

## Truth, Asha

What is 'truth'. This question has puzzled the mind of man (and possibly other life forms) for millennia. In this chapter, we will look at Zarathushtra's ideas on the subject.

*aša-* (pronounced 'asha', the 'a' short as in 'fun'), plays a foundational role in Zarathushtra's thought. Insler 1975 and many scholars today translate the word as 'truth'. But 'truth' falls far short of its meaning. Let us first consider the meaning of *aša-* based on its genesis and on the ways in which Zarathushtra uses it in the Gathas, and then explore briefly the role it plays in Zarathushtra's thought. All quotations from the Gathas are from the Insler 1975 translation, unless otherwise indicated. But when you read 'truth' for *aša-* in a quotation, I hope you will keep in mind the more detailed meaning demonstrated here.

### *The meaning of aša-*

*aša-* has been translated variously as 'truth', 'order', 'law', and 'righteousness'.<sup>1</sup> You may (reasonably) object: How can one word possibly have such different meanings. Well, Zarathushtra did not think in English (or any other language in use today). To understand his intent we have to think outside the box of the English language, and try to put ourselves in his mind-set.

*aša-* is related to the Vedic *ṛtá* (Old Persian *arta*) which mean 'what fits' or 'what is fitting' in the sense of 'a fitting order of existence'.<sup>2</sup> In the Gathas, *aša-* is used in the sense of the 'true (correct) order of existence'. Zarathushtra sees existence in terms of what he calls the existences of matter and of mind ~ the physical and the abstract ~ which in our reality are integrated. And in his thought, *aša-* the 'true (correct) order' ('truth' for short) pertains to both these existences.<sup>3</sup> For example he speaks of, "... the attainments of both existences ~ yes, of matter as well as of mind ~ those attainments befitting truth [*aša-*] through which one might set Thy supporters in happiness." Y28:2, Insler 1975.

### *Asha as an order that 'fits' in the existence of matter:*

In the existence of matter, *aša-* an order that 'fits' is what is factually correct, physically accurate. So its meaning includes factual truths, including the natural laws that order the universe – what today we call the laws of physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, astronomy etc. ~ the true (correct) order in the existence of matter. I think this is one reason why ancient Zoroastrians valued knowledge so highly. I also think this is one reason why they showed reverence for the natural elements, and emphasized not polluting them.<sup>4</sup> The pollutants that concerned ancient Zoroastrians are different from those that concern us today, but the underlying principle is the same.

In the Gathas, this aspect of *aša-* ~ the true (correct) order in the material existence ~ is touched upon in the rhetorical questions of Y44, many of which deal with the ways in which the physical universe is ordered, fashioned, or crafted. For example: "...Which man<sup>5</sup> did fix the course of the sun and of the stars? Through whom does the moon wax (now), wane later? These things indeed and others I wish to know, [*mazda-* 'Wisdom']." Y44:3, Insler 1975.<sup>6</sup>

A fundament of Zarathushtra's thought is the search for truth ~ for the true (correct) order of existence, "... 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 ... good thinking..." Y28:4 ~ 5, Insler 1975. And many of the verses in Y44 show us that in Zarathushtra's mind, this search for truth includes wanting to understand factual truths, the laws which order our physical universe "... These things indeed and others I wish to know, Wise One." Y44:3, Insler 1975.

*Asha as an order that 'fits' in the existence of mind.*

In the existence of mind, 'what fits' includes the truths of mind/heart/spirit including what is correct, as in what is 'right'.<sup>7</sup> Now, what is 'right' may vary greatly in the minds of different people, different cultures, different generations. What did Zarathushtra think of as 'right'?

In his thought, what is 'right' is not a puritanical, judgmental, rectitude. In the Gathas what is 'right' includes the truths of mind/heart/spirits, including such notions as honesty, integrity, intrinsic goodness, generosity, beneficence, lovingkindness, solicitude, friendship, compassion, justice (as in being fair), knowledge (instead of ignorance), – all the good values we cherish which comprise the true (correct) order in the existence of mind ~ the abstract existence. The phrase 'true (correct) order of existence' sounds rather sterile. That term itself does not convey to us Zarathushtra's idea of what constitutes an order of existence that is true, correct. So I write the term in various ways to remind us that in Zarathushtra's view, what is 'correct' is intrinsic goodness.

Here is the evidence.

*aša- is spənta-.*

In another chapter,<sup>8</sup> I explain the meaning of *spənta-* as 'beneficial'. But (as the evidence there details) 'beneficial' falls far short of the full meaning of *spənta-* which is [a generous, bountiful, loving, reasoning, nurturing, supportive goodness ~ the essence of the sacred](#). So when you see the word *spənta-*, I ask you to think of its full meaning (which isn't easy, I know).

In the Gathas we are told that a loving man is [beneficial \(spənta-\)](#) through [truth \(aša-\)](#) "...the loving man, ... for such a person, [*spənta-* 'beneficial'] through truth [*aša-*] is a world-healer and Thy ally in [*mainyu-* '(his) way of being'], [Wise One](#)." Y44:2, Insler 1975.

If a 'loving' person is 'beneficial through truth' as Y44:2 states, then his beneficial way of being (*spənta-mainyu-*) would have to accord with the true (good) order of existence (*aša-*). And this conclusion is corroborated in other verses.<sup>9</sup>

In the Gathas, in mirrored equations (*aša-* through *spənta-*; and *spənta-* through *aša-*) we see that this 'beneficial' quality (*spənta-*), is in fact, the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*).<sup>10</sup>

Does this equivalence between beneficial (*spənta-*) and truth (*aša-*) apply only to the true order in the existence of mind? Or also in the existence of matter? I am inclined to think that it applies to both ~ that there are not two types of *aša-* ~ one factual and one abstract ~ each having different qualities. That question is explored in other chapters.<sup>11</sup> These chapters also give evidence that helps us to understand Zarathushtra's thinking that the calamities that befall us ~ drought, hurricanes, floods, tsunamis, et cetera ~ are not the acts of an arbitrary, capricious, or uncaring Divine. Although it may not immediately seem so, in the long run (sometimes the very long run), they serve a beneficial purpose in the overall scheme of things ~ in the existences of matter and mind.

This equivalence between *aša-* and *spənta-* is corroborated by the later term *amesha spenta* (a collective noun for the attributes of the Divine). The term *amesha spenta* literally means 'non-dying, beneficial-sacred (ones)'.<sup>12</sup> And the term first appears in the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* YHapt.37:4, (a later text, but composed in Old Avestan, the same form of Avestan as the Gathas) where these two adjectives 'beneficial' (*spenta*) and 'non-dying' (*amesha*) are used to describe *aša-*, (along with some other lovely qualities). Here is an excerpt from that passage.

"We worship / celebrate then the true (correct) order of existence [aṣām] ... which (is) beneficial, non-dying [spəntəm aməšəm]..." YHapt.37:4, my translation.<sup>13</sup>

And indeed, in some later YAv. texts, the amesha spenta are called 'truthful ones' (aṣavan-).<sup>14</sup> This is easy to understand, because each amesha spenta is some aspect of the true (correct), good order of existence (aṣa-) ~ its comprehension good thinking (vohu- manah), its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (spənta- ārmaiti-), its good rule (vohu- xšaθra-), its complete attainment (haurvatāt-), comprising the wholly beneficial way of being (spənta- mainyu-) ~ an existence that is no longer bound by mortality (amərətāt-), an existence that is Divine. So if each amesha spenta is beneficial (spənta-), and if each amesha spenta is some aspect of the true (correct) order of existence aṣa-, we see again, in the term amesha spenta, an equivalence between truth (aṣa-) and beneficial (spənta-).

In short (!?), the order of existence that is true, correct (aṣa-) is a generous, bountiful, loving, good order of existence that is beneficial (spənta-), the essence of the sacred.

aṣa- is beneficent, loving.

The dictionary defines beneficence as: "... active goodness, kindness, charity; bounty springing from purity and goodness."<sup>15</sup> The word 'charity' here is used in its older sense of lovingkindness.

The meaning of spənta- includes the notion of 'beneficence' as we already have detailed in another chapter.<sup>16</sup> But here is just one example. In Y45:6, Zarathushtra describes Wisdom as "...Him who is beneficent [hudā]<sup>17</sup> through His [spəntā mainyū]..." Y45:6, Or as I would translate it '... Him who is beneficent through His beneficial way of being...'

Now, if there is an equivalence between beneficial (spənta-) and the true order of existence ('truth' aṣa-) and if 'beneficial' (spənta-) includes the notion of 'beneficence (hudāh-)', then the meaning of the true (correct) order of existence (aṣa-) would have to include the quality of beneficence. And Zarathushtra specifically say so. He describes the Divine as

"... the Lord, beneficent [hudā] through truth [aṣa-], ..." Y48:3.

And (in a turn of the kaleidoscope) he describes the "loving man" in a similar way, substituting spənta- for hudā,

"... the loving man ... such a person, [spənta- 'beneficial'] through truth [aṣa-] ..." Y44:2.

In Y34.3, Zarathushtra describes a person who earns salvation as beneficent "... let salvation be granted to the beneficent man ..." Y34:3. And he defines salvation as truth (aṣa-) and its comprehension, good thinking (vohu- manah-) "... let that salvation of yours be granted to us: truth [aṣa-] allied with good thinking! [vohu- manah-]..." Y51:21.<sup>18</sup> I translate this verse somewhat differently,<sup>19</sup> but for the moment, let us stick with the Insler translation.

Now it is an acknowledged truth that if a = b and if a = c, then there has to be some equivalence between b and c. Applying that principle to these verses:

If salvation (a) = the true (correct) order of existence and its comprehension (b), (Y51:20), and

If salvation (a) = beneficence (c) (Y34:3),

There would have to be an equivalence between a state of enlightenment, the true (correct) order of existence and its comprehension (b), and beneficence (c).

Finally, in Y30:3 the correct choice is made by the beneficent ("... and between these two, the beneficent have correctly chosen..." Y30:3). And in Y30:5, the correct choice is the true (correct) order of existence, *aša*- "... the [*spəništa*- *mainyu*-] ... chose the truth..." Y30:5, Insler 1975, in other words, the most-beneficial way of being (*spəništa*- *mainyu*-) chose the true (correct) order of existence.

*aša*- and *spənta*- are good, and most-good.

Before we look at the evidence of *aša*- and *spənta*- as good, I need to give you some linguistic information so please bear with me.

In the Gathas, *vohu*- 'good' is the notion of intrinsic goodness, and appears in its positive, comparative and superlative degrees.<sup>20</sup>

Its positive form is <i>vohu</i> -	good.
Its comparative degree is <i>vahyah</i> -	more good.
Its superlative degree is <i>vahišta</i> -	most good.

In Avestan, the comparative and superlative degrees are used sometimes as a crescendo of expression,<sup>21</sup> and sometimes as a difference of degree.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately translators usually translate the positive, comparative and superlative degrees as 'good', 'better', and 'best'. These last 2 words are materially inaccurate choices because in English 'better' and 'best' are used often in a competitive sense that has nothing to do with the concept of intrinsic 'goodness'. For example, this horror movie is *better* than that one'; 'this restaurant is the *best*'; et cetera. The positive *vohu*- 'good' expresses the idea of intrinsic goodness. So a more literal (and in my view, a more accurate) translation of the comparative and superlative degrees of *vohu*- are 'more good (*vahyah*-) and 'most good' (*vahišta*-). This is not an exercise in nit-picking. An accurate translation of *vahyah*- and *vahišta*- in a way that means intrinsic goodness materially affects our perceptions of Zarathushtra's notion of the Divine, and the way of life he advocates, because intrinsic goodness is a core teaching, and he uses its superlative degree (*vahišta*-) in key ways ~ almost as a code or word of art.<sup>23</sup>

Let us return to the evidence which shows that in Zarathushtra's mind, there is some equivalence between the true (correct) order of existence (*aša*-), beneficial (*spənta*-), and 'goodness'.

We see this equivalence in the way Zarathushtra describes the object of the correct choice.

In Y30:3, the way of being (*mainyu*-) which is the object of the correct choice is called *vahyah*- ('more good' ~ the comparative degree of *vohu*- 'good'). 'Now there (are) two primeval ways of being [*mainyu*-], ... ~ the more~good [*vahyō*] and the bad. And between these two, the beneficent have chosen correctly, not the maleficent.' Y30:3, my translation.<sup>24</sup>

In Y45:2, the way of being, *mainyu*- (which is the object of the correct choice and which is called 'more good' in Y30:3) is called *spanyah*- the comparative degree of *spənta*- 'more beneficial'.

'Yes I shall speak out (about) the two primeval ways of being of existence, of which the more-beneficial one [*spanyā*] would thus have spoken to (the one) who (is) harmful,...' Y45:2, my translation.<sup>25</sup>

And in Y30:5, the object of the correct choice (which is *vahyah*- 'more good' in Y30:3 and *spanyah*- 'more beneficial' in Y45:2) is truth *aša*-, which choice is made by the most beneficial way of being (*spəništa*-*mainyu*-) "... the [*mainyu*- *spəništa*- 'most beneficial way of being'] ... chose the truth [*aša*-]..." Y30:5, Insler 1975. A neat circle of thought. So in these three verses, we see that there is a close association in meaning

between 'more good' (*vahyah-*), 'more beneficial' (*spanyah-*), most beneficial (*spəništa-*), and the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*).<sup>26</sup>

And in fact, the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) is specifically described as 'most good' (*vahišta-*) "... the Lord who art of the same temperament with the best [*vahišta-* 'most good'] truth [*aša-*]..." Y28:8. This equivalence between *aša-* and *vahišta-* 'most good' in the Gathas, is corroborated in the same section of the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* that we looked at above which shows some of the qualities of the true (correct) order of existence. Here is the full section.

