

FEZANA

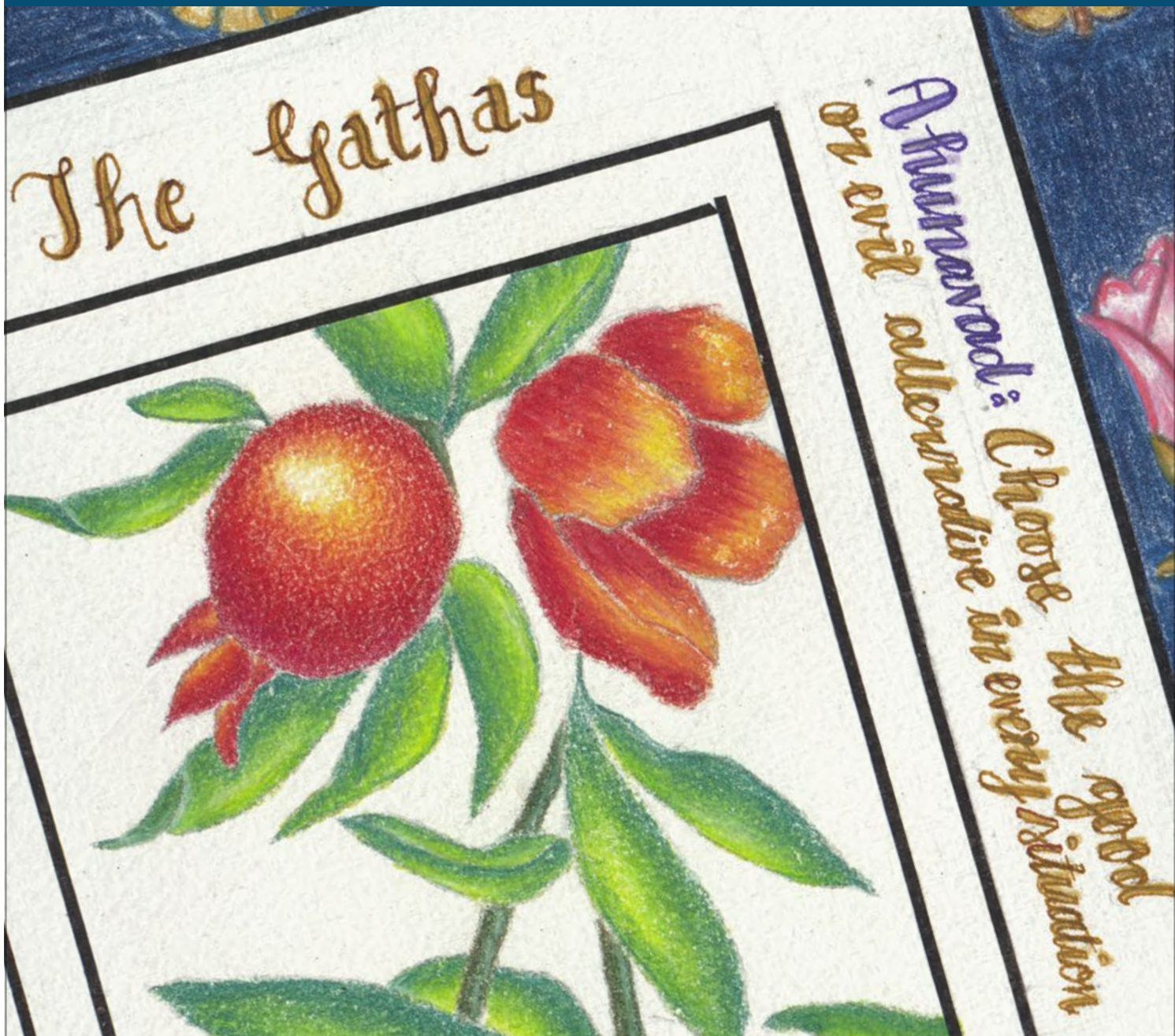
BAHAR 1390 AY 3759 Z

VOL. 35, No. 1 SPRING/MARCH 2021

JOURNAL

Fravadin – Ardibehesht – Khordad 1390 AY (Fasli) • Avan – Adar – Dae 1390 AY (Shenshai) • Adar – Dae – Behman 1390 AY (Kadimi)

NOROOZ PIROOZ BAD 🍷 NOROOZ MUBARAK



PUBLICATION OF THE FEDERATION OF ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA

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Vol 35, No 1 - ISBN 1068-2376

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SUMMER 2021 ISSUE

PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION IN PERSIA/IRAN OVER THE PAST CENTURIES

GUEST EDITORS MEHRBORZIN AND VIRAF SOROUSHIAN

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(USPS 021-495) published quarterly by FEZANA 8615 Meadowbrook Dr., Burr Ridge, IL 60527. Periodical postage rate is paid at Oakbrook, IL 60523 and at additional mailing offices. Annual subscription US \$35 (US and Canada) and \$80 (air) for other countries; details on subscription form. POSTMASTER: send changes to Fezana Journal, 8615 Meadowbrook Drive, Burr Ridge, IL 60527.

The theme for this issue is “Zarathushtra’s Gathas in the Contemporary World”. The theme was decided and the planning and work started by the two erudite co-editors, Dr. Keki Dadachandji of New York and Dr. Jamshid Goshtasbi of Maryland/Washington DC in early Fall of 2019 when the world, in spite of the raging COVID-19 virus, was relatively stable and no one knew the upheaval 2020 would bring.

2020 did not end well. And the new year, 2021, has also started with a lot of turmoil and unrest all over the world. Both on this continent and on almost every other continent, democracies are being trampled upon, protestors are being brutally harassed, demonstrations are disrupting the life of ordinary people and the pandemic rages on with its variants.

In retrospect, we feel that this issue is being published at a most opportune time for us to reflect on the timeless ethical message of the Gathas - of “living” the principles of the religion in our daily life, not merely being passive bystanders practicing rituals and reciting prayers but living with our conscience for righteousness.

Through four broad categories (“Rediscovering the Gathas”, “Zarathushtra’s Teachings in Daily Living” “Teaching the Gathas” and “Thus Speaks Zarathushtra to Me”) the guest editors hope to spread the understanding, not **only** as a subject of scholarly investigations, or as prayers recited on special occasions, but as a manual for daily living. Accordingly, mobeds, everyday Zarathushtis, scholars, and teachers alike, have been invited to contribute in the effort. Over thirty men and women, a cross section of the community, have responded by sharing their knowledge and viewpoints. Teachers of religious classes for children from Zoroastrian Association of Houston, California Zoroastrian Centre and Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey together with their students tell us how the basic principles of the Gathas are taught to the children and how they are made to understand the implications in their daily life. We invite you, our readers, to comment and send in your own reflections, which we will print in future issues.

We also compliment our two guest editors for leading monthly Gatha circles where participants read, analyse



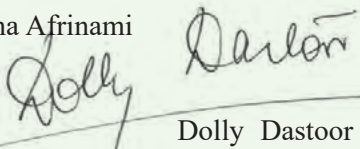
and discuss each verse, imbibing the true essence of the message of Asho Zarathushtra. For many, the Gathas were and are thought to be prayers to be recited on the five days before Nowruz, although for many the why on those days was not explained or understood.

This issue also promotes and congratulates the winners of all the FEZANA scholarships and achievers of national and international fame.

Our heartiest congratulations to the formation of the latest Federation of Associations of Australia and New Zealand into OCEANIA Federation. Our diaspora is growing far and wide, but we as a community without borders is getting closer thanks to ZOOM and other virtual platforms.

Nowruz Pirooz Bad, Nowruz Mubarak. As we head toward spring with its new beginnings, we remember that it is our individual responsibility to work towards the best world. As Zarathushtra said in the Ahunuvaiti Gatha; Yasna 31, 22, “*He who upholds Truth with all the might of his power, He who upholds Truth the utmost in his word and deed, He, indeed, is Thy most valued helper, O Mazda Ahura!*” May this issue on the Gathic principles inspire you to make every effort to move towards freshokerati!

Atha Jamiyad Yatha Afrinami


Dolly Dastoor Ph.D

Greetings

The first months of 2021 have seen events that have grabbed our attention. The very meaningful one to FEZANA is the re-establishment of the White House Office of Faith-Based & Neighborhood Partnerships. FEZANA had been an active participant in this sphere representing our faith at the highest levels of the US Administration and we look forward to our continuous participation. A new President and Vice-President took office in the United States this January. A beautiful and exquisite Gara made by Ashdeen Lilaowala was donated to FEZANA to be gifted to the USA Vice-President Kamala Harris. She set new benchmarks as the first woman elected to her office and also being of Indian descent, a momentous and historic occasion and this was a one-off gift to celebrate the Indian connection that many of our Zarathushti members share as a common heritage.



Navroze or Nowruz 2021 will hold a meaningful place as we welcome the new year and herald the arrival of spring in North America. It is also a sombre reminder that the pandemic has now been amongst us for over a year. A second Navroze will go uncelebrated at our Dar-E-Mehrs and without the community gathering in festivity. But the end is in sight as people get vaccinated and the efforts of the year past will hopefully slow down the spread of the virus and the world emerges into a new normal.

Celebrations for Navroze include everything from a Virtual Gala by Zoroastrian Youth of North America, a FEZANA Committee, to a Jashan to kick off the planning of the 12th World Zoroastrian Congress that will be hosted by ZAGNY jointly with FEZANA. It is our opportunity as Zarathushtis of North America to welcome the Zarathushti world to our continent. The 12th WZC 2022 returns to North America after 22 years and will offer numerous opportunities for everyone to get involved, whether you are local or living on the other coast. Reach out to the 12WZC 2022 team at contact@wzc2022.nyc for a truly meaningful experience.

While we focus on your youth, we also like to draw attention to our seniors. FEZANA is in a very early exploratory stage of setting up a mechanism for the Seniors in our community. If you have ideas and would like to get involved please email me. I would love to hear from you.

FEZANA continues to represent you at the Global Working Group. At the recent 12th GWG AGM, it was heartening for me to see so many of our Past-Presidents, Committee Chairs and community leaders participate in the various activities of the GWG.

FEZANA is also very close to the deadline to raise the 1.1M US\$ for the setting up of the FEZANA Professorship in Zoroastrian Languages and Literature at the University of Toronto. As of this writing we are less than 20% away from our target. This is truly a one of its kind endeavor where over 150 (and counting) large and small donors have stepped up to the plate including folks from all over the world. If you are considering contributing to this, now would be the time. Do reach out via email and I can answer any queries you may have.

From my family to yours; I wish you all Jamshedi Navroze Mubarak, Nowruz Pirouz Baad.
Arzan Sam Wadia, President



Committee Reports

YOUNG ERVARD ZAHAN ON HIS WAY TO RECOVERY



A recent photo of Er. Zahan Turel at a follow-up visit. We are thankful to all our donors, Zahan's well-wishers and Masina Hospital for their unwavering medical care.

2020 has been a historic and unprecedented year in so many ways. From the devastating Australian bush fires that spread over 18 million hectares to waves of the BLM social movement that sparked action all over the globe – 2020 has had several generation-defining moments. But it will be most remembered for the raging pandemic that bought the world to a screeching halt and redefined what 'normal' is.

There isn't a single person who has not been affected by COVID-19. Many lost their loved ones to the devastating virus and weren't allowed to say their final goodbyes. Others lost their livelihood and struggled to feed their family. We also saw a surge in mental health illnesses due to high anxiety levels and extended periods of isolation.

2020 was a busy year for the FEZANA Unity and Welfare Committee as we received several appeals from Zoroastrians struggling to pay for food and rent to those facing life-altering events.

One such worthy appeal was that of 14-year-old Er Zahan Turel who suffered 48.50 per cent severe burns on his entire upper body, neck, both hands, ears while offering the Rapithvan Geh boi ceremony at Goti Adarian, Surat. To add to the complications, Er. Zahan also tested COVID Positive at the time of admission. This delayed treatment for a few days as the plastic surgeon and burns specialist were not allowed to enter the COVID ward.

His chances of survival were low, but the staff at Masina Hospital worked tirelessly on Er Zahan's rehabilitation giving him word-class treatment in the Burns Unit which included two skin grafting surgeries with near absence of disfiguring scars and contractures.

Post-discharge, Er. Zahaan has been receiving daily massage and dressing which he will continue till his skin stabilises, but there are a few patches yet to be healed.. He receives daily occupational therapy at Masina Hospital's Occupational Therapy Centre as well as regular counselling. He will have to wear pressure garments for two to three years

Though Er. Zahan is unable to sit for long periods, he has decided to appear for his school board exams and has started preparing gradually.

We are very grateful for the generosity and outpouring of support from our worldwide Zoroastrian community for Er. Zahan's speedy recovery. We are blessed to belong to a community that truly cares and who we can rely on for unstinted support during periods of hardship and difficulty.



FEZANA WELFARE ENDOWMENT FUNDS

Kindness, generosity and philanthropy are core virtues of the Zoroastrian community and we are blessed to belong to a community that gives so willingly. The Unity and Welfare Committee is always amazed and in awe of the influx of love, support and donations we receive when we send out appeals for various worthy causes from all around the world.

We are fortunate to have some very generous individuals and families that have trusted FEZANA with monetary endowments to continue work in the fields of education, scholarship, welfare, medical & critical assistance including:

Mehrbanoo Bamasipour (Zardoshty) Welfare/Critical Needs Endowment for Women

This is an endowment set up by women for women. It caters to those from lower socio-economic conditions who have fallen on hard times; are in abusive relationships or are newly divorced and being deprived of the basic necessities of a dignified life. The funds are used for medical, clothing, food, clean shelter and/or other emergencies to restore a peaceful life for the recipients. This Endowment was set up in 2011 by Paridokht, Homayoun, Iran and Farangis (Zardoshty) in the loving memory of an incredible woman, their mother, Mehrbanoo Bamasipour. Full details [can be found on the FEZANA website](#).

Zarin Neville Sarkari Welfare Endowment Fund

Zarin Neville Sarkari Welfare Endowment Fund is set up in the memory of Zarin Sarkari. As a family, we know what it feels like to lose a loved one through cancer. Cancer exacts both an emotional and financial toll on the patient's loved ones, and although we cannot remove the emotional pain associated with the disease, in establishing this fund, we hope to help alleviate some of the financial burden for families whose loved ones are suffering from cancer. – The Sarkaris. Full details can be found [on the FEZANA website](#).

Other Welfare Endowment Funds include **Hormazdiar Damkevala Welfare Endowment Fund, Bhathena Family Welfare Endowment Fund and Pheroze Dorabji Tamboli Welfare Endowment Fund.**

To learn more, visit the FENANA website or get in touch with the FEZANA Unity and Welfare Committee.

The FEZANA Unity and Welfare Committee:

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Sanaya Master (sanaya.master@xtra.co.nz)

In the Winter 2020 Journal, on page 14, the photo of the re-print of the cookbook "Vividh Vani" was uncredited. The graphic was courtesy of Rita Kapadia. The oversight is regretted. ED.



GREAT FREEZE IN TEXAS CAUSING DAMAGE TO ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATION OF HOUSTON CENTER AND TO THE DALLAS DARE- MEHR

REPORT FROM PRESIDENT NOZER DUNGOR OF ZAH



We have heard reports of many who have been affected in our community dealing with the aftereffects of the freeze (busted pipes, water leaks, damaged roofs, and no flowing water, etc.).

The freezing temperatures and power cuts took a toll on our beloved ZAH Center also. We had a fire sprinkler pipe burst which caused flooding in the main hall with water flowing all the way to the kitchen area. We also had a water leak in the wall near the prayer room where we used to have a sink. The flooding from the sprinkler burst carved its way to the kitchen while destroying the wooden dance floor on its

way. Despite the damages we thank Ahura Mazda that the damages were containable as things could have been much worse. All of the damage was only to the main ZAH hall.

We have fixed both leaks and have dried up the area with professional help. The dance floor has been destroyed and will need to be replaced completely. The sheetrock wall of the area near the plumbing leak also had to be cut out and will need to be replaced and painted. We are continuing the work and expect everything to be ready in time for our Navroze function on Sunday, March 21st.

While we have our work cut out for us, we would like to Thank the following for all their assistance.

The Atash Kadeh Committee and Ervads Pervez Gonda and Manek Sidhwa for their dedication in making sure the Holy Atash fire kept burning in all its glory with all the requisite prayers despite freezing temperatures and lack of water supply and power. Ervad Gonda even spent a night at the Atash Kadeh due to the icy road condition.

We are very to our Building Maintenance Committee : Sheroy Haveliwala for being the first responder on the scene, assessing the damage and notifying others. Yezdi Engineer for his selfless dedication and Service and spending hours of his time and sweat equity to fix the leaks and work with the professionals. Aderbad Tamboli for his time and skills in supporting the restoration work.

We thank our Building Management Subcommittee and especially Arnavaz Sethna for her assistance with getting the Janitorial Company to come over to do the cleanup as well as her tireless effort to get us a plumber. Kershaw Khumbatta for helped us to get the dance floor replaced. and our treasurer Farokh Billimoria made sure all the the contractors received prompt payments for their services.

If any of the members still need help or assistance, they should contact the association us and they will gladly help in any way possible.

As the saying goes “When the going gets Tough the Tough get going”. We as Texan Zarathushtis are a resilient lot and we wish the coming Navroze brings us a New Beginning with positivity and optimism.

No damage to the Atash Kadeh. They had no electricity and water for more than a week but there was no damage. Possibly divine intervention!!!



REPORT FROM THE ZOROASTRIAN ASSOCIATION OF NORTH TEXAS BOARD

Hope you have survived the recent low temperatures and power outages. We realize that some/many of you are still dealing with the aftermath of the significant weather and power event and in the process of cleaning up. Do let us know if any help is needed!

Even with dripping faucets, the extremely low temperatures along with power outages for more than a day or two, took its toll within our Center. We had a pipe rupture above the kitchen ceiling, which took down the drywall and flooded the rest of the center including the carpeting in the prayer room. Pictures are worth a thousand words and are shown below:

Picture on the left shows the ceiling and damage in the kitchen which collected the water and then caved, the middle picture shows the portion of sheetrock and insulation on the floor, and the picture on the right shows the carpet in the prayer room that is wet and had to be pulled out to dry out the side boards. Currently we have filed a claim with our insurance company and await inspection of the damages along with the insurance reimbursement. Once we get that sorted out, we will get our Center repaired in due time.

“If you wish to help, donation checks can be mailed to ZANT, 1605 Lopo Road, Flower Mound, TX 75028-1306”.

While we have some damage, the situation could have been a lot worse without the quick action of the following members and community services:

1. Flower Mound Fire Department for calling us about the fire alarm, going to the site within minutes, turning off the water main and dewatering the building
2. Keshvar Buhariwalla for coordinating promptly with the fire department and ensuring that they have access to the building
3. Dilnawaz Rustomji and her family for reaching the center on the snow covered roads in the late evening hours and coordinating with the Fire Department
4. Arbez Patel for coordinating and ensuring that the building access is disabled
5. ZANT Board members for coordinating with insurance company, going to the site next morning, checking everything, stripping the carpet in the prayer room and mopping up the wet corners
6. Jamshed Jamadar and Firoze Sidhwa for coordinating with the board and going to the site on Monday to ensure that there is no further damage.

If we have missed any one please accept our forgiveness as we know that we strive as a community with the dedication and strength of our members.

We may get hit and fall, but we will always get up stronger!

ZANT Board





NEW APPOINTEES FOR FEZANA



Farzin Avari joins as Co-Chair of ZYNA (Zoroastrian Youth of North America)

Farzin Avari is an educator from Atlanta, Georgia with BA in Psychology from UGA, and Masters in Science Education from KSU. She served as the Youth Coordinator for Zoroastrians Stepping Forward, runs Sunday school classes in Atlanta and is currently serving as a mentor with the Zoroastrian Faculty Network.

Farzin is mentor to various organizations she supports: Asha for Education, Beta Club, UGA Mentor Program, KSU Owl Mentor Program, works at Georgia Connections Academy, was a Virtual Science Teacher, for Chemistry and Environmental Science, and a Beta Club Sponsor, teaching high school students about the importance of leadership and service. She is proud member of the first Zoroastrian Return to Roots Program in 2013. and is a member of Atlanta Zoroastrian Association. Can be reached at farzin.avari@gmail.com



Hanoz Santoke joins the Information Technology Committee as Co-Chair

Hanoz Santoke was born and raised in California and has been active in the Zoroastrian community since childhood. He holds a PhD in environmental engineering from UC Irvine and currently works as a professor of chemistry at CSU Bakersfield.

He has attended and volunteered with several Zoroastrian congresses and participated in the Return to Roots trip in 2018. He is an active member of two FEZANA member associations ZAC-LA and TMZA.

34th FEZANA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) will be held virtually on Saturday May 8th at 12.00 p.m. eastern time .A link to the Zoom call will be provided

Reports from Associations and Committees are due to the FEZANA Secretary (secretary@fezana.org) and Administrator (admin@fezana.org) by April 1, 2021. Mention the accomplishments of the committees in the past year as they tie with the FEZANA Second 10-year Strategic plan.

FEZANA BOARD 2021-2022

President	ARZAN SAM WADIA
Vice President	Ervad KAYOMARZ YEZDI SIDHWA (elected unopposed)
Treasurer	ROOKY FITTER
Secretary	CODY PARTOVI (elected unopposed)
Asst Secretary	XERXES COMMISSARIAT



SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH ORGANISERS

Article by Treasurer – Zeena Batliwalla



With the 8th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress (8WZYC) 2023 being hosted by the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE) in the United Kingdom (UK) in Summer 2023, a dedicated team of youth

volunteers have already commenced early groundwork to start planning and organising this momentous event. As part of a series of articles, we will be sharing the insights and visions of our 8WZYC organising team.

My name is Zeena Batliwalla (nee Maravala) and I am taking on the role as the Treasurer for the 8WZYC. I am currently a Manager at KPMG in the Audit Technical Programmes Team, developing and delivering technical training to the Audit business. I graduated in 2015 with a degree in Financial Mathematics with Professional Practice and completed my Chartered Accountancy in 2018 with ICAEW. Outside of work, I love spending time with my family, watching Bollywood movies and complete crosswords (trying to).

I have always loved being a Zarthusti and take pride in our beautiful and everlasting faith. I vividly remember one of my very first trips to Mumbai as a young girl, visiting Bikhaji Behramji's Kuo, (well) and the warm and homely feeling, being surrounded by countless Zoroastrians on Ava Roj. I loved that feeling, so much so that I dreamt of getting married in an Atash Behram in the future. My dream came true in December 2018 and by the grace of God, that feeling was recreated. I wish to share that same feeling on the stage at the 8th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress!

For me, being a Zoroastrian in the UK is a privilege. It means I can be a melting pot within myself - from learning how to cook my favourite dishes with instructions from my Mum and Mother-in-Law to debating with my Dad and Father-in-Law about why we lost that last round of Hokum! Having family all over the world, means that I can combine the Eastern and Western practices of our culture and religion whilst still feeling close to my roots – something that I believe all our youth overseas strive to do and what we endeavour to bring to this Youth Congress.

When I heard that this 8th World Zoroastrian Youth Congress was to be hosted by ZTFE in the United Kingdom, I was inspired to get involved to showcase with pride what London has to offer to our global Zoroastrian community! I am thrilled to be part of this monumental event and look forward to welcoming our amazing Zoroastrian Youth from across the globe.

As the Treasurer for the Congress, my main responsibilities include creating a master budget and ensuring this is adhered to by all. I am the first point of contact for approving any expenditure and keeping a general (but stringent!) check on whether our incoming donations match our outgoing plans.



At this stage of the Congress organisation, I have been busy crunching numbers and working with all the sub committees to ensure that we are planning for an affordable and inclusive experience for all participants. I have been heavily involved in negotiations with potential venues and I am extremely excited for what we have in store for 2023! I will also be working closely with the Entertainment Committee to ensure we have an extremely attractive, diversified and interesting set of events lined up and my hope is that this Congress will truly be memorable.

A great thing about being part of the 8WZYC committee is that I have the opportunity to get to know fellow young Zoroastrians. I am able to see what each individual brings to the team as well as their passion and enthusiasm for our Zoroastrian community, which is something I am incredibly proud of. This has already been such a wonderful experience and I cannot wait for what's to come in the lead up to 2023!



UNITED NATIONS WEEK FOR RELIGIOUS HARMONY

ZOOM conference to introduce and promote historic breakthroughs in religious understanding in the Seven Testaments Trilogy



“In the 1960s, we were entering the era of Comparative Religions, with the goal of comparing differences between religions ... today we are moving from Comparative Religions to Religious Studies – a new approach where we move from ‘comparing’ to ‘sharing,’ and find our own traditions enriched by learning from each other,” said Brian Arthur Brown [photo left] in his remarks at the ZOOM conference, Feb 1-3, 2021, for the UN Week of Religious Harmony.

The Conference featured internationally renowned scholars and practitioners to introduce and promote historic breakthroughs in religious understanding such as professed in the Seven Testaments Trilogy. Plans were also discussed for an archeological expedition to Afghanistan in search of the tomb of Zarathushtra.



The Seven Testaments Trilogy

In his quest for peace and harmony among religions, Brown professes that all religions of the world are inter-connected and each has gems to share. This compelling message is expressed in his three volumes of the Seven Testaments Trilogy.

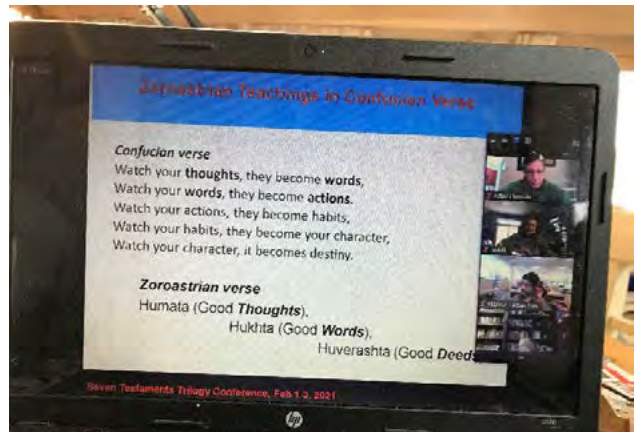
In *Three Testaments* (2012) Brown explores features of the Jewish Torah, the Christian New Testament and the Islamic Quran, and identifies passages in the Zoroastrian Avesta that correlate with verses in the scriptures of these three Abrahamic religions – which Brown calls the “Z factor”. *Four Testaments* (2016) analyzes the texts of the four Eastern traditions – Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism, exploring areas of connection and divergence, and again illustrates the growing realization of a “Z factor” – a Zoroastrian backdrop to all major world religions.

In *Seven Testaments of World Religion and the Zoroastrian Older Testament* (2020), Brown presents a heightened emphasis on the debt owed to Zoroastrianism by all seven world religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism. He points out references in the Avestan texts – that he calls the “older testament” – to creation stories and apocalypse, Satan, final judgment, the Messiah, salvation, heaven and hell, and other elements of religion that were inherited by Jewish prophets from Zoroastrian priests in Babylon and are recognizable as the Zoroastrian legacy to the modern world.

Zoroastrians in China

Among the panelists were Rohinton and Roshan Rivetna who spoke about a small, 10-year (755 – 763 CE) slice of Zoroastrian history in China, when Sogdian Zoroastrians numbered in the millions, but the dubious actions of Zoroastrian emperors dragged the faith to oblivion in the 8th century, only to emerge in an enhanced Confucianism.

Limited number of Legacy Edition boxed sets were produced by Rowman & Littlefield for conference use. This format may become permanently available, but only if sales continue at just \$100 USD for a test period. For orders at this discount please call 1-800-462-6420 Mon-Fri 8 am -5 pm EST Feb.-June 30, 2021 or click www.rowman.com/isbn/9781538156186

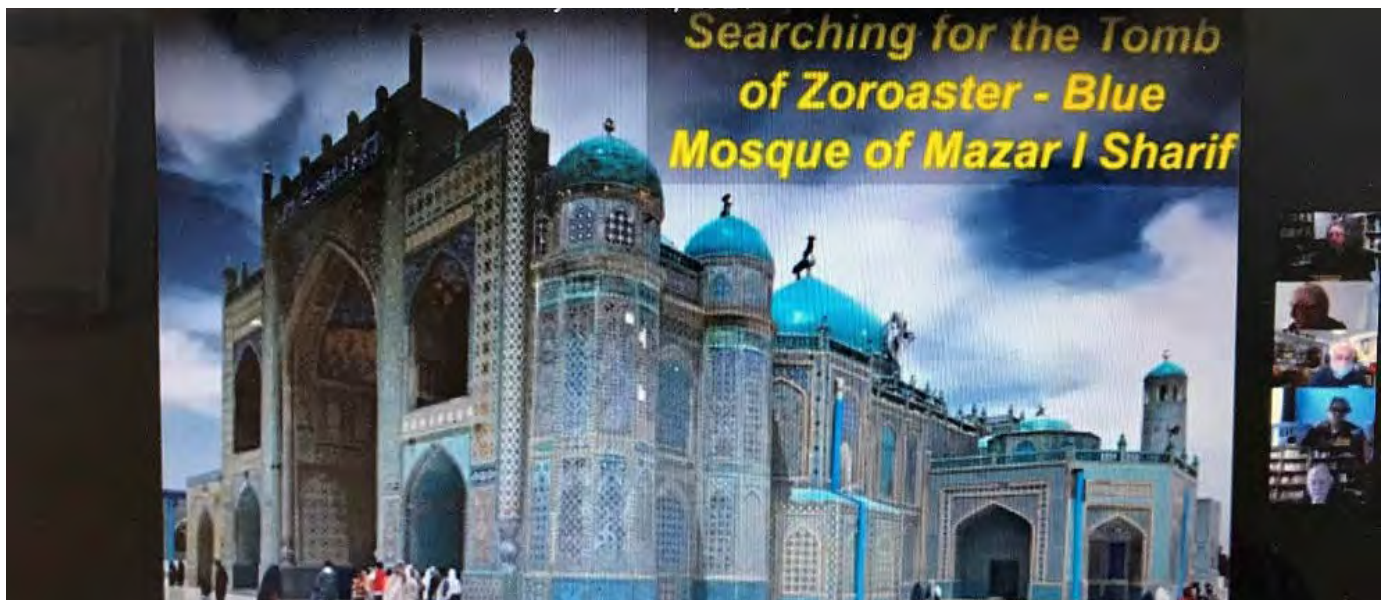


Above, Roshan and Rohinton Rivetna on the ZOOM panel on Day 3 of the conference. Right, a Confucian verse that appears in Confucian temples all over China to this day. One recognizes the quintessential Zoroastrian triad – Humata, Hukhta, Huvereshta in the first two lines.

Search for the Tomb of Zoroaster and the Dead “Zee” Scrolls

Another quest embarked upon by Brown is to find the lost portions of the Avestan writings that were destroyed, first by Alexander, and again by Arab armies. He believes these missing chapters still exist, like the “Dead Sea Scrolls” of the Hebrew Scriptures, and dubs them the “Dead Zee Scrolls.” Conference participants were captivated with the “big reveal” – identification of the tomb of Zoroaster in a crypt beneath the Blue Mosque, Mazar-i-Sharif (“Tomb of the Exalted”) in Afghanistan [photo below]. University of Wisconsin Professor Harry Jol presented site plans of the Mosque and non-invasive techniques of ground penetrating radar techniques to be used at the site of this archeological expedition, planned for when the security situation permits, likely in late 2021 or sometime in 2022. Interested persons are invited to join this expedition.

For further information, visit www.BrianArthurBrown.com or contact BrianArthurBrown@gmail.com



Ordering Information for Seven Testaments Trilogy

The *Seven Testaments Trilogy* deserves to become a standard resource in departments of religious studies, interfaith circles and libraries of religious institutions. The texts are the result of two decades of research by Dr. Brown, and have been vetted (among others) with scholars and religious leaders at the *Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism* conference in Chicago in 2018 and subsequently at the Parliament of the World’s religions in Toronto 2018.

REPORT By Roshan Rivetna, Chicago , Illinois.



Love of God & Love of The Neighbour
Or Love of The Good & Love of The Neighbour

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK—FEBRUARY 1-FEBRUARY 7, 2021

In observance of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week an interfaith event was held virtually in Mississauga on Friday February 12, 2021 hosted by the Mayor of Mississauga Bonnie Crombie and the Interfaith Council of Peel (ICP with Rabbia Khedr) ICP member & Ex. Dir. Of the Muslim Council of Peel as the moderator. Welcome address by Mayor Crombie was followed by an opening prayer by Rabbi Audrey Pollack, Chair of the ICP and Rabbi of the Jewish Solel Congregation. Faith Leaders from the Muslim, Hindu, Ba'hai, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Catholic, Christian and the First Nation Elder, Knowledge Keeper, Cat Kreeger made presentations. There were also presentations from community partners : Peel Region Police Chief Nishan Duraiappah, who is very supportive of a dialogue with the interfaith community and changes are being initiated to include diversity and initiative for handling cases dealing with mental health , the Peel Regional Council Chair: Nando Ianicca. The Peel Public Health: Dr. Lawrence: Peel Paramedics, Chief Peter Dundas; Peel Trillium Hospital Health Partners, COE & President Michelle E. DiEmmanuele and Mississauga Food Bank, Director Meghan Nicolls. The demand on the food bank has increased due to the pandemic from three million to four million and hence a greater need for the community and faith groups' to help out.

Submitted by Freddy Mirza, Chair, Zoroastrian Society of Ontario Interfaith Committee.

ZOROASTRIAN CRICKET CLUB (ZCC) INVITES YOUNG AND OLD ZOROASTRIANS TO JOIN AND LEARN THE SPORT



The Zoroastrian Cricket Club in Toronto has decided to start playing league T20 cricket again after an 8 year gap in play. The club started playing 50 over cricket and was formed in 1978 by a group of cricket loving Parsee immigrants that came to Canada from India and Pakistan. It ran successfully for many years in a local league but in 2013 the club folded due to a lack of interest amongst newer Zoroastrians.

However, in recent years the OZCF (Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation) field was

transformed to include a cricket pitch and it renewed interest amongst the Parsee community! For the past two years the team has played inter friendly matches and have occasionally invited other teams to play as well. Due to the creation of the new agiary, the OZCF ground is not available for the upcoming season. The club has decided to join Mississauga Cricket League, and would like to introduce and include more youngsters to the game in a healthy community atmosphere with proper coaching by ex national team players. So if you have kids that want to learn sports and have fun in an all Parsee community setting or if you want to join yourself please contact Khushroo Wadia at khushroo_wadia@hotmail.com. The club appreciates your support and enthusiasm and thanks the many former members who still donate generously to keep up equipment and help pay for the league costs, balls, and umpire fees. What a truly wonderful community we have. Come and be a part of it!

IN MEMORY OF DR. ALI JAFAREY

Fezana Journal would like to thank Darius Irani and his family for sponsoring this issue in memory of Dr. Ali Akbar Jafarey.



Dr. Ali Akbar Jafarey was born in Kerman, Iran, on February 6, 1921 and accompanied his parents to Karachi, British India, in 1925.

He was multi-lingual and self-studied thirteen living and ancient languages, and also studied linguistics, anthropology, Indo-Iranian literature, history, geology and research methods. At the Bai Virbaiji Soparivala (BVS) Parsi High School in Karachi, he studied Avesta, Old Persian (Achaemenian) and Pahlavi with Dr. Maneck Pithawalla, Principal, and later with Dastur Dr. Maneckjee N. Dhalla, High Priest of Pakistan, under whom he also studied the Gathas and Good Religion of Zarathushtra (1938-44). He learned his elementary Sanskrit from two friends, Vinodh Trivedi and Vikram Joshi, and was introduced to the Vedic lore by Mr. Ramsahai, Principal of Swami

Dayanand Arya Samaj High School. He obtained his Doctorate in Persian Literature from the University of Karachi. He worked for five years for Aramco in Saudi Arabia as an anthropologist and as newspaper assistant-editor. Returning to Iran and settling in Tehran in 1956, he founded his own business offering translation and research services to commercial ventures including the National Iranian Oil Company.

Once again in Karachi in the 1970s, he was part of a group that met regularly to discuss the Gathas and other aspects of Zarthushti history and literature. This group later was incorporated as Informal Religious Meetings Trust Fund. He settled in the United States in 1982 with his wife Amy and family, and served the California Zoroastrian Center as a scholar/teacher for nine years. In 1991, Dr. Jafarey, with seven other co-founders, established the Zarathushtrian Assembly in Los Angeles. As someone who chose to study and adopt the Zarathushti faith, Dr. Jafarey believed that any person who appreciated and wanted to live according to the fundamental principles of the faith, should be allowed to do so. Zarathushtrian Assembly's creed is, "Any person who has, after due consideration, chosen to adhere to the divine doctrine proclaimed by Zarathushtra in his guiding songs, the Gathas, who understands and practices the Primal Principles of Life aimed at promoting

and advancing the living world, and who calls himself or herself a Zarathushtrian, is a Zarathushtrian in his or her individual capacity—individual because it is an individual choice. But once the choice is made, then he or she is advised to join the fellowship of the people of the same choice who form a community."

Dr Jafarey was a scholar of Zarathushti religion and an accomplished author and speaker of the Gathas, spreading the message of Zarathushtra around the world. His commentary on Gathic verses made the message of the Gathas more accessible to non-scholars as they were not literal translations, but expounded on the essence of the words. His knowledge is collated in many publications which will continue to inform, educate and enlighten those interested in the Zarathushti faith. He was the Editor of The Ancient Iran Cultural Society Bulletin, Tehran, and The Zoroastrian, monthly bulletin of the California Zoroastrian Center, Los Angeles (both English and Persian editions), and the Editor of Spenta, bulletin of the Zarathushtrian Assembly, published bimonthly separately in English and Persian editions. His publications include:

1. The Gathas, Our Guide
2. Zarathushtrian Ceremonies
3. An Outline of the Good Religion
4. An Outline of the Zarathushtrian Religion and Zoroastrianism
5. The Avesta at a Glance

He passed away on October 6, 2020. He is survived by his children, Nahid, Nasrin, Nozar, and Naghmeh, and their extended family.

May his soul rest in ever lasting peace and keep guiding and looking after his beloved community across the world.

ZARATHUSHTRA'S GATHAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Gathas, Our Guide to Daily Living

By Keki Dadachanji
Guest Editor

I have been asked sometimes, “What is the best translation of the Gathas?” Since I am not a scholar of the subject, and have not done a comparative study, I hesitated to respond. However, upon some reflection, the answer came to me: The best translation of the Gathas is not a book; it is a life. A life transformed by the teachings of the Gathas is their best translation.

This perspective was inspired by the re-reading of the biography of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was transformed from a diffident, ineffectual lawyer to a colossal figure on the global scene. He testifies that the single force behind his transformation was the daily reading, reflection, and integration into daily living, of the verses of the Bhagavad Gita.

When I was asked to co-edit this Gathas-centric issue of the Fezana

Journal, I wondered what we could say that has not been already said. Clearly the basics need to be laid out for readers who are encountering this text for the first time. However, a religion is not of much value unless it can be practiced in daily living. What might make this issue special is if it could inspire readers to undertake a journey of personal transformation. Driven by this thought, we encouraged contributors to explore how the teachings of the Gathas might guide us in daily living.

My relationship with religion is personal. Zarathushtra speaks to me, and I persistently ask him to explain himself in a language I can understand. I try to progressively change the way I live based on what I understand, and this sincere effort, however imperfect, leads to a deeper understanding. I wanted to capture this process for all those who

have tried to understand and live by Zarathushtra's teachings. Thus we invited people to write “Thus Speaks Zarathushtra to Me.” These articles liberate us from scholarly exactitude to personal experiences of ordinary people.

In the language of John Donne, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” We have responsibility for the welfare of the whole of Mazda's creation – humans, animals, and the environment. Hence we invited people to contribute their thoughts on how the Gathas might guide us in addressing some of the serious problems facing humanity, such as the destruction of the environment, discrimination, inequality, and violence.

Extant Gathas are the sole record of the original teachings of Zarathushtra. Hence, we have

interest in understanding how those words have traveled from the day they were first recited to us today. How reliable are our translations and interpretations of these songs, written in an ancient language thousands of years ago? We have included an article that describes this history, from the times of Zarathushtra to the modern translations of the Gathas.

Our community is polarized between those holding traditional views and those who are more progressive. The reasons for this polarization are many and complex. However, one of the reasons is the inconsistencies between the Gathas and some of the later texts. These inconsistencies have resulted in inconsistent beliefs and practices. Articles are included that bring focus to these inconsistencies, so that readers can form their own opinions.

I would like to close by giving my personal understanding of the foundational teachings of the Gathas. Two of the foundational concepts in the Gathas are Asha (Truth) and the Doctrine of Choice. Asha (Truth) can be viewed as a perfect state of creation in which all constituents are in perfect harmony. No one prospers at the expense of someone else. Asha is alternatively interpreted as the Eternal Law that maintains this order. In Yasna 29.3 the key attributes of Asha are described as “doth not disunite” and “is non-inimical to all Creation”¹. In other words, Asha does not divide, does not discriminate; and Asha does not hold ill-will, does not hate. These attributes imply universal compassion, equality and love. They imply Unity of Life

The Doctrine of Choice, laid out in Yasna 30, is another foundational concept of Zoroastrianism. Life

consists of innumerable moral choices. We are all expected to make these choices for ourselves. And choices we make have consequences. If we choose Right (what promotes Asha), we will experience inner bliss and peace. If we choose Wrong (what frustrates Asha), we will suffer inner turmoil, stress, and pain. These are both internal states of being. This idea came to be known as the “Law of Karma” in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. In the Bible it is expressed

Extant Gathas are the sole record of the original teachings of Zarathushtra. Hence, we have interest in understanding how those words have traveled from the day they were first recited to us today...If absorbed in daily living, they have the power to transform a person completely.

by a very simple statement, “As you sow, so shall you reap.” This is a universal Eternal Law. These foundational concepts also appear in religions that followed: Sanātana Dharma (commonly known as Hinduism), Buddhism, Christianity, and other spiritual traditions. They are universal themes. If absorbed in daily living, they have the power to transform a person completely. A person who is impatient, anxious, angry, greedy, jealous and self-centered can become patient, loving, calm, generous, ever-contented and ever-secure.

A person who lives by these principles persistently, sincerely, and to the best of his ability, is a Zarathushti. He requires no other qualifications to be called a Zarathushti.²

AUTHOR'S NOTE

1. Translations from The Divine Songs Of Zarathushtra – I.J.S. Taraporewala.
2. “He” is used as the third-person singular pronoun for simplicity. It always implies “he or she”.



Keki Dadachanji, Ph.D. has a doctorate in operations research from Case Western Reserve University. He was a senior manager at M&M/Mars for 26 years, a part-time lecturer at Rutgers University and a teacher of mathematics and computer science at Parsippany High School. Dr. Dadachanji is a faculty member at Osher Lifelong Learning Institute within Rutgers University where he has taught many courses in spirituality and philosophy. Having great interest in world cinema, he has used the world cinema as a platform for encouraging mutual understanding and respect among various cultures of the world. Dr. Dadachanji, along with Adil Mistry, has initiated the Gatha Study Group for promoting a deeper understanding of Zarathushtra's teachings. This group currently includes only people from the Tri-state area, but may be opened up for general participation next year.

A 21ST CENTURY LOOK INTO ZARATHUSTRA'S THOUGHTS AND TEACHINGS IN THE GATHAS

By Jamshid Goshtasbi-G
Guest Editor

Being invited to co-guest edit this issue of the FEZANA Journal seemed quite overwhelming at first. The invitation cited “growing interest in the Gathas, interpretations and the practical applications of the principles embedded in them” and my involvement in leading the Gathas Study Circle at ZAMWI. I thought “I am no Gathas scholar, my education is in science/technology, my knowledge of Zoroastrianism is limited to what I learnt in Zoroastrian religious classes in elementary/ middle school and participation in Zoroastrian ceremonies and rituals.”

But then, I recalled “how intrigued I was when, in middle school, I learnt from the Mobed/Dastur who taught my religious classes about some unique aspects of Zarathushtra’s teachings in the Gathas, namely Freedom of choice, and that the Gathas were Zarathushtra’s own words. It was then that I started reading books on and/or translations of the Gathas. The more I read, the more interested I became to learn about the true meaning of Zarathushtra’s message/teachings in the Gathas, and how key terms have been interpreted/translated somewhat differently by different translators. I could see that some interpretations/translations made more sense to me than others and soon realized that no single translation alone could teach me the true meaning of Gathas’ verses. So, I started a journey that brought me to co-founding and

leading the Gathas Study Circle, now a global platform for secular comparative study and discussion of Zarathushtra’s teachings in the Gathas.” At this point, my answer to the invitation was a readily yes with gratitude!

When discussing this issue, we thought “[t]he Gathas are not calcified in time, so each generation must discover their relevance to contemporary times, freely choosing to follow Zarathushtra’s teachings and living life accordingly.” Hoping “to capture how Zarathushtis know of the teachings of Zarathushtra, and understand the extant Gathas,” we invited “everyone - Mobeds, scholars, teachers, and everyday Zarathushtis alike, to participate in the effort.” We wanted this issue be a platform for contributors to present and discuss their thoughts and understanding of different aspects of Zarathushtra’s teachings in the extant Gathas. The variety of articles shows that this objective has been achieved. We may or may not agree with one or more authors’ understanding/interpretation of the Gathas, but the goal is to engage in dialogue for better understanding of Zarathushtra’s teachings in his own words.

GATHAS AT A GLANCE

Linguists, translators and scholars tell us that 17 of the 72 chapters of Yasna constitute the extant Five Gathas. They are Ahunavaiti Gatha (Yasna 28-34); Ushtavaiti Gatha

(Yasna 43-46); Spenta-Mainyu Gatha (Yasna 47-50); Vohu-Khshathra Gatha (Yasna 51); and Vahishta-Ishti Gatha (Yasna 53). Yasna is the oldest part of Avesta and is compiled by Zarathushtra’s disciples over a period shortly after his death. Within the Yasna, the Five Gathas’ 17 chapters are distinguished -in terms of language constructs, meters of stanzas, and content - as being older than the rest of Yasna, and are Zarathushtra’s own words.

Chronology - The extant Gathas 17 chapters are not arranged chronologically. Yasna 29 is considered by some scholars/ translators as the first chapter. Yasna 30 is where Zarathushtra speaks of his foundational teachings.

Methodology - Zarathushtra observes the world around him and poses questions about people’s way of life. He asks these questions repeatedly and seeks knowledge that would enable him to find answers. He ponders upon and eventually finds his answers through his good mind.

A 21ST CENTURY LOOK

It is true that we cannot know the exact meaning of the Gathic words that Zarathushtra uses to *speak to people*. But, inspired by the teachings of Yasna 30 and empowered by collective knowledge of our time, I venture to have a 21st century look into Zarathushtra’s thoughts, and hearing what

Zarathushtra Speaks to Me.

In Yasna 29, I hear Zarathushtra speaking to me of the misery of the living world and the universe, and that he is going to teach/lead people out of their misery and to a life of happy and coexistence with the all in the existing world. I hear Zarathushtra speaking to me of MAZDA, VOHU-MANO, and ASHA.

Throughout the Gathas, I hear Zarathushtra speaking to me of people believing in untrue teachings and untrue “gods”, teachers and supporters (Karpans, Kavis, etc.) of such falsehood. I hear Zarathushtra speaking to me of “two principles that no one had spoken of before” (Yasna 30.1), that I have the freedom to choose a path per the principle that leads me to a good life in harmony with ASHA (Yasna 30. 2-3)

Throughout the Gathas, I hear Zarathushtra speaking to me of the good life for those who choose the right/good/true/truth path, and the bad life for those who choose the untrue/untruth/lie path.

I hear Zarathushtra speaking to me of always reaching out to MAZDA for knowledge, pondering upon facts with my VOHU-MANO and making choices that are aligned with ASHA. This leads me to VOHU-KHSHATRA (Good Deeds) which brings ARMAITI (Serenity/Tranquility) to my life. I hear Zarathushtra speak to me that when this becomes my way of life, I reach HAURVATAT-AMERATAT, a state of everlasting perfection, living forever in my legacy of good deeds that helped the world be a better place for everyone and everything in harmony with ASHA. When everybody chooses this path as his/her way of life, then the universe progresses to HAURVATAT-AMERATAT (everlasting perfection) according to ASHA.

I hear Zarathushtra speaking to me of his teachings in a logical and scientific method (although lacking the experimentation step) that I can picture it in the following diagram. My understanding - of all I can hear from Zarathushtra in the Gathas – is that each step in choosing and living my life mutually and positively

affects and enhances other steps.

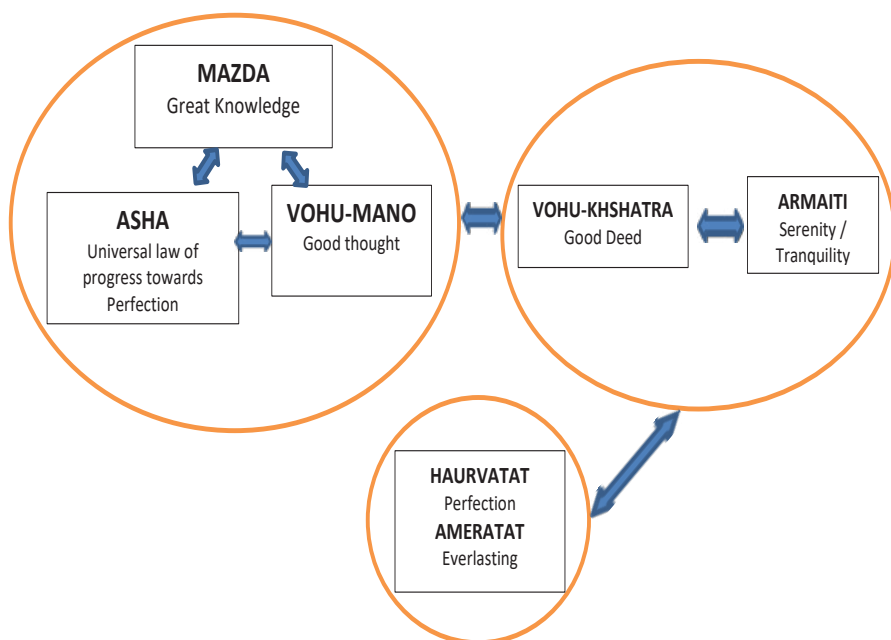
END NOTES

Many scholarly writings on and translations of the Gathas in Persian and English make the basis of my understanding. While no reference is made to a specific work, the following have been consulted frequently:

1. Gatha Soroodhaye Zartosht, by Mobed Firooz Azargoshasb (Persian)
2. THE GATHAS, OUR GUIDE, by Dr. A. Jafarey (Persian and English)
3. MAZDA, by Keikhosrow Keshavarz (Persian)
4. THE DIVINE SONGS OF ZARATHUSHTRA, by Dr. Irach J.S. Taraporewala (English)



Jamshid Goshtasbi-G, Ph.D. is an Intellectual Property (IP) Professional/Patent Analyst at an IP firm in Washington DC area. In his academic tenure, Dr. Goshtasbi taught and conducted research in Digital Systems and Computer Architecture. He is self-educated in his understanding of the Gathas and the Zarathushtra's teachings through comparative reading of works of Scholars of Zoroastrianism and the Gathas. Jamshid is an active member of ZAMWI and has served in different capacities including as the president of the Board of Trustees. Currently, he is the coordinator of the Gathas Study Circle - a global platform for comparative study and discussion of Zarathushtra's teachings in the Gathas, which meets online twice a month (2nd and 4th Saturday).



REDISCOVERING THE GATHAS

THE GATHAS A Timeline & History

By K.E.Eduljee

The Gathas are that part of the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Avesta, composed by Zarathushtra. Meant to be sung, the Gathas have also been called the hymns of Zarathushtra. Within the surviving Avesta, they are found in the book of Yasna. As such, any timeline and history involving the Gathas falls within the history pertaining to the Yasna or the Avesta as a whole.

The Yasna was one of the earliest Avestan texts acquired by Europeans. A Yasna manuscript found its way to England in 1633 CE. The 1800s saw the beginning of an intense examination of the Gathas in an effort to understanding the meaning of their words and thus the direct message of Asho Zarathushtra.

What follows is a short timeline and exposé of that effort's history.

c. 330 BCE – c. 1600 CE

A. Scattering & Recompilement Of The Avesta Including The Gathas

The Gathas as well as parts of the extant Avesta have survived two major attempts at obliterating the Zoroastrian scriptures entirely—first under Alexander of Macedonia who conquered Iran starting in 330 BCE and again by the conquering Arab Islamist hordes starting in the 630s CE. Their efforts included destroying Avestan texts and killing Zoroastrian priests who I call our living books—priests whose training from childhood included memorizing large parts of the Avesta. Despite, these attempts, parts of the original canon closed at the end of the Kayanian dynasty have survived. We must be eternally grateful to those priests and laity who hid in mountain refuges or concealed books in order that the Avesta and its Zand (translations and exposition) survive.

From c. 250 BCE onwards—after Iran, ruled by descendants of Alexander's generals, was gradually liberated by the Arshaki Parthava (Arsacid dynasty Parthians, Pahlavans, based around today's northern Khorasan) — the Parthava made a concerted effort to locate mobeds in hiding. As a result, they succeeded in recompiling what had survived of the Avesta, an effort that reached fruition during the subsequent Sasanian Parsi reign (Sasanian dynasty Persians).

If this collective effort had not succeeded, we may not have inherited the Avesta including the Gathas as a gift beyond compare.

The recompiled Sasanian Avesta consisted of 21 nasks or books. They are listed together with content summaries in the Pahlavi Dinkard—religious texts authored in the 8th to 9th centuries CE by the Hudinan Peshobay (meaning 'leaders of the people of Good Religion'), Zoroastrian head-priests during the Arab occupation of Iran-shahr.

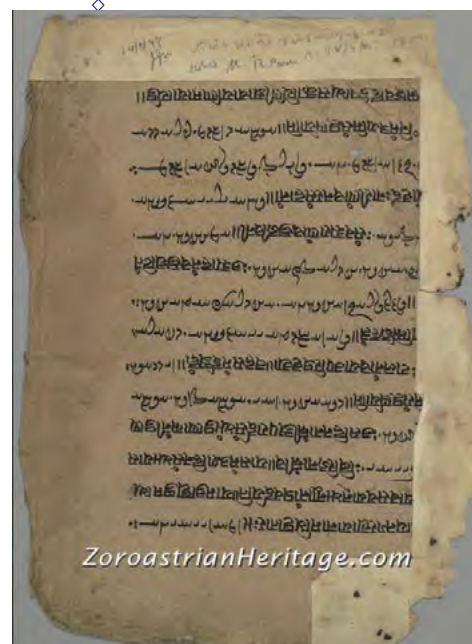
B. Gathas As Zarathushtra's Words Noted In The Dinkard

In the Dinkard's Books 8.2 and 9 we find the Gathas noted as being composed by Zarathushtra. The Zoroastrian priesthood has always been well aware that the Gathas had a special place in the Avesta as the direct words of Zarathushtra. If my reading of the Dinkard is correct, the Gathas (now Yasna 28-34 & 43-54) prefaced by the Ahuna-Variya, Ashem Vohu and Yenghe-Hatam verses (now Yasna 27.13-15) were placed at the very head of the Sasanian Avesta—in Book 1, the Sudgar Nask. This fact belies any claim that Europeans first identified the Gathas as the words of Zarathushtra.

