushtrian and other deities who were human-like in form.¹³ (In the Gathas, Wisdom alone is worshipped -- these other deities are not even mentioned by name -- only generically and in a way that is far from complimentary). The composers of such later texts, with their mind-set of the deities as human-like, focused on the word pictures of Wisdom 'fathering' truth, good thinking and *ārmaiti-*, and forgot (or

abandoned) the idea for which these word pictures stood, resulting in the myth that these Divine qualities were the physical sons and daughter of *Ahura Mazda* -- a myth that reverted to a pre-Zarathushtrian notion of the Divine as human-like. In so doing, these composers of the YAv. texts forgot (or abandoned) one of the things Zarathushtra was famous for in ancient times (even among the Greeks) -- his new conception of the Divine as a being who is Wisdom personified, truth personified, without physical, human-like form.

In YAv. texts, 6 qualities of the Divine (even those that are not described as allegories in the Gathas) were thought of as living (human-like) beings; (the 7th -- the beneficial way of being *spənta- mainyu-* -- was equated with Ahura Mazda's way of being, as it is in the Gathas). And various concepts in Zarathushtra's thought (none of which are allegories in the Gathas), also became personified human-like images that were worshipped with extensive (and expensive) rituals.

Why did this happen?

Perhaps for more than one reason. Let us consider a few of them.

First: One of the problems with allegories (images that stand for ideas), is that with the passage of centuries, the image remains, but the idea behind the image is forgotten. And by the time of the YAv. texts, Zarathushtra was already an ancient, almost legendary figure, who (according to such YAv. texts) lived in *Airyana Vaejah* -- the original homeland of the Aryas.¹⁴

Opinions differ regarding Zarathushtra's date, but based on the evidence of the Gathas themselves, as well as archeological and other factual evidence, I think that Zarathushtra could not have lived much before 2,000 BCE, nor later than 1,700 BCE.¹⁵ And indeed, in Skjaervo's opinion, the time period of the Old Avestan texts (including the Gathas), and Younger Avestan texts was as follows:

1,700 to 1,200 BCE composition of the Old Avestan texts;

1,200 to 900 BCE transition period;

900 to 400 BCE composition of the Young Avestan texts.¹⁶

If Skjaervo is even close, the YAv. texts would have been composed anywhere between 500 to 1,300 years after Zarathushtra composed the Gathas.

Second: When we humans are in need, or simply want something very much, we tend to ask the Divine for help. And human beings often find it easier to pray for help, or otherwise to relate to, a Being that is like us. (For example, Catholics might pray to a favorite saint). And I think that centuries after Zarathushtra, in YAv. texts, this very human quality played a part in portraying the *aməša- spənta-* and other personified concepts, as living beings.

Third: Before Zarathushtra, the 'deities' of his culture were the spiritual essences of important material things (like water), or important material concepts (like *mithra* 'contract'). This has been detailed and explained in another chapter.¹⁷

The YAv. culture was much given to personifying concepts -- even those that are not allegories in the Gathas. For example: One of Zarathushtra's core ideas, expressed in 1,001 beautiful ways

in the Gathas is that the reward for truth is truth itself -- a wholly 'good reward'.¹⁸ There is no personification of 'reward' in the Gathas -- not even as an allegory.¹⁹

But in YAv. texts, this 'good reward' became personified -- a living being called *Ashi Vanguhi* (which means 'Good Reward' in Avestan), and was praised, and worshipped in the *Ashi Yasht* specifically dedicated to her alone in which she is more beautiful than any movie star, and very powerful. Zarathushtra's beautiful, original idea (the reward for truth is truth itself) was forgotten -- at least it is not mentioned in the *Ashi Yasht*, which portrays *Ashi Vanguhi* as giving many good rewards to the man who worships her with offerings. These good rewards included a few abstract qualities in passing (such as "intelligence", "foremost in Asha" etc.) -- but the vast majority were material rewards -- horses, camels, "stores of food", houses, perfumes, beautiful wives loaded with jewels, beautiful daughters with slim waists, "hordes of silver and gold brought together from far distant regions", etc.²⁰

