

Does Animal Sacrifice Exist In Avestan Texts?

One of the creation myths in the Pahlavi *Bundahishn*, recounts that many life forms ~ plants, animals, birds, fish ~ were generated by a mythical primeval cow/ox.¹ The full story originally may (or may not) have been allegorical, but I will not get into that here. The *Bundahishn* (and other Pahlavi texts) also say that we,

"... changed from the shape of a plant into the shape of man, ..." *Bundahishn* Ch. 15, §§ 4 - 5, E.W. West translation).²

These ideas are not expressed in the Gathas. But they demonstrate that the mind-set of that ancient culture included the view that all living things are connected. A view that we find in the Gathas, in which Zarathushtra (expressly and impliedly) links divine qualities with multiple aspects of the material existence ~ indicating a mind-set that associates the divine with all that exists. This idea is echoed in the Younger Avestan *Farvardin Yasht*, which speaks of worshipping/celebrating, the *fravaši*- (the Divine),³ within all things,

"... tame animals, ... wild animals, ... animals that live in the water, animals that live under the ground, ... the flying ones, ... the running ones, ... the grazing ones. We worship [*yazamaide*] their Fravashis (§74).⁴

... That of the sky, that of the waters, that of the earth, that of plants, ..." (§86), Darmesteter translation.⁵

If ancient Zoroastrians in Avestan times believed that animals had fravashis (the Divine within), do you think they would have tried to please the Divine by inflicting on animals the pain and terror of ritual slaughter?

There is no ancient Avestan text (composed in Avestan times, and published in SBE) which actually *describes* the ritual slaughtering of any animal. Moreover, the ritual slaughter of an animal as part of an act of worship would require an altar. But Herodotus (484 - 425 BCE) in recounting how the Persians worshipped, states that they have no altars, nor even temples.⁶ Rock carvings of Achaemenian kings at worship (who professed to worship *auramazdah*-), show them worshipping before fire stands. There are no altars with animals being slaughtered in these carvings.

Let us look at the textual evidence, starting with the oldest surviving Avestan text ~ the Gathas.

Zarathushtra speaks of worshipping the Divine with Its Own qualities.

"Yes, praising, I shall always worship [*yazāi*] ... you, [*mazdā- ahura-* 'Wisdom, Lord,], with truth and the very best thinking and with their rule..." Y50:4, Insler 1975.

"I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers [*ārmatōiš* 'of embodied truth], ..." Y45:10, Insler 1975. So this verse tells us that thoughts, words and actions that embody truth, are Zarathushtra's idea of worship and the way to glorify Wisdom.

And Zarathushtra uses certain ritual food-offerings of his culture ~ milk (*īžā-*), butter (*āzūiti-*), bread/cake (*draonah-*) ~ as metaphors for how we nourish the Divine with Its own qualities, thereby strengthening It, making the divine in existence increase.⁷

"But that man, [*mazdā-* 'Wisdom'], is both milk [*īžā-*] and butter [*āzūiti-*] (for Thee) namely, the one who has allied his conception [*daēnā-* 'envisionment'] with good thinking. ... Y49:5, Insler 1975. Here, a person who is committed to comprehending truth (which is *good thinking* ~ a divine quality) is called milk and butter ~ ritual offerings intended to (symbolically) nourish Wisdom.

"... Your enduring worshipful offering [*draonah*- ritual bread/cake] has been established to be [*aməratāt*- 'non-deathness'] and completeness [*haurvatāt*-]." Y33:8, Insler 1975. Here, our own self-realization (the complete attainment of truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule ~ an existence no longer bound by mortality) is the worshipful offering [*draonah*-] that Wisdom wants.

