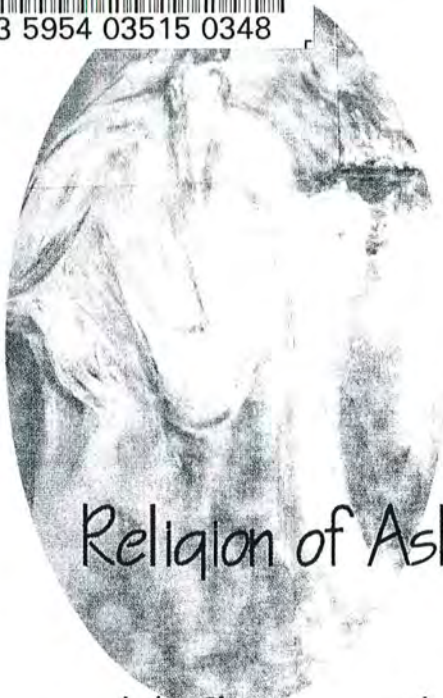




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Religion of Asho Zarathusht
and Influence through The Ages



Ervad Jehan Baqli



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**Religion of Asho Zarathusht
and Influence through The Ages**

Ervad Jehan Bagli

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To My Family
Freny, Darius, and Shiraz

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FOREWORD

Religions address the mysteries of creation and provide their followers with a guide to life. They are composed of two main parts: doctrine and ritual. Religious ritual without doctrine is like a shell without a kernel; religious doctrine without ritual is like a kernel without a protective shell. Religious doctrine respond to mental quests, religious rituals, to emotional needs. Rituals provide individuals with a means to communicate with God, with the souls of the deceased or imaginary angels, often within the context of their communities. They embody hopes and aspirations as well as expressions of gratitude for vouchsafes received.

In light of the important role that philosophy and doctrine play in the Zoroastrian religion it is helpful to touch on the main doctrinal concepts of this reflective religion. God or Ahura Mazda is characterized as having seven attributes. Ahura Mazda's first attribute is *Vahishta Mana*, which means supreme intelligence, essence of wisdom. The concept of wisdom holds a prominent position in the Zoroastrian philosophy. Ahura Mazda created the world in its wisdom. Also, Zarathushtra discovered the mysteries of creation, that is, the notion of one supreme creator in his wisdom. Zarathushtra then encouraged people to use their good mind, *Vohu Mana*, and Conscience, *Daena*, to decide if they choose to accept the religion and its way of life.

The second attribute of Ahura Mazda is *Asha Vahishta*, which means the essence of truth. Asha has been translated as truth and the ideal truth, but there is more to that concept. Asha is not only truth, but the quest for truth. Asha is also the immutable law of justice that governs the creation and existence of the universe. In its continuing search for truth, Zoroastrianism supports the notion of a progressive way of life.

The third attribute of Ahura Mazda is *Khashatra Vairya*, the constructive and holy power of Ahura Mazda. In Zoroastrian philosophy "Right is Might". Spenta Armaity, the fourth attribute of Ahura Mazda, is the essence of compassion, love and benevolence. It exemplifies the loftiest dedication and selfless service.

In Zoroastrianism Ahura Mazda is the essence and source of being. A spark of that 'being' exists in all creation: in the sands of desert, the metals in the mines, leaves on trees, animals and us. It exists in the air, water, fire, and, in sum, the entire universe. This is the principle of "oneness of being" first enunciated by Zarathushtra. The quest for comprehending the truth of that, which exists and the events that occur in the universe leads us to question, be curious and seek to understand. This journey of discovery reduces our suffering and increases our happiness, eventually contributing to the advancement, or as is often translated, the "refreshment/renovation" of the world. Self-realization in Zoroastrianism thus presupposes discovery and activity for good of all.

Zarathushtra propounded the doctrine of dualism: light and dark, warm and cold, positive and negative, thesis and antithesis and of course, good and evil. Dualism connotes the two antipodal attitudes, postures, prototypes, characters, moralities, and mentalities in the spiritual framework. In each case, the two polar opposites are neither complementary nor capable of producing a synthesis; they are, in one word, irreconcilable. They conflict in comprehension, belief, word and deed and oppose each other at every step.

Zarathushtra also propounded the concepts of freedom of choice and the related concept of the law of consequences or justice. Asha emphasizing that all human beings were created equal, the Zoroastrian doctrines notes that every human being is free to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. If we choose well, we will benefit and conversely, if we choose poorly, we shall suffer the consequences.

Given the duality between good and evil, we must choose intelligently, definitely and unambiguously. This distinction is important to understanding the concept of freedom of choice in Zoroastrian doctrine. Moral dualism, the existence of good and evil, is a fact of life that must be faced, and overcome. The modernity of these ideas and their applicability to modern living is worth mentioning.

In Zoroastrianism the law of Asha determines the consequence or fruits of our acts and the fate of our soul after our physical death. Physical death marks the end of one stage and the beginning of a new stage in life. We can change our future or destiny by changing the

direction of our acts towards goodness. By committing ourselves to positive acts of love, devotion and holy rationality, we can achieve self-realization and perfection (*Haurvatat*) both in this world, and life that shall follow our physical death. By doing so we achieve immortality (*Ameratat*). Ahura Mazda's fifth and sixth attributes are Haurvatat (*perfection*) and Ameratat (immortality). Sparked with god-like characteristics, by choosing rightly, we have the potential to become like Ahura Mazda.

The seventh attribute of Ahura Mazda is *Spenta Mainyu* or creativity, which is an overriding attribute. Through *Spenta Mainyu*, Ahura Mazda creates or gives (*datar*) and transforms (*tashea*). *Spenta* means augmenting and thus *Spenta Mainyu* refers to the ever increasing creativity of God, that is, its infinite constructive power. Ahura Mazda is the creator of everything good and all good things; destruction does not emanate from him and evil is not its creation.

Philosophy and science are not in discord with Zoroastrianism. Zarathushtra acquired his knowledge of Ahura Mazda and soul (*Urvan*), from observing the manifestations of Ahura Mazda's acts. He in turn, explained it, through wise analogies. It is the intellectual guide (*Vohu Mana*) that the religious sentiments needs.

Rituals are different in function and nature. Rituals performed for the anniversary and death of the prophet, the initiation into the Zarathushti fold (the Novjood ceremony), marriage, and death are indispensable for preservation of religious status and solidarity of the community. These are time tested rituals, endorsed by the religious community, although they may be modified in the course of time. They are meaningful and beautiful.

Rituals related to the seasonal religious festivities (*Gahanbars*), national-religious festivities (*Norooz, Mehrgan, Sadeh, Tirgan and Yalda*), and the monthly occasion when the name of day and month correspond, not only bring about communal cohesiveness but are beautiful in their symbolism. All these rituals entail some expression of gratitude for blessings sometimes taken for granted.

The Zoroastrian religion is not free of rituals dating from pre-Zarathushtra days when people believed in multitude of deities

and power of miracles. For instance, in special ceremonies performed for the recovery of terminally ill, some rituals require communicating with the supernatural world and asking for a cure or miracle. As Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians learn more about their religious doctrines, they will come to realize the importance of relinquishing the practice of such rituals.

Few scholars are as qualified as Dr. Jehan Bagli to do justice to these topics. Dr. Bagli is an erudite scholar versed in science, philosophy, history, Zoroastrian doctrines and ritual. He is a Mobed (a Zoroastrian priest) and is currently president of 'North American Mobed Council'. Having lived most of his life in North America, Dr. Bagli is intimately aware of issues facing Zoroastrians in diaspora. Having attended many regional and global congresses on Zoroastrianism, Dr Bagli is conversant with the views of both conservative and reformist on socio-religious issues facing Zoroastrians who have migrated to North America. Dr. Bagli was the founder of one of the first Zoroastrian journals published in North America. A distinguished research fellow at Wyeth Research Institute, Dr. Bagli is a scientist and medicinal chemist. It is therefore, no surprise that his method of research is logical and systematic.

An analytical discussion of religious doctrines and rituals is important for the preservation of the Zoroastrian community and for the education of those interested in exploring this ancient religion. This book on Zoroastrianism is very comprehensive and informative. It will, therefore, be of great benefit to Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians alike.

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PREFACE

It was in 1952 that I left India for England, for postgraduate studies. Little did I realize, that I was leaving Bombay - the present day Mumbai, as a place of domicile for good? In the relative isolation of my studies in the foreign land, that I discovered my newfound interest - the study of comparative religion.

While on a visit back to Bombay, India in 1967, I received a letter from the community in Montreal, that they had a meeting and I was elected, in absentia, the founding president of the newly formed Zoroastrian Association of Quebec (ZAQ), an organization that celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2002. Here I was faced unexpectedly, with a decision, whether to accept or decline this unusual honor. Being of a nature to take things lightly, I firmly believed, that accepting the position would directly bear on the commitment to undertake a serious study, to find answers to questions of the laity about my God-given religion - the Religion of Asho Zarathust, about which I knew pretty little at that time. That was the initiation to my study of Zarathushtrian religion, which is to this day on going.

Self imposed study of any subject, as antiquated as Zarathushtrian religion is, has a major disadvantage. Firstly, long periods of our history have highly tinted, various aspects of the religion due to its exposure to a number of cultural and social eras. Consequently it is important to research a specific topic, through the viewpoints of more than one scholar before arriving at a conclusion. Secondly, it is difficult to assess the correctness of ones conclusion in such a study. That was the motivation for me to write and expose my learning to Zarathushtrian at large. This was done with a hope, to expose the essays to a knowledgeable segment of the community, indirectly subjecting the writings to a peer review for ineffableness of the conclusions.

In my study of Zarathushtrian religion a strong beacon that has consistently enlightened itself, is that the Gathic teachings of the first Prophet are truly a profound guide to a thought process that helps chart a way of life, for the entire humanity. Despite its antiquity, teachings of Asho Zarathushtra are as relevant today as they were in the era he

propounded them. It is open to question, if the prophet ever intended his discourses to become an organized religion as we recognize it today.

In the history of our Faith, we see a major void after the passing of the Prophet. History also provides clear evidence to the fact that Zarathushtrian religion that evolved in the Northeastern Iran around 1700 B.C.E. moved westward very gradually¹. It was only around the eighth century B.C.E. that Medes from Western Iran encountered the practicing Zarathushtis from eastern Iran in the City of Raga. Magi the priestly caste of Media usurped the religious authority from their Chorasmian counterparts, the Athravans, and added a number of innovations to Zoroastrianism² As Prof Zaehner³ in his introduction says, " never before has a great religious thinker been more grossly travestied - travestied by his own followers who straightway obscured the purity of his monotheistic vision, travestied by the Magi in the Levant who presented him to the Greco-Roman world not only as the author of a rigid religious dualism which made Good and Evil two rival and co-eternal principles, but also a magician, astrologer, and a quack..."