'We worship / celebrate, then, the true (correct) order of existence, (which is) most-good  
*ašəm at vahištəm yazamaidē*

which (is) most beautiful,  
*hyaṭ sraēštəm*

which (is) beneficial, non-dying  
*hyaṭ spəntəm aməšəm*

which (is) light-filled<sup>27</sup>  
*hyaṭ raocōṇhvaṭ*

which (is) all good.  
*hyaṭ vīspā vohū.*" YHapt.37:4, my translation.<sup>28</sup>

So here the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) is described as 'beneficial' (*spəntəm*), 'most good' (*vahištəm*) and 'all good' (*vīspā vohū*). Indeed, so firmly established was this notion that the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) is the superlative of intrinsic goodness (*vahišta-*), that in later YAv. texts, Asha Vahishta became a common way of referring to *aša-*.

And parenthetically, don't you love the idea that to ancient Zoroastrians, truth (*aša-*) is most beautiful (*sraēšta-*)?<sup>29</sup> To me also, truth is most beautiful ~ "warts and all" (as Abraham Lincoln once said, in a different context).

Finally, we know that 'good thinking' (*vohu- manah-*) is the comprehension of the true (correct) order of existence, *aša-* ("Truth [*aša-*], shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire ... good thinking ..." Y28:5; "Give, o truth [*aša-*] this reward, namely, the attainments of good thinking ..." Y28:7 ).<sup>30</sup> This understanding provides us with the largest body of evidence that the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) is equated with goodness, because the adjective with which Zarathushtra describes the kind of thinking that comprehends truth (*aša-*) is *vohu-* 'good' and also its superlative degree *vahišta-* 'most good' ("... that thinking which is best [*vahišta-* 'most good']..." Y28:9; "... but the best thinking [*vahišta- manah-* 'most good thinking'] for the truthful person [*ašāunē*]." Y30:4, Insler 1975).<sup>31</sup>

*The qualities of truth (aša-) and beneficial (spənta-) are linked with being a world-healer.*

In the Gathas, it is through implementing the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) ~ an order that is beneficial (*spənta-*), generous / beneficent / full of lovingkindness (*hudāh-*), the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness (*vahišta-*) ~ that existence is healed. Here are some examples in each of which truth (*aša-*) or its comprehension (good thinking) is involved in healing existence.<sup>32</sup>

"... the loving man ... such a person, [*spənta-*] through truth [*aša-*], watching over the heritage for all, is a world-healer and Thy ally in [*mainyu-*], Wise One." 44:2, Insler 1975.

Or as I would translate it, '...the loving man, beneficial through the true (correct, good) order of existence, watching over the heritage for all, is a world-healer, and Thy ally with his way of being, Wisdom.' Y44:2.

Referring to himself in the third person, "This knowing world~healer has listened, he who has respected the truth [*aša-*], Lord ..." Y31:19, Insler 1975.

"...Through good thinking the Creator<sup>33</sup> 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. Y31:15 Insler 1975. Wisdom's rule is the rule of truth, its comprehension, its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (Y51:4).<sup>34</sup>

In short, "healing" existence means healing it from the defects or diseases of ignorance, deceit, falsehood, hatred, cruelty, violence, bondage, tyranny ~ all the wrongful things that are the opposite of the true (correct, good) order of existence *aša-*, and that are complained of so eloquently in Y29:1, "...**(For) the cruelty of fury and violence, of bondage and might, holds me in captivity...**" Y29:1, Insler 1975.

Before moving on, I would like to show you in tabulation form, the exquisite, kaleidoscopic complementation between the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*), the beneficial (*spənta-*), beneficence, the generosity of lovingkindness (*hudāh-*) and intrinsic goodness (*vohu-*) ~ as concepts, and also as characteristics of Wisdom (*mazdā-*), and of man. These are all from the Gathas.

45:6 <sup>35</sup>	Wisdom	is beneficent ( <i>hudāh</i> ) through	His beneficial way of being, (His <i>spənta- mainyu-</i> )
48:3 <sup>36</sup>	Wisdom	is beneficent ( <i>hudāh</i> ) through	truth ( <i>aša-</i> )
34:2 <sup>37</sup> , 45:8	good <i>vohu-</i>	is interchanged with	beneficial ( <i>spənta-</i> ) in describing a way of being ( <i>mainyu-</i> )
30:3, 30:5 <sup>38</sup>	good <i>vohu-</i>	is interchanged with	truth ( <i>aša-</i> ) (as the object of the right choice)
30:3 <sup>39</sup>	the way of being ( <i>mainyu-</i> ) to be chosen	is called	more good ( <i>vahyah-</i> )
45:2 <sup>40</sup>	the way of being ( <i>mainyu-</i> ) to be chosen	is called	more beneficial ( <i>spanyah-</i> )
30:5 <sup>41</sup>	the most beneficial ( <i>spəništa-</i> ) way of being	chose	truth ( <i>aša-</i> )
28:1 <sup>42</sup>	Wisdom's way of being ( <i>mainyu-</i> )	is beneficial ( <i>spənta-</i> )	through truth ( <i>aša-</i> )
44:2 <sup>43</sup>	the loving man	is beneficial ( <i>spənta-</i> )	through truth ( <i>aša-</i> )



Y30:5 <sup>44</sup>	the right choice	is	truth ( <i>aša-</i> )
Y30:3 <sup>45</sup>	the right choice	is made by	the beneficent ( <i>hudāh</i> )
Y44:2 <sup>46</sup>	the loving man	is beneficial ( <i>spənta-</i> ) through	truth ( <i>aša-</i> )
Y44:2	the loving man	is	Widom's ally in his way of being ( <i>mainyu-</i> )

A small glimpse of the many-splendored patterns of sunlight in the garden of Zarathushtra's thought.

*aša-* as justice.

In some verses, justice is included within the meaning of the true (correct) order of existence, *aša*.

"... those whom Thou dost know, Wise Lord to be just ... in conformity with truth [*aša-*] and good thinking..." Y28:10. Here, the quality of justice is in conformity with the true (correct, good) order of existence and its comprehension. Justice therefore would have to be included within the meaning of the true order of existence.<sup>47</sup> And the quality of justice would have to be in accord with the true (good) order of existence.

"..... the glories of Him who offers solicitude (to us), the Wise Lord who, together with His clever advisor truth [*aša-*], has judged the just and the unjust." Y46:17, Insler 1975 (or as I would translate it '... has discerned (what is) just and (what is) unjust...'),<sup>48</sup> ~ an allegorical way of saying that through His nature, which personifies the true (correct, good) order of existence *aša-* the Lord (who is) Wisdom discerns what is just and unjust. Notice that His discernment, (judgment in that sense) is also associated here with His solicitude. The kind of justice that is inherent in *aša-* is not a punitive or vengeful justice, but one that is associated with solicitude (loving care, concern). This conclusion is corroborated by the way in which the law of consequences (that we reap what we sow) works (explained below).

At first thought, it may seem inconsistent that the one concept, *aša-* can include within its meaning, both beneficence and justice. When trying to de-code the meaning of a given word, we might see different perspectives of one underlying meaning. For example, if we were trying to decode the meaning of the color purple, we might see shades of red and blue ~ both of which are included in purple. But we could not (accurately) say that the meaning of purple includes shades of yellow or green, because those colors are not a part of the color purple. So how (we might question) could Zarathushtra include in the meaning of *aša-* both the rigid tit-for-tat that is justice, and the generosity that is beneficence? Well, this seeming inconsistency is founded on our human, punishment based perception of 'justice' which is not the justice that is a part of the true (correct, good) order of existence (*aša-*). Allow me to explain.

In the early history of the human race, if some wrong was done to a person, it seemed only natural (or just) that such a person, or his family or clan, should exact some sort of revenge on the wrongdoer. Indeed, in many early societies – both eastern and western – the exaction of such revenge became a duty, and an entitlement, of the individual, his family, his clan. In some societies (in both Europe and the East), it even became a right that was tied to their honor.<sup>49</sup>

But as human beings formed larger and larger (for those ancient times) social units, it became increasingly apparent that these individual acts of revenge/justice were destructive of social order, resulting in never-

ending feuds which decimated clans and destroyed property on which survival depended. So eventually, these individual acts of revenge/justice were replaced by a system of societal revenge/justice, in which those who governed (priests or princes) meted out 'punishment' – something harsh, or painful, or a deprivation of some sort – which punished the wrongdoer, and removed from the person wronged, (or his family/clan) the necessity of punishing the wrongdoer themselves.

This revenge based notion of justice was founded on the idea of punishment for the sake of punishment – to make the wrongdoer suffer in an unpleasant way for his wrongful act, sometimes including payment of recompense to the person wronged – all to obviate the need for individual revenge. And in the religious thought of many institutionalized religions, in envisioning how the Divine might act when faced with mortal wrongdoing, this man-made notion of revenge-based justice was extrapolated on to the Divine, as a characteristic of Divine justice. Thus were formed paradigms of the Divine as wrathful, and inflicting punishment (revenge-based justice) on humans for their wrongdoing.

This revenge/punishment based paradigm of Divine justice is found in both pre-Zarathushtrian Indo-Iranian religions,<sup>50</sup> (which existed in Zarathushtra's day, and which he rejected), and also in some schools of Zoroastrianism that evolved many centuries after Zarathushtra.<sup>51</sup>

A revenge/punishment based paradigm of Divine justice also exists in some religions that are dominant today, and therefore tend to influence the mind-set of modern translators of the Gathas.

This revenge/punishment based paradigm of Divine justice has resulted in such conclusions as the notion that natural calamities are punishments from God for wrongdoing, and also the notion of punishment in a hell of torture and suffering after death – a paradigm which gave the priests tremendous power, since they determined what 'sins' would result in damnation, and they also assumed the power (always in 'God's' name, naturally) to grant reprieves from the consequences of such sins, i.e. reprieves from damnation, punishment in hell (and the fears that the tortures of 'hell' generate in the human mind) – reprieves which, although dispensed in 'God's' name, could only be obtained through such priests. So the whole notion of divine justice that was punitive, became a fixed feature of many institutionalized religions whose priests had a vested interest in such a fear-based theology ~ including the Indo-Iranian (pre-Zarathushtrian) religions in which punishments were meted out in this life, and Zoroastrianism as it appears in some Pahlavi texts in which punishments were given in an afterlife ~ a hell of torments.<sup>52</sup>

But Zarathushtra rejected many of the religious ideas that were prevalent in his day, and the notion of vengeful, cruel, 'gods' (and its corollary, punitive divine justice) was one of the ideas he rejected.<sup>53</sup> So to understand his thought we have to take off the spectacles of such conventional religious ideas, and view his words without these filters.

In Zarathushtra's thought, Divine justice ~ that we reap what we sow ~ is part of the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) ~ an order that is beneficial, good, generous, loving, caring ~ as we have seen. Thus the purpose Divine justice ~ that we reap what we sow ~ is not revenge or punishment. Its purpose is beneficial ~ to sculpt our souls, to enlarge understanding, to enable spiritual growth. So the 'justice' that is part of the true (correct, good) order (*aša-*) is a notion of justice motivated by caring, to bring about a good end ~ enlightenment, changing minds and preferences from a mix of harmful and more beneficial, to a state of being that is wholly good, wholly beneficial, wholly in accord with the true (correct), good order of existence. So there is no inconsistency between the 'justice' and the 'beneficence' that are a part of the true order of existence *aša-*,<sup>54</sup> ~ a conclusion that is consistent with Y46:17 *'... the glories of Him who offers solicitude,*



the Lord Wisdom who, through His skilled advisor truth [*aša-*], has discerned (what is) just and (what is) unjust." Y46:17, my translation (explained in a ft. above).

*aša-* as 'unharmable' and as compassionate.

In Y28:3 we are told that the rule of truth, its comprehension (good thinking) and the Lord, Wisdom (who personifies these qualities) is 'unharmable' ~ "I who shall eulogize all of you as never before ~ thee, o truth [*aša-*], and good thinking and the Wise Lord and (those others)<sup>55</sup> for whom [*ārmaiti-*] increases their unharmable [*ayžōnvamnəm*] rule ...." Y28:3). In what sense is this rule of truth 'unharmable'? That it cannot be harmed? That it cannot harm? Probably both. Double entendre is a technique that Zarathushtra delights in.<sup>56</sup> Parenthetically, *ayžōnvamnəm* is a GAv. word that has not been de-coded with any degree of certainty.<sup>57</sup> I use the Insler 1975 translation as one of its potential meanings.

Insler in his comment on Y28:3 understands 'unharmable' as unassailable,<sup>58</sup> which is corroborated by the Parsi version of the 42d name of the Divine in the 101 Names (prayer) in which Sethna's Khordeh Avesta translates 'a-satoh' as 'unconquerable'.<sup>59</sup> In the same way, Kanga translates 'a-satoh' as 'undefeated, undistressed'.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, we have the Iranian version of this 42d name (as translated by Mobeds Shahzadi and Azargoshasb), which translates 'asi tov' as 'harmless' (i.e. one who does not harm, or one who is without harm). Unknown to me are the linguistics of this 42d name, its correct translation, and manuscript variations. However, there is a verse in the Gathas which may throw light on what Zarathushtra means by "unharmable rule" in Y28:3. That verse is Y51:4 where, in a series of rhetorical questions (which contain their own answers) Zarathushtra tells us what Wisdom's rule consists of. "Where shall there be protection instead of injury? Where shall mercy [*mərəždikā* 'compassion'] take place? Where truth [*aša-*] which attains glory? Where [*spənta- ārmaiti-*]? Where the very best thinking [*manō vahištəm*]? Where, Wise One, through Thy rule?" Y51:4, Insler 1975.