C. Avestan Manuscripts in India Grow

Following the Islamist Arab occupation of Iran, the Zoroastrian refugees from Iran called Parsees (who were graciously given a home in India) gained a collection of religious texts from Iran and via visiting Iranian priests. An awe-inspiring story in itself, we once again owe incalculable thanks to our priests and laity who laboured to collect, copy and preserve manuscripts including the Gathas, at great risk to life and liberty.

It is a misconception that Zoroastrian priests at this time did not understand Avestan. They had translated much of the Avesta into Pahlavi and while we may quarrel with some translations, our priests had an understanding of the Avesta. One notable priestly scholar from Sanjan, Neriosangh Dhaval (11th or 12th cent. CE), translated portions of the Avesta into Sanskrit. Thus the Zand-Avestan manuscript collection in India grew and some of these books were later acquired by visiting Europeans. Photo on the right is a folio from a manuscript in Avestan and Sanskrit ascribed to Mobed Neriosangh Dhaval (11th or 12th cent. CE).



1600s – 1700s CE

A. 1633 CE: Canterbury Yasna Manuscript

One of the early Avestan manuscripts acquired by Europeans around 1633 CE was a copy of the Yasna (likely including the Gathas). Deposited in a Canterbury, England, library, its contents were a mystery to its new owners. European efforts to decipher the Avesta would start in the next century.

B. 1700s CE: Boucher Manuscript

Based on information gleaned from the classics and modern travelers, in 1700, Thomas Hyde, an Oxford, England, orientalist and chief curator of the Bodleian Library, wrote a book in Latin titled *Veterum Persarum et Parthorum et Medorum Religionis Historia* (A History of the Persian, Parthian and Median Religion). Hyde also sent out an appeal for travelers to procure further Zoroastrian manuscripts.

George Boucher, an English resident of India, answered Hyde's call by procuring in 1718 a Vendidad Sadah manuscript from the Parsees of Surat. In 1723, he sent the manuscript to the Bodleian Library. Unintelligible to its new owners, the book was hung on the wall of the library by a chain. Hyde however circulated tracings of four pages with the hope someone could decipher the contents. One set of tracings was sent to France.



C. 1750 – 1770 CE: Anquetil du Perron

Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil du Perron (1731-1805) was a French scholar with a keen interest in eastern languages. After seeing the facsimile tracings of the four Vendidad pages sent from Oxford, he resolved to travel to India and procure copies of the Avesta and their translations. Perron found his way to Surat arriving there in 1759. Once there, he persuaded a Zoroastrian priest Darab Kumana, pupil of a leading Kadmi priest Jamasp Vilayati, to translate the Avesta for him. Much to the dismay of the Zoroastrian community who saw this as an act of betrayal, Kumana agreed. Kumana provided du Perron with 180 Avestan manuscripts as well as his version of their translation. Du Perron published these on his return to France provoking an outcry from the European community of scholars since the contents ran contrary to their understanding of Zoroaster's highly regarded teachings.



1800s CE

A. Martin Haug, 1859

In 1859, an exceptional German philologist Martin Haug (1827-1876) became Professor of Sanskrit in Poona (Pune), India. Assisted by his knowledge of Sanskrit, he also researched the Avesta and in 1862, published his Essays on the Sacred Language, Writings and Religion of the Parsees. Haug may have read the comments in the Pahlavi Dinkard that the Gathas were composed by Zarathushtra, for he ardently promoted this concept. (The claim that Haug was the first to discover that the Gathas were the words of Zarathushtra is patently incorrect.) He translated the Gathas afresh and found within them a tone that he surmised was different from the rest of the Avesta.

B. Early Gathic Messaging Interpreted by Haug

As a result of du Perron's publications supported by some classical works, many Western authors labelled Zoroastrianism as a religion that espoused theological dualism i.e., propounding the existence of a good and evil god. Haug, however, found in the Gathas a doctrine of strict monotheism, i.e., propounding the existence of one creator God. This led him to the conclusion that Zarathushtra's theology was monotheistic while the prophet's existential philosophy was dualistic. Since the Gathic verses were seemingly devoid of any reference to rituals, Haug further surmized that rituals were introduced into the religion after Zarathushtra's time. (Paradoxically, the Gathas being part of the Yasna recitation and ritual may have helped preserve the Gathas.) Haug energetically delivered his findings to the Zoroastrian community of India and many reformists took up his call without perhaps understanding the context of the Gathas within the big picture.



C. Father of Modern Gathic Studies

Regardless, Haug's work was seminal and it introduced a balancing argument in the fast evolving understanding of Zoroastrianism in general and the Gathas in particular. Prof. Dr. Martin Haug can lay claim to the epithet, 'Father of Modern Gathic Studies'.

While Zoroastrians had left religious scholarship to the domain of priests, the concept of lay scholarship as demonstrated by Haug and other Europeans gradually began to gain a foothold within the Zoroastrian community. Lay authors were greatly aided by books printed for the public in Bombay presses rather than the tradition of very limited handwritten priestly manuscripts meant for priestly eyes.

1900s CE



A. Irach J. S. Taraporewala

The exemplar of modern lay Gathic scholarship is Dr. Irach Jehangir Sorabji Taraporewala (1884-1956) who translated the Gathas word-for-word.

Having read several other translations (many without word-for-word justifications), I find Dr. Taraporewala's translation to be one of the most credible and least biased. I strongly, recommend reading his *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra* (1951) available as a free copy on FEZANA's web-site. If I were to choose only one translation to read, this would be it.

Dr. I. J. S. Taraporewala was born in 1884 in the then princely state of Hyderabad. In 1903 he went to Cambridge, England to study law and after graduation, became a barrister-at-law in London. While traveling in Europe, he met Professor of Philology Christian Bartholomae, who had a particular interest in the Avesta. The chance encounter changed the course of Taraporewala's life. He abandoned a potentially lucrative law career and moved to the University of Würzburg in Germany to pursue a doctorate (obtained in 1913) under Prof. Bartholomae on Avestan texts. Dr. Taraporewala returned to India before the outbreak of World War I to accept a chaired professorship of Comparative Philology at the University of Calcutta's Linguistics Department. Space does not permit me to relate the rest of Dr. Taraporewala's amazing story or his very relevant comments on Gathic studies.

B. Jatindra M. Chatterji

There must be something in Calcutta's water, for another seminal Gathic study and translation from there sponsored by The Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Calcutta was Jatindra Mohan Chatterji's (1891-1981) *Hymns of Atharvan Zarathushtra* (1967). In it the author includes a Rig-Vedic & Sanskrit etymology of translated words. While I find that his background introduces a certain bias and a few of his word translations cannot be supported for they conflict with known Avestan, Old or Middle Persian derivatives of the Gathic words, nevertheless, his assertions form essential reading for an in-depth study of the Gathas. You will find a free copy of Chatterji's book on Joseph Peterson's Avesta.org site.

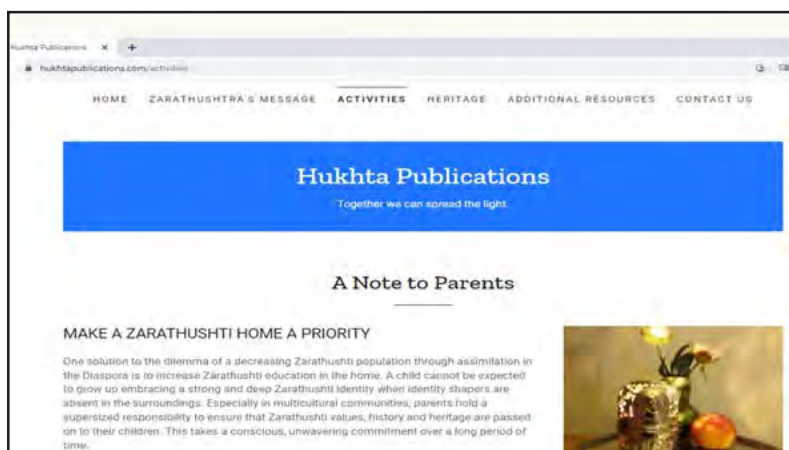
These two works stand at the head of the numerous other works to which I refer when translating the Gathas' verses for myself. Speaking for myself, I have found no shortcut for the need to study not just the original text aided by Avestan and Rig-Vedic or Sanskrit dictionaries as well as different Gatha translations, but all Zoroastrian texts in order to even begin the development of an understanding. The more I study, the more I am astounded by the wisdom of Asho Zarathushtra. I say this having studied most world religions.

The Present

A. Rediscovering the Message of the Gathas

Since few can claim to be fluent in Gathic Avestan as it was spoken natively, what we now understand about the Gathas' message comes to us from modern translations. Many translations, however, do not agree one with the other. Some, perhaps influenced by the bias or background of the translators, may contain added or altered words and ideas without word-for-word justifications. This can lead to differing conclusions about the message by readers. The good news is that there are many areas of common ground that will provoke great insight.

An understanding of the Gathas' many messages provides the foundation for theological, spiritual, ontological, existential and ethical principles developed further in the Avesta and its Zand. There are of course, numerous other fields introduced in the Gathas and elaborated on in the Zand-Avesta—take for example animal care (and thereby care of the earth) and diet. The entire Zand-Avesta corpus including the Gathas is a treasure beyond description.



The Gathas online: Hukhta Publications, a website on the Gathas for teachers and parents



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The Gathas in different languages: Spanish



Gatha studies: Prof. Gernot Windfuhr delivering: "Dramatic structure and cosmic events in the Gathas" at the ZAGNY WZO FEZANA Gatha Colloquium, New York, 2009



Simple Message of Universality

By Soli Bamji

THE LANGUAGE OF THE GATHAS

Zoroastrian prayers, some dating back to more than 3000 years, were composed over several centuries in two languages: Avestan and Pahalavi. Avestan is a very ancient language and is analogous to Sanskrit, the language of the Hindu Vedas. The similarity between Avestan and Sanskrit is due to a common Indo-Iranian heritage. In the third millennium BCE a group of people called Indo-Iranians lived on the South Eurasian Steppe and many centuries later they branched out into two groups. One group migrated southwest and came to be known as the Iranians while the other group went southeast and was known as the Vedic Indians. The Indians developed the Sanskrit language while the Iranians developed the Avestan. Several centuries later Pahalavi became the religious language of the Iranians, thus Zoroastrian prayers composed after the 3rd century CE, are in this language.

Prior to Zarathushtra, the Indo-Iranians used to worship many Gods, called *Ahuras* in Avestan and *Asuras* in Vedic Sanskrit. Both words come from the root *Asu*, which means a vital force. Zarathushtra revealed to mankind that there is only one God whom he called *Ahura Mazda*, Lord of Wisdom. Gathas, which literally means “songs”, were composed

by Zarathushtra in Older Avestan language, a living language of his time. Avestan was only a spoken language for it did not have a script and the Gathas, like the Hindu Vedas, were composed in poetic form. According to Dr. Almut Hintze, SOAS Professor at the University of London, the poetic form of the Gathas is governed by the rhythm of the syllables.

For several centuries in the post-Zarathushtra period, his followers composed most new prayers in prose text and in a different dialect called Younger Avestan. The Gathas along with some of these prayers were compiled into the Yasna -- a prayer of veneration. The Yasna (Y) has 72 chapters and is represented in the kusti woven from 72 threads. In the 6th century CE, the Avestan script of 46 characters was invented and all Avestan and Pahalavi prayers were transcribed in this new script. The Great *Avesta* was formed by

compiling all prayers into 21 *nasks* (books) to correspond to the 21 words of the *Ahunavar* prayer. Over the centuries, many Zoroastrian scriptures were destroyed due to the invasion of Persia by the Greeks, Arabs and Mongols. However, the Gathas have survived because they were memorized by each generation of Zoroastrian Priests and passed down orally from one generation to the next. The book of daily prayers, *Khordeh Avesta* (Smaller Avesta), contains only a few verses from the Gathas.

RELATIONSHIP WITH AHURA MAZDA

The simplicity of the Gathas lies in the fact that it does not have commandments to direct every move of our lives; instead, it guides us to think, speak and act freely throughout our lives with good thoughts, words and deeds. Zoroastrianism is liberal, comforting,

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Extract from Yasna 45.1 provided by Ian James (www.avesta.org)

egalitarian and contemplative, encouraging reliance on personal responsibility. A Zoroastrian cannot achieve deliverance either through states of trance, visions and healings, or through mystical experiences, offerings and sacrifices, purification and penance. For every Zoroastrian, the relationship with Ahura Mazda can only be expressed in terms of moral behavior because every individual has the capability to contribute and improve the quality of human life and thus renew this world.

The Gathas refer to Ahura Mazda as “*Tashô*” (Y 31.11), and according to Dastur Dr. Dhalla [1], signifies a designer and conveys the idea of improvement, progress and evolution. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra described the attributes of Ahura Mazda such as, *Vohu Manah* (intelligent and good thinking), *Asha* (truth and righteousness), *Khshathra* (benevolent power and rule of goodness), *Armaiti* (tranquility and serenity), *Haurvatat* (perfection and completeness) and *Ameratat* (immortality). Zarathushtra introduced the unique idea that the purpose for human life is to emulate these attributes and help move this world towards perfection.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Ahura Mazda has bestowed human beings with a *Manah* (mind) so that they can think and discern what is good and bad, and rationally choose their own path in life. The

human mind is unique as humans are the only species in this world capable of assessing rationally and discriminating good from evil. By employing their *Manah* humans can be creative, constructive, and progressive or be unimaginative, destructive and ignorant.

The freedom to choose between, good and evil is the underlying principle of the Gathas:
*sraotâ gêushâish vahishtâ avaênatâ
sûcâ mananghâ âvarenâ vicithahyâ
narêm narem hvah'yâi tanuyê parâ
mazê yânghô ahmâi nê sazdyâi
baodañtô paitî* (Y 30.2).

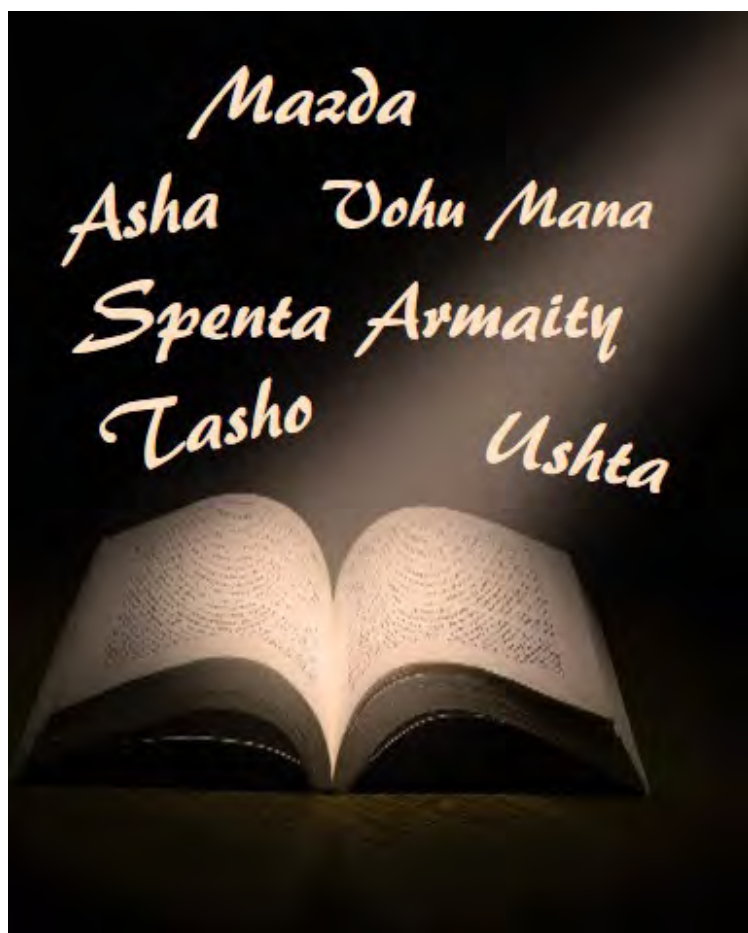
“Hearken with your ears to these best counsels, Reflect upon them with illumined judgment.
Let each one choose its creed with that freedom of choice each must

have at great events.
O ye, be awake to these, my announcements” [2].

According to Zarathushtra humans should make their choices only after listening and reflecting and not base their decisions on popularity or because they are coerced to do so. Humans are co-workers of Ahura Mazda but not his slaves. Zarathushtra does not implore blind faith but a reflective philosophy based on knowledge and learning. People are ultimately responsible for their choices and reap the consequences of their actions. The law of consequences is not intended to punish but to deliver enlightenment and understanding for what is true and right.

TRIUMPH OF GOOD OVER EVIL

The Gathas teach a doctrine of two conflicting principles, one good and the other evil. In Yasna 30.5 Zarathushtra describes the primordial choice of the two principles as: the wrongful one chose the worst actions while the most progressive one chose righteousness [2]. The dualism reflected in the Gathas is moral, as good and evil are confined to the human mind, and thoughts, when translated into words and actions can produce good or bad results. Evil arises when the wrong mentality chooses bad actions.



Zoroastrianism teaches that mortals can achieve spiritual completeness by fighting evil with *Humata, Hukhta and Havarashtra* (good thoughts, good words and good deeds) and evil can be eliminated by changing human minds through knowledge and understanding. The triumph of good over evil is gradual and not abrupt. One cannot just instantaneously rid the world of all its miseries but each and every one can play a role in destroying evil.

The beauty of Zoroastrianism is that humans by their own free will can make the right choices, get rid of evil and make this world a better place. By helping those in need, each person can make a difference. In Yasna 43.1 Zarathushtra states: *ushtë ahmâi yâhmâi ushtë kahmâicî* "Happiness be the lot of him who works for the happiness of others" [2].

UNIVERSAL LAW OF ASHA

According to Zarathushtra the universe is regulated through *Asha*, the law of truth and precision. *Asha* represents the laws of the universe at the physical level, the force of truth at the psychological level and the fusion of order and truth leading to the path of righteousness at the spiritual level. Goodness, benevolence and knowledge are an integral part of what is right.

By implementing *Asha* one can eliminate evil and make this world move towards *Haurvatat* (completeness). "Asha is doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right place with the right means to achieve the right purpose" [1].

GENDER EQUALITY

In the 21st century women all over the world are still fighting for equality with men, and even in advanced countries the number of women holding high positions in corporations and other key posts is very low. The Gathas show gender equality as Zarathushtra mentions several times that men and women are equal. In Y 53.6 he addresses men as well as women who have come to hear him and in Y 46.10, he says that both, good men and good women, can cross the *Chinvat* Bridge. Such equality is mirrored in the Yasna, *Yenghe Hatam* (Y 42.4) and *Airyema Ishyo* (Y 54.1). Yasna *Haptanghâiti* (Y 41.2) mentions that both men and women can function as a good ruler in this world and hereafter.

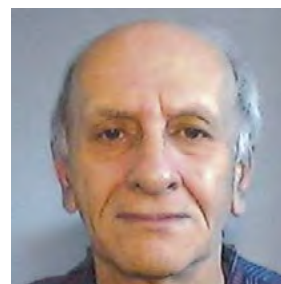
The Gathas provide a simple message of universality, gender equality, tolerance and respect for one another. They are a guide to help humans think rationally and perform good deeds which can bring a positive change in the world. In

Yasna 30.9, Zarathushtra implores: *atcâ tôi vaêm h'yâmâ yôî îm ferashêm kerenâun ahûm* "So, may we be like those making the world progress toward perfection" [2].

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This article is extracted from the author's website on Zoroastrian religion at <http://www3.sympatico.ca/zoroastrian/>



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TRIVIA

- The Avestan alphabet was created in the 3rd and 4th century CE to put the Gathas into writing.
- The alphabet is written from right to left, in the same way as Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew.
- The Avestan alphabet was replaced by the Arabic alphabet after Persia converted to Islam during the 7th century CE.

Timeless Messages from the Gathas

By Freddy Mirza

There are five Gathas composed by our Holy Prophet Zarathustra, namely, Ahunavaiti (Yasna 28 to 34), Ushtavaiti (Yasna 43 to 46), Spenta Mainyu (Yasna 47 to 50), Vohu Khshathra (Yasna 51) and Vahishtoishiti (Yasna 52).

The Gathas give us an insight into the history and the life of our Holy Prophet Zarathushtra. His messages in the Gathas are as relevant to us today, as they were thousands of years ago. Some of these messages are as follows:

ONE CREATOR, AHURA MAZDA

1. There is only One Immortal Creator, Ahura Mazda: Ahura means “the Lord of Life” and “Mazda” means “all-knowing, omniscient”¹ Ahura Mazda chanted the Ahuna Vairya prayer and used the “Thought Force”¹ to create the spiritual and temporal world. Hence our prayers are referred to as Manthra Spenta, that is, the Holy Word. Ahura Mazda has given the gift of wisdom to all human beings and is represented by the priests and the attendees during jashan ceremonies.

SPIRITUAL VIRTUES

2. The term “Amesha Spenta” (Bounteous or the Holy Immortals) is not mentioned in the Gathas.¹ However, each and every Amesha Spenta is

mentioned individually named in the Gathas. The Amesha Spentas preside over spiritual powers, virtues and qualities, and also over material creations¹:

- (a) **Vohu Manah** (the Divine Intelligence, the Good Mind): Zarathustra refers to Vohu Manah as the “mouthpiece of Ahura Mazda” (Yasna 47.2)³. When our Holy Prophet’s mind reached the Divine Plane of Ahura Mazda’s Wisdom through his meditation and prayers, his Good Mind, (Vohu Manah), led him before the Divine Counsel of Ahura Mazda. Vohu Manah presides over animals and is represented by milk in the jashans.
- (b) **Asha Vahishta**, (the Divine Cosmic Law)¹: The Law which governs life as well as non-life (Yasna 30.4). Ahura Mazda is referred to as the “Father of Asha” (Yasna 47.2)² but does not interfere with the work of Asha Vahishta in any way. In the physical world, it is the Law of Nature which governs the food chain and maintains a balance of Nature in the eco-system. In the spiritual World the term “Asha is the “divine cosmic law’ interpreted as Humata (Good Thoughts), Hukhata (Good Words) and Hvarshta (Good Deeds) and connotes all virtues of life – truth, honesty, purity, piety, devotion, liberality, goodness and benevolence”

¹. Zarathushtra preached that the Holy Fire of Righteousness (“Athrascha”) and the Good Divine Intelligence (Vohu Manah) (“Mananghrashcha”) will protect and guard us from evil. Asha Vahishta is represented by fire in our prayers and jashans.

- (c) **Kshathra Vairya** (the Divine Authority, Kingdom of Ahura Mazda): looks after the metals in the physical world and is represented by the metallic tray and the implements (alat), used during the jashan.
- (d) **Spenta Armaity** (Ahura Mazda’s Holy Devotion): looks after Mother Earth and guides us to be truly devoted in our work. It is represented by the ground on which jashans are performed.
- (e) **Haurvatat** (Divine Perfection): takes care of all bodies of waters and is represented by water in a small metallic container during the jashan.
- (f) **Ameretat** (Ahura Mazda’s Immortality): looks after the vegetation, and is represented by fruits during the jashans.

THE SOUL

3. Zoroastrians believe that every creation of Ahura Mazda has a soul and so also is the entire Universe bestowed with a soul. In the Gathas, there are metaphorical references to animals. The soul of the Universe is referred to as Geush

Urvan which literally means “the soul of the earth, the soul of animals”¹. It is also interpreted as the “Soul of Mother Earth”³ or “the soul of the Universe”². In Gatha Ahunavaiti, Y29, Zarathushtra refers to a dialogue between Geush Urvan and Ahura Mazda in which Geush Urvan complains that there was wrath, violence, plunder, impudence and cruelty on Earth and that none except the Creator can save the Earth. Ahura Mazda consulted with the Divine Council and was informed by Vohu Mana that the Fravashi of Zarathushtra Spitaman “will listen to the teachings of Ahura Mazda, Asha and Vohu Manah”². Geush Urvan lamented that it desired someone who was a powerful Lord and not a weak mortal. Ahura Mazda assured that since Zarathushtra was granted Spiritual powers

on account of his righteousness, he will conquer evil together with King Vishtasp. Geush Urvan was satisfied with this explanation.

ORIGINAL FOLLOWERS

4. In Yasna 29.11 and Yasna 46.11, there is a phrase “mazoi Magai” which refer to those people who were the original followers of Zarathushtra and formed a “Brotherhood of Zoroastrians”. In later ages, they seem to be scattered and referred to as Magus in Achaemenian Inscriptions in the Old Persian language.³

ORIGIN OF GOOD AND EVIL

5. Zarathushtra, for the first time in the history of philosophy, explained the origin of good and evil. Zarathushtra preached that we all have the freedom to choose between good and evil. He preached that evil can be overcome by righteousness. He saw “the evolution of the positive from the negative and of the negative from the positive” and explained the “philosophy of eternal polarism.”². He explained the existence of the “Twin Spirits” (Ta Mainyu), as “Being and Non-being”³. One is called “Spenta Mainyu”, which means the Holy Benevolent Spirit of Ahura Mazda and produces life, help growth, progress and prosperity and the other one is called Angra Mainyu, which is responsible for non-life, decay and destruction.

It is the duty of every human being to transform their negative feelings into positive, their bad thoughts, words, and deeds into good ones. We should assist Spenta Mainyu in overcoming all the negative energies of Angra Mainyu. Every person should listen first and then decide individually as guided by their inner voice (Sarosh Yazad). In the Gathas, Sarosh Yazad is referred to as Sraosha ‘obedience (to the religious laws)’¹. Sarosh Yazad “was the first to chant in the spiritual world the celestial songs of the five Gathas of Zarathushtra.”¹

RESURRECTION OF SOULS

6. Ahura Mazda will come at the end with His Perfect Devotion (Spenta Armaity), Power (Khshathra Vairya) and Good Divine intelligence (Vohu Manah) (Yasna 43.5 & 6)². This is referred to in the later writings as “Ristakhez” (Resurrection of all souls). In the Pahlavi text book “Bundahishne”, which is based on Yasna 29 of Gatha Ahunavaiti, there is a reference that there will be a final war of good versus evil at which time all the souls will be resurrected and will go through the ritual of “Ordeal by Fire”. The souls of the evil will be purified after this ritual and will help in fighting against all evil practices. In the end, the Good Spirit, Spenta Mainyu, shall conquer the Evil Spirit, Angra Mainyu, evil will be vanquished and the world shall reach the stage of Frashokereti, “Eternal Bliss”.

REWARD OF DIVINE INTELLIGENCE

7. Zarathushtra advised his listeners not to promote evil,



“Zarathushtra with his Disciples” (artist unknown)

as it will result in destroying the country. Those who try to deceive the righteous will have a tearful future and a wicked spiritual existence and those who obey the Laws of Ahura Mazda will receive the reward of the Good Divine Intelligence, Vohu Manah.

AFTERLIFE

8. To gain salvation, every person must follow the Path of Devotion (Armaity), which will lead to Righteousness (Asha), Perfection (Hourvatat) and Immortality (Ameretat). A person leading the best spiritual life will cross the Bridge of Judgment ("Chinvat perethu") after death and will be destined to "Garō Demana" or the "House of Hymns" (Yasna 28.4)². The soul of the wicked shall fret because of their unholy life which was not following the Divine Law of Asha and will be destined to "Druj Demana"- the abode of worst mind¹. In Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 33.1, those whose bad deeds balance the good deeds are mentioned. These souls will be destined to the abode which is referred to as "hamestakan" in Pahlavi. It means an intermediary stage between the holy and the wicked, hence 'purgatory'¹

PRAYERS

9. Our Holy Zarathushtra paid reverence to Ahura Mazda with outstretched arms while praying. Each verse of the Gatha Ahunavaiti begins with the words "Ahya Yasa Nemangha", which means that "with obeisance I pray, with hands uplifted for this wish"² In order to "converse" with Ahura Mazda, it is imperative that we pray with true devotion.

OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES

10. Zarathushtra faced many challenges. He was divinely inspired that his firm faith following Asha's path through his Good Mind, Vohu Manah, will help him overcome his difficulties.

HAPPINESS

11. In Gatha Ushtavaiti, our Holy Prophet preaches that "happiness comes to that person who makes others happy" – "ushta ahmai ya ahmai ushta kahmai chit". Our religion is a religion of actions ("karma"). Prayers alone are not sufficient unless they are accompanied by a high moral character and good deeds.

ONE RIGHT PATH

12. In Gatha Vahishtoisti, Zarathushtra revealed that there is only one right path, the Daena, which Ahura Mazda will give to future benefactors ("saoshyant"),² Zarathustra advise all the brides and the grooms to treat each other 'with love in accordance with the Law-divine. This alone will lead to a life of peace and repose'².

SPIRITUAL MESSAGE

13. "The Gathas are spiritual in the fullest sense of the term. Therefore, it is essential to lift up their Message to spiritual heights and never to understand them at the ordinary earthly level."³

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3. Taraporewala I.J.S. (2014). The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra. Illinois: FEZANA with permission from the HUKHTA FOUNDATION



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COMPLETE MESSAGE

"And a point to remember is that of all the founders of religions, Zarathushtra is the only person whose very words have reached us as his compact, complete, melodious Message in 241 stanzas of 17 songs. No dictation, no narration, no interpretation, and no adulteration of the original statement."

Dr. Akbar Ali Jafarey speech given "The Festival of Fire, Introduction to the Religion of Zarathushtra" at the Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, California on Thursday, February 25, 1999.

The Divine Light of Mazda

By Behram Deboo

The divine light of Mazda Ahura is one of the Gathas' primary themes. Since all fire emits light and is coexistent within fire, we will discuss the fire revealed by Zarathushtra in his discourses in the Gathas before and after the creation.

In Yasna 31.7, he says:

*yastâ^{1,2} mañtâ³ pouruyô⁴
raochêbîsh⁵ – rôithwen⁶ hvâthrâ⁷
hvô⁸ khrathwâ⁹ dāmish¹⁰ ashem¹¹ –
yâ¹² dārayat¹³ vahisstem¹⁴ manô¹⁵,
mazdâ¹⁵ mainyû¹⁶ ukhshyô¹⁷ – yê¹⁸ â¹⁹
nûrêmchît^{20,21} ahurâ²² hāmô²³.*

He² who¹ in the very beginning⁴ conceived³ the thought³, “Let the light⁷ stream through the expanding spaces⁶ to generate starry firmaments⁵ (cosmoses).” With wisdom⁹, He⁸ created¹⁰ the cosmic order¹¹ through which¹² He upholds¹³ the best mind (best creative, cosmic mind). This¹⁴ (creation), O Mazda¹⁵, is still growing¹⁷ through (your creative) spirit¹⁶ which¹⁸, O Ahura²² has remained the same,²³ indeed²¹, up to¹⁹ now²⁰. (2, 3).

In my opinion, this verse is critical as it addresses the Creation of the Cosmos. Here we see that it is the light of Mazda along with His thinking mind that created the star-filled heavens and the cosmic order for the whole cosmos to function. It is through Asha that He upholds The Best Mind and so He has remained the same as He was before and after the creation. In Avesta, fire as the cosmic fire of creation is intricately linked with Asha, the cosmic laws through which the cosmic order in the universe is sustained. The symbol of Asha Vahishta, the best truth or righteousness is the physical as well as spiritual fire.

In Yasna 31.19, it is the glowing fire of Mazda with which He hands out justice to both the righteous and unrighteous. Though many physical and chemical activities go in the non-moving fire like our solar system, it is the sunlight which travels at a speed of 180,000 miles per second and reaches the earth in eight minutes.

In Shahnameh, Ferdowsi writes that Zarathushtra held up a censor containing a flame and said to King Vishtasp “Look upon the heavens and the earth. God made them not with dust and water. Look upon the fire and behold therein how they were created.”

In Yasna 30.1, He proclaims that if you follow the revealed manthras for Vohu Manah and Asha, we will envision the realms of light here and there. The beauty of this verse is his assurance that the manthras were revealed to him by Mazda for the welfare of the humankind.

*At¹ tâ² vakhshyâ³ isheñtô⁴ – yâ⁵
mazdâthâ⁶ hyatchît⁷ vîdushê⁸
staotâchâ⁹ ahurâi¹⁰ – yesnyâchâ¹¹
vanghêush¹² mananghō¹³
humâzdrâ¹⁵ ashâ¹⁶ yâechâ¹⁷ – yâ¹⁸
raochêbîsh¹⁹ daresatâ²⁰ urvâzâ²¹.*

O eager seekers⁴, now¹ I shall speak³ to (you) these² (manthras) which⁵ are revealed (given) by Mazda,⁶ indeed⁷, for the sake⁷ of knowing⁸, the hymns of praise⁹ unto Ahura¹⁰, prayers¹¹ for

Vohu¹² Mano¹³, and¹⁷ good uplifting words¹⁵ which¹⁷ are for Asha¹⁶ (truth). And through¹⁷ which¹⁸ you²⁰ will have²⁰ joyful²¹ vision²⁰ of both¹⁹ the realms¹⁹ of light.¹⁹ (2, 3).

We see that Zarathushtra provides us a path of enlightenment; thus, he is sharing the Divine attributes with us and how to reach to that highest culmination point.

In Yasna 28.2, he talks about the wellbeing in both the existences, physical as well as spiritual:
O Mazda, I who approach you through Vohu Manah, the good mind, would like you to grant me the rewards leading to the enhancements of well-being in both the existences (worlds), the physical and that of mental (spiritual) through the law of righteousness and through which You lead your supporters (seekers, faithful) to the abode of Light. (2).

In the above verse, we see that Zarathushtra connects everyone with oneness of light by showing a way to be enlightened and leading them to the sovereignty of light unlike other religious scriptures where man's destiny depends on the founder or deity alone.

In Yasna 32.2, Ahura Mazda is a good friend of sun-like truth. It means the truth is like the rays of light of the sun. Thus, light is the symbol of Asha, truth.

In Yasna 31.3, *Yâm¹ dâ² mainyû³ athrâchâ⁴ - ashâchâ^{5,6} chôish⁷ rânôibyâ⁸ khshnûtem⁹*
And grant² the blissful joy⁹ which¹ you have promised⁷ to both the followers⁸ through the mental spirit³ and fire⁴ of (yours) and⁵ Asha⁶. (2)

In Yasna 30.5, Zarathushtra requests us to choose Spenishta Mainyu (the

In Yasna 31.3: And grant the bliss which you have promised to both the devoted followers through the spiritual fire of (yours) and Asha. Afterwards both will have that wisdom of discernment of the rules. O Mazda, speak to us, for (our) knowing, with the tongue of Your (Thy) mouth, so that I may convert all the living to believe. (2).

In Yasna 34.4 of the Ahunavaiti Gatha, Zarathushtra says we long for your strong fire of thought which guides clearly and brings joy.

In Yasna 43.4, I shall realize that you are firm and holy, O Mazda, when the superiority of good thought comes to me from that hand which you hold the rewards which you assign to the deceitful one and to the truthful one by the heat of your fire strong through the truth. (5).

In Yasna 43.9, Zarathushtra offers his homage to the fire of Mazda.

In Yasna 43.4, Zarathushtra says:
at thwâ mêñghâi taxmemcâ speñtem mazdâ
hyat tâ zastâ yâ tû hafshî avâ
yâ dâ ashîsh dregvâtê ashâunaêcâ
thwâhyâ garemâ âthrô ashâ-aojanghō
hyat môi vanghêush hazê jimat mananghō.

Translated Text:
Wise One, I realize You to be



In the Atash Niyaesh, we pray: *nemase tê âtarsh mazdâ ahurahe hudhâ mazishta ýazata*. It means, "Homage to you, O Fire of Ahura Mazda, O good created, great Yazata."

most holy spirit) who is clothed in the hardest stones (imperishable light of the firmaments) to perform the righteous deeds which will please Ahura Mazda. Spenishta Mainyu is the most creative, imperishable cosmic energy of Mazda. And it is light. In the similar manner, this idea is very well echoed in Yasna Haptanghaiti 36.3. In fact, Yasna 36 is composed and dedicated to the fire in Gathic Avesta by the disciples of Zarathushtra during his life or closely after his death.

powerful and progressive because You help with Your own hand.
You give rewards to both the wrongful and the righteous by means of the warmth of Your fire which is mighty through righteousness, and through which strength of good mind comes to me. (7).

It is clear that Mazda gives the rewards to both the parties, truthful and untruthful by the heat of the fire which is strong through Asha.

When we perform the Koshti prayer, we pray:

*Kēm¹-nâ² mazdâ³ mavaitê⁴ pâyûm⁵ dadât,⁶
hyat⁷ mâ⁸ dregvâ⁹ dîdareshatâ¹⁰ aēnanghê¹¹
anyēm¹² thwahrāt¹³ āthraschâ¹⁴ mananghaschâ^{15,16}
yayâ¹⁷ shyaothanâish¹⁸ ashem¹⁹ thraoshtâ²⁰ ahurâ²¹
tām²⁴ mōi²⁵ dāstvām²⁵ daēnayâi²⁶ frāvaochâ²⁷. (Yasna 46.7).*

What¹ person², O Wise One³, gives⁶ me⁷ protection⁸
when⁷ the evil person⁹ stares fiercely¹⁰ at me⁸ for harm¹¹,
other than¹²¹ Your¹³ Fire¹⁴ and¹⁶ Mind¹⁶?

Through these two¹⁷ deeds¹⁸ righteousness¹⁹ flourishes²⁰, O Ahura²¹
Declare²⁷ clearly²⁷ to me²⁵ that²⁴ knowledge²⁵ of inner-self²⁶. (2)

In Atash Niyesh, we pray we revere the fire of Ahura Mazda which is the giver of good things and the highest Yazata. Then fire is made 'the son of 'Ahura Mazda'. In Gathas, Zarathushtra does not define fire as Mazda's son but refers to the fire as "Thwa athra sukhra" meaning Your radiant, blazing fire. "It is the Mazda's fire which started time and

space when the creation began. As one astrophysicist said, "We are children of the star dust." However, I believe 'son' is metaphorically used as His Entire Creation.

In Atash Niyesh, we pray: *nemase tē ātarsh mazdā ahurahe hudhā mazishta yazata.*
It means, "Homage to you, O Fire of Ahura Mazda, O good created, great Yazata."

Here we are asked to pray to the Fire of Mazda Ahura which is noticeably clear. Later it becomes 'puthra', the son of Ahura Mazda. Probably, all physical fires in the cosmos are His creation.

However, Ardeshir Papekan, the founder of the Sassanian dynasty started the cult of Verahram (Behram), the divinity responsible in helping to win the war. So, every time, he won a war, he built a fire temple and named Atash Verahram. Thus, there was a beginning of Atash Behrams which continued thereafter even though we lost Iran to Arabs and Mazda Yasna to Islam. In the end, I would pray that if we are the followers of Mazda Ahura, we should build the fire temple in His name.

In the end, I believe Zarathushtra was not content with his own illumination. He wanted his followers to achieve the same luminosity of the soul as he had attained. That is the greatness of Zarathushtra - unparalleled and incomparable in the history of humanity.*

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Zarathushtra's Spiritual Experiences: *Gleaned from Yasna 28*

By Ramiyar P. Karanjia



In Zoroastrian context, the word Gatha is used for the personal poetic compositions of prophet Zarathushtra. Secondly, the word is used to denote the last five days of a Zoroastrian Calendar year, which have been named after these metrical outpourings of the prophet. This gives us a glimpse of the high esteem in which the Gathas have been held by Zoroastrians down the ages.

The Avestan word Gatha is derived from gā- “to sing”, and hence it literally means “a song.” In Pahlavi, the word is rendered as gās. As the name suggests, the text of the Gathas is purely metrical in composition. The Gathas record prophet Zarathushtra’s communications with Ahura Mazda, right from the inception of his quest to the later stages of his life, which include his Revelation and acceptance as the Prophet.

The Gathas comprise of 17 chapters having 896 lines and about 5660 words. These chapters are further subdivided into five groups, on the basis of their metre. These five groups are named after the first word of the first chapter of the group, thus: Ahunavad, Ushtavad, Spentomad, Vohu-khshathra and Voshishtoish. The 17 chapters of Gathas comprise the 72 chapters of the text of Yasna, and are placed almost at its centre.

In Avestan texts, the Gathas are reverentially referred to and remembered at several places in Avestan texts, especially the Yasna and the Visperad. In Yasna 57.8 (Sarosh Yasht Vadi, Kardeh III) it is stated that Sarosh Yazad was the first to chant the Spitama Zarathushtra’s five Gathas, having metre, stanzas, commentary and catechism. The Rapithwin Gah extols the five Gathas by names and so do other prayers like the Afrin-i-Ardafravash.

Yasna 55.1,2 describe the Gathas as food, protection and clothing for the soul. It states “the Gathas are for us defense, protection and spiritual food; they are for our soul both food and clothing. They offer good reward, abundant reward and righteous reward beyond this life, after the separation of life and consciousness.” In the sixth paragraph of the same chapter, it is stated that the Gathas can be recited in the following different ways: frasraothremcha “chanting softly”, framarethremcha “remembering mentally”, fragāthremcha “singing aloud”, and frāyashtimcha “for purpose of veneration”.

The Gathas are highly abstract, ethical, metaphysical and philosophical texts. Prof. Mary Boyce refers to them as “deeply enigmatic”, and “having “baffling

verses.” One has to deeply understand the Avestan language and the context of the time and place of their composition, to understand them fully and properly. The translation and interpretation of the Gathas thus veritably becomes the pinnacle of studies for any Avestan student. Apart from the fact that the Avestan language used for the Gathas is an older dialectical variation, one also needs to have an intrinsic grasp of the religion in order to understand the belief system expressed in the Gathas. The allegorical references in the Gathas, makes it more challenging to grasp the spirit of these ancient texts.

This paper, solely focuses on Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna chapter 28, which most scholars regard as the first chapter of the first Gatha, Ahunavad. This chapter demonstrates the quest and yearning of the prophet to reach Ahura Mazda, especially through Vohu Manah and Asha. Almost every stanza of this chapter alludes to Vohu Manah and Asha, which may be regarded as the virtues of “good mind” and “righteousness” or divine beings in their own right, later referred to as Bahman and Ardibahest Ameshaspands. This chapter has some very important lessons which Zarathushtra learnt, and which later helped him immensely in his quest. These lessons are universally relevant and can vastly benefit the present generation.

At the beginning, Zarathushtra declares his intentions to please the soul of the universe. He shows willingness and readiness to dedicate all of his own personal faculties for this purpose. He fervently prays for Ahura Mazda’s help to fulfil his mission, through Asha with the guidance of Spenta Mainyu and wisdom of Vohu Manah, so that he may succeed in his endeavour to give solace to the soul of the Earth. Here the words Spenta Mainyu and Vohu Manah can be understood as proper nouns, names of Ameshaspands as also abstract nouns meaning “beneficence” and “good mind.”

Zarathushtra desires to approach Ahura Mazda through Vohu Manah and also instructs his followers to do so. This indicates the supreme importance of elevating the mind to succeed in the fulfillment of material and spiritual goals. Here, Zarathushtra reinforces the message

of the Ashem Vohu prayer, that by following Asha, the faithful can attain bliss.

Zarathushtra knows that on the spiritual path, he needs the help of divine beings and himself needs to imbibe and develop their virtues and qualities. He places supreme importance on a devotional life, wherein songs of praise are to be recited in honor of divine beings to fulfill the goals of his life. In the fifth stanza, one gets the important lesson to keep a watch over one’s soul, through the mind. One has to be quite determined and aware about this aspect, till it becomes a subconscious part of one’s being.

The mind is capable of misleading the soul, hence it has to be first controlled and then evolved into the state of Vohu Manah so that it may not waylay the soul. The rewards of watching over one’s soul are great, as it assures the constant grace, guidance and blessings of Ahura Mazda. Zarathushtra knows that once he is aware of his purpose of life, it will be easier for him to transcend the levels of his mind, so he asks for the boon of Good Mind, Vohu Manah. In the second line of the Yathā ahu vairyo prayer too, the devotee asks for the gift of Good Mind, by dedicating his life’s actions to Mazda.

Zarathushtra realizes that Ahura Mazda communicates through the evolved mind. He is also aware that once he is

convinced about his purpose nothing can stop or deter him, so he keeps asking for guidance about the purpose of his life through Vohu Manah, that is his evolved mind.

Zarathushtra also realizes that to watch over one’s soul, one has to lead the life of Asha, that is, to make virtues the lodestone of one’s life. It is interesting to note that the concept of Asha encompasses most virtues. Hence Asha is of paramount importance for leading a spiritual life. Zarathushtra here gives the classic pledge, which can also be an advice to his followers: *yavat isāi tavachā avat khshāi aeshe ashahyā* “As long as I wish and I am able, I shall teach for the quest of Asha!”

Zarathushtra keeps great faith in the power of Manthras, that is, Avestan prayers. He believes that with prayers, one of the most difficult obstacles of his mission, that of convincing skeptics, removing their mental blocks, and making them believe in the supreme power of Ahura

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Mazda, could be overcome.

Zarathushtra is confident about his mission as he is convinced that with perseverance he can achieve all his goals, even those which seem highly improbable, like having a glimpse of the divine beings and a conference with Ahura Mazda. Zarathushtra exhibits immense humility while tackling various aspects of his life's mission. He knows that by himself he won't be able to fulfill his mission, so he keeps on asking for the help and support of Ahura Mazda and other divine beings in order to overcome the stiff opposition of malicious persons and spirits.

Now the prophet is aware of his life's mission and destiny, and is very keen to accomplish the same. Hence he prays for its success and strength for himself and his disciples. He knows that his mission will succeed only if his followers are strong and successful, so he keeps asking for inner strength and clarity for himself and his followers, especially his patron king Vishtaspa, whom he names in the eighth stanza, and for one of his foremost disciples Frashaoshtra, whom he names in the ninth stanza.

Zarathushtra is very mindful of the pitfalls that a human being may face no matter how lofty and evolved he may be. Cases in point have been there in most civilizations of the world. In the Iranian tradition, we know that king Jamshed lost his divine effulgence when he exhibited the momentary weaknesses of vanity and pride. Keeping these pitfalls in mind, Zarathushtra assures Ahura Mazda that after attaining spiritual power, he will not offend Him or any other divine being and neither will he waver from his life's mission. On the contrary he assures the divine beings of his constant humility and devotion even after achieving his mission and attaining Bliss.

As a parting lesson of this chapter, Zarathushtra says that people who are known to be wise and upright, have attained these qualities on account of Vohu Manah and Asha. The just desires of such people are always fulfilled. This emphatically demonstrates the importance of Vohu Manah and Asha at every stage of life.

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The prophet ends the chapter by once again seeking Vohu Manah and Asha, the foremost powers of Ahura Mazda, who are always closely linked to Him. Through their help, Zarathushtra seeks guidance from Ahura Mazda to get the wisdom to understand the working of the universe and the mechanisms of the human mind, which may lead him to revelation. The way Zarathushtra perceives the divine world as a distinct entity, and leads his life as if it was a tangible and perceptible reality, is one of the biggest lessons from the Gathas in general, and this chapter in particular. It emphasises the fact that the divine quest is a very personal journey in which the road map and signposts are provided but the steps have to be undertaken by the seeker himself.

End Notes

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Illustration of Zarathushtra with uplifted arms from a painting by V.S. Wagulkar. "In Search of My God" (1978). Published by The Lost Generation Publications, a division of The Zoroastrian Foundation, Los Angeles, California.



**GOOD
THOUGHTS**



**GOOD
WORDS**



**GOOD
DEEDS**

What in God's name does that mean?

By Meheryar N. Rivetna

In a discussion about the Zoroastrian religion a Zoroastrian, ordained into priesthood, was emphatic that rituals and prayers are fundamental to Zarathustra's doctrines. When it was pointed out that Zarathustra's unique teachings are rooted in good thoughts, words and actions the priest snapped, "Now, which religion teaches you to have bad thoughts, speak bad words and do ill deeds?" None, of course. But the naiveté of the priest was an eye-opener that a vital principle of Zarathustra's religion is so poorly understood. This very important trine is emblazoned on the walls of Zoroastrian Centers, T-shirts, artifacts and such, but, really, what in God's name does it mean?

The answer lies in the Gathas.
In God's name: Wisdom!

M. L. West, the University of Oxford Gatha scholar, said, Zarathushtra

was the first to formulate the triad 'thought, word, and deed.'¹

Does that mean that the people before Zarathustra did not think good thoughts, speak good words and do good deeds? The answer is: Not in the context of what the prophet meant. Zarathustra's credo of this profound trinity is not a cookie-cutter philosophy of "thinking pleasant thoughts", "speaking kind words", and "acts of common courtesy." Without minimizing the importance of these social niceties, Zarathustra's doctrine has a far deeper and richer meaning.

Zoroastrian lore begins with an uncreated (Abadah), without form (An-Ayanah) good force Spenta Mainyu and its evil counterforce Angra Mainyu battling each other; the good spirit engaged in creation, and the opposing spirit in destruction, of life (Ha 30.4.) The

two spirits are distinct in thought, word and deed (Ha 30.3.)

Spenta Mainyu, the creative attribute of Ahura Mazda, is conjointly used with the godhead. Angra Mainyu, the antithesis of Spenta Mainyu, is its sworn adversary. Spenta Mainyu created perfection; a world free of strife, misery, unhappiness, disease. Spenta Mainyu's antagonist, Angra Mainyu, countered with disease, deceit, depravity, duplicity, among many other evils inciting humans to act in opposition to Ahura Mazda, vowing to destroy all that is good in creation.

SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF AHURA MAZDA

Ahura Mazda, Lord of Wisdom, possesses six characteristics: Vohu Manah—the Good Mind defined as a mind imbued with wisdom, ability to reason (be rational) and

intelligence; Asha—Righteousness or Truth defined as the Will of Ahura Mazda, Truth being evident in the laws of nature; Khshathra Vairya—the Kingdom of God defined as the world being in a state of perfection (heavenly) wrought by human endeavor; Armaiti—Piety or Devotion defined as fidelity to the laws of Ahura Mazda. Without an unwavering devotion, the earlier three attributes become inconsequential. Haurvatat and Ameratat—Well Being and Immortality. These two are conjoined for the welfare of humankind and celebrated together. They symbolize the everlasting physical and spiritual well being of humans here on earth.

These attributes, like Ahura Mazda, are not anthropomorphic, but are personified aspects of Ahura Mazda. Collectively, they are called Amesha Spentas although the term does not appear in the Gathas. Individually, the attributes frequently occur in the hymns and are at the core of Zarathustra's teachings from which the concept of Good Thoughts, Words and Deeds takes root. Angra Mainyu infuses the world with evil luring humankind to wrath, oppression, dishonesty, deceit, hypocrisy, selfishness—all forms of wickedness—making Ahura Mazda's world imperfect (Ha 29.1.)

ROLE OF HUMANKIND

Humankind was created to help Ahura Mazda bring the world to its original state of perfection—defined as *frashokereti*—from the decay wreaked by Angra Mainyu. Ahura Mazda offers humankind the gifts of the Amesha Spentas which humans are not born possessing, but can and must acquire them to help the Lord of Wisdom in His objective (Ha 33.13.) The Gathas aver that Ahura

Mazda expects humans to use these gifts to perfect oneself and establish an ideal social order.

Life consists of thinking, speaking and acting and it is through these means that humans either better themselves and their fellow human beings or sink into depravity. The two spirits mentioned earlier refer to a human's moral position inherent in his/her thoughts, words and deeds and are not external to human beings.²

Humankind was created to help Ahura Mazda bring the world to its original state of perfection, defined as *frashokereti* ... Zarathustra's followers are expected to teach humankind the path laid out by the prophet so they, too, can advance with thought, word and deed to satisfy Ahura Mazda in His design of an immaculate world (Ha 53.2.)

The Gathas do not demand practices peripheral to the prophet's teachings, but entail exercising one's innate free will with thought, word and deed that contributes to human progress and vanquishes wickedness.

The Gathas tenaciously state that when humans are devoted (Armaiti) to truth and righteousness (Asha) using their wisdom and rational thought (Vohu Manah), that is,

use the gifts of Ahura Mazda to think and act to effect good moral conduct, they increase righteousness (defeat evil) (Ha 44.6) and conform to Zarathustra's doctrine of Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds. The Gatha ethics lay heavy emphasis on a Good Mind. Human destiny is shaped by wisdom. Good words and deeds originate from wise thoughts. If the thoughts are directed towards [Zarathustra's] religious principles to destroy evil and uplift humankind, then one realizes one's heart's desires (Ha 48.4.) To augment one's prosperity and happiness, one's deeds must be dictated by good reason (Vohu Manah) and righteousness (Asha) (Ha 51.1.) Righteous thoughts lead to righteous actions that lead to well being (Haurvatat) and heavenly bliss (Ameratat) right here on earth. Zarathustra's followers are expected to teach humankind the path laid out by the prophet so they, too, can advance with thought, word and deed to satisfy Ahura Mazda in His design of an immaculate world (Ha 53.2.)

The Gathas, while stressing the importance of thought, word and deed for one's own perfection, also emphasize directing one's thoughts, speech and action to thwart evil influences where encountered. It is not enough to resist evil, but it is incumbent upon humans to confront it with thought, word and deed and punish the evildoer. One's thoughts, words and deeds must then be geared towards showing the wrongdoer the path of rectitude. This is a gift from humans Ahura Mazda cherishes (Ha 33.2.)

This natural law in the Gathas was eloquently expressed some 4000 years after Zarathustra by the English scientist-philosopher George Gore: "Nature never forgives, nor

omits to punish wrong conduct, she mercifully punishes in order to prevent evil-doing, and she inflicts pain in order to preserve life and compel improvement; there is no wheedling her by means of begging petitions.”³ Merciful punishment is not escaping punishment, but being shown the righteous path after retribution, compelling improvement to prevent further evil-doing, as in Ha 33.2. A mind that is reflective and contented is the best mind. A reflective, wise mind does not show sympathy for or support vicious people. Ha 46.6 and Ha 53.6 instruct that one’s thoughts, words and deeds that overlook another’s evil not only strengthen the evildoer, but make that individual complicit in evil, thereby perpetuating evil and that is counterintuitive to Ahura Mazda’s edicts². In Ha 43.15, Zarathustra articulates a fundamental natural law that our thoughts, words and deeds must enhance virtue while actively discrediting wrongdoers.

Prayer is not muttering words from a prayer book or reciting the Gathas for five days every year, nor does it mean burning wood, tapping urns, or lighting oil lamps. Prayer, be it the Gathas or another, is implementing the words of the verses recited. Prayer lies in thoughts, words and deeds dedicated (Armaiti) towards fulfilling Ahura Mazda’s mission of eradicating all that is inimical to humankind and nature.

While no religion teaches one to indulge in bad thoughts, words and deeds, it is in the Zoroastrian faith that good thoughts, words and actions form the bedrock of the religious tenets (Ha 49.3). This triad, when practiced, benefits humankind moving the world towards an ideal state: the Kingdom of God (Kshathra Vairya.)

Dastur Maneckji Dhalla said that the true life is a constant effort to mitigate the wrongs of the world.⁴ The Almighty has given humankind the power of thought, speech and action to accomplish that task. Thus, “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds” means directing our mental and physical energies towards doing God’s work of perfecting the world by freeing it of iniquity (Ha 48.2.)

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Instead of being embroiled in embargos on conversion and inter-marriages, posing inane questions, denying humankind the benefit of Zarathustra’s teachings, the Zoroastrian community and the world will be better served doing Ahura Mazda’s work here on earth with Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds as decreed in the Gathas - Humata, Hukhta, Huvarashta.

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The Gathas, as “the word of Zarathustra,” have, in one way or another, informed Iranian literature for some two-and-a-half millennia and inspired Western thought for almost as long.