These and other such literature references leave little doubt in the minds of any serious student that what Zarathushtis practice today, as Zoroastrianism is a syncretic faith, distinct from the Gathic religion taught by Asho Zarathusht There is no question about the fact that Magi added a number of innovations to the religion of Zarathushtra. They evolved Zurvan the divinity of time, explained the Twin Mainyu as Ahura Mazda and Anra Mainyu emanating from Zurvan, thereby reducing the supreme Gathic divinity Ahura Mazda to an issue of Zurvan.

In my research on the Zarathushtrian calendar I have consistently attempted to bring to the readers and the audience, the notion of a way of reckoning that is as congruent as is physically possible, with the time of the religious rituals for High Festivals. It must be realized that there is no such thing as a perfect calendar. The Laws of Nature are immutable and planetary movements do not always comply the initiation of changes at the beginning of a new day. For example time down to hours and minutes, for sun entering the constellation Aries, varies from year to year. One can if they wish, use that precise time of Vernal equinox to start their religious devotion for Noruz day. However one has no choice but to compromise and start the working New Year

with the beginning of the next closest day, which happens to be March 21st.

More recently we have noticed a continuous debate among Zarathushties about loyalty to the Gathic scriptures versus the extant Avesta of the later days. There is no question that Gathas are the only words of the Prophet Zarathushtra and as such occupies a primal position as scriptures. We do not even know, if we have all of them or that they are the fraction that survived. However, the later writings some of which has come down to us since more than 2500 years ago cannot be outright rejected. In my limited studies of prayers, I have always attempted to identify the continuity of the Gathic strands and evaluate the influence of the extraneous beliefs that have influenced the later writings.

This book "Religion of Asho Zarthusht and Influence Through the Ages" is a compilation of my written papers and oral presentations over a period of several years. It is conceivable that readers will find certain viewpoints and explanations repeated in more than one place due to their context in the subject of various presentations. For this I ask tolerance.

About the cover: We do not know the image of Prophet Zarathushtra for a fact. What we have are rendering of the imagination of individuals. The cover presents two images of the prophet, one of which reflect the antiquity captured by the artistic talent of Dr. Roda Patel, of Chicago, while the other is the conventional one which evolved during the Younger Avestan era. I am thankful to Dr. Roda Patel for the use of the painting and to Ms. Kamalrukh Katrak for the design of the cover.

Lastly I would like to express my appreciation to all the organizations and individual Zarathushtis who through their encouragement provided the spiritual inspiration to study and disseminate the knowledge of the invaluable Zarathushtrian Tradition. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Trustees of the Informal Religious Meetings Trust Fund, Karachi in publishing my work in a book form, to permit the propagation of knowledge and to further the understanding of Zarathushtrian Faith. In particular, I am thankful to Mr. Virasp Mehta for his initiative, to undertake this venture and his

dedicated assistance through its preparation. Careful proofreading and editing of the manuscript by Mr. Rumi Engineer is gratefully acknowledged.

Finally it gives me great pleasure to be able to dedicate this compilation to my Family; my wife Freny, son Darius and daughter Shiraz, without whose support and sacrifice over several decades this work would not have seen the light of the day,

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CHAPTER 1

History of Zarathushtrian Religion

INFLUENCE *of* DYNAMIC IRANIAN CULTURE *on* THE GATHIC RELIGION *of* ZARASTHUSHTRA

The religion of Zarathushtra is synonymous with those remote times of our ancestors when the Proto-Indo-Iranian people had divided into the Iranian and Indian tribes, socially and in the Gathic era spiritually. Gathic religion of Zarathushtra can be best understood in the context of times it has weathered. How the Faith and its fundamental Concepts underwent gradual erosion, and were replaced by Magian thoughts, is best comprehended through the study of Iranian history, at a specific point in time.

All our efforts to pinpoint the date of initiation of the Zarathushtrian tradition has resulted in approximations. The Aryan people began to drift apart around the third millennium B.C.E. It is therefore difficult to commit to a date for the prophet and his religion before his people acquired their distinct identity. Two dates that are generally assigned to the time of the prophet in the Zarathushtrian history are (a) 6000 B.C.E. as preserved by the writings of the Greek historians, and (b) around 600 B.C.E. as derived by the later Zoroastrian tradition, based on the occurrence of an important event, 258 years before the time of Alexander the Great. Both these conclusions are erroneously computed. The earliest work of the Hindu tradition Rig Veda is believed to have been composed in the vicinity of 1800-2000 B.C.E. **In the light of linguistic similarities of the Avesta and Vedic tradition, the record of the archeological evidence of the Mohenjo Daro and Harappa civilizations, and in the absence of any external compelling evidence it is reasonable to assign 1700-1500 B.C.E. as the time when the prophet and the Avestan people inhaled the Northern Steppes of Central Asia.**

Considering the homeland of early Aryans in central Asia, east of Caspian sea the Avestan people are believed to have had their home somewhere in the Northeastern Iran - the region known to early Greeks as Khwarezmia near Aral sea. This is an area that

was a part of Russian republic and now represented by the smaller nations of Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Turning our attention to the Gathic hymns of the Prophet, it is unequivocally established among the scholastic community of the Zarathushtrian studies, that these hymns embody the words of the prophet. These words and the message therein transmitted by the Athravans orally through centuries, imprinting profound impressions on the minds of the people who heard it. The understanding and the interpretations of this scriptural text must vary, based on the intellectual ability of the culture to comprehend the reflective message. As we know, even today, some 3500 years after the prophet the interpretation of the Gathic hymns remains a subject of intense discussion. It is therefore of interest to study the mutual influence of the Iranian Culture and History of over two millennia on the religion of Zarathushtra, and how the **Basic Reflective Principles underwent changes with time.**

From the scriptures of the Younger Avesta, and particularly from the contents of the Yashts (written after the time of the prophet) it is inferred that the early religion must have evolved among the tribal groups. As noted in Fravardin Yasht (YT. 13.17,149) we venerate therein a long list of men and women who first listened to the message of the Prophet and followed the religion (YT. 13.100-149). These includes names that are familiar to us from the Gathas such as Vistashpa, Maidhyomaha, Hutaosha, Jamaspa and the tribal names that are not in the Gathas, such as Tuiryas, Sairimas, Sainus, Dahis and others. However we learn very little about the actual organization of the religion, the functions of the local clergies -- Athravans, or about the heads of the community. All we are told is that these were the men and women who fought for righteousness to follow the faith.

Historic events that establish the connection of the religion of Zarathosht, which evolved in the Northeastern Iran with the central and western Iran, are critical to understand the influence of the culture on the Gathic Faith. The religion was a deeply rooted way of life in the east for many generations, before its introduction

to the western Iran. Until the ninth century B.C.E. - almost 600 years after the inception of Zarathushtrian religion in the east - the Medes and the Persians knew little about the Gathic religion. From the accounts of Herodotus it is apparent that the Medes moved eastward by invading through mountain-passes in the Zagros mountain range. Of the five Median tribes that moved east one was MAGOI (Av. *Magupaiti*, Latin: Magi) that is believed to have been literate and pontifical. They provided the priesthood for the Medes and western Persians of the time.

As the Medes moved eastwards across the Zagros into the plains of Kermanshah (earlier known as Mahi Dasht) they could have established their first contacts with the Zarathushtrian traders from Badakhshan - a district of Bactria. The town of Raga (modern Rae) located just south of Tehran gradually evolved to become a major trading post. Here the Zarathushtrian traders from east have settled since eighth century B.C.E. and interacted with Median tribes and attracted many adherents to the religion of Zarathushtra.

At about the same time Persians who had moved into the southern Iran drifted eastward to assimilate the Elamites and in time Achaemenians became the masters of the kingdom of Anshan near Fars, (little north of Shiraz). Achaemenians ruled as the vassals of the Medes for almost a century. Meanwhile the religion of Zarathushtra was continuously gaining grounds among the Medes and the Persians advancing eastwards. Concomitant with the propagation of the religion rose the spiritual importance of the city of Raga. In time the devotion and piety of the western Iranians was so firmly bound to the city that the **Median priests or Magi, evolved a tradition that "Zarathushtra himself has been born there"**. This erroneous notion was later incorporated in Videvdad or Vendidad CH.1.15 (a text that was written almost 2000 years after the Prophet) and disseminated as factual information by many religious teachers. Yasna 19.18 also mentions Raga as the city known as the "Zarathushtrian District" suggesting it as the city of that great teacher.

ACHAEMENIAN ERA -- CYRUS THE GREAT:

A question that is often asked is, were Achaemenians Zarathushtrian and rightfully so, since in that era Avestan scriptures were still orally transmitted, and the name of the Prophet Zarathushtra is non-existent in their memoirs.

The successful rebellion in 558 B.C.E. by Cyrus against the ruling Median monarch Astyages - his own father-in-law, that led to the establishment of the great Achaemenian Empire in Iran. By this time all the Persians in the eastern Iran were under one command, that of Cyrus the Great. That the Achaemenian nobility and the royalty had warmly embraced the religion of Ahura Mazda was evidenced by the fact that many eastern Iranian princesses bringing with them Zarathushtrian faith were accepted in wedlock by the nobility and many of the Avestan names were incorporated as family names by the ruling dynasty. For example the eldest daughter of Cyrus was named Atossa - a Greek rendering of Hutaosa - the name of the queen of Kavi Vistashpa, the first royal disciple of Prophet Zarathushtra. The name Vistashpa also occurs more than once in the Achaemenian genealogy.

Aryaramnes and Arsham the ancestors of Cyrus referred to Ahura Mazda as the god in their inscriptions suggesting that Zarathushtrian faith was inbred in the Achaemenians even before Cyrus founded the empire. On a tabernacle of gold excavated in Hamadan in 1920, it was inscribed as Aryaramnes saying, "THIS COUNTRY WHICH I POSSESS WAS BESTOWED UPON ME BY AHURA MAZDA. BY THE GRACE OF AHURA- MAZDA I AM THE MONARCH OF THIS COUNTRY. I PRAY THAT AHURA-MAZDA, MAY HELP ME". Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenian House has left numerous inscriptions near Pasargadae none of which clearly reflects his religious beliefs.