This verse corroborates what we are told in other verses – that His rule is the rule of these three divine qualities (amesha spenta) – the true (correct), good order of existence (*aša-*), its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its comprehension (the most good thinking). But in addition, this verse contains two descriptive phrases which describe Wisdom's rule as "Where shall there be protection instead of injury? Where shall mercy [*mərəždikā* 'compassion'] take place?...". The word *mərəždikā* has been translated by Insler as 'mercy'. Taraporewala (who studied under Bartholomae) shows Bartholomae translating the word as 'pardon' but he comments that Bartholomae gives alternate meanings for *mərəždikā*, 'compassion', 'grace', 'kindness'.<sup>61</sup> However, the concept of 'mercy' (as a reprieve from damnation) is not relevant to Zarathushtra thought, in which there is no notion of damnation.<sup>62</sup>

So through this verse (Y51:4) we see that Wisdom's rule is not only described as the rule of the true (correct, good) order (*aša-*), its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its comprehension, the most good thinking, we see that this rule of the true order of existence includes within its meaning, the notion of 'protecting against injury', as well as compassion, kindness, grace (a goodness that does not have to be earned by the recipient ~ just as the generosity of beneficence, also a part of the *aša-*, does not have to be earned by the recipient), all of which throw light on the double entendre in Y28:3, where the rule of Wisdom (*mazdā-*), truth and good thinking is called 'unharmable' – a rule that is 'unassailable' or incapable of being harmed (just as truth cannot be destroyed which parallels amesha 'undying' in amesha spenta), and also a rule that is 'unharmable' as one that does not injure (or harm) which parallels Y51:4.<sup>63</sup>

*aša* is strong.

Many of us tend to think of 'goodness' as weaker than evil. But in Zarathushtra's thought, that is not so. The true (correct) order of existence, and its component parts ~ its comprehension, its beneficial embodiment, its good rule ~ are described in the Gathas as strong, mighty.<sup>64</sup> Here are a few examples.

"... Thee and the truth and that thinking which is best [*yahišta-* 'most good'] ... to mighty ones (like you) belong to the powers and the mastery." Y28:9, Insler 1975;

"... When I might call upon truth, the Wise One ...<sup>65</sup> shall appear: also reward and [*ārmaiti-*]. (And) through the very best thinking I shall seek for myself their rule of strength, through whose growth we might conquer deceit.' Y31:4, Insler 1975.

"Rise up to me, Lord. Along with Thy [*spāništa- mainyu-* 'most beneficial way of being'], Wise One, receive force through (our) [*ārmaiti-*] strength through (every) good requital, powerful might through truth, protection through (our) good thinking." Y33:12, Insler 1975.

"... Thy fire, Lord, which possesses strength through truth..." Y34:4, Insler 1975; 'fire' (which gives light) in the Gathas, and throughout the later texts, is a material metaphor for truth (which enlightens).<sup>66</sup>

"... the esteemed strength of good thinking..." Y48:6, Insler 1975.

*aša-* is the opposite of *fury, cruelty, violence, destruction, deceit*.

In some verses, we can see Zarathushtra's notion of what the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) means based on what he considers to be its opposite ~ deceit, fury, cruelty, violence, tyranny, bondage, what is false et cetera ~ all things that harm, that injure, that destroy, that are inimical, that are intrinsically 'wrong' or 'bad' or ignorant. For example:

Zarathushtra's calls his notion of (what we call) 'heaven' the "House of Good Thinking" Y32:15, ~ a state of being that houses comprehension of the true (correct) order of existence (a state of enlightenment). And what does he call his notion of the opposite of 'heaven'? He calls it the "House of Deceit" Y46:11; Y49:11; Y51:14, Insler 1975 (or as I would translate the applicable Avestan word, the 'house of untruth') ~ a state of being that houses a mind that is deceived, and perhaps is also a deceiver ~ a mind that does not understand, and is not committed to, the true (correct), good order of existence.<sup>67</sup>

In Y48:7, a person who wishes to attract the true order of existence ('truth' *aša-*) and its comprehension, good thinking is told to stop fury and cruelty, indicating that where fury/rage and cruelty exist, the true (correct), good order *aša-* and its comprehension, good thinking, cannot be present. "Let fury be stopped. Cut away cruelty, ye who wish to attract the attention of good thinking along with (that of) truth [*aša-*]. The [*spānta-* 'beneficial'] man indeed is its [truth's] companion..." Y48:7, Insler 1975. Parenthetically, notice that it is the beneficial (*spānta-*) person who is the companion of truth (*aša-*), indicating yet again the equivalence in meaning between the beneficial (*spānta-*) and an order of existence that is true (correct), (*aša-*).

In Y48:11, in a series of rhetorical questions (which contain their own answers), Zarathushtra tells us that the advent of truth (the true order of existence) and its embodiment in thought, word and action (*ārmaiti-*) brings peace and nurture, which occurs when cruelty, violence and deceit are stopped. And he considers a person who stops cruelty, violence and deceit as one who receives understanding through good thinking, "When, Wise One, shall [*ārmaiti-*] come along with truth [*aša-*], bringing peace and pasturage throughout the dominion? Which men shall stop the cruelty (caused) by the violent deceitful persons? To which man

shall come the understanding stemming from good thinking. Y48:11, Insler 1975. The word *pasturage* is a metaphor for nourishment, nurture, care.

In the very next verse, Y48:12, Zarathushtra calls those who expel fury/rage, the saviors (*saošyant-*) of the lands, and he tells us that such saviors are those who translate Wisdom's teachings into actions in harmony with truth and its comprehension, good thinking (which is the concept of *ārmaiti-*). "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 with truth [*aša-*], Wise One. These indeed have been fated to be the expellers of fury." Y48:12, Insler 1975. Notice what it is that is expelled ~ not another religion, or tribe, but "fury" ~ a wrongful state of mind.

In Y30:6, Zarathushtra describes the wrongful choice made by the local gods (as portrayed by their priests) as the worst thought, and he describes what this choice generates ~ fury/rage and affliction: "The gods [*daēvācinā*]<sup>68</sup> did not at all choose correctly ... Since they chose the worst thought, they then rushed into fury, with which they have afflicted the world and mankind." Y30:6.<sup>69</sup>

It would be reasonable to conclude from these verses that the true, (correct) order of existence *aša-* is the opposite of all that is false, ignorant, wrong ~ cruelty, violence, fury, deceit, destructiveness, injuring and the other 'wrongful' conduct mentioned in the Gathas.

*No negative or destructive meanings for aša-.*

Can the meaning of *aša-* include anything that is 'bad' or 'evil' or 'wrong'? It cannot. We have already seen that the true (correct) order of existence *aša-* is equated with good (*vohu-*), most-good (*vahišta-*), beneficial (*spənta-*), a good generosity (*hudāh-*), compassion, not injuring, not harming (Y51:4). While it is clear that (unperfected) existence is a mix of more good and bad (Y30:3), more beneficial and harmful (Y45:2) ~ which reflects our reality ~ the concepts themselves are diametrical opposite, and therefore what is beneficial, etc. cannot (by definition) include any qualities that are harmful. We see this very clearly in Y45:2 where the more beneficial way of being (*spanyah- mainyu-*) allegorically tells the harmful way of being, that they have nothing in common. "Yes I shall speak out (about) the two primeval ways of being of existence, of which the more-beneficial (one) [*spanyā*] would thus have spoken to (the one) who (is) harmful, not our thoughts, nor teachings, nor reasonings, neither our choices, nor words, neither (our) actions, nor envisionments, nor selves, are in accord." Y45:2 my translation.<sup>70</sup>

By definition, what is false cannot be a part of truth; what is 'harmful' or 'wrong' cannot be a part of what is 'right', and therefore negative, destructive qualities cannot, by definition, be part of the true (correct) order of existence, *aša-*, which is wholly beneficial (*spənta- / spəništa*), wholly good (*vohu- / vahišta-*), et cetera.

This idea raises a different and troubling question: In light of the fact that *aša-* is also the true (correct) order in the existence of matter, how then do we account for all the grief and suffering caused by natural calamities ~ earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, et cetera, all of which are part of the true (correct) order in the physical existence? How is such an order of existence, which causes such suffering, consistent with a Divine way of being that is supposed to personify the beneficial ~ all that is good, loving, generous, reasoning? Zarathushtra has a most interesting take on this question which is discussed elsewhere,<sup>71</sup> so I will not go into it here.

*aša-* as generating happiness, peace, tranquility.

*Happiness:* We are told that the true (correct, good) order of existence (*aša-*), generates happiness,<sup>72</sup>

"...those attainments befitting truth [*aša-*] through which one might set Thy supporters in happiness." Y28:2;

"Do Thou grant the most happy alliance of truth [*aša-*]..." Y49:8;

"He who first thought thus, 'They are to be joined with happiness throughout their days', He created<sup>73</sup> truth [*aša-*] in accordance with this very intention, by reason of which He has (also) upheld the very best thinking..." Y31:7;

"...happiness has been lost to the deceitful who violate truth [*aša-*]..." Y53:6).

*Peace, Tranquility:* The rule of truth (*aša-*) and its comprehension, (good thinking), creates peace, tranquility, "Lord, grant ye to these (mortals) strength and the rule of truth [*aša-*] and good thinking, by means of which one shall create peace and tranquility..." Y29:10.

*Prosperity:* The true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) brings prosperity,

"... truth [*aša-*] which prospers the creatures,..." Y33:11;

"...the creatures allied with truth [*aša-*] do prosper..." Y43:6;

"...the blessed one who shall be eager to prosper the rule of the house or of the district or of the land with truth [*aša-*]..." Y31:16;

"...Have they truly seen that vision which ... in companionship with truth [*aša-*], would prosper my creatures already allied with truth [*aša-*]..." Y44:10.

Does this mean that every time a person makes a 'right' or 'good' choice, it will result in happiness, peace and prosperity? Of course not. We have all (at one time or another) experienced adverse consequences for making difficult choices that were nevertheless 'true', or 'right' or 'good'. I think what Zarathushtra means in these verses is that in general, in the long run, a social environment that is governed by good qualities, will be a happier, more friendly, more peaceful, more productive one, than a social environment which is governed by deceit, greed, cruelty, injustice, tyranny, bondage, violence, et cetera. Zarathushtra's thoughts on happiness, joy, prosperity are discussed in another chapter.<sup>74</sup>

These verses also demonstrate a key (and profound) idea of Zarathushtra's ~ that happiness, well being, prosperity, peace, tranquility, can only be brought about when thoughts, words and actions are in sync with the true (correct, good) order of existence (*aša-*). In other words, cheating, lies, violence, injustice, harmful words and actions, may bring success, or be profitable, in a temporary, short-term way, (just as acting with truth can sometimes bring unhappiness in the short term). But lasting success, peace, happiness, prosperity can only be brought about when thoughts, words and actions are in sync with the qualities that comprise the true (correct) order of existence. A profound insight.

*aša-* as reflected in Wisdom's qualities.

If Wisdom's nature, His way of being, is one that personifies the true (correct) order of existence,<sup>75</sup> then certain of His qualities described in the Gathas, shed additional light on what Zarathushtra includes within the meaning of *aša-* ~ qualities such as support, protection, help, friendship, solicitude, nurture.<sup>76</sup> These qualities corroborate the conclusion that the rule (*xšaθra-*) of truth (*aša-*), its beneficial embodiment in thought, word

and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its most good comprehension (*vahišta- manah-*), is one that is compassionate, that protects from injury, that does not harm (Y51:4), as discussed above.

We sometimes question whether truth (*aša-*) is subjective or objective; I do not think that truth (*aša-*) is subjective in Zarathushtra's thought. It is only our attempts at understanding the true (correct) order in the existences of mind and matter (*aša-*) that are subjective, that vary from person to person, from generation to generation, and from culture to culture. But as our knowledge increases, as we grow in experience and understanding, those perceptions become more accurate until finally, truth, and our understanding of it, is the same ~ a state of being that is the complete comprehension of truth which is Zarathushtra's notion of paradise (the [House of Good Thinking](#)), a state of being that is wisdom personified (*mazdā-*). Until then, figuring out how to bring the true (correct, good) order of existence to life with our thoughts, words and actions is sometimes fun, and sometimes painful, but always the ultimate creative challenge.

*Conclusions on the meaning of aša-:*

*aša-* means the true (correct) order of existence in all aspects of our reality. In the existence of matter, this order of existence comprises factual truths, and includes the natural laws that order our universe. In the existence of mind this order of existence comprises the abstract truths of mind/heart/spirit ~ all that is right ~ honesty, goodness, lovingkindness, generosity, compassion, justice, friendship, knowledge, not injuring, not harming, being supportive, being constructive, healing existence. An order of existence that is the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness (*aša- vahišta-*).

In light of all this evidence, it is clear that there is no one English word which expresses the full meaning of *aša-*. What then is the closest English equivalent that is grounded in sound linguistics, and also is consistent with the ways in which Zarathushtra uses the word?

*'what fits'*: Although 'what fits' or 'what is fitting' is a literal translation of *aša-*, I do not think it adequately informs the reader of what (in Zarathushtra's thinking) is fitting. 'What fits' is essentially subjective, and depends on the mind-set of a given reader. What a given reader thinks 'fits', may be very different from what Zarathushtra thinks 'fits' on a given subject. To translate *aša-* as 'what fits' would cause the reader to read into the word his own subjective views on 'what fits' in a given verse.

*'order' or 'law'*: If *aša-* is the true (correct) order of existence (based on its Ved. cognate), that would explain why some scholars have translated *aša-* as 'order' or 'law'. But these are only a part of the meaning of *aša-*. Things can be ordered in a good way or in a bad way. And indeed, chaos is a part of the 'order' that is *aša-* in the existence or matter (and probably of mind as well).<sup>77</sup> The English words 'order' and 'law' miss the essential qualities of *aša-* as all that is factually correct (in the existence of matter), as well as all that is spiritually correct, ~ good, beneficial, right, generous, loving, etc. (in the existence of mind).

*'righteousness'*: It is true that in the existence of mind, *aša-* 'what fits' is what is right. And this aspect of *aša-* is indeed a central focus of Zarathushtra's thought. Perhaps that is why some scholars especially of an older generation have translated *aša-* as 'righteousness'. But 'righteousness' once again, is only part of the meaning of *aša-*. It does not include the factual truths that order existence in the physical universe ~ which is part of the meaning of *aša-*. It misses a fundament of Zarathushtra's thought – the ongoing search for truth in both existences – factual knowledge, as well as what is 'right' (abstract truths). In addition, down through the centuries, the word 'righteousness' in the English language has carried the baggage of a puritanical, judgmental, damning, type of rectitude, which is very far removed from Zarathushtra's friendly, generous, compassionate, nurturing, joyful, rectitude.