From “The Gathas, a Forgotten Masterpiece Third Millenium BCE to 600 CE. The Ethical Turn” by Prods Oktor Skjærvø. (2019).

Athra in the Gathas & Atash in the Atash Neyaesh

By Lovji Cama

FIRE IN THE GATHAS

For Zoroastrians, fire is the most important symbol of our religion. Almost all religious ceremonies are performed in the presence of fire. Fire holds the central place in a Zoroastrian temple and the worship of God is performed in front of it. Long before Zarathustra preached his message, fire was part of the religious observances of the Indo-Aryan society into which he was born. Yet only in Zoroastrianism it is such a powerful and respected symbolic object. This is because Zarathustra in the Gathas gave a totally new concept of fire.

The word fire-*Athra* or its cognate *Atrem, Athre, Athras, Athro and Athri* occur in the Gathas in Yasna 31.3, 31.19, 34.4, 43.4, 43.9, 46.7, 46.8, 47.6 and 51.9. Now to understand the nature of Athra, it is necessary to have a brief look at the verses in which the word appears. (For a detailed analysis of these verses see: Athra, Fire in the Gathas, by Lovji Cama, in An Introduction to The Gathas, No. 7, April 1990, Dina McIntyre, Editor.)

In every passage where it appears Zarathustra refers to it as Thy Fire, clearly associating it with Ahura Mazda. Its nature is explained as follows:

- 1) First Athra is an agency or faculty or aspect of Ahura Mazda (Yasna 31.3) it is an active agency, unlike the Amesha Spentas which are the attributes



- of Ahura Mazda.
- 2) The most obvious action of Athra is to bestow the just rewards to the deceitful and the truthful, at the time of the judgment of the soul. In this activity Athra is undeceivable by those who are evil, in other words the evil cannot escape the consequences of their action. (Yasna 31.3, 31.19, 31.20)
- 3) Athra derives power from Asha (right and truth) and works with Vohu Mano towards the fulfillment of Asha (order) and therefore the final victory of good over evil. (Yasna 34.4)
- 4) Athra gives constant and clear help to the faithful, this help is always there and it is a clear guidance, easily perceived by the truthful, in that sense Athra illuminates or reveals the path of

Asha. (Yasna 34.4.)

- 5) Not only does Athra give guidance and help to the truthful, it also protects them from physical harm that is intended or caused by the deceitful. In Yasna 46.7 Zarathustra specifically says so.
- 6) In Yasna 43.4, Athra is referred to as the power or hand of Ahura Mazda, and Zarathustra asks for help from this very hand.
- 7) From Yasna 34.4 we learn that Athra is to be earnestly desired.
- 8) Yasna 43.9 teaches us that Athra is worthy of homage (great respect or honor), as is Asha.
- 9) In Yasna 51.9 it is described as the agency of the Test of Molten Metal, which will, at the advent of Frashokereti, destroy all Evil. Yasna 51.9 serves as a warning.

What then is the concept of Athra, God's Fire in the Gathas? To me it is God in action in the world of man, guiding, illuminating, protecting those who use their good thinking to understand Asha and then work towards its fulfillment and also meting out the true rewards to those who promote Asha and those who frustrate Asha. Athra is God meting out the just consequences of a person's action in this world. Athra is also God bringing about the final purification at the time of the final judgment, at Frashokereti. Athra is God, actively helping man to fulfil his good destiny.

In Zoroastrianism man is the co-

worker with God. Not only does his personal salvation depend on his understanding and his actions but so does the salvation of the entire creation. In spite of a person being good and trying his best to live the good life, there will be times when evil will threaten, when forces clearly out of a person's control will try to destroy or hurt. It is at such times that man looks for help from God. It is a comfort to know that in Zarathustra's scheme of things, God does help, and that help is Athra. Zarathustra himself invokes it in Yasna 46.7. Yet one point needs to be clarified, the nature of the help and how it is given. We are told that Athra is mighty through Asha (Yasna 34.4) and Athra works with Vohu Mano to fulfill Asha and together they will protect against the machinations of the evil (Yasna 46.7). It seems that the help that Athra gives is reserved for the person who acts in accordance with Asha, I would even say that it is proportional to the extent that a person acts that way. This is my understanding of the statement that Athra is mighty through Asha. Secondly the help that comes through Athra has to be in accordance with Asha, Athra cannot help protect the person who acts without Vohu Mano i.e. acts irrationally.

If in Zoroastrianism, Athra is God in action in the world of man, then the physical consecrated fire, which is the object of reverence, could be regarded as a symbol of the Gathic Athra. The consecrated fire of an Atash Behram or Atash Adarian must be regarded as a symbol of the presence of God in our world. It would then make sense to keep the fire ever-burning because extinguishing it would be a symbolic denial of God's presence in our world. Worship in front of

it would be acknowledging that one is worshiping God. Reverence and respect to a consecrated fire would be the logical consequence of realizing what it stands for.

FIRE IN THE ATASH NEYAYESH

The main liturgy dealing with fire is the Atash Neyayesh, It is the main part of the Boi Ceremony and is usually recited before other ceremonies. The Atash Neyayesh prayer is used to consecrate a Dadgah fire before its ceremonial use. An examination of the translation of this prayer is necessary to compare it with idea of Athra in the Gathas. Because of the length constrain of this article I will only use the summary of the central part of the Atash Neyayesh and leave out the other parts, which do not refer to the nature of fire. This central part consists of 10 paragraphs in which the priest or the person who is praying asks the fire for its blessings in return for proper care of the fire, and the Fire replies with the grant of blessings.

These are summarized below.

The person who prays says:

- 1) O Fire, the purifier of all things (Kanga translates the word puthra as purifier, Sethna and Rustomjee translate it as the purifying fire) thou art worthy of worship and invocation in the abodes of men, may there be greatness, happiness unto that man who shall always worship thee with fuel, Baresman, milk and mortar in hand.
- 2) O fire, may thou be proper in fuel and incense, proper in logs of wood. May thou be provided with food for a long time.
- 3) O fire for a long time, until Frashokereti may thou be burning in this house. May Thy brilliance increase in this house.

- 4) O fire, grant me comfort, sustenance, long life, happiness, greatness, wisdom, fluent tongue, intelligence for my soul and intellect which may always increase and not diminish in strength.
- 5) O fire we ask thee for strength for standing firm footed. Wakefulness except when we are asleep, steadiness in our own duty, offspring that are of innate wisdom, who will rule over the region, sit in the assembly, possessing good respect, delivering the poor from distress. Offspring that may render this house, my clan, my town, my country and the religion prosperous.
- 6) O fire the purifier grant me those things that may instruct my life, guide my life for now and forever so that I may attain happiness in reward for the holiness of my soul.

The Fire replies:

- 7) The fire of Ahura Mazda carries admonition (warning) for all for whom the fire cooks the evening and noon meals, that from all, it solicits a good and healthy and friendly offering.
- 8) The fire looks at the hands of all comers and says: "What does the walking friend bring to the sitting friend?"
- 9) And if any person brings unto the fire either fuel, religiously, with sincere heart or Baresman or the fragrant plant; to that offeror, then the fire of Ahura Mazda being pleased, revered and satisfied, gives a blessing.
- 10) Unto thee, may the flock of cattle increase. Unto thee may there be increase of heroic men. May your mind be thoughtful, may thy life be active in performing benevolent and virtuous deeds.

May thou live a joyous life those days and nights that you live. This is the blessing of the fire for him who brings to the fire dry fuel, examined in the light, purified with the blessing of righteousness.

CONCLUSION

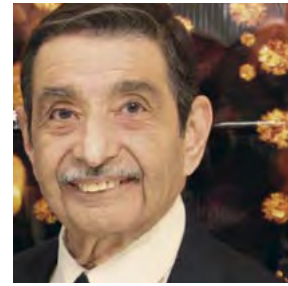
At first glance the Atash Neyayesh appears to be transactional. In return for worship, praise, offering of fuel, incense, Baresman, milk etc., the person who prays asks for a number of gifts. Even when the fire replies it appears transactional and the gifts are granted if certain conditions are met.

In the Atash Neyayesh, the fire is addressed as the son of Ahura Mazda or the purifying fire of Ahura Mazda implying that the ritual fire is associated with Ahura Mazda. Fire in the Gathas is not a physical fire and the ritual fire is definitely a physical fire, this explains the

demands for dry, well examined wood and incense and other offerings because the physical fire needs these to keep burning. The gifts asked for and given do include prosperity, a long life and happiness, but also moral strength and wisdom, to use the gifts to bring about a just and happy society that progresses on the path of Asha. The Atash in the Atash Neyayesh could be regarded as a physical symbol of the Gathic Athra even though the symbolism appears to be tarnished by the transactional language of the Atash Neyayesh. Still there are attempts to associate it with the Gathic Athra, such as the inclusion of Yasna 34.4 towards the end of the Atash Neyayesh.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

For the Gathas, I have used the translations of Dr. Irach Taraporewalla and Prof. Stanley Insler and for the Atash Neyayesh, the translation of Ervad Kavasji Edulji Kanga (English version by Prof. Ervad Maneck Furdoonji Kanga) and translation by T. R. Sethna.



Lovji D. Cama, Ph.D. is the co-chair of FEZANA's Religious Education Committee. He lectures on Zoroastrianism in North America, UK and India and contributed to the text book "Good Life". He is a founding member of ZAGNY (Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York), the longest serving trustee of the Dar-e-Mehr and is in charge of the ZAGNY Religious Education classes and youth camps.



"May the fire grant us the wisdom to create interreligious harmony and a framework for expressing many visions of a just, peaceful and sustainable future."

BOI CEREMONY

Ervad Tehemton F. Mirza, Vice President of the North American Mobeds Council (NAMC) performed an abbreviated *boi* (Sacred Fire) ceremony at the Sacred Fire site tended by the Canadian Indigenous Peoples on November 4, 2018 as part of the Parliament of World Religions events in Toronto.

Forty individuals of different faiths gathered to participate in the early morning ceremony. Participants were given sandalwood to offer to the fire and pray for harmony, peace and justice.



After the Bad Choices

By Ann Van Sevenant

'Free choice' in Zoroastrian ethics is often defined as a choice between good and bad. But what does this exactly mean? In what follows, I emphasize the act of choosing itself, our engagement in choosing. In order to make circumstantial choices, we first need to develop a good understanding of our commitment to choose, of what makes us commit. Only then can we get involved in the process of making better choices and activate dedication in our attempts to do so. In other words, the power or strength to choose is put on the forefront, the renewal of our commitment, especially after the bad choices. This way of being can be inspirational to others who also engage in the unending process towards the light that shines on all.

In my study on the proto-philosophical ideas present in the Gathas, I came across Zarathushtra's indirect reference to the difference

between 'what' and 'that'. When something happens, we wish to know 'what' happened. But we can also focus on the fact 'that' this happened. In the first Gatha, Zarathushtra lets us in on how enlightenment came to him, on how he was touched by what appeared to be infinite wisdom. He shares with us, his amazement of the fact that living beings are not just alive, but take part in life, in an energy and an ingenious process. Most interesting is this admiration for what is, for the fact that things that are, for the elements of nature, for human connectedness, for a sovereign wisdom that can enlighten humans. In this passage of my latest book, *Thus Replied Zarathustra*, I try to grasp the magic and wonder he experienced: "Once he had been enlightened by an inner eye, Zarathustra was overwhelmed by the beauty of nature, astonished by the brilliant interplay between all things, by the enchantment he experienced in the ingenious composition of

the universe. We recognize in his descriptions the philosophical amazement at the existence of things, rather than their non-existence, together with his endless search for answers in many of his darkest moments" (p. 24).

Now, the discovery of nature's ingenious order was possible only because the human mind is conceived in such a way that it can comprehend this. By developing their intellect, by opening up to a secret understanding, humans can try to live in consonance with the ordering principle of the universe. It is inherent to all things and when individuals open up to it and recognize it as such, they can experience the self-regulating principle and participate in the cosmic dynamism that regenerates in all living beings. Humans need the full use of their potential to sense this cosmic ingenuity and reach moments of happiness. And when

it is reflected in the moral conduct of one individual, it may also start to function as a recognizable self-regulating principle in others. One of the ways to get in touch with this principle is to practice what I have called the primordial choice. In my approach of the Zoroastrian way of life I emphasize that this choice has to be recognized and activated, to be reactivated and renewed again each time. Without knowing the future circumstances, we solemnly declare that we will choose trueness over untrueness, truth over the lie, honesty over deception. It can have an unexplainable effect in our social relations when it becomes a social practice reminding people of the tripartite motto, of trying to make thoughts, words and deeds correspond.

Yasna 30.3 explains that there are two opposite tendencies present in each individual and that during a disagreement, it falls to the wisest person to choose, while the most ignorant does not choose. The idea is to underline the importance of the two opposite tendencies – towards being true and towards being untrue. The committed person gives preference to the first. His or her choice is founded on the understanding that prioritizing the first tendency has a beneficial effect both on the individual and social level. The primordial choice is based on the experience that prioritizing the first tendency has an invigorating effect and that choosing for trueness also unleashes the power to prioritize. The person who is indifferent to choose or who supposes it is possible not to choose will not only not know the beneficial effect of choosing but will also not be able to fight the second tendency.

My personal experience can be

summarized as follows. As I became more involved in the process of opening up to the two tendencies, I gradually experienced that the act of choosing – also called free choice – depended on a preliminary debate with myself, with an inner confidence, with a higher wisdom. Rather than to start by concentrating on the content of the choice, I focused on the act of choosing itself, on decision-making. So, it seemed

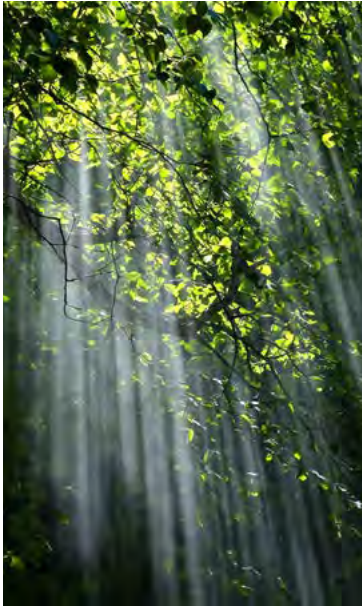
Rather than to be subjected to arbitrary laws, Zarathushtra understood from Ahura Mazda how humans can take part in the cosmic energy when they live in accordance with the cosmic self-regulating principle of trueness.

that a decisional power came from the very fact 'that' I chose to choose, that I confirmed the primordial choice. Actually, to engage in moral choices is not about blindly following an absolute rule or a law that applies to all circumstances and times (e.g., "I shall not murder"), but about understanding the necessity of making true choices in the first place. The person who is not indifferent or who complies with this necessity is more likely to adjust or adapt himself to the idea of the self-regulation of trueness.

Of course, no proof can be given of this interaction between the microcosmos and macrocosmos, but we cannot deny it exists or takes place. The realm of the interactive

energy can be experienced each time the primordial choice is effectively put to action. There is no methodology, no program, no teaching that can sufficiently explain these hidden, enigmatic workings, but we can read between the lines of the Gathas, that Zarathushtra testifies to an ingenious order, of the dynamic ingenuity ordering the cosmos (*asha*), of the fact that we can try and understand the importance of our insertion in the cosmical play (*vohu mana*). What's more, our immersion in this ancient wisdom brings us in contact with the origin of life that regenerates in all life forms (*armaiti*) and makes life progress towards accomplishment (*haurvatat*) in an evolution towards completion (*ameretat*). Rather than to be subjected to arbitrary laws, Zarathushtra understood from Ahura Mazda how humans can take part in the cosmic energy when they live in accordance with the cosmic self-regulating principle of trueness.

Our wish to make thoughts, words and actions correspond is not an idle goal, but the expression of the hidden connection between living beings and cosmic ingenuity. It reveals a possible taking part in the cosmic play: the fact that we can contribute to the regenerative principle of life, and make our actions correspond with a demand coming from elsewhere. To prioritize the intention to not be harmful to others, to other living creatures, is an act of consolidation that extends itself to the whole of being, of what was, is and will be. To be on the side of trueness and before all choices to choose life over non-life is a consistent way to address our bad choices. It is often after the bad choices – as if we needed them to adjust our lifestyle – that we come to our senses, again and again, and



This most ancient existential philosophy inspires us to personally engage in a durable fight against old habits, to enable ourselves to make better choices, for ourselves and in our community life. "So, let each with his inner self commune" (Yasna 53.3), says Zarathushtra, and learn how to resist chaos, which is a beneficial social practice: "The best life is that of who strives for light and shares it with others" (Yasna 43.2).

and it is the evolving and dynamic aspect of progression that we need to underline. To bring something to a good end was the initial motivation of every single cell coming to life. This is also true today. When we ask 'what' is happening to our planet? Or 'what' can humans contribute to life on earth, we can recite this line: 'that' he alone shall be happy and wise - who brings wisdom to the wise (Yasna 51.8).*

pay more attention to each other, to our surroundings, to other living beings. "Let each one strive with thought and word and deed" (Yasna 53.2), says Zarathushtra, in terms of a primordial choice that is not imposed but renewed, as to offer a better chance of protection against inconsiderate choices and actions. Because the latter always come back, the idea is not to eliminate them and become pure, but to address them each time anew.

The meaning of the New Day is indeed not just symbolic, since it requires the daily practice of renewing our choices. Not guilt, was imparted by Zarathushtra, but rather the adverse consequences of bad choices, one of which is regret, to be distinguished from repentance, a religious feeling connected with sin. Indeed, Zarathushtra's warnings to consider 'the final account' (Yasna 31.14) has everything to do with the regret of not having made better choices when there was still time. He incites us not to wallow in guilt and self-pity, but to renew our commitment. Regretful actions are part of life and they cannot be prevented. which is whv.

when regret comes, we say 'yes' (in Nietzschean terms) to the primordial choice. We say 'yes' to saying 'yes', again and again. This confirmative way of life is consolidating and progressive, especially when we focus on finding the best existence on time.

This most ancient existential philosophy inspires us to personally engage in a durable fight against old habits, to enable ourselves to make better choices, for ourselves and in our community life. "So, let each with his inner self commune" (Yasna 53.3), says Zarathushtra, and learn how to resist chaos, which is a beneficial social practice: "The best life is that of who strives for light and shares it with others" (Yasna 43.2). To experience the enduring strength (*kshathra*) that stems from trusting infinite wisdom may possibly unite people. Even if a majority of fellow-citizens neglects the primal scream of mother earth, there will always be individuals who take consistency as a personal rule of life and who jointly carry out what was implicit in the beginning. Life is an ingenious process towards accomplishment.

REFERENCE

In this article, the author refers to her book "Thus Replied Zarathustra" Ann Van Sevenant Mimesis International (Feb. 28, 2020)



Ann Van Sevenant, PhD in Philosophy (Brussels, 1987), is the author of eighteen books on philosophy in Dutch, French, English, Italian. She is also an international guest speaker, was professor of Philosophy at the University College of Antwerp (Belgium), and is currently an independent researcher associated with the University of Brussels.



THE GĀTHIC ORIGINS OF THE AMƏŠA SPƏNTAS

By Benedikt Peschl

According to the traditional Zoroastrian view, Ahura Mazdā was aided in his creative activities by six principal divine beings. Each of them presides over and protects one of the central constituents of the cosmos. I give them here with their Avestan names:

1. Vohu Manah 'Good Thinking' — cattle
2. Aša Vahištā 'Best Order' — fire
3. Xšaθra Vairya 'Desirable Dominion' — metals
4. Spənta Ārmaiti 'Life-giving Right-mindedness' — earth
5. Haurvatāt 'Wholeness' — water
6. Amərətāt 'Absence of Death' — plants

Together with Ahura Mazdā himself, these six beings constitute the canonical group of the seven Lifegiving Immortals or Aməša Spəntas (Avestan: hapta aməša spənta). Complementing the areas of responsibility of the other six, Ahura Mazdā functions as the protector of mankind, the seventh constituent of his creation.

The ancient sources offer a variety of metaphors that illustrate how the six subordinate Aməša Spəntas came into being and how they relate to the supreme deity Ahura Mazdā. Their role is succinctly expressed in the Young Avestan Zamyād Yašt (Yašt 19), where they are referred to as the "creators and shapers, carpenters and overseers, protectors and preservers

of these creations of Ahura Mazdā" (Yašt 19.18). And in the Bundahišn, the central Middle Persian (Pahlavi) text about the creation of the world, Ahura Mazdā is said to have created the Aməša Spəntas (in Pahlavi: Amahraspands) "from his own light".

In this small contribution, however, I would like to shed some light on the historical rather than the mythological origins of the Aməša Spəntas. When was their exact number established? Are they already present in the oldest parts of the Avesta, Zarathustra's Gāthās and the similarly ancient Yasna Haptaṇhāiti?¹ These and related questions have been discussed in detail by German philologist Johanna Narten in her 1982 monograph *Die Aməša Spəntas im Avesta* ("The Aməša Spəntas in the Avesta"). Her conclusions form the basis of the remarks below.

Each of the concepts that later came to be subsumed under the term Aməša Spəntas already occurs in the Gāthās. Here, the terms vohu manah, aša, xšaθra etc. show a curiously ambiguous usage: depending on which passage one is looking at, they either function as non-personal abstract principles (simply denoting notions such as 'good thinking', 'order', 'dominion' etc.); or they are personally addressed as divine beings (except perhaps

haurvatāt and amərətāt, for whom such a personified use cannot be demonstrated). The Gāthā poet refers to these divine beings as being "of one joy" or "one will" with Ahura Mazdā. They are the addressees of numerous invocations that are directed towards a collective of divine beings. We may further assume that it is them whom the Gāthā poet twice refers to as ahuras ('lords') in the plural.

The prototypes of the later Aməša Spəntas are thus clearly present in the Gāthās. However, they do not yet seem to form a fixed group of seven, nor are they called Aməša Spəntas. In one single instance, all seven concepts that later came to be referred to as Aməša Spəntas occur in close association with each other within one single Gāthic stanza (Yasna 47.1):

spəntā mainiū vahištācā manahā
hacā ašāt šiaəθanācā vacaṇhācā
ahmāi dan hauruuātā amərətātā
mazdā xšaθrā ārmaitī ahurō

With life-giving force and best thinking,
with action and word in accordance with order,
they shall give to him wholeness and absence of death.
The lord is wise through dominion and straight thought.

But this is only one of several

constellations in which these and similar terms occur in the Gāthās. Indeed, the Gāthās also feature a number of further concepts that belong to the same category of abstract (and occasionally personified) principles. These include sraoša ‘readiness to listen’, daēnā ‘vision’, fsəratū (meaning unclear, perhaps ‘joy’), mərəždikā ‘mercy’, and others. However, contrary to vohu manah, aša, xšaθra etc., these further concepts were eventually not included among the canonical group of seven.

In the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti, we seem to have come slightly closer to the idea of a well-defined group of Aməša Spəntas. Unlike the Gāthās, the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti does attest the term Aməša Spənta, although in reverse order (Spənta Aməša). Furthermore, in one of its sections (Yasna 37), it features a series of seven divine beings that are successively the object of veneration. One may regard this as a sort of “proto-list” of the later seven Aməša Spəntas.

This proto-list, however, does

not fully correspond to the later, canonical one that is amply attested in the Young Avesta. Instead of Haurvatāt and Amərətāt, the list in the the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti includes Daēnā and Fsəratū, and the sequence in which the other entities appear is slightly different. Moreover, the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti features Aša Vahišta before Vohu Manah, not the other way round (as later on in the Young Avesta). The differences between the proto-list of the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti and the canonical Young Avestan list is summarized in the table on this page.

It was the theologians of the Young Avestan period who eventually selected from the various Old Avestan divine entities a fixed group of seven. Several other developments went along with this process. (1) Based on existing blueprints in the Old Avesta, the names of some of the Aməša Spəntas were equipped with a fixed attribute: Aša Vahišta ‘Best Order’, Xšaθra Vairya ‘Desirable Dominion’, and so on. In contrast to their optional use in the Old Avesta, these attributes became obligatory in the Young Avesta. (2) The personal

aspect of the Aməša Spəntas was strengthened and their correlation with the natural elements was systematised. (3) Of the remaining divinized abstract concepts of the Old Avesta, some became obsolete. Others, most notably Sraoša ‘Readiness to Listen’, came to be subsumed under the other group of divine beings that is first firmly established in the Young Avesta: the Yazatas.

End Notes

1. Linguistically, the Avesta shows a clear distinction between two historical layers: the “Old Avesta” (which includes the Gāthās and the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti) and is, from a scholarly perspective, commonly dated to the late 2nd millennium BCE; and the “Young Avesta”, which took shape in the subsequent centuries. There is a good argument to be made that certain texts also exhibit traces of an intermediary, “Middle Avestan” layer.



Benedikt Peschl holds a BA in General and Indo-European linguistics from the University of Munich and an MA Religions of Asia and Africa from SOAS, London. He recently submitted his PhD thesis in Zoroastrian Studies at SOAS and is 2020's recipient of the Rising Scholars of Zoroastrianism Award presented by the Society of Scholars of Zoroastrianism (SSZ).

Yasna Haptaṅhāiti: entities venerated in Yasna 37	Young Avestan: canonical list of Aməša Spəntas
Ahura Mazdā ‘Wise Lord’	Ahura Mazdā ‘Wise Lord’
Vohu Manah ‘Good Thinking’	Vohu Manah ‘Good Thinking’
Aša Vahišta ‘Best Order’	Aša Vahišta ‘Best Order’
Vohu Xšaθra ‘Good Dominion’	Xšaθra Vairya ‘Desirable Dominion’
Vaṅhvī Daēnā ‘Good Vision’	Spəntā Ārmaitī ‘Life-giving
Vaṅhvī Fsəratū ‘Good Joy (?)’	Haurvatāt ‘Wholeness’
Vaṅhvī Ārmaitī ‘Good Right-mindedness’	Amərətāt ‘Absence of Death’

The Gathas: How to Enjoy Life in Heaven

By Fariborz Rahnamoon

We, humans, have explored Outer Space and found nothing as heavenly as planet Earth. **The Gathas is the users-manual on how to conduct and enjoy life in this heaven.** It shows the way to progress towards a better life, the best life, a heavenly life on Planet Earth. The most important tool mentioned is **WISDOM**, the word Mazda has been used 164 times, the most any single word has been used in the Gathas. The Gatha starts by seeking the perfect-ness of the mind. The goal is to harmonize the human spirit with the universe.

Ahya Yasa Nem Angha
This I seek with reverence

Ustana Zasto
With uplifted hands

Rafedrahya MainYeus Mazda
The perfectness of the mind, Wisdom

Pourvim Spaentahya Asha
The first righteous gift of Asha

Vispeng Shyothana
All should aspire to make

Van Gheush Kharatum Manangho
Good creation with intelligent thoughts

Ya Khshnevisa Geush
Thus, creating harmony between the creation

Ca Urvanem
And the inner-self
Gatha – Yasna 28.1 (FR) ¹

Next, it tells us how to achieve enlightenment by using our Good Mind to acquire the pertinent “Wisdom in Creation”. The wisdom that is embedded in the Asha and makes it function with such precision.

Ye Vaio Mazda Ahura
Truly, The Wisdom in Creation

Pairi Jasai Vohu Managha
I shall acquire Through the Good use of the Mind

Maibyo Dav vooi Ahvaio
I shall master the dual forces

Ast va tas Ca Hyat Ca Man angho
Physical and Mental

Ayapta Ashat Haca
Gained through Asha

Yaish Rapanto Da Idit Khavatre
Whereby the truthful achieve enlightenment.
Gatha – Yasna 28.2 (FR)

The Gathas acknowledges that we humans are not perfect but have the potential and need to evolve towards wholeness, perfection, and proposes a seven-step formula derived from Nature and mentioned it Ha 28.3 and 28.10 later tabulated but wrongly personified by scholars.

Ye Vaio **Asha** Ufyani
Truly, the **Asha (2) derived**

Manas ca **Vohu**
By the **Good Mind (1)**

A-paourvim
Never before known

Mazdam Ca Ahurem
Among the wise and all creation

Yaeibyo **Khashtrem** ca Ayzaonvamnem
With it make **Good Rules (3) and never waning**

Varedaiti **Armaitish**
Increasing **Righteousness (4)**
A Moi **Rafedrai** Zeveng Jasata
Leading us towards **Perfection (5)**
Gatha -Yasna Ha 28.3 (FR)

SEVEN STEP FORMULA

Here is the un-personified version.

1. **VOHUMANA** - *Good Mind* - *Use your Good Mind to inquire and learn the*
2. **ASHA-VAHISTA** - *Ultimate Truth* - *the Laws of Nature- Use them to make*
3. **KHASH-ATRA-VAIRYA** - *Good Rules-Good Laws-Good Products* - *Which will lead to*
4. **SPANTA-ARMAITI** - *Lawful Desire-Righteousness* – *that will pave the way toward*
5. **HUVATATA** - *Perfection-Wholeness- Mental, Physical and Spiritual* - *which will lead to*
6. **AMERETATA** - *Immortality* - (a) *In Death being remembered for your good work for generations²*
(b) *In Life by losing the fear of Death* - *resulting in oneness with*
7. **AHURA-MAZDA** - *Creator of Wisdom-Khod-Ah through Self Realization KHOD=Self AH=to come.*

The human mind, the mental force, has a spiritual part, the “Urvan” the inner-self. This spiritual part of the mind derives satisfaction when there is harmony between the thoughts/deeds and the Wisdom in Creation. This is a continuous process of progressing generation after generation and as long as each one of us has the strength, we should strive for the truth, **and also teach others to strive for the truth.**

Ye Urvanem Men Gaire
Truly, the Urvan is exalted (when)

Vohu Dade Hatra Managha
Goodness leads to harmony in thoughts

Ashish ca Syaotananam
Which result in good deeds

Vidus Mazdaio Ahurahya
In harmony with the Wisdom in Creation

Yavat Isaie Tava Ca
As long as we have the will and strength

Avat Khshie Aese Asahya
So long we should teach to strive for Truth
Gatha -Yasna Ha 28.4 (FR)

It is also the duty of every person who derives the truth, to pass on the knowledge to those who do not know and help keep the process of progress universal. Otherwise, the evil minds will overwhelm and destroy that progress. Truly history has been a witness to such destructions. An

important point to note is that the knowledge is not to be forced upon others but to be passed on by speaking. **Persuasion not persecution is the mode of passing on the message and showing the path to progress.**

Asha Kat Twa Daresani
Asha when you gain

Manas ca Vohu
With mind's good use

Vaed Mno
Having realized wisdom

Gatum ca Ahurai
The path to creativity

Servistai Seraosem Mazdai
The ultimate message of Wisdom

Ana Mantra Mazistem
Through words excellent

Vauroimaidi
We shall turn (convert)

Khrafstra
Those who do not know

Hizva
(With tongue) By speaking
Gatha -Yasna Ha 28.5 (FR)

There can be no real progress if knowledge is not universal. It should be shared even with one's enemy. Like during the Achaemenian era when the peace treaty was signed with the Greeks in 449 BCE, there was a sudden influx of philosophers in Athens, most of whom were born in the realm of the Persian Empire.

It is a common belief among people that natural calamities are the work of God. Even insurance companies will not pay claims by calling them an Act of God. The Gatha makes it clear that God is not to be blamed for them. It is nature taking its natural course that causes these disasters. We do not have to give up and accept them as the will of God. Instead, we should use our mind and find ways to stay out of harm's way, while nature takes its course. The best minds are the ones that give good guidance to survive such situations. Like the Japanese, who have acknowledged that their land is earthquake-prone and so are continuously

designing their lives in such a way that they can survive the earthquakes without loss of life and property. The Japanese are worthy of praise as per the Gathas.

Anaish Vaio Niot Ahura Mazda
Through these, not Ahura Mazda

Ashem Ca Yanaish Zaranaema
Asha also brings fury

Manas Ca Hyat Vahistem
Mind also is the best

Yoie Ve Yvoithema Daseme Stutam
That which strives to give good guidance

Yuzem Zevistayio Angaho
For you to be worthy

Isho Khshttram ca Srav Angham
Mighty, satisfied, also worthy of praise
Gatha - Yasna HA 28.9 (FR)

Humans can create whatever they put their minds to. The Gathas reminds us that everything that we create is first a thought. Therefore, we should keep our thoughts good and in harmony with the wisdom in creation. Then again, we may have many thoughts but only those that we discuss with others becomes reality. Therefore, we need to declare only our Good Thoughts through Good Words, so that we end up creating good products and doing Good Deeds. By not converting our bad thoughts into words we avoid creating a Frankenstein.

Ya Aish Ashem
When in pursuit of Ashem

Nipaghe Manas Ca Vohu Yaveetaite
Keep your Thoughts Good forever

Tvem Mazda Ahura
In Harmony with the Wisdom in Creation

Fro Ma Sisah Twahmat Vaocanghha
Train yourself to declare

Manyeus Haca Twa Aeaionghha
those thoughts by words of mouth

Yaish aa Anghush Pouruyo Bavat
For that's when creation first comes into being
Gatha - Yasna 28.11 (FR)

This verse is also the inspiration of Ashem Vohu, the Good Ashem.

CONCLUSION

The Gatha has passed the practicality test in history but has failed against the dark force in human nature that desire and conquer the human imagination and enslave the human spirit, by making it believe in supernatural forces and not see the plain truth. The Gathas require the use of "Wisdom" but it is easier not to use it. Organized Religion not only offers that opportunity; it banishes those that use their wisdom. Those that eat from the Tree-of-knowledge³.

Zarathushtra changed the paradigm of human belief. He raised humans to a higher level of existence. He pulled them out of slavery to petty gods and made them realize that they were also creators, that it was their creations that made them different from other animals and not because they were walking upright. He revealed the secret of creation and showed how they could be good creators.

Slowly but certainly progress was being attained when unfortunately, the evil thinkers took control; the very Greek philosopher whom the Persians had trained turned against them. Aristotle advised Alexander "If you destroy the Persians you will destroy one of the Pillars of Civilization (and we will rule the world)".⁴ Systematically the followers of the teachings of Zarathushtra were reorientated, by killing the experienced and training the youth in Roman ways.⁵ In the scuffle that followed, Organized Religion became the mode of the day. They used the weakness of the human mind to their advantage; very soon the evil part of the mind, the Ahri-Mind took over under the disguise of benevolence. This time everyone was made a slave to a single God, to the advantage of the inner enclave, the keepers of the House of God.

In their effort to reorganize, the Sassanian in their weakness fell into the trap of their enemies and fashioned their religion on that of their enemies. Mashya and Mashyaneh were introduced to counter Adam and Eve, Arda Viraf was commissioned to describe heaven and hell, and a bridge was envisioned for the dead to cross over to it. Gathas, the teachings of Zarathushtra, has taken the form of prayers in this reorganized religion.

Today many people have realized the futility of their way of life and are staying away from organized religion. It

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Today many people have realized the futility of their way of life and are staying away from organized religion. It

The Relevance of Zarathushtra's Gathas in the Modern World

By Rohinton F. Nariman

Prophet Zarathustra is said to have belonged to hoary antiquity and preached a message that has never been completely appreciated, but has never been completely forgotten. At the time he preached his message, the religions in vogue in ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, ancient China and ancient Japan, which belonged to the times in which they were preached, have now largely disappeared from the face of the earth. How is it then that Zarathustra's teachings continue to be followed in the 21st Century, albeit by a few hundred thousand persons? Are they at all relevant to modern living or are they outdated like the ancient faiths that have since disappeared?

TIMELESSNESS OF ZARATHUSHTRA'S MESSAGE

The first important difference between Zarathustra's message and the ancient faiths which have disappeared, is the timelessness of the message, which consists of universal truths that were revealed to the Prophet, and which will continue either till the end of time or till the end of the human race, whichever vanishes first. In the two sermons that have been preserved in the form of Yasna Ha 30 and Yasna Ha 45 of the Ahunavaiti and Ushtavaiti Gathas respectively, Zarathustra teaches the doctrine of moral choice according to one's conscience - importantly, each person has to decide for himself. He, therefore, spoke in allegorical

What then is this path of truth and where does it lead? This question is answered in one of the most significant verses in the Gathas, namely, Verse 8 of Chapter 45. In this verse, Zarathustra states that, having seen Almighty God with his mind's eye, he was instructed along the path of truth, which is the path of good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

terms of two spirits being created by God - and this is important - that the spirits were twins, i.e., exactly equal in every respect. He then tells us that one of the spirits chose to be good, whereas the other chose to be evil, resulting in happiness being the lot of the person who chooses a right and misery being the lot of the person who goes astray. The moral precepts laid down in these hymns are simple and straightforward. Happiness is the lot of only those who follow the path of truth, with all its difficulties, misery being the lot of those who follow the path taking the easier option. The supplicant is also informed that the triumph of evil is short-lived, as retribution for evil acts is certain to follow.

The importance of prayer is then stated, which is that God may grant goodness to the person who prays, so that the people around such person may benefit from this goodness. Indeed, the opening declaration of the Ushtavaiti Gathas reads thus: "happiness to him, who gives happiness to whomsoever else". A life full of vigour along the path of truth is best. This appeals to those who are farsighted - life on earth is a laboratory in which each soul is tested, which ends in a flash. It is the life that is to come that is all-important; and once this is clearly understood, many of the riddles of life get answered.

PATH OF TRUTH

What then is this path of truth and where does it lead? This question is answered in one of the most significant verses in the Gathas, namely, Verse 8 of Chapter 45. In this verse, Zarathustra states that, having seen Almighty God with his mind's eye, he was instructed along the path of truth, which is the path of good thoughts, good words and good deeds. If successful, the supplicant then lands up in a heaven which is described as an Abode of Song in which Almighty God dwells. The importance of this verse, therefore, is that each soul having been created by God, the object of life is to return to God, and the path of truth is the way along which the supplicant is able to go back to his Creator.

What then is evil? Evil is described

as any deed done or words spoken with a selfish motive. Lies that are spoken are frowned upon more than anything else. Deeds done in anger are done without applying reason, and are, therefore, to be abjured. Duplicity, i.e., saying one thing and doing another, is another form of evil expressly referred to in the Gathas, which leads the supplicant astray. Equally, giving undue importance to evil persons and associating with them is frowned upon in no uncertain terms. Moral choice, therefore, consists in choosing to do as much good as is possible in thought, word and deed, and resisting all forms of evil (to the extent one is capable of resisting them), but never with methods that are violent. Violence is something which ultimately recoils on the person who uses it, smiting that person even harder than the violence used by him.

AFTERLIFE

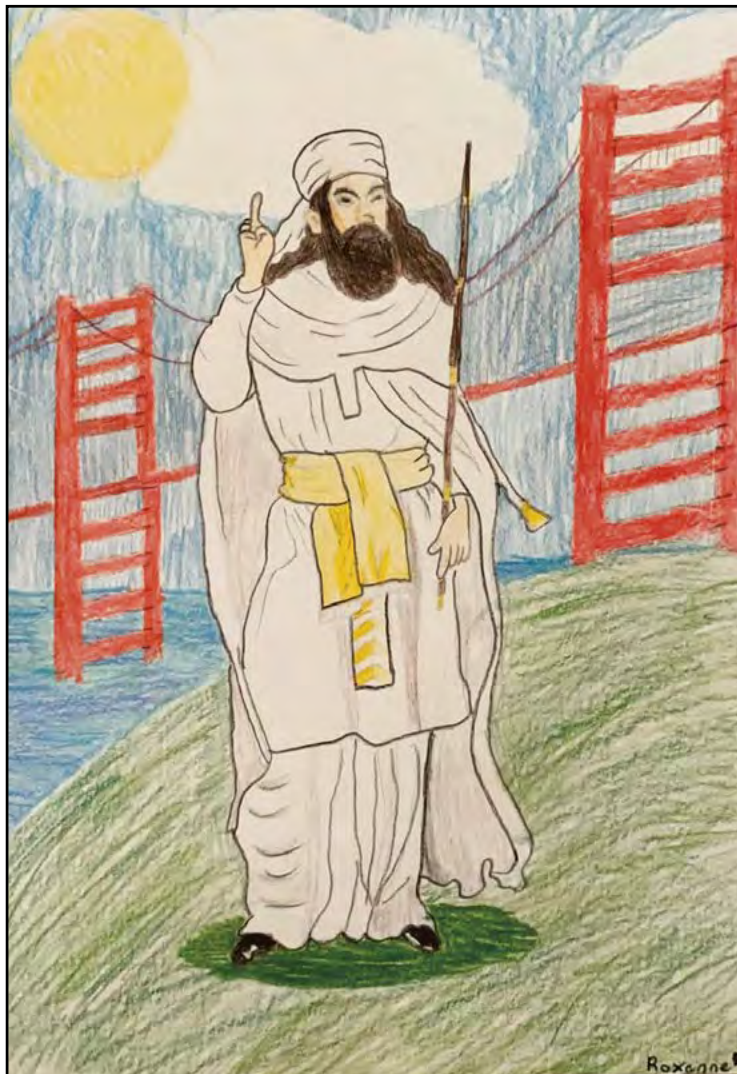
The importance of the life that is to come - i.e., what happens after death - has been set out with great clarity in the Gathas and also forms the basis for the eschatology of all the Semitic faiths. When one dies, a dead soul's entire life is played back to it, after which the judgment faculty that is in every one of us decides where the dead soul is to go. If the good that it has done outweighs the evil, it goes to the Abode of Song, where it will reside with Almighty

God in everlasting happiness. If, on the other hand, the evil that it has done outweighs the good, it goes to a reformatory plane of existence, popularly referred to as hell, in which the dead soul is made to suffer so that it can see with clarity how and where it has gone wrong, so that it may exercise its moral choice aright. The Zoroastrian hell is a reformatory place in which one works out the evil that has been done by one while on earth, so as to become fit to cohabit with the other good souls in the company of Almighty God. At the end of time, Judgment Day arrives, after which

the gift of immortality is given to all. At this stage, all evil vanishes as all persons see that what according to some was merely delusionary, is now in fact true.

Given this universal message, imagine what this earth would be if all of us were to even attempt to live by it. The earth would become a much better place in which to live, the Utopian ideal being that heaven itself would come down and make life on earth the way it is in heaven. Utopia is an ideal that has never been attained, but there is no harm in trying. And try all human beings

must, if they are to live peaceably happily with each other.*



"Zarathushtra in America"
Roxanne McCrear-Dastur. 12 years



**Ervad Justice
Rohinton Fali**

Nariman is a Judge of the Supreme Court of India. He is a member of the Supreme Court's Mediation Committee. He set up the Supreme Court Welfare Trust for the welfare of lawyers and to encourage young talent. He is considered an expert in comparative constitutional law and civil law. He is also an ordained priest.

DESTINY'S JOURNEY

A Poem

By Deenaz P. Coachbuilder



*Were you lonely
Ahura Mazda
before
the Creation?*

*In the North
the dark solitude of the night.
Beneath
the vast expanse of time.
Movement
as the sun skims across the firmament.*

Were you lonely?

The beginnings

I, Medyomah, grew up on the steppes with my cousin, young Zarathushtra. Quiet labor and order surrounded our shepherd homesteads. He was the celebrating priest,

I held the *chasni*.
Through his lens, face to face and close as ephemeral breath,
I shared his mystic vision of the creator *Ahura Mazda*,
who wears the sky as a garment,
six *spentas* dwelling within him.

From the void Ahura Mazda,
the one eternal being,
created the first plant, animal and man, diverse inhabitants
of a glorious firmament.
For a long while *Asa* ruled with harmony and peace,

Then the evil entity of Angramainyu invaded the world, inflicting mankind with ignorance and destruction. The battle was joined between the mighty spirits of good and evil.

Ahura Mazda selected the prophet Zarathushtra, to teach humanity a simple spiritual and ethical way of living. He gave each Zoroastrian, soldiers all, a choice; save the world, actively, optimistically, with good thoughts words and deeds, or slide into the realm of darkness.

At the time of righteousness, good will prevail and attain supremacy at the end of times.

An inclusive way of thought,
the scriptures declare--

“We revere and love all good thoughts, words and deeds that may have been presented here or elsewhere, now or at any future period because

we are on the side of Goodness”.

He asks us to be guardians of the natural elements of earth, fire and water and nurturing shepherds of all animals and living things.

I gazed at my grazing cattle, the trees and the surrounding lands.

I endured the conflict within me, in my heart, an abiding struggle, to reject the easy way.

How could I, his cousin, not walk with Lord Zarathushtra, our prophet,
every day,
along the path of truth?

Lord Zarathushtra - 1,000 to 500 BCE approximately

Such a harsh journey into exile.

Friendless, reviled, to what land could I, Spitaman Zarathushtra, flee? Who would protect me through my arid wanderings? I shivered in remembrance, for after many, many years, it was gentle Queen Hutaosa who first chose the faith of Ahura Mazda, then her beloved husband Kavi Vishtaspa. Their simple wisdom, adherence to prayer, happiness in living,

persuaded the clan and then the community.

Like an ever-expanding stream, *His* message tumbled
through the vast rocky northern Persian terrain
through the Hindu Kush mountains in the east, unfettered
until it lapped westwards
against the Mediterranean Sea.

Darius and the Zoroastrian kingdom, 550 to 486 BCE

The air is crushed with the sound of trumpets and drums.
Teaming crowds gather around the royal palace
to glimpse courtiers hurrying towards the banquet
in the hall of the hundred columns.
There sits Darius amidst the splendor
of Persepolis, his luminous capital.

I am the chief standard bearer of Armenia,
a nation conquered by the great Zoroastrian king.
My countrymen have sent tributes,
vases of precious metals and finely bred horses.
Marching ahead are Susian bearers
offering gleaming weapons and royal lions.
The Babylonians are close behind, with
intricately embroidered textiles and ebony horned
buffaloes.
What a tale will I weave
when I return home.

The written script - mid 500s CE

My pages are worn, they shred and curl
at split edges across the centuries.
For so long, so very long, each holy word
each verse, each sacred prayer was gifted,
a precious treasure, from priest to novice,
father to son, generation after generation
through devotion and study, until at last
Zarathushtra's Gathas, the *Yasna Haptanhaiti*,
were collected and preserved in the first
Sassanian era *Avesta*. Today my manuscript
lives on the tongues of Middle Persian,
Azerbaijan, Gujarati, English, German--
an eternal universal testament.

Islam conquers Persia - 630 CE

The glory of Persepolis has faded.
Forlorn winds whistle through crumbling towers.
Arabs, Turks, Mongols, fierce fighters,
stern followers of Islam sweep away
Zoroastrian princes, their power, their piety,
their trappings. Dust and rubble
swirls around renowned fountains of learning,
hallowed fire temples are razed
to house mosques, a palace, on sacred ground.

We are forced to leave behind our rich pastures
to huddle together in remote desert villages
of Sharifabad and Turkabad, on to Khurasan
and then Hormuz, bringing with us
precious manuscripts and the sacred fires of Fars.
The winters harsh, water scarce, our mudbrick houses
dark, airless, our lives cramped, insecure, oppressed,
even our garments dun colored and roughly textured.

Pay a *jizya* or convert to Islam, is the law,
a mandate that threatens, menacing our lives
from dawn through the fraught uncertain cold nights.

This we bear for "two centuries of silence".

With my eyes I see the rivers of Isfahan
red with the blood
of our martyrs.

Fleeing the homeland and landing in Sanjan - 772 CE approximately

My hull, my mast is hewn from Persian wood,
bedecked by cypress and polished myrtle. I groan
with the weight of refugees fleeing from Fars
to the Isle of Hormuz. I carry the sacred flame,
ancient holy scripts and fugitives driven
from home and familiar landmarks on seven ships.
Our exodus takes flight again across uncharted seas,
hiding from persecuting Arab ships, caught
in unknown currents and harrowing storms
until, at last, my oars touch
the welcoming shores of Div.
Providence carries my weary vessels across to Sanjan,
where shattered ancient planks touch the sheltering
harbor of India's welcoming earth.

*Through the centuries
in wealth and in hardship
dwelling in mighty cities or scrub land huts,
in ancient Persia, India or
the scattered diaspora
of unknown lands we travel,
entering into new worlds
building, not breaking
serving, not searing,
endeavoring to make better and brighter
bearing the gentle weight of
Ahura Mazda's
everlasting
cleansing flame.*

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Illustrations by the author.

A LIVING RELIGION

The core of our religion is the beliefs and doctrines contained within the Gathas. They are everlasting and unchangeable. They give us the strength to undertake our mental quests. The rituals are described in the literature accompanying the Gathas. The actions of the rituals appeal to our senses. Imbued with meaning, the rituals are a manifestation of the faith, a reminder of our demotion and commitment. Without meaning, rituals become empty motions, devoid of significance. The core and the rituals together are necessary in order to maintain faith.

It is possible to be open-minded and acquire new and different political identities without sacrificing one's religious identity. In the ever-changing, ever-expanding global community, religious minorities are not assimilated into the more powerful majority groups. Religion, when practiced and exhibited outwardly, becomes a stronger part of an individual's inner self. It becomes part of a person's thoughts, deeds, and words, and is exhibited in his or her attitude towards those who are of a different faith. When our youths understand the significance of our rituals, they are better prepared to take our religious community into the future, armed with understanding and religious knowledge, confident in themselves and their heritage.

These goals cannot be achieved with the current social and religious attitudes of our fractured community. The core of Zoroastrianism as laid out in the Gathas is immutable; the traditions and practices not based in Gathic principles may be modified. Liberty is the most precious of Ahura Mazda's gifts to humankind. It is a component of divine law. The right to liberty is so undeniable that Ahura Mazda does not curtail humankind's actions, even in regard to one's choice of religion. Intolerance is not a tradition sanctioned by the Gathas. A tradition of non-acceptance has established itself within the Zoroastrian community, and manifests itself in our attitude toward people who, though not born to Zoroastrianism, are devoted to Zarathushtra's teachings and desiring to embrace our faith. This tradition owes its existence to historical -- not religious -- facts.

Though at times difficult, some traditions can -- and should -- be modified as social conditions demand change. In a civil society, issues can be resolved through discussion and the application of reason, goodwill, and compromise.

Excerpted from "Triumph Over Discrimination: The Life Story of Farhang Mehr," by Lylah M. Alphonse

The Life-Affirming Gathas of Spitaman Zarathushtra

By Khojeste P. Mistree

Zoroastrians across the world universally view the five hymns, the Gāthās of Spitaman Zarathushtra, as the bedrock of the Zoroastrian faith. Zarathushtra became the first Iranian Prophet and teacher (Av. *pairyō. tkaesha*) when he received a series of revelations from Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom, c.1500 BCE. His teachings form part of the oldest revealed religion in the world, which took root among the Iranian speaking people on the South-Central Steppes of Central Asia.

In his poetic hymns, Zarathushtra declared Ahura Mazda to be the Creator (Ys. 44.7) the First One (Ys. 31.8), Eternal (Ys. 28.11), Omniscient (Ys. 45.3), Perfect (Ys. 34.1) Totally Good (Ys. 45.8) and Virtuous (Ys. 43.3). Ahura Mazda, he taught, was to be praised and worshipped (Ys. 34.6) as He was a friend of Man (Ys. 46.2) and therefore not to be feared. He declared, that Ahura Mazda worked through His Holy Spirit, Spenta Mainyu (Ys. 45.6), who was His motivating force against Angra Mainyu, the Evil or Hostile Spirit (Ys. 45.2).

Hence, Zarathushtra was the first to promote a cosmic and ethical dualism, when he declared in his hymns *"Yes, there are two primal spirits, twins, which are renowned to be in conflict. In thought, and in word, in action they are two; the better and the bad...when these two spirits first came together, one*

created life and the other death... of which the Bounteous One would have thus spoken to the evil one: Neither our thoughts, nor teachings, not intentions, neither our preferences nor words, neither our actions nor conceptions nor our souls are in accord" (Ys. 30.3-4, 45.2). In these verses Zarathushtra marked the complete separation of Good from evil by letting His followers know that it is only Goodness that emanates from Ahura Mazda.

In the Gāthās, human beings are given a choice between the virtuous and the unvirtuous (Ys. 45.9), with a caveat that the choice must be made judiciously. For Zarathushtra declared, *"Listen with your ears to the best things... Reflect with a clear mind - man by man for himself upon the two choices of decision... declare yourself to Him"* (Ys. 30.2). There are consequences that follow if the choice made by an individual is flawed. The Zoroastrian understanding is that while there is choice and free will, the choice made by an individual has to be measured by the Good which brings benefit to the world of Ahura Mazda, while that which is bad must be shunned. Zarathushtra encouraged his followers to listen and then reflect using one's mind to make the appropriate choices in life. Choice circumscribed within an ethical parameter is not an unrestricted gateway to do whatever one chooses: *"...between these two, the beneficent*

have chosen correctly, not the maleficent" (Ys. 30.3). Therefore, Zoroastrians are directed to choose, wisely and correctly to strengthen the world of Ahura Mazda.

To help human beings make the right choice, Zarathushtra outlined the importance of a task force of divinities called the Bounteous Immortals (Av. Amesha Spentas) and another tier of divine beings, collectively known as the Yazatas, adorable beings worthy of worship. The word Amesha Spenta is a collective noun, and it first appears in the post-Gāthic compilation, Yasna Haptanghāiti (Ys. 35.1). However, the individual names and attributes of the six Amesha Spentas are highlighted extensively, in the Gāthās, with Ahura Mazda heading the heptad of divine beings. Zarathushtra in his revelation also refers to the divinities, Sraosha, the Lord of Prayer (Ys. 45.5), Ashishvangh, the divinity who brings wealth (Ys. 43.12), and Mithra, the *yazata* of light, contract, and justice (Ys.46.5).

As several divinities have been mentioned individually in the Gāthās, it implies that the theology does not lend itself to a strict form of monotheism and may be better defined as henotheistic; meaning a supreme Godhead with a team of divinities, the Amesha Spentas and Yazatas, helping Ahura Mazda in the physical world. The message in Zarathushtra's Gāthās is dualistic, one

in which a relentless battle is being fought between the forces of Good and evil.

Guests in the House of Deceit

Ahura Mazdā is an Omniscient Being and central to His power are the innate qualities of Wisdom and Knowledge. Nowhere in the Gāthās, is Ahura Mazdā addressed or attributed as possessing omnipotence, as held in the religions of the Abrahamic tradition. In Zoroastrianism, evil is a real and an active force, which persistently attacks the seven physical creations,

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seeking to cause mayhem in the world and is not perceived as a mere mentality in human beings. Evil is responsible for all forms of imbalance and chaos in the world, resulting in falsehood, wickedness, pain, suffering, poverty, misery, cruelty and death. Hence, Zarathushtra declared that *"... the wicked who gave evil power; evil deeds, words, conscience and thought...truly they shall be guests of the House of Deceit"* (Ys. 49.11).

Ahura Mazdā is described as a friend *'who supports a friend'* (Ys.

46.2). He can never be feared, as anger, violence, hatred, destruction and death are not part of His intrinsic nature. The question often asked is that if God is almighty, then why do bad things happen to good people? Why does disease, accident, suffering, misery, pain and indeed death, afflict good people? Surely, an almighty God cannot be a whimsical being and should have the inclination and power to prevent any form of catastrophic imbalance afflicting His creations? But this does not happen. Therefore, it follows, that God is temporarily not almighty,

but He is nevertheless seen as the mightiest (Ys. 45.6). Although natural calamities such as floods, earthquakes, storms have a scientific rationale for their occurrences, if God is all-Powerful, then surely an almighty God would have the power to stop the natural calamities from happening, but this does not happen, either.