A strong attestation of his loyalty to Zarathushtrian faith comes from the archeological finds in the palaces of Pasargadae. Fire-holders were uncovered, carved out of stone with a three stepped top and base joined by a slender shaft. The top balancing a deep receptacle to accommodate a thick bed of hot ashes to sustain

an ever burning fire for devotional purposes. There was no evidence of a structure in the vicinity suggesting that these were not the parts of a temple. It can be concluded that these were *Atasgah* installed for devotional purposes for the use of royalty. These, finds were characteristically different from those found at the Median site at Tepe Nush-i-Jan near Ecbatana (Hamadan) which had a shallow receptacle and supported by a four stepped base. It is rationally speculated that those found near Pasargadae with three stepped top and base suggests that the assembly of the architecture was motivated by the prominence of the number three in the Zarathushtrian observances. This coupled with the use of Avestan names mentioned above provides tangible evidence for Cyrus' belief in the faith of Zarathosht.

Perhaps the strongest attestation of Cyrus' fidelity to the Zarathushtrian faith is provided by his actions in accordance with the Gathic Principle of Asha towards those he ruled. His benevolent attitude towards those he vanquished is evident from the inscriptions on a clay cylinder excavated at the palace site in 1879. He speaks of his conquest of Babylon as follows, "THE INTERNAL CONDITION OF BABYLON AND ITS SACRED PLACES TOUCHED MY HEART. I ORDERED THAT ALL PEOPLE WERE FREE TO WORSHIP THEIR GOD... THAT NONE OF THE HOUSES OF THE PEOPLE SHOULD BE RUINED...". Professor Pir Nara in his book *Iran-I- Bastan* describes how Cyrus liberated the Jews and "Challenged them to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem for Jehovah their God". Xenophone narrating Cyrus' belief in eschatology quotes the monarch, "WHEN THE HUMAN BODY DECLINES AND DIES EVERYONE OF ITS COMPONENT PARTS RETURNS TO ITS OWN ELEMENTS. IT IS THE SOUL ALONE THAT IS INVISIBLE TO THOSE WHO ARE PRESENT. NOTHING RESEMBLES DEATH MORE THAN SLEEP. IT IS DURING THIS TIME ...THAT THE HUMAN SOUL COMES CLOSER TO THE IZADS AND IS AWARE OF THE PRESENT AND FUTURE...". It is thus apparent that despite the acknowledgment

of alien Gods, the monarch treaded the path of life preached by Prophet Zarathushtra.

History records little about the political achievements and the religion of Cambysus, the son of Cyrus (Achaemenian: Kurus), except to say that his throne was pirated by his brother Bardiya, while he was in Egypt suppressing a rebellion. Darius (Achaemenian: Darayavahu) the Great, son of Hystaspes (this Hystaspes in history has been confused for Vistasp of the Kyanian dynasty, the first royal disciple of the Prophet. This mix up has contributed to the erroneous date of sixth century B.C.E. for prophet Zarathushtra) rebelled against and slew Bardiya to inherit the formidable monarchy for the next 36 years.

DARIUS I – THE GREAT

Long and detailed inscription on the mountainside of Behistun tells the story of how Darius became the king. More importantly however, these and others on his tomb, often carved in Cuneiform, together with Elamite and Akkedian versions, speak a lot about the allegiance of the monarch to the God of Zarathushtra. Phrases such as “AHURA MAZDA BORE ME AID”, “I WORSHIPPED AHURA MAZDA”, “I AM THE KING. BY GRACE OF AHURA MAZDA, I SET THE COUNTRY RIGHT”, “MAY AHURA MAZDA SAVE THIS COUNTRY FROM THE CALAMITIES OF FALSEHOOD” leaves little doubt about his belief in the God of Zarathushtra.

Furthermore his awareness toward the doctrinal concepts also becomes apparent from his inscriptions. Phrases such as “..FIRMLY ABSTAIN FROM FALSE HOOD, “RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE SOURCE OF SALVATION AND HAPPINESS”, lend strong support to the belief that he was fully cognizant of the existence of GOOD and EVIL. His familiarity with the concept of ethical dualism also becomes apparent, when he says, “I AM THE FRIEND OF GOODNESS. I AM NOT A FRIEND OF THE EVIL; I DO NOT APPROVE THAT THE WEAK SHOULD EXPERIENCE TYRANNY FROM THE STRONG. I FURTHER DO NOT APPROVE THAT THE

SUBORDINATE SHOULD BE HARMED BY THE POWERFUL MAN. I LIKE THE TRUTH; I AM NOT A FRIEND OF A LIAR...”.

Another curious fact about this great monarch was public recognition of his SIX collaborators in his inscription when he says at Behistun, “THESE ARE THE MEN WHO WERE THERE WHEN I SLEW BARDIYA; ...THESE MEN STROVE TOGETHER AS MY FOLLOWERS PROTECT WELL THE FAMILY OF THESE MEN”. History records he rewarded them lavishly. Some six kilometers from Persepolis, on a steep cliff-face today recognized, as Naqs-i-Rustam is the location of Darius’ tomb. A monumental stone carving on the outside depicts once again the SIX noblemen, three on each side of the king (Bd XXVI.8). This association of the SIX nobles with the mighty monarch has been interpreted by some noted Iranists as an effort by the king, to verbalize the analogy between **the Divine Kingdom of heaven, ruled spiritually by Ahura Mazda with the help of SIX Amesha Spenta; and the Mighty temporal Persian Empire of the time being ruled by a king aided by six nobles.** This notion thus suggesting that his kingship was divinely inspired and is in complete consonance with the sentiments of his direct link with the creator, which he has repeatedly expressed in his inscriptions. His inscription “UNTO AHURA MAZDA WAS THUS THE DESIRE, HE CHOSE ME AS (HIS) MAN IN ALL THE EARTH... A GREAT GOD IS AHURA MAZDA WHO MADE DARAYAVAHU KING...” unequivocally sums up this idea.

There is **another important factor, alien in its origin, to the Gathic Zarathushtrian religion** that has also played a major role. In Younger Avesta we read about *khvraena* - the Divine Grace or Divine Fortune, which is derived from the Median term *farnah* meaning having the radiance of. It was through the Egyptian conquests of Darius that the symbolism of the divine grace associated with the Egyptian concept of Sun God, in-born in the Pharaoh, was accepted within the Iranian culture. The symbol on the Behishtun monument with human figure however, resembles more to the Urartian representation adopted from the

Assyrians. This divine grace manifests itself as a falcon and is symbolized in our Faith as a winged disk. It was believed that these Achaemenian monarchs and those of pre-zarathushtrian dynasties possessed the in-born "Divine Grace". In Zamyad and Fravardin Yashts (YT. 19.34-38, 13.95) we read about *Khvarenah* leaving Yima in the shape of a bird. **In time this alien symbol of a winged image became incorporated in the Gathic religion of Zarathushtra.** Today it is fully integrated in the Faith as *Fravashi* - the Immortal Divine Spirit of Human. The male figure in the winged disk has been often interpreted as the *fravashi* of the monarchs holding the ring as a symbol of power and prosperity through divinity. This therefore establishes as another notion of a direct link of the Achaemenian monarch with their God - Ahura Mazda.

From the above account it can be inferred, why these Achaemenian monarchs, despite their awareness and loyalty to the God of Zarathushtra, their knowledge of the Zarathushtrian Principles of Asha, the existence of Good and Evil, the concept of ethical Dualism and the Amesha Spentas has totally refrained from mentioning the name of the prophet in their writings. **It is thus apparent that in this era the Gathic teachings while maintained in principle, were beginning to be diluted by the pre-zarathushtrian Indo-Iranian thoughts as well as the influence of the Egyptian culture.**

This was also the Iranian epoch, when, due to the vastness of the empire, an intimate mixing of the Greek, Babylonian, Egyptian and Asiatic culture was taking place. It was around the seventh century B.C.E. that in the Phoenician region a myth of the Divinity of Time arose and spread through to Ionia and India. These three different traditions evolved the belief of the God of Time as the primal originating Being, which later developed as **Zurvanism, a Zarathushtrian heresy in Iran in the fifth century B.C.E.**

UNDER LATER ACHEMENIANS:

Xerxes followed in his father's path, first to subdue the Egyptian revolt and then to extend the European border of his empire by marching onto Greece. In his inscriptions like Darius he praised Ahura Mazda and said, "...WHERE PREVIOUSLY DAIVAS WERE WORSHIPPED I DESTROYED DAIVAS and made a proclamation 'DAIVAS SHALL NOT BE WORSHIPPED.'" The Zarathushtrian priesthood by this time had developed a stringent code of actual and ritual purity to preserve the practice of Gathic principles. This must have posed a formidable barrier to the spread of the religion among the *anarya*-the non-zarathushtrians. By this time however, Zarathushtrian theologians also had to make significant compromises to assimilate several non-Avestan divinities in the pantheon of the faith. **Prominent among these were the cults of Anahiti and Tiri.** The alien divinity known to Greeks historians as 'Aphrodite Anahitis'- goddess of Venus was not only assimilated in the faith but for the first time image-cult was introduced unknown to Gathic religion. The divinity was identified with the ancient Indo-Iranian, Harahvaiti the goddess of the mythical river, which is believed to be the source of all waters of the world. The association of the term Harhvaiti with the Goddess has dropped with time, while the cult evolved under the epithet **Aredvi (anoist) Sura (strong) Anahita (undefiled, immaculate).** About the same time the cult of **Nabu-Tiri of the early Babylonian, a goddess associated with Mercury and Sirius was introduced into the orthodox Gathic religion.** Tiri was identified with the Indo-Iranian Tishtrya a divinity associated with the 'bringing of rain'. It was only decades after the time of Darius II when Artaxerxes II came to the throne (404 B.C.E.) that the full impact of, these changes was felt by the Zarathushtrian community.

Artaxerxes II broke the tradition of exceptional praise of Ahura Mazda in his inscriptions. For the first time in the stone writings at Persepolis he says, "BY THE WILL OF AHURA MAZDA, ANAHITA, AND MITHRA I BUILT THIS PALACE. MAY AHURA MAZDA, ANAHITA AND MITHRA PROTECT

ME FROM ALL THE EVIL AND THAT WHICH I HAVE BUILT, THEY NOT SHATTER OR HARM". So potent was the devotion of the royal tradition to the veneration of Anahita that we note from the writings of the Babylonian theologian Berossos who said, "After a long period of time they (Zoroastrians) began to worship statues in human form". By royal decree temples were erected to worship this divinity in Babylon, Susa, Ecbatana, Persepolis, Bactria, Damascus, and Sardis. Despite the fact that Anahita was worshipped by the pre-zarathushtrian community, the worship of the statue-cult (of Anahita) was a direct imposition on the Zarathushtrian community, devoted to the Gathic teachings. The lavishness of the imperial family, through zeal of Artaxerxes and his mother Parysatis, towards the Anahita cult, is expressed by Polibius when he speaks of the ravishing of the Ecbatana temple by the Seleucid in 209 B.C.E. He records denuding of the temple walls off its gold and silver bricks, the columns of its gold plating, and stripping off the silver roof-tiles. The opulence and splendor of those edifices must humble a twentieth century cathedral to a country chapel.