The Gathas do not mention any meat offerings ~ not even as a metaphor. Nor do they describe any rituals, let alone the ritual slaughter of animals, a practice which Zarathushtra condemns. He says,

"Even the Kavis [princes, rulers,] have continually fixed their intentions on capturing and plundering the riches of this world, since they have begun to aid [*drəgvantəm* 'what is) untruthful'] and to say: 'The cow is to be killed (for him) who has been kindling the Haoma'." Y32:14, Insler 1975.⁸

However as centuries passed, the worship of pre- and post-Zarathushtrian deities became syncretized with Zarathushtra's envisionment (the worship of wisdom/Wisdom ~ *mazdayasna*-).⁹

During Younger Avestan (YAv.) times, worship once again became highly ritualized, and YAv. worship chants show that meat was included in the food-offerings for these deities.¹⁰ Even so, there is no description or mention of slaughtering animals as part of any ritual. So this ritual 'meat' could equally have been meat from an animal slaughtered for human consumption, a choice part of which was set aside for an offering to a particular named deity. These food offerings (after they had been ritually offered to the deity), may have been consumed by the priests ~ just as the (non-meat) foods in the *jashan* ceremony are consumed today by the priest and also those who attend this ritual.

Here is a typical description of ritual offerings in YAv. texts. The deity Anahita says,

"... Who will offer me a sacrifice [*kō yazāite*], with libations cleanly prepared and well-strained, together with the Haoma and meat ? ..." *Aban Yasht*, § 8, Darmesteter translation, in SBE 23, p. 55; Avestan words transliterated from Geldner 2P p. 83.

Here the description of worship does not describe (or mention) any ritual killing of animals. So the translation choice *sacrifice* ~ a ritual killing ~ is not supported by the context; *yazāite* is a grammatical form of the verb stem *yaz*- 'to worship'. In this context, the YAv. phrase *kō yazāite* is more accurately translated as 'who worships (me) ...'.¹¹

Other typical descriptions of YAv. rituals also include "bundles of baresma" ~ a type of plant.

Over time however, these ritual offerings came to include not only food, but also wealth. In that ancient culture, herds of domestic animals were wealth. And in many *Yashts* (repeated almost verbatim), various legendary heroes supposedly offered large herds of domestic animals to a named deity to obtain their wishes for success, power, victory over enemies, et cetera (thus purportedly attributing the success for which a given hero was famous, to the named deity honored in each such *Yasht*). Here is an example involving Yima (Jamsheed) from the *Aban Yasht* (which is about the deity Anahita).¹²

"To her did Yima Kshaeta, the good shepherd, offer up a sacrifice from the height Hukairya [a mountain] with a hundred male horses, a thousand oxen, ten thousand lambs. He begged of her a boon, saying: 'Grant me this, ... that I may become the sovereign lord of all countries ...' Ardvi Sura Anahita granted him that boon, as he was offering libations, giving gifts, sacrificing, ..." *Aban Yasht*, §§ 25 - 27, Darmesteter translation.¹³

When I first read these passages, I assumed (with great disgust) that "offer up a sacrifice" and "sacrificing" meant the ritual slaughter of these animals. But a moment's reflection makes it apparent, that the ritual slaughter of such large herds could not have been intended for the following reasons.

In those ancient communities, neither the priests nor even the entire tribal village would have been able to consume 11,100 slaughtered domestic animals at one go. And if they were ritually slaughtered, but not eaten, how would they have disposed of 11,100 carcasses?

Domestic animals were vital to survival. People could not have survived if such huge numbers were slaughtered (repeatedly! ~ with each hero's request).

Even just gifting a deity with 11,100 animals (without slaughter), would have impoverished any chieftain or ruler, however wealthy. Horses especially were an indispensable part of any ruler's army ~ essential to his retaining power, in an age when tribal warfare was endemic (as the YAv. texts show). And not all the named persons who (supposedly) offered such huge herds were rulers.

So these numbers and herds may simply have been a way of expressing large numbers ~ representing the hopes of the priests (who composed these chants), because they would have been the recipients of the gifts of such living herds (read wealth) in behalf of the deity.

In short, the notion that the *Yashts* describe the sacrificial slaughter of thousands of animals, is simply not supported ~ neither by the Avestan words of any text, nor by the contexts in which they are used, nor by reality.

You may well wonder: If there are no descriptions (nor even any mentions) of animals being ritually slaughtered in YAv. texts, why have excellent scholars translated Avestan worship words (*yaz-* related and other worship words) as 'sacrifice'?