I think these factors -- the Avestan cultural mind-set of personifying concepts, as well as the very human mind-set of feeling more comfortable with an object of worship that resembles ourselves -- contributed to the popularity of the 7 qualities of the Divine, being thought of as living beings, collectively called *aməša- spənta-* in YAv. texts. But there were other (less innocent) factors involved, which essentially turned the original Zarathushtrian envisionment of the Divine into a henotheistic pantheon of multiple deities (all to be worshipped with rituals), in which Ahura Mazda was only the chief deity -- and sometimes paired with Mithra as an equal.²¹ Let us consider these (less innocent) factors.

The composers of the YAv. texts introduced *Ashi Vanguhi* personified 'Good Reward' as a female deity to be worshipped -- female because the Avestan word for 'reward' is *aši-* -- a grammatically fem. noun. (The concept of 'reward' has no intrinsic gender). This new female deity became a new source for incentivising expensive rituals and ritual offerings.

"... I will offer her a sacrifice worthy of being heard ... We sacrifice unto Ashi Vanguhi with the libations; with the Haoma and meat, with the baresma, with the wisdom of the tongue, with the holy spells, with the words, with the deeds, with the libations, and with the rightly-spoken words." *Ashi Yasht*, 17:3, Darmesteter translation.²²

And her worshippers were promised that this goddess, *Ashi Vanguhi* would in return give them extravagant material gifts.

There was just one problem: This goddess *Ashi Vanguhi* 'Good Reward' was a new (YAv.) invention (a new kid on the block). She did not have an ancient Indo-Iranian or other heritage, which would give credibility to the idea that she was powerful enough to dispense material rewards to those who paid out good money to worship her through expensive rituals. So the priestly establishment, which wished to promote this new source of revenue, dedicated a separate *Yasht* to her which did a number of things:

Trading on the popularity of Zarathushtra, this *Yasht* has *Ashi Vanguhi* saying:

"Who art thou who dost invoke me, whose voice is to my ear the sweetest of all that invoked me most?"

And he said aloud: 'I am Spitama Zarathushtra ...'²³

And (in a character totally unlike what we see in the Gathas) the composers of the *Ashi Yasht* have Zarathushtra bragging about how great he is, and how afraid of him the Chief Devil (Angra Mainyu) is, whereupon the goddess invites him to "lean against my chariot" and proceeds to flirt with him (at least in Darmesteter's translation).²⁴

Trading on the popularity of Ahura Mazda and other popular deities, the composers of this *Yasht* endowed *Ashi Vanguhi* with a pantheon of powerful relatives. She is called:

- the daughter of *Ahura Mazda* (twice), described as "the greatest of all gods",²⁵
- the sister of all the *aməša- spənta*-,²⁶
- the sister of Mithra,²⁷ (a powerful YAv. deity of Indo-Iranian origins, sometimes mentioned in other YAv. texts, together with Ahura Mazda as an equal),
- the sister of Sraosha,²⁸ (personified 'listening' to Wisdom's teachings who in the YAv. *Yasnas* is depicted as a powerful martial hero, a formidable fighter against evil, and a protector of the needy),
- with *ārmaiti*- as her mother,²⁹ and
- "thy sister is the Law of the worshippers of Mazda [*x vanha. daēna. māzdayesniš.*]."³⁰

In the Gathas, *daēnā*- means 'envisionment', and there is 'good' *daēnā*- and 'bad' *daēnā*-. But over the centuries, the meaning of the word evolved so that by the time of the YAv. texts the meaning of *daēna*- came to mean the religion itself -- the Wisdom-worshipping religion,³¹ (what Darmesteter translates as "**the Law [*daēna*] of the worshippers of Mazda**").