The cult of Mithra can also be traced long before the times of Zarathushtra in the Indo-Iranian social fabric. The Immutable Law known to the Indian as Rta and to the Avestan people as, Asha through the movements of Sun and changing of the seasons represented the absolute truth of the Natural Law. Through the law of Truth in Nature, righteousness was deeply woven into the Indo-Iranian social fabric. **The devotion and sanctity of the given words between two human beings or between two groups of humans wielded such profound power of covenant in that era that it came to be regarded as the divinity of Mithra.** This divinity was also recognized as solar deity, and was worshipped by those who upheld their covenant with God. The question as to whether Zarathushtra accepted or denied Mithra as a revered divinity is a subject of debate among the Western scholars. Whereas Humbach, Lommel, and Barr hold that Mithra had no role in the Gathic Zarathushtrian faith, Mary Boyce argues otherwise in her article "On Mithra's part in Zoroastrianism" (BSOAS, 1969,

32, 10). The fact however remains that Artaxerxes II was the first Achaemenian monarch to recognize Mithra in his inscriptions, in contrast to his predecessors Cyrus and Darius thus reviving that pre-zarathushtrian cult in the fifth century B.C.E. long after the time of prophet Zarathushtra.

Gathic tradition in general does not recognize sacred buildings as the places of worship, even though some recent archeological finds have uncovered fire alters as early as 1800 B.C.E. As Cicero mentioned Zarathushtrians considered it wrong "to keep shut up within walls, the Gods whose dwelling place was this whole world". Despite all that, the royal fervor towards the erection of Anahita temples must have served as a catalyst for the community devoted to the Gathic religion. In the fourth century B.C.E. they were forced to accept the idea, of having places of worship and responded with the **founding of their own temples** where the man-made image was replaced by a consecrated fire the sole acceptable expression of Ahura Mazda. It was more than a millennium after the era of the prophet Zarathushtra that the Gathic Faith was introduced to the temple cult of Fire. The cult of Temple fire was totally integrated into the Zarathushtrian devotional life within decades and markedly revolutionized the Gathic understanding of Fire. **Fire in the Gathas is the very essence of Ahura Mazda.** The Prophet saw within this element the spiritual Purity, absolute Truth, and Righteousness. With the initiation of this new cult, the fire came to be associated with the pre-zarathushtrian divinity of Victory- Varahran or Verethreghna a symbol of absolute power. In time the hymn dedicated to Vahram yazata came to be recited by warriors and laity alike to confer upon them the boon of victory or to protect them for perils of the daily life, and the reflective Gathic component of living on the path of Truth and Righteousness associated with Fire, receded. Soon to differentiate the most revered Fire of Varahran (Vahram or later Behram) categories of fires evolved and lesser ones were labeled Atash-e-Aderan and Atash-e-Dadgah. The concept of Khvaren: h the Divine Glory described earlier; was invoked upon through the cult of Vahram -Fire thus making the new image of the Fire-temple more acceptable to the Royalty.

Thus it was **in the time of Artaxerxes II that the face of Gathic religion changed markedly.** The monarch re-placed the veneration of a sole Gathic Creator - Ahura Mazda by a divine triad of Ahura Mazda, Anahita, and Mithra, and he brought in the image worship in the form of the temples of Anahita; and Nabu-Tiri was incorporated into the faith as Tishtarya yazata. The evolution of Anahita temples in turn, led to the genesis of the cult of fire in the form of places of worship, bringing into prominence veneration of another pre-zarathushtrian divinity Verethraghna and markedly altering the Gathic interpretation of fire.

It was in this era that we also note **the origin of the major heresy of ZURVANISM**, that was to perpetuate through the centuries and to basically change the interpretation of the Ethical and Cosmic Dualism as elaborated by the Prophet. The God of Time, Zurvan has been the focus of worship as the Creating Being in the ancient Phoenician Tradition in the seventh and sixth century B.C.E. The Magus priesthood of the western Iran in its pursuit to understand, the Ethical dualism elaborated by Zarathushtra described in Ys 30.1-4, and searching for an innovative expression for a Divinity to generate the Twin mentalities, must have seen it fitting to ascribe the role of the Creator to the early God of time Zurvan. The reflective principle of Mainyu - "the way of thinking" - and the Choice by the Humans between the righteous and the evil mentality was at this point in time, anthropomorphized into the Good and the Evil Spirit emerging from the common force Zurvan. It seems clear that the fundamental Gathic principle of Freedom of Choice (Ys 31.11) with an unequivocal emphasis on the truth and the righteous way of lifestyle and progressive thinking (SPENTA MAINYU) was entirely misinterpreted through the Zurvanic thoughts. In contrast the notion that Zurvan created Ahura Mazda and Anghra Mainyu (Av. Anra Mainyu - a term that does not appear but once, as such in the Gathas) and ascribed the task of all Good creation to Ahura Mazda was deeply rooted in the Faith of that period. Zurvanites thus peacefully coexisted within the Zarathushtrian community, and were often considered by some, in that era, as those who best understood the religion of

Zarathushtra. This heresy caused the irreparable damage to the religion of Zarathosht (a) by diminishing the Majesty of the uncreated Lord of Wisdom - Ahura Mazda, and (b) in times to come; in the face of evolving Christianity and Islam, the religion was portrayed as the one that promoted the idea of two Gods, one of Good and the other of Evil. **The heresy had thus contaminated the core of the Gathic Faith.** The religion thus burdened with the misinterpretation of Zurvanite clergies, prevailed only on the profound strength of the undercurrents of the Gathic principles of its theology and eschatology. Zurvanism inseminated in the Achaemenian times was so deeply entrenched that its considerable influence still remained visible in the Sasanian era about six centuries later when the religion of Zarathushtra was revived to its highest status of National Faith.

During the forty-five year long reign of Artaxerxes II however, the cult of Yazata as a second pantheon of divinity was intensely rooted and accepted as a part of "Evolved Zarathushtrian Religion". The advent of the cult of Anahita, Tiri, Mithra and Verethraghna had spread through the Persian Empire from west to east. That these Indo-Iranian deities of pre-Gathic times were fully integrated within the Zarathushtrian faith is attested by the fact, that they all were **honored and venerated with a day of dedication in the first truly devotional Zarathushtrian calendar** that evolved during his time. The earliest mention of the reverence to these yazatas is recorded in Ys.16.3-6. The profound veneration of Mithra (Mehr in Pahlavi) is reflected in this calendar by the dedicating to this divinity, the 16th day and 7th month, thus occupying a position of reverence at the head of the second half of the month and of the year. The day at the beginning of the month is dedicated to Ahura Mazda (Ph: Hormazd), while Fravashi (Ph: Fravardin), the Divine Essence of Ahura Mazda occupies the venerated position at the beginning of the year. The day of Mehragan - ruz Mehr of the mah Mehr being solemnized as one of the holiest days of the year by the Iranian Zarathushtrian community to this day.

Thus at the end of the time of Artaxerxes II, the Gathic religion of Zarathushtra, had turned into a brand of Zoroastrianism that had absorbed both pre-zarathushtrian cult as yazatas, as well as the sacrificial modes of worship of the Median magi. The Gathic concept of the Twin Mentalities was reduced to a struggle between Ahura Mazda and the evil creating spirit Anghra Mainyu. This continued through well over two decades (358-331 B.C.E.) during which time, Darius III and Alexander (at the age of twenty) simultaneously and independently ascended the throne of Persia and Macedonia respectively in 336 B.C.E. It was five years of vigilant campaign by Alexander the Great that brought him from Susa to Ecbatana, and through Raga to Bactria, totally extinguishing the House of Achaemenians in Iran. **Through this; what was left of the Gathic Faith, paid a heavy price.** Alexander is execrated in the Zarathushtrian tradition for widespread indiscriminate slaying of the Herbad and Mobeds who were the living books of the faith and sole transmitters of the Zarathushtrian liturgy orally. Many temples including the "Fratadara" temple of Persepolis, excavated in the early 20th century, were pillaged, and many consecrated fires were quenched (Bd. Ch. XXXII. 14).

SELEUCIDS, ARSACIDS AND PARTHIANS:

After the passing of Alexander, the power struggle for the Iranian empire continued until about 311 B.C.E. when one of his generals Seleucus established himself as the ruler of a large segment of the Achaemenian Empire. Seleucids were soon overpowered by the Arsaces who established a new dynasty that later became known as the Parthian dynasty. By 87 B.C.E. the Parthian king Mithridates I established his rule from the borders of India to Mesopotamia. Parthians adopted the Zarathushtrian faith and the Parthian Zarathushtrian clergies once again dominated the religious community. With the advent of this new era the Zarathushtrian iconography began to undergo another change. The Egyptian and Mesopotamian symbols borrowed by the Achaemenians gave way to Hellenic anthropomorphic depictions, and soon yazatas appeared in the guise of Greek gods. Zeus,

Apollo, and Nike representing Ahura Mazda, Mithra and Ashi, while the figure of Herakles Kallinikos was depicted as the yazata of victory, Verethraghana.

In the later part of the second century B.C.E. the Greek cultural impact dominated eastern Iran and the invaders of the Greco-Iranian kingdom of Bactria adopted the local culture and began mixing of the Bactrian language with the Greek script in place of Aramaic. Later, in the first century C.E. the Kushan invaders carved out a major fragment of the Parthian Empire in the east. However the Hellenised icons of the Zarathushtrian yazatas still dominated their coinage. Over a period of time the Kushans adopted Mahayana Buddhism as their faith, which imported a **new rival faith to the already belabored Zarathushtrian religion**, in the borderlands and inside Eastern Iran.