There is no dispute that the Avestan verb stem *yaz-* and its related nouns, mean 'worship'. They have been so translated by many professional linguists in Old Avestan and YAv. texts. But *yaz-* related (and other worship) words have also been translated ~ routinely ~ as 'sacrifice', by Darmesteter 1884, Humbach 1991, Humbach/Faiss 2010, Skjaervo (and others).¹⁴

So yes, we have to wonder: Why?

In the vocabulary of worship, a 'sacrifice' means killing an animal as an offering to a deity. And such sacrifices ~ killing animals ~ were indeed a way to worship in many ancient cultures. So it is possible that in translating *yaz-* related (and other worship) words as 'sacrifice', these translators assumed that the ancient ritual practice of killing animals continued to prevail in Zarathushtra's envisionment [*daēnā-*] and in the syncretized religion of the Younger Avestan texts, without looking to see if such assumptions are supported by the evidence of Avestan texts themselves. With respect, they are not so supported.

The Avestan notion of worship includes a joyful celebration, as Humbach came to recognize. In 2010, (in his updated translation of the Gathas and other Old Avestan texts) he translated *yaz-* related words sometimes as 'worship', sometimes as 'sacrifice', and sometimes as 'celebrate',¹⁵ ~ without there being anything in the context of any particular verse to justify the selection 'sacrifice' ~ the killing of an animal as part of a ritual.

I am immensely grateful to *all* linguists who have expended so much time and effort to decode Avestan, motivated by a love of knowledge for its own sake. Without their work, Zarathushtra's own words would not now be available to us. But we should not blindly accept interpretive translation choices without question, especially since linguists themselves often do not agree.

Even more important: Such interpretive translations, reflecting personal opinions (and other religious paradigms!) unsupported by Avestan words, or the context of a given text, illustrate a problem we face. The Zarathushti community, needs to develop amongst its members, cutting edge knowledge of the Avestan

language and Indo-Iranian philology (from up to date, state of the art, professional Indo-Iranian philologists).

If we do not, the continued decoding of Avestan, as well as such knowledge of the Avestan language to the extent it already has been decoded, will once again be lost to us, as professional Indo-Iranian philologists retire or depart this life ~ which is currently happening. And equally important, if we do not acquire such cutting edge knowledge of Avestan, we will forever be dependent on translations/interpretations that are unsupported by the contexts of ancient texts, that conflict with Zarathushtra's teachings, and indeed reflect other religious paradigms (or that are linguistically faulty) ~ without even being aware of such problems. And Zarathushtra's magnificent teachings will become lost to us (although we still may call ourselves 'Zoroastrians'). I have footnoted some ideas on how such knowledge of Avestan can be fostered and developed in the Zarathushti community, to prevent such a catastrophe from occurring.¹⁶

There is another aspect of how other life forms, the environment, indeed existence as a whole, factor into Zarathushtra's way of worshipping the Divine.

In the Gathas, the links (whether as metaphors, or symbols, or allegories) between qualities of the Divine and various aspects of the material existence ~ other life forms, the natural elements ~ are kaleidoscopic. By Pahlavi times, these links had become rigid ~ one to one ~ and each quality of the Divine was then believed to be a living angel-like entity who cared for the aspect of the material existence with which it was linked.

A *Pahlavi Fragment* text states that we should make these entities (amesha spenta) happy by taking care of the aspect of the material existence under the given entity's care. By Pahlavi times, their understanding of creatures to be cared for by good thinking (Pahlavi *Vohuman*) had shrunk to "the well-yeilding cattle" (a homocentric view), but still worthwhile, as a step in the right direction. And I was touched by the advice of the author of this text. He says,

"9. Whoever wishes to propitiate Vohuman in the world, and wishes to act for his happiness, is he who wishes to promote the things of Vohuman; ... the well-yeilding cattle ... and should act for their happiness; in the terrible days and the hurried times... which befall them, he should afford them protection from the oppressive and idle.