'truth': If we must have a one-word English equivalent, I agree with the choice of Insler 1975, Humbach/Faiss 2010 and many other eminent linguists, that 'truth' is the closest one-word English equivalent for *aša-*. Its disadvantage is that in today's mind-set, 'truth' tends to mean factual truth only, and it is not normally associated with an order of existence. 'Truth' is not adequate to express Zarathushtra's understanding that *aša-* also means all that is good, 'right'. So it is important to remember, when we read 'truth' in a quotation from the Gathas, that it means not only factual truths, but also the truths of mind/spirit ~ honesty, goodness, lovingkindness, generosity, compassion, justice (as in being fair), friendship, solicitude, not injuring, not harming, helping, supporting, protecting, being constructive, healing, et cetera ~ the true (correct), wholly good order of existence as it pertains to abstract qualities and their implementation.

'the true (correct) order of existence': Translators do not favor multi-word translations. But if we have a passion for the truth, (as indeed we must), the 'true (correct) order of existence' is the closest English equivalent to what Zarathushtra has in mind for *aša-*. This translation choice is also flawed in that the word 'correct' normally is not associated with being wholly good ~ which is Zarathushtra's notion of an order of existence that is 'correct', 'what fits'. And in English 'correct' carries a lot of baggage (in meaning) that does not fit Zarathushtra's use of the word *aša-*. But I think that the 'true (correct, good) order of existence' is the least flawed of all available alternatives. In many verses, his meaning comes through more accurately, more understandably, and more beautifully if we so translate *aša-*. And (although cumbersome in English) this understanding of *aša-* fits so very well into the mosaic of his ideas and helps us understand his intent in many Gatha verses.<sup>78</sup> Unfortunately, the full phrase is too cumbersome to be used in all contexts. And one's mind tends to glaze of multi-word descriptions for one concept. I therefore think the short-hand 'truth' is the closest available English equivalent for consistent use ~ including as it does, factual truths as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit.

Let us move on to consider the central role that this true order of existence *aša-* plays in Zarathushtra's thought.

#### *aša- in Zarathushtra's thought.*

In the Gathas, the truth appears sometimes as a concept, sometimes as an attribute and activity of Wisdom (*mazdā-*), sometimes as an attribute and activity of man, and a few times as an entity. Here are some examples.

##### *As a concept.*

The verses are legion in which *aša-* is spoken of as a concept:

".....the paths, straight in accord with truth [*aša-*] ....." Y33:5; i.e. the paths, straight in accord with the true (correct, good) order of existence;

".....as long as I shall be able ..... so long shall I look in quest of truth [*aša-*] " Y 28:4; i.e. as long as I shall be able, so long shall I look in quest of the true/right (correct, good) order (in the existences of matter and mind). Additional examples are footnoted.<sup>79</sup>

There is a very lovely precept, repeated more than once, in YAv. texts which echo Zarathushtra's thought that the path of Wisdom is the path of *aša-*. To translate this precept, one has to use a short hand word for *aša-*, so I have used 'truth'. But if we keep in mind the multi-dimensioned meanings that are included



within the one word *aša-*, this precept (and Wisdom's path) become so much more meaningful, so much more beautiful.

*aēvō pantā yō ašahe vīspe anyaēšqm apantqm*

'(There is) one path, that of truth; all others (are) non-paths.' Yy72:11; *Visperad* 24:3.

### *As the nature of the Divine*

"... Thou dost look upon all these things with truth [*aša-*]." Y31:13; i.e. Thou dost look upon all these things (in accordance) with the true/right (correct, good) order of existence.

"... if ye have mastery through truth [*aša-*] ..." Y48:9; i.e. if you have mastery through the true/right (correct, good) order of existence. Additional examples are footnoted.<sup>80</sup>

*aša-* through its adjective *ašavan-* as an attribute or characteristic of the Divine: "... the truthful Lord ..." Y46:9 and Y53:9; "...the Lord who art of the same temperament with the best [*vahišta-* 'most-good'] truth [*aša-*]..." Y28:8).

The Divine is equated with *aša-* "When I might call upon truth [*aša-*], the Wise One [*mazdā-* 'w/Wisdom'] ... shall appear ..." Y31:4. And Wisdom is called *aša-* "Yes, I shall swear to be your praiser, Wise One [*mazdā-* 'w/Wisdom'], and I shall be it, as long as I shall have strength and be able, o truth [*aša-*]"<sup>81</sup> ... Y50:11, indicating that Wisdom's existence is the true order of existence *aša-* ~ all that is true, and good, and right. A conclusion that is corroborated in later YAv. texts.<sup>82</sup>

The fact that the Divine personifies the true (correct) order is also reflected in the name Zarathushtra chooses for Him ~ his most used name for the Divine ~ Wisdom *mazdā-*, which ultimately is the complete comprehension of the true order in the existences of matter and mind. In addition, if the amesha spenta are characteristics of Wisdom and if each of them is some aspect of *aša-*, ~ its good comprehension (*vohu- manah-* good thinking), its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its good rule (*vohu- xšaθra-* which is the rule of truth, its embodiment, its comprehension), and its complete attainment *haurvatāt-* ~ then, logically, Wisdom would, of necessity, personify the true (correct) order *aša-*.<sup>83</sup>

This naturally leads to the question: Does the Divine embody this true order (*aša-*) only in the existence of mind? or also in the existence of matter? An interesting question which ties into the evolution of existence towards completeness, and may tie into Zarathushtra's notion of 'creation'.<sup>84</sup>

### *aša- as an attribute of man*

It is interesting that there are even more verses in the Gathas, in which this divine characteristic, *aša-*, through its adjective *ašavan-* is an attribute or characteristic of man,

"...for the truthful person [*ašāunē*]." Y30:4;

"...for the truthful [*ašavabyō*]..." Y30:11;

"...from the truthful [*ašāunō*] ..." Y31:14;

"...a truthful person [*ašavanəm*]..." Y31:20.

Insler 1975. And there are many, many more such verses.<sup>85</sup>

But I have found no verse in which any human being is called *aša-*, or equated with *aša-*, indicating perhaps, that we have this divine quality truth (*aša-*) in part, but that (in our present reality at least) we are

still a mix of bad and more good (Y30:3), of harmful and more beneficial (Y45:2). We are not wholly *ašavan-*. We do not wholly or completely personify the true order of existence (yet!).<sup>86</sup> Our personification of the true order is incomplete, imperfect, sporadic.

*aša-* as an activity of mortals

"... I ... wish enduring strength ... to uphold the truth [*aša-*] ..." Y43:1; i.e. I wish enduring strength to uphold the true (correct) order of existence.

"... Let each of you try to win the other with truth [*aša-*] ..." Y53:5; i.e. let each of you try to win the other with the true (correct) order of existence, ~ with factual truth and abstract truths (all that is right), honesty, goodness, lovingkindness, generosity, compassion, justice, friendship, not injuring, not harming and all the other qualities included within the meaning of *aša-*.

"... Let him listen with truth [*aša-*] ..." Y49:7); listening with truth, is part of the way we search for truth ~ indicating that we should use good judgment in listening to what others tell us ~ the kind of judgment that accords with truth (*ašātāt hacā*).<sup>87</sup>

It has been argued, that truth (*aša-*) applies to man, and the most-good truth (*aša- vahišta-*) applies to the Divine. But the evidence of the Gathas does not support this argument ~ *aša-* without *vahišta-* often is used in connection with the Divine. Nor (with respect) is this a logical conclusion. In Zarathushtra's thought, truth is described as both 'good' (the positive), and 'most-good' (the superlative). Indeed, there is ample evidence that in Avestan, (in the Gathas, and in later Avestan texts as well) that the superlative often is used as a crescendo, or epiphany ~ not necessarily as a difference in quality or kind.<sup>88</sup>

*aša-* as an entity

In comparatively fewer verses, *aša-* is spoken of as an entity

"Truth [*aša-*], shall I see thee as I continue to acquire ... good thinking ..." Y28:5;

"... let us reverently give an offering to Thee Lord, and to truth [*aša-*] ..." Y34:3.<sup>89</sup>

Now, if in the Gathas truth (*aša-*) is a concept, and also an attribute / activity of both the Divine and man, then the references to it as an entity, can only be an allegory (except in the one instance in which Zarathushtra calls Wisdom "o truth" Y50:11). An allegory is simply the use of a form to stand for an idea. The Statue of Liberty is an allegory (the use of a woman's form holding a torch, to stand for the concept of liberty). Indeed, Zarathushtra signals the conclusion that his reference to truth as an entity is allegorical, in the first Gatha/song (Y28), where truth (*aša-*) is mentioned in delightful alternating sequences ~ as a concept, as an activity of man, as an entity (sometimes in tandem with the Lord Wisdom), and in some verses (with perhaps deliberate ambiguity) as a concept and/or an entity.<sup>90</sup>

So the perception of *aša-* as a separate, living being, a type of 'angel' entity, who is one of Wisdom's helpers, as we see in some of the later texts, is not consistent with the ways in which Zarathushtra uses *aša-* in the Gathas. Most of the later Avestan texts (in YAv.) were composed, many centuries after the Gathas. The earliest Pahlavi texts were written in the mid to late 800s CE ~ more than 2,000 + years after the Gathas, and certainly more than 1,000 years after the devastating loss of knowledge occasioned by the invasion of Alexander (circa 331 BCE). Indeed, the Pahlavi texts were written after 200 + years period of textual silence following the Arab invasion of Iran (circa 647 CE) which resulted in a far more devastating loss of knowledge than the religion suffered after Alexander's invasion. So these later authors' imperfect understanding of Old Avestan and the Gathas is surely understandable. Nevertheless, even in Pahlavi times, Zoroastrianism

was not one monolithic belief system. A Pahlavi Fragment text has survived which seems to understand that the amesha spenta are qualities of the Divine, (and that paradise is a state of being) discussed in other chapters.<sup>91</sup>

As so often happens, the perceptions of these later texts sometimes contain some golden strands of thought from the Gathas. In the Gathas, when we implement, bit by bit, the true (correct) good order of existence (*aša*) in ourselves and in our world, we do indeed help the world to progress towards the perfection that is its complete attainment. And how can truth (*aša*) be anything but a help to wisdom/Wisdom (*mazdā*)? Then too, in the Gathas, truth (*aša*), is indeed an object of reverence, worship and service. Zarathushtra says, for example:

"... truth [*aša*-] is to have a gift of reverence." Y43:9;

"... Therefore, let us reverently give an offering [*myazdam*<sup>92</sup>] to Thee, Lord, and to truth [*aša*-],..." Y34:3;

"... fame is to serve Thee and the truth [*aša*-], Wise One, under Thy rule." Y32:6.

So all these things (in the Gathas) together with the fact that Zarathushtra sometimes refers to truth as an allegorical entity, may have been the genesis of the perception in the later texts, that *aša*- is a living being (instead of an allegorical being), a helper of Wisdom, to be revered, worshipped, and celebrated.

There are those who contend that it is ridiculous to conclude that in the Gathas, *aša*- (and the other amesha spenta) are not living beings, because who ever heard of worshipping an idea ~ truth! Well, that is precisely the point. A unique and beautiful aspect of Zarathushtra's thought, is that he does indeed worship the true order of existence and its comprehension (good thinking) ~ personified w/Wisdom. In his thought, it is not *who* a being is that makes it divine, worthy of worship. It is the quality of a being that makes it divine, worthy of worship,<sup>93</sup> and that quality comprises comprehending and personifying the true order of existence ~ all that is true and good and right ~ an enlightened state of being (which is Wisdom).

That is why *aša*-, is entitled to reverence "...As long as I shall be able, I shall respect that truth [*aša*-] is to have a gift of reverence." Y43:9).

That is why *aša*- ~ in tandem with its comprehension (good thinking) and with the Being who comprehends it completely, and personifies it, Wisdom (*mazdā*-) ~ is an object of worship and reverence.

"Come hither to me, ye best ones [*vahišta*- 'most-good-ones'] ... Thou, Wise One, together with truth [*aša*-] and good thinking ... Let bright gifts and reverence (for all of you) be manifest amid us. Y33:7.<sup>94</sup>

Let me leave you with a thought and also with some questions:

*The thought:*

If this divine quality *aša*- is also found in mortals (albeit less than completely), then we see that in Zarathushtra's thought, we (and perhaps all the living) are not born sinful, corrupt, incapable of 'redeeming' ourselves. We are born with a capacity for the divine and a capacity for evil. And according to the Gathas, we have the ability to attain the divine completely (*haurvatāt*-), through our own endeavors, and with mutual, loving, help ~ from the Divine (whom Zarathushtra never calls 'God' in Av.), from other humans, from all the living.

*The Questions:*

If some qualities of the Divine are also found in man, and if man is capable of attaining them all completely, what does this tell us about Zarathushtra's ideas about the nature of the Divine, and the relationship between man and 'God' ? (and possibly all the living) ? What does this tell us about the *identity* of the Divine?<sup>95</sup>

If the true order applies to the existences of matter and mind, and if in the existence of mind, this order is beneficial, good, is this order also beneficial, in the existence of matter?

My friend Shahriar Shariari has posed an interesting question: "*If the physical is a reflection of the Spiritual, then is the Spiritual a reflection of the Physical too?*" Shahriar Shariari: [www.zarathushtra.com](http://www.zarathushtra.com).

Place these questions on the back burner of your mind, so that you can let your mind play over them, as you read more about Zarathushtra's thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Insler 1975, Humbach / Faiss 2010 and Hintze 1994 translate *aša-* as 'truth'.

Azargoshasb leaves the word untranslated.