While this was the status in the east, in the west Armenia once a satrapy of Achaemenians, now fell to Parthians. In 62 C.E. Tiridates a staunch Zarathushtrian was appointed to the throne of Armenia. The Romans by this time had marched into Asia Minor and their influence was being felt in the western borders of Iran and in turn the cult of Mithra had a profound impact on them, to the extent that Mithraism was elevated to a religion in the Roman Empire. Tiridates was the first Zarathushtrian to travel to the court of Nero to pay homage to the Roman monarch. Under his rule Zarathushtrian was the dominating faith of Armenia, however, the country embraced Christianity after his time. The Greek writer, Strabo and Pausanias have described vividly the presence of Fire-temples in the Parthian times, while the evidence of existence of the Parthian dynastic fires is provided by Isidore of Charax (circa 70 C.E.). Parthian monarchy in their efforts to establish their loyalty to the Zarathushtrian faith revived many royal traits of the Achaemenian times. Vassal kings in those eras were allowed to establish their own dynastic fires. It is believed that Adur Franbag, Adur Gushnasp and Adur Burzin-Mehr revered in the Atash Niyaesh were installed around this time. The Creation text writer few centuries later (circa 600 C.E. Bd, XVIII.8) attributes their origin to Ahura Mazda. It is important to note that the Gathic

concept of fire, its **relation to the purity and righteousness and the concept of Asha by this time are all but overshadowed** by pomp and power of the observances of the Royal Fires. Prevalence of a strong influence of the Greek culture on the Iranian faith is evidenced by the names of Greek gods and goddesses in the inscriptions of the Parthian era.

All through the history of migration of the Zarathushtrian faith to the western Iran, the Median magi continuously attempted to appropriate the entire Avestan tradition to Northern Media. They invented Raga (Rae) as the place of birth for Prophet Zarathushtra, and identified Aryana Vaejah with their own homeland. Valakhsh the Parthian monarch, decreed to preserve all the surviving Avesta and its Zand commentaries of Zarathushtrian religion. It was sometime in this era, a period of aggressive domination by Median magis, that the often disputed text of Vendidad - the Book of "Law against Demons" is believed to have been composed. It is, therefore, clear that many of the concepts such as those of Duality, and Eschatology are highly anthropomorphized, and rigorous codes of purification using Nirang and Gaomez have been mandated, in contrast to the rest of the Avesta. This is also the only Avestan text that speaks of the "Temple Fires", in stark contrast to the Gathas, and its legend of Yima demonstrates, a strong slant of Macedonian and Mesopotamian influence. We shall never find out for a fact, who the composer of Vandidad was, however, from the existing facts it would appear reasonable to conclude that the composition was compiled by the Median Magi who adopted the Zarathushtrian religion later, rather than by a native Athravan - a clergy who inherited the faith.

The title for the Zarathushtrian clergy had by now undergone marked changes. **The Aethrapaiti - a teacher of the Gathas and the Athravan - the fire priests of the early Avestan age, was almost forgotten.** In the Parthian times the ecclesiastic authority resided with Erbad or Herbad (Ervad of today). The term Magpat or Magbad derived from Magupati (old Persian) was also

prevalent for the chief priest of Fire temples, and may well be the precursor of Mobed of today.

The Gathic religion, that had markedly influenced Judaism since the time of Cyrus had, by now, undergone profound transfiguration in its migration from eastern to western Iran. The domination by the Greek and later by Romans and its encounter with Buddhism in the eastern Iran had left a strong multicultural imprint on the Faith. In the process the Gathic faith that had lost some of its fundamental logic and congruency finds itself on horizon of a new era - the birth of Christianity. Thus, the religion was now faced with the dynamic front of expanding Buddhism in the east and the aggressive proliferation of Christianity in the west. The Zarathushtrian faith, as mentioned by **Professor Boyce, "the oldest of the dogmatic, proselytizing world religions" was subjected to various forces "to limit its missionary activities and turn into what was virtually an ethnic faith"** towards the end of the Arsacid era.

SASANIAN ERA:

It was at this tumultuous moment of the Gathic Faith that the Arsacid dynasty ended with the death of its last monarch, Ardaban V at the hand of Ardashir Papak who soon established a new Persian Empire under the House of Sasanians, championing the cause of the Zarathushtrian faith. This initially rejoiced the Zarathushtrian Priesthood, however, the joy was short-lived with the revelation that, the powerful prelate Tansar (Pahlavi: Tosar) the Herbad who was determined to make his mark through a central authoritarian Zarathushtrian church, abolishing the tolerant fraternity that evolved in the Parthian era. As mentioned in Dinkard, **Tansar evolved an eclectic canon of Avesta from among those that were preserved by the Arsacid king Valakhsh,** and incorporated the Five day intercalation to change the lunar Zarathushtrian calendar of Semitic origin, to a Solar one (M. Boyce BSOAS. 1970, 33, 513). The question of the origin of the solar Zarathushtrian calendar is, as yet, a debatable point among the scholars; (see: M.Boyce BSOAS, 1993, vol. 56, 209) .

The cult of images and statues that emerged in the places of worship, during the Achaemenian and later in the Hellenic domination, were restored by Ardashir with aggressive iconoclasm. It is important to note that whereas, the images were banned from religious places of worship, Iconography of the anthropomorphized divinities, of the Parthian era, in the Sassanian carvings remained unchanged. At Naqs-i-Rustam one finds the carving believed to be of Hormazd and Ardashir both on horseback slaying, what is interpreted by scholars, as evil, identified in the form of a snake and a prostrate human figure, respectively. The inscription is carved in three languages: the Middle Persian, Parthian and Greek, indicating continued strength of Greek influence. In this new era all the dynastic fires of the vassal kings were extinguished and their temples razed. Only one central dynastic fire burnt in Iran. Ardashir is thus credited with the establishment of Atakhsh-i-Vahram (Atash-e-Behram) the Verethraghna Fires of victory in Pars. This founding of the sacred fires is repeatedly mentioned in the inscriptions of another powerful prelate, Kirder of this era, who lived through four Sasanian monarchs. He was the only commoner who was allowed to have his inscriptions, which was strictly a royal prerogative. The inscriptions of Kirder at Sar-Mashhad speak of another fire, viz., Atakhsh-i-Aduran, a common local fire. This may well be comparable to "Daitya Gatv" mentioned in Vendidad (Vd. VIII.81), "little fire in an appointed place".

At this time in the history, the Gathic Faith, experienced another heresy, that was originated by Mani, a self acclaimed prophet of Parthian descent from Babylonia. Having absorbed much of the Gnostic tradition from Judeo-Christian theology Mani preached leading of a life of asceticism and celibacy. The religion he propagated did include Zarathushtrian concepts of Dualism, Eschatology of Heaven and Hell, the individual judgment at death, and the Last Judgment at the end of time. However, it sharply differed from the Gathic concepts of full, and progressive life of achieving perfection in this temporal world. He traveled far and wide in central Asia, and may well have been responsible for bringing Zarathushtrian thoughts in China and Tibet. Mani's

thinking was favorably received by Shahpur I. However, adoption of Zurvan as the supreme God by Mani and changing the names of yazatas - that had by now been deeply entrenched in the Zarathushtrian religion - earned for the Manicheans a role of 'zandiks' (heretics). Herbad Kirder, who rose to the summit of his power through the reigns of Shahpur I, Hormazd I, Behram I and Behram II, succeeded in passing a death sentence for the Prophet around 275 C.E.

Despite the death of Mani, and the persecution of Manicheans, Zurvanism must have been flourishing, as the term Zurvan for supreme God seems to have been accepted by the Zarathushtrian clergies of the time including Kirder. This may explain why we find **no mention of prophet Zarathushtra** in the inscriptions of the Sasanian Kings or those of Kirder, despite the fact that Pahlavi texts of the time are replete with the name Zarathushtra. Another evidence of acceptance of Zurvanism by the Sasanian royalty stems from the family names; for example, Shahpur II named one of his daughter Zurvandukht (Daughter of Zurvan). **How far the Gathic religion had drifted from the worship of Ahura Mazda** can be seen from the utterances of Shahpur II during the trial of a Christian clergy saying, "I pray to the Sun and honor Fire... Who is the God who is better than Ohrmazd (Av. Ahura Mazda), or whose anger is harsher than Ahriman's?" Persecution of Christians was rampant in that era, and the damage done by the prevalence of Zurvanism, to the Gathic Zarathushtrian Faith and even the Zarathushtrian religion of the time becomes evident from a quote of a Christian bishop during his trial, saying to the King, "According to what the Magi say, Ohrmazd is the brother of Satan ... we do not pray to the brother of Satan, how should we then acknowledge this brother's (Ohrmazd's) children?" The heresy believed Zurvan to be the father of the twins Ohrmazd and Ahriman, and the sun, moon, and stars as the children of Ohrmazd. Thus, in his statement, the bishop objects to the worship of a creator who is postulated as the brother of Satan (Ahriman) - a stark contradiction to the Gathic Faith. The historic account of Tabari provides evidence of the

heresy flourishing for the next hundred and fifty years to the time of Yazdegard II. Mihr-Narseh, a man of wisdom, and chief minister under three Sasanian monarchs, (Yazdegard I, Vahram V, and Yazdegard II) a devout Zurvanite, has left a detailed account of the heresy in his efforts to bring Armenians from Christianity back into the Zarathushtrian faith of the time. History suggests that Staota Yasna - a portion of the present day 72 chapters of Yasna - may have been expanded during this epoch to include some of the younger Avestan liturgy such as the Haoma Yasht (YS. 9-11). The Haoma ritual of Indo-Iranian origin, which is repudiated as destructive in the Gathic scriptures (YS. 32.14) could have been included in the Yasna ceremony at this time.

The Zarathushtrian clergy and the church at this time is believed to have been quite affluent and it was around 487 C.E. that we note the appearance of the Mazdakite movement. Mazdak, following the path of Mani preached and propagated the doctrine of an ascetic and moral life. Despite the **equality of man and woman preached by the Gathic religion** we are told that in Sassanian law women were held as belongings of their, nearest male relative. Mazdakite went a step further and proclaimed the doctrine of community of property to include women, which at that time, gained popular support from the poorer sector of the community. Kavad the ruling monarch was at first favourably inclined to this new faith and consequently faced a fierce opposition from Zarathushtrian clerics and nobles. Later, Kavad named his son Khusrow to the throne. Khusrow, the Just, put an end to the Mazdakite heresy through proclamation of death sentence for the prophet.

In the Mid-Sasanian time around fourth century C.E. Avesta was first written down, and was published during the reign of Khushrow Anoshiravan. He was a just and pious ruler, and appointed thousands of priests in the fire temples. The priesthood at this time was extremely influential in the affairs of the state and the life of the community. There are recorded instances where these powers were misused at the expense of the laity. The country at this time was overridden by the clergy and, consequently, with

the performances of the religious services. The laity, rich and poor was under pressure to provide revenues that these clerics exacted. But there were masses of the faithful who in time accepted these rituals as a means of their salvation.