10. He should not give them as a bribe to ... a wicked tyrant, but should keep them in a pleasant and warm ... place; ... he should provide them a store of straw and corn, so that it be not necessary to keep them on the pastures in winter; ... he should not drive them apart from their young, and should not put the young apart from their milk." *Fragment Text*, §§ 9, 10, E. W. West translation.¹⁷

I feel a deep sense of admiration, gratitude, affection, for this unknown author who, despite not having the benefit of Zarathushtra's own words, despite living "in the terrible days" of his time period, nevertheless clung to such teachings as were passed down to him ~ trying to *live* his beliefs (with courage!), and record them for the benefit of others.

Today, Zarathushtis in India and in diaspora are no longer persecuted, although sadly certain forms of discrimination and persecution are still very much a reality in Iran. But we are so lucky that once again we have Zarathushtra's own words. Even though (approximately) only 80 + % of the Avestan language has been decoded, Zarathushtra's words are enabling us to move past the restrictions in thinking caused by so much loss of knowledge, and discover once again his inclusive, holistic thought.

He tells us to use our good thinking (*vohu- manah-* the comprehension of truth), to heal ~ not just cattle, not even just all living things, but existence as a whole, from all that is ignorant, false, wrong. In the Gathas, good thinking (*vohu- manah-*) is used in ways that include more than just intellectual functions. Its meaning includes the full spectrum of conscious capabilities ~ intellectual, emotional, creative, et cetera.¹⁸

So we become existence-healers (*ahūm.biš*) by using our minds/hearts/spirits, (*vohu- manah-*) to search for and understand, the many-splendored faces of truth ~ factual truths, scientific truths, emotional truths, social truths, spiritual truths ~ truth in all its enlightening glory, and translate that understanding into words and actions. Indeed, that is how Zarathushtra describes a *saoshyant* a 'savior'.¹⁹ This healing of existence needs to be brought about, not just by the Divine, but also by all the living ~ through truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule ~ a rule that serves ("... One chooses that rule of good thinking allied with truth in order to serve ..." Y51:18, Insler 1975).

As Zarathushtra says,

"... Through good thinking
the [*dātā* 'Giver'] of existence shall promote the true realization
of what is most healing according to our wish."
Y50:11, Insler 1975;

"... By your rule, Lord, Thou shalt truly heal this world in accord with our wish."
Y34:15, Insler 1975.

(Wisdom's rule is the rule of truth, its comprehension, its embodiment in thought, word and action
(Y51:4).

"...the loving man ...
[*spənta-* 'beneficial'] through truth [*aša-*],
watching over the heritage for all,
is a world-healer [*ahūm.biš* 'existence-healer']
and Thy ally in [*mainyu-* '(his) way of being'], Wise One."
Y44:2, Insler 1975.

" Therefore may we be those who shall heal this world! ..."
Y30:9, Insler 1975.

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¹ *Bundahishn*, Ch. 10 §§ 1 - 4, as translated by E. W. West in SBE 5, pp. 31 - 32.

² SBE 5, p. 54. Some of these 'creation stories' are detailed in *Part Four: Next Of Kin Marriage & The Pahlavi Texts*.

³ Moulton says,

"The Fravashi is the highest part, the divine and immortal part, of man; ..." Moulton, EZ, 1912, p. 257.

I agree. But I take it a step further. Based on the ways in which *fravaši-* is used in YAv. texts, I think it means the Divine, not just in man, but in all that exists. See *Part Three: Fravashi*.

⁴ SBE 23, pp. 197 - 198; Avestan word from Geldner 2P p. 184.

⁵ SBE 23, p. 200.

⁶ Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, as translated by George Rawlinson (Random House 1942), page 73.

⁷ Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of Worship*.