Obviously, a religion (or a Law) cannot be a physical sister, sired by a physical father. But if Ashi's 'sister' -- the Wisdom-worshipping religion -- is not a physical sister, the question arises: Were all these other eminent family relationships also either allegories, or idiomatic figures of speech? (Like a shopkeeper in rural India (in the 1950s) saying to a prospective customer "you are my mother (and my) father" -- indicating, that he is being as honest with the customer (about the price, quality, etc. of his goods) as he would be with his own parents).

If (as the *Ashi Yasht* states) the Wisdom-worshipping religion was the 'sister' of this (new) deity *Ashi Vanguhi*, it would be reasonable to conclude that the other family relationships in the *Ashi Yasht* would not have been actual, physical relationships, but were likewise idiomatic figures of speech (or allegories).

One can see how the idea of *Ashi Vanguhi* as personified Good Reward, may have originated, because in the Gathas, the end result of spiritual evolution is to personify completely, truth and its component parts -- its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule, (all qualities of the Divine). So each of us, when our spiritual evolution is complete, will personify (as living

being) the good reward, which is truth -- the true, wholly good order of existence (*aṣa-*) which is the wholly beneficial way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*).

But the composers of the *Ashi Yasht* had lost their way. There is very little that is spiritual in *Ashi Vanguhi*, or that reflects Zarathushtra's teachings in her Yasht which depicts her as a very beautiful and powerful goddess, related to other powerful, well known deities -- a goddess who dispensed material rewards in return for expensive rituals.

I have been informed that the following quotation has appeared on the internet (written by a Zoroastrian).

"Mino Ashishwangh is the daughter of Pak Dadar Ahura Mazda and the sister of Vakshure Vakshuran Zarathustra Paigambar, such is the high stature of this Yazad."

If indeed (as this posting states) "Ashishwangh" was the daughter of *Ahura Mazda* and the sister of Zarathushtra, that would make Zarathushtra the son of Ahura Mazda. There is nothing even remotely like *any* of this in the Gathas.

I think the *Ashi Vanguhi* 'Good Reward' of the later Avestan texts may have been the "Ashishwangh" of such internet postings. A myth that arose many centuries after Zarathushtra's time period, and had nothing to do with his teachings.

But we should be aware of one thing. In later Avestan and Pahlavi texts, the religion was not one monolithic belief system. True, much of these later texts express ideas and belief systems that are far removed from the Gathas, and indeed often contrary to them, (and sometimes quite awful). But hidden within these later texts, are little gems which could only have been expressed by those who loved, and knew well, various parts of Zarathushtra's teachings, and cared enough about them to want to keep them alive, and pass them on to others. These little gems (though few and far between) indicate that down through the millennia, at least some of Zarathushtra's beautiful thoughts were understood, remembered, loved, practiced, and kept alive by dear, good souls who (as the composers of such texts) were probably priests. I value, and am grateful to, everyone of them.

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¹ Detailed in 2 chapters in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine; and The Identity Of The Divine*.

² Quoting Herodotus in *The Persian Wars*, as translated by George Rawlinson (Random House 1942), page 73.

³ Thieme, *Reflections on the Vocabulary of Zarathushtra's Gathas*, in *Proceedings of the First Gatha Colloquium*, 1993 (WZO, 1998), page 201.

⁴ Moulton 1912, *EZ*, Lecture 2, p. 67.

⁵ Detailed in *Part Three: Evolution Of The Names Mazda, Ahura*.

⁶ Detailed in *Part Three: Evolution of the Name(s) Mazda, Ahura*.

⁷ Detailed in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.

⁸ Metaphors and similes are both figures of speech in which images (word pictures) are not intended to be taken literally, but are used to evoke an impression, or stand for an idea. The difference between them is that a simile *likens* one thing to another (*her eyes resemble starlight*); whereas a metaphor uses the image directly to evoke an impression (*her eyes are starlight*); or stand for an idea (*to understand him, we have to walk in his shoes*). An allegory is a type of metaphor in which a figure or form (often human) is used to stand for an idea or concept, like the beautiful Greek sculpture, the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*. An allegory is an extended metaphor.