In summary, the Gathic Religion proclaimed by Zarathushtra, that taught good thinking through reflection of Vohu Manah; that charged every individual to contemplate and choose the true and righteous path; that preached a progressive and full life through Spenta Mainyu; that propagated to humanity to define their own salvation through good expression and actions; that only had teachers of religion – Ratu, in place of an organized priesthood; and, that was highly self-reflective, introspective and universal was markedly transformed at the end of Sasanian dynasty.

In that epoch, and what followed, the first revealed faith of mankind was highly cluttered with priesthood, and belabored with rituals, that were imposed upon the laity for a price, to generate substantial revenue for the clergy. The Zarathushtrian church of the time highly influenced the interpretations and viability of communal life, fabricating the religion into a prescriptive rather than a reflective one, and through rigid imposition of the ritual code converted the universal message of the Prophet into an ethnic one.

It was ripe then, as it is now, to fully understand, why the Gathic universal message of salvation of mankind proclaimed by Prophet Zarathushtra, and his vision of a world faith has been lost. A rational comprehension of the evolution of the modes of the rituals can relate them to the Gathic religion and return them to their simpler forms in consonance with their principles. Such measures will redirect the hopes of individual spirituality and salvation within the control of every human being and outside the pressures of little understood clerical utterances. Gathic studies coupled with the understanding of the changes inflicted by the culture and history is the only salvation, that will aid in perpetuating the true Religion of Zarathushtra.

THE GATHIC VISION *and* LATER TRADITION

Gathic Vision

We may never know for a fact the date of the era of the Gathic tradition, but remains an undisputed fact that we owe the genesis of the Gathic teachings to Asho Spitaman Zarathushtra. He did that at a time when the tribal groups of the early ages deified the elements of nature to visualize gods among the numerous creations of the cosmos.

It was in this environment of an illiterate society, that Asho Zarathosht rose from an Indo-Iranian tribe, roaming the steppes of Asia Minor, to champion the cause of absolute Righteousness, of human freedom of choice and, of moral justice for mankind.

Zarathushtra rejected the religiosity of the numerous gods controlling the destiny of individuals, of the tribe and of the world. In the infancy of civilization he proclaimed that peace and perfection could not be attained, either in the passion for ceremonial observances or in the worship through sacrifice.

He paved the way to harmonize human existence in this world through Truth in its moral significance.

This divinely ordained master envisioned that the Creation conceived by Ahura Mazda -the Wise Lord -will continue to flourish, following the progression of the Holy Spirit – *spenta mainyu*. That this Holy Mentality rigorously pursues the principle of immutable order in nature through absolute truth and moral justice. These are the basic implications of the divine concept of Asha .

However, this profound thinker admonishes humanity that life in this world of actuality (Ys. 45.2) is soiled by the presence of two mentalities: two ways of thinking that contradict each other. These two spirits oppose each other in every way. In their

teachings and in their thoughts, words and actions. One of them is in concordance with the concept of Asha, while the other. in discordance.

In his vision of a way of life Asho Zarathushtra preaches to humanity of the priceless gift of Mazda (Ys 45.4) the Good Mind - *Vohu Manah*. This precious 'essence of life' is invariably cluttered with the haze of imperfections and defiled with carnal instincts in this world full of flaws.

It is complete Mindfulness, through Holy Tranquility - *Spenta Armaiti* that preserves the mind 'good' and peaceful.

For it is only through the “good and clear mind” that the human can commune with the divinity, and the one who communes is the one who is attuned with the path of Asha to unfold the Divine Kingdom – *khshthravairya* – in this physical world.

It is only through the Good Mind that humans can realize the divinity within and relate to the same without in this *getic* world. The prophet stresses this fact in Gatha Ushtavaiti (Ys 43.7,9)

*“Yes I realize you to be holy
when thee attuned me
through Good Mind.”*

The proclamation by Asho Zarathust of the moral and righteous nature of the divinity, freed the religion, at the dawn of civilization, from the confines of the tribal gods and offered the supreme wisdom to mankind. His great vision of the world faith, however, dissipated by the late sixth century B.C.E. to generate a religious tradition that was the heritage of only a tribe.

The words of God cast in those prolific hymns of the Prophet were surrounded in time by later liturgical works. The yasna of seven chapters, *haptanhaiti*, (Ys 35-41) resonates the archaic dialect of the Gathic language. Despite some significant

deviations, the liturgy invokes upon most of the fundamental teachings of the prophet.

Words such as Yazamaide, Amesha Spenta, Fravashi and the principle triad of *humatanam*, *hukhtanam*, *huvareshstanam*, which are absent in the Gathic hymns appear here for the first time.

The other important chapters that surround the Gathic hymns, are Haoma Yasht (Ys 9-11), the confession of faith Ys. 12. The amplification of Ahuna Vairya, Ashem Vohu, and Yenghe Hatam liturgies also appear respectively in Ys. 19, 20, and 21

In addition, worships of praise for fire (Ys 62), for water (Ys 65), and homage to the Gathic hymns (Ys 55) of the prophet were also incorporated. The central portion of the yasna liturgy came to be recognized as the *staota yasna* meaning the 'worship of praise'.

This gradual encrustation of the reflective enlightenment of the prophet, with the worship of praise, suggests itself, as a restoration, of the tribal mode of veneration of pre-zarathushtrian era.

Scripture by definition are words of God, revealed to us by Asho Zarathusht. To all Zarathushtis without exception, the Gathas are the scriptures of their religion.

However, for many Zarathushtis, other parts of older Avestan literature, such as Haptanhaiti, Haoma Yasht, Sraosh Yasht, and part of Niyashes embedded within the yasna liturgy, are **open to question, as the words of Zarathushtra**. For many others Vendidad, Bundahishn, Denkert and other middle Persian compositions, all of which are the most priceless treasure of holy texts, **do not command the level of gospel truth embedded in the Gathas**.

Despite the strand of continuity of Gathic notions in these later texts, often, the corruption due to the social and political bias of the era is clearly visible within them.

This analysis, however, is only of academic interest. Prayers of every origin, either older or younger Avesta should not in anyway proscribe to compromise the spiritual significance, if they fulfill the spiritual need of an individual. **Tolerance and respect must prevail for individual conviction for that constitutes the foundation of Zarathushtrian unity in the centuries to follow.** The major barrier to the spread of the religion of Zarathosht in Iran was the geography of the country. The formidable range of the Zagros Mountains separated the Medes of the Mesopotamian plains from the Persians of the Iranian plateau. It was not until the migration of the Medes into the plains of Kermanshah across the Zagros, that they encountered traders of the east from Badakhshan who brought with them the Zarathushtrian way of life.

History records the spread of the Median domination farthest east, to the town of *Rae* or *Raga* just south of Tehran below the Caspian sea. This was the city that evolved as the major focus of encounter. The encounter

- Of the organized religion of western Iran with the religion of Zarathushtra.
- Of the Magi of the west with the Athravans of the east.

That was the turning point in the history of the religion of Zarathusht from the reflective to the prescriptive, from the inspirational to the autocratic.

The religion of Zarathushtra made deep inroads into the Median tribes. As the Achaemenians assumed the mastery over their vast empire from the Mediterranean, in the west, to the western frontiers of India, in the east, the religiosity of the Medes became inextricably bound to the religion of Zarathusht.

So potent was the holy bond of the Medians with the city of Rae, that in time they evolved a fallacious tradition, of Raga as the birthplace of Asho Zarathusht. This erroneous information has unfortunately propagated in our holy texts. Ys 19.18, and Vendidad Ch.1.15 both make reference to the city of Rae as the city of

Zarathushtra. By the end of the Achaemenian Dynasty, the chief magus of this Holy city of Ragah assumed the title of "Zarathushtratema".

This was the era of the genesis of a pantheon of Yazatas meaning those 'worthy of worship'. This was followed by the literary works of hymns of praise, to these lesser divinities that came to be recognized as 'Yashts',

This was the era that saw a profound dilution of the Gathic tradition: an era where the vastness of the empire brought an intimate mix of the Greek, Babylonian, Egyptian, and Asian cultures. This was truly, the junction that can only be identified as **the beginning of the syncretic Zarathushtrian Religion which is what we have today.**

- Nabu-tiri the Babylonian - Persian lord of planet Mercury, in time, was assimilated as the Indo-Iranian Tishtrya, the yazata associated with "Bringing of rains".
- Aphroditis Anahitis the Greek goddess of Venus, was assimilated with Iranian Harvaiti, to emerge in the mid-Achaemenian era, as the most powerful dominant water divinity of Aredvi-Sura-Anahita meaning Moist-Mighty-Immaculate.

The pre-zarathushtrian cult of Mithra and Verethrgana also found their way back into the pantheon of yazatas.

In the calendar, that also evolved in this epoch, the exceptional pre-zarathushtrian cult of Haoma did not even have a day dedicated to it. Despite that, the ceremony of pounding of Haoma became the central sacramental act of the Yasna ritual, and Haoma is honored with three chapters in the liturgy of yasna.

It was more than a millennium after the time of the prophet that the sublime Gathic faith was introduced to the cult of temple fire. In the younger Avestan tradition, the divine fire of Ahura Mazda came to be associated with the pre-zarathushtrian divinity *Varahran* or *Verethraghana*, or *phl.* Behram, the 'yazata' of 'victory'. Elaborate rituals were later instituted to consecrate this

highest category of fire that we today recognize as Atash-e-Behram.

The hearth fire that the **early devotees venerated as incarnation of Mazda** now came to be regarded as *adurog-i-pad dadgah*, "the little fire in an appointed place". We learn from the long inscription of that great prelate Kirder, at the rock relief of Sar Mashhad, that another category of place of worship evolved for local people as *atakhsh-i-aduran*, comparable to the *agiary* fire of today. These gradations of fire and their modes of consecration completely **revolutionized the original concept of a central Divine Fire of Ahura Mazda.**

The insult to the injury of these deviations of Zarathushtra's theology was the genesis of the heresy of Zurvan. Suffice it to say, that it was in the long Achamaenian reign of over two centuries, that the political and social power wielded by the Magi resulted in deep-seated compromises by the Zarathushtrian clergies.

This was the era that inspirational and reflective aspects of the Gathic religion of Zarathushtra suffered the most, replacing the Divine vision with a Syncretic Faith.

Later Tradition:

Zarathushtis who fled their homeland just over a millennium ago, had fresh in their minds the memories of massacre and sacrilege by the Macedonians at Persepolis and Hamadan coupled with, the wounds of slaughter, death and destruction of their religious heritage by the Umayyads, and the Abbasid era.

It is no surprise that these migrants from Khorasan to India, while integrating successfully, closely protected their ethnic identity by maintaining rigid ground rules with sectarian attitude of exclusivity to preserve their religion.