⁸ Y32:14 is a verse which professional linguists both translate and interpret very differently in many respects. The diversity of views (among professional linguists before 1951) in translating many aspects of this verse are discussed by

Taraporewala 1951 pp. 295 - 299. Here is the Insler 1975 translation/interpretation of this verse (Y32:14) in which Insler has Zarathushtra saying,

" Even the Kavis [Insler's ft. 16 "A class of rulers, the princes of the lands."] have continually fixed their intentions on capturing and plundering the riches of this world, since they have begun to aid the deceitful one [*dragvantəm* Insler's ft. 17 "The evil spirit."] and to say 'The cow [Insler's ft. 18 "Here the good vision."] is to be killed (for him) who has been kindling the Haoma [Insler's ft. 19 "The intoxicating drink which formed the sacrament in the worship of the traditional gods."]. Y32:14, Insler 1975. Insler thinks that the 'cow' in the Gathas, is frequently used as an allegory for Zarathushtra's good envisionment (*vañuhī daēnā-*), and he thinks that is how 'cow' is used here in Y32:14 ~ as an allegory for the good vision. So in his view, this verse says in effect that the (secular) rulers of the land, motivated by greed and self interest, want to kill Zarathushtra's good envisionment in order to benefit the other religion(s) of his culture, one of which was the religion of the Haoma cult (Vedic 'Soma'). As you can see, this translation includes a lot of interpretation.

The word *Haoma* is not in the Avestan text of this verse. Insler assumes that Zarathushtra intended the *Haoma* cult, but his commentary does not explain this assumption (p. 209). He may have made this assumption because (as Taraporewala 1951 explains p. 297 - 299) one of the Avestan words used in this verse *dūraošəm* "is a well-recognized epithet of Haoma in the later Av." and its Vedic cognate is associated with the Vedic 'soma' cult.

In this verse, there is no Avestan phrase "the deceitful one" which Insler thinks is "The evil spirit". The Avestan word is *dragvantəm* ~ an adjective which means 'possessing untruth' which can be used as a noun that is a concept or a noun that is a person, depending on the context (detailed in *Part Three: Ashavan & Dregvant*). In Avestan, there are no articles 'the' or 'a'. So even if we translate *dragvantəm* as 'evil one', the translation choice '(an) evil one' would mean a person who is evil, whereas '(the) evil one' could mean the devil or evil spirit ~ a translation choice which reflects an interpretation by the translator. There is no 'devil' or 'evil spirit' in the Gathas, other than translations/interpretations personal to a given translator (detailed in *Part One: Does The Devil Exist?*).

For our purposes, the two key words in this verse (Y32:14) are *gāuš jaidyāi*. Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index shows *gāuš* is nom. sg. of the masc./fem. noun stem *gao-* 'cow', 'bull'. And he shows an Old Avestan verb stem *jan-* < *gam-gan-*, and under *gan-* 'to smash, strike', he shows *jaidyāi* as its infinitive form.

Insler 1975 translates *gāuš jaidyāi* as "the cow is to be killed"; but thinks the 'cow' here is an allegory for the good vision.

Humbach 1991 translates *gāuš jaidyāi* as "let the ox be killed" (Vol. 1, p. 135; commenting in Vol. 2. p. 89).

Humbach/Faiss 2010 translate *gāuš jaidyāi* as "have the bull slaughtered" (p. 94).

Taraporewala 1951 translates *gāuš jaidyāi* as "Life [*gāuš*] has-been-doomed [*mraoī*] (by them) to-death [*jaidyāi*] p. 295.

Bartholomae, "The Ox shall be slain" (Tarap. 1951 p. 299)

Moulton 1912, "The Ox shall be slain" pp. 357 - 358.

In my view 'cow' in the Gathas, is part of a network of allegories, and stands for the beneficial-sacred in mortal existence, detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Cow & Its Network*. If that is so, then in Y32:14 (quoted above) Zarathushtra may well have intended a double entendre ~ a ritual killing of a cow, as well as the smashing, the destruction, of the beneficial in mortal existence (as we see in Y29:1), by greedy, predatory rulers who caused a great deal of suffering in Zarathushtra's society (frequently mentioned in the Gathas).

⁹ See *Part Four: The Syncretization*.