Bartholomae translates the word as 'Right'; his translation appears in Taraporewala (1951).

Darmesteter translates the word as 'holy' in his translation of YAv. texts in SBE 23.

D. J. Irani's translation has been edited by his son, our greatly loved Professor K. D. Irani, who, in his Introduction explains that *aša-* is usually translated as "Truth" but carries the double meaning of Truth and Righteousness. Irani, D.J. *The Gathas, The Hymns of Zarathushtra*, (edited by K. D. Irani, and reprinted in 1998), page 15.

Jafarey translate the word as "Righteousness".

Moulton 1912 translates *aša-* as 'Right', and its adjective *ašavan-* as 'righteous'. He acknowledges 'Rightness' and 'Truth', but concludes that 'Righteousness' is the closest in meaning. Moulton 1912 p. 344.

Sethna translates the word as "Righteousness" and also acknowledges "Divine Holy Law". Sethna 1975 *Gathas*.

Skjaervo's *Old Avestan Index* translates *aša-* as "Order".

Taraporewala in his translation leaves the word untranslated, but in his commentary sees various shades of meaning in the word ~ "the Divine Will which has planned out our Universe", "the Plan of God", and for humans, "Truth and Righteousness", "the Path of Knowledge", and also in his commentary to Y28.1, "the Eternal Law". Tarap. (1951), pp. (12) and 92.

Darmesteter and Mills, both translate *aša-* and its adj. *ašavan-* as 'holy' and 'saint' in their translations in SBE 23 and 31 respectively, show. Many passages from their translations have been quoted throughout this web-book.

<sup>2</sup> Insler states that the older form of *aša-* was *arta* deriving from the root *ar-* 'to fit'. He says it originally meant 'what fits or what's ordered', hence 'truth' in the sense of 'what's fitting' and also 'what's ordered' in a system. In addition, he states that the root *ar-* generated other words (in addition to *aša-*) such as Old Av. *ārəzva-* 'honesty, righteousness'; *arəzu-* 'straight' (both as in 'straight line', and as in true, right, honest); and YAv. *arštāt-* 'honesty, righteousness'. See Insler's comments in *An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra* (1989 - 90), No. 2, pg. 12, ft. 1. This series may be viewed on Shahriar Shariari's website [www.zarathushtra.com](http://www.zarathushtra.com).

So based on the words this root *ar-* has generated (in addition to *aša-*), we see that *aša-* is an order of existence in which 'what fits' is what is inherently true, right.

<sup>3</sup> Zarathushtra speaks of the existences of matter and mind. It is worth noting, that in his thought, while the 'material' existence exists only in mortal existence, the existence of 'mind' exists in both mortal and non-mortal existence (an added dimension to the idea 'both existences'). Here are the Gatha verses in which he speaks of the existences of matter and mind.

"... to the straight [əṛəzūš] paths of the Mighty One ~ (to those) of this material existence and (to those) of the mind [aṇhəuš astvatō manahascā]..." Y43:3. Insler 1975. Here, the existences of matter and mind are in the "straight paths" and thus are limited to mortal existence. The "straight paths" are the paths of truth (aša- see *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*), so the true (correct) order of existence (aša) pertains to the existences of matter and mind.

"... the attainments of both existences ~ yes, of matter [astvatascā] as well as of mind [manahō] ~ those attainments befitting truth [aša-] through which one might set Thy supporters in happiness [xʷāθrē]." Y28:2. Here truth (aša-) pertains to the attainments of both matter and mind in mortal existence (the path of truth). But the attainment of truth (aša-) is also Zarathushtra's notion of the ultimate existence which is not bound by mortality (see *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*). And he also describes both this path and its ultimate (non-mortal) end as an existence that is "happiness" in the sense of xʷāθra- ~ an Avestan word which has multi-dimensioned flavors of meaning (discussed in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire, and The Houses of Paradise & Hell*), so in the above Gatha verse Y28:2 we see the added dimension of the attainment of truth in the non-mortal existence of mind.

And we see this same concept of 'both existences' (the material and the abstract) in other Avestan texts.

The GAv. YHapt. 41:6.

'... and for this (material) existence and that of mind [ahmāicā ahuyē manahyāicā]...' YHapt. 41:6. my translation; Avestan words from Geldner 1P p. 138.

The YAv. Mihir Yt.

... aṇhəuš yō astvatō yasca asti manahyō ... Yt. 10:93, Geldner 2P p. 145;

'... of the existence which (is) material [astvatō], and which is of mind (abstract) [manahyō] ...' Yt. 10:93, my translation.

And the following 2 sections of the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*.

'Lord Wisdom, may we attain Your good rule, for all (of our) lifetime; may a good ruler ~ man or woman ~ rule over us in both existences, O most beneficent One among living beings.' YHapt. 41:2, my translation.

vohū. xšaθrəm. tōi. mazdā. ahurā. apaēmā. vīspāi. yavē. huxšaθrastū.nā. nā.vā. nāirī.vā. xšaētā. ubōyō. aṇhvō. hātqm hudāstēmā. ♀ YHapt. 41:2. Geldner 1P p. 137.

Here (YHapt. 41:2) 'both existences' are the existences ruled over by a good ruler ~ man or woman ~ so of necessity, the term would have to apply to mortal existence ~ thus the existences of matter and mind in mortal existence. Now look at,

'O Wisdom, Lord, beautiful through truth [ašā.srīrā], we would choose to think, speak, and perform actions which, among living beings, (are) most-good for both existences.' YHapt. 35:3, my translation.

taṭ. aṭ. \*varəmaidī. ahurā. mazdā. ašā.srīrā. hyaṭ. ī. \*mainimaidicā. vaocōimācā. \*varəzimacā. yā. hātqm. šyaoθananqm. vahištā. hyaṭ. ubōibyā. ahubyā. ♀ YHapt. 35:3, Geldner 1P p. 129, asterisks indicate the mss. preferences or emendations of Humbach/Faiss 2010.

Here (YHapt. 35:3), our good thoughts, words and actions operate in this life, and therefore are most-good (vahištā) for the existences of matter and mind ~ 'both existences' in mortal existence. But possibly also in the non-mortal existence of mind, based on the ways in which Zarathushtra uses vahištā-, see *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*.

A word on the linguistics of the existence of mind/thinking/thought. Beekes 1988 translates *manahiā-* as an adjective 'spiritual' p. 132 (Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index sees the same word *manahya-* an adj. 'of thought'); and indeed, in the Gathas, what in English we call 'mind' and 'spirit' are equated and describe the abstract existence (see *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*). This would give us 'the existence which (is) material, and which is abstract (mind/spirit)'. The 'material' existence exists only in mortal existence. The 'abstract' existence exists in both mortal and non-mortal existence.

<sup>4</sup> In the thousand or more of years that followed Zarathushtra, some of these practices against pollution deteriorated into taboos, and lost their original meaning, but that is another story (see for examples, *Part Four: The Menses*).

<sup>5</sup> The interesting use of "which man" in this and other verses in Y44, is discussed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Creation*.

<sup>6</sup> See also "... Which man has upheld the earth below and the heavens (above) from falling? Who the waters and the plants?..." Y44:4;

"... Which craftsman created the luminous bodies and the dark spaces? Which craftsman created both sleep and activity? Through whom does dawn exist, along with midday and evening, ... Y44:5.

<sup>7</sup> The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path is close to the idea of the path of *aša-* in thought, word and action. In Thich Nhat Hanh's, *Old Path White Clouds*, (Parallax Press, Berkeley CA 1991) the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path is described as "right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration," p. 121. I love this book, it is well worth reading (even though I don't always agree with it).

<sup>8</sup> See *Part One: The Beneficial-Sacred Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu*.

<sup>9</sup> In Y51:21, we have "...virtuous is truth [*ašəm spənvat*],...", Insler 1975; *spənvat* is nom. sg. ntr. of *spənvant-* which literally means 'endowed with *spən-*, characterised by *spən-*.' *spənta-* and *spənvant-* are two different adjectives, which may be etymologically related. I owe the foregoing information to Professor Elizabeth Tucker.

In Y45:9 we have *spəncā aspəncā* and Humbach 1991, commenting on this verse, is of the opinion that the adj. *spənta-* is "derived from the root noun *spən-*" Vol. 2, p. 172, (although not all linguists may be so certain). Humbach's understanding of the meanings of *spənta-* and *spən-* are discussed in *Part One: The Beneficial-Sacred Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu*. Insler 1975 translates both *spənta-* words and *spənvant-* words as "virtuous".

Thus in Y51:21 "...virtuous is truth [*ašəm spənvat*],...", Insler 1975, we see at least a potential equivalence between the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) and what is beneficial-sacred, 'truth (is) endowed with beneficial-ness' [*ašəm spənvat*].

<sup>10</sup> In the Gathas, in mirrored equations (*aša-* through *spənta-*; and *spənta-* through *aša-*) we see that this beneficial quality (*spənta-*), and the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) are equated. For example:

*spənta-* through *aša-*:

The quality of being beneficial-sacred (*spənta-*) is obtained through being in sync with the true order of existence (*aša-*).

'Hand outstretched, with reverence of this (our) support ~ the way of being, beneficial-sacred through the true order of existence [*ašā*]...' Y28.1, my translation. See *Part Six: Yasna 28:1* for a linguistic discussion of how this verse is translated.

"... for such a person, [*spənta-*] through truth [*aša-* ]..." Y44:2, Insler 1975;



I translate this, 'for such a person, beneficial-sacred (*spənta-*) through the true order of existence (*aša-*)'.

*aša-* through *spənta-*:

We are told that being in sync with the true order of existence (*aša-*) is obtained through a way of being that is beneficial-sacred (*spənta- mainyu-*).

"... from those who are properly truthful [*ašaonō*] from this [*spənta- mainyu-*] ... " Y47:4, Insler 1975;

I translate this, 'from those (who are) truthful from a beneficial-sacred way of being'. The word *ašaonō* is a declension of the stem *ašavan-* 'truthful' ~ the adjective for *aša-*. Thus *ašaonō* is 'truthful' in the sense of being in sync with the true order of existence. Its literal meaning is 'truth-possessing' (detailed in *Part Three: Ashavan & Dregvant*

*Later texts.*

That the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) is beneficial (*spənta-*) is corroborated in the Ormazd (*Hormezd*) Yasht, a much later Younger Avestan (YAv.) text "... Asha-Vahishta, most fair [*sraēštəm* 'most-beautiful'], undying, and beneficent [*aməšəm spəntəm*, 'undying, beneficial-sacred]..." Yt. 1:22, Darmesteter, SBE 23, p. 30; Avestan words in square brackets from Geldner 2P p. 65, with my preferred English translation of such words.

<sup>11</sup> See *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*, and *The Puzzle of Creation*.

<sup>12</sup> In Av., adjectives are also used as nouns, indicating a thing (person, concept, activity) which has the qualities of the adjective. And in the YAv. term *amesha spenta*, unless the context gives a clear answer, it is anyone's guess as to whether the two adjectives 'amesha' and 'spenta' are used, both as adjectives, or both as nouns, or as an adjective and a noun, and if so which is the adj. and which the noun. Its literal meaning is 'undying [*aməša-*] beneficial-sacred [*spənta-*] (ones)'.

<sup>13</sup> Avestan words from Geldner 1P, p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> For example, in the *Zamyad Yasht*, Ch. 2, § 15, the English translation by Hintze (1994) p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Webster's International Dictionary, 2d Edition, (1956).

<sup>16</sup> See *Part One: The Beneficial-Sacred Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu*.

<sup>17</sup> The (conjectured) stem is *hudāh-*. Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index states that *hudāh-* means "who gives good gifts, generous."

If *hu-* is a prefix, there is no doubt that it means 'good' (e.g. *hucisti-* 'good understanding' Y34:14c, Y46:4e; *hušyaoθana-* 'good action' (Y45:4d); *hujūti-* 'good (way of) life' Y33:10a, Y32:5a; *hušana-* 'good gain' Y53:5; *hux šaθra-* 'good rule', Y44.20a, Y48.5a).

And according to Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index *dāh-* means 'gift' deriving from *dā-* which means 'to give' (among other things).

But, different linguists see different Vedic cognates for *hudāh-*, (as with so many Gathic Avestan words) which result in different shades of meaning for this word.

<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in Y30.11 and Y48.1, salvation is equated with the attainment of truth:

"..... salvation for the truthful [*ašavan-*] ...." Y30:11; Insler 1975.

"If, during the times after this (present) one which is under the workings of evil, one shall defeat deceit by truth [*aša-*], ... then one shall increase Thy glory, Lord, during those times of salvation." Y48:1, Insler 1975.

In Y48:12, "saviors" [*saošyantō*] are those who implement actions of truth and its comprehension, good thinking (which implementation is the concept of *ārmaiti-*): "Yes, those men shall be the saviors of the lands, namely, those

who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and with truth [*aša-*], Wise One [*mazdā-* 'Wisdom']. These indeed have been fated to be the expellers of fury." Y48:12. Notice, it is not another tribe, or race, or religion, that is expelled, but a wrongful way of being, 'fury'.

<sup>19</sup> Discussed in *Part One: A Question of Salvation*.

<sup>20</sup> Jackson 1892 § 365, p. 104; Beekes 1988 pp. 135 - 136 (although Beekes' spellings differ from the way the words are written in surviving manuscripts ~ because he tries to reconstruct what he thinks were the original ways in which Avestan words were said/spelled).

<sup>21</sup> As in the YAv. *Hormezd Yasht*.

<sup>22</sup> Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Most Good, Vahishta*.

<sup>23</sup> Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most Good, Vahishta*.

<sup>24</sup> See *Part Six: Yasna 30.3 and 4*, which gives a linguistic analysis and other translations for comparative purposes.

<sup>25</sup> See *Part Six: Yasna 45.2*, which gives a linguistic analysis and other translations for comparative purposes.