These inflexible rules of selectivity, were man-made decrees, resulting purely from historic experiences. They were set out to protect the religious heritage, but were not invoked by any

doctrinal dictum. Adherence to this rigid order was, perhaps, essential under the prevailing circumstances then, and they deserve full credit for their wisdom.

However, **rigidity as a rule is never without a price.** The universal message of salvation of mankind, preached by Asho Zarathushtra continued to be regarded as a racial heritage treasured by a tribe of people.

Today, such attributes of rigidity and selectivity are demeaning to the profound verses that we chant in our sacred invocations. In ending of *khshnuman* of every single Yasht and all Niyaesh we recite:

*Ahura mazda khoda avazunie
mardum mardum sardegan,
hama sardegan hambayeste vehan.*

**Ahura mazda, Lord beneficent to mankind
and to all races of mankind
and to entire creation of the world.**

It is therefore crucial that in the new millennium Zarathushtis carefully scrutinize the notion, why human beings, other than those born of Zarathushti parents, cannot attain ritualistic purity and commune, during Zarathustrian rituals, with the wise lord Ahura Mazda – who is responsible for their creation!

It is our obligation, in the centuries to follow, to restore the status of our sublime doctrine, to its rightful place, as the primal religion of the world. The challenge before us is to bring this recognition to the world, preserving the unity within.

In conclusion, I recall reading that at a medical congress, held recently in India, the triumphant acronym that resonated the philosophy of the congress, was **TEAM**

Together Everyone Achieves More

If the deliberations at this congress can emanate a spark of that morality, this Odyssey will have taken a giant step for the Zarathushti community.

I would like to close with the words of a Hindu Gathic scholar, Jatindra Mohan Chattterji, who said,

“The religion of the Gathas has the simplicity and vigour. It has got the additional merit of being.... the most comprehensive of all religions”.

“The religion is bound to spread, but this cannot happen by a mere pious wish. Every Zarathushti has a part to play. He must have a personal touch with the gospel of the holy prophet.”

[Presented at the 7th World Zoroastrian Congress, Houston, Texas:
December 28, 2000 – January 1, 2001]

ZARATHUSHTRIAN COMMITMENT

Since the advent of Asho Spitama Zarathushtra the teachings of a way of life proclaimed by that Great Manthran, have demonstrated an unbroken chain of continuity through millennia.

It was the commitment of Maidyoimaongha Spitama, the first person to understand the religion of Mazda who, through his spiritual consciousness, said: it is better to live life through deeds following the laws given by the Wise One (Ys 51.19). This is the foundation of the modern day axiom - **"The religion of Zarathushtra is the religion of action"**.

This Gathic belief has resonated through the history of our Glorious Faith. We see this reflected in the actions of the founder of the Achaemenian Dynasty, Cyrus the Great. This mighty monarch marched through the gates of Babylon to liberate the exiled Jewish people and challenged them to rebuild their temples. The Book of Ezra (Ezra 1.1, 2) records this crowning **Zarathushtrian Commitment** of Cyrus for which he is entitled the Anointed One (Isaiah 45.1).

Moving further down the historical highway, we approach another illustrious monarch of the same suzerainty; Darius. His act of fulfillment of the commitment of his ancestors is also recognized by Ezra, when that Jewish prophet says, "...and they completed this house (of Yahweh) in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the King" (Ezra 6.14,15). The perennial question, "Were Achaemenians Zarathushtrians?" becomes redundant when one reads the copious tributes paid by these monarchs to Ahura Mazda. Despite the fact that they never mentioned Zarathushtra by name, their commitment to Ahura Mazda, the God of Zarathushtra, demonstrates, their pledge to the tenets of that first Savior of mankind.

Moving through history one clearly observes some remarkable changes in the Gathic religion of Zarathushtra. The Mesopotamian Magi of western Iran usurps the reigns of

Zarathushtrian religion from the Athravans of the east. And as the Achaemenian Empire spreads from Aegean Sea on the west, to the Indus river, on the east, the religion of Zarathushtra is immersed in a highly politicized melting pot of Greek, Babylonian, Egyptian and Asian cultures. Many beliefs and modes of expression of religiosity underwent stark changes. But through all that debris of overt changes, the Zarathushtrian pledge - **EXTOLLING THE PATH OF ASHA THROUGH THE THINKING OF A SERENE MIND (VOHU MANAH), FREE OF EARTHLY CONFLICTS AND MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE OF ACTION** - has filtered through, like crystal clear water through the layers of richly mineralized rock.

Entering the first millennium, around the middle of the Parthian suzerainty (250B.C.- 226C.E.), posed new challenges for the Zarathushti way of life. In the beginning, the religion of Zarathushtra, and its practitioners in northeastern Iran, was were challenged by the spread of Buddhism in transition to Mahayana. This transition may well have a bearing on the strength of the undercurrent of the Zarathushtrian milieu that prevailed in that era (M.Boyce, HZ Vol III. Pg.149). The later half of the Arsacids rule was then faced with the emergence of the formidable missionary Christian faith. The Parthians remained committed to the teachings of the prophet Zarathushtra. They were kind to the captives, generous to the fugitives, and of scrupulous morals. The middle of the 3rd century C.E. saw the decline of the Parthians, with the ascension of the Sasanians. With this the Zarathushtrian faith, coached by powerful prelates Tansar, Kirder, Adurbad Maraspand and Mehernaresh was resurrected to withstand the challenges of the time.

Here again as before, the expression of religiosity was cluttered with institutionalized priesthood and belabored with rituals.

Nevertheless the Zarathushtrian Commitment, **that taught** the good thinking reflecting a peaceful Mind; **that propagated** to humanity to define their own salvation through Good expressions

and actions; **that charged** each Human to contemplate and choose the path of Truth and Righteousness; **that preached** a progressive and full life through Spenta Mainyu; **that was** highly self reflective, introspective and universal, came through unscathed. Despite the highly prescriptive nature of the religiosity that evolved in later eras, the reflective and the inspirational nature of the commitment to the way of life, as preached by Asho Zarathusht, is immortalized.

As we enter the New Millennium it is imperative to recognize that in this shrinking world of technology there is significantly increased human interaction between different ethnic groups. This has markedly increased the mutual interdependence among mankind, has dissolved the barriers, and improved our understanding of different religions that, in an early era, evolved in seclusion. The Gathic commitments of Zarathushtra, such as "May we be among those who renovate or progress this world" (Ys 30.9) and "Lord, thou shalt truly refresh the life in this world as you desire" (Ys 34.15) has a profoundly greater responsibility today, than when they were uttered by Zarathushtra.

Asho Zarathushtra in his commitment to the Wise Lord recognizes through repeated chanting, in Ys 43.7, 9, 11, 13, and 15 "I have realized Thee (Mazda) to be Holy, when he attended me through Good Mind". It is beyond question, that the Mind of that Divinely ordained Thinker, was always in a state of Holy Serenity - *Spenta Armaiti* - to align His Mentality with Holy Mentality - *Spenta Mainyu* - to conceive Best Righteousness -*Asha Vahishta* - in consonance with the Will of the Wise Lord.

The first step for an average human to influence the renovation of this flawed world is to revitalize the human mind - *Vohu Manah* - that is constantly beleaguered with good and evil temporal instincts in this imperfect environment. **Love, compassion, and, care for the creation, in general, and for less fortunate humanity, in particular, is an integral part of Zarathushtrian Commitment.** These are the very foundations

on which to build the infrastructure of renovation, the edifice of that Divine rule - *Khshthravairya*.

These lofty ideals have a way of getting washed away in the torrents of the day-to-day stress of life. The Human Mind needs frequent rejuvenation to that benevolent mode of thinking. While such **Good Thinking** requires special efforts, to put these thoughts into **Good Words and Actions** demands even greater stress, and a degree of self-sacrifice. A consistent effort to commune with the Divine, in a state of Holy Serenity, in a state of True Devotion, can unlock the doors to attunement with Divine Spirit -Mazda - within, to pave the way to refresh life in this physical world. Zarathushtrian Kusti prayers aid us with the Holy mantras which, when intellectually understood and recited with spiritual compassion, harmonize the human mentality with the Holy Mentality. Only through such a revelation, does one recognizes the venerable spirit of giving, of serving creation and mankind. Only the persistent effort to attune with the Divine can result in a **concordance between the Physical and the Spiritual within.** That is the awareness that elevates mankind, beyond ones physical self, to manifest the **Wholeness and Oneness (*Haurvatat*)** of a human being to reflect the **Immortality (*Ameretat*) of the Zarathushtrian Commitment.**

Ushta ahmai ya ahmai ushta kahmaichit (Ys 43.1)

Radiant Happiness to him who radiates Happiness to others.

THE RELIGIOUS *and* THE DIVINE

When our ancestors landed on the shores of India in 936 C.E., they had but one single major objective, and that was to "**PRESERVE the SPIRITUALITY** of the Faith of Zarathushtra". They went through insurmountable tribulations and thousands sacrificed their lives to keep from desecration the consecrated *Alat* that they are believed to have transported from Khorasan and maintain aglow the Sacred Fire they kindled. During these years of turmoil the consecrated Fire journeyed through Sanjan to Bharot to Navsari to Bulsar and finally to Udvada. This voyage through these villages of India by that **Consecrated Fire** marks a period of over **EIGHT HUNDRED YEARS** before it found the present throne in 1742 in Udvada, where it is today.

In Iran, a similar state of affairs prevailed in 11th to 13th centuries when, with the insurgence of Turks and Mongols in Azerbaijan and Seistan, the Sacred Fires temples were razed to ground and tens of thousands of Zarathushtis slaughtered. Rarely do we; who live in a 20th century materialistic milieu of North America, realize that our ancestors were people with a **high order of spirituality**. They believed that life is but a glimmer of an eternal Glow of Wisdom beyond the physical. Traditionally they prayed and meditated, in front of **their consecrated Hearth Fire**, as did Asho Zarathusht (Ys 33.12-14), **to commune with that Reality beyond** - their Personal God Ahura Mazda. They sanctified Mazda, to say grace to and ask guidance from, so that they may **FEEL his presence in this physical world** around them. **They lived with and died for Zarathushti Religiosity so that we in today's world can practice freely the first monotheistic faith.**

The surge of Zarathushtis to this North America was primarily motivated for "material betterment". Religion although in conscious view, was clearly overshadowed by the overt pressures of the new social fabric. The community having successfully integrated into this new milieu, the dormant sentiment for the recognition of the spiritual has surfaced over the past decade. The

primal challenge is to spark Religiosity in the mind of the next generation. The sentiment for a religion is a belief in the existence of God. It is not something that can be explained in material terms of dollars and cents. It must evolve through observances and through cultivated intuition.