In the prophet's teachings evil is seen metaphorically as the absence of Good, just as where there is light, moving away from light brings about darkness, as darkness is the absence

of light. According to the Gāthās, Ahura Mazdā creates life, but pain, anguish and death occur through the agency of evil (Ys. 30.4, 51.10). If there was no life, then there would be no death; evil does not come from anywhere, but is parasitic to the good and is seen as the metaphysical absence of good.

The Timeless Revelation of Ahura Mazdā

The timeless revelation of Zarathushtra, offers an ethical structure to combat the forces of Evil in the physical world, through a defined process culminating in the right thought, word and deed. The prophet declared, *"...Thou 'O' Wise One, has come into the world with Thy Virtuous Spirit with the rule of the Good Mind..."* (Ys. 43.6). The Virtuous Spirit comprises Wisdom, both innate and acquired which the Good Mind (Vohu Manah) seeks and then processes this knowledge, allied with the Truth (Asha). The conscious and constant use of the Good Mind delivers to human beings Wisdom, cushioned by the Truth, as the guiding principle of life. *"... through Thy most Virtuous Spirit, 'O' Wise One... Thou did create the wondrous powers of the Good Mind allied with the Truth"* (Ys. 43.2).

In the Gāthās, Ahura Mazdā is seen as the 'father' of both the Good Mind and Truth (Ys. 31.8, 47.2). When the triadic forces of Wisdom, the Good Mind and Truth work in tandem, it results in the formulation of knowledge received by the Good Mind through the faculties of reason, intellect, and understanding. Knowledge, when processed through the Good Mind in an ordered and structured way is supported by a substratum of Truth. Knowledge gives one the Power or Desirable Dominion (Khshathra Vairya) which

when balanced with a sense of Holy Devotion or Piety (Spenta Ārmaiti) promotes and enhances the world of Ahura Mazdā. When all these four forces come together, that is, Piety with Truth and Dominion with the Good Mind, it is said that “...the Wise Lord dwells amid abundance” (Ys. 46.16).

To ensure that Wisdom always prevails in an abundance of goodness and well-being, it is imperative that the task undertaken must include Perfection (Haurvatāt) and Immortality (Ameretāt), bringing about completion and a sense of finality. This is achieved when all the seven Bounteous Immortals are invoked and work sequentially, to oppose and weaken the forces of evil in the world.

Zarathushtra's teachings are devoid of any form of belief in predestination, fate or the concept of reincarnation. The religion offers instead a dualistic paradigm relevant in the physical world, and a Zoroastrian must learn to recognize and fight evil by using the task force of the Amesha Spentas and by being righteous (Ys. 30.2).

Looking at the Pandemic in a Zoroastrian Way

For many months, the world has been reeling under the assault of the destructive COVID-19 virus which has caused economic havoc, pain, misery, suffering and death in the world. How can the Amesha Spentas work through human beings, to solve this vexed evil problem?

The scientists at a global level have had to tap into wisdom, to think and reflect and devise a method to solve this grave calamity facing the world. Viewed from the paradigm of the Amesha Spentas, they must first

bring to the fore all the innate and acquired knowledge which medical science has accumulated to deal with this issue, which is the world of the Wise One (**Ahura Mazdā / Hormazd**). This knowledge has to be reflected and deciphered by the Good Mind (**Vohu Manah/Bahman**) using the faculties of intellect and reason. Scientific research and analysis of data needs to be undertaken to solve the problem through the process of establishing the Truth (**Asha Vahishta/ Ardibehesht**). A great deal of

An essential concept in Zoroastrianism is the notion of material well-being and happiness. A spiritual Zoroastrian is not required to renounce the world or take vows of celibacy, abstinence, fasting or monasticism.



hard work is required to garner strength or Dominion (**Khshathra Vairya/Shehrevan**) towards finding a solution. Sustained devotion (**Spenta Armaiti/Spendārmad**) and dedication are required to solve the problem of this elusive virus. The approach of the scientists based upon thoroughness and perfection (**Haurvatāt/Khordād**) creates the

baseline for success. And finally, if all the six Amesha Spentas manifest in the work done by the scientists, then a long-lasting solution (**Ameretāt/Amardād**) will evolve to contain the virus, as has happened. The synergy between Ahura Mazdā and the Amesha Spentas, as outlined in the Gāthās and in classical Zoroastrian theology, is unique and timeless and its application is equally relevant today.

Happiness unto Others

An essential concept in Zoroastrianism is the notion of material well-being and happiness. A spiritual Zoroastrian is not required to renounce the world or take vows of celibacy, abstinence, fasting or monasticism. The purposeful generation of wealth through righteous living, and the promotion of happiness and harmony in the world, are the mainstays of the faith. Zarathushtra declared in his sacred hymns, “*ushtā ahmāi yahmāi ushtā kāhmāichit...*” - happiness unto the one (who radiates) happiness to others. The creation of a zone of happiness and contentment in one's life, is a Zoroastrian belief that must be achieved in both the physical and spiritual worlds.

Praise and Worship

Zarathushtra cast the first brick in formalizing worship and prayer not just for oneself, but one that embraced a broader vision to encompass the family, the community and ultimately the universe. The religion fosters the worship and well-being of the earth, the skies, the waters, the sun and moon, the stars, embracing all that forms part of the great universe.

The emphasis on praise and worship in the Gāthās, created the early structure of a faith which was to evolve in time. “*With Hands*

outstretched in reverence... [we] worship you O Wise One with the Good Mind... [and] Truth... in both worlds of matter and mind... in Happiness” (Ys. 28.1-2). Worship in Zoroastrianism entails gesture, a sense of reverence and the recitation of Holy words. Reverence and worship are offered to the living creation of Fire as the Prophet asked, “... to whom will Thou address your worship - to Thy Fire! While I offer veneration to it, I will think of the Truth to the utmost of my power” (Ys. 43.9).

Fire represents Truth, strength and power (Ys. 34.4), and is seen as a bright and active, living force. Zoroastrians, in turn, must offer “... hymns of devotion...(Ys. 45.10) and veneration to the sacred fire. Therefore, fire cannot be seen as an icon or a mere symbol in Zoroastrianism, but as the living embodiment of Ahura Mazda. The praise and worship of divinities and the sacred creations are central to the Zoroastrian faith (Ys. 51.20)

Zoroastrianism and its Link to Moral Philosophy

The Zoroastrian message can also be linked with concepts found in the moral philosophy of the early intellectuals. Virtue ethics, as expounded by the philosophers, is found in the construct of the Amesha Spentas, which serves in weakening the effectiveness of evil in the physical world. It is through the world of good deeds that a Zoroastrian creates a powerful resource of Goodness and Happiness for those other than themselves. The outcome of one's action is significant to a Consequentialist, who seeks to spread knowledge through an ethical structure which intrinsically values happiness. The Utilitarianists seek to maximize Goodness and joy for

the benefit of others, with only right actions justifying the end; which is Zoroastrian in spirit and application.

According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who was influenced by the Magi in the 4th century BCE, every action should result in Good not just for oneself, but one which extends happiness to others, known in Greek as Eudaimonia, which is a branch of Virtue Ethics. This Aristotelian idea is reflective of the Ashem Vohū prayer which, enables one to be

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happy within oneself “...ushtā astī...” and to make others happy “...ushtā ahmāi...”. An Eudaimonist also seeks personal well-being through a life governed by reason, and reflected in the pursuit of Truth and Happiness. Zarathushtra dwelled on these very ideas which were born before their time and conveyed to his followers, over three millennia

earlier, through the Gāthās.

In its finality, the message of the Prophet Spitaman Zarathushtra, is as relevant today as it was in his time. To listen, reflect and act using the Good Mind are the signposts for a happy and contented life. The Zoroastrian pathway, marked with the attributes of the Amesha Spentas, draws one conclusively towards Goodness and the renovation of the world at the end of time. “Through your Dominion ‘O’ Lord, make life truly renovated in accord with your wish” (Ys. 34.15).

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The Gathas, A Reanalysis

By Daryoush Jahanian

I have studied various translations of the Gathas in English and Persian, I have taught them in religious classes. Throughout my dedicated study, I have always struggled with one mind-boggling issue. The thoughts and concepts reflected in the Gathas were far beyond the farming and herding society of their era. How could these advanced notions develop during that time period? I noticed that, from the beginning, various translators of the Gathas have similarly struggled with this contrast. Earlier, some of them tried to adjust their translations to the environment and time. These translations contained a lot of issues regarding pasturelands and domestic animals. But these translations still did not answer the question of how, in that society and time, the advanced concepts of liberty and freedom of choice could develop. Then, some scholars took a more drastic approach by trying to move the date of the Gathas forward all the way to 100 A.D.¹

Others presented another theory that the Gathas were a production of a group of thinkers who addressed an imaginary saint, named Zarathushtra.² They refer to the Gathas' verses in which Zarathushtra is addressed in the third person. These scholars however are not familiar with Persian poetry, in which, to this day, Iranian poets name themselves in their poems and address themselves in the second or third person. In addition, they ignore a number of aspects of the Gathas.

First, Zarathushtra repeats the following phrase several times in the Gathas: *"I am Zarathushtra, the strong supporter of Truth and true opponent of Falsehood, and as long as I have strength and will-power, I teach the people to strive for Truth."*

Ahura Mazda is the beginning and the end. ... Ahura Mazda as an entity has no birth (the oldest, or by Zarathushtra's words the most ancient), and no death (the youngest). In simple words, God is beginning-less, or always has existed, and endless, or always shall exist. In Pahlavi: *Abada, Abi-anjam*.

Second, in Yasna 30, 45 and 53, Zarathushtra addresses the audience in the first person, and in Yasna 28 he declares his mission, to bring happiness to both the material and the spiritual worlds.

I persuaded myself by believing that according to Yasna 29.11, there was an association of scholars, Magavan, who after comprehension and analysis of the teachings, would spread the message to ordinary people. But today I am not so

confident, because some of the Gathas' concepts even in our time require careful explanations to be understood by the public. They include but are not limited to the Divine attributes and mental faculties of mind, wisdom, conscience, will-power, soul, and adding to them, Spenta Mainyu or creativity.

AHURA MAZDA

Zarathushtra is concise and precise, and the Gathas in their totality consist of 238 stanzas. Hence, careful analysis of each sentence of the Gathas is required to extract Zarathushtra's advanced thoughts. For example, in Yasna 31.8, Zarathushtra defines Ahura Mazda as both the oldest and the youngest entity. The free renderings generally have been: Ahura Mazda is the beginning and the end. But I believe here, Zarathushtra defines the real nature of God by amazingly careful selection of the words: Ahura Mazda as an entity has no birth (the oldest, or by Zarathushtra's words the most ancient), and no death (the youngest). In simple words, God is beginning-less, or always has existed, and endless, or always shall exist. In Pahlavi: *Abada, Abi-anjam*.

Careful analysis of the Gathas reveals more progressive concepts that apply to modern times.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

In the entire Gathas, Zarathushtra refers to the regional rulers (Kavis) and the religious leaders (Karapans), who have unified forces and

exploited hardworking people by coercion. He stands against both. In Yasna 32.14 he addresses Grahma : *“For a long time Grahma (a spiritual leader) and the Kavis are using their minds and power to hurt the faithful. They wish death and destruction to the world, fired by the wisdom-wasting drink (Haoma juice) and hoping that the invincible (Haoma) will protect him” “But the power that Grahma has attained by conspiracy and bad deeds will finally destroy him Y 32.13.”*

Here Zarathushtra is delivering his message to the corrupt rulers: The power that you have attained through force and corruption will destroy you and you will become the victims of your own corrupt power.

Today it is generally accepted that the two holy prayers, Ashem Vohu and Yata Ahu, were composed by Zarathushtra. Yata Ahu is about establishing the ideal “Chosen Dominion.” Let us analyze: Yata Ahu vairyo, *just as the worldly leader (Ahu) is to be chosen; ata Ratush, so is the spiritual leader (Ratu); ashat-chit hacha, for their righteousness...*

We can extract from this first sentence that the spiritual leader’s (Ratu’s) position is separated from that of the material leader (Ahu), at the same time both are chosen for their righteousness... Zarathushtra had observed the harms resulting from the unification of state and religion (Kavis and Karapans).

By teaching the separation of these two chosen (elected) officials, does Zarathushtra not preach separation of church and state, a foundation of modern democracy?

CAMPAIGN FOR JUST RULE

The teachings of Zarathushtra in the Gathas maintain that determination of destiny is an individual responsibility through wisdom and freedom of choice. Accordingly, every individual is the author of his/her own life, and no one is condemned by pre-ordained fate. These teachings leave no room for slavery, a concept that unfortunately exists in the writings of many religions. The message of Zarathushtra is a warning to

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those who rule through oppression, exploitation or enslavement: He proclaims, in Yasna 32.15: *“Finally the oppressed shall rise up and defeat those who have deprived them of freedom, and the liberated people with two gifts of wholeness and immortality shall enjoy freedom in the abode of good mind (real paradise).”*

It is noteworthy that, in this verse and Yasna 31.18, which recommends active resistance toward those who

resort to violence, Zarathushtra carefully shuns references to bloodshed. In Yasna 31.18, he uses word Sazdum, which means to correct and teach the aggressor, while he avoids the word Merezdum, which means killing and wounding.

In general, Zarathushtra wishes for all men and women to participate by their own will in an active movement to establish the chosen dominion. But his voice through the darkest period of history is heard: *“Withhold your anger. Keep hatred far away, do not resort to violence, and hold on to love and the good mind”* Yasna 48.7. *“Peace shall overcome violence and through good rule humanity enjoys peace and prosperity. Stand firm against the cruel tyrants with the wisdom of good mind”* Yasna 48.11. Here Zarathushtra is teaching, in a campaign against the tyrants, to use wisdom, hold on to the good mind, and avoid anger and violence so that in the end good rule prevails. Otherwise by resorting to violence a new tyranny will replace the old one. Isn’t Zarathushtra teaching the present nations that **in your struggle for a just government, anger and violence can be counter-productive, because they can result in a new tyranny? and by holding on to good mind and wisdom, you can finally achieve the desired good rule?**

GENDER EQUALITY AND THE FAMILY UNIT

Zarathushtra addresses all humans equally regardless of gender, race or nationality. Of interest in the Gathas gender is not an issue because men and women are addressed equally, and even in some verses women are mentioned first. Yasna 53.5, 53.8. This is truly outstanding because in so many teachings, women do not enjoy equal standing to the

ZARATHUSHTRA'S GATHAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

men. One should be reminded that in the U.S., women did not have the right to vote until 1920, and in Switzerland, women's electoral rights were finally established in 1971. Even today, women are not equal to men under the constitutional laws of many nations.

In Yasna 46.10, Zarathushtra enunciates that women and men equally receive salvation by good deeds: *"The man or woman who performs the work declared as the best by You in this world, a life full of truth and spiritual strength achieved by good mind and service to humanity, I shall teach them to worship You alone and shall guide them to cross the sorting bridge."* In Yasna 51.22, the Wise God recognizes men and women for their good deeds and worship. This is the predecessor of the holy prayer, Yenghe Hatam, in which men and women are praised for their acts of worship through conduct of good deeds.

In Yasna 53, or the chapter regarding the wedding, Zarathushtra expresses his wish, a good husband for his youngest daughter. He is to be righteous, wise and who has attained the divine attributes, but she is left free to decide. We do not see such freedom and respect of women in the Greek and Roman civilizations that millennia later were developed in Europe. Of particular interest is the advice of Zarathushtra to the newly-wed couples. First, as a show of respect he mentions brides and then

bridegrooms. Second, rather than dictating dominant and subservient roles, he encourages the bride and groom to *"try to surpass each other through righteousness."*³ Finally, Zarathushtra teaches that family life is based on monogamy, as he states: *"Disassociate yourself from temptation and lies, and remember that the joy and satisfaction that is linked with dishonor shall bring sorrow and bad reputation..."* Isn't

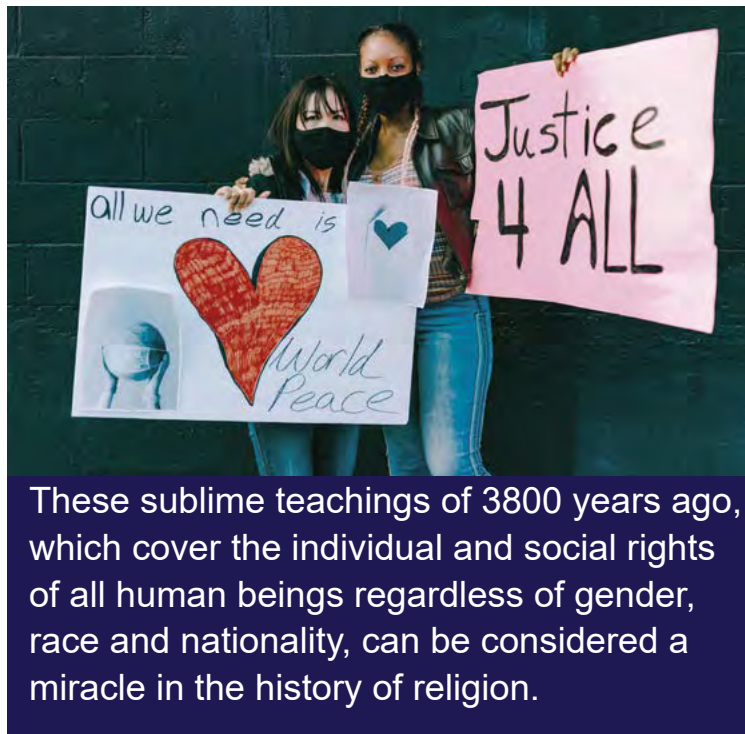
the freedom to choose one's path of life, and to determine one's destiny. Yasna 30.2. There is more emphasis on freedom of religion, when he announces that men and women are granted life, conception, intellect, will-power with deeds and doctrine so that they can choose their religion and beliefs freely. Yasna 31.11. Hence, coercive conversion is not permissible. Then he presents another novel concept for all ages,

freedom of expression: *"Every person, whether right or wrong, wise or unwise, should announce his/her belief freely and express what is in his/her heart and mind..."* Yasna 31.12.

People are given the freedom to choose their leader by wisdom in full serenity, because this is an emotional decision. Meanwhile they are warned against wolves disguised as lambs. As Zarathushtra puts it: *"Never may a false leader with a sharp memory who pretends piety rule."*

Yasna 31.9,10. It is of

noteworthy that in three emotional states, Zarathushtra recommends that people should decide by wisdom and in full serenity, choice of path and destiny, Yasna 30, choice of leader, Yasna 31, and choice of spouse, Yasna 53. In those occasions, remaining emotional can result in the wrong decision. Zarathushtra calls the ideal government, the Chosen Dominion or Khshathra Vairia, because it is to be chosen by men and women in search of freedom and justice. Even participation in this movement is by free-will.



These sublime teachings of 3800 years ago, which cover the individual and social rights of all human beings regardless of gender, race and nationality, can be considered a miracle in the history of religion.

Zarathushtra talking about the importance of the family unit and family life in our modern world? HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights is a modern term coined only forty years ago. But the concept is not new to those of us familiar with the teachings of Zarathushtra, because 3800 years earlier, he presented human rights in a very comprehensive manner under **"Freedom of Choice."** In the Gathas, freedom of choice covers all aspects of human rights, beginning with the right to accept or not to accept the words of Zarathushtra,

In Yasna 53.3, freedom of choice extends to the choice of spouse, when Zarathushtra advises his daughter to choose her husband with full freedom. Finally, respect for human dignity is so paramount that even God is not imposed upon man, but rather humans will choose God by conduct of good deed. In Yasna 53.2, Zarathushtra declares: *"So, let all strive with thought, word and deed to satisfy Mazda. Let each one choose to perform good deeds as His true worship."* The best gifts dedicated to God are the fruits of good thought, good word and good deed with love, Yasna 33.14, 34.1, and no rituals and blood sacrifices are recommended. **These sublime teachings of 3800 years ago, which cover the individual and social rights of all human beings regardless of gender, race and nationality, can be considered a miracle in the history of religion.**

JUSTICE AS THE FOUNDATION OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY

Zarathushtra teaches that the reward of justice is peace. Yasna 33.1 illustrates the importance of law and duties of the supreme judge: *"According to the Primal Laws of Life, the just leader should do full justice to the wrongful and to the righteous, as well as to the person whose falsity and probity are combined."* In Yasna 31.13 he says, *"Mazda is well aware of the thoughts and deeds of everyone in open and in secret, and why sometimes a person for a small sin pays a heavy price."* Yasna 31.14 reads, *"The Wise God is well aware of the past and future, what is the reward of the righteous and the punishment for the wrongful and what is their standing when their action is complete."*

Finally, Mazda with His creative mind (Spenta Mainyu), and by

the means of His light of wisdom empowered by truth and justice (Asha), will determine the reward and penalty for the two groups. Yasna 47.6. It is significant that upon reckoning, **all stand equal before the law** and the men of power, for their wrong deeds, will pay the price on the bridge of judgment as well. Yasna 46.11. Finally, Zarathushtra declares: *"Once the principles of happiness*

People are given the freedom to choose their leader by wisdom in full serenity, because this is an emotional decision. ...Zarathushtra calls the ideal government, the Chosen Dominion or Khshathra Vairia, because it is to be chosen by men and women in search of freedom and justice.

and pain ordained by Ahura Mazda are realized, that the wrongful will suffer for a long time and the righteous shall enjoy everlasting happiness and prosperity, then all should receive salvation through right choice." Yasna 30.11.

CONCLUSION

Zarathushtra's peaceful campaign for improvement of the living world was twofold: religious and social. As he declared in Yasna 28.2, his goal was to bring happiness and prosperity to both spiritual and material worlds.

It is generally believed that the **renaissance** was a European phenomenon of the middle ages. But in the Gathas, Zarathushtra teaches that notion not only through his visionary and novel ideas of world views and the perfect human society, but also when he proclaims: ***Let us renovate the living world;*** Yasna 30.9, ***let us refresh this life.*** Yasna 34.14, 50.11.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Many thanks to my son Arash Jahanian for editing this article.

1. James Darmesteter: quoted from Zartusht, Mazdayasna and governance, J.Ashtiyani, in Persian, 1984,p64
2. Jean Kellens of Sorbonne, believes the Gathas is not the creation of a single known author, quoted from the website on Zarathushtra and Zoroastrianism, The problem of legend versus fact.
3. Dina McIntyre, CZC Zoom seminar on women in the Gathas.



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THE PREDOMINANT GATHIC VIRTUES OF *Truth & Good Mind*

By Natalie Gandhi

Inquiry into the Gathas, joyfully, doesn't suffice for all for its inspiration or all we may learn. Like drops of precious water, knowledge rarely gives us the entire ocean of thought; inquiry is unending. But our pristine, profound verses give us enduring precepts that prevail for any time or place. Two Gathic virtues, Truth (Asha, Asa) and Vohuman (Vohu Mano), elevate Zoroaster's teachings into the foremost ranks of thought. They mark the cosmic picture and spiritual value of our religion as singularly distinctive, as strong, and as exceptional in World thought.

To explain, consider that virtue is a quality tending towards an excellence that something or someone has. Correspondingly, vice tends away from something excellent, towards failure or flaw. Thus a good tool fulfills its function well and a good person achieves a fine character, whereas a poor tool is dangerous and a bad person has a poor character.

In philosophical schemes, no virtue holds more weight than Truth. Other virtues such as justice, charity, love, beneficence and beauty receive a portion of Truth's consideration. Truth is our first entry into knowledge and we assess the worthiness of our knowledge with it. It steers us away from an opposing force of falsehood.

...“Truth” is often capitalized to stress its ideological bearing and importance. It is not merely a virtue, but instead “The Highest Virtue”, elevated above all else. While our analytical camps laugh at the idea that truth pertains first to virtue, Zoroastrians glory in this.

In analytical consideration on truth, it is explained by way of major camps; correspondence with reality, internal coherence in a pattern or arrangement of thinking, constructed social thinking, consensus, deflationary or redundancy accounts, and more. In “the correspondence theory of truth”, a claim is thought to correspond to, or to match, an external observed reality. For simple, or “naive realist” pictures of reality, the external world is held as independent of observers. It is independent of their inner mental life and of their empirical assessments of the external world.

The Zoroastrian concept though differs, predominates, and offers more than even the correspondence theory of truth. One clue is that “Truth” is often capitalized to stress its ideological bearing and importance. It is not merely a virtue, but instead “The Highest Virtue”, elevated above all else. While our analytical camps laugh at the idea that truth pertains first to virtue, Zoroastrians glory in this.

“Asha” is a Gathic word for The Highest Truth and its translation goes to the supposition of an inherent, eternal and abiding order, a righteousness, and “right working” of the Universe. Its shadings of meaning intimate a cosmic picture of an ordered, unfolding, thriving world; a natural law or regularity whereby this order softly unwinds through time and prevails; and a Platonic, idealized conception of ideal reality, a making of Freshokareti. The reality of Asha under-girds our world, so often filled with mere appearance and fleeting things rather than ultimate, obdurate, and inviolable reality.

Already we see aspects which distinguish this concept of Truth from the ordinary view, whether philosophical, religious, spiritual, or historical. For one, Asha is not a feature of language per se. Decision on the side of Truth, choosing Truth over evil, falsehood, or wrong is

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not simply “speaking” the Truth or providing true claims. It is more than even “living in” the Truth, which some religious traditions recommend. Actually, the Highest Truth posits something about how the whole of the cosmic scheme, the Universe, is. In that sense, it gives us a metaphysics of reality. It says something about the way things are. The way they really are.

Woven with this metaphysical scheme, at the human level, thought, words, and actions recommended to us by the virtue of Truth offer choice between right and wrong. Each individual has an inner capacity for judgment and right choice. A nihilistic world wherein choice offers no meaning or substance is excluded by this view of reality. A moral vision of a person's choices in accord with Truth provides an ethics and this very potent

concept gives us an ethos, aesthetics, spirituality, and culture oriented to its sustenance and progression.

The Truth is The Highest Truth with vital implications. As well as predominating in the visionary Zoroastrian ideology, Truth enfolds the other virtues within it. The

Amesha Spentas, foremost virtues though personified, are extractions from Truth.

Each of Vohu Manu (Good Mind), Khshatra Vairya (Good Dominion), Spenta Armaiti (Devotion), Haurvatat (Wholeness), and Ameretat (Immortality), in their

apex of all virtue.

In a classical mold of thought, we anticipate that the virtues taken together comprise a unity. Is there a unity of virtue? Do Truth, Justice, and Beauty meld into a unified excellence in Ideality? Asha may be the unifying underwriting of the

virtues per se, and various virtues are taken together in Asha's high excellence.

Ahura Mazda, God, has so granted this universe and our humanity within it through his imminent, inspired creation. What manner of making was his creation? Our God is known by many as The Wise Lord or The Lord of Wisdom. The created reality of the Universe is the divinity's conception. It springs into existence, into birth, from the mind of God and is given to our temporal, material realm. The

Zoroastrian deity is foremost a God of finest thought.

Our spiritual natures share in His divine creation, as our choices should be towards good and right and away from bad and wrong. We assist God and carry further the cosmic path offered by our



Inner spiritual orientation, a good will for thinking, speaking and acting well, arise with our Vohuman. We take up and affirm this spirituality in our Navjotes, whereby we profess responsibility henceforth for our actions.

Zane and Zara Commissariat's Navjote, November 26, 2016, Irvine, California

particular right and nature descend from Truth itself and are implicit in it. (1)

Imagine it said, “All is love”. In another tradition, Agape unifies all subsequent virtue within a concept of abiding care. Yet distinctively, the Zoroastrian theme places Truth at the

inner commitment and outer action for the sake of right choice itself. While God himself is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good; thus of infinite, boundless, perfect, and eternal Wisdom, a marvelous aspect falls to each of us. That is, the Wise Lord ordinarily gives each person a capacity for virtuous choice led by our inner Wisdom. (2)

Our spiritual mentality, Vohuman, the Good Mind, shares a whisper of the glorious mind of God. As complex and magnificent as human will and the human brain are, our minds are not God's. We have many failings in our attempts to be good and choose rightly. Yet, the mentality some have suffices for the loftiest of noble striving. The Good Mind suffices for the spiritual depths of life, and for times when we go beyond ourselves and our obligations to achieve supererogatory levels of choice.

The mentality of persons is variegated and subject to diversions from the virtue of the Good Mind. Not everyone will be a top-performer in exercising their Good Mind. Sometimes it is not the person's fault. A child abused by fetal alcohol syndrome suffers deeply. A thoughtful person though overwhelmed by abuse may have difficulty in choosing well. A person situated in a society confining choice to injustice may not have foresight or wide insight to see beyond into better possibilities. An Alzheimer's patient may have lost requisite judgment for handling a checking account. But most people have the duty and right to think good thoughts, speak good words, and do good things. Inner spiritual orientation, a good will for thinking, speaking and acting well, arise with our Vohuman. We take up and affirm this spirituality in

our Navjotes, whereby we profess responsibility henceforth for our actions.

Some people are fortunate exemplars of the Good Mind though not especially focused on cognitive pursuit. A wisened crafts person or trades person, a skillful athlete, an abiding elder may have incredible aspects of wisdom which humble us in the telling. Think perhaps of a single mother, illiterate, yet wise enough to inveigle smalls sons into writing book reports so to instill a love of learning in their tender souls.

Zoroastrians prize learning, advanced education, and cognitive skills such as literacy. We are inclined to think the mind gets better with its pacings through education, schools, and the push to outdo ourselves in studies. This too rides upon the virtue of the Good Mind when it is also a journey to wisdom.

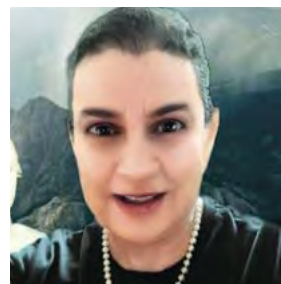
For one thing, as individuals we have to learn how to self-educate ourselves and take individual responsibility for our judgments. We "Dare to Know!" and do not surrender our responsibility to the command of other authority.

Further, our cognitive growth, adherence to education's humanistic imports, and education's honing of character, can provide a person with capacity for the Good Mind in dimensions not yet known in Zoroaster's time. The science researcher who works tirelessly to find a vaccine against a dreaded disease is acting with good motive for right actions. A dispassionate inquiry of unknown use now may lead to a new threshold later for freshokarati, the world's flourishing. In no other tradition but the Zoroastrian is the love of Truth

stronger. Because it is such an elegant holding, it provides something exceptional to the world's thought as nowhere else do these ideas come together as they do than in the Gathas of Spitaman Zarthosht.

END NOTES

1. Taraporewala, Dr. Irach J.S., "The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra", Hukhta Foundation, Bombay, 1993, ISBN 978-0-9826871-4-7, p. 5.
2. (Ha 30.1)"O ye, coming to seek knowledge, now shall I proclaim to you, the messages of the wise Creator,/ The hymns unto Ahura, and the prayer offerings of the Good Mind,/ The enduring sacred Truth, and the glorious vision of the Heavenly Lights attainable through Truth sublime." (Dinshaw J. Irani, "Understanding The Gathas, The Hymns of Zarathushtra, Introductory Lectures on Gathic Themes", edited with introduction by Kaikhosrov D. Irani, Ahura Publishers, Inc., Womelsdorf, PA, USA, ISBN 0-9638045-0-2, p.13).



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GATHAS IN OUR DAILY LIVES

Gathas: A Blueprint for Living

By Dina G. McIntyre

Zarathushtra's teachings provide solutions for so many problems that cause suffering in the world. Now, you may think that his perception of the Divine is 'just philosophy' -- up in the stratosphere. But actually, it is his blueprint for living. It includes seven qualities. Because Avestan has not yet been 100% decoded, there are disagreements about the following definitions, but they are linguistically sound, and fit every use of these Avestan terms in the Gathas.

1. A beneficial way of being (*spenta-- mainyu--*), which is Wisdom's way of being; it personifies,
2. The true (correct, wholly good) order of existence (*asha-- vahishta--*) -- 'truth' for short,
3. Its comprehension, good thinking (*vohu-- manah--*),
4. Its beneficial embodiment in thought, word, and action (*spenta-- aramaiti--*)
5. Its good rule, (*vohu-- xshathra--*),

6. Its complete attainment (*haurvatat--*), resulting in
 7. Non--deathness (*ameretat--*), a state of being not bound by mortality;
- An enlightened state of being -- Wisdom personified (*mazda--*).

Now, it is readily apparent that we mortals (in varying degrees) have the first five divine qualities (although incompletely); and Zarathushtra says we can attain all seven completely.

How?

By following the path of these qualities -- the path of truth, its good comprehension, its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action, its good rule, the beneficial way of being -- with our choices. For example he speaks of,
"... the beneficent man ... he serves truth, during his rule, with good word and good action. ..." Y31: 22;
"... [*spenta-* 'beneficial'] is a man of

[*aramaiti-* 'embodied truth'], he is so, by reason of his understanding, his words, his actions, his [*daena-* 'envisionment']..." Gathas, Yasna 51, verse 21.

So each time we think, speak, act, in a way that is beneficial, truthful, generous, loving, we create something of the divine, in ourselves and in our world. In Zarathushtra's thought, it is impossible to benefit ourselves spiritually, without at the same time benefiting the people and events which are impacted by our beneficial thoughts, words and actions.

This path to the Divine is incremental. Zarathushtra says, **"Truth, shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire both good thinking [*vohu-- manah--*] and the way to the Lord"** Y28:5. So for mortals, **good thinking** is the incremental (and ultimately the complete) comprehension of truth (which is wisdom). And what

is the “**way to the Lord**” which we also “**continue to acquire**”? In the Gathas, it is the ‘**path of truth**’ (Y51:13; Y33:5) and its comprehension, the ‘**path/road of good thinking**’ (Y51:16; Y34:12 and 13). As later Avestan texts state, “(There is) one path, that of truth, all others are non--paths” my translation. (Yasna 72:11; Visperad 24:3).

A **path** is an on-going way of living. Zarathushtra’s **path of truth** comprises an on-going search for truth in what Zarathushtra calls, **both existences -- the existences of matter and mind** (Y28:2, Y43:3).

So this search includes all the many faces of truth -- scientific truth, social truth, spiritual truth. A seamless, evolving, perennially relevant blueprint for living, through which our understanding increases, as each generation continues to discover what is true, good, right, in its own time period.

Now, it is apparent that the possession of truth, its comprehension, its embodiment in thought, word and action, its rule, are not restricted to any one race, tribe, or group of mortals. They exist (imperfectly) in *all* mortals. Just as in the Gathas, the ‘enemy’ is not another tribe or race. The ‘enemy’ is untruth -- all that is false, ignorant, wrong.

In searching for ‘God’, Zarathushtra discovered the family of mankind, which is probably why his teachings eventually became so popular, spreading over large areas of

the then-known world, evidenced in an ancient Soghdian manuscript discovered in 1976 which includes (in an ancient Soghdian language), what we call the *Ashem Vohu*, (how close Soghdiana was to where Zarathushtra lived, we do not know), *artam wahu, wahishtem ishti; ushta ishti ushta ahmai; yat artai wahishtai artam*.

So Zarathushtra’s path is inclusive -- extending to the family of mankind -- without discrimination or prejudices based on gender, race,

ethnicity, or the color of one’s skin. This inclusivity is evidenced in accounts of the reign of Cyrus the Great. Archeological evidence from the reign of Darius the Great establishes that there was no discrimination against women in societal norms including owning property, running businesses, hiring policies in the workplace, and rates of pay. And these great kings governed the many nations in their vast empire, in ways that did not discriminate on the basis of skin color, or racial, religious, and cultural differences.

But Zarathushtra takes us a step further.

In the Gathas, the seven qualities of the Divine are linked (in kaleidoscopic ways -- implied and expressed) with various aspects of the material existence. For example, Wisdom (*mazda--*), truth (*asha-*) and its comprehension good thinking (*vohu-manah-*), are linked with light/fire. This is easy to understand. Truth enlightens. Wisdom (*mazda-*) is truth personified -- the complete comprehension of truth -- an enlightened state of being. So fire (which gives light) is a material symbol of the Divine.

And later Avestan and Pahlavi texts speak of the fire in all things -- in man, animals, plants, the sky, the world itself. What does that tell us ... For me, this was a



Wisdom (*mazda-*), truth (*asha-*) and its comprehension good thinking (*vohu-manah-*), are linked with light/fire. This is easy to understand. Truth enlightens. Wisdom (*mazda-*) is truth personified - the complete comprehension of truth - an enlightened state of being.

“Eureka!” moment, (but one which I had a lot of trouble accepting). Yet, if we can free ourselves from the mental conditioning of post Avestan times, this teaching helps us to see the rest of existence, not as something separate and inferior to us, to be used and exploited for our purposes (or condescended to), but as something of which we are an integral part -- cogs in the amazing clockwork of existence -- an interdependent eco--system.

Which brings us to the question: If Zarathushtra's path is truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule, the beneficial way of being (qualities of the Divine), do the material links ascribed to these divine qualities play any role in defining this path? They do. Wisdom helps to heal, not just humans, not just sentient life, but existence as a whole -- matter and mind -- healing it from all that is false, wrong, ignorant. “... By your rule, Lord, Thou shalt truly heal this world [*ferashem ... ahum* ‘heal existence’] ...” Y34:15. And what is the Lord's rule? It is the rule of truth, its comprehension, its embodiment in thought, word and action (Y51:4).

And we heal existence in the same way.

“...the loving man ... [*spenta-- ‘beneficial’*] through truth [*asha--*], watching over the heritage for all, is a world--healer [*ahum.bish* ‘existence--healer’] and Thy ally, ...” Y44:2;
 “... Therefore, may we be those who shall heal this world [*ferashem ... ahum* ‘heal existence’] ...” Y30:9.

In later texts, the qualities of the Divine were thought of as personified beings (amesha spenta), and the links between these

(personified) divine qualities and the material existence became rigid, one to one. Here are four of these links which demonstrate how ancient Zarathushtis thought these material links were included in Zarathushtra's path.

They are as follows,

-- good thinking (*vohu- manah-*) is linked with the material symbol **cow**, (which in the Pahlavi *Bundahishn* is mythically associated with other life forms -- **animals, birds, fish, etc.**).

In some texts, good thinking is linked more restrictively with ‘**useful four legged animals**’ -- a somewhat homocentric view, but ... a step in the right direction.

-- beneficial embodied truth, (*spenta-- aramaiti--*), is linked with the material symbol **earth**;

-- completeness (*haurvatat--*) is linked with the material symbol **water**; and

-- non--deathness (*ameretat--*), is linked with the material symbol **plants**.

Here are some excerpts from the *Ashirwad* part of the Zoroastrian wedding ceremony (translated into English by Shahin Bekhradnia from a Farsi translation of the Pazand), which show that Wisdom's path includes both the qualities thought to be implicit in each amesha spenta, as well as caring for their material symbols. The priest says, “... Here is some advice fundamental to our religion. Hear it and in your own lives practice it so that it may be the source of happiness to Ahura Mazda and of good fortune (to you). ...

The law and custom of Holy **Vahman** [Avestan *vohu- manah-* -- linked with **animals**] is good thinking and peace. Do not be revengeful nor malicious. Be of good mind and positive. ... Pursue

knowledge and advance learning. Spread culture and **overcome prejudice**. Deal with your enemies according to justice. With your friends behave well. Look after **useful four-legged animals** well and do not give them excessive work to do. ...

The law and custom of Holy **Sepandarmad** [Avestan *spenta-- aramaiti-- ‘beneficial embodied truth’* -- linked with **earth**] ... Be kind and friendly towards each other ... and like the **earth**, be productive and bountiful. Keep the **earth** clean and well watered ...

The law and custom of Holy **Khordod** [Avestan *haurvatat-- ‘completeness’* -- linked with **water**] ... Out of barrenness create fertility and produce happiness. Since **water** is the source of fertility and prosperity, keep **water** clean ...

The law and custom of Holy **Amordod** [Avestan *ameretat-- ‘non-deathness’* -- linked with **plants**] ... create cultivated land. Plant **trees** and **plants**. Do not cut down young **trees**. ... Give **herbs** and medicines to the needy ...”

To summarize: In the Gathas, the path of truth includes caring for and healing existence as a whole -- matter and mind -- humans, other life forms, the environment. Later texts implemented this teaching by living life in accordance with ways of thinking, speaking and acting that are implicit in the seven qualities of the Divine, and also caring for the material symbols linked with these qualities. Thus, they expressed Zarathushtra's idea that we heal the existences of matter and mind, in fact specific ways that reflected the perceptions and needs of their times (some of which are amazingly

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relevant today, and some of which are not).

We should start with this teaching of healing the existences of matter and mind, and apply it in our lives in ways that are relevant to our own time period. I am so proud of those who openly oppose racial injustice and gender inequality (in non-violent ways). I am so proud of those who help to nurture and protect other life forms and the environment -- implementing the many faces of truth in action. They are the *saoshyants* -- the saviors. Zarathushtra speaks of, **"... the saviors [saoshyant-] of the lands, namely, those who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and truth, [mazda- 'Wisdom']. These indeed have been fated to be the expellers of fury."** Y48.12. Notice, the 'enemy' to be expelled is fury, (anger, rage).

If we wish to follow Zarathushtra's teachings, we need to shake off the inconsistent mind-sets we have acquired over centuries, when Zarathushtis lived by suffering, under incredible hardship. Some of the mind-sets we acquired were survival mechanisms; but we also absorbed different dominant norms which considered man to be the center of the universe, with other life forms, and the environment created for man's benefit. This is alien to Zarathushtra's thought. In his teachings (which are so beautiful!) it is not

enough for us to advance ourselves spiritually and materially -- neither as individuals, nor as communities, nor even as the family of man. We have to care for existence as a whole (without depriving others of their freedom to choose!).

According to him, when we follow the path of truth -- caring for other human beings, other life forms,

the environment -- we become Wisdom's partners in healing existence. And in so doing, we heal ourselves.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Gathas quotations are from the Insler, 1975 translation, except words in square brackets which are my translations.

Further details at <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/westernauthors/index.htm>.

Excerpted from a post by Irach Taraporewala at Zoroastrian Heritage, Facebook, July 7, 2018.

See my monograph *Were Ancient Zoroastrians Vegetarian?* found as a pdf at zoroastrianheritage.com; also The Farohar/Fravahar Motif as a further example of how Gathic principles are developed in the rest of the Avesta and Zand.

Photograph of the fire courtesy Joanne Porter.

Photograph of justice sign holder by Logan Weaver.



The law and custom of Holy Vahman [- linked with animals] is good thinking and peace. Do not be revengeful nor malicious. Be of good mind and positive. ... Pursue knowledge and advance learning. Spread culture and overcome prejudice. Deal with your enemies according to justice. With your friends behave well. Look after useful four-legged animals well...



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Zarathushtra's Teachings in Daily Life

By Khushroo Mirza

Prejudice, misuse of the environment, disproportionate inequality and a surge in violence – these are some of the most serious problems facing our world today. This article will draw upon those teachings of the prophet which help guide us in dealing with these issues.

As an overall perspective it's essential to know that while there are no specific injunctions against prejudice, discrimination or racism per se, the Gathas do teach us to acknowledge the universality of all human beings and indeed to regard all Ahura Mazda's creations as equal and that false pride has no place in our lives. As a whole, therefore this is a macro injunction against prejudice and other human behavioural ills.

In attempting to be useful, this article will (broadly) view the major attributes given to humanity as tools that can be used to help directly combat the above problems. The intention is not to provide a rigid "how to" manual but to supply some Gathic reference points that illuminate the letter and spirit of the guidance which can be drawn from Zarathushtra's wisdom.

First let's note the attributes as excerpted from the opening verse of the Gatha Spenta Mainyu.¹ In the following passage Asho Zarathushtra invokes all the Amesha Spentas

(Divine Attributes of Ahura Mazda).

*"Led by Thy **Holy Spirit** and Thy **Love**,
Led on by thoughts and words and deeds of **Truth**,
Perfect Eternal Life shall man attain;
Through **Xshathra** (Ahura Mazda's creative spirit) and through **Holy Armaiti** (devotion) Mazda Ahura shall all these bestow."*

The Attributes invoked are as follows.

1. **Spenta Mainyu** – Ahura Mazda's Holy/Benevolent) Spirit.
2. **Vohu Manah** – Good Mind (Prof. Taraporewala translates this as "Love").
3. **Asha Vahishta** – Best Righteousness or Truth. (Prof. Taraporewala calls it "the changeless eternal law of God").
4. **Xshathra Vairya** – Good Rule (Prof. Taraporewala calls it "Ahura Mazda's Creative Spirit").
5. **Spenta Armaiti** – Holy Devotion.
6. **Haurvatat** – Perfection.
7. **Ameretat** – Immortality (of spirit).

Now let's examine some general use cases for these attributes.

PREJUDICE

Prejudice, which is rooted in ignorance springs from a false sense of pride in one's ethnic origin,

religion, social status or personal appearance. In addition to this, there is a clannish mentality that causes people to segregate others who are different from them into "us and them". Clan bigotry in turn leads to systemic racism, sexism and other phobia based practices. For instance, women receive lower compensation than do men for the same job. This results in an unfair lowering of status of the wife as compared to the husband in their relationship, because society tends to measure status against a yardstick of salary earned.

We Zarathushtis are not exempt from this discriminatory attitude. Many in the community frown upon marriages with non-Zarathushtis, and in India they do not perform navjotes of children of mixed parentage, particularly when the mother is Zarathushti but the father is not. This is a clear form of discrimination against women. While a majority of our discriminatory practices are based on religious grounds, sadly we Zarathushtis also suffer from a racial stereotype which is to be biased in favor of "fair skinned people" within our own community.

As noted from the outset, while there is no specific mention of prejudice in the Gathas, there is clear inclusivity of all human beings. The prophet, himself, only distinguished between

people who chose to follow the path of righteousness and those who chose to be deceitful.

Asho Zarathushtra considered his message to be universal for all humanity. In Y46.12 he applauds the families of Fryana, a Turanian who chose to follow the path of righteousness. Traditionally, the Turanians were enemies of Iran and there were several wars between these two countries.² In Y31.3 he declares “...by means of which I might convert all the living.”³ He strengthens this concept further in Y31.11 by saying “...whereby one-may-hold whatever Faith one-wills.”⁴

ENVIRONMENT

Millennia before “ecology” became a catch phrase, Zarathushtis considered the environment an important part of creation to be preserved and not to be defiled or polluted in any way. The laws of Asha can also be considered the laws of nature, and if we cause any harm to nature we actually upset the balance of nature.⁵ Furthermore, each of the Amesha Spentas is also associated with a material creation. Spenta Armaiti is associated with mother earth. In Y48.6 she is referred to as “our safe refuge”.⁶ Zarathushtis have always taken great pains to avoid polluting the land, air and water in their daily practices. One prominent example of this is highlighted in the manner of disposal of the dead. Burial is forbidden as it



pollutes the earth. This was amply demonstrated in Modena, Italy where hundreds of workmen died while digging up the place, which had been a burial ground during the plague of 1630 (some 300 years earlier). The germs had survived for hundreds of years and caused a fresh outbreak of the plague.⁷ Zarathushtis go to great lengths to avoid polluting water. We pay homage to water through our prayers. This is another way of showing our respect for all creations of Ahura Mazda.

The following quote from Andrew Carnegie tells the story of our respect for the elements:

*“Parsees cannot burn the dead, because fire should not be prostituted to so vile a use. They cannot bury, because the earth should not be desecrated with the dead, neither should the sea; and therefore God has provided vultures, which cannot be defiled, to absorb the flesh of the dead.”*⁸ Carnegie praised the simple but majestic sight of Parsees praying to Ahura Mazda’s creations at the beach.

DISPROPORTIONATE INEQUALITY

One of the sad problems facing humanity is the growing gap between the rich and the poor in the world. Although this disparity is nothing new and has existed for ages, it has become more pronounced especially recently. Our Zarathushti faith does not frown upon wealth, as long as one uses it to better the lot of all Ahura Mazda’s creation. When we hear or read about employers who treat their employees well and in a fair, generous manner, we feel happy for

the wealth of such employers. On the flip side, there are ruthless people who care only about the “bottom line” and squeeze every penny out of the labourer in order to keep the wealthy shareholders happy and satisfied.

Historically Zarathushtis have been known to be quite charitable by nature. In India, they built hospitals, educational institutions and affordable housing, not only for their own community but also for non-Parsis.⁹ The idea of helping the needy has been embedded in the “Ahuna Vairya,” commonly known as the “Yatha Ahu Vairyo” prayer, which ends by stating “the Xshathra of Ahura (descends) indeed upon (him) who becomes a Shepherd to the meek.”¹⁰ In simple language, Ahura Mazda blesses those who take care of their poorer needy brethren.

VIOLENCE

While on his mission to spread the message of Ahura Mazda, the prophet incurred the wrath and



hatred of many unsavoury people and so-called priests, who felt that he was hindering their efforts to dupe the populace with their false practices. (Y32.14)¹¹ Asho Zarathushtra advises his followers to resist the temptation to resort to violence by using their good mind.¹² In another place the prophet declares that hatred causes the spread of cruel gossip.¹³ All this negativity leads to the creation of “evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds” the very opposite of the holy triad that the prophet was proposing to his followers. Hatred and violence have never been the answer to any situation.

Pointing out the ways in which Zarathushtis have dealt with all these problems in our history should not be misconstrued as “blowing our own trumpets for past achievements” or some form of “virtue signalling”. We can, nonetheless take inspiration from the fact that our ancestors in India as well as the Zarathushtis of Islamic Iran managed, in their own simple and dedicated manner to deal with various problems of prejudice,

the environment, inequality and violence (the last two specifically in Iran) and established a reputation for being honest and trustworthy. With rising prosperity, these values have seen some slackening.¹⁴

If we can manage to recapture these attributes in our daily lives, we will be able to set an example for our future generation of Zarathushtis and help them to succeed in any environment.

END NOTES

1. - The Divine Songs Of Zarathushtra – I.J.S. Taraporewala
2. - Ibid
3. - Ibid
4. - Ibid
5. - Introduction to the Gathas – Chapter2 – Asha – Dr. Farhang Mehr, Boston University.
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Illustrations by Farzana Cooper.

Zarathushtra in the Shah-Nameh

In Iranian literary traditions, as personified first by the 12th century poet Ferdowsi, author of the Shah-Nameh, or Book of Kings, the national epic of Iran, writes that: “Zardosht (Zarathustra), the prophet of the Most High, appeared in the land . . . And showed the people a new faith . . . He reared throughout the realm a tree with beautiful foliage. Men rested beneath its branches . . . (and) became perfect in wisdom and faith.”

Cited in “Iran’s Other Religion” by Jehangir Pocha. 2003. Boston Review.

THE AHUNAVAITI GATHA

Lessons Learnt From It

By Soli Dastur

In my study of the Gathas, I realized that each Gatha has a different subject matter and Ahunavaiti Gatha is based on our ancient prayer Ahunavar. So, I decided to use Ahunavaiti Gatha for this article.

Ahunavaiti Gatha starts with Yasna 28, but I have selected to start with Yasna 29 due to its subject matter.



L: Zarathushtra praying with uplifted hands.



R: Dasturji praying in a painting at the Iranshah Atash Behram, Udvada.

CHOICE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

Ahunavaiti Gatha, Yasna 29

The evil is all over the world with Princes and Priests ruling ruthlessly over poor people. The mother Earth had enough of this, and she cried out to Ahura Mazda for help! "Help me to get rid of this evil. Send a strong man as our savior who would defeat them and bring order and justice."

Ahura Mazda consults with Vohu Mana and Asha Vahishta and asks them if they know any suitable soul among us that we can send down to Mother Earth. They had no knowledge of such a soul.

Then Ahura Mazda said: "I know such a soul: Zarathushtra Spitama, who has heard all our teachings. For his work on Earth, we will give him Sweet Tongue!"

Mother Earth at first was disappointed in selection of a gentle soul and not a strong man to defeat the evil; however, she eventually accepted Zarathushtra.

And so Zarathushtra came to Earth as HIS Prophet.

Lessons Learnt

1. During your difficulties in life approach someone you trust for help.

2. As a leader always ask your associates for advice on major issues.
3. A leader should know more than his associates and decide when required.
4. Always listen and act upon the teachings of a teacher, like Zarathushtra did.
5. Ahura Mazda gave sweet tongue and not a sword to

Zarathushtra so that he can discuss with disciples and oppositions and bring them to accept his teachings. So, dealing with people of all types, use your Good Mind to discuss and guide them.

6. Like Mother Earth, you do not always get what you want in life. Accept what is given to you by Ahura Mazda.

UPLIFTED HANDS WITH HUMILITY

Ahunavaiti Gatha, Yasna 28

In his first Verse – Yasna 28 Verse 1, Zarathushtra with uplifted hands and deep humility asks Ahura Mazda for the abiding joy of

Progressive mentality so that he can perform all actions in harmony with righteousness.

He also wants to acquire the wisdom of the good mind, so that he can take care of the Mother Earth and make her happy! Is this the original start of the so-called Green Movement some 3500+ years ago?!

He further declares that “as long as I have power and am able, I shall teach all to seek for Truth and Right.” (Irani)

And he believes that no prayers offered devotedly to Ahura Mazda by sincere persons with high and noble objectives shall remain unanswered on HIS part.

Lessons Learnt

1. The first Verse in this Haa teaches us to be humble and practice righteousness and truth.
2. It also teaches us to use our Good Mind to protect every creation on this Mother Earth - start of the Green Movement.
3. Whenever we get a chance, we should teach all to follow truth.
4. Prayers done with high sincerity and noble objectives, Ahura Mazda will surely answer them positively.

ZARATHUSHTRA'S FIRST SERMON

Ahunavaiti Gatha, Yasna 30

In his first sermon, our Vakhshur-e-Vakhshuraan Zarathushtra Spitamaan explains the two mentalities, the good and the evil, which are in all of us.

Then he states that good people will choose Good Mind, whereas the evil people will choose untruth.

The followers of untruth shall face the worst mental situation, but the followers of truth shall enjoy the best mental state.

He summarizes: “If ye, Mortals, realize and understand Mazda’s laws of happiness and pain; and if you learn that wicked persons shall face long punishment but pious ones shall enjoy ever-lasting prosperity, then you shall reach contentment and salvation, by learning these principles.”

Lessons Learnt

1. Recognize the two mentalities in all of us – the good and the evil.
2. When a wise one advises you, listen carefully with open mind.
3. Use your Good Mind and choose between good and evil.
4. Understand the consequences of your choice.
5. We should understand the laws of happiness and pain.
6. We should learn that ever-lasting punishment comes to wicked persons, but prosperity to pious ones.

ZARATHUSHTRA'S GUIDANCE FOR MANKIND

Ahunavaiti Gatha, Yasna 31

Zarathushtra’s message was welcomed enthusiastically by good people, but not by the wicked. Zarathushtra has come to guide wicked people to the right path. He is going to be a teacher for all, good and evil.

Ignore the words of the wicked persons because they will lead us all to ruin and destruction.

We should resist such persons and repel them with truth and righteousness.

May all people listen to a wise man and act according to his teachings. The righteous people shall attain the Abode of Light; but the wicked shall attain long life of misery and darkness.

Lessons Learnt

1. Like Zarathushtra, we should guide even the wicked to the path of

righteousness.

2. We should not hear the words of wicked but resist them and repel them with righteousness.

3. The righteous shall attain the House of Songs, whereas the wicked shall have a long life of misery and darkness.

THE PRINCES AND THE PRIESTS WHO FOLLOWED THE OLD EVIL CULT

Ahunavaiti Gatha, Yasna 32

This Ha is all about the wicked people who tell lies to the good and drag them in the wrong direction, far removed from Ahura Mazda and the path of Truth. Eventually, Ahura Mazda will punish them severely.