¹⁰ For example, the YAv. Yasna 11, dedicated to Haoma (a pre-Zarathushtrian Indo-Iranian deity, Ved. *Soma*), the meat offering reserved for Haoma was the tongue and left eye of the animal (Yy11:3, 4). Now this may not sound like a "choice" piece of meat set aside for a ritual offering to Haoma. But our attitudes towards foods are culturally conditioned. For example, today, the idea of eating the brain of any animal seems repulsive to me, until I remembered that as a kid growing up in a Parsi family in India, I thought a Parsi dish called *Khara Bheja* (a sheep's brain cooked gently with herbs and spices) quite delicious.

¹¹ In the YAv. phrase *kō yazāite* 'who worships (me) ...' the verb *yazāite* is 3p sg. present tense Indicative of the verb stem *yaz-* (Skjaervo Old Av. Index).

¹² The *Yashts* are in YAv. but their titles are in Pahlavi (Middle Persian).

¹³ SBE 23, pp. 59 - 60.

¹⁴ To illustrate: Skjaervo in his Old Avestan Index, translates *yaz-* related words as follows:

The verb stem *yaz-* which he says means "to sacrifice, to worship";

The noun stem *yasna-* which he says means "sacrifice, ritual";

The noun stem *yesnya-* which he says means "sacrificial performance";

¹⁵ The notion of worship in Old Avestan texts (and also in some YAv. texts like the parts of the *Tir* and *Farvardin Yashts* quoted herein) in some contexts includes the flavor of a joyful celebration (discussed in *Part One: Worship & Prayer*; and in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of Worship* (including its footnotes). Here is an example in which *celebrate* for a *yaz-* word is a good contextual fit.

The *Yasna Haptanghaiti* is in Old Avestan. It is not a part of the Gathas, but it contains some beautiful aspects of Zarathushtra's thought (as demonstrated in each of the following chapters in *Part Six: YHapt. 35:2 - 3; YHapt. 35:8; YHapt. 37:4 - 5; and YHapt. 41:2*, in their respective *Discussion* sections). Here is one example from the Old Av. *Yasna Haptanghaiti* in which 'celebrate' reflects the notion of worship as a joyful celebration (as it is in the Gathas).

YHapt.37:1 Humbach 1991 "In this way, we worship [*yazamaidē*] the Wise Ahura, who created the cow and truth, (who) created the waters and the good plants, (who) created the lights and the earth and all good (things)."

YHapt.37:1 Humbach/Faiss 2010 "Herewith we celebrate [*yazamaidē*] the Wise Lord, who created the cow and truth, (who) created the waters, (who) created the good/useful plants and the lights and the earth and all good (things)."

Each thing mentioned here (in YHapt. 37:1) was something that (with double entendre) brought joy ~ material and spiritual ~ to the people of Zarathushtra's society and therefore warranted offering the provider (the Divine) of such things a thankful worship that was a celebration. Specifically:

The *cow* (material) is a metaphor for the beneficial (*spənta-*) in mortal existence (spiritual).

The *waters* and *plants* are material metaphors for (and linked with) completeness (*haurvatāt-*) and non-deathness (*amərətāt-*) ~ a perfected spiritual existence.

The *lights* are used as a metaphor (and symbol) for truth and its comprehension ~ an enlightened existence ~ throughout the Gathas and other Avestan texts. And in some later texts, 'Endless Light(s)' is a term for a state of being that is Zarathushtra's notion of paradise (an enlightened state of being) ~ one that houses the comprehension of truth (the *house of good thinking*); one that houses the bliss of hearing or singing beautiful music (the *house of song*); an existence that is wholly good, with no evil preferences in it (the 'most-good existence' *ahu- vahišta-*) ~ all names for what we call 'heaven' which in Zarathushtra's thought is a perfected state of being, not a place of reward.

The *earth* is the material arena for the process of spiritual evolution to w/Wisdom (the attainment of wisdom in Zarathushtra's thought is experience based).

And goodness ~ *all good (things)* ~ is the very core of Zarathushtra's teachings. In the material existence many good things bring us joy. And in the existence of mind/heart/spirit, goodness (*vohu- /vahištā*) is an epithet of the true order of existence (truth), and is the nature of the Divine (who is truth personified), the path to the Divine (the path of truth), and the reward for taking that path ~ a state of being that personifies completely, truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule ~ a perfected state of being (detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Most Good, Vahishta*).