<sup>26</sup> This equivalence is corroborated by the fact that 'good', (*vohu-*) is sometimes used interchangeably with 'beneficial' (*spənta-*) when describing a way of being *mainyu-*,

"... the (correct) thinking stemming from good spirit [*mainyāušcā vaṇhāuš*]..." Y34.2;

"... the word and deed stemming from good spirit [*vaṇhāuš mainyāuš*]..." Y45.8;

The words *vaṇhāuš mainyāuš* in these two verses are the abl./gen. sg. case forms of *vohu- mainyu-*. Insler's translation is abl. ('stemming from \_\_\_\_'). But these two words are also the form for genitive ('of \_\_\_\_'), giving us, '(the) correct thinking of (a) good way of being' and '(the) word and deed of (a) good way of being', indicating once again that thoughts, words and actions are a part of the concept of *mainyu-* ~ the totality of a way of being. See *Part One: The Beneficial-Sacred Way of Being*. In the first of these quotations, the *-cā* tacked on to *mainyāuš* simply means 'and'.

<sup>27</sup> Here, YHapt.37:4 describes the true order of existence (*aša-*) as 'light filled' ~ another example of the many instances in which 'light' is used as a symbol, or metaphor, for the true order of existence, indicating (in my view) an enlightened existence.

<sup>28</sup> The translation is mine. The Avestan words of YHapt.37:4 are from Geldner 1P p. 133. For a detailed discussion and translation supported by a linguistic analysis, with the translations of professional linguists given for comparative purposes, see *Part Six: Yasna Haptanghaiti 37.4 and 5*.

<sup>29</sup> Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index defines the stem *sraēšta-* as 'most beautiful' the superlative form of the stem *srīra-* 'beautiful'.

We see the same thought expressed in the *Ardibehesht Yasht*,

*ašəm vahištəm sraēštəm aməšəm spəntəm*

'... truth the most-good, the most beautiful, non-dying, beneficial ...'. Yt 3.18, my translation;

Avestan words from Geldner 2P, p. 77.

<sup>30</sup> See also *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*, and *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*.

<sup>31</sup> The word *ašāunē* in Y30.4 is one of the dative sg. case forms of the stem *ašavan-* 'truthful' (Jackson 1892, § 312, p. 91); *ašavan-* is an adjective which here is used as a noun 'truthful (one)' or 'truthful (person)' (see *Part Three: Ashavan & Dregvant*). This verse Y30:4 is discussed in more detail in *Part Six: Yasna 30:3 and 4*. For other Gatha verses in which the superlative degree *vahišta-* 'most good' is used to describe 'thinking', see *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah*.

<sup>32</sup> Here are a few more examples in which truth (*aša-*) or its comprehension (good thinking) is involved in healing existence.

"The person who, really in accordance with truth [*aša-*], shall bring to realization for me, Zarathushtra, what is most healing according to (our) wish, ..." Y46:19.

Those who deliver deceit into the hands of truth in Y30:8, are referred to as world-healers in Y30:9 "... then, for Thee, Wise One, shall the rule of good thinking be at hand, in order to be announced to those, Lord, who shall deliver deceit into the hands of truth [*aša-*]. Therefore may we be those who shall heal this world! ..." Y30:8 - 9.

In Y51:5 a rhetorical question tells us that the pastor serves the cow (an allegory for the beneficial-sacred in mortal existence) with truth (*aša-*) ("... I am asking how the pastor ... shall (best) serve the cow in accord with truth [*aša-*]..." Y51:5), in other words, the true order (*aša-*) is the way to nurture (be a pastor) the beneficial in existence (the allegorical cow), indicating that the true order (*aša-*) includes the concept of nurturing, caring, (healing).

<sup>33</sup> Zarathushtra has unconventional ideas regarding what in English we think of as 'creator' and 'creation'. See *Part Two: The Puzzle of Creation*.

<sup>34</sup> See *Part One: Good Rule, Vohu Xshathra, & Power*.

<sup>35</sup> "... Him who is beneficent through His [*spənta- mainyu-* 'beneficial way of being'] to those who exist..." Y45:6, Insler 1975.

<sup>36</sup> "... the Lord, beneficent through truth [*aša-*]..." Y48:3, Insler 1975.

<sup>37</sup> "... the (correct) thinking stemming from good [*mainyu-* 'stemming from (a) good way of being']..." Y34:2; "... Lord of the word and deed stemming from good [*mainyu-* 'stemming from (a) good way of being'] ..." Y45:8, Insler 1975.

<sup>38</sup> "Yes, there are two fundamental [*mainyu-* 'ways of being'], ... In thought and in word, in action they are two: the good [*vahyah-* 'more-good'] and the bad. And between these two the beneficent have correctly chosen..." Y30:3, Insler 1975;

"... the [*mainyu- spəništa-* 'most beneficial way of being'] ... chose the truth [*aša-*]..." Y30:5, Insler 1975.

<sup>39</sup> "Yes, there are two fundamental [*mainyu-* 'ways of being'], ... In thought and in word, in action they are two: the [*vahyah-* 'more-good'] and the bad. And between these two the beneficent have correctly chosen..." Y30:3, Insler 1975.

<sup>40</sup> "Yes, I shall speak of the two fundamental [*mainyu-* 'ways of being'] of existence, of which the [*spənyah-* 'more beneficial'] one would have thus spoken to the evil one..." Y45:2, Insler 1975.

<sup>41</sup> "... the [*mainyu- spəništa-* '(the) most beneficial way of being'] ... chose the truth [*aša-*] ..." Y30:5, Insler 1975.

<sup>42</sup> "With hands outstretched in reverence of him, (our) support, the [*mainyu-* 'way of being'] [*spənta-* 'beneficial'] through truth [*aša-*], I first entreat all (of you), Wise One, through this act..." Y28:1, Insler 1975. Notice that *spənta-mainyu-*, Wisdom and the unidentified "all" are not referred to here as a collection of disparate beings, serially linked with "ands". Here, (thanks to Insler's insight into the syntax of this verse), the object of the act of reverence in the first part of this sentence is the beneficial (*spənta-*) way of being (*mainyu-*) – a way of being which is that of Wisdom and its other divine qualities "all" because they are the objects of the same act of reverence (see *Part Six: Yasna 28.1*). In Insler's translation, the "all" may refer to Wisdom's attributes the amesha spenta and also those who have attained these qualities completely and thus are part of the Divine, see in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Singular and the Plural*; and *A Question of Immanence*.

But I translate this verse a bit differently,

'Hand outstretched, with reverence of this (our) support ~ the way of being, beneficial-sacred through the true order of existence ~ first, through (this) act, O Wisdom, I ask for all (that) through which You may satisfy [sg.] the reasoning of good thinking, and the soul of the cow." Y28:1, my translation.

I therefore think that 'all' refers to Wisdom's teachings, for which Zarathushtra is asking in this verse Y28:1 (detailed in Part Six: Yasna 28:1).

<sup>43</sup> "... the loving man... For such a person, [*spənta-* 'beneficial'] through truth [*aša-*], ..." Y44:2, Insler 1975.

<sup>44</sup> "... (But) the [*mainyu- spəništa-* 'most beneficial way of being'] ... chose the truth [*aša-*]..." Y30:5, Insler 1975.

<sup>45</sup> "Yes, there are two fundamental [*mainyu-* 'ways of being'], ... In thought and in word, in action they are two: the [*vahyah-* 'more good'] and the bad. And between these two the beneficent have correctly chosen..." Y30:3, Insler 1975.

<sup>46</sup> "...the loving man... For such a person, [*spənta-* 'beneficial'] through truth [*aša-*], 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.

<sup>47</sup> See also: "The priest who is just in harmony with truth [*aša-*] ..." Y33:6 Insler 1975. In the Old Avestan text of this verse, these words are: "*yā zaotā* [the priest who] *ašā* [through truth] (is) *ərəzuš* [straight] ...". The stem *aša-* here is in its instr. sg. form (*ašā*), ('through/with/by truth'). And Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index shows the adj. *ərəzu-* 'straight (not crooked)'. So literally 'The priest who through the true order of existence is straight ...' my translation.

<sup>48</sup> This quotation can be translated with different translation options. The Old Av. words which Insler has translated as people ~ "... the just [*dāθəmcā*] and the unjust [*adāθəmcā*]..." are actually adjectives (Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index), which in Avestan can be used as nouns ~ either people or concepts. Insler 1975 has chosen to translate these adjectives as people. But with equal accuracy, they could be translated as concepts '(what is) just, and (what is) unjust'. The verb *vīcinaoŋ* which Insler has translated as "has judged" derives from *caē* which with the prefix *vī* means 'to distinguish, discriminate (between/ among), sharing the same genesis as *cinvatō* (Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index) ~ used to describe the Chinvat Bridge, which as Insler 1975 comments derives from *cī-* 'to discern, decide' (detailed in Part Three: Chinvat, The Bridge of Discerning). The translation options which Insler 1975 has chosen reflects the paradigm of 'God' judging people (preliminary to rewarding and punishing). But (with respect) that paradigm is alien to the Gathas. The quoted phrase in Y46:17 in GAv. is as follows,

*yā vīcinaoŋ dāθəmcā adāθəmcā*  
*daŋgrā mañtū ašā mazdā ahurō*

'... the Lord, Wisdom [*mazdā ahurō*] through truth [*ašā*] the skilled [*daŋgrā*] advisor [*mañtū*] discerns between (what is) just and unjust." Y46:17 my translation.

<sup>49</sup> In some societies, such as amongst the aristocracy in England and parts of Europe during the Middle Ages, and even today amongst some Afghan tribes and other cultures, the idea of revenge was/is not only considered a right and a duty, it was tied to the honor of the person or his family. Taking revenge was honorable. Failure to do so was dishonorable.

<sup>50</sup> See for example, the cruel punishments meted out by Mithra, a pre-Zarathushtrian Indo-Iranian deity. Here are a few examples. There are many, many more. These examples are from the *Mihir Yasht* as it appears in SBE 23, pp. 126, 128, 130, 131, Darmesteter translation: referring to Mithra, this YAv. text states,

§ 26: "...Who breaks the skulls of the Daevas, and is most cruel in exacting pains; the punisher of men who lie unto Mithra..."

§ 37: [referring to people] "He can bring and does bring down upon them distress and fear; he throws down the heads of those who lie unto Mithra, he takes off the heads of those who lie unto Mithra."

§ 43: "And then Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, throws them to the ground, killing their fifties and their hundreds, their hundreds and their thousands, their thousands and their tens of thousands, their tens of thousands and their myriads of myriads; as Mithra, the lord of the wide pastures is angry and offended."

§ 48: "... then he binds the hands of those who have lied unto Mithra, he confounds their eyesight, he takes the hearing from their ears; they can no longer move their feet; they can no longer withstand those people, those foes, when Mithra ... bears them ill-will."

<sup>51</sup> In the Gathas, 'heaven' is not a place, it is a state of being in this life (incrementally) and in a (perfected) non-mortal existence (in which the 7 qualities of the Divine have been attained completely); and 'hell' also is not a place, it is a wrong-headed, mistaken, state of being in mortal existence, which ceases to exist when a life form has attained the true order of existence completely, perfectly, and is no longer bound by mortality. For notions of 'heaven' and 'hell' in the Gathas, see *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise & Hell*.

In Younger Avestan texts (that were composed during Avestan times) there is no concept of 'hell' as a place of torment and punishment in the afterlife. This idea is simply absent from YAv. texts (as it is absent from the Gathas). In YAv. texts, all punishments from the pre-Zarathushtrian deities (who by then had been syncretized into the Zoroastrian religion) are material punishments in this life. But in some YAv. *Fragments* and in the *Vendidad*, (composed in YAv. which linguists agree is so grammatically faulty, that they could not have been composed when the religious establishment was fluent in Avestan, and therefore would necessarily have been composed long after Avestan times), we see the beginnings of the 'bad' reward as an unpleasant places in the afterlife but with no torment or punishment other than cold, stink, and bad food (see *Part Three: The Absence of Damnation & Hell in Other Avestan Texts*).

And in YAv. Avestan texts, the truthful state of being is also incremental ~ in mortal existence and in a perfected non-mortal (as in the Gathas), but in some YAv. texts, we see a transition in thinking of the 'good' reward from a state of being (as in the Gathas) to a light-filled place in the afterlife (see *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*).

In some later (Pahlavi) texts, "heaven" and "hell" are not states of being, but pleasant places of reward and unpleasant places of torture for punishment as detailed in the *Arda Viraf Namag* and other texts (discussed in *Part Three: Heaven & Hell in Pahlavi Texts*).

<sup>52</sup> See *Part Three: The Absence of Damnation & Hell in Other Avestan Texts*.

<sup>53</sup> See in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*, and also *A Friendly Universe*; and *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>54</sup> See *Part One: A Friendly Universe*, and *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution* for the evidence on which these conclusions are based.

<sup>55</sup> See *Part Two: The Lords and the Equations of Y31.4*.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Schwartz discusses Zarathushtra's use of double entendre in some specific verses of the Gathas in his essay *The Ties that Bind: On the Form and Content of Zarathushtra's Mysticism in Proceedings of the First Gatha Colloquium, 1993* (WZO 1998). And we see many instances of Zarathushtra using double entendre in many chapters in *Part Two*.

<sup>57</sup> *ayžōnvamnəm* was translated by Insler in 1975 as 'unharmable' in the sense of 'unassailable'. But linguists are not in agreement regarding the translation of this "very obscure middle participle *ayžōnvamnəm*".

There are two alternative translation proposals 'not faltering' (more literally 'not over-reaching, not missing the mark') and 'not perishing, unfailing' both of which connect this GAv. form with different Indo-European verbs and both of which are also supported by historical linguistic reasoning. So different scholars have arrived at different conclusions. I owe the foregoing information to Professor Elizabeth Tucker.

These differences are simply part of the process of de-coding a very ancient language ~ the exact grammar and vocabulary of which had become unknown for possibly more than 1,000 years.

<sup>58</sup> Insler 1975, p. 122.

<sup>59</sup> Sethna 1980, *Khordeh Avesta*, p. 209.