Lessons Learnt

1. Do not listen to the wicked people.
2. Do not forsake Ahura Mazda.
3. Keep your faith in Him and be on the path of righteousness and you will be rewarded by Him eventually.

DEVOTION TOWARDS DUTY

Ahunavaiti Gatha, Yasna 33

The Spiritual Leader shall deal the perfect justice to the good and to the wicked.

He who opposes the wicked and guides good people to truth, shall truly enjoy the paradise.

The last three verses form a most noble prayer for spiritual illumination and in the last verse there is a total dedication of Zarathushtra’s life’s work and his very Self.

“Through my devotion give me steadfastness of purpose.

Through Thy Bounteous Spirit make me pure in goodness.

Through the Spirit of Righteousness grant me the courage of might.

And through the Good Mind give me the trust of the people.”

Lessons Learnt

1. We should obey the judgement of our Spiritual Leader and act accordingly.
2. We should oppose the wicked and guide the good people to truth.
3. We should use our Good Mind to protect the Mother Earth's creations.
4. By doing so, we will achieve paradise in our own lifetime.
5. We should try to emulate Zarathushtra by being steadfast in purpose, pure in goodness, having courage of spiritual might and gaining the trust of the people.

RENOVATION

Ahunavaiti Gatha, Yasna 34

Deeds, words and worship by which the people will attain immortality and Kingdom of Perfection, Zarathushtra dedicates to Ahura Mazda.

To Thee we tender our offerings of reverential adoration. In Thy Kingdom may all living achieve their destiny through Good Mind. Thy sacred fire, O Ahura, mighty, most swift and powerful, may its helpful radiance be a bringer of joy to the good; but for the malicious wicked, may it disclose their evil! How intense my desire for deeds

performed in your service, O Mazda, so that I may follow after you in order to protect the poor in spirit and lowly of heart (word 'dregubyo' in Yatha Ahu Vairyo).

The evil foes by their hostile actions have spread fear, misery and ruin. Unmindful of Thy commands, the powerful oppress the weak, O Mazda! They think not of Truth and Right.

The sages shall teach those who have gone astray the way to train their minds with good thoughts, and deeds. Ultimately, all wicked persons shall come towards Thee, O Mazda. Teach me, O Mazda, the best words and noblest deeds, so that I may worship Thee with a clear mind and a pure heart. Through Thy power, make it such that I enjoy a life full of Truth.

Lessons Learnt

1. Like Zarathushtra, we should try to dedicate our words, deeds and worship to Ahura Mazda.
2. We should try our best to be a virtuous person.
3. If we are good people, Ahura Mazda's fire will bring us joy by his helpful radiance.
4. Be not worried about wicked people harming you. The Fire will

take care of them.

5. We should follow Ahura Mazda in protecting the poor and needy.
6. We should teach the evil persons to be good and kind to all.
8. Ask Ahura Mazda to teach you the best words and noblest deeds so that you may worship HIM with a clear mind and a pure heart.

The above is from the last Verse #15 of Yasna 34. It is one of the only three prayers which we are required to pray four times; the others are Ahunavar and Aa Airyemaa Ishyo (Yasna 54) indicating their importance.*

Ervad Dr. Soli Dastur is an active member of the North American Mobed Council (NAMC). Soli has been performing mobed duties all over Florida and North America wherever requested. In 2009 he started and continued for 8 years the first ever annual all Florida Mukta Gatha prayers in Miami. He has contributed articles in WZO Hamazor and FEZANA Journals.



Ervad Soli Dastur leading a jashan.

Ervad Soli Dastur has conducted religious classes in Tampa, Orlando and Miami started a teleconferencing ZRC and conducted 17 tele Classes (<https://zoroastrians.net/category/z-tele-class/>).

Soli has published 395 Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture Extracts (WZSE) with translation and audio recitations (<http://www.avesta.org/wzse/index.html>), distributed to over 900 people.

A Road-map to Navigate, Fact-Check, and Decide Actions in Today's News-Saturated Global Society

By Maneck Bhujwala

We live in a society which is very different from the times when Prophet Zarathushtra founded his religion and when his followers developed an institution with rules, customs, traditions and rituals in the Persian empire, and different from when our ancestors settled in India among the Hindus and Muslims. Our communities are faced with different opinions about changes to adapt to the modern world. The original timeless teachings embedded in the Gathas of Zarathushtra offer us inspiration and guidance to deal with complex issues and realities that cannot be managed with the current status quo on rules and traditions.

DISCRIMINATION

Gathas tell us that Zarathushtra offered his teachings to all men and women who will listen attentively, ponder on them, ask questions, understand them with their open mind, and make decisions after thinking for themselves what is right. He does not discriminate based on race, and we should do the same, especially today, as past stereotypes about racial differences have been disproved in all areas of work and play. Neither is there any mention about discrimination between rich and poor people or between people born in different professional classes. In the Irach Taraporewala,

Ahunavaiti Gatha Yasna 31.1, 31.2 and 31.3 this is made clear by our prophet.

There is no mention of discrimination based on gender. In the Gathas Y.53.5 Zarathushtra tells brides and bridegrooms to love each other. He even holds up his daughter Pouruchista as an example of a righteous person. There is no excuse in today's times to discriminate against women, seeing how they have proved themselves capable of all positions in industry, police, military, religious ministry, education, business.

In the Parsi community we practice separation between priest class and non-priest class, restricting priesthood to male children of priest class parents, in spite of acute shortage of practicing priests in India and abroad. Many of the handful of adult lay persons who had the calling to serve as priests, and who were trained to perform ritual prayers, are still excluded from equal participation and respect in the very few places where they are available. Executive committees and Trustees can change this discrimination by educating the community, resisting pressure from some orthodox groups, and stopping such behavior which is already leading to a decline in prayer ceremonies done at private homes.

Iranian Zarathushtis follow Asho Zarathushtra's policy against any kind of discrimination and do not discriminate against Mobedyars, men and women. At their community functions they invite all Mobeds and Mobedyars with equal respect. The late Dr. Ali Jafarey wrote an article about how in Iran, with the blessings of their Mobedan Mobed (Chief Priest) Rostam Shahzadi they trained and gave equal respect to Mobedyars, who after five years of practice were made full Mobeds. Parsis who discriminate can learn to follow the Gathas from the Iranians.

ENVIRONMENT

In the Gathas, we see Zarathushtra promoting the farmer and settled life in society. The farmer depends on the natural environment being in good condition for sustainable growth of his crops, year after year. This means timely rainfall without contamination from polluted air (from burning of fossil fuels in homes, automobiles, industrial factories, power plants) and plenty of trees in nearby forest areas (that attract rain and absorb carbon dioxide), clean water from rivers and underground sources and good soil with natural nutrients, both undefiled by chemical or excess animal wastes (like from meat factories). Zarathushtra tells his followers

to take proper care of animals, especially those domestic animals who are beneficial to our lives. Cows and goats provide milk from which butter, cheese and other products are made. Horses and bulls provided ecology friendly help in farming. Camels provided ecological transportation in desert areas. Dogs provide companionship and guard duty. Zarathushtra also condemns people who kill animals for sport. Reference - Ervad Kavasji Kanga, Ahunavaiti Gatha Y.31.15, Y.32.10, Y.32.12, Y.33.4.

Individuals can do many things to reverse the damage being done to the environment. By recycling paper, metals, plastics, we can reduce the need for cutting down too many trees, limit the amount of mining for metals that destroys land, and reduce pollution of land and waters from plastic shopping bags thrown out instead of recycled. We can reduce or stop eating meats produced by factory farms where animals are often mistreated and create huge amounts of animal wastes that poison the land and underground water. We can reduce the use of our gas driven cars by walking for short distances, taking public transportation, combining several errands on one trip, or buying an electric car. Installing solar panels on homes, Daremehers, community centers, etc. can lower electricity bills and reduce fossil fuel use at power plants.

INEQUALITY

In the Gathas we can see how Zarathushtra treats other people and animals with a sense of equal respect

for all creations of Ahura Mazda. Although he teaches respect for authority and for ownership rights of property owners, he does not approve of inherent superiority or inferiority of individuals based on their economic class – rich or poor, ruler or subject, high or low caste, occupational class – priest, warrior, trader, carpenter, business owner, or



gender – male or female, racial or ethnic origin. He preaches his new religion to anyone who is willing to listen attentively with an open mind and follow a righteous life. Taraporewala, Ahunavaiti Gatha Y. 31.1 and Y. 32.2 mention this.

In the world we live in, we can see inequality being practiced in all spheres of society in all countries, some more than others. Many rich people look down on the poor, exploit the poor, humiliate the poor. Majority religion followers in some countries discriminate, humiliate, persecute and even kill followers of minority religions. Priest caste members look down on others including those who become priests from non-priest caste (like Mobedyars in our Parsi community who do not even have a vote in the North American Mobed Council, and are mostly excluded from

participating in community prayers with the Ervads). Parsi women who marry non-Parsi husbands and their children are not allowed to enter our temples or attend public prayers. Women in many societies including our Parsi community are not allowed to become priests.

Individuals can change such practices of inequality by speaking out at community meetings, conferences, writing articles and educating community members how they go against the teachings in the Gathas, and how they break



the hearts of the victims of unequal treatment, and displease our common Creator, Ahura Mazda.

VIOLENCE

In the Gathas Zarathushtra condemns those who kill even animals for sport, and promotes a settled life and the farming occupation that provides vegetables and fruits, instead of the hunter gatherer life style. He stretches out a welcoming hand even to his detractors to listen to his teachings and follow a peaceful righteous life. He does not advocate violence against those who decide

ZARATHUSHTRA'S GATHAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

not to follow his new religion but leaves it to Ahura Mazda to judge them. In Taraporewala Spentamainyu Gatha Y.48.7 Zarathushtra speaks out against hatred and violence and promotes love.

As Mazdayasni Zarathushtis we can also do things as individuals and as groups like community associations to speak out and support others



in opposing and ending violence. We can join local, County, State, National, and International interfaith

organizations and collaborate with them to work against violence. We can sign on online petitions from other groups that are working to end violence. We can contact our government representatives to ask their help via legislation that would end violence.

FACT CHECKING

In our technological society there are all kinds of opinions from scholars and non-scholars, orthodox, reformists and middle of the road members, that are posted on email and social media, besides lectures and discussion groups, educating and supporting different ideologies about what is religiously right and wrong. So, what can we as individuals do to choose what is right? While rules and regulations and traditions that were established by our ancestors in ancient times may have been valid in those bygone days, how do we know which ones are still right in today's times and societies we live in? Zarathushtra founded his religion by laying down basic principles that apply in all ages, such as

equality, justice, compassion, charity, etc., somewhat like scientists who do basic research and discover scientific principles. His followers developed rules and traditions that would help people to carry on their daily lives during their times, in accordance with the basic principles, like

how product developers come out with tools and products within constraints of available materials in

their applied research.

Just as reporters and news analysts do fact checking to determine which news coming from politicians and their staff members are factual to differentiate from fake news, by verifying them against trusted sources, we as individuals can compare the rules and traditions against the basic principles to see if they will satisfy the principles within the constraints and realities of today's society.*



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Enable me to do in my humble way what Zarathushtra did in his magnificent way and now exhorts me to do. Kindle the fire of Asha's righteousness in my heart and burn wickedness within me. Strengthen me to combat it in the world without and vanquish it, Ahura Mazda.

Dastur Dr. M. N. Dhalla in "Homage to Ahura Mazda".

HUMATA FOR HEALTH

The Power of Positive Self-Talk

By Farishta Murzban Dinshaw

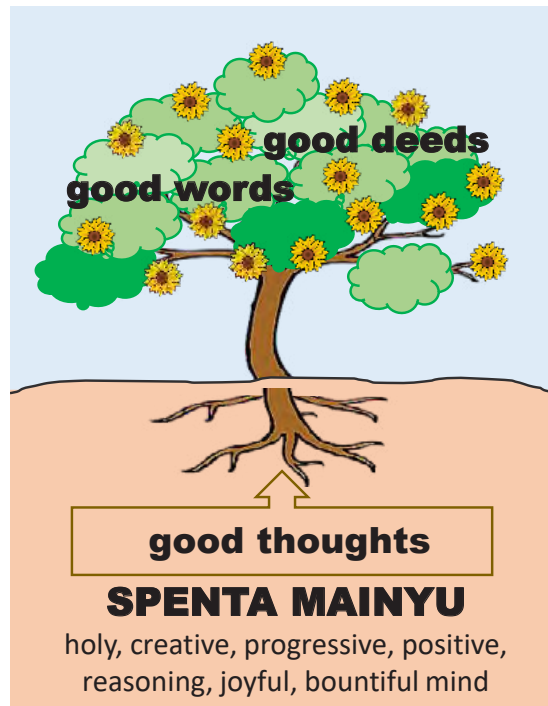
HUMATA – GOOD THOUGHTS

One of the first things a young Zarathushti learns is that our faith is based on *humata* (good thoughts), *hukhta* (good words) and *hvarshta* (good deeds). And although it is fairly easy to give tangible examples of good words (compliments, affirmations) and good deeds (hugging, volunteering), we are rarely able to go beyond a nebulous understanding of what thinking good thoughts actually entails. If good words and good deeds are the visible flowers of a plant, good thoughts are the roots that help nourish the plant.

To continue the analogy, strong roots need a fertile soil, thus to have good thoughts we need a creative, positive, reasoning mind, *spenta mainyu*. In the Gathas, the term *spenta mainyu* has a fundamental place in Zarathushti scripture. If our mind tends towards being regressive, negative, irrational, i.e. *angra mainyu*, our thoughts too will reflect that and will influence our internal dialogue or self-talk.

SELF-TALK

Self-talk are the endless stream of statements and questions that run through our mind about ourselves and the world around us. Self-talk can be both positive and negative.



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It can be encouraging or it can be distressing. Much of our self-talk depends on which mentality – *spenta mainyu* or *angra mainyu* – we choose to favor. As Henry Ford said, “Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t – you’re right.”

Positive self-talk is supportive and non-critical. Consider the following two inner statements:
Negative self-talk - “I messed up. I am such an idiot!”
Positive self-talk - “I messed up. I’ll have to be more careful next time”.

The concept of choosing *humata* (good thoughts) over *dushmata* (bad thoughts) preached by Zarathushtra four millennia ago has been proved by modern science. Quantum mechanics shows that every thought and emotion has its own vibrational frequency or wave frequency and has demonstrated how a wave frequency can be altered. The shape of a thought wave has peaks and valleys. When you overlay an opposite shaped wave on to an original wave, the original wave is straightened, essentially canceling the first one out. This is the principle of positive self-talk; by choosing to deliberately replace a negative thought with an opposite - a positive - thought, we can cancel the negativity.

Choosing to focus on positivity does not mean that we live in a ‘la la land’ away from the realities of emotions like anger, jealousy, guilt, or shame that fuel negative thoughts. In fact, it is crucial to acknowledge and label such emotions so we can deal with them. It is a normal human response to be anxious or angry in certain situations. There is nothing wrong with analyzing our thoughts, words, actions and mistakes, and holding ourselves to a high standard, but self-criticism should be intentional,

not habitual. When we fall into a constant pattern of thinking that is negative, critical, or irrational (qualities of *angra mainyu*) it can be paralyzing.

RUMINATION

In psychology, constantly focusing on negative self-talk is called rumination. It is any thought that diminishes our ability to make positive changes in our life and affects our self-confidence. It is when we replay worrying or angry thoughts over and over again in our head. Sometimes, long after an upsetting event is over, we continue to think about it, keeping the emotions alive. This can snowball into anxiety, depression, phobias, and other mental health disorders. Consider the escalation in the following example: "I look so fat in these jeans. → Look at that belly. It looks gross. → It's impossible to lose weight. → I am ugly and pathetic. → No wonder no one loves me. → I wish I was dead."

We often say things to ourselves in our heads that we would never say to a friend so we need to treat ourselves with the same supportive kindness. We shouldn't feel guilty when we find ourselves locked in a spiral of negative thoughts or for not being able to think positively. Sometimes we may require professional help to set us on the right path.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

The underlying concept behind Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is that thoughts and feelings play a fundamental role in behavior. The goal of cognitive behavior therapy is to teach people that while they cannot control every aspect of the world around them,

they can take control of how they interpret and deal with things in their environment.

CBT helps to reduce these emotional problems by helping us identify distortions in our thinking and to stand back from the thoughts we have to consider situations from different viewpoints.

CBT teaches us to stop and question our thoughts when faced with situations that make us anxious or angry.

- **Filtering** is magnifying the negative aspects of a situation and filtering out the positive ones. E.g. if we are on a diet and binge on cake one night we might get caught up on that lapse instead of the fact that we have lost several pounds.
- **Catastrophizing** is when we automatically anticipate the worst. E.g. if a doctor orders more tests we start worrying that it may be cancer.
- **Fortune Telling** is the mental habit of predicting what will happen based on little or no real evidence. E.g. if we see someone look at their watch while we are presenting at a meeting and immediately think that our presentation is boring.
- **Personalization** involves assuming excessive amounts of responsibility, especially for things that are mostly or entirely outside our control. E.g. if after our child fails a test, we hold ourselves responsible, sometimes to the extent of questioning our worth as parents. "If only I had sat with her when she was studying, she would have passed."
- **Polarizing** is black-or-white thinking. There is no middle ground, only absolutes like

"always", "never", "everything", and "nothing". E.g. if we get stuck in a traffic on the way to an important appointment, we think, "Why does this always happen to me?"

Recognizing that certain thoughts are not rational or healthy is the first step. For cognitive behavioral therapy to be effective, we must be ready and willing to spend time and effort analyzing our thoughts and feelings. Such self-analysis and homework can be difficult, but it is a great way to learn more about how internal states impact outward behavior. It is also important to identify what brings us comfort and joy - a night out with friends, a massage, a special meal - and consciously go to that space now and again so that we feel supported and pampered as we move gradually towards a new way of thinking.

GOOD WORDS AND DEEDS

In the Spenta Mainyu Gatha (47.2) Asho Zarathushtra says, "*Ahyâ Manyêush Spênishtahyâ vahishtem, Hizvâ ukhdhâish Vanghêush êeânû mananghō, Ârmatôish zastôibyâ shyaothanâ verezyat.*"

"Through the most holy mentality (*spenta mainyu*) the best life will be for the one who with his tongue speaks in accord with good thoughts and with his hand performs tasks of divine wisdom inspired by the one idea that Ahura Mazda is the father (upholder) of righteousness" (T. R. Sethna, 1978, page 85).

Some of strategies to help us reframe our worldview include:

Changing the Language

We can change the intensity of the words we use. "I can't stand this"

becomes, "This is challenging." "I hate..." becomes, "I don't like..." and even, "I don't prefer..." When our self-talk uses less intense language, much of its negative power is neutralized as well.

Change Statements to Questions

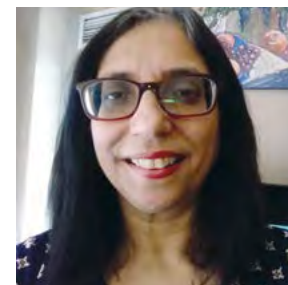
When we use negative self-talk statements like, "I can't handle this!" or "This makes me so angry!" our stress levels can increase. They also stop us from seeking solutions

to change the given situation. Changing the statements to questions focusing on action can decrease stress. "How can I handle this?" or "What can I do to feel less angry?"

cardiovascular health. And while it is important to think of ways to maintain positivity, it is also important to remember that in some cases sad thoughts are a result of hormonal changes, as in post-partum depression, or neurobiology, and cannot be willed away by ourselves, but need professional help. In any case, be gentle and encouraging. *

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*"It's the end of the world," said the caterpillar.
"It's just the beginning," said the butterfly.*

Anonymous

Practicing Affirmations

Affirmations are repetitive positive statements that can help you to challenge and overcome self-sabotaging and negative thoughts, such as "I can do this!" Affirmations reprogram our thinking patterns so that, over time, we begin to think – and act – differently. They are like exercises for our mind similar to the repetitive exercises we may do to improve our physical health.

Learning from the Past

One strategy is to write down past times when we have worried about something that didn't happen. This helps put things into perspective knowing that 'this too shall pass'.

Preparing For 'Worse Case Scenarios

Another strategy is to list the things we worry about most, imagine the worst outcome, then make a plan for exactly how we would deal with it if that came to pass. This helps us differentiate the line between what we can and cannot control.

can open up our thinking to new possibilities

Learning Relaxation Techniques

In the seventies, Harvard Medical School cardiologist Dr. Herbert Benson introduced "relaxation response" to counteract the stress responses. These techniques include breath work, meditation, listening to relaxing music, yoga, tai chi, and taking a warm bath.

Staying Active

One helpful strategy is to step outside the mind and do things with our hands - crafts, cooking. And keep moving whether it is walking in nature, doing yoga, dancing. Other "good deeds" include keeping our spaces clean and tidy. And of course, volunteer – "Happiness is to the one who makes others happy." (Ushtavaiti Gatha 43.1).

When our state of mind is generally positive and optimistic, we are better able to handle everyday stress which may contribute to the benefits such as better mental wellbeing and

TEACHING THE GATHAS

Teaching the Core Values of the Zarathushtrian Religion

By Armita Dalal, Artemis Javanshir, and Nooshin Jahangiri

The Gathas, the core of the Zarathushtrian religion, can be complicated in all its simplicity, hence at times can be a challenge for the teacher to deliver its true message to students. The focus of this article is to introduce some of the techniques used to help the 10 to 18-year-old students better understand the concepts in the Gathas. These hands-on practices allow the students to experience the meanings in action.

To demonstrate, let us use Yasna 43-1 as an example. The English translation of this verse by Dr. Jafarey states:
*"May the Wise, Ruling-at-will God grant radiant happiness to the person
who radiates happiness to any other person at large.
I pray for steadfast strength
and courage in order to uphold*

righteousness.

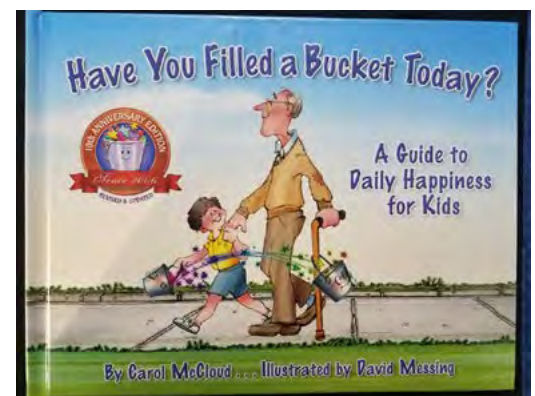
Grant me through serenity the blessings of a rich life of good mind."

This verse comprises three sentences. Each sentence carries an important and powerful message independently. As such separate projects and activities could be presented to bring these meanings to life for the students.

KINDNESS

Selecting the right storybook, followed by a project that relates directly to the concepts expressed in the story is one of the best approaches for helping the younger age groups grasp these teachings.

The book "Have You Filled Your Bucket Today?" by Carol McCloud (Nelson Publishing & Marketing; May 16, 2006)



which tells the story of how doing good deeds for others fills our own bucket of happiness, is a great example. Reading the book in the class, the teacher can talk about the concept as the story goes on. Then each student can either be given a bucket or be asked to make a paper box or a container. Simple instructions on origami paper boxes are readily available online. Each student is then asked to write a short positive message for each classmate and place it in his/her respective buckets. Time is then

ZARATHUSHTRA'S GATHAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

dedicated for the messages to be read either privately or out loud to the group.

Once this exercise is completed, the teacher can then engage the students by asking them how it felt to write the positive messages for their friends and how it felt for them to receive the positive messages from their friends. Once the answers are heard, the teacher can relate them back to the first sentence in verse 43-1.

Furthermore, for a communal and out-of-class activity, the class can organize a charity function. One example could be a "blanket drive". This can be accomplished by asking the community to donate their extra blankets. The class then can take these blankets to a homeless shelter and hand them out. At the end, the teacher can again start a discussion on how this activity affected their happiness and the community's.

COURAGE

The second part of Yasna 43.1 states that it takes courage and strength to do the right thing. To demonstrate these points, a puppet show based on a courageous story can be organized. For younger students, the teacher can play the puppets while the older ones, can each select a role and even run the puppet show.

Furthermore, teachers can organize fun social events to present this subject. The class can watch a movie together showcasing the desired message. After the film, the students can discuss the message over pizza and ice cream.

GOOD MIND

In the third part of the verse, Zarathushtra through Armaiti asks for a rich life of good mind. Questions such as, what constitutes a rich life could be discussed.

Case studies are another method

for demonstrating the teachings in the second and the third part of verse 43.1. This is an excellent opportunity for the teacher to present a case where the main character is caught up in a dilemma having to choose between a difficult but a righteous path versus an easier and less threatening but a wrong path. The students can break into smaller groups to discuss the matter and then re-join the class to present their choosing.

For the older age group, thought provoking discussions can be implemented. The older age group can partake in a short story competition to creatively analyze their understanding of Zarathushtra's teachings.

An additional technique to keep the teens engaged in learning the Gathas is by having conversations about the current affairs and social issues and then relating the discussion to a verse in the Gatha's.

Here are examples of some thought-provoking and relatable topics for teens:

- How can one be a good leader?
- How can one select the right leader? How can one be mindful, set goals and stay focused so that they could reach their goal?
- What is one's opinion on abortion? Is it bad or good?
- How can one be the change she/he wants to see in the World?

Creating safe environments, is one way to encourage the teens to participate in discussions willingly. This can be accomplished by forming smaller groups

of three to four teens in each group. Once the small groups have had a chance to discuss a subject, then they all can come together in the class to share their conclusions. The teacher then can relate their discussion to a verse in the Gathas. This practice allows the meanings in the Gatha's to come to alive.

Another excellent method for teaching the Gathas is using games such as Jeopardy and Kahoot (an online game). The questions and answers for each of these games can be designed and created by the teacher according to the message they want to deliver. Games are ideal teaching tools for both the younger and older students.



Armita Dalal, Artemis Javanshir, and Nooshin Jahangiri are active affiliates of the Zarathushtrian community and also religion class teachers, and members of Core Education Committee, a subcommittee of California Zoroastrian Center in Los Angeles County (CZC-LA). Core Education Committee was formed in 2016 to further solidify the roots of the Zarathushtrian education for the youth and adults in Los Angeles and beyond. Organizing the Zarathushtrian Studies and Persian classes for youth, providing Gatha and Din-Dabireh classes for the adults and establishing a strong relationship with the interfaith council in Los Angeles are among a few of the projects that this committee has been involved with.

THE GATHIC SYMPHONY

Conducted by the Zoroastrian Sunday School Students of Houston

By Vehishta Kaikobad

When requested by FEZANA to write an article on how I teach Sunday School topics like the Gathas to children, my response was a natural expression of joy. Having taught Sunday School at ZAH for over 20 years and supported by my dear colleague Khursheed Dastur for the past 15 years, we feel blessed with the good fortune of bonding with the children from their formative years to young adulthood through Sunday School sessions and community events, earning their trust, faith, and respect through mutual feelings, allowing every voice to express itself without any fear of criticism. Thus, it is not how I teach Sunday School, but how we work collaboratively with our children and learn together.

The Gathic Symphony project epitomizes the eternal triangle of learning where the child, home, and school have worked cohesively to produce a unique learning approach. Interested students, ages nine and up, were invited to an initial Zoom meeting where the topic “what do the Gathas mean to me and how can I apply the concepts in my daily life” was discussed. Each student was asked to choose a Gatha as it appealed to their

senses. Some were interested in researching the historical content while his priestly family guided a young Ervard in applying Gathic verses as part of other liturgical prayers. Our youngest 9-year-old piped in with some Fun Facts! Some of our students related to the theme through exquisite artistic expressions and brilliant digital creations. After additional (promptly attended) follow up meetings, the ZAH students were ready to orchestrate their Gathic Symphony as an ode to the Songs Of Zarathushtra initiated from their hearts.

The following pages exemplify the spiritual growth that has blossomed to fruition among our Sunday School scholars due to motivation, discipline and self-learning coupled with a remarkable sense of responsibility.

In their Formative Years, our students (exemplified by the participants) are introduced to handmade, visual, and tactile materials that can be manipulated by each child in his/her quest for cognitive inquiry and learning. Art activities, drama, music, and movement, are added attractions that make Sunday School “sunnier” to attend.

Currently, the Sunday Schools continue to be conducted virtually

– based on the same principles with the inclusion of digital games created by our talented ZAH youth student, Mahtab B. Dastur.

Thus, our task as spiritual nurturers is a joyful experience in watching as the orchestra continues to play. At the same time, as silent conductors, we observe from the side of the stage, always ready to guide, support and applaud them in their endeavors.

Acknowledgments – Aban Rustomji for her guidance; ZAH Sunday School teachers (past and present) who have been instrumental in the children’s religious education.



Hands-on activities to teach the Gathas help children understand and remember the messages in the Gathas.

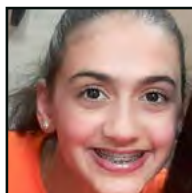
ZARATHUSHTRA'S GATHAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD



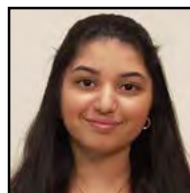
Roshni Chikhliwala



Darius B. Dastur



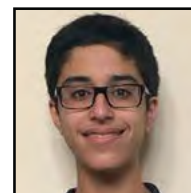
Mahtab B. Dastur



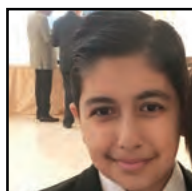
Natasha Dungor



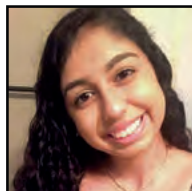
Natasha Kanga



Neville Kanga



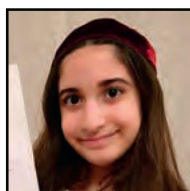
Zal Italia



Zara Italia



Sabrina Warden



Sanaea Warden



Khursheed B.
Dastur

Origins of the Gathas

The Gathas are the heart of our origin and prayers. They are a source of nourishment and protection for the mind, body, and soul, and help us to incorporate the essence of living a true Zoroastrian life. The Gathas educate us on how to use our good mind, Vohu Mana, to make moral choices, and take actions to promote good in the world. The religious text of the Zarathushti faith are referred to as the "Avesta." The oldest part of the Avesta is the Gathas, which are hymns and songs composed by Zarathustra in his quest of discovering Ahura Mazda as the one true God who was all good, wise, and giver of truth, light, and happiness.

"The Gathas belong to an ancient Indo-Iranian tradition of wisdom poetry and consist of rhetorical questions addressed by Zarathustra to the god and source of revelation who spoke to him, namely Ahura Mazda, 'the Wise Lord'" (Sara Stewart).

The Gathas were transmitted orally by priests from one generation to the next. "In Zarathushtra's day, there was no actual Avestan Alphabet. There was no written form of Avesta. The alphabet came about 2000 years after Zoroaster, by unknown priestly scholars, probably during the Sassanian period" (Khojeste Mistree).

Sometime during the Sassanian period these texts were transcribed into Pahlavi. Other important texts that were recorded in Pahlavi include the story of Bundahishn ("Primal Creation") and Denkard, both which contain references to the Gathas.

Several subjects are covered in the 17 chapters of the Gathas. It draws our attention to all of Ahura Mazda's creations and encourages us to respect and protect them. It talks about the divinities of religion slowly emerging, namely the Ameshaspands, immortality of the soul, prayers, and rituals.

By Natasha and Neville Kanga; Ages 15

Fun Fact - Gathas were used for mediation by a Chinese mediator!

By Sanaea Warden; Age 9

The GATHAS through the eyes of a Priest

The Gathas include the teachings of Zarthushttra about the struggle between good and evil, friendship of Ahura Mazda with Zarathustra, the importance of Asha (Truth), and Vohu Mano (Good Mind). Khordeh Avesta mentions that those who chant the Gathas with reverence become victorious. Gathas are referenced in many of our daily prayers and religious rituals. Below are a few examples:

Yatha Ahu Vairyo - Ahunavad Gatha is named after the Ahunavar prayer (Yatha Ahu Vairyo)

Kem-na Mazda - The verses of the Kem na Mazda (from *Kem-nā Mazdā* to *daenayāi frāvaochā*) and the last line (*Nemaschā yā Ārmaitish izhāchā*) are from Ushtavaiti Gatha and Spenta Mainyu Gatha respectively: Who will protect me O Mazda when the wicked threaten to harm me, other than your Fire and Mind? It is through their working that righteousness thrives. Do enlighten my inner-self with this doctrine. Homage (be) unto right thought and prosperity

In the **Atash Nyiash**, the part from *Us-mōi uzāreshvā Ahurā* to *ukhdhakhyāchā seroshem khshathremchā* and from *At tōi ātareh Ahurā* to *dereshā aēnanghem* are from Ahunavad Gatha: “O-Ahura Mazda, may my good action, righteousness, good thought, humility, gentleness, free me from ignorance and evil and grant me vigor, power (strength) and success. May Spenta Armaiti instruct me the religious commandments through truth and when I follow my religion in the true way and follow the laws laid down in the Vendidad and use my wisdom and strength to overpower evil within me, may I attain the gift of Kshatra vairya (power) and Vohu Manah (good mind) and only then, O- Ahura Mazda, give me your blessings to attain spiritual bliss. O- Ahura Mazda we revere your mighty, swift, courageous, miraculous, helpful fire through truth (Asha Vahishta). Your fire through his full strength is the giver of joy & courage to those who tend to the fire properly.”

Geh-Sarna (Funeral ceremony) - The Ahunavad Gatha is chanted in its entirety during the Geh Sarna ceremony (Paidast or Funeral) of a ruvaan (dead body).

In the **Vendidad** (laws against demons)– Fargarad/Chapter 10 – Zarthushttra asks Ahura Mazda, as to what are those words that will cleanse and ward off evil. Ahura Mazda points out specific words from the Gathas to be recited once, twice, thrice, four times.

By Darius B Dastur; Age 11

Voices of the Gathas

Ahunavad Gatha (Ha 28.4)

Translation: “Whatever words and deeds are noblest and best, Teach me, O Mazda! Through Love of Fellow-man, Through Search for Truth, Make my life express the yearnings and the prayers of my heart! Through the Strength to Serve, O Ahura! Renew my Life, and make it as True as Thou wishest!”

Reflection: I chose this Gatha as it represents good “battling” over evil, and advocates for people to do good deeds, in order to help others. It appeals to me as a reminder to always make a better choice and analyze the differences when given multiple choices or options. In my daily living, it serves as a reminder to do what is good. It also reiterates that we, as Zoroastrians, worship the fravashis, and Ahura Mazda, as the highest order. I chose the specific Ha above as it relates to the aspect of having good thoughts in union with having the power and strength to do what is right.

By Zara Italia; Age 17

Gatha Ushtavad (Ha 43.11)

Translation: Doing that which is best. Then I realized your glory, Mazda, when good mind made its first appearance to me and when through your teaching I first got enlightened. In difficulties my faith in mankind leads me on to do that which you have taught me to be the best.

Reflection: This phrase spoke out to me, as when confronted with difficulties one tends to be indecisive of the outcome. Nonetheless, one should keep faith in Ahura Mazda and know that whatever will happen will be for the best. One continues to ask Ahura Mazda why do bad things happen? However, in the long run it might be a blessing in disguise as it could be for a person's betterment. For example, when one is taking a final exam, and the mind becomes blank, one should use Vohu Mano and recall what Ahura Mazda taught to find the right answer. This reaffirms our faith in Zarathustra's teachings.

By Sabrina Warden; Age 14

Gatha Spentomard (Ha 47.1)

Translation: Homage to you, O sacred Gathas. Through his holy spirit and his sovereign mind, Ahura Mazda will grant self-realization and immortality to him whose word and deeds are inspired by righteousness, moral courage and divine energy.

Reflection: These wordings reflect that good thoughts, good words and good deeds are the pillars of Zarathustra's teachings. When one does charitable work or volunteers, Ahura Mazda will grant self-realization and a long life. For example, by volunteering at a food bank, animal shelter or nursing home, one experiences fulfillment and feels satisfied in life. It also lowers one's stress by doing good deeds and following Zarathushtra's teachings in life. Small acts of kindness help build community spirit.

By Sabrina Warden; Age 14

Gatha Vahishtoist (Ha 54.2)

Translation: We revere the much desired prayer giving happiness and peace of mind, powerful, victorious, malice removing, the most exalted righteous order of prayers. We revere the righteous bountiful Gathas which rule with exalted dignity. We revere Staota Yasht (praise of adoration) which the supreme existence created.

Reflection: This phrase spoke to me because when one is overwhelmed, wants to seek forgiveness, in a dilemma or is desperately seeking for help, Ahura Mazda comes to one's mind. For example, before a person is about to go for an interview or for a major surgery one asks Ahura Mazda for help to succeed. Prayers should be recited with utmost faith in Ahura Mazda to keep worries away, gain peace of mind and to understand that whatever occurs is for a reason. One should have strong belief and faith that prayers when recited on daily basis. Regardless of success or failure, prayers are important in life, for one's best interest and could also be a source of meditation.

By Sabrina Warden; Age 14

Vohukshathra Gatha (51.7)

Translation: "Give me, O thou that didst create the Ox and Waters and Plants, Welfare and Immortality, by the Highest Spirit, O Mazda, strength and continuance through Good Thought at the sentence."

Reflection: I chose the Vohukshathra Gatha because Zarathustra's teachings show that we have to be courageous, brave and have a good mindset throughout our Zoroastrian life. Although we have the freedom to choose our path in life, we must choose wisely because our past choices would still determine our future experiences. Zarathushtra's teachings impact our daily lives. I keep a good mental composure over any stress that comes towards me. At school, no matter what happens I keep a good attitude and keep moving forward. Zarathustra developed these teachings because he wants us to be prepared to face future challenges with perseverance.

A Game about the Gathas



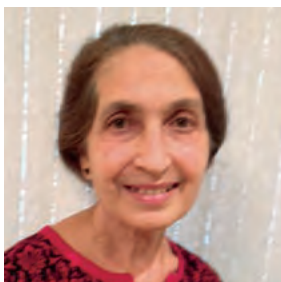
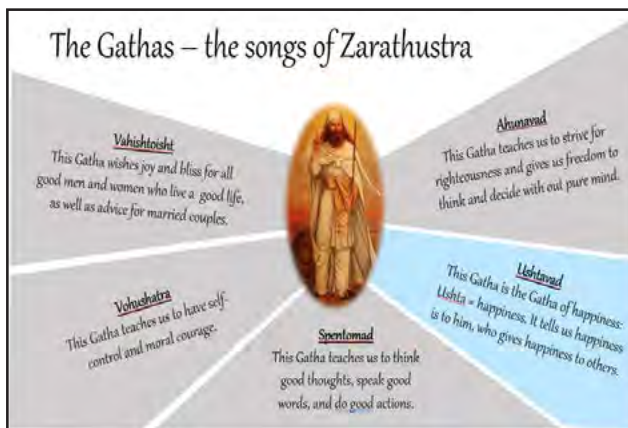
This is a digital game you can play with all ages to learn the Gathas and their meaning, while still having fun! It was developed by Mahtab B. Dastur. You can download it using the code above.

1 Teach and explain the messages of the Gathas.



3 Discuss and answer.

2 Ask about the Gathas - the Songs of Zarathushtra
E.g. “Which Gatha is the Gatha of happiness?”



Vehishta Kaikobad has been a Sunday School Educator at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston and beyond, since the 1980's. She has conducted Sunday School Workshops at national and international level using innovative teaching aids and methods. She spearheaded the first “Kids Congress” for the North American Zoroastrian Congress in 2010 held in Houston and, later, in New York in 2012 and Los Angeles in 2014.

A ROAD-MAP REVEALED

Teaching the Gathas to Children

By Tashan Mistree Byramji

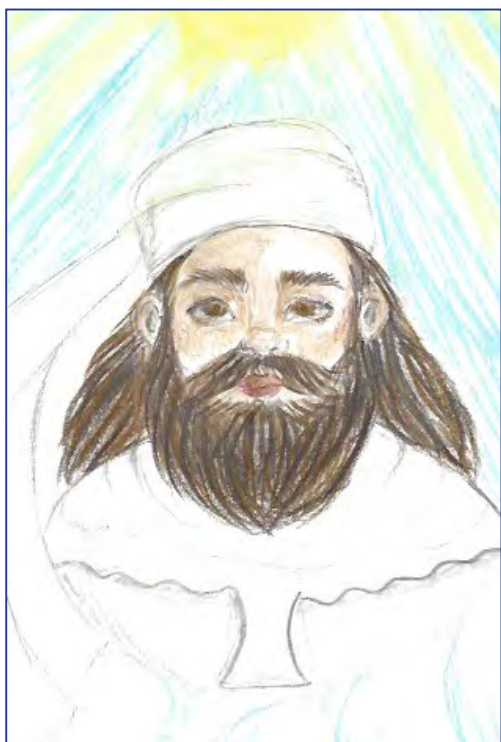


Illustration of Zarathushtra by Ava Mistry, 15 years

The Gathas as revealed by Spitaman Zarathushtra 3500 years ago, introduced for the first time in history a new way of thinking and a new way of living for the people of Iran. The revelation of Spitaman Zarathushtra – which we call the Gāthās, taught the Iranian people how to lead a Good Life based on Truth – Asha, the use of the Good Mind – Vohu Manah and most importantly by investing in Happiness – Ushta.

In the contemporary world, it may seem obvious, that one should live a happy life of truthfulness based upon knowledge and learning, but in the time of Zarathushtra, this was a revelation of many firsts. Through his message, he brought to the world the importance of ideas, such as the need to be just, to bring order and harmony into the world and to be righteous. And for the first time in human history the people of Iran were given a road map on how to be Good Zoroastrians.

Long regarded as complex, esoteric, deeply poetic and mysterious, the Gāthās, which are reputed to be the divinely inspired utterances of Prophet Zarathushtra, have been faithfully passed down through the centuries through prayer, praise and worship, and this revelation forms the cornerstone of religious doctrine in Zoroastrianism.

The 17 sacred chapters or hās lay homage to Zarathushtra's pursuit of knowledge, the profound depth of his vision, his quest for spirituality and his desire to seek answers from the one he perceived to be the Lord of Wisdom - Ahura Mazdā.

At the heart of this complex body of hymns or songs are simple doctrinal beliefs that have stood the test of time and continue to be relevant in the modern world. To equip our children with these messages, is to give them a way of thinking and the same road map for a good life that was revealed to Zarathushtra and his followers for 3500 years.

The Gāthās which we have today, are divided into five hymns – Ahunavaiti Gāthā (Ahunavād), Ushtavaiti Gāthā (Ustavād), Spentamainyu Gāthā (Spentomad), Vohukhshathra Gāthā and the Vahishtoisti Gāthā (Vahishtoisht) illustrated in Figure 1. Each Gāthic hymn provides us with fundamental Zoroastrian concepts that easily translate into an ethical paradigm to live by. Passing these messages on to the next generation, even from a young age, is paramount, to ensure the continuity of our faith and the forging of a Zoroastrian identity through practice, prayer and worship.

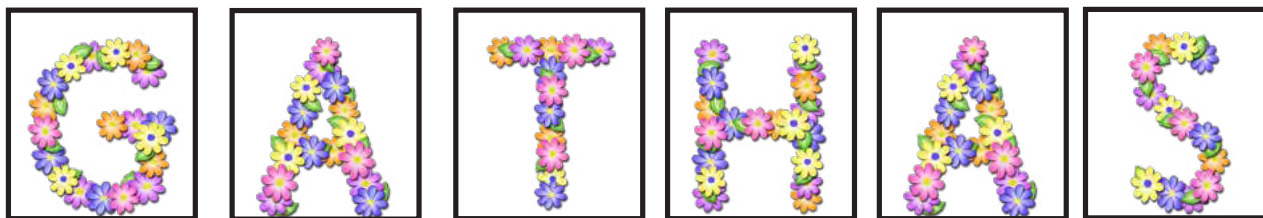


Figure 1: A schematic layout of the Five Gāthās
© Zoroastrian Studies, Mumbai, 2020

G-A-T-H-A-S:

An acronym for the Good Life of Righteousness, Truth, Order and Knowledge

To help understand the messages within the Gāthās at an elementary level, it is necessary to identify the key themes that the Gāthās convey. For children, these themes form part of the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism and can simply be conveyed as:



G = Good/Goodness

"... He serves truth, during his rule, with good word and good action ..." (Y.31.22)

Throughout the Gāthās, Zarathushtra places a lot of emphasis on the qualities of Good, Righteousness and Virtue, by recognizing:

- That Ahura Mazdā is totally good, in thought, in word and in deed and there is no room for even a speck of evil within Ahura Mazdā.
- That Ahura Mazdā through the Good Spirit (Av. Spenta Mainyu) is in constant battle with the Evil Spirit (Av. Anghra Mainyu), and our task is to constantly fight evil so that Good may prevail.
- And that as worshippers of Mazdā, we must always choose between the virtuous (Good Spirit) and the unvirtuous (Evil Spirit).

MESSAGE FOR KIDS: Ahura Mazdā is totally good. Imagine a glass of water that is totally filled to the brim, and has no space to add even a drop more of water or else the water will overflow. In the same way, Ahura Mazdā is filled to the brim with goodness and there is no room for even a speck of bad within Him. A good Zarthushti is one who strives to function by being like Ahura Mazda and having within one, the same goodness of Ahura Mazdā. This is accomplished by enacting good deeds of life by using the Good Mind (Vohu Manah).

In Zoroastrianism, this message is also conveyed in our most sacred prayer, the Ahunavar or the Yatha Ahu Vairyo prayer (from which the first Gāthā is named). And when we recite the Yatha Ahu Vairyo prayer every day, it serves to remind us to continuously do good deeds, with good thoughts and good words for the sake of Ahura Mazdā and help those in need in the world. Even the wearing of our sacred Sudreh serves to remind us to stay on the good path, as Sud is the word for good and reh means path while the Kusti is the direction finder that leads you onto the right path.

A = Ahura Mazdā/ Ohrmazd (Lord of Wisdom)

"... when I gasped Thee in a vision to be the Father of the Good Mind, the real Creator of Truth, (and) the Lord of existence in Thy actions." (Y.31.8)

ZARATHUSHTRA'S GATHAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

In the Gāthās the recognition of Ahura Mazdā as the Lord of Wisdom, the one supreme God within the Zoroastrian religion is crystalized. This is conveyed through Zarathushtra's frequent descriptions of the qualities and attributes of Ahura Mazdā. While we have already covered Ahura Mazdā being totally good, he is also all-knowing, the creator, righteous and truthful, the first one, immortal (for he has no beginning and no end), very very powerful (but not all powerful) and above all our friend.

MESSAGE FOR KIDS: The qualities of Ahura Mazdā help us understand why Ahura Mazdā is supreme and worthy of our worship. By promoting the concept of Ahura Mazdā being our friend, Zarathushtra is helping us to see that one should not follow Ahura Mazdā through fear and ignorance, but through wisdom and truth. By emphasizing the qualities of Ahura Mazdā, Zarathushtra also wants us to use them as a framework for a good Zoroastrian life, namely one where you do good for the sake of good, you speak the truth, you act with your good mind, you promote the creations and do not destroy them, you act with fairness and justice and do things to the best of your ability by acquiring as much knowledge as possible to help increase the good power of Ahura Mazdā.

T = Truth (Asha)

“... those attainments befitting truth through which one might set Thy supporters in happiness.” (Y.28.2)

It is clear from the Gāthās that the path of Truth (Asha) is one that leads to Ahura Mazdā. And one who chooses such a path, is an Ashavan or a possessor of Truth. As Zarthushtis, if you follow the path of Truth (Asha) you actively reject the Lie, which in the Gāthās is a quality attributed solely to Ahriman (the Evil Spirit).

MESSAGE FOR KIDS: Telling the truth is a core value that we follow from an early age as worshippers of Mazdā. It is important to understand that, the best Zoroastrian life to lead, is one based on truth and order. A good way to remember this is through the daily lighting of the divo (oil lamp), which represents Mazdā's 7th creation, Fire, which is the Amesha Spenta Asha Vahishta that stands for Truth and Order.

H = Happiness (Ushta)

“May happiness be unto him, who gives happiness unto others” (Y.43.1)

The Ushtavaiti Gatha celebrates the idea of Ushta (happiness) and no other prayer within Zoroastrianism exemplifies the concept of Ushta as the Ashem Vohu prayer. The Ashem Vohu is the perfect marriage of Asha (truth) and Ushta (happiness), giving every Zoroastrian the idea that truth is good, truth is best, truth is happiness, and that lasting happiness comes to those who recognize and affirm i.e. follow the path of the highest truth.

MESSAGE FOR KIDS: Put simply, to live the Ushtavaiti Gatha, one must be truthful and spread happiness, as this is why Ahura Mazdā has created you. Spreading happiness increases goodness, increasing goodness helps Ahura Mazdā become powerful and helps Him to triumph over Ahriman. By saying your Ashem Vohu prayer every day, you are committing yourself to be a happy Zoroastrian who spreads truth and happiness to help Ahura Mazdā keep Ahriman away.

A = Amesha Spentas (Bounteous Immortals)

“Therefore, Lord, this Zarathushtra chooses that very spirit of Thine which indeed is the most bounteous of all, O Wise Lord...” (Y.43.16)

The seven qualities and characteristics of the Amesha Spentas probably play the most important and effective role in conveying the ethical structure and fundamental doctrinal beliefs within Zoroastrianism. The Amesha Spentas are the divine spirit beings -the Bounteous Immortals- that assist Ahura Mazdā and are represented by the physical creations of Sky (Shehrevat), Water (Khordad), Earth (Asfandarmad), Plant (Amardad), Animal (Bahman), Humans (Hormazd) and Fire (Ardibehesht). Apart from being guardians of the creations, each Amesha Spenta also represents a value or ethical quality to help one lead a good Zoroastrian life.

- Sky – Khshathra Vairya – Best Power/Strength
- Water – Haurvatat – Perfection
- Earth – Spenta Armaiti – Holy Devotion
- Plant – Ameretat – Immortality
- Animal – Vohu Manah – Good Mind
- Humans – Spenta Mainyu – Holy Spirit/Spirit of God
- Fire – Asha Vahishta – Truth and Order

MESSAGE FOR KIDS:

RUSTOM AND THE SANDWICHES

To best understand the Amesha Spentas, I am going to tell you the story of Rustom and the Sandwiches. Rustom and his family were going on a picnic one Sunday morning. Everyone in the family was given a job to do to help prepare for the picnic. For Rustom it was to make the ham and cheese sandwiches for the family to eat. Rustom was also told to remember to make a special cheese sandwich for his aunt Ava Fui who is a vegetarian. On Saturday evening, just as Rustom was about to make the sandwiches, his friend Zal invited him to a movie. Rustom really wanted to go to the movie, but when he asked his parents, his mother reminded him that he needed to make the sandwiches first, before leaving for the movie. Rustom was very upset with his mother and said he didn't want to make the sandwiches as he would be late for the movie; but she told him he had to fulfill his responsibility to the family and make the sandwiches especially as she had informed him two days ago. So Rustom, who was by now very upset, went to the kitchen, where he found the bread and as he was in a bad mood, he roughly cut it up into slices. Then he put blobs of hard butter without spreading it and threw in the ham and cheese slices and gathered the terribly made sandwiches in a hurry, flung them into a bag and chucked them in the fridge before running off to his movie.



The next morning after a long hike, the family settled down to picnic. But when they pulled the sandwiches out of the cooler they found the bag was filled with badly cut sandwiches and the ham and cheese had fallen apart from the bread and there was really no proper sandwich that any member of his family could have eaten. And worse still, there was no plain cheese sandwich for Ava Fui. Everyone was very disappointed in Rustom who had let them all down by making really bad sandwiches. If only Rustom had used his Amesha Spentas, the family may have ended up with sandwiches that they would have really enjoyed.

HOW SHOULD RUSTOM HAVE MADE THE SANDWICHES?

Rustom could have made his sandwiches with Good Spirit (Spenta Mainyu); He could have cut the bread properly and stacked the ham and cheese in an orderly way (Asha Vahishta); He could have used his good mind (Vohu Manah) and remembered the sandwich for his Ava Fui; He could have used his best strength/power (Khshatra Vairya) instead of being rough and careless with the bread and the butter and he could have taken care, devotion (Spenta Armaiti), to make the sandwiches well instead of having them fall apart; Alas Rustom didn't make the sandwiches with perfection (Haurvatat) and no one in the family remembered the picnic as being a great picnic and a good family memory, thus lacking immortality (Ameretat). If Rustom had remembered his Amesha Spentas, the sandwiches and this story may have been very different and his family would have enjoyed a great picnic.

So unlike Rustom, the best way for you to live a good Zarthushti life is to remember your Amesha Spentas and use them in all that you do.

S = Spiritual

“Take ye heed of these goals of mine, which I shall enact with the good mind. Worship of all of you O Wise One, and words praiseworthy with the Truth ...” (Y.33.8)

Ultimately the Gāthās link religious doctrine with the idea of religious practice and the tradition of prayer, worship and rituals. One can think of the Gāthās as a combination of good thoughts and words, that require implementation or action/deeds to be a good Zoroastrian. In the Gāthās, Zarathushtra speaks of prayer, worship, rituals, the physical and the spiritual worlds and the existence of the soul.

MESSAGE FOR KIDS: The daily recitation of prayers, the ritual of untying and re-tying the kusti, the lighting of the divo, worshipping at an Atash Kadeh/Agiary/Atash Behram, worshipping of the Yazatas, all add to the spiritual aspects of Zoroastrianism. Attending a Jashan or a Gahambar, celebrating one's birthdays through traditions like sagan, laying a NoRuz table or even starting one's day with Khshnaohtira Ahurahe Mazdao (Glory be to Ahura Mazda) are small acts, rituals or ceremonies that create that spiritual link between us and Ahura Mazda and helps to foster our Zoroastrian spiritual identity.

To live the Gathas is to constantly put into action Zarathushtra's teachings and by instilling these concepts in our children from an early age, we are providing an ethical and religious value system in their lives which is uniquely Zoroastrian.

Finally, always remember: “A Good Deed a Day Keeps Ahriman Away!”



Tashan Mistree Byramji was fortunate to have been taught classical Zoroastrianism from a young age and has been teaching since she was a teenager. She currently resides in Berwyn, PA, with her husband and two children, and is an active member of the Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania and New Jersey (ZAPANJ). Tashan believes in teaching Zoroastrianism the fun way, making it easy and relatable for kids and their parents to practice together.

THUS SPEAKS ZARATHUSHTRA TO ME

GATHAS: AN ETERNAL STORY

By Behroze A. Clubwala

Many decades ago, in a normal scorching summer in Madras, Chennai now, my Mum told me to use my summer vacation to educate myself further on our religion and learn to read and write Gujarati. She recommended I go to the Jal Phiroj Clubwala Dar E Meher and get some books. In that era, we did not question our parent's decisions. I went annoyed and reluctantly. Ervad Pesi told me that it was neither Hormuzd nor Behram Roj. When I disclosed my mission, he told me to visit the Annie Besant Library at the Theosophical Society. I had visited earlier with Mum, loved the world's largest Banyan tree there, but persistently proceeded to the few bookcases. Many books were in Gujarati; now I know it was Avestan or Pahlavi. I was comforted; a book by Sir Ervad Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, referenced as a relative of my elder sister's husband. Triumph: a book in

English. "The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra" by D. J. Irani. Mum was impressed. The word "divine songs" sounded like hymns. At my Catholic School we sang their hymns and said their prayers. Two wins, a word I understood; a voluminous book in English to last all summer. My strategies were in place.