So it is clear (to me, at least) that the author of YHapt. 37:1 was someone who understood well, Zarathushtra's teachings), and to whom the worship of w/Wisdom, which provides all such good things, was indeed a joyful celebration.

And just to give you the flavor of worship as a joyful celebration in a few YAv. texts, (in addition to the quotations from the *Farvardin Yasht* in the main part of this chapter) here is a part of the YAv. *Tir Yasht* in my translation.

"... *ušta mē ahura mazda ušta āpō urvarāšca ušta daēne māzdayasne ušta ā.bavaṭ daijīhavō* ..." *Tir Yt. 8:29, Geldner 2P p. 112.*

"... Happiness for me, O Lord, Wisdom! happiness, O waters and plants! happiness, O wisdom-worshipping envisionment! happiness O lands!", Tir Yt. 8:29, my translation.

And here also, if we think about it, each of the named things brings both material and spiritual joy ~ the waters and plants being metaphors for completeness and non-deathness.

¹⁶ One of the reasons why a knowledge of Avestan has not been obtained by more Zarathushtis (who are not independently wealthy) is that it is difficult to make an independent living, if one's university major is Indo-Iranian philology. And in our communities today, too often the priority seems to be earning a good living. There's nothing wrong with earning a good living ~ that is an intelligent thing to do. But what is wrong is that we seem to have forgotten what our ancestors remembered even through times of intense persecution ~ that truth (factual truths and the truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ all that is good and right) is at the very core of Zarathushtra's teachings, and should be at the very core of how we live our lives. We need to get back to giving priority to these teachings as a way to live our lives, (and in the process, earn good livings, and enjoy the many blessings of our material existence as well). Perhaps the answer is to endow scholarships for Zarathushtis who will take dual majors, at universities that have Indo-Iranian philologists (who specialize in Avestan, rather than Pahlavi) on their faculties. Such dual majors would likely require more than 4 years, and may require some pre-university summer schools for learning the basics of Avestan (and determining aptitude). Such dual majors would include:

1. A major in a field which interests the scholarship recipient, and in which s/he can earn an independent living, and
2. A major in Indo-Iranian philology with *an emphasis on the Gathas and other Old Avestan texts*.

And in return for such financial aid, each such student would give a reasonable commitment to teach the Avestan language to others ~ Zarathushtis and non-Zarathushtis ~ after graduation, so that Zarathushti communities can develop larger numbers of people who know Avestan ~ even though such people (who are so taught Avestan) would not themselves be Indo-Iranian philologists.

This proposed solution would have the following benefits.

1. It will ensure that knowledge of Avestan will not die out, and that its de-coding will continue; and
2. Zarathushti communities will no longer be *solely* dependent on the opinions of others for knowledge of Zarathushtra's envisionment ~ with no way of knowing whether a given opinion is linguistically and contextually defensible. And many Zarathushtis (who are taught Avestan by the recipients of such financial scholarships) will be able to decide for themselves, and inform others, whether or not a given translation/interpretation is accurate and supported by evidence ~ based on cutting edge knowledge of Avestan.

Needless to say, as more Zarathushtis learn Avestan, there will be a diversity of views regarding Zarathushtra's teachings, but that is nothing to fear. A diversity of views is inevitable in any search for truth ~ so long as the diversity of views is collegial, well intentioned, and based on reason and evidence, including a sound knowledge of the Avestan language.

¹⁷ SBE 5, p. 374.

¹⁸ Detailed in *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*.

¹⁹ For example, Zarathushtra says,

"Yes, those men shall be the saviors [*saošyant-*] of the lands, namely, those who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and truth, Wise One. These indeed have been fated to be the expellers of fury." Y48:12 Insler 1975.

Such *actions in harmony with truth and* its comprehension, *good thinking*, is the concept of *ārmaiti*- 'embodied truth', and brings about good rule (over one's self and in one's social units) ~ qualities of the Divine.