⁹ Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of Creation*.

¹⁰ Insler 1975, p. 233, commenting under Y43:5.

¹¹ Detailed in the following chapters in *Part One*:
Truth, Asha,
Good Thinking, Vohu Manah, and
Beneficial-Sacred Embodied Truth, Spenta Aramaiti.

¹² Detailed in *Part Two: A Question Of Power*.

¹³ Detailed in *Part Four: The Syncretization*.

¹⁴ References to, and examples from, YAv. texts in which Zarathushtra was deemed an ancient, almost legendary figure are given and discussed in *Part Four: Zarathushtra's Date & Place*.

¹⁵ Detailed in *Part Four: Zarathushtra's Date & Place*.

¹⁶ Skjaervo, *Introduction To Old Avestan*, (updated to Feb. 24, 2022), p. xii.

¹⁷ Detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*.

¹⁸ Detailed in *Part Two: A Question Of Reward & The Path*.

¹⁹ There is no personification of 'reward' in the Gathas (not even as an allegory) in the Insler 1975 translation which linguistically is less interpretive than other translations (even though he does sometimes translate (and interpret) through a biblical mind-set). The problem is that many eminent translators tend to translate words in the Gathas in the ways such words have been translated in YAv. texts, without looking at all the evidence of how *all* instances of a given word is used in the Gathas, and without considering how the meanings of such words evolved over the many centuries between the Gathas and the YAv. texts. Examples are detailed in the following chapters in *Part Three: Daena; and Xratu; and Ratu; and Seraosha*.

²⁰ Detailed in the *Ashi Yasht*, SBE 23, pp. 270 et seq., in the following sections: The translation is by Darmesteter. In return for worship:

-- § 6 The houses she comes to are "full of perfumes."

-- § 7 The men whom she attends "are kings of kingdoms, that are rich in horses, with large tributes, with snorting horses, sounding chariots, flashing swords, rich in aliments and in stores of food; well-scented where the beds are spread and full of all the other riches that may be wished for."

-- § 8 The men whom she attends "have houses that stand well laid up, rich in cattle, foremost in Asha, and long-supported."

-- §§ 9 - 11 The man whom she attends has opulent beds, "with feet inlaid with gold" ... whose wife, wait for him eagerly, adorned with "square bored ear-rings, and a necklace of gold ..." and has daughters who are "thin-waisted" and beautiful "as fair of shape as those who look on can wish."

-- §§ 12 - 14 The men whom she attends have swift horses, battle chariots, sharp and long spears, swift arrows, "who hits his aim, pursuing after his enemies, and smiting his foes" and also has "large-humped, burden-bearing camels" who also fight "with holy fierceness" and has "hordes of silver and gold brought together from far distant regions; and garments of splendid make." p. 273.

²¹ Detailed in *Part Four: The Syncretization*.

²² *Ashi Yasht*, 17:3, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, p. 271.

²³ *Ashi Yasht*, 17:17 - 18, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, p. 274.

²⁴ *Ashi Yasht*, 17:18 - 22, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, pp. 274 - 275.

²⁵ In the *Ashi Yasht*: Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, pp. 270, 274.

§ 2 [referring to *Ashi Vanguhi*] "The daughter of Ahura Mazda, ..."

§ 16 [referring to *Ashi Vanguhi*] "Thy father is Ahura Mazda, the greatest of all gods, ..."

²⁶ *Ashi Yasht*: § 2, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, pp. 270

²⁷ *Ashi Yasht*: § 16, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, pp. 274

²⁸ *Ashi Yasht*: § 16, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, pp. 274

²⁹ *Ashi Yasht*: § 16, Darmesteter translation, SBE 23, pp. 274

³⁰ Avestan words from Geldner, *Ard Yasht*, § 16, 2P p. 234. The titles of Yashts are in Pahlavi, but the Yashts themselves are in YAv.

³¹ Detailed in *Part Three: Daena*.