After days of delaying, or rather reading six romance novels by Barbara Cartland hidden under my mattress, I started on Yasna 29.1, Ahunavaiti Gatha. "*Unto Thee, O Lord, the Soul of Creation cried: 'For whom didst Thou create me, and who so fashioned me?'*" Sister Mary had read similar texts at the school assemblies each morning. I began to enjoy the conversations Zarathushtra had with Ahura Mazda. I thought he was lucky to have a dialogue with God while mine was a monologue. What started as a reluctant assignment, as a teenager, took many interesting twists and

turns! My takeaway as a teenager was elementary. The Gathas were the words of Zarathushtra. How profound.

Gatha Ahunavaiti addresses the concept of Truth – Asha. My Mum had talked about Truth endlessly. In her words, it would be the cornerstone of success in my life. I knew I had to make a responsible choice. I should use my Vohu Mano – the Good Mind. I did not get the depth of the concept. Zarathushtra here talks of the evildoer. I could only relate this to people who had wronged me at school. Zarathushtra asks Ahura Mazda for inspiration. If I had a chance, what would I have asked for.

Gatha Ushtavaiti is about Zarathushtra looking for followers to do the right thing. Yasna 44.6: "*Doth Armaity (Right Mindedness), through the benevolence of our actions, further the cause of*

Truth?" 44.7: "Who established blessed Armaity, the spirit of Benevolence...." Yasna 44.18:

"How, indeed, shall I earn the final reward through Truth and Right?"

The gift of happiness is yours, if deserved. Rather complex to fathom. My English translation of the Ashem Vohu, which I said nightly, parrot-like, quickly was similar. "In righteousness lies real happiness for it is God's finest gift; happiness is his who is righteous for the sake of righteousness."

Gatha Spenta Mainyu, references a time of social and political uncertainty. It again addresses the conflict between righteousness and unrighteousness. My world was small; the ideas were larger than my world, so I read on.

Gatha Vohu Khshathra references an "ideal society." Leaders of countries are charged with responsibility of that order.

Gatha Vahisto Ishti was short and sweet. Zarathushtra advises his youngest daughter as she gets married on living a righteous life.

It is now August 1975. I came to New York City (NYC), a young bride married into the Clubwala family. Serendipity took on a new meaning. March 1976, our first Jamshedi Navroze celebration, as it was called then. A group of Parsis met at the UN International School in NYC; cooked Pulav Dar, Sali Boti and celebrated. It was a good beginning recalling that my first twenty one years were centered around a strong Parsi community at the Jal Phiroj Clubwala Memorial Hall aka Parsi Club with badminton and table tennis matches, square dances, fancy dress competitions, celebrations of Jamshedi Navroze,

Navroze and Khordadsal functions with fun filled activities, picnics and superb camaraderie. We 200 Parsis knew each other. Therefore, imagine how difficult it was to date Astad on his motor bike without an immediate report to his mother!

The Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY) in North America was the first Association to receive a gift from Arbab Rustam and Morvarid Guiv for the purchase of a property as our Darbe Mehr, called Dar-e-Mehr since 2015. The New Rochelle, NY, center, inaugurated December 1977, was a large home, lovingly remodeled for a prayer room, a place to meet for our celebrations and children's monthly religious classes. It was a place of love, sharing and Parsipanu.

ZAGNY introduced Adult Religious Classes. A tall imposing man, good looking, debonair in his bowtie greeted us. He was a tower of intelligence. It was Professor Kaikhosrov D. Irani, fondly known as KD. In his very unassuming and storytelling style he talked about the Gathas and everything on Zoroastrianism. His passion, wisdom and explanations were deep. The penny dropped soon. I was listening to D. J. Irani's son. This book that I had accidentally found had a living dynamic link. Dinshawji, as I call him now, published his book in 1924 in London - a translation of selected Gatha verses, a little over half the total. He finished the complete translation in 1938 a few months before his death. Rabindranath Tagore says in the Foreword: "The most important of all outstanding facts of Iranian history is the religious reform brought about by Zarathushtra. He was the first man we know who

gave a definitely moral character and direction to religion, and at the same time preached the doctrine of monotheism".

In 1998, KD republished Dinshawji's complete translations: "The Gathas – The Hymns of Zarathushtra." His introduction is the most succinct Gatha summary you can read. I revert to Dinshawji's book because the verses convey the religious message rather than the literal translation, although I have acquired some others of the 26 or so translations.

In the early 1990s, during the five Gatha days, I read Dinshawji's text from a xeroxed copy. My focus now dwells on deeper issues. Zarathushtra very courageously brought the message of Ahura Mazda and advocated a religion that was contrary to practices at that time. Truth must prevail in thought and action. Elimination of deception was necessary. Zarathushtra's messages address all humanity, plead with us to preserve the environment, see all people as equal and to make the practice of our religion a part of our daily lives. Zarathushtra asks Ahura Mazda how he can share these insights and convey that the essential form of worship in our religion is to live a life of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Simple, but challenging I say.

The Ushatvaiti Gatha Ha 44.13 says: "This I ask Thee, tell me truly, O Ahura; How shall we dispel the Spirit of Untruth from among us. Let it be with the unfaithful and the disobedient, Who strive not to be the companions of Truth, Who care not to listen to the counsels of the Good Mind." Our Good Mind is the influencer. But life, career and the daily challenges make all this

seem impossible. I begin to see how complex the path ahead is and how I would navigate it in a world which did not subscribe to this wisdom. Mum's discussions on Truth take on a new meaning. Truth at all costs in a career? Is silence on my part represented as Truth in the business world?

At our opening ceremony for our new Dar-e-Mehr, 26 March 2016, KD as the keynote speaker, aged 93, spoke on Zarathushtra's message to us without a single note. The message of Zarathushtra was engraved in his heart, mind and in every cell in his body. Sadly, he passed on 29 June 2017. He had chosen a few verses of the Gathas for his final ceremony. I owe him a debt of gratitude. He left me with an inquiring mind and a love for the Gathas.

Fast forward, it is Fall 2019. Adil Mistry begins a Gatha class at ZAGNY with Keki Dadachanji as our teacher supported by Ervad Cawas Desai who has become the historian. We have had about a dozen classes as I write. My learning evolves. Vohu Mano is an intuitive wisdom which, when not clouded by selfishness, anger, and fear, allows us to grasp right and wrong. We must awaken it, nurture it, and grow it. To awaken your Vohu Mano you must have the will and determination to do the right thing and resist the wrong. Knowing what is right is just not enough. The faculty that decides to act on the right is Urvan. It is the Urvan that is judged on the Chinvat Bridge. Vohu Mano guides us through the choices and we are rewarded according to our choices. Asha, Truth; is a "spiritual law"; It is also a vision of an ideal creation. We must strive to create perfect harmony and balance in that creation. It is

our mission in life as Zarathushtis to work to restore the perfect balance and harmony on this earth. A person who accepts this way of life is a Zarathushti.



"He [Zarathushtra] was the first man we know who gave a definitely moral character and direction to religion, and at the same time preached the doctrine of monotheism". Rabindranath Tagore

Zarathushtra's statue in the Court of the Appellate Division, New York

The "Ahuna Vairya" prayer (Yatha Ahu Vairyo) is believed to have been said by Ahura Mazda when he created the world. It is one of our most powerful prayers, along with the "Ashem Vohu" and the "Yenge Hatham." Our teacher asks us to reflect on them deeply.

Some paras in the Ahunavaiti Gatha Ha 28.1, "*Ahya yasa nemangaha, Ustana zasto rafedhrahya.....*" repeat many times. Zarathushtra asks for help to bring harmony to the soul of creation. The repetition is to remind us repeatedly of what we should do but do not do.

Retiring in 2012 from United Nations Development Programme, my Norwegian boss, working with the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development, saluted me as a "dying rare species" as a Zoroastrian and referenced the Gathas as an epic. A distinct honor. I could see the large audience add Zoroastrianism to their Google bar. He brought the President of the Group to meet a Zoroastrian, describing it as an opportunity he may never have.

The Gathas tell an eternal story: the time of creation, the earth crying out for support, the need for re-engineering, if I can call it that, to save the world and the environment, the need for honesty, purity, the journey of one's souls and much more. The Gathas are our spiritual laws to help us achieve spiritual heights. In the words of Keki Dadachanji, "live by these teachings persistently, sincerely and with sustained enthusiasm." Yes, choosing Truth added a few more years to achieving my career goal at UNDP. Mum, I will always be grateful. Reaching my total awakening with the Gathas will take my lifetime.



Behroze Clubwala is a passionate and active member at ZAGNY. She retired from the United Nations Development Programme as a Human Resources Advisor after an amazing 37-year tenure.

THE CORE TEACHINGS OF THE GATHAS OF ZARATHUSTRA SPITAMA

The precepts of the Younger Avesta that contradict and a Zoroastrian's path to choose aright

By Zane Dalal

Cardinal König, the late Archbishop of Vienna, is just one of many clerics from Christian denominations who have weighed in on Zoroastrianism¹. Most of them are intrigued if not challenged and enticed by its compelling universal message, its timeless currency and its ability to move men to live better lives. Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang remarked that if he had not been born a Christian, he would most have liked to have been born a Zoroastrian².

It is the solidity and the unassailable logic of the ideas that make this first foray into monotheism so compelling and so attractive.

However, it should be of concern to all Zoroastrians if there is error or confusion in what is presented. The confusion undoubtedly arises if one does not separate the Gathas and the time in which Zarathushtra lived from the impulses of Mazdaism and the writings of the Younger Avesta in the third century BCE.

Scholars who have spent any time with the Gathas know that the message contained in them is at odds with, or completely contradicted by later texts. Whilst both form the textual and theological canon

of modern Zoroastrianism, the *two strands of religious teaching confound and complicate one another*. Which then should be followed? The answer seems completely obvious, namely that the Gathas must prevail over the Younger Avesta, at all times and in all places.

One strand represents the original Gathas, the ideas put forward between the Godhead and Zarathushtra, the text of which speak to profound philosophical questions posed and answered in this sacred hymn format. This version of the faith is deeply introspective and relies on each individual in their own thought processes exercising their own faith with the Almighty. It is stylistically both poetic and metaphorical, challenging the mind with great and lasting philosophies that are being introduced for the very first time. The second, later version as contained in the Younger Avesta, contains multiple strands and variations on those original themes, repurposed by priests to create simplistic traditional myths by which they hoped to control the burgeoning and organized population of faithful. Their intent was to compile, codify and fix the religious canon of Zoroastrianism, and once and for all prescribe absolute dogma,

the falseness at the heart of all religion, by which the importance and essence of the original Gathas are seriously shortchanged, if not obliterated all together. The style is not poetic, nor can these dogmatic and controlling texts devised by a tyrannical and deeply flawed priestly class, begin to mirror the eloquence or substance of their sacred source material. This difference is not merely stylistic. If we are supposed to know a certain course or philosophy the Gathas make it plain and uncontestable, whereas the murky, muddling origins of some material, especially eschatological, is obviously the multiple transference of multiple people.

High Priest Minocher Homji delivered a speech at the 1st -World Conference on the Zoroastrian Religion, London, 1984 –which was reproduced in the WZO Souvenir Edition from the same year. In this now famous speech, he said the following: *“I request you to distinguish between the religion of Zarathushtra and Zoroastrianism. Many scholars have written on ‘later Zoroastrianism’ and they call it Zoroastrianism. There is a world of difference between the religion of Zarathushtra and the (later) third century Zoroastrianism and (therefore) between the Gathas and*

the Vendidad. Dr. Dhalla has done a yeoman service by distinguishing the periods in his 'History of Zoroastrians'. So please, whenever you read some quotations from the Vendidad, also take care to see that you read quotations from the Gathas".

Cardinal König, an exact contemporary of Homji, fails to account for this difference. Whereas there is mention of an afterlife, there is no mention in the Gathas of a Heaven or a Hell. The Gathas hold that Good does eventually triumph, but a constant battle continues every minute of every day, until the course is done. That battle is within us, a test for each individual, and it is a battle of the mind, whilst in this mortal span. (Yasna 48.1)

In the later canon, the battle takes on huge proportions— suggesting erroneously that wickedness is equal to 'evil' – some primordial force with its own powers that exists alone, separate and self- propelling. To misunderstand this is to run amok amidst theories of dualism. All religions must explain the presence of Evil, despite an Omnipotent Godhead, or give a dualistic rationale that equalizes Righteousness and Wickedness as two sides of the same coin. But they have tended to be weaker theories, and though aligned with the Younger Avesta, do not have root in the Gathas. Dualism goes against fundamental principles by suggesting that some extra force, other than Ahura Mazda, can 'create'. The Gathas simply state that to side with good is to ever reside in a state of happiness, joy and ease – in the *House of Asha*. To side with wickedness is to ever reside in a state of discomfort, unease and shadow - all that is not

Asha or, the *House of the Lie*. (Yasna 45.7). The mythology surrounding the 'Cinvut' - or Bridge of Judgment, has presented a theatrical setting similar to the later Greek or Egyptian traditions, complete with rivers, ferryman, and gatekeepers, which in turn may have transferred back into the Younger Avesta. The Gathas make reference to a "Cinvut", but it is much more a conduit than an edifice, which the Gathas tell us with absolute surety, not only awaits us,

The Gathas simply state that to side with good is to ever reside in a state of happiness, joy and ease – in the House of Asha. To side with wickedness is to ever reside in a state of discomfort, unease and shadow or the House of the Lie. (Yasna 45.7)

but is the necessary and preordained destiny of life. (Yasnas 46.10 and 51.13)

The Gathas also refer to a period of Refreshment or Repurposing. This again, is as powerful as it is abstract. This time of perfection when the whole world is governed by ASHA, and Saoshants walk the earth, is the realization of Good eventually prevailing over Wickedness. (Yasnas 45.11, 46.3, 48.11/12) It is just an exposition suggesting that the end of the period of time in which we now reside will manifest only Good creations. The younger Avesta, similar in scope to so many religious

texts that are separated from source material, finds itself putting forward commentary that expands and adds whatever seems to be the prevalent view at the time, even if it is not what Zarathushtra taught, or if it contradicts or changes his fundamental understandings. The Gathas, however, convey the most influential and important theological point in human history, namely 'human free will' and that the choices be made wisely in the sight of ASHA. (Yasna 30. 2)

The Younger Avesta talks of the arrival of the Saoshant. The Messianic Return of a Prophet, who will be of the lineage of Zarathustra is likely the root of the Messianic prophecy in all the western religions. The origin of the Messianic mission on earth is therefore plausibly Zoroastrian, but in its fanciful storytelling, definitely attributable to the Younger Avesta.

The Gathas speak of a moment in time when the whole world will be governed by ASHA and the time at which Truth shall prevail over the Lie. (Yasnas 46.3 and 51.9) Whether this absolutely requires the return of a single Messianic prophet is certainly not in the Gathas. In fact, Saoshant (the name or title of that 'returning being') in its original context does not have to be one person, but can be the accumulation of several people who are Saoshant – in other words, so perfectly Zoroastrian that they are embodiments of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds - living and manifesting only these three in an unfailing, zero error, self-perpetuating manner.

The Gathas also make each human the independent and individual center of the faith and in many

places speak of Zarathushtra as a man, a gifted spiritual man, but nevertheless human and not divine. (Yasna 29.9) The Soul of Creation initially decries that Ahura Mazda has chosen a **man** for the great work that is to come. Zarathushtra teaches us his philosophies by posing questions from the state of a mortal man to Ahura Mazda, the Godhead, who then reveals the plan **Kxathra**, as ordained by Righteousness **Asha**, and as revealed through the Good Mind **Vohu Mana**. It is the stylistic format of all the Gathas proper, and therefore Zarathushtra's mortality is attested by every question asked. It is in this way that Ahura Mazda proves to the Soul of Creation that man is capable of achieving the goal to which he has been set and that Zarathushtra is the man to whom the Soul of Creation must give aid and support for the success of his earthly ministry. In contrast, the Younger Avesta, misses the point, by not emphasizing the individual's value and rather speaks of the Divinity of Zarathushtra who, similar to other revealed religions, outlines a program in which all humans are expected to fail.

The Gathas importantly draw fundamental characteristics that are stronger and more emphatic about Free Will, (Yasna 30.2) the character of Man, and the relationship he has with God. The best exemplar of this character and relationship is evident in Ahura Mazda's choice of the man Zarathushtra to lead the new religion and the "co-equal through Vohu Mana, co-worker of Asha" stance that Zarathushtra adopts. The Gathas contend that man is a coworker of God's mission, a friend, and at times, equally empowered through Vohu Mana providing for Free Will and Self Determination in an absolute way, making the failings of

relationship or the idea of Original Sin an anathema.

Zoroastrians are co-opters of the Truth, co-directing and co-leading the way to the House of Asha, with God at their side, not reigning from above, nor driving from behind, but a co-spirit who grants them the prospect of complete perfection if they choose it. Man, who like Zarathushtra, can ascend to the highest moral and ethical state

We have a duty to make frank and pragmatic appraisals of each piece of religious text, prayer or recitation, or for that matter any life choice that presents, and measure it against the intent of the Gathas and Zarathushtra's original message.

in life on earth, and is capable of empowered self-determination is not the creature bound to service in other religions. That creature born imperfect, who continually must recognize his imperfection and struggle under its weight, even whilst praying for connection with God, all the while is commanded to be perfect and is a figure with a losing gambit. The gulf between the message of the Gathas and the later religious canon that represents recodified Zoroastrianism is so wide as to suggest heresy.

We have a duty to make frank and pragmatic appraisals of each

piece of religious text, prayer or recitation, or for that matter any life choice that presents, and measure it against the intent of the Gathas and Zarathushtra's original message, making sure that those are always the predominant themes. This 'call to reason', this 'call to judgment', not God's wrath later- but our personal judgment in the moment, is the very essence of Zoroastrianism, and whilst it might seem like a good suggestion, it is no less than an 'inexorable command' from Ahura Mazda, to all believers, delivered through his coworker, Zarathushtra, in this splendid text from the Gathas: ***Yasna 30 Verse 2: Hear ye then with your ears; see ye the bright flames with the eyes of the Better Mind. Let each man/ woman choose his/her belief with that freedom of choice, which each must have at great events.***

END NOTES:

1. Franz Cardinal König's article is posted on <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zarathustra>
2. Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang's remark is popularly attributed to him.



Zane Dalal was born and educated in England holding degrees from the University of Oxford, and Indiana University. He is Music Director of the Symphony Orchestra of India. Zane's wide ranging academic pursuits include European Medieval History, US Constitutional Law, Comparative Theology and regular commentary on Zoroastrian themes.

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THUS SPEAKS ZARATHUŠTRA TO ME...AND THUS HE DOES NOT

Inconsistencies Between The Gāthās And The Later Texts

By Shahin Bekhradnia

As Zoroastrians, where are we supposed to draw our knowledge from? For that matter where are Christians supposed to look for their inspiration? Should they be trying to work out from the Bible what Jesus was hoping to teach as his message? Or should they be looking at the Pope or the Archbishop of Canterbury today with their edicts about contraception, abortion, gay vicars and celibacy? Which is the true message? I dare to suggest that thinking people who really want the original ideas would go to the New Testament Bible. So we Zoroastrians should turn to the Gathic verses (Gathas: songs/verses with metrical rhythms).

We are lucky to have access to the Gathas, Zarathushtra's original philosophy exposing his mental conversation with Ahura Mazda, the divinity which guided him to formulating his message. In considering what the Gathas say to me, I am interested in what relevance they have for my life in today's world. More than three millennia down the line (suggested by Stanley Insler's analysis -the late Yale professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology) we still strive to create a compassionate society showing respect towards each other through honesty, justice

and the pursuit of peace and harmony - ideas found in the Gathas. We also more than ever need to respect our environment that is so central to Zarathushtra's philosophy.

Lack of familiarity with the Gathas understandably makes sceptics ask whether we are not perhaps inventing or bending the philosophy to suit the needs and fashions of the times we are living in today. To dispel this cynical view, we should examine the appropriate sections of the Gatha verses which unambiguously advocate right thinking and attribute moral responsibility to each individual to choose the right path leading to improvements and progress. This positive spirit of thinking exists in contrast to the negative spirit, where deception, dishonesty and selfishness prevail.

The sections generally agreed by translators to be foundational concern the importance of the moral struggle between good and evil. This discussion can be found in Yasna 30 verses 2 to 5 which refer to two spirits/mindsets in thought, offering two paths of action: one leading to positive and one to negative outcomes (truth/asha vs deceit/druj). Significantly in this same section, it makes it clear we each make our own

moral decision & carry responsibility for the choice we make.

Listen with your ears to the highest truth, consider it with illumined minds carefully and decide man for man (or maybe as in the Pahlavi rendition: each man and woman) *personally between the two paths, good and evil. (Yasna 30, 2)*

The two choices embody truth and untruth. The emphasis on the truth and a hope for a just ruler and respect for the laws of the land are poignantly ironic in view of the current political climate where fake news fosters social and political disharmony. This philosophy of moral choice speaks to me loud and clear, and is paramount as the core teaching of Zoroastrianism.

However, alongside this fundamental tenet, we also encounter the entity called Ahura Mazda with which Zarathushtra engaged through a vision or revelation. What Zarathushtra does NOT say is that this divine entity resides up in the sky and intervenes to change human fortunes. Linguists agree that the translation of 'Ahura Mazda' roughly equates to Lord of Mind, Lord of Wisdom, Lord of Thinking, Wise Lord, Mindful One. Translators have adopted these interpretations of the designation of the Divine. Given the

ZARATHUSHTRA'S GATHAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

conceptual similarity of translation, it is evident that the word Mazda denotes the functioning of the mind or thinking.

The 3 major Abrahamic religions with which Zoroastrians have had most contact, each identify the divine entity (God, Jehovah, Allah) as being located up in the sky or at least outside of one's being. Their adherents attribute all sorts of anthropomorphic qualities such as mercy, anger, kindness etc. to the divine being. Non-Zoroastrian commentators/translators may have therefore assumed that Zarathushtra's divine entity must share the same sort of conceptual divine characteristics with which they were familiar, reflected in the translations and assumptions they present about our religion. Zoroastrians themselves also have regularly chosen to present Ahura Mazda in a similar fashion, perhaps to counteract the fast-growing popularity of Christianity & Islam. The 13th century Zartosht Nameh's miraculous birth echoes the Christian tradition. Certainly, by the 19th century Bombay Parsees produced an image strikingly similar to the depiction of Jesus. Subsequently, some interpreters of Zarathushtra's revelation have copied the Christian style of address to the divine being, notably the liberal Dastur Dhalla whose English prayers are recognizable clones of Christian ones.

This is far from the concept of the

divine being found in the Gathas where it is located in one's mind which has created the awareness in each of us of good /truth/asha and its opposite of bad/deceit/druj. It rings true that one might have an internal dialogue within one's own mind asking questions, and formulating answers that come into the mind after the question has been posed.



The 13th century Zartosht Nameh's miraculous birth echoes the Christian tradition. Certainly, by the 19th century Bombay Parsees produced an image strikingly similar to the depiction of Jesus.

My understanding of Ahura Mazda is that this is the power to think. The Lord of Wisdom /Thought/ Mind enables us to make our own choices and to differentiate between positive and negative actions. It is also the unknowable energy that

has given the natural world its order and workings (Asha Vahishta = Ordibehesht), an understanding of which comes through the mind. Ahura Mazda has given rise to the other characteristics that can make us complete balanced human beings, such as rightful thinking (Vohu Manah = Bahman), control, organization, discipline (Kshathra = Shahrvir), humility/piety/devotion (Armaity=Armita), health/fertility/perfection (Haurvatat = Khordad), and longevity/immortality (Ameretat = Amordad). These traits are embodied in the Amesha Spentas (Amshaspandan) referred to in the Gathas. Using these qualities, we are able to harness the power of our minds to make rational choices & decisions based on logic and common sense and to arrive at an insight into the laws of the natural universe and to make progress. This is what the Gathas say to me.

In the Gathas we also find Zarathushtra expressing his earnest hope aloud, that others will be persuaded to hear, understand and accept his message inspired from within his head. Zarathushtra is NOT speaking to an entity somewhere up in the ether but rather musing upon what he has concluded from his mind (Ahura Mazda) in order to achieve the best life for all.

Now we come to the final concern - what the Gathas MOST DEFINITELY do not say to us: ideas embarrassingly found in some Zoroastrians' discourse concern pure/impure actions. They have their origins in a text called the Videvdat/

Vendidad and are bizarre distortions of Zarathushtra's moral philosophy about the innate existence of positive and negative energies inside our minds. Pronouncements in the Vendidad about evil spirits, and penances to be undertaken for breaching the rules, are hair-raising and bear no resemblance to the rational mental process advocated by Zarathushtra for reaching all decisions and beliefs. An example (tr. James Darmesteter) is taken from Fargard 9, section 3, of the Vendidad:

47. O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! If a man who does not know the rites of cleansing according to the law of Mazda, offers to cleanse the unclean, how shall I then fight against that Druj who from the dead rushes upon the living? How shall I fight against that Druj who from the dead defiles the living?

49. O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! What is the penalty that he shall pay?

Ahura Mazda answered: 'The worshippers of Mazda shall bind him; they shall bind his hands first; then they shall strip him of his clothes, they shall cut the head off his neck, and they shall give over his corpse unto the greediest of the corpse-eating creatures made by the beneficent Spirit, unto the vultures, with these words

And an example of the superstitious beliefs in named demons is well illustrated in Fargard 7, section 5:

5. Ahura Mazda answered: 'At the next watch after death, the Druj Nasu comes and rushes upon the dead, from the regions of the north, in the shape of a raging fly, with knees and tail sticking out, droning

without end, and like unto the foulest Khrafstra.

And again Fargard 11, section 9:

9. 'I drive away Aeshma, I drive away the Nasu, I drive away direct defilement, I drive away indirect defilement.

'I drive away Khru, I drive away Khruighni.

'I drive away Buidhi, I drive away the offspring of Buidhi.

'I drive away Kundi, I drive away the offspring of Kundi.

'I drive away the gaunt Bushyasta, I drive away the long-handed Bushyasta; [I drive away Muidhi, I drive away Kapasti.]

'I drive away the Pairika that comes upon the fire, upon the water, upon the earth, upon the cow, upon the tree. I drive away the uncleanness that comes upon the fire, upon the water, upon the earth, upon the cow, upon the tree.

It should be pointed out that before Zarathushtra spread his radical revolutionary message, his contemporaries were polytheists and probably shamanists who believed in demons similar to those accepted by some religions still today. We can see that Tibetan Buddhism has integrated a highly demonic local pre-existing set of beliefs with the later arrival of Buddhism. It is unlikely that Zarathushtra's concepts were able to supplant belief in all pre-existing supernatural beings/deities, even if at some later point the principal aspects were officially adopted. Similarly, in some African or south American Christian groups, beliefs and practice will be very different from Christians in Scotland or in New Zealand. So within

Zoroastrianism, the parallel survival of beliefs in demons will have informed the content of the Vendidad which seems to have come back into the mainstream by Sasanian times and probably influenced local versions of Zoroastrianism.

The Sasanian kings were from a Zoroastrian priestly line. Two important priests Tansar and later Kartir (who served under 5 successive kings) were given responsibility to create a new official version of Zoroastrianism based on the literature and information they could bring together (after the alleged destruction of libraries by the Macedonian invaders 5 centuries earlier). The new redacted state religion certainly endorsed Zoroastrianism evidenced by the reverse sides of Sasanian coins which invariably depict a fire altar. However the new corpus of doctrine appears to endorse a dualism which juxtaposes the evil spirit (Angra Mainyu morphed linguistically into Ahriman) with the divine entity (Ahura Mazda morphed linguistically into Ohrmazd). Apparently, the beneficent energy or spirit of positivity- Spenta Mainyu - was eclipsed and overlooked. A once monotheistic system was transformed with the passage of around 1500 years from Zarathushtra's Gathas, promoted by the Sasanian dynasty which seems to have been comfortable with this hybrid.,

The messages found in the Gathas had obviously been truly forgotten, or at the best distorted, by that time. So it is the legacy of the Sasanians and the tone of the Vendidad which assumed prominence thereafter informing official Zoroastrian thought.

So when we hear threats of the dire consequences of not performing the last rites in a required fashion, or of admitting “impure” outsiders to our temples, burial grounds etc. or of marrying “out”, or of not using sandalwood to fuel our fires, or of entering sacred precincts during menstruation etc. , we can only conclude that those so called Zoroastrians who think like this, have been fed on the “nasu”/druj contents of the Videvdat /Vendidad which has more to do with Voodoo than with Zoroastrianism. Those are people to whom Zarathushtra most definitely has NOT spoken.



Shahin Bekhradnia started the Pourchista Foundation in Yazd for young Zoroastrian ladies to enable them to earn a living, she helped to open a senior citizens' day center there. She has been a long-standing advocate for environmental policies and stood as a Green Party candidate in the UK General Election back in 1992. She sits as a magistrate in the criminal and family courts in Oxfordshire, UK.

Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed world-religions, and it has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith.

Mary Boyce. “Zoroastrians”. 1979. Routledge & Kegan Paul

THOUGHTS FROM INSLER

An Interview with the Renowned Gathic Scholar

Fezana Journal presents extracts from an interview conducted with the late Professor of Sanskrit at Yale University, Stanley Insler, one of the world's renowned specialist on the Gathas by Shahin Bekhradnia in November 2012.

Insler was born in New York City on June 23, 1937. He graduated from Columbia College in 1957. He studied at the University of Tübingen, Germany (1960 to 1962), and completed a doctorate at Yale University in 1963. Upon earning his Ph.D Insler joined Yale's faculty, where he was later named the Edward E. Salisbury Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology. Insler wrote extensively about the literatures and languages of ancient India and Iran, Sanskrit classical and epic poetry, and Pali and Prakrit texts. His interests were wide ranging — from religious history and textual interpretation, rhythmic patterns and effects, foundational issues of semantics, morphology, and phonology. Among his many achievements, Insler is known for his translation of the Gathas, which made this classic text accessible to many Zarathushtrians. His many publications include “The Love of Truth in Ancient Iran,” Parsiana (September, 1989), 18-20; chapters on “Human Behavior and Good Thinking” and “Zarathustra's Vision” in An Introduction to the



Gathas of Zarathustra, ed. Dina G. McIntyre (Pittsburgh, 1989-90). In 2001, he was elected fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was granted emeritus status upon retirement in 2012 and died at Yale–New Haven Hospital on January 5, 2019, aged 81.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SANSKRIT

No one can really try to interpret the Gathic language without a good grounding in Vedic Sanskrit. In terms of linguistic history and Indo-European grammar, Sanskrit is really the only language which gives a pretty full picture. And furthermore, there is the unmistakable fact that the literary devices and stylistic metaphors used throughout the Gathas are so very resonant of what one finds in the Vedas. For anyone who is trying to understand

th Gathas and who does not have a familiarity with the Vedas, some of the expressions will completely fool you if you try to give them a literal translation. Instead one should look for parallel expressions and rhetorical turns of phrase in Vedic literature. By doing so, you will then understand the style of expression used by Zarathustra which is typical of the common era shared by the Gathas and the Vedas. Many scholars overlook this important fact.

OPINION OF ZARATHUSTRA

I have to say that he had a great intellect. The Gathas reveal a deep thought process in which abstraction and reality are juxtaposed. The physical and mental realms are constantly being placed in parallel with each other and the sympathetic understanding of the human condition is evident throughout. He asks questions to which there are no cut and dry answers - instead he explores and directs our thoughts to some of the possibilities but leaves us the freedom to come up with our own understanding. It is above all a philosophy where intelligent reasoning and freedom to choose underpin all other considerations. And the man who managed to put down his thoughts and communicate such important moral values in this way is worthy of endless respect and admiration.

THE LITERARY VALUE OF THE SONGS OF ZARATHUSTRA

The quality of the poetry is outstanding and for anyone who has any appreciation of this genre

of literature, you will find rhythm and meter, rhyming, alliteration, metaphor and synonyms and every sort of word play. We have to remember that in the past, in a pre-literate society, it was a very common way of packaging a message in the form of poetry. I have always told my students that the ancients used their ears the way we use our eyes.



OPINIONS ON ZOROASTRIANS

I love them! I have been welcomed and given warm hospitality among them, wherever I have gone. As human beings they are wonderful. However I have to be frank about something else. It is very disappointing indeed to find that with very few exceptions, hardly any members of your own religion have bothered to read the Gathas. I find that quite staggering. They don't have to try very hard to find a copy somewhere these days - and I

don't think they have to read only my translation, although obviously I think I'm the closest in translation and spirit to what Zoroaster wanted to say. Nevertheless the other translations would at least give an idea of the contents. As an example (and this is by any means unusual), a reasonably intelligent lady I know from the past and saw again in London the other day asked me what the Gathas have to say about

abortion and being gay. That is such an uninformed question that it makes me despair that the very adherents of the faith still have not grasped the wonderful qualities within the message of Zarathustra. People have to be reminded that the Gathas were composed around 3500 years ago and Zarathustra did not make dogmatic statements. On the contrary, free choice within a context of rational clear thinking was prescribed as the way forward.

I fear that, as I just said, a great number of your community seem not to want to take the time to find out for themselves: they appear to want spoon feeding in terms of religious tenets which of course allows the more extreme and misinformed elements to spout

whatever they want. And ironically this is precisely the opposite of the enlightened message of Zoroaster. I don't want to appear ungrateful for the admiration I have had the pleasure of receiving from so many of you, but I sincerely hope that within your own community, members will wake up and realize that they must take responsibility for their own futures and they need to read and become better informed themselves and forge their own opinions based on the Gathas.

SOLACE FROM THE GATHAS

A Tribute to My Grandmother

By Mahshad Khosraviani

I found myself sitting in my Grandmother's rocking chair by the fireplace, holding on to my Gathas book and staring at the burning logs of wood turning from bright orange to red, crackling away while gracing the room with heat and light – truly mesmerized by its unmatched beauty. I held on to my adored Gatha book (a family heirloom) like my life depended on it; a treasured book, passed down through generations that my Grandmother had gifted me as a Nowruz present years ago, and the only thing that seemed to calm my heart after learning that my Grandmother had lost her battle to cancer.

I felt numb for I had lost my best friend, my angel, and all I could think of was this book, the Gathas. A book so old that some of its words had faded away with age, and its pages had to be taped on in order to hold them in their rightful place. I gently ran my fingers through its pages, mindful of all the tears and folds that it had collected throughout its life and came across my favorite verse; the first one ever that my Grandmother taught me: Yasna 30 Verse 2, *"Listen with your ears the highest truth, consider them with illumined minds carefully and choose each man and woman*



personally between the two paths, good and evil. Before ushering in of the great day, or the day of judgment, arise all of you and try to spread Ahura's words."

would always say that Zarathushtra phrased this passage so wisely and eloquently; the choice he speaks of is greater than one can ever put in words. For when we say 'good', 'bad' or in this case 'evil', we are opening the gates to a universe beyond our imagination. The words we choose – good or bad – mixed with our beliefs, coalesce into our reality. What we speak over our life is what our life will become. She introduced me to the Gathas at an early age, & patiently taught me everything that I know today; my journey of becoming a mobedyar was corollary inspired by her unfeigned piety.

The Gathas draws great attention to the eminence of choice, and its repercussions. I was taught to put choice as an authority in my daily life, a power to be heedful of.

By choosing how to utilize each word, we either walk into a world filled with misery, dissatisfaction, pain, anger, or one infused with positivity, love, gratitude, and wisdom. We often speak words without truly thinking about what we are saying; we tweet as we please or email while failing to comprehend the impact of our words and the power that they

each hold, the strength they carry to either inspire a soul or destruct one's happiness.

So, I think that's what Zarathushtra meant by 'Good Thoughts, Good Words, And Good Deeds', and the path between good or evil. The words 'good' or 'evil' each hold a universe unto itself depending on how they are exploited.

My Grandmother always told me that I am powerful. I have the power to choose my words and how I make others feel. I control how my world is painted through my thoughts and words. I learned early in life to let go of virulent words such as entitle and blame. For the reality is that I am not entitled to anything in life, and I will only attract unfavorable perceptions by blaming others for my unmet expectations. Through the doctrine

of Zarathushtra, my Grandmother taught me that words have the potency to either plant a garden or burn a forest down.

I flipped through few more pages and came across Yasna 30 verse 6, where it had been tattooed with ink, a scribble of notes analyzing the verse; emphasizing the importance of choice, as it is the fundamental ingredient of the human experience. Our days are bathed with choices, both knowingly and inadvertently. The choices we make shape our experiences and are a critical part of our self-development, leading us to where we are in life. *"...They did not choose the right path but followed the worst thought, the devil or anger, which is the cause of all evil deeds, so as to destroy the mental life of the people."* She often spoke of the choice to pass your wisdom from the years of your life rather than sufferings.

Our lives are tainted with unforeseen grief, pain and anxiety often difficult to digest, and one can only hope to grow stronger from them. By choosing to pass our wisdom, we are choosing to remain unbowed and live a life empty of despair.

Choosing wisdom over suffering can prompt one to forgive. The choice that our prophet has accorded us is a powerful tool at our disposal. Forgiveness is an immense choice engendering tremendous results. Holding yourself a prisoner to anger, sadness, or frustration will only bear pain. Forgiving yourself and others is a precious gift allowing for healing, whilst instilling love and happiness. I often remind myself of the choice that Zarathushtra has granted us, *"...choose each man and woman personally between the two paths, good and evil..."* the choice to let

go of expectations, anger, fear, and hate; the choice to live an integrous life where we are in control of our thoughts, words, and deeds, the choice to have power over our words for they are magic, the choice to pass on our wisdom, strength, and love instead of suffering – leading to a happier you.

Through my studies of the Gathas, I learned that one should treat others as they wish to be treated. As a woman, I was not often (and occasionally now too) treated with the same respect as my male peers. However, it is noteworthy that in the ancient Persian society, women had far more significant roles than probably in any other pre-modern society. In antiquity, there were many female priests, politicians, warriors; we had female naval commanders in the Persian Empire, women who were owners of the largest estates up to the Sasanian time. The whole concept is rather more modern and not something that is often associated with ancient empires! But it is imperative to note, that the respect for woman has to do with Zarathustra's emphasis on the individual. My Grandmother would always point out that in the Gathas, Zarathushtra refers to "man or woman" or "man & woman" repeatedly, for the position of man and woman is equal in all aspects; also, in the rites, rituals, and customs man and woman are considered equal. And in particular, when Zarathushtra is officiating his youngest daughter's wedding, he honors her choice of her own husband, and refers to her and addresses her with utmost respect. Furthermore, Zarathustra considered the respect of man and woman as one of his duties; he has considered any kind of indignity or any inequality as something against the

order of wisdom.

There is a tremendous emphasis on personal conscience in Zoroastrianism. The Gathas of Zarathustra furnishes one's mind with the lofty, timeless, divine, fundamental and philosophical principles, to serve as a guide, throughout one's life. However, the Gathas are not prescriptions and interdictions, consisting of do's and don'ts. If this was the case, they would be only relevant for its time, or shortly thereafter, but the Gathas, and doctrine of Zarathustra are as relevant today as they were when composed by our prophet millennia ago. In fact, they are timeless and ever abiding. It is a doctrine based on the trifold ethos of "Humata, Hukhta, Hvarshta", denoting "Good thoughts, Good words, and Good deeds."

I have learned that there are no good deeds without good thoughts and good words, as reflected in the basic teachings of Zarathustra. A Zoroastrian is responsible for his or her own choices in life. The path we choose to follow can bare wondrous fulfillment or alternatively dire consequence. We choose to practice good thoughts, good words and good deeds not because we are forced to abide by a strict set of tenants, but because it is the correct thing to do. It is the path of righteousness, the path that Zoroastrians calls "Asha"; a unique notion to Zoroastrianism – highlighting the importance Zoroastrianism places on free will, providing and empowering, each individual with the ability and freedom of self-determining their own destiny by the choices they make, for themselves and by themselves.

I could almost hear her kind voice

as if she was sitting right next to me, her angelic laugh that effortlessly colored my soul, telling me to sit up, to smile, and to free myself from the pain. I knew deep down that I would be alright; I had been taught well and that I had her wisdom and Zarathustra's words to guide me through life. I gently ran my finger over her handwriting one last time and closed the adored Gathas book, placed it back on the bookshelf whilst saying a quick prayer for her departed soul.



Mobedyar Mahshad Khosraviani is the youngest female Zoroastrian mobedyar in Iran, and one of the first in North America. She is the only ordained mobedyar recognized by both NAMC and the Iranian mobed council. Currently she is the Secretary for the World Zoroastrian Organization, Canada.

STATUS OF WOMEN

The essential parity between the religious status of women and men in Zoroastrianism is reflected in the Avestan texts' frequent praise and veneration of its righteous adherents, irrespective of their gender. In Y. 39.2 it is said: "And we worship now the souls of truthful men and women, wherever they may have been born"

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THE PATH OF ASHA The Journey of a Convert

By Pablo Vasquez

In 2018, I undertook my Sedreh Pushi. Now, working on translating the Gathas, I've been rather self-reflective lately. Being a Mazdayasni convert can be rather lonely and I've been asked often why someone not raised Mazdayasni and culturally foreign to it would want to become one. I'm sharing my story once again with my wonderful community and to encourage anyone thinking of converting. Thank you for joining me on this journey!

GOOD THOUGHTS

"Where can I escape away to? My community and their leaders desire nothing to do with me nor can I find any people who are pleased with my words, for they listen instead to the lies of their leaders. How can I possibly please you, Ahura Mazda?" Yasna, 46.1

I'm Caribbean-born, raised in a multicultural/multifaith household blending Catholic and Santero influences. My family, led by my lovely parents, eventually moved to the USA and after a short stint in the Northeast, we moved to good ole Texas. I've lived here for almost 17 years and it's my homeland but it's definitely home, a feeling relatable to the diaspora that makes up the majority of modern Mazdayasna. During my teenage years, as most teens do, I developed a rebellious streak in a destructive fashion. Though I graduated early from high school and have always been intellectually-inclined, I fell in with

disgruntled types and found refuge in a criminal life where I also picked up the horrid habit of alcoholism. I left the gang life behind soon after but still used booze to escape my circumstances, anxieties, and anger. I left the Catholicism of my youth after a short flirtation with the priesthood and began exploring a variety of faiths, none of which fulfilled me or felt like home. In my chaotic stage of being a mid-20s militantly-atheist drunk college dropout living in poverty with no future, I ran across the Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR), one of the world's largest interfaith gatherings, during a late-night internet binge session.

I quickly shelved attending it as a hopeless desire despite my interest. I filled out the scholarship form but didn't think anything would come from it. However, shortly after, I awoke to an email stating that I had been granted a full scholarship to attend! I was stunned and took it as a sign that perhaps this meant something. My nights were filled with excitement and luggage preparation, daydreaming of the adventure that awaited me. I became hopeful again for the first time in a while, good thoughts filling my mind, and I didn't even know why yet. I would meet the Mazdayasnis here for the first time, a life-changing circumstance that I remember like it was yesterday. My life before this moment reminds me of Zarathushtra's own doubts

and despair with the turmoils he had to endure through his journey to establish his teachings. If our greatest Ashavan also felt lost and hopeless for a time in his life before Ahura Mazda brought him hope, then now I have no need to worry with faith by my side.

GOOD WORDS

"May he who teaches us of the true, blessed, and direct paths that lead us to where Ahura Mazda dwells here in physical realm along with the mental and spiritual realm be granted the greatest of all good things: To be faithful and knowledgeable, striving towards a holiness like yours, oh Mazda."

Yasna 43.3

While wandering around the PWR, collecting all the free literature, I came across the FEZANA booth and was stunned at encountering Mazdayasnis. See, in the Western World, we're taught that Mazdayasna is a dead and strange religion so imagine my surprise realizing it wasn't true. Out of genuine curiosity and amazement, I asked them a few questions which those present, including the lovely Rivetnas, the first Mazdayasnis I ever spoke to, were happy to answer. I noted the Mazdayasni panels during the PWR and woke up early the next day, excited and intrigued, for a Jashan at dawn. The ritual filled me with joy and peace as those ancient words and boisterous ritualists spoke to me of an eternal truth I hadn't yet discovered. Enraptured by their teachings, I realized it all resonated with my theological beliefs excellently so after I went back to the FEZANA booth, pestered those kindly folks a bit more, and purchased a handful of books, the only ones I bought at the PWR. On the flight home, I began my deep

dive into the ocean of Mazdayasni wisdom in which I still happily swim. However, nothing truly clicked until I read Zarathushtra's Gathas which I have now re-read in a multitude of translations and in Avestan countless times. That night I first read the Gathas I reread them



Statue of Zarathushtra, Efrin, Kurdish Syria

three times, the eternal wisdom resonating with me, and I knew that this was the faith I was searching for, the key to my spiritual future.

The Mazdayasni organizations I contacted never responded, sadly, and Mazdayasnis I encountered online and IRL advised me against converting. I wasn't deterred, finally reaching Mobed Behram Deboo at the California Zoroastrian Center. He taught me the sacred manthras and helped me further understand

Mazdayasna, sending me countless resources to prepare me for my Sedreh Pushi. I further consumed all Mazdayasni literature and media I could find and realized that, beyond my spiritual enrichment, Mazdayasna was also becoming my academic focus. My knowledge got to a level where I was accepted to SOAS University of London's prestigious Zoroastrian Studies program despite being a college dropout and after I finished my Sedreh Pushi that blazing hot July day, I left in a few weeks to London where I began my studies. I still remember that holy fire, the flames flickering as the mobed chanted in Avestan, the kushti tied around my waist as I held back tears feeling that my life was finally beginning.

GOOD DEEDS

"Oh Ahura Mazda and Asha, you point the way towards joy and bliss which we are certain to receive through the wonderful aid that you also gave to he who spoke for you."

Yasna 50.5

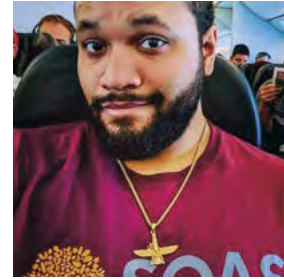
SOAS was a rigorous affair where I learned from great and strict teachers and had access to an endless amount of Mazdayasni resources. Honestly, I spent more time in the SOAS Library than I ever did with my friends! I finally learned the merits of discipline and hard work and, due to the NHS, I was finally able to attend to my physical and mental needs being previously not able to afford them. My mentors and friends, Mazdayasni and not, were supportive and though the community in London wasn't exactly welcoming, they weren't terribly rude about it. I concentrated on my studies and practiced alone as I usually had with the light of my laptop becoming the fire of my spiritual focus where I

ZARATHUSHTRA'S GATHAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

could meditate on all the blessings that rained upon me since becoming a Mazdayasni. My dissertation on Kurdish Mazdayasna brought me an invitation to speak at the World Zoroastrian Youth Congress, the first time I was around so many Mazdayasnis! It was a wonderful time I'll never forget that was sadly stained by what came after. Some Mazdayasnis detested that a convert outside the traditional cultural zones was invited to the event and a brutal attack against me began. It was my "dark night of the soul" where I was accused of every monstrous act possible and my family, friends, and colleagues were threatened for associating with me. I felt alone again, my community turning against me, but instead of retreating into the destructive ways of my youth I instead concentrated on my studies and faith. If the community didn't want me, I would still have Ahura

Mazda, the Yazata, and the Gathas, the stalwarts of my soul. Finally, I was vindicated against my attackers thanks in a large part to the efforts of Mazdayasnis that supported me. I graduated with Merit from SOAS and am currently undertaking second Masters and living with people I love experiencing after much turmoil a life of comfort, security, and wonderful prospects. When anyone asks me what changed me so drastically, I tell them it's all thanks to an ancient man, whose God was his best friend, and the poetry he composed to build a better life for himself and everyone else. Ahura Mazda is my closest friend, who I trust deeply, and I'm proud to be a Mazdayasni convert. I hope my story enlightened you about my life and the struggles converts can go through. If you're thinking about converting, do it, you won't regret it. Mazdayasna is here for you

and if you're ever feeling doubtful, pick up the Gathas and you'll be filled with comfort and assurance. I read it every day to meditate on as I go about my life and it's the best practice I've ever engaged in. I welcome you to walk with me down the Path of Asha and be truly transformed.*



Pablo Vazquez is currently working on translating the Gathas among other projects including hosting the Zoroastrian Q&A podcast (anchor: [fm/zoroastrianqa](https://www.anchor.fm/zoroastrianqa)). Some of Pablo's academic writing can be found at pablovazquez.academia.edu

NEED OF THE DAY: TO RESOLVE THE DISTORTION OF ZARATHUSHTRA'S MESSAGE

It is an open fact that Zarathushtra's religion was distorted and reinterpreted in many respects by the Magis after they took over the reigns of the religion from the Athravans before (around 7th century BCE) and during the sovereignty of Achaemenians. The distortion of the concept of dualism, the consecrated fire, the coming of the Saoshyant, the timeline of the creation, and reincorporation of pre-Zarathushtrian divinity into the teachings of Zarathushtra can all be attributed to the Magian leadership. It was also the Magi who manipulated the date and time of Zarathushtra to be around 6th century BCE, and fabricated the birthplace of Zarathushtra as Ragah or Rai earlier and later after the time of Alexander the emphasis was shifted to Azerbaijan in western Iran. Magian leadership historically had as their ultimate agenda, to hold on to the priestly power and authority using all means at their disposal. Having said all that, it must be realized that it was the power and authority that these Magian leaders wielded in those days that has kept the religion of Zarathushtra alive and allowed its spread, albeit in that Syncretic form, across the vast Iranian empire of the time and further. ... It is no surprise, that migrants from Khorasan to India, well over a thousand years ago, while integrating successfully, closely protected their ethnic identity by maintaining rigid ground rules with sectarian attitude of exclusivity, to preserve their Zarathushti religion. These inflexible rules of selectivity, were man made decree, resulting purely from their historic experiences. They were set out to protect their religious heritage, but they were not invoked by any doctrinal dictum of the Religion and Teachings of Zarathushtra. Adherence to this rigid order, was perhaps essential under the prevailing circumstances, and they deserve full credit for their wisdom. However, in doing so, the universal message of salvation of mankind preached by Asho Zarathushtra, was degraded to a racial heritage, treasured by a tribe of people. Zarathushtis now have a tradition, distorted as it is, that is rooted in some 2700 years, that has come to be accepted as Zarathushti religion. It may not be the Religion of Zarathushtra but it is the Zarathushti religion that they have come to believe and are sentimentally associated with. In the final analysis it is indeed important to bring certain facts regarding the Religion of Zarathushtra to the attention of the community.

Excerpts from "Was Zarathushtra's original religion diverted?" by Ervad Dr. Jehan Bagli, A Zoroastrian Educational Institute. zoroastrian.org.uk/vohuman

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

By Framroze K. Patel

Let me describe with brevity and clarity my childhood spent in the best Zarathushti school, far better than Harrow or Eton, Surat Parsi Orphanage (SPO) and Sir J. J. High School, Surat. Being a Zarathushti school, prayer (five times a day) was an inescapable routine. No prayer no food. Religious education was the norm along with liberal education. The teachers molded us to be righteous Zarathushti, but we were not introduced to the words and message of the Prophet. At that time study of the Gathas was not part of religious education within the community.

After spending 16 years at SPO, a “bagho” (meaning not very smart) is ready to face the world. At that time, the protective umbrella of “Parsi-ism” was lost. I was living alone in Baroda, Jamshedpur, and Calcutta. I was now a part of secular, yet predominantly Hindu society and culture.

In this environment, I was like my Hindu friends looking for intermediaries — a Guru who would perform Vedic ceremony and be an intercessor with Hindu Deities and change my destiny. I also started praying at a dargah (Muslim mausoleum). Once I attended a Catholic church in a suburb of Calcutta. The priest administering ‘Body of Christ’ was smart and realized I was not baptized, therefore denied the blessings. In Calcutta, every day (yes, every day) I used

to visit an astrologer in a mistaken belief he would change my life for the better. Of course, none of that happened.

I want the reader to understand that as I had drifted from my own glorious religion, I was praying the basic prayers, Atash Niyesh, and Behram Yasht *every single day*. I do not recall that I ever missed daily prayers unless it was physically impossible. That routine continues till this day.

Lo and behold, no Hindu priest intervened and performed miracles, I did not receive a life-changing spectacle from visiting the dargah, and I enriched a phony astrologer. However, I married a beautiful Zarathushti lady, my one and only wife, Armaity (she was raised in a strictly traditional, nay, conservative Zarathushti family), and had two beautiful children. At age 35, I came to America as an immigrant. When I landed in New York there were 550 Indians staying at the 47th St. YMCA (paying \$21 per week). The first Sunday in America, a fellow Indian (Sikh gentlemen) took me to Marble Collegiate Church (MCC) where the late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale presided. Why? If you attend MCC during Saturday and Sunday services, you can have breakfast and lunch courtesy of the church and you save a few dollars. Finally, the period of Vohu Manah (The spirit of Good Mind) dawns. I came to my senses, and I returned

to my roots. ZAGNY was formed in 1973. Without any forethought I dove in the pool full of my co-religionists. It was an enlightened and open-minded period of understanding and experiencing the core message of the Prophet. Our family was fortunate to have known a righteous and morally upright Zarathushti whose passion and zeal was to explain the core message of the Prophet to anyone, Zarathushti or non-Zarathushti. His eloquence lay in opening your mind to the message of the Prophet.

The first thing I learned from his association is: *“Hearken with your ears to this best counsel; reflect upon them with clear judgment. And think on your own. And what is the best counsel? Let each one choose his creed with freedom.”* If I follow the Prophet’s message contained in Yasna 30.2, I do not need gurus and astrologers.

Dear reader — for a minute put yourself in my position. I was born after my father left for his heavenly abode. We three children of Goolbai were educated in Parsi orphanages. Can you imagine what educational opportunities we would have had without the help of the righteous Zarathushti souls who decided to follow the teaching of the prophet, i.e., *“Happiness is the lot of him who works for the happiness of others.”* Y.43.1. Seth Rustomji Kooka lost his only son at a young age of 21, and established SPO in his memory in

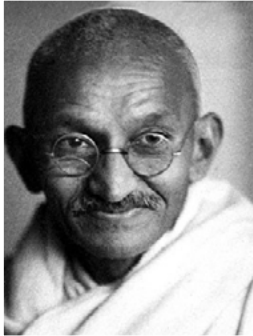
ZARATHUSHTRA'S GATHAS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

1912. SPO continues to take care of Zarathushti students even today. The Gatha recognizes such an individual as a helper of Mazda Ahura., “*He who upholds the Truth with utmost in his words and deeds, He indeed is Thy most valued helper, O Mazda Ahura, Y.31.22.*”

what was required of them — what was morally right. Sir Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy established communal wells so that ‘untouchables’ could have access to the water. The House of Tatas ensured that their legacy was available to any one regardless of creed, class, or religion. Jews and

and my followers such authority and power through Truth, that with Good Mind, we may bring the world peace and happiness, of which Thou, O Lord, art indeed the first possessor.”

This is what I believe: Righteousness in thought, words, and deeds is the



In addition to Asha and Vohu-Manah, Zarathushtra emphasizes Spenta Armaity or right-mindedness, the inclination or intention to do the right thing. Role models like Mohandas K. Gandhi, Oskar Schindler, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela embody this.