<sup>60</sup> Kanga 1880, *Khordeh Avesta*, (1995 reprint, Trustees Bombay Parsi Panchayat), p. 406.

<sup>61</sup> Taraporewala 1951, commenting on Bartholomae's views on p. 775. Bartholomae's translation appears on the same page. For a given GAv. word, (like *mərəždikā*) there might be a number of valid English equivalents.

<sup>62</sup> The concept of 'mercy' or 'pardon' (as a reprieve from the painful consequences of wrongdoing) is not relevant to Zarathushtra's thought, in which (unlike later Pahlavi texts) there is no concept of damnation in a hell of tortures or punishment (detailed in *Part Three: The Absence Of Damnation & Hell In Other Avestan Texts*).

Therefore, there can be no concept of pardon, or mercy as a reprieve from such damnation. There is only the law of consequences ~ that we reap what we sow ~ which is not for punishment, but for enlightenment ~ to increase understanding through experiences in the material existence. The law of consequences is a part of the way we grow spiritually, and is part of Zarathushtra's solution for defeating evil. To 'pardon' or give a reprieve (mercy) from the adverse consequences of our wrongful conduct would defeat that purpose. Such concepts as 'mercy' and 'pardon' are relevant only to a theology that believes in a hell of punitive divine justice. It is not relevant to Zarathushtra's thought. (Detailed in *Part One: A Friendly Universe*, and *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*). However, the concept of 'pardon' as in 'not holding a grudge' is indeed relevant to Zarathushtra's thought. The Divine shows 'mercy', 'pardon' in the sense that, regardless of what wrongs we have committed, Wisdom offers loving help, support, protection (with truth and good thinking) to help us change our minds, preferences. So *mərəždikā* as 'mercy' in that sense would be consistent with Zarathushtra's thought.

<sup>63</sup> In this regard, it is interesting that this same notion of 'good' rule as being one that is caring, nurturing, appears in some later texts. It appears in the story of Yima as told in the YAv. *Videvdāt* (Pahl. *Vendidad*) quoted in *Part Four: Ancient Origins & Homelands*. And it appears (with equal eloquence, but less story-telling drama) in the 7th book of the *Dinkard*, a Pahlavi text written in or about the 9th century C. E., which re-tells the legend of Yim (Jamsheed) in which Ahura Mazda gave Yim rulership of the world. The author of this Pahlavi text, in recounting the legend as it came down to him over time, has Ahura Mazda saying the following words which corroborates the fact that in Y51:4, good rule includes not harming, not injuring. In the following quotation, I have omitted the Pahlavi words which E. W. West has inserted in round parentheses. English words in italics are additions by West which are not in the Pahlavi text, but which West thinks are implied.

"21. And in the good religion it is declared, by the word of the creator Auharmazd [Av. Ahura Mazda] to Yim, thus: 'Then do thou widen my world! (...), then do thou extend my world! (...), and then thou shouldst accept from me the protection, nourishment, and chieftainship of the world; and do thou effect such watchfulness over it, that no one shall be able to occasion the wounding or injury of another'." *Dinkard* 7, § 21, E. W. West translation, SBE 47, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> In the Gathas, power, might, strength, are associated with the qualities of the Divine, the amesha spenta. See *Part One: Good Rule, Vohu Xshathra & Power*.

<sup>65</sup> The omitted words in this quotation are "and the other Lords" ~ a phrase which is discussed in *Part Two: The Lords & The Equations of Y31.4*.

<sup>66</sup> See *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.



<sup>67</sup> See in *Part Two, A Question of Reward and the Path*, as well as *The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*, and *The Houses of Paradise and Hell*.

<sup>68</sup> In Y30.6a, the translation of *daēvācinā* as the 'gods' has troubled many Zoroastrians, who think this must be an incorrect translation because it indicates that Zarathushtra believed in the existence of the 'gods' of his culture, whereas, (such Zoroastrians argue) he was a strict monotheist. Let us consider the matter, first linguistically, and then as a reflection of Zarathushtra's thought.

*Linguistically,*

Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index shows that the (grammatically) masc. noun stem *daēva-* means "the ancient Indo-Iranian gods, now followers of the Lie." (By "now" he means during the time of the Gathas). He construes the inflected form *daēvā* (with a long final *ā*) as nom./voc. plural. The nom. pl. fits the context of Y30:6a. And under the stem *daēva-* he shows *daēvācinā* citing Y30:6, but does not give a meaning for this word.

Insler's commentary does not explain what *-cinā* in *daēvācinā* signifies.

Taraporewala 1951 says *-cinā* means 'even' (p. 149). Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index also shows *cinā* as an emphatic particle meaning 'even'. Beekes 1988 shows *cinā* as an indeclinable emphatic particle, citing this verse Y30:6 as an example of its use (§ 1, p. 144, and § 25, p. 149). An 'indeclinable' word is simply one that is not inflected for case/number/gender. This would give us, in literal translation, 'Between these two, even the gods did not choose correctly ...' i.e. between these two ways of being (*mainyu-*) mentioned in the preceding verse. Insler 1975 uses "at all" instead of 'even' as does Humbach (1991), whereas Humbach/Faiss (2010) use "particularly" ~ each of which is simply a different English form of an emphatic particle. Thus Taraporewala, Skjaervo, Beekes, Insler, Humbach and Faiss, all appear to agree in seeing *cinā* as an indeclinable emphatic particle tacked on to the nom. pl. form (*daēvā*) in Y30:6a.

Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index shows *cinah-* as 'loving', citing *ašacinah-* (which I translate as 'truth-loving'). Beekes 1988 likewise says that *artacinah-* (what he considers to be an ancestral spelling of *ašacinah-*) is a stem adj. which means means 'loving arta' (i.e. 'loving *aša*') in the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* (p. 116).

If (as Skjaervo and Beekes say) *ašacinah-* (Beekes *artacinah-*) means 'truth-loving', it is tempting to think of *daēvācinā* in Y30:6a as a noun, meaning 'daēvā-loving (people)'. But in the context of Y30:6a, I do not think that option would fit either grammatically or contextually because for the stem *cinah-* the declension *cinā* is nom. du. whereas the mentioned *daēvā* word is nom. pl. ~ multiple 'gods' who did not choose correctly between the two ways of being (*mainyu-*) in the preceding verse. For *ah-* stem nouns (such as *cinah-* 'loving'), the nom. pl. inflection is *-aṇhō* (Jackson 1892 §§ 339 - 340 pp. 97 - 98; Skjaervo, *Old Avestan*, Lesson 4). The nom. du. *cinā* 'loving' cannot belong with the nom. pl. *daēvā* 'gods' to create the one word *daēvācinā* 'daēvā-loving (people)'. Therefore, with respect (and affection) for my friends who so content, *daēvācinā* in Y30:6a cannot mean 'daēvā-loving (people)'. This is just my opinion and I could be mistaken.

*As a reflection of Zarathushtra's thought,*

The fact that in this and other verses, Zarathushtra mentions the local gods of his society does not necessarily mean that he believed in their existence. Zarathushtra's belief or non-belief in the local gods of his culture is discussed with evidence in *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

<sup>69</sup> The full verse Y30:6 and the verse that precedes it Y30:5 read as follows Insler 1975, except that I have substituted the applicable GAv. words in square brackets with my preferred translation in black font in place of Insler's translation of these words). In verse 5, the 'deceitful (one)' is not the Evil Spirit (see *Part One: Does The Devil Exist?*), it is the previously mentioned deceitful way of being (*mainyu-*). In the verse that follows (Y30:6) 'between these two' refers to the two ways of being (*mainyu-*) mentioned in the preceding verse. And the words "deceptive one" in verse 6 is not

a reference to the Evil Spirit as a discrete entity. It refers to the "deceptive one" of the two ways of being (*mainyu-*) previously mentioned (Y30:5).

"Of these two [*mainyu-* 'ways of being'], the deceitful one chose to bring to realization the worst things. (But) the [*spēništa- mainyu-* 'most-beneficial way of being'], who is clothed in the hardest stones, chose the truth [*aša-*], and (so shall those) who shall satisfy the Wise Lord continuously with true actions." Y30:5. Insler 1975.

"The gods [*daēvācinā*] did not at all choose correctly between these two, since the deceptive one approached them as they were deliberating. Since they chose the worst thought, they then rushed into fury, with which they have afflicted the world and mankind." Y30:6, Insler 1975.

<sup>70</sup> See *Part Six: Yasna 45:2* for my translation of this verse, together with a brief discussion, a linguistic analysis, and other translations for comparative purposes.

<sup>71</sup> See *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*, and *The Puzzle of Creation*.

<sup>72</sup> The word which Insler 1975 translates as 'happiness' is *xʷāθra-* (which derives from *sū-āθra- hu-āθra-*), and which in YAv. texts formed part of a compound word *~ aša.xʷāθra-* ~ a word which has lovely multi-dimensioned meanings, and sheds light on one perspective of Zarathushtra's notion of 'happiness', explained in detail in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.

<sup>73</sup> For Zarathushtra's understanding of the creative act, see *Part Two: The Puzzle of Creation*. One of the keys to understanding Zarathushtra's ideas regarding the creative act is to be aware that for millennia, Zoroastrians have lived under dominant religions in which the Creator is a being who is separate and apart from Its creation. That is very different from Zarathushtra's thought of the in-dwelling Divine.

<sup>74</sup> See *Part One: Joy, Happiness, Prosperity*.

<sup>75</sup> The concept of *aša-*, the true (correct) order, exists in the existences of matter and mind. Yet, when Zarathushtra describes *aša-* as an attribute of the Divine (and one that also exists incompletely in man), he does not add any kind of a limitation, limiting the description of *aša-* to the existence of mind. One cannot help but wonder why. Was Zarathushtra implying that the identity of Wisdom the Lord includes the existence of matter? This would be consistent with his notion of 'creation', which is a creation by emanation (see *Part Two: The Puzzle of Creation*). It would also be consistent with the notion of the immanence of the Divine in all things (see *Part Two: A Question of Immanence*). But this would require the conclusion that everything in the *material* existence is part of the same underlying 'matter' (for want of a better term) which was emanated to effectuate 'creation'. While there is a school of scientific thought that we are all part of stardust, I do not know if this conclusion was in Zarathushtra's mind; nor do I know whether it is valid (or would in future be valid) in light of our present (or future) knowledge of physics.

But we should bear in mind, that Zarathushtra's ideas were a part of his own search for truth, based on the knowledge available in his time period. He did not pretend to have all the answers. His teaching is an on-going search for truth ~ a quest from which he did not exempt himself ("*Truth shall I see thee as I continue to acquire ... good thinking?...*" Y28:5, Insler 1975). In short, his ideas were the product of applying his intelligence and his thought processes to what he observed. As such, they are remarkably logical and consistent, when it comes to how we should live our lives. And his understanding of the Divine, in the existence of mind, has the fewest unanswered questions of any religious paradigm that I have come across. But it raises some questions when it comes to *aša-* as the nature of the divine in the existence of matter ~ it raises questions which, on our present state of knowledge (about the existence of matter) we cannot answer.

<sup>76</sup> See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

<sup>77</sup> It is interesting that Chaos was the name of an ancient Greek deity who was 'the differentiator' ~ the originator of thought ~ thought being necessary to be able to differentiate (however I do not read or know ancient Greek ~ this is just what I have read in English translation).

<sup>78</sup> See *Part One: The Manthra of Truth, Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu)*, and *Part Three: Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu), An Analysis*.

<sup>79</sup> For truth (*aṣa-*) as a concept, see also the following (all in the Insler 1975 translation) in each of which [truth](#) is an *aṣa-* word:

"... those attainments befitting truth ..."Y28:2;  
 "... a judgment which ... befits truth ..."Y29:6;  
 "... but the very [*spāništa- mainyu-*] chose the truth ..."Y30:5;  
 "... he who has respected the truth ..."Y31:19;  
 "...the worst mortals ... retreat from good thinking and disappear ... from truth."Y32:4;  
 "... the rich Karpan chose the rule of tyrants and deceit rather than truth."Y32:12;  
 "Rise up to me, Lord ... receive ... powerful might through truth ..."Y33:12;  
 "... those conceptions in harmony with truth."Y33:13;  
 "... the word allied with truth ..."Y33:14;  
 "... Thou didst receive for Thyself ... truth..."Y34:1;  
 "... the [*spānta-*] man whose soul is in alliance with truth ..."Y34:2;  
 "... Thy fire which possesses strength through truth..."Y34:4;  
 "... Thy extoller shall proceed in alliance with truth..." Y34:13;  
 "... the best words and actions namely those allied with good thinking and truth..."Y34:15;  
 "... the wondrous powers of good thinking allied with truth."Y43:2;  
 "... May truth be embodied and strong with breath ..."Y43:16;  
 "... an existence in harmony with truth..." Y44:8;  
 "... the good relationship of good thinking with truth."Y45:9;  
 "... through whose actions one has nourished the truth..." Y46:7;  
 "... truth for the truth ..." Y46:10;  
 "... thus satisfying your wish with truth, Wise One..." Y46:18;  
 "... through both actions and the word befitting truth..." Y47:1;  
 "... he deflects others from the truth ..." Y49:2;  
 "... the truth is to be saved for its (good) preference..." Y49:3;  
 "Do Thou grant the most happy alliance of truth ..."Y49:8;  
 "Lord, let wisdom come in the company of truth across the earth! ..." Y50:5;  
 "...the victories of your glory, strong with both truth and good thinking..."Y50:7;  
 "...the deceitful person ... he has disappeared from the path of truth ..." Y51:13;  
 "...let that salvation of yours be granted to us: truth allied with good thinking..."Y51:20;  
 "...[*spānta-* 'beneficial'] is truth..."Y51:21;  
 "... He shall grant the firm foundation of good thinking and the alliance of truth and wisdom..." Y53:3;  
 "... happiness has been lost to the deceitful who violate truth..."Y53:6.

There are some other verses in which it is ambiguous (perhaps deliberately so) as to whether truth is a concept or an entity.