In addition to Asha and Vohu-Manah, the Prophet emphasizes Spenta-Armaity, i.e., Right-mindedness — the inclination, or intention to do the right thing. Some years ago, when I was the president of a Zarathushti organization, I was forced to do what was legally right but morally wrong. If I did not do what was legally correct it would have had ominous consequences for the organization and community. The righteous individuals of the community were disappointed that I did not have the courage to do what was morally correct. According to their considered opinion, with which I now agree, doing what is legally correct is not enough. What is imperative is: Doing what is morally right.

Mahatma Gandhi’s decision to ride in a “white only” carriage was a righteous one. Millions of Indians who participated to follow the Swaraj movement (a.k.a. Quit India) and defy the unjust laws were doing

Christians were morally justified to run the Underground Railroad¹ to help the masses who wanted only one thing — freedom. Rosa Park’s moral courage to sit in the front of bus, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., and scores of others who defied morally unjust laws were most righteous. By their action they were promoting Asha and Vohu-Khshathra, i.e., good social order. However, the message of the Prophet, as I understand it, is to engage in furtherance of Asha, the ultimate Truth and by our action establish the righteous order. You and I may not be able to prevent another Kristallnacht² (the Night of Broken Glass), to save another Anne Frank, or prevent another ethnic cleansing. We may not be able stop the factional wars between adherents of various religious but sitting on the fence is not what is expected of us. Our Dharma is to promote Asha. In Y.29.10, the Prophet, in a prayer to Mazda Ahura, requests on behalf of his followers, “*Do Ye grant me*

manifestation of Truth in human existence. From the principles of Truth and righteousness, the harmony of universal law and order is evoked. Zarathushtra defines the quality of a true follower as one who upholds the Truth. He who upholds Truth with all the might of his power, He who upholds Asha to the utmost in his deeds and words, He is indeed, Thy most valued helper, Mazda Ahura. Y.31.22.

Our responsibility as the Prophet’s followers, is to make the world progress towards perfection. The law of righteousness is the norm to which a true follower of the Prophet has to conform in life.³

Therefore, what I have learned is:

- Hearken with your ears to these best counsels, reflect upon them with clear judgment, let each one chooses his creed, with freedom of choice. Y30.2.
- The Prophet’s teaching is contained in the word “Asha,”

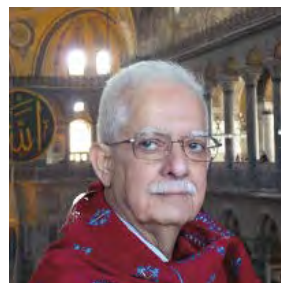
the truth underlying all existence.

- The development of the Good Mind (Vohu Manah), the recognition of Righteousness and Constructive Actions are central to Zarathushti religion, and
- Active life means righteous life. Those who serve God best are those who render service to all of God's creations.⁴

END NOTES

1. The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States during the late 18th century and used by enslaved African Americans to escape into free states and Canada. The scheme was assisted by abolitionists and others sympathetic to the cause of the escapees.

2. On November 9 -10, 1938, Nazi leaders unleashed a series of pogroms against Jewish population in Germany and recently incorporated territories. This event came to be known as Kristallnacht (the Night of Broken Glass) because of the shattered glass that littered the streets after the vandalism and destruction of Jewish-owned businesses, synagogues, and homes.
3. The Good Life, An Introduction to the Religion of Zarathushtra, published by the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, Fourth edition December 2015, p.43.
4. The Good Life, An Introduction to the Religion of Zarathushtra, published by the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, Fourth edition December 2015, p.75.



Framroze K. Patel has been associated with ZAGNY as a board member and past President. He has also served as the President of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America (FEZANA) for two terms. He has served as the accountant for ZAGNY for 40 years and offers pro bono accounting services to other Zoroastrian Associations in North America

REFLECTIONS OF A MOTHER & DAUGHTER

By Yasmin And Farah Pavri

I remember reading a Zoroastrian book to my kids. It taught them the Amesha Spentas and the goods and evils of the world. The Good and Evil were always depicted as cloud-like figures. I assumed that it meant that Good and Evil could take any form. Once I started taking the Gatha classes at ZAGNY, I realized that the Good and Evil are a struggle inside the human mind. A wonderful representation of this struggle came from an old Native American story. In the story, there are two wolves who live inside each person, one good and one evil. Only one of the wolves



would emerge victorious. A child became curious and asked his grandfather which wolf would beat the other. The grandfather replied, whichever wolf you choose to feed. I feel that this story holds a powerful message, especially beside the teachings of Zarathushtra. In our religion, we have Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds (Humukta, Hukta, and Huvarshtha). These three tenets help feed the good wolf in us, which helps us defeat the evil inside.

All humans have the ability to

separate good from evil and right from wrong. Our Vohu Mano, or our good mind, needs to be awakened in order to fight the evils of our lives such as greed, fear, anger, hatred, selfishness, lust, and lies. We must keep a strong will and continue to walk on the path of Asha. With a good and strong will, we are able to achieve anything.

Asha is the spiritual law. It is a state of spiritual creation. When everything is in harmony, it is said to have reached the state of Asha. When the harmony is disturbed, Asha is violated. All of our thoughts, words, and deeds have consequences.

I came to America when my kids were very young. There have been a lot of ups and downs and not having any family in the states made each problem more difficult. This could have broken us, but we stayed strong. Blessings from my parents and the good wishes of friends combined with the power of prayers helped us get through everything life threw at us. There have been times where we have been very low, but we would keep our heads up and pray. There is good in everything, we just need to find it. Instead of getting angry at life, I took a step back and saw the bigger picture. I was able to see the good in everything that had happened. This gave me experiential knowledge, something that cannot be explained, but only gained through experience.

For someone who has been praying/reciting the Gathas for the past twenty-five years, I've only started to understand the true meaning of it since the past year. The Gathas speak about being a devoted follower to Ahura Mazda, but that does not only mean praying. It also means committing good deeds. I try to do

at least one good deed a day. It can be anything from letting a car pass before me to letting an elderly person go ahead of me in line at a grocery store.

The Gathas also speak of Zarathushtra's journey to promote and bring attention to the idea of Asha and how to follow its path. At first, Zarathushtra's kinsmen rejected the idea but Zarathushtra knew in his heart that what he was doing was the right thing. Even if he had to go through ridicule, he would do and promote the right things for the betterment of society. We everyday people don't need to walk 100 miles to get our message across. We can push a simple button on our phones. So, what stops us from promoting our good thoughts, words, and deeds to others who can benefit from them? Zarathushtra at one point had doubts about his message, because of all that had been said to him about his ideas being ridiculous, but he persevered. Nothing can stop us, as Zoroastrians and as the human race, from spreading good in the world.

I was always fascinated by our religion and so I joined the Gatha classes at the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York (ZAGNY). We would meet on the first Sunday of every month and we would read through a passage in the Gathas, our teacher would explain the meaning, and then we would have an open discussion on what we thought the passage meant. It was refreshing to hear all of the different ideas of what the passages could mean. As they say, there are no wrong answers. And it truly did help me better understand the teachings of Zarathushtra through the Gathas.

I implore you to explore our religion, as old as it may be. Even though

the Gathas were written originally in Old Avestan, the teachings still remain. Praying is not the only way to be devoted to Ahura Mazda. Consciously following the three tenets of our religion and helping make the world a better place to live in is also important. *



Yasmin Pavri is a mother of two who loves attending the Gatha classes at ZAGNY. She is heavily involved in volunteering. Yasmin came to the United States with her husband Cyrus and two children, Farah and Porus, 14 years ago and has been very grateful for the community that has helped her through her ups and downs.

Farah Pavri is a high school senior from NHRHS in New Jersey. She enjoys writing and listening to music. She is also a co-teacher at ZAGNY. Farah plans on pursuing a career in the engineering field and would one day like to create prosthetics for animals.

Illustration of young Zarathushtra with his father Pourushaspa by Homi Meherhomji. From "Discovering Ashavan" by Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, 2001. Karachi Zarthoshti Banu Mandal, Karachi.

ASHA TO USHTA

Based On Asho Zarathushtra's Gathas

By Karishma Koka

In Asho Zarathushtra Spitaman's message in the Gathas, I find timeless knowledge that goes beyond Neuro-Cognitive guidance. The lessons in the Gathas are applicable to the changing times, catalysing our work together for the progress of all. **Value-based** methods are outlined that are applicable in different contexts to **evaluate** and **add value**.

OVERVIEW

Asha Vahishta is the Ideal Truth in the Mainyu domain of Ahura Mazda (The Supreme Wisdom) created with the Progressive Bounteous Spirit (Spenta Mainyu). Asha (Truth/purity) translates into Good Thought, Good Word and Good Action in the Getig domain of the material world. When this is applied with Vohu Manah (Good Mind) and Khshatra Vairya (respectful responsible authority that is desired, bringing strength/power), combined with Spenta Armaiti (devotion) and Haurvatat (completeness), it is able to manifest in Ushta (bliss, happiness, harmony for all). Harmony and progress can continue and propagate achieving the Good of All (The Collective Consciousness) through time (Ameratat).

WISDOM

Wisdom based on the Gathas, to me, is applicable to **Spiritual Development, Self-Development** (well-being) and **Sustainable**

Development (of the World), enabling us to joyfully work together for the Good of All at all levels throughout life. It empowers us to grow at the individual level and at the level of networks and teams. Sustaining advancement necessitates being able to implement change as appropriate. The wisdom in the Gathas that stems from the Wisdom/will of the Good Mind (**Vohu Khratum Manangho**) facilitates this.

Similarities to NEUROSCIENCE (**Meta-plasticity**) seem clear to me – the on-going development/change in an activity dependent - regulated manner that can be further altered by processes that utilize it. **Neuro-Cognitive goal-directed executive function** involves organization of

information and regulation with evaluation and flexibility. I find Asho Zarathushtra goes further by guiding us to first create an ideal plan based on a progressive mind to advance Ushta. Furthermore, the study of the prayers and concepts within them from in-utero and in infancy, I suggest, will benefit the development of the brain and epigenetic changes within the Nervous and other systems.

EFFECTIVE THINKING

Effective thinking occurs best in a mind based on a firm belief in good, with the ability to let go of negativity and allow the Neuro-endocrine system to regulate itself, lowering stress levels, maintaining a well-balanced immune system, and allowing the brain to work optimally. In such a well-balanced mind it is possible to create time-based plans free from bias. This can be at an individual level, family, institution and National/inter-National. It applies to finding sustainable ways of creating abundance/advancement while facilitating equity of opportunity and maintaining peace/justice. Such a program requires us to Learn to learn (Meta-cognition) as individuals and as a network enabling us to respond to positive and negative changes with joint effort. The body and the brain work best this way, and so do Societies and Nations. **Asho Zarathushtra's Principles work well at all levels.**



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EVALUATION OF INFORMATION

Evaluation of information follows planning. This is best done in a **well-regulated mind** (the Neural Correlate of the Brain networks) at an **individual or the Collective** level, with sufficient knowledge (with a combination of **Vohu Manah** and **Kshatra Vaira**). This is critical to finding appropriate ways of utilising resources (natural resources of the world and resources of the human community) in a fair manner that gives opportunity to people (equity) to contribute while also sharing the product. Asho Zarathushtra outlines this in the Ahunavaiti Gatha, along with instances in the other Gathas.

DECISION MAKING

Decision making that implements **Lessons Learned** is a critical part of any process be it to achieve change or the effectiveness of an ongoing plan. To me, this necessitates conviction of purpose for the Good of All, belief in the skills and trust in the intent of one's team members. Asho Zarathushtra gives us guidance for this including in the Ahunavaiti and Ushtavaiti Gatha.

EXECUTION OF THE PLAN

Executing the plan necessitates that the outcomes of the actions are constantly fed back into the system, ideally in real time. For this to be achieved there needs to be a high level of organisation and clarity. Something that can be achieved only in a system that has a clear purpose in each department with proper **communication** between departments and the ability to choose the most appropriate course of action with sufficient information; very much like how the brain works with constant **feedback** from the five senses. Output needs to be regularly compared to the

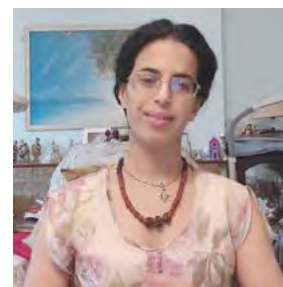
ideal original plan, evaluated and the necessary course-correction implemented in a context dependent manner. The Ahunavaiti and Spenta Mainyu Gatha suggest this.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

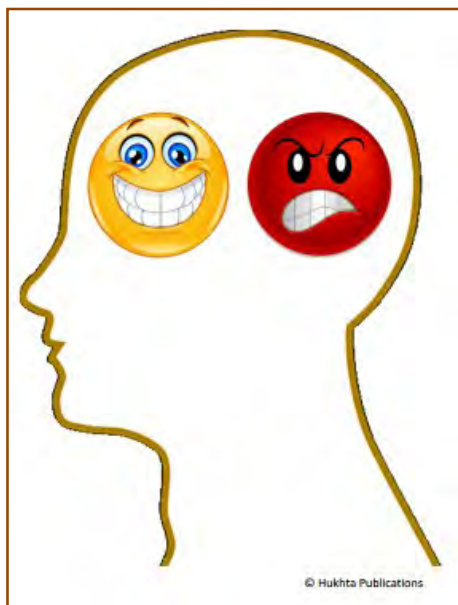
In order to be resource-efficient, execution needs to implement lean-agile methods for achieving success. Key parts of higher cognitive function are the combination of self-regulation, reasoning and adaptability which are key for Sustainable Development for the Collective. Together with empowering each one with a choice of thought and action, the knowledge Asho Zarathushtra empowers us with, also catalyses the building of trust in our own decisions and the efforts of our team members and **extended networks**. Taken together, this builds both credibility and accountability. To me, the Vohu Kshatra Gatha and the Ahunavaiti Gatha outline how this can be achieved.

In the Zarathushti Daena, 'we venerate' (Yazamaide) together for advancement as a Collective-representing the concept of

Frashokereti. This, is clear guidance that there needs to be progress that enables the advancement of others and the Earth now and in the future. We venerate the Fravashis who have facilitated the development that we have benefited by. In the Yenghe Haataam we venerate the living beings who are recognised by Ahura Mazda through their good ACTIONS. These facts taken together, indicate to me, the essence of our joint commitment to **Sustainable Development**. The knowledge in the Gathas allow us to connect with the Supreme Wisdom and all. Zarathushtra's message helps us prime ourselves and our actions to be well-prepared to respond to changes in real time, making informed choices interdependently in well-regulated and synergistic ways for increased effectiveness with positive action, achieving good for us, the World, the Earth and for All...Ushta.








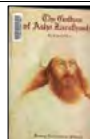
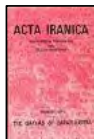
Karishma Koka, PhD. is a Learning and Development Consultant, Strategic Meta-cognitive Solutions for Academics, Corporate Executives. She is also a Fellow of the Cambridge Philosophical Society, Cambridge Commonwealth Society Scholar, and British Government Chevening Scholar. Dr. Karishma supports the Zarathushti Faculty Network, while being a member of the ZTFE (London).






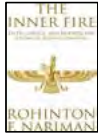

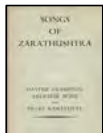


BOOKS ABOUT THE GATHAS

Over the last two centuries, many translations of the Gathas have been published. Each differs widely for many reasons. For example, Humbach emphasized rituals and Zarathushtra's role as a priest, Insler's translation focused on moral and ethical teachings, and Taraporewala's emphasis was on the meter. Despite the variations and difficulties, work by scholars over the past has brought much light on the Gathas, and the research has been largely confined to technical journals and symposium papers, little known to the lay person.

The suggested booklist differs in approach and intent. There are over 60 books on the Gathas in the FIRES collection. The titles listed below are for the reader to experience the understanding of its spiritual content and the wisdom of its message. These titles have been frequently mentioned and requested, and made accessible to Gatha study groups and individuals on request.

	<p><i>Divine songs of Zarathushtra</i>: a philological study of the Gathas of Zarathushtra containing the text with a literal translation into English by Irach J. S. Taraporewala. Bombay, Union Press, 1993.</p> <p>Taraporewala picks up the essential words and phrases of the Gathas and describes the meaning and interpretations by different Western and Parsi scholars, and at the end expresses his own opinion. He has also demonstrated exact meters of all verses and has over a100 pages at the end about these meters.</p>
	<p><i>The Ethical Conceptions of the Gatha</i> by Jatindra Mohan Chatterjee. Bombay, Karani Sons, 1935.</p> <p>A highly regarded work by a Sanskrit scholar, which is presently out of print. He has painstakingly demonstrated the resemblance of the Gatha verses with the Rig Veda verses.</p>
	<p><i>Gatha: Holy Songs of Zarathustra</i> by Mobed Firouz Azargoshasb. California, Council of Iranian Mobeds of North America, 1980.</p> <p>This book contains a simplified version of the Gathas in both Persian and English translation.</p>
	<p><i>The Gathas, our Guide</i>: the thought-provoking divine songs of Zarathushtra by Ali A Jafarey. USA, Ushta Publication 1989.</p> <p>Translated and annotated by the author, each verse of the Gathas together with other important prayers are published with the Avesta prayer, its translation, and a simple explanation at the end.</p>
	<p><i>The Gathas: the Sublime Book of Zarathustra</i> by Khosro Khazai. Brussels, European Centre for Zoroastrian Studies, 2007. ISBN: 2930473002.</p> <p>This new translation of the Gathas is intended more as an inspirational and devotional text than a scholarly work. It is very readable, in spite of uneven copy-editing. The author brings the perspectives of philosophy to the work of understanding the Gathas, and the loving hand of a devotee and religious leader.</p>
	<p><i>The Gathas of Asho Zarathushtra</i> by Jimmy Nadershaw Sidhwa. Bombay, Meera Offset Printers, 1998. A book in English verse.</p> <p>The work is essentially a compilation of verses based on the verbatim and word-for-word translations of the Gathas.</p>
	<p><i>Gathas of Zarathushtra</i> translated by S. Insler, Leiden E Brill, 1975. ISBN: 9004043993.</p> <p>In this work, the author has attempted to correct and explain the text of the Gathas employing strict linguistic and philological methods, and concentrating on the chief problems of grammar, vocabulary and syntax.</p>

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	<p>The Heritage of Zarathushtra: a New Translation of his Gathas by Helmut Humbach, Pállan Ichaporia. Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1994. ISBN: 3825302512.</p> <p>Helmut Humbach, in collaboration with Pállan Ichaporia, has a pivotal composition accessible to specialists and non-specialists alike. The detailed notes they provide are invaluable in understanding the problems and provide clues to a better understanding of the Gathas.</p>
	<p>The Holy Gathas of Zarathushtra: Translation and Transliteration in English with Prologue by Behrangore T. Anklesaria, M.A.</p> <p><i>This book is out-of-print and not in the FIRES Library. If you have the book and would like to donate it to the library we would be very appreciative.</i></p>
	<p>Hymns of Zarathushtra: Being a translation of the Gathas together with introduction and commentary by Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin. London, John Murray, 1992. ISBN: 0719551900.</p> <p>This book is a serious attempt by a distinguished scholar to translate into the western language the traditional hymns of Zoroaster. So, to reproduce as nearly as possible the words Zarathushtra actually spoke.</p>
	<p>The Inner Fire: Faith, Choice, and Modern-Day Living in Zoroastrianism - by Rohinton F. Nariman.</p> <p>It is hard to believe that the hymns of the faith have traveled down to us in accurate form and poetic meter, purely through the memory of generations of priests. Nariman's book is the first of its kind. It is a complete analysis of the Gathas, which consist of 238 verses, and is for anyone who wants to gain a deeper understanding of the purpose of life on earth and what happens to mankind after death. This book is available as a pdf on www.avesta.org.</p>
	<p>The Journal of the Research and Historical Preservation Committee. Edited by Sarosh Manekshaw and Pállan R. Ichaporia. FEZANA, 1996. ISBN: 1883345022.</p> <p>Proceedings of the Second North American Gatha Conference held in Houston, Texas, 1996. A pdf copy is available for interested readers.</p>
	<p>Songs of Zarathushtra: translated from the Avesta by Dastur Framroze Ardeshtir Bode and Píloo Nanavutty. Foreword by Radhakrishnan.</p> <p>Editor's note: Scholars are still much decided upon the interpretation of the Gathas. The present volume contains a version of their meaning as understood by two Parsi students of the Avesta.</p>
	<p>The Teachings of Zarathushtra: the Prophet of Iran by T. R. Sethna. Karachi, Ahmed Bros. Printers, 1989.</p> <p>The author has translated the Gathas in a more familiar way rather than a word-by-word translation.</p>
	<p>Understanding the Gathas: The Hymns of Zarathushtra; Introductory Lectures on Gathic Themes by Dinshaw J. Irani. ZAGNY, Rep., 2020. ISBN#0963804502.</p> <p>The chapters of this book were originally delivered as lectures to Zoroastrians' audiences who had little familiarity with the Gathas. Their purpose is to bring the reader closer to the thought and expression, the ideas, and the topics in the Gathas. A foreword to this work by Rabindranath Tagore gives a masterful introduction to the Zarathushti religion. The author's son, Prof. Kaikhosrov D. Irani, gives a detailed understanding of these inspirational songs' theology.</p>

WEBSITES

The following websites may also be useful resources.

- **avesta.org** - well accepted by several global Zarathushti entities that the go-to website for Zarathushti scriptures and commentaries.
- **gathasofzarathushtra.com** - this is a work in progress by Dina McIntyre and chapters are added as completed.

List prepared by Aban Rustumjee, FIRES (fires-fezana.org) and Ervad Dr. Soli Dastur, NAMC (namcmobeds.org).



COVER ILLUSTRATION

Drawing and composition: Roshni Chikliwala, Age 15

Coloring with Prismacolor pencils: Natasha Dungar, Age 13

ESSAY CONTEST

The contest was initiated to capture how Zarathushti youth know of Zarathushtra's teachings and understand the extant Gathas. Zarathushti youth in three age groups (13-18, 19-24, and 25-30 years old) were invited to submit an essay on "How Zarathushtra's teachings in the Gathas guided me in choosing a right path that led me to a right decision to do a good deed." A \$250 cash prize was announced for the winning essay in each age group.

Initially, eight youth declared their intention to participate, but only four submitted their essays. Our judges - Kersy Dastur, Fereydoon Keshavarz, and Kersi Shroff - agreed that all four entries were winners in that they all followed up on their intention and shared with us their understanding of the Gathas and Zarathushtra's teachings. Thanks to the generosity of the judges, each of the authors will receive a \$250 cash prize.

The judges evaluated all essays for (1) a reference to specific verse(s) or teachings in the Gathas, (2) if not 1, then a reference to specific teaching(s) of Zarathushtra, and (3) overall, the clarity in conveying the author's thoughts. The comments that the judges provided to each author are thoughtful, positive, encouraging, as well as honestly advising them to further their understanding of the essence of Zarathushtra's teachings in the Gathas.

Essay By Neelufar Khosraviani

Age Group: 25 - 30 years old



Choosing My Path

Which path to follow was never a question for me. My parents raised my sisters and I with the tools to follow a good and righteous path, but much like Zarathushtra, they too gave us room to make our own choices and to learn from consequence. The distinction between good and bad came to me in the third grade, as I waited outside of school for my mom to pick me up. Nearby, I witnessed the class bully finding joy in mocking a girl for the pigtails she wore. Without hesitation, I marched up and placed myself between the two. As much as I feared the bully, to stand by and do nothing, when someone was being hurt, felt wrong to me. Although my moment of courage backfired and led to a target on my own back, I never regretted my decision. By the teachings in the Gathas, I was raised to believe, and still do to this day, that good deeds are not done for reward but to help those who are in need. My very career has been shaped by Zarathushtra's teachings. I fervently believe in the philosophy of treating all humans, animals and our environment with dignity and respect. As a physical therapist at the community hospital, I treat individuals of all backgrounds. I have learned it is not my role to bring judgement but to provide the tools for others to choose their own path, so that they may heal and hopefully follow a more righteous path.

Neelufar Khosraviani is a physical therapist at an inpatient rehabilitation center in Chico, CA and is currently working towards her neurological specialist certification. She received her B.S in Physiology and Neuroscience from UC San Diego and completed her doctoral studies in physical therapy at Midwestern University - Glendale with special recognition for her commitment to community service in 2017.

Essay by Spenta Jassawala

(Age Group: 19 - 24 years old)



Compassion with Passion



Lords teachings. From being truthful no matter what, to having no evil thoughts enter my mind and treading the narrow path of virtue through



righteousness, there are many Ha's (verses) from the Gatha's that stay in my mind. But there is one, which has always been at the forefront- Yasna Ha 51.1- *Vohû khshathrem vaîrîm bâgem aîbî baîrishtem, vîdishe*

manaî, îzhâchît Ashâ aîntare-charaitî shyaothanâish Mazdâ vahishtem tat nê nûchît vareshânê.

I still remember the words my grandmother said, to describe this Yasna to me. "Khshathra Vairya means Divine Strength," she said, "It is the most precious gift we can be given by God, for it urges us to serve mankind." She told me, that as long as I strive to serve all beings on our planet respectfully, and by treading the path of truth, God will shower his choicest blessings on me.

Fast forward to 2018, when I went to Chennai for Nowruz. On a chance encounter, my mother and I met a friend who employed destitute women, who had lost their jobs in big garment industries to machines. He employed them in making sustainable bags, which are foldable, durable, washable and super good

looking! When we went down to his basement to look at the bags, and he gave me one as a gift. I immediately felt a spark, a connection... a calling. "I will help sell these bags and give these women a source of livelihood," I promised myself.

Since then, my mother and I have put all our efforts into selling these bags. With every bag that is sold, my heart soars and I feel a great sense of pride as I see a smile on these women's faces, as they eat another meal with their families. But most importantly, I feel grateful, that I now have the opportunity to serve them through this charitable organization.

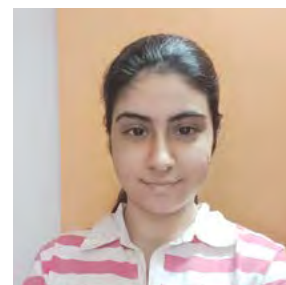
Every good deed that I do is dedicated to Ahura Mazda and his journey to the Truth. I pray that He always gives me the strength to power on, for I will strive to serve mankind, forever.

Spenta Jassawala is currently in her final year of her degree in Journalism and Mass Communication from the University of Delhi. She is on the managing committee of her college's National Service Scheme and helps promote and sell sustainable bags, the proceeds of which go to destitute women in Chennai. She is currently the editor of a student-run blog. She is also an ardent photographer.

I was born into a family of devoted Parsis. Naturally, I imbibed, 'Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds', the importance of our prayers and the significance of our *sadra* (sacred vest) and *kusti* (sacred girdle), in my growing years. It was in the Farohar classes I attended when we first shifted to New Delhi, India, that I learned more about Ahura Mazda's teachings and our rituals. Learning and understanding the Gatha's was a tad complicated for my 13-year old brain, but my parents and grandparents never gave up. They simplified it as much as they could, to instill in me, the

Essay by Goolnawaz Porus Kapadia

(Age Group: 13 - 18 years old)



My Faith in the Gathas

The Gathas are 17 Avestan hymns believed to have been composed by Zarathushtra (Zoroaster) himself. They form the core of the Zoroastrian liturgy (the Yasna). They are arranged in five different modes or metres.

I was 6 years old when I got to know about the Gathas, my bapai (grandmother) had introduced to me the concept of Gathas. It is the time in the year when the departed soul arrives on earth. The Gathas are amongst the oldest remnants of the Indo-European literature, but since they were translated into European languages in the eighteenth until twentieth century, they did not catch on like their close relative the Rigveda. Every parsi knows that the importance of Gathas to Zoroastrianism cannot be emphasized enough, and this new thing to me was truly a new and interesting topic for my small six year old brain. I have believed in my God and that was the reason my grandparents conscientiously made me pay a visit to agyari (the holy place) every day.

My everyday routine during childhood was to wake up, do breakfast and visit the agyari. The most charming thing about the surrounding of the agyari was the pleasant and silent atmosphere near it. Interior of the agyari was even more interesting to me as I could see many people coming every day to pray and recite the prayers. Because of developing a keen interest in the new topic bapai and I approached a Dasturji. Dasturji explained all the necessary aspects of the holy book of Zoroastrianism "KHORDEH AVESTA", and further gave very crucial and necessary information about the Gathas.

Gathas are of five types, any of the five Gathas can be prayed daily

if desired. The appropriate way of reading the Gatha is given in the book called 'Khordeh Avesta' or even smaller Gatha booklets. Ahunavad Gatha should not be prayed every day. You must have understood with all the above discussion how important and how relatable Gathas are in our life. The contemporary world has started to forget its importance and eventually lose out on some very beautiful and beneficial aspects of nature and its tremendous power. The words written in the Gathas eventually have all the power of Nature. I personally have a very positive change in my life by following what the almighty has made for me and continuing to share my knowledge with everyone I feel lacks it. The contemporary world is indeed a nice place to live, just the lost importance of Gathas should be spread on a world-wide scale.

Goolnawaz Porus

Kapadia is pursuing a degree in Microbiology in Mumbai, India. In future, she wants to pursue a Masters degree in virology and become a virologist and invent various antibiotics against different types of viruses. She wants to be a successful scientist and a contributor to the medical science and the whole world.



The Avesta words for Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds embroidered in cross-stitch by Diana Dinshaw in her schooldays.

Essay by Zeyus Spenta

(Age Group: 13 -18 years old)



Inspired by Zarathustra

Zarathustra, the prophet of the Zoroastrian religion, is an inspiring figure, whose teachings have guided the lives of millions, over thousands of years. The doctrines, credos, and principles that have been passed to us by our beloved prophet live on to this date, and have influenced my thought process and outlook on life. The messages, ideas, and way of life which our judicious prophet conveys through the Gathas continue to guide our lives, like the eternal holy flame in our place-of-worship. One line in particular has had a lasting impact on me, and positively affected my thoughts, words, and deeds. I feel that “spreading love and kindness to others” has guided me towards a righteous path laid out by Zarathustra, where kindness, generosity, and compassion prevail in various aspects of my life.

I have integrated Zarathustra’s “big idea” of love in my everyday life, such as spreading joy to others through my writing, volunteering to help out at our local Dar-e-Mehr, being a “big buddy” to little kids, fundraising for a harvest food project, and Nicaragua aid project at school. We can make real-life connections to the Gathas from all aspects of life, and it is a reminder that some of the same 2500-year-old teachings of Zarathustra are timeless, and are applicable and relatable to this date!



I have, and continue to do my best to assist others. A couple years ago, one of our class science experiments involved a three-step process. During the second phase, one of my classmates was unable to successfully complete the trial, and she was in tears, extremely upset. With Zarathustra’s preachings in mind, I offered to partner with her, and have her use my experiment on the next test phase, which made her day.

In addition, I have brought joy and cheer to my community by knitting small toques for seniors at a care home. It is vital that we spread happiness to those who may be lonely and are most vulnerable to COVID-19.

I have also contributed to our natural environment by planting trees, and engaging in voluntary cleanup activities at local parks, giving families the opportunity to enjoy themselves in a healthy community. Through the Gathas, the Zoroastrian holy book of hymns, psalms, and songs, Zarathustra communicates the importance of spreading love, joy, and kindness in our daily lives.

The word “love” is a vital part of our faith and makes our world a special place. “Love” encompasses a wide-ranging spectrum of qualities, including being truthful, respectful, kind, and compassionate. In addition to the most basic, grassroots tenants (good thoughts, good words, and good deeds) of the Zoroastrian religion, demonstrating the above qualities are ways to show our love for others. “Kindness is the ability to know what is right and having the courage to do it.”

Zeyus Spenta is a Grade 8 student. He is an avid reader, artist, and loves learning about history. He enjoys being outdoors, playing badminton, and learning new songs on his piano. Zeyus takes pleasure in travelling, meeting new people, and sampling food from a diverse variety of cultures. He looks forward to the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia's Zoroastrian classes, which he finds to be a wonderful source of knowledge.



A Life Time Journey : ANNE KHADEMIAN

INTERVIEW WITH NAWAZ MERCHANT
ON DEC 11, 2020

Petite and thoughtful, Anne Khademian speaks with delightful simplicity about profound concepts. We spoke about how her journey into Zoroastrianism over a decade ago has guided her own growth and decisions



Anne and Zarir were married in Michigan in 1985. Since Anne was born to a practicing Lutheran family and Zarir came from an educated, progressive Muslim family, they started their life together with a tolerance and understanding of different religious traditions. Having long been interested in the Zoroastrian religion, it was Zarir's mother who introduced him to an Iranian Zarathushti woman in Minneapolis who in turn connected them to the Council of Iranian Mobeds.

The Council of Iranian Mobeds shared prayer recordings and books and introduced them to Parvin and Keikhosrow Mobed who became lifelong friends and mentors. The Khademians moved to St Louis when they married, then DC, Wisconsin, Detroit, Philadelphia. In 2003, they passed up offers at Vanderbilt University to return to the DC area because they wanted their children to be part of the inclusive DC Zarathushti community.

"We discovered the Zoroastrian religion together, learning about it gradually," said Anne, who was named executive director of the Universities at Shady Grove (USG), the University System of Maryland (USM) regional higher education center, last year. Zarir is a pediatric neuroradiologist at Children's National Medical Center, and former economist.

Their daughters had their Sudreh-Pushi first, followed by Anne and Zarir in 2009. Anne began to co-teach around 14 students in ZAMWI's Huvareshta Class early on, and gradually took on other volunteer roles. Seeking our own knowledge, making our own choices—these principles struck her as uniquely



empowering, and drew her to the Zarathushti religion. She was impressed that while the religious leaders she met taught prayers and the Gathas, they did not set themselves up as authorities, but allowed each person to explore at their own pace.

When they joined the Zarathushti religion, “Our parents did not oppose our choice in any way,” Anne reported, “We went to church until we were about sixteen, but it was our choice from there.” Zarir’s father had already passed away and his mother, a practicing Muslim, was very open-minded, interested in the faith, and supportive. They came from families with similar values, recognizing the importance of education and community.

When asked, “*What was it in the Gathas that propelled you to this religion?*” Anne pointed out the concept of the ‘Good mind’ where one achieves happiness through righteousness. Zoroastrian concepts unfolded for her and Zarir “*like an onion. One keeps discovering more. The Gatha’s themselves are a puzzle, a source of contemplation. One can read a passage one day and feel it speaks to you in a certain way, but on another day, one can find more implications of the same words.*” Together, Zarir and Anne founded the 501(c)(3) organization *Arash the Archer* to explore Ancient Iran and Zoroastrian History and Culture through research. Arash the Archer’s annual Kamran Seminar brings international scholars to the Dar-e Mehr for a day-long seminar and discussion.

In 2019, Anne had a unique opportunity to meet Dr. Ali Jafary who was 99 years old at the time. After speaking with Darush Irani, she flew to Los Angeles to spend a day with them. Dr. Jafary insisted upon taking them to the Armenian Iranian Bakery as a special treat, a trip that’s now a precious

memory. “We already have all we need to answer our questions,” she remembers him saying.

Anne has been the President of ZAMWI from 2018 to 2021. Her Executive team on the board and other volunteers for the 2023 Z Games includes young adults and community stalwarts, Persians and Parsis. She enjoys the Tuesday and Thursday evening prayers, remarking upon the beauty of the experience, the sound of spoken prayers. To keep the community safe, ZAMWI moved to online ceremonies and celebrations such as Gahambars in 2020, broadcasting them because “these are things we need to practice, to exercise our faith.”

Since the 1970s, ZAMWI’s progressive leadership has included an inter-married diaspora, taking pride in diversity and being a welcoming group. In 2019, ZAMWI raised funds to retain a full-time mobed. Her board focuses on sustainable growth in membership and programs. With 29 years in higher education, Anne wants her new academic role to further her Zoroastrian ideals of making a difference and leaving the world a better place. She feels aligned with USG’s mission to reach students who would not otherwise have an opportunity for college. Through scholarships and partnerships with community colleges, USG provides an affordable and accessible path to a 4-year degree.

Her daughters are also following their own path by asking the hard questions that should be addressed. Their Instagram account *Decolonizing-Zoroastrianism* addresses racism in our practices. Anne is content that daughters Yasna and Gordiya live their lives with Zoroastrian principles of personal responsibility. “To do the job well, we can’t be content with what is,” she says. “We must write our own stories, be better and be more!”

She acknowledges that “*So many people embrace something that’s easier to believe, that feels comfortable. Part of finding truth is to be always seeking truth. Don’t get intellectually comfortable. Make curiosity and the desire to do better into an ongoing daily effort.*” That’s uncomfortable, she agreed, but “that’s the work of practicing our faith.”

As President, her aspirations for ZAMWI are completing the prayer room and needed construction and repairs of the Dar-e Mehr. Asked about the future of Zoroastrianism, she says “*Belonging and inclusion are what holds a community together.*” She refutes the general perception that our numbers are shrinking, saying that actually, our numbers are growing in a few places across the globe.

Her closing comment was profound: “*Are we brave enough to do as the Gathas ask? We need to put our faith into practice, embracing the world, thinking for ourselves. Let’s recognize the enormous good that our children are doing in the world and own our identity as Zoroastrians—to put ourselves out there, in a more public way.*”

Nawaz Merchant won the Minotaur Books/Mystery Writers of America First Crime Novel Award with her debut novel Murder in Old Bombay. She teaches creative Writing at Rutgers-Osher Institute.



Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary

Mobed Mehraban Firouzgary of Anjuman of IRAN informs us that the IR of Iran Justice Ministry has , bestowed upon him another honor. He has been asked to lead a Consulting Body that will help Iranian Law Courts in finalising the

matters of specific laws which apply to the Iranian Zarushtis, viz in legacy, adoption, property disputes and divorces etc. Mobed Firouzgary had previously been appointed as the Registrar of Tehran marriage for Z couples.



In his very unassuming style he tells us “ I have submitted to the pressure for accepting this post, just because I consider it as my duty towards our Community, here. Otherwise it is going to be applying a heavy toll on my conscience, especially knowing that our Religious criterion / yardstick for meting out justice ought to follow that of our Spiritual Judge, Meher Yazata, who uses “Hazangro Gaoshahe (= 1000 ears) and “Baevan Chashmano” (10’000 Eyes), indicating that no Verdict would be issued unless 1000 witnesses are listened to and 10’000 documents - all pertaining to that one Case are examined personally!!” He requests “Please pray with me that no conflict will come up any time or reported to me.”

Congratulations Respected Mobed Mehraban our prayers are always with you for your success always with a vohuman and clear conscience. FEZANA JOURNAL

Rashneh Pardiwala’s work showcased at United Nations International Day of Forests

The “Water and Trees” group of the FEZANA Ava Project, with sustained and skillful help from Aysha Ghadiali from Washington D.C. put Dr. Rashneh Pardiwala’s work in India on the global stage on the United Nations Forum on International Day of Forests, March 21st, 2021.



Rashneh’s film, “Restoration of Urban Forests - Reviving the Forests of Doongerwadi in Mumbai, India” was watched live on UN Web TV and showed how the forests of the Doongerwadi are under tremendous stress being situated within one of the most polluted cities of the world and face many challenges like invasion of exotic species, termite infestation, soil erosion and loss of biodiversity. Since 2015, Rashneh has undertaken afforestation efforts with the support of BPP and the Parsi community and over the past 6 years, the forest has gradually revived, looks rejuvenated and is far healthier with the addition of 7500+ large tree saplings across 50+ native forest species. The transformation of the forests of Doongerwadi has been captured in the short film.

NINA WADIA AWARDED THE ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN THE 2021 NEW YEAR HONOURS LIST

London-based actress, and Mumbai born Nina Wadia, was awarded the prestigious Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the New Year Honours list. She was given the news of the OBE on her 52nd birthday earlier in December 2020, but thought the official phone call was being pranked by friends when told she was being made an OBE/

Nina Wadia, 52 years, who found fame on acclaimed sketch show 'Goodness Gracious Me', before landing a role as Zainab Masood in the BBC soap, 'East Enders', has been recognised for services to entertainment as well as to charity.

She said: "My mum and dad (who were) very big in the charity field themselves, always said to me if success comes your way, make sure you pay back because that is the way forward in life and I have taken that very seriously. And it breaks my heart that they are not around to see this happen for me. I hope they would have been proud. That's

the sad part of it. I feel it's a huge, huge honour that this has come my way. It's made the last 30 years of my career, all the hard times, feel worthwhile. And certainly, the thing that's making me the happiest in the world is the fact that every charity that I represent will now have a bit of a boost, especially after the year that we've had where raising funds has been particularly difficult. So I'm hoping that this will add a bit of gravitas to the work that I do, and help raise more money for charity than before."

She has worked with charities which have particular significance for her viz Barnardo's, in tribute to her father who was an orphan in India and the kidney illness research charity in memory of her mother, who died with kidney failure. She supports the Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund and Diabetes UK after her son was diagnosed with Juvenile Diabetes

Nina Wadia is married to the composer Raiomond Mirza and they



have two children. Tia and Aiden.

Congratulations Nina, the community is proud of you and your achievements



Firoz K Pestonji, of Perth, Australia is happy to inform the Global Working group of the formation of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of Oceania. FEZAO which will represent the Zarathushti member associations in Australia and New Zealand. The Federation has been a nascent idea for many years and it was after the 2018 World Congress that it received new impetus and energy and with the guidance of the world community that the OCEANIA Federation became a reality. It was officially registered

A NEW FEDERATION IS BORN

in West Australia and is now an official Federation registered and incorporated in Perth on January 27, 2021 under the Associations Incorporated Act 2015.

The first highly productive 45 minutes meeting was held on Zoom on February 3rd, 2021 with team members from Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Auckland & Perth.

"The long awaited & cherished wish and dream is now fulfilled, as we in Oceania finally, will take our stand on the world body, with an official Incorporation. All regions

on the globe are in the GWG fold." says Firoz Pestonji.

The world community welcomes the new Federation as it will play an important role in the lives of the Zarathushti's residing in Oceania Region and be a Voice in Global matters. We are spread out over the globe but in reality closer than ever even in these pandemic days. Our diaspora is expanding.

We commend Firoz for his perseverance, determination and tenacity to achieve this goal

Congratulations and welcome to the Global family

INSPIRATIONAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR' AT 2020 BRITISH CURRY AWARDS *Pervin todiwala*



Pervin Todiwala, Co-Founder of Café Spice Namaste, wins Inspirational Woman of the Year Award at the British Curry Awards 2020

On December 17, 2020 UK based Café Spice namaste co-founder, Pervin Todiwala was awarded the 'Inspirational Woman of The Year' at the prestigious 2020 British Curry Awards, which were held over a virtual ceremony, and hosted by comedian Rory Bremner. The award was announced by the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan.

Pleasantly surprised on receiving the award, Pervin said, "I am thrilled as I have always felt that there are many Asian women who are behind the scenes who sometimes don't get recognised. I also feel that people are now starting to recognise that we are doing a good job and there are more of us coming to the forefront. It's amazing. We don't have to be in the background. This award is not just for me, but for all of us together."

Mayor Sadiq Khan shared, "It has been an extremely difficult year for curry restaurants who have faced immense challenges as a result of the Covid pandemic. Restaurateurs and their staff have shown extraordinary resilience and worked tirelessly to adapt and provide a safe environment for their customers while continuing to deliver excellent service throughout these uncertain times. Despite these difficult times, it is heartwarming that many restaurateurs have gone out of their way to provide a vital helping hand to those in need during the pandemic."

Pervin added that she and her husband Cyrus always supported each other, and that he calls her 'the boss', while Cyrus quipped, "She holds the whip!"

CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP AT WZO ON FEBRUARY 7, 2021

With the sad demise of Shapur Captain, and Sammy Bhiwandiwalla within a span of 30 days in December 2020, the mantle of leadership has fallen on Rumi Sethna as Chairman and Prof Zenobia Nadirshaw OBE, as President, of the World Zoroastrian Organization.

PROFESSOR ZENOBIA NADIRSHAW MBE, PRESIDENT OF WZO



Professor Zenobia Nadirshaw MBE is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist with over 44 years of experience of working in the English National Health Services and social services sector, with financial and management responsibilities. She holds 3 Honorary Doctorates and 2 Professorships at 2 different Universities in UK. She is a Publisher, Teacher, Trainer, Examiner and Supervisor. She has published widely in the area of Double Discrimination, of inequality, disadvantage and discrimination for vulnerable people in Society.

Over the years Professor Nadirshaw has received several awards from British Psychological society including Honorary Life Fellow and Lifetime Achievement Award. Inspirational Migrant Woman of the year Award in 2016. (Her portrait was hung in the National Portrait Gallery in London), 2017 Award from the City of London (Freeman of the City of London), and in 2019 an MBE from Prince William at Buckingham Palace.

Professor Zenobia's extensive experience, her dedication and enthusiasm is awe inspiring. We wish Professor Zenobia Nadirshaw many further years of great achievements for WZO.

RUMI SETHNA Chairman of WZO

In 1986 Rumi joined WZO, was elected as secretary, treasurer, president and was chairman till 2004 when he resigned

Rumi and his wife Hilda used their own home as the Headquarters of WZO from where the Gujerat farmers project operated after 1990. They travelled to India filming the condition of rural Parsis in order to raise awareness world wide over their living conditions. Over 20 years they have raised more than £200,000 for the farmers of Gujerat and their fund raising work continues. Rumi travelled to Pakistan, India, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to promote the work of WZO and to encourage the local anjumans to join WZO, who thought WZO was a charitable organization but it was formed for political reasons to help people in Iran to be repatriated to the West during the revolution in Iran.

In his closing remarks Rumi said "I would like WZO to be a globally recognised organisation and maybe get recognised by United Nations. I would dearly like all associations to join us so that we can speak with one voice and help our community where ever they are in the world."



POOR-BOX PRODUCTIONS

MAHABANOO MODY-KOTWAL AND KAIZAAD KOTWAL'S POOR-BOX PRODUCTIONS WINS THE 2020 NATIONAL LAADLI & MEDIA ADVERTISING AWARD FOR GENDER SENSITIVITY

On December 15, 2020, the 2020 Laadli Media Awards For Gender Sensitivity were awarded to Poor Box Productions company of Mahabano Mody-Kotwal and Kaizaad Kotwal for their work in bringing the path-breaking play THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES to India 17 years ago. The Laadli Awards are supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Mahabano Mody-Kotwal while accepting the award said that, "While Laadli is honoring Kaizaad, myself, Poor-Box Productions and The Vagina Monologues, we would like to share this prestigious moment with many, many who have made this journey possible – our committed and brilliant cast and crew who, 17 years later, are still going strong with us." She mentioned every actor and crew who has been a part of this revolutionary play's journey. Mahabano and Kaizaad have used the play to raise funds and awareness towards ending violence against women and children.

Poor-Box Productions' The Vagina Monologues (in English and Hindi) still witnesses house-full shows for the public, has been produced for schools and colleges as well as for the most economically disadvantaged women and men in bastis in urban areas. The show has become a cult-phenomenon in India.

"We promise to keep going with this play and this work as long as audiences will keep coming and as long as women continue to be violated," Mahabano continued. "In India, that road seems endless and very fraught. Sometimes when giving up seems easier, I remember the words of Mary Anne Radmacher who said, 'Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying 'I will try again tomorrow.'"

L To R: Mahabano Mody-Kotwal, V (formerly Eve Ensler) and Kaizaad Kotwal at the International launch of the movement ONE BILLION RISING in Mumbai, India in 2013.



FEZANA SCHOLARSHIPS (2021-22)

Applications are invited for:

ENDOWED AND FEZANA ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS

MEHRABAN AND MORVORID KHERADI Endowed Scholarship for Academic Excellence
(The FEZANA Scholar)

FEZANA SCHOLARSHIP (6 Available)

FEZANA 25th ANNIVERSARY Endowed Scholarship

MORVARID GUIV Endowed Scholarship

PURVEZ AND ABAN RUSTOMJI Endowed Scholarship

YASMIN AND SHAPUR PAVRI Endowed Scholarship

SOONU AND JAL BIRDY Endowed Scholarship

VILLY AND HOMI GANDHI Endowed Scholarship

JERRY AND CELESTE KHERADI 30th Anniversary Endowed Scholarship

BANOObAI AND MANECKSHAW KAPADIA Endowed Scholarship

DR MINOCHER RUSTOM AND DOWLAT MINOCHER VESUNA WZO Endowed Scholarships

SHEROO DARABSHA KOLSAVALA Endowed Scholarship

FEZANA ALUMNI Scholarship

ENDOWED AND FEZANA SCHOLARSHIPS FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS

BAPSY IRANI Fine Arts Scholarship

BAPSY IRANI Culinary Arts Scholarship

FEZANA SCHOLARSHIP for the Performing & Creative Arts

KEKI AND GOOLCHER CAPTAIN Endowed Scholarship for the Performing and Creative Arts

FEZANA EXCELLENCE IN SPORTS AWARD

THE NAMES OF SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS WILL BE PUBLISHED ON FEZANA.ORG, IN THE FEZANA JOURNAL, AND WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR ONLINE ACCESS.

All academic scholarships are open to Zarathushti applicants who have obtained admission for attendance at institutions of higher learning (accredited degree-granting colleges or universities) in USA or Canada. Students from overseas must have studied in the US or Canada for at least two semesters before applying. Creative arts scholarships are available to any Zarathushti applicant who is pursuing a program in the creative arts (performing arts, fine arts, culinary arts, etc.). The sports award is available to any North American above the age of 15.

SCHOLARSHIPS—For the 2021-2022 academic year, scholarships will be awarded in September 2021.

AWARD CRITERIA—Applicants will be rated on Scholastic Achievement, Financial Need, Extracurricular Activities, and Community Service.

APPLICATION FORMS—Application forms are available from the FEZANA website at www.fezana.org/scholarships.

Completed applications should be submitted online by July 1, 2021 (11:59 EST).

FEZANA SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS—2020

Dolly Dastoor PhD
Chair, FEZANA Scholarship Program

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world

Nelson Mandela

Education and training continue to fuel the engine of social mobility and contribute to social cohesion and integration in our ever more diverse societies and cultures. The benefits of education go beyond the economic returns—contributing also to better health, citizenship, and lower crime rates. In the words of JFK “The goal of education is the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of truth.”

Investment in our youth is an investment in the future of the Zarathushti community. The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason to hope. You have given hope to our youth by your donations. Your faith and trust in the FEZANA Academic Scholarship Program—as demonstrated by your support and endowments—are appreciated by your committee and the recipients. Thank you.

Your continued financial support and your encouragement is of the utmost importance to maintain this program and sustain the hope of the next generation.

MEHRABANAND MORVORID KHERADI ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP THE FEZANA SCHOLAR (\$5000)



ZENIA PATEL, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, MBA

Born and raised in Mumbai I am currently in the 2nd year of my MBA at University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management. After graduating as the top 10 rank holder in my undergraduate degree in Business Management, I started off my career in Investment Banking at Barclays Bank where I worked as a Fixed Income Analyst for 2 years. With an urge to transition to a more creative role and a penchant for marketing, I pivoted my career to Advertising and worked as a Brand Solutions Manager at DDB, one of the largest Marketing Communications firm in the world. With more than 4 years of experience, I decided to pursue my MBA to learn from a truly diverse cohort with unique perspectives and accelerate my career to be a senior leader in the consumer goods sector in Canada. I was fortunate to get the opportunity

to study at one of the best business schools in Canada and be part of a university that is among the top 20 in the world.

Without the moral and financial support of several Zoroastrian institutions, I would not be where I am today. I feel extremely honored and fortunate to have received the Mehraban and Morvorid Endowed Scholarship and to be named the FEZANA Scholar which would go a long way in enabling me to follow my aspirations and realize my personal and professional goals. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the donors and the FEZANA selection committee for your generous contributions towards my education and your trust in my abilities. The Zoroastrian community’s generosity and support for the young members of our community is truly exemplary and inspires me to give back to the community and continue to support the future generations to the best of my abilities

FEZANA 25TH ANNIVERSARY ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE



TARANA KAOVASIA JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, MASTERS IN BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING (\$3000)

I am a biomedical engineering student who aims to work in the healthcare system and improve quality of life by bringing engineering solutions to medicine. I developed a love for this field during my undergraduate studies in electrical and electronics engineering in India, where I am from. This brought me to Johns Hopkins University after graduating, to pursue my Master's degree and continue research in the field of biomedical engineering. My current research is on the non-invasive treatment of brain tumours using focused ultrasound.

I have been fortunate enough to be surrounded by a family and community who have been by my side and motivated me. This scholarship, the Vakshoori Scholarship, among numerous others, are examples of the unwavering support I have received from our community and it has been nothing but encouraging. I would like to have a similar impact by extending my support to students who seek it.

WZO Canada —SAM MINOCHER VESUNA ENDOWMENT SCHOLARSHIP, DR MINOCHER RUSTOM VESUNA, WZO/CANADA ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$3000)



Nadia Jam, California Institute of Integral Studies Masters in Integral Counselling Psychology

Nadia Jam earned her Bachelors in Political Science in French Immersion at the University of Ottawa in 2019 with Magna Cum Laude and with zero interest in pursuing a career in the field of her study. So she decided to surrender to the flow, trusting that as long as she follows her heart, the universe will guide her towards a fulfilling professional path. It was not until Jan 2020 when she serendipitously discovered the program of her dreams, MA in Integral Counseling Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies. Within three months, her enrollment was confirmed and her vision of becoming a psychotherapist crystallized. With Nadia's passion for connection and non-ordinary states of consciousness, she aspires to restore balance in one psyche at a time, assisting people on their quest for the Truth through holistic and unconventional healing modalities. Nadia's faith in life's organic unravelling's is the basis of her recent successes; the kinds that are defined by the extent to which the soul is nourished by the humans she engages with, by the knowledge she

expands her being with, and by the authenticity, she radiates and inspires in others. She exemplifies this in the Zoroastrian community as a leading teacher for Basic Farsi Fun, a YouTube Channel and Facebook group with over 300 members. In addition to being a writer for the FEZANA Journal and World Zoroastrian Organization Hamazor, based on her journalism at the 2019 World Youth Congress and her founding work for the Zoroastrian LGBTQ+-Straight Alliance, respectively.

The new endowed scholarship Soonu and Jal Birdy, of \$5,000 (\$2,500 for graduate students and \$2,500 for undergraduate students) was set up in her memory by her husband, Ervad Jal Birdie.

Soonu Jal Birdy



Soonu Nania came from Rustom Baug in Mumbai. When 25 years old she traveled by car to London with her brother who lived there. She had interesting stories about her journey including a car search by brash armed soldiers in eastern Europe and how her brother had persuaded her to have her long hair cut in Iran. Contrary to her dreams, London was not as hospitable a place for a lone Parsi girl as she had imagined. She longed to return to Mumbai but her mother had told her that she was going abroad using her dowry and she will have to find her own way back. Luckily, Jal was also a lonely lad who had recently arrived in London. By chance they met at a mutual friend's place, struck up a friendship and eventually decided to get married and spent nearly 55 years of happy married life bringing up their lovely daughter Meher Mistri. Soonu was really a wonderful person, very likeable, kind and loving, was outspoken in her beliefs and never hesitated in speaking her mind. She was a big support to her husband Ervad Jal who often relied on her judgment. We pray her soul progresses quickly in the spiritual realm to achieve eventual peace.