<sup>80</sup> For other verses in which truth is an activity/quality of Wisdom, see also:

"... be present to me with support and with truth ..."Y30:9;  
 "... Thou dost look upon all these things with truth."Y31:13;

"The Wise Lord, in consequence of His abounding authority of rule over ... truth..."Y31:21;  
 "Have ye the mastery ... Wise One ... to protect ... with truth..."Y34:5;  
 "...Therefore protect us in accord with truth." Y34:7;  
 "... the Lord, beneficent through truth..." Y48:3;  
 "... Therefore do Thou reveal to me the truth..."Y43:10;  
 "... the Wise One shall increase the plants for her through truth..." Y48:6;  
 "...Wise One, if ye have mastery through truth ..." Y48:9;  
 "What help by truth hast Thou for Zarathushtra who calls..." Y49:12;  
 "... Him who has upheld the truth ..." Y51:8;  
 "... Thy tongue (which is) in harmony with truth..." Y51:3; 'tongue' is an idiomatic way of saying 'the words you speak'.  
 English has the same idiom.

<sup>81</sup> In this quotation, the stem *aša-* 'truth' appears in its inflected case form *~ ašā* *~* with a long final *ā*. This is the inflected form for both the vocative case 'o truth', and also for the instrumental case 'by/with/through truth'. Because of the context, or possibly the syntax, Insler has chosen to translate the word *ašā* here as vocative 'o truth', which I find persuasive, but not all translators agree.

<sup>82</sup> For example, in the *Hormezd (Ormazd) Yasht*, a YAv. text, among the Wise Lord's names is 'truth' (*aša-*), 'most-good truth' (*aša- vahišta-*), 'truthful' (*ašava*) and its superlative 'most-truthful' (*ašavastama*). An academic scholar once described this Yasht as 'boring' *~* no action in it, unlike some of the other Yashts. I think he missed the point. As Thieme has pointed out (in a different context), in a religion which knows no images, the names of a deity are the means by which His nature is disclosed. The sections of this Yasht (as with some other YAv. texts) are a bit disjointed and repetitive indicating that the form of the text we now have may represent a collection of various disparate texts on this same subject, which over time the copiers included into this one text.

Here are excerpts from §§ 15, 12, and 7. The composer has Wisdom the Lord purportedly speaking *~* disclosing His nature through His names. Words in round parentheses are insertions by the translator. Darmesteter translates *aša-* words as 'holy' instead of 'truth/truthful'. The YAv. word *ahmi* means 'I am'. (GAv. *ahmī*). And Jackson 1892 § 731, para. 1, p. 202, tells us that the Av. *nqma* is a word used 'with adverbially force', and means 'by name'. Here, (as elsewhere), I find the Avestan quite enchanting, and cannot resist giving you a more literal translation *~* just to give you the flavor of the original (which I rather like). It places the emphasis on the quality which is each name *~* truth, lord, wisdom etc. *~* each of which appears first in the Avestan text (almost like a joyful shout *~* you can almost hear how it would have been sung). But I also offer Darmesteter's (more conventional) English translation. Take your pick.

Yt.1.12 ... *ahura nqma ahmi mazdā nqma ahmi*... Geldner 2P, p. 62.

My translation, 'Lord by name am I, Wisdom by name am I'

Darmesteter, "...My name is Ahura (Lord). My name is Mazdau (all-knowing)." SBE 23, p. 27

Yt.1.12 ... *ašava nqma ahmi ašavastama nqma ahmi*... Geldner 2P, p. 62.

My translation, 'Truthful by name am I; most truthful by name am I';

Darmesteter, "My name is Holy [*ašava*]; my name is the most Holy [*ašavastama*] ..." SBE 23, p. 27.

Yt.1.15 ... *aša nqma ahmi* ... Geldner 2P, p. 63.

My translation, 'Truth by name am I'

Darmesteter's translation, "... My name is Holiness ..." SBE 23, p. 28;

Yt.1.7; In this section, the composer has Ahura Mazda again enumerating some of His names, the fourth name being *aša vahišta* 'most-good truth'. And I could not resist showing the first name as well (one of my favorites).

*āaṭ mraoṭ ahurō mazdā•• frax štya nqma ahmi ašāum zaraθuštra*  
*bityō ...*  
*θrityō ...*

*tūirya aša vahišta* ... Geldner 2P, p. 61.

'Then spoke Wisdom the Lord. I am named One of whom questions may be asked, O truth-possessing [*ašāum*] Zarathushtra;

second ...

third ...

fourth, (I am named) the most-good true order of existence...'. My translation.

Darmesteter's translation. "Ahura Mazda replied unto him: 'My name is the One of whom questions are asked, O holy [*ašāum*] Zarathushtra! My second name ... My third name ... My fourth name is Perfect Holiness [*aša vahišta*]." SBE pp. 24 - 25.

<sup>83</sup> See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

<sup>84</sup> See in *Part Two: Asha & the Checkmate Solution*; and *The Puzzle of Creation*.

<sup>85</sup> In the following quotations the words *ašāunē*, *ašavabyō*, *ašāunō* and *ašāunqm* are various declensions of the stem *ašavan-* 'truthful' (more literally, 'truth-possessing'; *ašavan-* is the adj. form of *aša-* 'truth'). In the Gathas, an adjective is frequently used as a noun, representing a thing (person, concept, activity) that has the qualities of the adjective. Thus various forms of the stem word *ašavan-* as a noun can mean 'truthful (person)', 'truthful (conduct)', 'truthful (concept)', or 'truthful (thing)' See *Part Three: Ashavan & Dregvant*. We see this same phenomenon in many European languages, including English, French and Spanish. Avestan is in the Indo-European family of languages. Here are some other Gatha verses in which *ašavan-* is an attribute of a mortal ~ all in the Insler 1975 translation:

"...the truthful man [*ašavā*] ..." Y31:17;

"... to the truthful man [*ašāunē*]." Y32:10;

"... to deflect the truthful [*ašaonō*] ..." Y32:11;

"... to the truthful man [*ašāunē*]..." Y33:1;

"... for the truthful man [*ašāunē*]..." Y33:3;

"... to the truthful [*ašāunaēca*]..." Y43:4;

"...the truthful [*ašaonō*]..." Y43:15;

"...Who is truthful [*ašavā*]..." Y44:12;

"...that the soul of the truthful person [*ašaonō* 'truth-possessing (one)'] be powerful in immortality..." Y45:7;

"... a truthful person [*ašavā*]..." Y46:5;

"Zarathushtra, which truthful person [*ašavā*] is thy committed friend..." Y46:14;

"... those who are ... truthful [*ašaonō*] from this [*spənta- mainyu-*]..." Y47:4;

"... he shall be loving to the truthful person [*ašāunē*]..." Y47:4;

"... for the truthful person [*ašāunē*] ..." Y47:5;

"...the souls of the truthful ones [*ašāunqm*] ..." Y 49:10.

<sup>86</sup> See *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*; and *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>87</sup> For other verses in which truth (*aša-*) is an activity of mortals, Insler 1975:

"... those whom Thou dost know... to be ... deserving in conformity with truth ..." Y28:20;

"... we are going to live in accordance with truth." Y31:2;

"...the blessed one who shall be eager to prosper the rule of the house, or of the district, or of the land with truth..." Y31:16;

"The priest who is just in harmony with truth ..." Y33:6;

"... praising with truth..." Y45:6;

"Those of evil actions ... from them one has ... retreated in accordance with truth ..." Y34:9;

"...Instruct us to those paths of good thinking easy to travel in alliance with truth," Y34:12;

"... as they further the good understanding of your will with truth, Lord, ..."Y34:14;  
 "...Thou didst say to me: Thou hast come to the truth in thy discernment ..."Y43:12;  
 "... For such a person, [*spənta*- 'beneficial'] through truth..."Y44:2;  
 "... as he continues to dwell ... in alliance with truth and good thinking." Y44:9;  
 "... praising with truth Him who is beneficent ..." Y45:6;  
 "... for I have knowingly through truth, seen the Wise One in a vision to be the Lord of the word and deed stemming from good spirit....." Y45:8;  
 "...Whatever one has promised to Him with truth ..." Y45:10;  
 "... Through such actions ye shall assume the truth for yourselves..." Y46:15;  
 "... thus satisfying your wish with truth, Wise One ..." Y46:18;  
 "The person who ... in accordance with truth, shall bring to realization ... what is most healing..." Y46:19;  
 "If ... one shall defeat deceit by truth ..." Y48:1;  
 "...I who try to satisfy the poorly protected (creatures) with truth, Wise One..." Y49:1;  
 "... those who are yoked with truth ..." Y49:9;  
 "... as he lives honestly in harmony with truth..." Y50:2;  
 "...I will always worship ... you, Wise Lord, with truth ..." Y50:4;  
 "... I shall serve ... you... with truth..." Y50:8;  
 "...I shall encounter you ... with actions stemming from good thinking allied with truth..." Y50:9;  
 "...I am asking how the pastor ... shall (best) serve the cow in accord with truth" Y51:5 the 'cow' here is an allegory for the beneficial in mortal existence (in my view);  
 "...This prize has been promised to you ... by reason of your good thinking and truth." Y51:15;  
 "... Kavi Vishtaspa reached this understanding of our task which he respected in harmony with truth..." Y51:16.

<sup>88</sup> Both truth / truthful (*aša-* / *ašavan-* words) and the most-good truth (*aša vahišta-*) are used to describe Wisdom. So I do not think that Zarathushtra intended a substantive difference between *aša-* and *aša- vahišta-*. Part of the problem has arisen through the choice of translating *vahišta-* as 'best'. In English, 'best' has acquired a competitive meaning that is absent from the meaning of *vahišta-* in Avestan which is intrinsic goodness in the superlative degree.

In Avestan (as sometimes in English) the superlative degree is used often as a crescendo of expression, rather than a difference in kind. In using *vahišta-* with truth, Zarathushtra is simply expressing his view that the true order of existence (*aša-*) is the epitome of goodness (discussed in detail in *Part Three: Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) An Analysis*, giving examples from both the Gathas and later Avestan texts, all of which warrant the conclusion that this idiomatic use of the superlative as a crescendo was an established style of expression in Avestan).

<sup>89</sup> For other examples of truth (*aša-*) as an entity see also:

"... thee, o truth, and good thinking and the Wise Lord ..."Y28:3;  
 "Come Thou together with good thinking. Along with truth ..."Y28:6; (ambiguous)  
 "Give, o truth, this reward, namely the attainments of good thinking..." Y28:7;  
 "... those, Lord, who shall deliver deceit into the hands of truth. Y30:8;  
 "... I lament these words of my spirit (to Thee) Wise One, and to truth ..."Y32:9;  
 "... fame is to serve Thee and the truth, Wise One..."Y32:6; (ambiguous)  
 "Come hither to me, ye best ones ... Thou, Wise One, together with truth and good thinking ..." Y33:7;  
 "The Wise One who is the Mightiest Lord, and [*ārmaiti-*], and truth which prospers the creatures ... listen to me..." Y33:11;  
 "... How might I deliver deceit into the hands of truth..." Y44:14;  
 "Since thou, truth, didst arise among the noteworthy children and grandchildren of Friyana, the Turanian ..." Y46:12;  
 "... the Wise Lord who, together with His clever advisor, truth, ..." Y46:17;  
 "I do urge you ~ Thee, Wise One, and the truth ..." Y49:6;  
 "... the Wise One is the Father of truth ..." Y47:2; a metaphoric use ~ discussed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Creation*.



<sup>90</sup> Here are the alternating ways in which truth [aša-] is used in the first Gatha, Y28, in the Insler 1975 translation except where otherwise indicated.

Y28:1: as a concept "... the spirit [mainyu-] virtuous [spənta- 'beneficial'] through truth [aša-] ..." Y28:1;  
or as I translate this phrase 'the way of being [mainyu-], beneficial [spənta-] through truth [aša-] ...'.

Y28:2: as a concept "... those attainments befitting truth [aša-] through which one might set Thy supporters in happiness." Y28:2;

Y28:3: as an entity in tandem with the Lord Wisdom, and good thinking "I who shall eulogize ... you [plural] as never before ~ thee, o truth [aša-], and good thinking and the Wise Lord ..." Y28:3;

Y28:4: as a concept "... as long as I shall be able and be strong, so long shall I look in quest of truth [aša-]." Y28:4;

Y28:5: as an entity "Truth [aša-], shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire... good thinking..." Y28:5;

Y28:6: as an entity? as a concept?, "Come Thou together with good thinking. Along with truth [aša-], grant..." Y28:6;

Y28:7: as an entity "Give, o truth [aša-], this reward, namely the attainments of good thinking ..." Y28:7);

Y28:8: as a concept? as an entity? Thee, Best One, the Lord who art of the same temperament with the best truth [aša- vahišta- 'truth (which is) most-good']..." Y28:8;

Y28:9: as an entity? a concept? ("...Thee and the truth [aša-] and that thinking which is best [vahišta- 'most good'] ..." Y28:9.

Y28:10: as a concept / activity of man "... those whom Thou dost know, Wise Lord, to be just and deserving in conformity with truth [aša-] and good thinking ..." Y28:10;

Y28:11: as a concept? an entity? "Thou who dost guard truth [aša-] and good thinking for eternity..." Y28:11.

<sup>91</sup> See *Part Two: A Question of Immanence*; and see *Part Three: Heaven & Hell In Pahlavi Texts*.

<sup>92</sup> *myazda-* means an offering of worship; *myazdām* is its acc. sg. form.

<sup>93</sup> See *Part One: The Nature of the Divine*.

<sup>94</sup> See also: "... Thou, Wise One, along with truth [aša-] and good thinking ... I shall very happily approach all of you, as I worship and praise." Y34:6;

"... through both praise and worship for the very Wise Master [*ahura-* 'lord'] of good thinking and for truth [aša-] ..." Y30:1.

<sup>95</sup> See *Part Two: A Question of Immanence*.