SOONU AND JAL BIRDY ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$2,500)



Havovi Desai, Birdy Endowed Scholarship Masters NYU

Being awarded this FEZANA scholarship means so much to me as I begin my graduate studies in music therapy at NYU! The cost of tuition and housing in the city is tough to manage, so this financial support is a huge blessing which will allow me more time to focus on my studies, practice my instruments, and explore this amazing city while I have the chance! I am very passionate about jazz and have been studying this music extensively on flute, trumpet, and vocals. I am also very passionate about environmental activism and animal welfare. I have volunteered at various animal shelters in the past, and I currently volunteer with World Wildlife Fund, one of the world's leading conservation organizations.

Throughout my undergraduate years at Ohio State, I was a member of our prestigious marching band for 3 years. At OSU, I was awarded various research grants that gave me the opportunity to create my own project and develop my senior thesis. At NYU I am excited to begin my study of music therapy under world renowned faculty giving me the opportunity to learn various techniques to use as a music therapist to help people from both clinical and healthy populations overcome physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual obstacles. While in quarantine, I have been connecting with different musicians on the Worldwide Zoroastrian Facebook page and creating musical collaborations which I love, and I hope that younger / future generations will continue to foster a close and strong Zoroastrian community. I have also been working on fundraising for my local community to build a temple in Ohio by offering free music lessons (online for now) in exchange for donations for our cause. My vision for us as Zoroastrians is to continue to care for and preserve our religion, to establish meaningful friendships with Zoroastrians of all backgrounds across the globe, and to continue pouring love, light, wisdom, and positivity into the world.

MORVARID GUIV ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE (\$1,000)

NAWAZ SHROFF, ST GEORGE'S UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



I am a licensed medical speech language pathologist and an aspiring physician currently attending St. George's University School of Medicine. Having worked in two major cities (Mumbai and NY) as a speech language pathologist, I have provided essential services across all healthcare settings - private practice, home health, sub-acute/acute care and outpatient to enhance not only my knowledge and skillset but also understand the finer nuances of healthcare service delivery models. In my free time I enjoy reading, meditation and international ballroom dancing.

As an international student, I am not granted access to federal student loans/aid. While this stance does seem prohibitive towards my educational goals, I am committed to being successful despite the odds. I couldn't be more thankful towards FEZANA for believing in my long-term goals. I am passionate about global medicine and public health and receiving an academic scholarship provides me with an opportunity to make meaningful contributions towards an ever changing and challenging career in healthcare.

I also thoroughly enjoy mentoring students interested in pursuing a career in healthcare and can be reached at shroffnavaz@gmail.com

30th ANNIVERSARY JERRY AND CELESTE KHERADI ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$1,000)

Cyrus Karai, University of Pennsylvania, The Wharton Business School,
Master of Business Administration



I want to thank FEZANA and the donors for the \$1,000 scholarship towards my MBA studies at the Wharton School of Business. I am also deeply grateful to the Master Family of Hong Kong for their major and continued financial generosity and personal mentorship.

Growing up in a strong Parsi household from Bombay, I have always felt grateful and proud to be part of various strong Parsi communities that have nurtured me through my life.

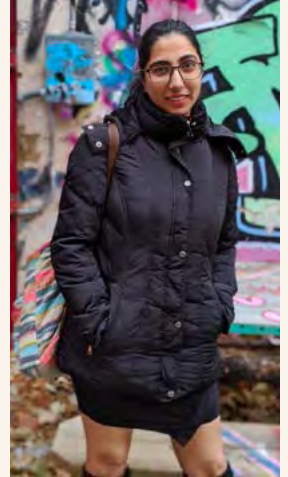
I was born in Auckland, New Zealand, and moved to Sydney, Australia, when 2 years old. I left Sydney for the UK at 20 years old, after graduating from The University of Sydney, to pursue a Chartered Accountancy qualification with PWC, London, and then transitioned to roles in Strategy and Investment Banking at Credit Suisse. At Wharton, whilst studying, I have started an Insuretech start up and have now been offered a full-time role with Blackrock from May 2021.

My deepest gratitude to the donors of the FEZANA scholarship that I was provided.

FEZANA 30th ANNIVERSARY ENDOWED FUND (\$1000)

DELNAAZ KHARADI, Illinois School of Architecture UIUC. Masters in Architecture in Urbanism and Minor in Art History

I am a Graduate Student studying Master of Architecture with a concentration in Urbanism and minor in Art History at Illinois School of Architecture, UIUC. My Undergrad in architecture is from Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat. Later I worked with Architect Hafeez Contractor, Mumbai, for four years as an Architect. I am also the lead editor of the Illinois School of Architecture's publication 'Ricker Report.' I also co-own and am the editor of 'Indic magazine,' a digital platform for young architects. I was very thrilled when my abstract for the conference of Society of Architectural Historians 2021, whose title was "Flames of Atashbehram," got selected. I intend to do a Ph.D. in architectural history and theory on Zoroastrian Architecture; I aspire to be a scholar on Zoroastrian Architecture. FEZANA scholarship has hugely benefited me towards my scholarly endeavors, for which I am highly indebted.



FEZANA SCHOLAR (\$2000)

ROBIN ASGARI, SCHULICH SCHOOL OF LAW AT DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY, NS, CANADA

Robin Asgari is a second-year law student at the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University. Robin previously completed a BA in Political Science and International Relations at UBC graduating with Class 1 Standing. Prior to law school, Robin worked in consulting as the co-founder of a firm focused on technology, clean energy and transportation. He also co-managed a mayoral campaign for a top placing candidate in Vancouver. Robin is currently a World Economic Forum Global Shaper, recognized for his leadership at a regional, national, and international level.

Through his work, Robin tries to give back to his community and supports issues he is passionate about. He is humbled to receive a FEZANA scholarship. This scholarship will allow him to continue to focus on his studies. As a lawyer, Robin hopes to give back to the Zoroastrian community in any way he can.



FEZANA SCHOLAR (\$2,000)

SHEZAN MIRZAN University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Computer Science

I am Shezan Mirzan, a computer science graduate from University of Massachusetts Amherst. As a young kid, I was always fascinated by the miracles of engineering surrounding me! This curiosity was my guiding light that eventually led me to complete my Bachelors in Technology from Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, during which I received the prestigious DAAD-WISE scholarship to intern at TU Berlin, Germany. Apart from work, I am an ardent lover of cricket, and have also played for inter-college tournaments. After my undergraduate, I worked as a senior software engineer at Samsung Research Institute for two years. Currently, I will be joining Amazon USA as a software developer, a dream come true! My journey has been truly great, though it did have its share of struggle. The FEZANA scholarship will be a great aid in covering part of my tuition fees and paying back my education loan. This scholarship offers not just monetary gains, but it motivates me to work harder towards a successful career. I have always believed in giving back to society, and as a student, I joined multiple NGOs that are working towards the betterment of rural kids. In the near future, I also hope to be of help to the aspiring young students of the Parsi community, a community that shaped my thoughts and helped me become a better person at each stage of my life!



FEZANA SCHOLAR (\$2000)

RAMIN AKHAVIJOU , UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH, DOCTORATE CANDIDATE IN MUSIC COMPOSITION AND THEORY

Iranian composer, Ramin Akhaviyou, graduated from the Art University of Tehran with a Master's degree in Music Composition and later moved to the United States in 2017 to study at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) where he received his second Master's degree in Music Composition. He is currently a Ph.D. student in Music Composition and Theory at the University of Pittsburgh where his focus is "Music Perception" and its relation to his compositions. The dialectic interrelation between sounds has always been one of his main concerns and motivators for his compositional work and research. He is scientifically investigating this interrelation through various interdisciplinary projects. His passion for science and technology have led him to take diverse compositional paths that are reflected in his wide range of compositions. His opera "language machine" was produced by the Pittsburgh Opera Company and performed by the CMU New Music Ensemble in April 2019.



His works have been performed in many countries by different soloists, ensembles, and orchestras and, he has received numerous honors, prizes, and commissions such as Iranian Music Association Prize (Tehran, Iran, 2013), ACIMC Award (Paris, France, 2014), IMHM prize (London, England, 2014), Iranian Music Association Prize (Tehran, Iran, 2015), ConTempora Award, Association of Macedonia (Skopje, Macedonia, 2015), Orient/Occident Award (Lviv, Ukraine, 2015), ABLAZE Records Award (Cincinnati, USA, 2016), Bruno Maderna Award (Lviv, Ukraine, 2016), NAT28 (Pittsburgh, USA, 2017), WZO commission (Toronto, Canada, 2017), Kamraton commission (Pittsburgh, USA, 2018), CMU String Quartet Prize (Pittsburgh, USA, 2018), Gindroz Prize (Pittsburgh, USA, 2018), CMU Orchestral Prize (Pittsburgh, USA, 2019). He is one of the directors of CFIM (Center for Iranian Music) at Carnegie Mellon University and currently writing his Probable collection.

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UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS

PURVEZ AND ABAN RUSTOMJI ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$5000)

NIAYESH NAMDARMEHDIABADI,

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, ENGINEERING FIRST YEAR



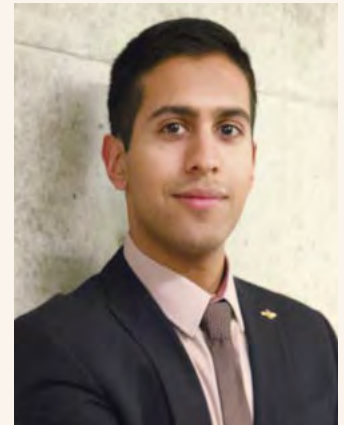
My name is Niayesh Namdarmehdiabadi and I am from Tehran, Iran. Back in Iran, my strongest subject was Mathematics, and I was really passionate about applying it to general Sciences. I pursued my passion for Math and Sciences when I moved to Canada. I was in a full Advance Placement (AP) program throughout high school and achieved the “AP scholar award” at the end of grade 12. AP program enhanced my learning experience and enabled me to attain my Academic goals. I am currently in the first year of Engineering at University of Toronto. I chose to study Engineering, since I wanted to apply my knowledge and expertise to be able to solve problems that our world faces. In parallel, I have always been involved in social events that are held by the Zoroastrian community. I have been participating in “Manthra Competition” in Iran for almost ten years and won several times. Recently, I was entitled as the best presenter for “Gathashenasi” in the virtual Manthra Competition, 2020.

I am so fortunate to be awarded the Purvez and Aban Rustomji Endowment Scholarship through FEZANA. “Daad va Dahesh” is the key element to Zoroastrianism and I am proud to be part of this culture and community. I hope in the future I would be able to pay back what I have been granted now, as I believe this is a great opportunity to remind ourselves of who we are and what a rich background we come from.

TATA-PAVRI ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$5000)

Dario Dharsi, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BA, South Asian Studies

I am currently completing a BA Honours in South Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. I am very passionate about Zoroastrianism and Iranian Studies and plan to specialize in these fields for my graduate studies. It is a great honour to be a recipient of a Fezana Scholarship. I hope to pursue a career in academia and continue the work of many great Zoroastrian scholars in not only producing valuable research on our faith, but also to spread awareness and knowledge about our religion and its history.



WZO-CANADA SAM MINOCHER VESUNA ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP-DOWLAT MINOCHER VESUNA SCHOLARSHIP (\$3,000)

VARUN SHROFF UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO, ENGINEERING

My name is Varun Shroff, and I am currently studying computer engineering at the University of Waterloo. I was actively involved as the vice president of my school's engineering club. I was the head of finance for an organization that raised money for cancer research and awareness, a valued member of the FIRST Robotics' team, mentor for incoming students, provincial level DECA presentation and volunteer for various clubs and high school community programmes. Outside of school, I have a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, play piano, enjoy baseball, soccer, and skiing. I was a volunteer for Toronto Parks and Recreation program throughout my high school years. My biggest pride would be my involvement with our very own Zoroastrian Society of Ontario and their scouting program. I have volunteered at Darbe Mehr for many events and will continue to do so in the future. The teachings of our prophet, Zarathustra and the Zoroastrian community has shaped me into the person that I am today. I am thankful for FEZANA's recognition and scholarship and hope to continue to achieve bigger goals and accomplishments in my career.



SOONU AND JAL BIRDI ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$2,500)



Porus Karwa University of California, Los Angeles, Psychology Major 3rd year

I am Porus Karwa a 3rd-year Psychobiology B.S. major at UCLA. Currently, at UCLA I volunteer in the Ronald Reagan Medical Center, do research in a neurovascular lab on campus, and volunteer as a mental health coach for COVID-19 relief. I assist professors in the organic chemistry department and help my peers learn about the intricacies of organic reactions and pharmaceuticals as well. After my undergraduate studies, my dream is to go to medical school and study to become a physician. Similar to other physicians in the Zoroastrian Association of California-Los Angeles (ZACLA), I plan to use my medical knowledge in the future to offer advice and help to all Zoroastrian members in our community. I am grateful to be awarded the Soonu and Jal Birdy Endowed Scholarship as it will go a long way to help me and my family. I plan to pay it all forward with Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds.”

KAPADIA ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND ACADEMIC STANDING (\$2000)



FARNAZ BEHDINAN, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, MARSHALL SCHOOL OF BUSINESS 1st YEAR

Farnaz Behdinin was born in Tehran, Iran and moved to the US at a very young age. She grew up in Bakersfield, CA and moved to Los Angeles during her high school years. She has participated in two Zoroastrian essay contests and received second place in both. In her high school she was a High Honors graduate, received the AP scholar with Honors Award, and the Visual and Performing Arts Department Award. She is currently studying business administration at the Marshall School of Business at USC and also hopes to minor in product design. She plans to create sustainable products in her future career which falls in alliance with her Zoroastrian beliefs. In the future she also plans to continue to be a part of CZC and wants to help the youth of the Zoroastrian community feel more connected. During these unprecedented times she sees the Zoroastrian youth becoming more involved in their communities to tackle their feelings of isolation and uncertainty to find their purpose.

MORVARID GUIV ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$1000)



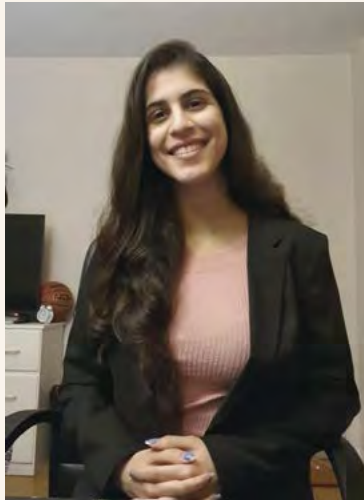
PARSA MEHRABANI, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA, PREMEDICAL TRACK

My name is Parsa Mehrabani and I am currently attending my first year at the University of California, Santa Barbara, following a pre-medical track. I graduated high school with honors, particularly showing excellence in the sciences. I was heavily involved with clubs throughout high school, such as the California Scholarship Federation and Student to Student club. I have also been awarded the Advanced Placement Scholar with Distinction award due to my completion of multiple Advanced Placement tests with passing scores.

Moreover, I have been involved with the California Zoroastrian Center my whole life. Through my Sunday classes, I was able to volunteer with fellow Zoroastrians to help our community and own Dar-e Mehr. Being Zoroastrian has led me to create lifelong friendships, learn valuable advice, and attend memorable sleep away camps: camps I would eventually counsel at.

I am honored to have received the Morvarid Guiv Endowed Scholarship. The generous contributions made by Morvarid Guiv and her husband have made a large impact in my life, from the construction of numerous Dar-e Mehrs to this scholarship. This scholarship is very impactful to my success in college because it will allow me to continue my education with a heightened sense of financial security. I am very grateful to be Zoroastrian and be a part of a beautiful and caring community that has offered me life-changing opportunities.

JERRY AND CELESTE KHERADI 30TH ANNIVERSARY ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$1000)



ROHINA GANDHI, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, BRITISH COLUMBIA, BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (BBA) 1ST YEAR

I am sincerely honored to have been selected as the recipient of the Jerry and Celeste Kheradi 30th Anniversary Endowed Scholarship.

I am currently a first-year student at Simon Fraser University, studying Bachelors of Business Administration. I recently made it to the Honors List and received the Highest Academic Standing Award in my program. Apart from academics, sports and creative arts have always played an important role in my life. I professionally trained for athletics (track events) and swimming since quite a young age, which allowed me to win the titles of Best Athlete (Girls) and Best Swimmer (Girls) in my school for five consecutive years, up until 2018-19. I fell in love with dancing ever since I was three. I have been a part of Shiamak Davar Institute of Performing Arts' Advanced Training Batch (ATB), have participated in shows as often as I can, and have continued my passion through the quarantine. Elocution competitions, turncoat debates, and various team sports are my other strong suits; which clearly makes the stage and the outdoors, my favorite places to be!

I intend to prove myself worthy of receiving this scholarship by giving my best to my studies and everything that I pursue. This act of generosity has motivated me to concentrate on self-development and give back to my community, not only financially but also in kind. I would love to be fully involved in any activities concerning the furtherment of our giving community which I believe, can achieve heights.

SHEROO DARABSHA KOLSAWALLA ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$1000)



SHAHVIR SARKARY SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, BRITISH COLUMBIA, PSYCHOLOGY AND BUSINESS, 3RD YEAR

Shahvir Sarkary is a proud Zoroastrian who finds his values to be an anchor of his upbringing. Shahvir was born in Mumbai, India, and is currently in his 3rd year studying psychology & business at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada. Using his knowledge from the field of psychology and business, Shahvir is consistently involved to make a valuable difference in his community through his university's mental health club and also participates as the fundraising director of the Neurohealth BC organization that constantly works towards spreading awareness about neurological diseases. He has hosted several events on campus also including many virtual events on a nation-wide scale to raise money for the people who suffer from neurological disorders. Shahvir has been involved with the local ZSBC community since his arrival in British Columbia and offers his ongoing support with events and volunteer activities.

Before he began his university journey, Shahvir represented his hometown Mumbai on a global level as a right-back defender at the Under-16 FIFA Gothia Football Cup in Gothenburg, Sweden. He has continued this as one of his many passions and likes to use it as a refresher when school gets overwhelming.

VILLY AND HOMI GANDHI ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP (\$1000)



AVAKHSHIA POURBEMANI, WESTERN UNIVERSITY BIOLOGY HONORS

Currently I am finishing my undergraduate degree in Honors Specialization in Biology at Western University in Canada to follow a career in healthcare. A few months ago, I joined Baycrest Hospital in Toronto to help our overwhelmed healthcare workers cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is my professional goal to enhance health therapeutic outcomes and patient care methods, providing a more pleasant experience for hospitalized clients and improved recovery rates. Engaging and serving the Zoroastrian community has always been a central value in my life. As a member of the ZSO Youth Committee, I actively participate in engaging the Zoroastrian youth and shaping the future of Zoroastrianism in Ontario by planning events and publishing engaging material in the monthly ZSO Newsletters. I have been on the Dean's honors list for the last two years. Overall, I am very honored to have received the Gandhi Endowed Scholarship and very thankful to the Gandhi family plus everyone involved at FEZANA who made this possible.

ALUMNI SCHOLASHIP (\$1,000)



ERVAD NAVROZE ANTIA UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO, CANADA, COMPUTER SCIENCE.

Currently, I'm enrolled in the Honours Computer Science program at the University of Waterloo and am pursuing my degree in hopes of becoming a software developer. In high school, I held an executive position in numerous clubs, while also running for the cross-country team, reaching the stage of being a city finalist each competing year. As well, I have been an active member at the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario (ZSO) from a very young age, participating in functions and volunteering regularly. Since completing my navar three years ago, I have also frequently been performing jashans at the ZSO, gaining great experience from Ervad Hoshang Udwadia and Ervad Mehbhad Dastur.

I am thankful to have been a recipient of the FEZANA Alumni Endowed Scholarship this year, which has not only been a tremendous financial aid in helping me get one step closer to reaching my career goals, but also one of countless reminders of the supportiveness of the Zarhosti community. My vision for our community is to become even more inviting of the new generation's mindset, in being willing to adapt our customs to parallel the advents of technology.

FEZANA SCHOLARSHIP (\$2,000)



AFRITI CHINYOY, CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY, CLEVELAND , OHIO, MAJOR IN NUTRITIONAL BIOCHEMISTRY AND MINOR IN CHEMISTRY 3rd YEAR

Afriti Chinoy has received the FEZANA Academic Scholarship for undergraduate studies. Afriti Chinoy, from Troy Michigan, is a third year student graduating summa cum laude in Spring 2021 from Case Western Reserve University located in Cleveland, Ohio. She is majoring in Nutritional Biochemistry and minoring in chemistry. She plans to start dental school in Fall 2021 with acceptances to University of Michigan School of Dentistry and University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine. During her time at CWRU, Afriti served as president of Pre-Dental Society and CWRU Marketing Club. She won the Dean's scholars award and received the CCEL Scholars award for her volunteer work. Additionally, Afriti has published her biological sciences research work and presented her Orthodontic's research at Craniofacial conferences. She currently works at the University of Michigan Dental School Mishina Lab. After dental school

Afriti plans to pursue a specialization in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. Afriti is actively involved and engaged in the Zoroastrian Association of Michigan and will most definitely continue to give back to her community. She will use this scholarship to fund her future endeavors in academia.

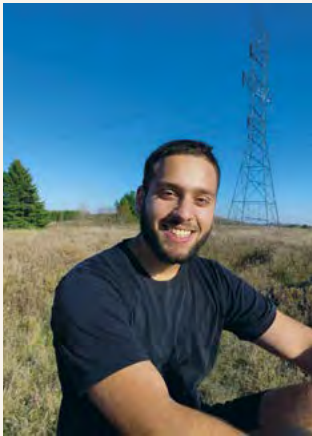
FEZANA SCHOLARSHIP (\$2,000)



JENNIFER SIDHWA , UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE 1st YEAR

This year, I will be going into my freshman year of college at the University of New Hampshire, pursuing a degree in biochemistry. As of now I'm looking into being a Physicians Assistant (PA) in the future. In high school, I was a member of the swim, track, and cross-country teams. I was also part of the math team and the science and engineering club. During my Sophomore year of high school, I conducted research on the history of Portsmouth education, which turned into a mural by the guidance office of my school. To me, this scholarship means that I can achieve a higher education without worrying about the amount of financial stress I am putting on my family. My vision for the Zoroastrian community in the future is to have every single child/person educated. More specifically to get there, I believe that we need to always support each other in times of need.

FEZANA SCHOLARSHIP (\$2,000)



FRAVASH CHOTHIA, RYERSON UNIVERSITY, 3RD YEAR GLOBAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

I was born in Toronto, and I am in my 3rd year at Ryerson University currently studying global business management. This \$2,000 FEZANA academic scholarship will be used to launch my career after graduating. We, as Zoroastrians are so privileged to have these resources to help us get

further in life. I am currently the chair for the ZSO (Zoroastrian Society of Ontario) Youth Committee, and we as a committee host many events at the ZSO like sports-nights, New Year parties and quiz nights online. My Vision for this community is importantly focused on the youth, and for them to get more active and involved in our community that works in seamless harmony. I believe that with us working together is very important and with the rise in technology we are able to be closer than ever. My awards include: High School Honours (2018), Semper Progreiens Award in English (2018), Semper Progreiens Award in Kinesiology (2018), Business Studies Award (2016-2018), TRMC Case Competition 1st Place (2020).

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WINNERS OF THE 2020 COMPETITION

FEZANA SCHOLARSHIPS



SANAYA MISTRY, DANCE PERFORMANCE AND CHOREOGRAPHY

My name is Sanaya Mistry, I am a junior at Towson University in Maryland working towards achieving my BFA in Dance Performance and Choreography with a minor in Entrepreneurship. Currently I am one of six people who were accepted into the Nickerson-Rossi Dance Apprenticeship Program in Palm Springs, California. I am spending my semester training with them alongside continuing my education at Towson University. My dream career is to join a professional dance company and tour internationally with them. After my career as a dancer is over, I want to open my own dance studio for kids and adults with special needs, such as Autism. I truly believe that dance is a form of therapy and should be accessible to all.

MITRA KHODADI, Music Composition & Piano Performance

Mitra Khodadadi is currently a third year music student at McGill University. Her program allows her to learn more about theory, performance, composition, musicianship, and music history. All these courses allow Mitra to improve her performance skills and have a better vision of different pieces and composers.

Mitra started learning the piano at age four. She continued her studies in high school, in mathematics, and took private piano lessons at the same time. She acquired a high GPA in high school and then changed her field of study to Arts to be more concentrated on theory lessons. In 2018 she applied to McGill Music School and was admitted to the Music Performance program. From 2011-2017 she participated in charity programs for children suffering from cancer.

She has participated in Jam-e-Jambakhtegan Sports competition standing first in swimming and was a swimming coach from 2013-16.

As a Zarathushti, Mitra's vision is to see Zarathushti youths studying in high-ranking universities and to see experienced Zarathushtis nurture other Zarathushtis to become professionals in the future. Furthermore, Mitra expects to see her community becoming more united by helping each other through all difficulties. She will try to do her part as a young Zoroastrian in the best possible way to make these visions come true.

The FEZANA scholarship has lightened Mitra's financial burden, which will allow her to focus more on the most important aspect of her life, including school and learning.



FARSHAD ENGINEER, GRAPHIC & INTERACTIVE DESIGN

I am a Graphic designer/ Illustrator based in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. I have worked as a Graphic Designer at J. Walter Thompson (JWT), and I am a graduate from the Art Fundamentals and Visual and Creative Arts programs at Sheridan College., Ontario. My work consists of illustrations of portraits, landscapes, and nature. Each illustration contains bold color and creativity with deep meaning to express myself and narratives through the work. Each stroke I make is a stroke with intent. I also strongly believe in encouraging my audience to interpret my work as

they see it because it gives me a new dimension to see things better through the eyes of others and improvise my artwork further. “As an Artist, I care most about satisfying the needs of my audience and myself and will go the extra mile to meet the standards.” I am currently pursuing, a career in Interaction Design enrolled at Sheridan College in the Honours Bachelor of Interaction Design program.

BAPSY IRANI FINE ARTS SCHOLARSHIP



SPENTA CHOTHIA FINE ARTS

My vision for my career as an artist is to unleash creativity from all individuals, in whatever way they please. Through my work, I hope to give people the courage to create in public and not be afraid to show others what’s in their mind. For people to experience that feeling of letting out ideas they have into tangible reality. I chose this career path because it’s what I believe is the best thing for me. As a Zoroastrian, I want to create an environment where everyone wants to be involved, and together create an accepting community for one another and our future.

Thank you FEZANA for giving me the opportunity to share my vision.



XENIA BYRAMJI FASHION DESIGNER

Xenia Byramji is a Zoroastrian woman in her third year of Fashion Design at Ryerson University School of Fashion, in Toronto, Canada. Since childhood, Xenia has always had an interest in Fashion and it has shaped her into the woman she is today. Xenia’s personal experiences have provided her the opportunity to find her own identity and aesthetic through the process she has created.

BAPSY IRANI CULINARY ARTS SCHOLARSHIP

The Bapsy Irani Scholarship for the Culinary & Fine Arts was set up and dedicated in memory of their mother—Bapsy—by her children, Cyrus Irani, Kerbanu Pudumjee, and Roxan Bottlewala. The aim of the scholarship is to enable students pursuing an education in the Culinary or Fine Arts to study at an accredited institution. “



VAHISHTA CHOTHIA CULINARY ARTS

With the greatest appreciation, I want to express my gratitude to the members of FEZANA and our Zoroastrian community for their support and assistance. This contribution will help me complete the American Culinary Institute certified Baking and Pastry subspecialty program at the Johnson County College. In the tradition of many bakeries and shops that define our culture and warmest memories, I hope to be able to sustain and grow this tradition with our next generation. It is an honor to share this mission with other members of our community who have an interest in one day opening their own restaurants and bakeries. I am sure we hope to represent our religion’s ideals of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds for all. Many thanks for supporting our traditions and being part of this journey.



NAIRA SARKARI CULINARY ARTS

Naira Sarkari studies at the Culinary Institute of America in New York State. Her vision in life is to be a World Renowned Chef and being successful, encourage Zarathusti youth to take up Culinary Arts as a career. It is a career that encourages discipline and order in multiple parts of our life and it is something that truly can be enjoyed with the right person and passion. She hopes that the community flourishes even more than it has in the past and that she can be a small part of it too. She is a hardworking and persistent individual and believes that with the support of her family and loved ones, she can accomplish her goals and bring pride to the community.

Applications are invited FOR PERFORMING AND CREATIVE ARTS SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE YEAR 2021

Applicants should be involved in any Performing or Creative Art study and plan to follow this as a major career choice, though not exclusively. This scholarship should help enable the recipient to study with experts in their field. For Applications visit www.fezana.org/scholarships.

FEZANA EXCELLENCE IN SPORTS AWARD (EXISS) FOR YOUNG ZARATHUSHTIS

The FEZANA Excellence in Sports Scholarship (EXISS) fund was established to provide financial support to young Zarathushtis who have performed exceptionally well in a sport and have become recognized as such. The Fund's purpose is to provide financial scholarships to enable the recipients to get world-class training and/or study with experts in their field; thereby fine tuning and enhancing their talents and capabilities.

For applications VISIT <https://fezana.org/scholarships/sports/>



CADET RUKSHANA SARKARI , VMI CLASS OF '24

Rukshana Sarkari, recipient of the FEZANA 2020 Sports Scholarship, was recruited by Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia, to swim on their Women's Swimming and Diving team. She graduated in 2020 from William P. Clements High School in Sugarland, Texas and is now studying International Studies and History with a minor in French at the Virginia Institute. Due to COVID the swim season on has been pushed back till November but they are currently training everyday in and out of the water. This scholarship will help in her four year journey to represent the US and Zoroastrians at the World Military Games. Upon graduation she will be commissioned into the Navy where she intends to serve as a Surface Warfare Officer. At present she has the title of 4th class cadet.

FALI CHOTHIA CHARITABLE TRUST SCHOLARSHIPS 2020

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2020 Fali Chothia Charitable Trust . Awards were made to all thirteen worthy applicants this year.

- **Yazmin Rustomji** is working towards a Doctor of Medicine at Rush Medical College. She hopes to focus on primary care with an emphasis on geriatrics. She has put her Zoroastrian values to work in her university life as well as her local Chicago community by leading and volunteering for a myriad of organizations and events, way too many to even begin listing them!
- **Robin Asgari** is working towards a Juris Doctor (law) at Dalhousie University, and hopes to go into business law. He is passionate about human rights, and is very keen to help fellow humans around the world who cannot fight for themselves. With that mindset, he participates and volunteers in many community organizations which address local, regional and international challenges. (Winner of 2020 FEZANA Scholarship)
- **Navaz Shroff** is working towards a Doctor of Medicine degree at St. George's University. She is a licensed medical speech pathologist, and has worked in NYC as well as Mumbai to provide essential services across many healthcare settings. She also has volunteered for medical initiatives that provide care to marginalized populations, and hopes that being a doctor will allow her to serve a larger population base.
Awards were also made to the following ten students: (Winner of 2020 Morvord Guiv Endowed Scholarship)
- **Darius Engineer** is pursuing a Master's degree in Mechanical Engineering at California State Polytechnic University.
- **Navasz Hansotia** is working toward a degree in Political Science at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.
- **Armon Kaboly-Zadeh** is studying Political Science at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- **Hoshang Karwa** is pursuing a degree in Psychobiology at the University of California, Los Angeles.
- **Muavan Khorshidian** is obtaining a BS in Nursing at British Columbia Institute of Tehnology, Vancouver.
- **Rohen Pithawala** is pursuing a Bachelor of Science, Finance, at Kean University in Union, New Jersey.
- **Jimmy Postwala** is working toward a Masters in Business Administration at US University in San Diego, California.
- **Shirin Rateshtari** is enrolled in an MBA program at George Washington University, Washington,

DC.

- **Hoshner Tavadia** is completing a degree in Computer Science, Software Development at York University, Toronto.
- **Shauhin Yazdani** is pursuing a degree in Biochemistry at the University of Waterloo, Canada.

The Fali Chothia Charitable Trust was established in 1988 to help provide scholarships and interest-free loans to needy Zoroastrian students. Awards are based on financial need, educational achievement, and community service. The trust is established under the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Washington Inc. (ZAMWI), and has awarded scholarships to students from all parts of the U.S. and Canada.

To demonstrate solidarity and trust between organizations while serving community causes, the U.S. Chapter of the World Zoroastrian Organisation is once again joining the Fali Chothia Trust's Scholarship Program by adding up to fifty percent to every scholarship we give from our trust's resources. This partnership enables us to significantly increase the amount of our scholarships.

HOUSTON
congress2000legacy – 2020 awards

ZARA ITALIA
CYRUS. R DESAI LEGACY AWARD



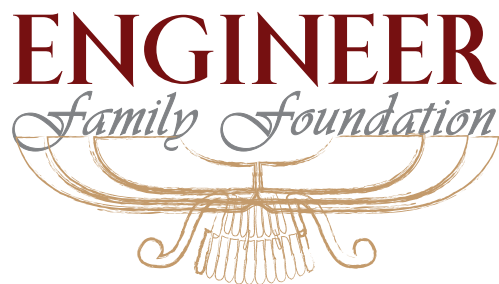
Zara is a Sunday School Teacher and as a Mentor of the Houston Community Youth at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston and in 2020 was the President of the Youth Group and has held various different positions in the last few years.

Zara is also a leader and motivator. She is inclusive in her decision making and a team player. This summer she came up with the idea of initiating a fund raising drive which was very successful and collected ~ \$10,000 which was matched thrice over by others and donated all the funds to the Houston Food Bank. Later in the summer she along with other youth once again came up with the idea of creating and donating lunch bags for the Hungry which led to a donation of 500 lunch bags.

Impacting Lives Positively One at a Time

Engineer Family Foundation (EFF) is a philanthropy minded charity institution that aims to make a difference in the lives of talented and aspiring individuals and those in need of assistance for basic human needs like food, clothing and shelter.

Our charity invites applications from students aspiring for education, pursuing work related technical diplomas and seeking excellence in the fields of sports and fine arts.



www.engineerfamilyfoundation.org

GOOD THOUGHTS | GOOD WORDS | GOOD DEEDS

BIRTHS

Adelina, a girl to Farzeen and Dave Ventresca, granddaughter to Fali and Zarine Sidhwa on October 16, 2020. (ZAPANJ)

Zinnia, a girl to Diana and Khuzaan Screwvalla on November 6, 2020. (ZA-Chi)

Zia a girl to Dixie and Kaizad Cama, sister to Darius and Shanaya, granddaughter to Nilufer and Nevil Kadva of California and Mehru and Lovji Cama of New Jersey, on November 15, 2020 in New Jersey.

WEDDINGS

Shahrukh Rustom Dinshaw, son of Bakhtawar and Rustom Dinshaw to **Rima Sudhir Shetty**, daughter of Asha and Sudhir Shetty on August 20, 2020. (ZAPANJ)

Malcolm Cooper, son of Hutokhshi and Porus Cooper to **Liz Gibbons** on December 5, 2020. (ZAPANJ)

DEATHS

Cawas Jamshed Daruwalla, husband of Farida Daruwalla, father of Shiraz (Cyrus) Billimoria, Spitum Daruwalla, grandfather of Alizeh, Priyana, Armaan Billimoria in Albuquerque, NM on May 12, 2020. (ZAPANJ)

Kuku Keki Bunshah, mother of Freny (Burgess) Jokhi, grandmother of Jessica, Michael in Atlanta, GA on September 15, 2020. (ZAGNY)

Shirin Savak Irani, 97, mother of Sarosh (Veera). Zerin (Porus) Dadabhoy, Zenobia (Sorab) Mistry, Shanaz (Dinsha) Cooper, grandmother of Harnoz, Danesh, Darius, Dina, Maneck, Minoo, Vispi, great grandmother of Cyrus, Arianna, Zane, Amy, Parende, Pervez, Kainaz in Downers Grove, IL on December 13, 2020.

Bahadur Jehangir Saher, 88, husband of Amy Saher (nee Davierwalla), father of Sarosh (Kamal) Saher, Keshwar (Hormuzd) Ghadiali, Naju (Hormuzd) Khasimai, grandfather of Darius, Shirin, Aviva, Khushru, Zubin, Zinnia, brother of Dolly Italia (Mumbai, India), Soonu Tantra (Mumbai, India), Jehanbux Saher (Melbourne, Australia) in Elgin, IL on December 16, 2020.

Pooran Behmoodi (Keykhosravian), wife of late Jahangir Behmoodi, mother of Farshid, Parvin,

Farzad, Anahita, grandmother of Siyavash, Arsha, Nairika, Armita, Vesta on December 17, 2020. (ZSO)

Fahrokh Keki Dudhmal, husband of late Rena Dudhmal, son of late Sheroo and Keki Dudhmal, cousin of Bachi (Bomi) Damkewala, Rumi (Kashmira) Jamsetjee in Birmingham, AL on December 17, 2020. (ZA-Chi)

Noshirwan Jehangirji Katrak, 92, husband of Arnavaz Katrak, father of Mahrukh (Feroze) Motafram (Sammamish, WA), Jehangir Katrak (Mumbai, India), Cyrus Katrak (Mumbai, India), grandfather of Freya Motafram and Jamsheed Motafram in Mumbai, India on December 25, 2020.

Dinyar Khurshed Jussawalla, husband of Roshan Jussawalla, father of Malcolm and Zubin Jussawalla, father-in-law of Delila Law, late Firoza Jussawalla, brother of Aban Jalnawala, brother-in-law of Freny Engineer, grandfather of Zarna, Samira, Nazreen, Shirin on December 26, 2020. (ZSO)

Sammy Bhiwandiwalla, husband of Ursula, father of Cyrus, Nicola, father-in-law of Christine, David, grandfather of Chloe-Rose, Marcus, Reubens, Lara, Rhea, Thomas on December 27, 2020. (ZTFE)

Tehmi Dara Patel, wife of Dara Patel, mother of Kersi (Marie-Joelle), Maharukh (Rohin), Roxy (Rustom), grandmother of Farhad, Shirin, Adarvan, Daryus, Adel on December 28, 2020. (ZSO)

Pasupuleti (Krish) Kishnayya, husband of Pervize, father of Raiomand (Meghan), brother-in-law of Rohinton and Roshan Rivetna (Hinsdale, IL) on December 31, 2020. (ZA-Chi)

Najoo Gustad Nanavati, wife of late Gustad Nanavati, mother of Shiraz Minwalla, Hoshedar Minwalla, grandmother of Tenaz Sunavala (Houston, TX), Cyrus Minwalla and Anaheeta Minwalla, great grandmother Zenia and Farzad Sunavala, Amy and Naomi Minwalla, sister of late Viloo Vakharia, late Maneck Soparivala, late Dinoo Mistry, Bachi Patel, Ava Dubash in Silver Springs, MD on December 31, 2020. (ZAMWI)

Godrej (Goshi) Randeria on December 31, 2020. (MANASHNI)

Goolcher Dinshaw Joshi, mother of Shehernaz, mother-in-law of Farhad, grandmother of Ana, Roksana, in Washington, on January 4, 2021.

Arnaz Jamsheed Marker, wife of late Ambassador Jamsheed Kekobad Ardeshtir Marker, mother of



MILESTONES

Niloufer Marker Reifler, late Feroza Marker in Karachi, Pakistan on January 7, 2021.

Ervad Peshotan Mogal, father of Khushnam and Dilkhush, brother of Beroz Kasad (ZAPANJ), Shehru, Perviz, Thrity, Goolshan, grandfather of Shanaya, Sheryl, Myra, Niel in Mumbai, India on January 18, 2021. (ZAGNY)

Percy Kelawala, 71, husband of Yasmin Kelawala, father of Yazdan Kelawala, father-in-law of Crystal Kelawala, grandfather of Sam Kelawala, brother of Jimmy, Mehernooos, Kashmira Kelawala, brother-in-law of Roshni Kelawala, uncle of Sharmeen Karbhari, Mehernooz Kelawala on January 21, 2021. (ZSO)

Marzban Jehangir Austin, 78, husband of Guloo Austin, father of Pheroz (Zareen), Navroze (Lisa), Arshes (Vanessa), brother of Erach Austin (Mombasa), late Adil, late Freny (Keki) Bulsara on January 22, 2021. (ZSO)

Aban Wadia, 72, wife of Aspi Wadia, mother of Farah (Matthew) Brink, Shernaz Wadia (Ryan Marmion), Holly Wadia, grandmother of Audrey, Joshua and Zachary Brink, Madison, and Morgan Marmion in Symmes Township, OH on January 25, 2021. (ZA-Chi)

Jemi Jal Tabak, 78, father of Khosro and Hanoz Tabak (Toronto, ONT), brother of late Minoo Tabak, Freni Tabak (Mumbai, India) in Richmond, BC on January 25, 2021.

Zenobia Songadwala, wife of Dosu, mother of Cyrus (Amanda), grandmother of Zanya, Pheodard on January 28, 2021. (ZSO)

Roshan Khatao, mother of Neemtaz Khatao in New Jersey on January 29, 2021.

Dara Mistry, 83, brother of Roshan, in Vancouver, BC on February 2, 2021.

Kurush Bejon Maneckshana, life partner of June Posner, father of Michael, Joshua, grandfather of Charlotte, Teddy, brother of late Farida, Arnaz, Temus, Nainshad (Nick), brother-in-law to late Yasmin, Behroz, Niloufer, Afzal, uncle of Armeen, Zahin, Bejon, Zarnosh, Neil, Triana, grand-uncle of Zachary, Mason, Friyana, Zaal in Bordentown, NJ on February 4, 2021. (ZAGNY)

Ruby Gustad Vakharia, wife of late Gustad Munchershaw Vakharia, mother of Khursheed Gustad Vakharia, sister-in-law of Naval Munchershaw Vakheria, Coomie Hoshang Mavalvala, sister of late

Hoshang Maneckshaw Mavalvala, late Mehru Naval Vakharia, Minoo and Meher Mavalvala (Vancouver, BC), Darayes and Hufri Mavalvala (Vancouver, BC) in Pune, India on February 7, 2021.

Nargis Bharucha, 81, wife of Lovji Bharucha, mother of Mehernosh Bharucha in Montreal, QUE on February 7, 2021.

Kersasp Ardeshtir Bhesania, husband of Ruby Bhesania, father of Mehernosh, Teosar, Zubin, Grace, father-in-law of Niloufer, Yesna, Linda, Mark. (ZSO)

Goshtasb Abtin 82., husband of Delnavaz father of Fereidun, Houman, Farbod, Katayoun and grandfather of Autria, Kaveh and Shayan in Los Angeles, on Feb. 8, 2021, (CZC)

Mahin Fereidooni (Azari) wife of late Nariman Azari, mother of Fariba, Mehrdad and Sam, and grandmother of Behan, Sarah, Tanya, Ashdin, and Zeanna. in Irvine CA., on February 10, 2021.

Zarintaj Farahmand, wife of Keykhosrow (Kika), mother of Kambiz, Kamyar and grandmother of Rambod, Armeen, Arman, Aryana, Artemis, in San Jose, CA, on February 11, 2021.

Parvin Hemati Farhang, 97, wife of late Ardeshtir Farhangi, mother of Shida Farhangi Anoshiravani, Shahram, and Shahnaz Farhangi, in Newport coast, CA, February 13, 2021. Roj Ormazd, month Esfand.

Rashid Behram Rateshtari husband of Dolly Rateshtari, father of Azita Kaovasia and Hoshang Rateshtari and grand father of Anush, Zenia, Leena and Leila in Gaithersburg, Maryland on February 18, 2021.



PLEASE SEND ALL
SUBMISSIONS FOR
MILESTONES TO
MAHRUKH MOTAFRAM
TEL 425-961-0298
MAHRUKHM83@GMAIL.COM



Matrimonials

Female, 57, 5'8", retired, US citizen, enjoys cooking, house-keeping, music, movies, walks in the park. Interested in meeting gentleman with similar interests. Contact Joeparsi@gmail.com, (631) 645 7588 [F20.56].

Male, 36, 5'11", M.Sc (Computer Science), working as Software Developer for logistics company in Toronto. Enjoys music, movies, travel, foodie, reading, gaming and scrabble, playing the guitar, physics and astronomy and much more. Looking for an honest and faithful, traditional girl willing to settle in Canada. Contact: nevil_5@yahoo.com. [M20.57].

Male, 38, 5'8", B.Com, MBA, Pilot with Go Air, based in Mumbai. Enjoys travelling, movies, watching TV. Non-smoker, non-drinker. Willing to relocate to USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand. Contact hdjmodi@gmail.com, +91 98334 19197. [M20.58]

Male, 38, 5'6", B.Com (India), Diploma in Culinary and Diploma in Avionics (Adelaide, Australia), Maintenance technician, residing in Adelaide. Australian citizen. Family in Pune. Enjoys outdoors, walking, riding, swimming, cooking, music, movies. Interested in meeting girl from Australia/ New Zealand or willing to settle in Australia. Contact kameightytwo@gmail.com. [M20.60]

Male, 27, 5'8", B.S. in Finance from University of Florida, working as Strategist at Google in CA. Contact +1 (305) 785 7368. [M20.61]

Female, 34, 5'4". Parents of 34-year-old MBA, working as Event Specialist with a Government company in Dubai, invite correspondence from well-settled boys, preferably in USA, Canada or Australia. Having grown up in a liberal family, would prefer someone with a progressive and realistic approach to life. Contact porustar@hotmail.com or +91 83691 22310. [F20.62]

Male, 38, 6'0", Advanced Master's degree, Teacher in Boston,

Massachusetts. Patient, hardworking, with a good sense of humor. Enjoys travel, the outdoors, movies, and spending time with friends. Interested in meeting someone who is loving and understanding. Should be willing to relocate to Boston. Contact mehshroff@yahoo.com. [M20.63]

Male, 28, 5'6", Bachelor of Commerce, University of Auckland, New Zealand, double major in Information Systems and Operations Management. Working as Customer Service Representative at Concentrix, NZ. Director of KDFJ Enterprises (Zoroastrian Culture Shop). Family immigrated from Mumbai when he was 9 yrs. Enjoys outdoors, tutoring, spending quality time with family and friends. Contact jehan_11@hotmail.com. [M20.64].

Female, 20, 5'3", starting University in Auckland, New Zealand (planning to study engineering or medicine). Enjoys tennis, gym, sports, black belt in karate, music, reading, athletic. Contact DaliahKermani@gmail.com. [F20.65].

Female, 25, 5'6". Third year medical student, in Southern California. Brought up in USA. Outgoing, loves to explore new places, go on runs and hike. At home she likes to read, enjoys music a lot. Great sense of humor. Compassionate and helpful, and passionate about her work and line of studies. Looking for like-minded, well educated boys in USA or Canada only. Contact +1 951 202 4868. [F20.67].

Male, 34, 5'7", Bachelor of Engineering (Electronics), post-grad in Supply Chain Mgmt. Working as Category Buyer at Maersk Group, Mumbai. Contact +91-99691 68546 [M21.01]

Female, 30, 5'1". B.Com, chartered accountant, Manager in International tax department at Deloitte, Mumbai. Diploma in piano from Royal College of Music, London. Enjoys reading

and watching movies. Contact naazarir@omantel.net.om, +91 9821 3909 80. [F21.02].

Female, 28, 5'7". LLM, Masters in Commercial and Corporate Law from Queen Mary University, London (2020). Studied in London for 2 years and returned to job as legal advisor in corporate law in a law firm in Pune. Boy must be well-educated (masters degree) and professionally well-placed from a good family. Willing to relocate. Contact mother +91 96231 13949. [F21.04].

Female, 33, 5'9", B.Com. and L.L.B. from Mumbai. Currently working as a Legal Advisor in Dubai. Open to moving anywhere. Enjoys travel, baking, health and fitness, nature, socializing and spending time with family and friends. Contact on whatsapp - +91 98193 00755, [F21.07].

Female, 35, BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) Head of Business Development in Aviation Industry in Mumbai. Ambitious and driven, smart, intelligent, caring and fun-loving. Enjoys travel, music, Salsa and other dances. Contact mother Freidaedwards@gmail.com, +91 98201 95764 [F21.08].

Male, 49, 5'11". Looking for an alliance for my brother (divorcée) residing in Mumbai. Post graduate in Mass Communication and Journalism. Working as a manager for a reputed Airline, having his independent accommodation, living alone (as parents have passed away). Fun loving, having a good sense of humour; loves travelling. Is looking for a girl either single/divorcee without encumbrance email farrydoc@gmail.com. or adilm972@gmail.com. [M 21.09].

FEZANA Journal will coordinate initial contacts between interested parties. We do not assume any responsibility for verifying credentials. Contact Roshan Rivetna at roshanrivetna@gmail.com.



Obituary

REMEMBERING ARNAZ JAMSHEED MARKER (1937-2021)



Arnaz

Jamsheed Marker (nee Minwalla), the beloved wife of the late Ambassador Jamsheed K. Marker, passed away peacefully at her Karachi home on January 7th, 2021. As the wife of Ambassador Jamsheed Marker, Arnaz was part of living history. They both served in postings to Geneva, Bonn, Paris, Washington DC, and the United Nations, where Jamsheed chaired the Security Council. Arnaz was the President of the UN Ambassadors' Wives Association. She carried out a wide-ranging series of diplomatic activities in each of these important capitals; both in association with her husband, and independently with international organizations, non-government organizations (NGO's), and private sector groups.

Arnaz was actively involved in women's development activities in Pakistan and abroad, especially the of female education, for which she was a significant fund raiser. She also had a particular interest in the treatment, rehabilitation and welfare of disabled children and organized the Pakistan team to the Special Olympics in the US.

Born to a family of hoteliers, a graduate of the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne, she took pleasure in making others feel good about themselves. She helped countless people both individually, with advice and practical assistance. Her incredible empathy for the ill and unfortunate made her generosity extend beyond her circle to include strangers in need. Her instinct to serve others left her to become a Reiki Master, and in retirement, she volunteered at hospices and other care facilities.

Arnaz encouraged the Dastur Dhalla family to entrust the Dastur Memorabilia Trust, including his awards, Anjuman presentations, and personal items to the Zoroastrian Association of Houston library. The Trust has also recently acquired lecture notes, newspaper articles, and photographs as a gift from Ervad Dr Soli Dastur of Florida.

Her joie de vivre, liveliness, and irrepressible good humor cheered the many people she helped and brightened the lives of all around her. She is survived by her beloved niece, Naila Jamall whose devotion eased her final years; her stepdaughter, Niloufer Marker Reifler; her siblings, Goshi Masnata, Mithoo Birdie and Daraius (Happy) Minwalla; and everyone in the Marker, Minwalla and Jamall families. She will be missed very much.

With fond memories from her friends and admirers



Between the Covers

THE WHITE PUGREE: MY STORY

By Yezad Sam Kapadia; Reviewed by Yasmin Pavri
Pps: 106; Price: \$8.99

Ervad Kapadia wrote this memoir as a legacy for his young grandsons. It encompasses his extended family, his growing up in Mumbai, his study abroad and his career. But most importantly he wanted to impart to them the importance of living a righteous life, based on Zoroastrian principles.

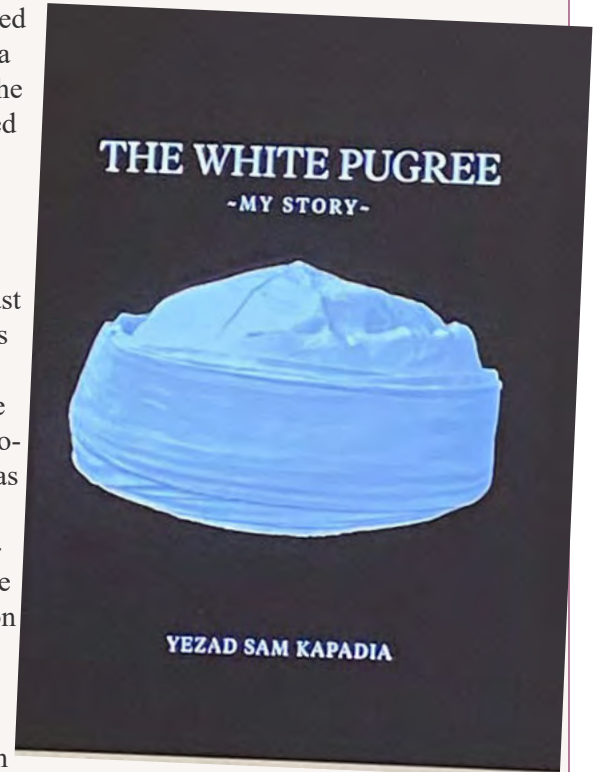
Yezad Kapadia was born in Mumbai in 1934. He attended Cathedral High School and Wilson College. Like many other students of modest means, he was able to study abroad only by obtaining a scholarship. Although he would have preferred to go to an English speaking country, the J.N.Tata Endowment agreed to sponsor him on condition that he go to Germany. As he states very matter-of-factly: "In 1954, USD 1 was equivalent to INR 4 and DM1 was equivalent to INR1. This meant that I could study in Germany four times longer with the same amount of money". So he buckled down and studied German with such an excellent teacher that he talks with pride about how even to this day he is mistaken for a German when he speaks the language. He studied Metallurgy at the prestigious Technical University of Aachen. At several points in the book, he talks fondly of the friends he made in Germany and how his family and theirs have kept in touch through three generations.

His first job was in Jamshedpur with Tata Steel where he spent twenty-seven years. Once his education loan was paid off he married his wife Rati, who was his friend and partner till she passed away. Interestingly,

this is where his life intersected with that of Dr. Pesi Bharucha whose life was portrayed in the book *What Pesi Did* (reviewed in the Winter 2020 FEZANA Journal)

He talks about the problems that he encountered in the blast furnace department during his tenure, including resistance from management to fix these problems due to the costs associated with those fixes. He was relegated to the bottom rungs in keeping with the hierarchical practices of the day, but he concludes with the satisfaction that by getting to know the workers at the very bottom, he learnt a lot of lessons that helped him as he rose through the ranks. He had intuitively figured out the quality of Emotional Intelligence 30 years before it was identified as a management tool! After many years with Tata Steel, he joined the internationally renowned German Company, Lurgi, as the Managing Director of its operations in India.

Yezad was inducted as a Navar at his mother's insistence since she wanted him to be of service to the community. He muses that his mother could not have visualized in what way he would be of service. He sees the need for priests to perform ceremonies for children of interfaith couples. He also has no compunction in inducting an individual into the Zoroastrian faith if he is satisfied that he/she has studied the religion and learned the prayers. He believes that the Gathas teach us



that: (1) There is only one God (2) We need to treat all people with dignity and respect (3) We need to think good thoughts so we speak good words and then perform good deeds (4) It is not sufficient to do good deeds – we need to fight evil wherever it exists (5) We need to be humble and compassionate (6) We have the freedom of choice but we alone will face the consequences of our choices (7) We need to be righteous because righteousness is its own reward.

Ervad Kapadia has lived his life based on these Gathic principles. Looking back, he is content in the knowledge that he has passed on this legacy to his two daughters and to his grandsons.

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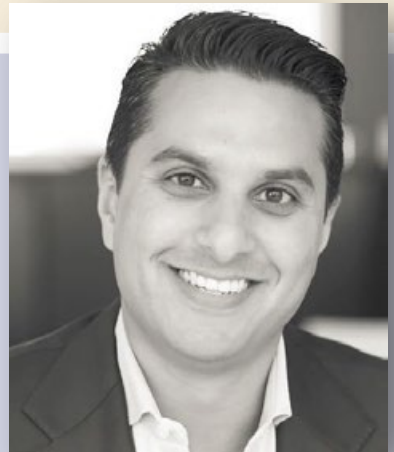
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