Spirituality is a notion that is innate in humans, and comes to light through various channels in life. A personal tragedy, a natural disaster, an event beyond comprehension of a mortal mind or sheer tranquility and awe for the Nature, can trigger the feeling of Religiosity. The instant that triggers that sentiment of Spirituality is the moment when the human mind is totally divorced from the **diversions of the material and worldly thoughts, words and actions**. It is in a state of *Spenta Aramaiti* - Right-mindedness, Holy Tranquility.

The human mind in its physical state cannot fully comprehend God or the associated religiosity. Bestial notions of, food and shelter, comfort and pleasure continuously tends to overpower the mental capacity. These earthly instincts are basic parts of physical life and years of fascination with temporal charms entombs the **Divine Spirit within** beyond recognition. With the passage of time, it becomes increasingly difficult for the mind to attain a state of purity devoid of the physical thoughts to realize the immanent Divinity. It takes a very special effort to free the mental activities off the physical. This state of mental purity is often accomplished through meditation, in a mystic state of spirituality. While knowledge develops the corporeal facet of mind, **spiritual wisdom** is only attainable to a mind free of earthly chaos where **Holy tranquility - Spenta Aramaiti** - can prevail.

Why one should commune with God is a question that can only find an answer if one believes in God. And the belief in God can only evolve through persistent efforts of daily communion with the Reality beyond, through a spiritual discipline. With strength of will, patience and determination one can penetrate this paradigm to ignite the spark of religiosity through focusing the mind on a single entity. Zarathushtra identifies this entity for us in the Gathas (Ys

34.4); our ancestors realized it as a means of communion, that is the *epiphany of Mazda - the Fire*. The **flame of an oil lamp or of a candle** in a consecrated corner, commands the respect of the **Spirit of Mazda** just as much as that which is incarnate in the consecrated fire of Atash-e-Behram or in the fiery Sun up above.

A devotion for a short period, in front of a consecrated flame, dedicated to the remembrance of Zarathushtrian Holy liturgies, can **clear the thoughts**, keep the mind from excessive immersion into the material, keep alive the consciousness of the Divine within and without in the viable world, and open the doors to the **path of enlightenment**. That is the beginning of the fulfillment of *Vohu Manah*, the realization of the path of *Asha*, the **recognition of the Spiritual** within the Microcosm of life, leading to *Khshthra Vairya* - Divine dominion in this Macrocosm, the World of actuality.

MAGA IN THE GATHAS

The term *Maga* occurs in the Gathas six times (Ys.29.11; 46.14; 51.11,16; 53.7 twice) while *Magava* (Ys 53.15) and *Maganono* (Ys.33.7) once each. All these terms are not at all related to the Median tribe. The *Maga* or *Magava* in the Gathas refers to, and means Fellowship or Brotherhood that Zarathushtra has evolved.

Dastur Dhalla in History of Zoroastrianism is explicit about it (pg.136) when he says: "The Avestan texts do not recognize the Magi. The forms derived from the term *Maga* "great" occurring in the Gathas and later Avesta do not represent this priestly class."

Prof. Boyce in History of Zoroastrianism Vol. I, Pg. 250 says: "It is plain however, that those who accepted the "maga" (meaning brotherhood), the message preached by Zarathushtra themselves felt this to be a decisive step which separated them effectively from the pagan."

Dr. Ali Jafarey, in one of his lectures has also used Fellowship or Brotherhood as translation for *Maga*. However, he also quoted Kanga and Insler who translate "Maga" as "Task". Insler has also used "adherent" (Ys. 33.7; 51.15) as the meaning.

We notice that in the two of the Gathic references (Ys 29.11 and 46.14) the expression used is *Mazoi Magai*. This derives from *Maz* meaning Majestic or Great, implying the Great Fellowship. Thus in Ys.29.11 it is a prayer for the Soul of the Universe, to Mazda for the establishment of the "Great Fellowship on earth." Similarly in Ys.33.7 Asho Zarathushtra prays for "the Good Mind and Righteousness to be heard beyond the limits of the Fellowship. (See Taraporewala, Bode/Nanavuty and Jafarey).

In the Gathic reference 51.15 we read:

*Hyat Mizdem Zarathushtra magavabyo choist para
Garō demane ahuro mazdao jasat paouryo.*

The promise unto all His Brotherhood hath Zarathushtra made that their reward shall be the House on High wherein dwell as first and foremost Mazda Ahura (Translation by Taraporewala)

So one can see that Maga of the Gathas has no relationship to the Priestly tribe. Regarding the Median tribe Prof. Boyce, in *History of Zoroastrianism* Vol. II pg. 19 says: "Herodotus writing in the mid 5th century B.C describes the *Magoi* collectively as one of the Median tribes, and as a body of priests. However, Persians in the 6th century B.C. also used the word *Magu* for their priests".

CHAPTER 2

Zarathushtrian Religious Calendar

UNIFIED CALENDAR -- PROS AND CONS

“One of the essential points in my outline of the history of the Iranian Calendars is the theory I put forward about the date of the creation of a fixed religious calendar, co-existing and running parallel with the civil year which was a vague one. This fixed year, called in Pahlavi literature *Vihejakik* was, however, theoretical. It was used only by the Zoroastrian clergy for the purpose of ascertaining the original position of the religious festivals and keeping them in or about their astronomical position.”

Taquizadeh¹

“It is not a matter of course for the reason that we have to distinguish between the civil calendar, which has no intercalation, and the religious (*Vihejakik*) calendar which intercalates a full month of 30 days at the same intervals (so far generally accepted as 120⁴ years).”

Hartner²

“It results from these reports that two year forms were in use simultaneously. One of them the civil, which we know continued in use after the downfall of the Sassanian empire, had no intercalation, whence its beginning receded by one day every four years. The other called *Vihejakik* year in Pahlavi texts served religious purposes (note that Biruni ascribes its inauguration to Zoroaster) it added one intercalary month (allegedly) every 120⁴ years.”

Hartner³

“The Persians of the Sassanid times had what is known as the vague year, that is an inexact solar year of always 365 days which is said to “wander” through the whole fixed year. The Persians however felt this calendar quite unsuitable for dating their religious feasts. Alongside the civil was set up a religious year, whose sole and exclusive purpose was to date the various sacred acts and functions. This “ecclesiastical” calendar was adjusted to the spring equinox by the intercalation of a month every 120 years.”

Rev. Higgins⁵

“Research in any aspect of calendar issues demands a diligent and in-depth study of the subject rather than a superficial and sentimental outburst. The authors of the above quotes are all devoted researchers who spent better parts of their lives in the study of calendar reforms of history.”

The above quotes prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the early Zarathushtrian community followed a dual calendar system. A civil (*Oshmurтик*) calendar, devoid of intercalation, used for official purposes of the daily life and a religious (*Vihejakik*) one, believed to have been initiated around 441 B.C.E., and was exclusively used by the Zarathushti clergy⁶. The ecclesiastic computation was adjusted by intercalation of one month (*kabiseh*) every 120 or 116 years⁴. This maintained the Noruz day on Spring Equinox and kept all the High Festivals of Gahambar, as well as the observance of Rapithwin, essentially fixed within the annual cycle. These facts are clearly defined and recognized in our Middle Persian Texts of Bundahisn⁷, Dinkard⁸ as well as in our prayers⁹.

Historical research on the subject has conclusively established that it was after eight intercalations^{10,11,12} that the process of adjustment was interrupted and the True Religious Calendar of Zarathushtrians ceased to exist. The civil calendar continued beyond the Sassanian era as mentioned by Hartner³, the vestiges of which are embodied in the Shenshai and the Kadimi calendars of today.

An unequivocal proof of the fact that indeed there were eight intercalation cycles is embodied in the day that Zarathushtis observe for the death anniversary of Asho Zarathusht at the present time¹³. This event is observed presently on the **11th Day - Khursheed** of the **10th Month - Dae**. The actual date of the demise of the prophet according to the fixed Religious calendar is **11th Day - Khursheed** of the **2nd Month - Ardibehest**. This is clearly recorded in Chapter 23 verse 9 of the “Selections of Zadsparam”¹⁴. The difference between the actual and the observed month

conclusively proves that the civil calendar had drifted ahead, **eight months** over the religious calendar during the period when the intercalations were observed.

Some Mile Stones in The Historical Dateline of Civil (*oshmurтик*) calendar.

Sassanian Era:

A cumbersome system of intercalation, despite its accuracy led to the **demise of the Zarathushti Religious Calendar**. The civil calendar system continued to be observed till the reign of Kavad I (488-531 C.E.). This powerful monarch, realizing the doctrinal importance of religious observances synchronized the day of **Noruz with the Vernal Equinox**. At that time *Roz Hormazd* of *Mah* (month) *Adur* overlapped with the day of vernal equinox. The reform was carried out by royal command, without shifting the month of *Adur*¹⁵. Consequently the New Year started with *Mah Adur* and the *Epagomenae* (Gatha days) remained at the end of *Mah Aban*.

The Yezdegerdi era (Y.Z.) or Anno Yezdegerdi (A.Y.) was initiated on 16th June 632 C.E., when Yazdegerd III came to the throne¹⁶. In the year 1006 C.E.= A.Y. 375 the first day of *Mah Farvardin* coincided with the day of the vernal equinox. In this year by the order of the Buyid, ruling prince (probably Bahaa ad-dawla¹⁷ *Epagomenae* (Gatha days) were shifted from the end of *Mah Aban* **8th Month** to the end of *Mah Spendarmad* **12th Month** where they are today. The history of the present day Shenshai and Kadimi calendars thus started in the year 632 C.E.=A.Y.1 and spans over some fourteen centuries. A Zarathushti Y.Z. or A.Y. Year can be readily computed deducting 631 from the Gregorian year. Thus 1999 C.E.- 631= A.Y. 1368. It is a fact that, over the past 1368 years, Shenshai and Kadimi Zarathushtis have evolved strong ties of spiritual sentiments with a tradition, executing their religious rituals and practices following the civil calendar. It is also true that both these systems due to the lack of intercalation are in fact entirely inconsistent and in disharmony with the Natural cycle of religious observances.

Jalali Era:

About one and a half-century after the first exodus, in 936 C.E. of Zarathushtis (Parsis) to India, the ruling Seljukian dynasty in Iran decided to introduce a solar calendar system. Jalal al-Din Malikshah (1073-1092 C.E.) ordered a group of eight mathematicians and astronomers, among whom was the great poet and mathematician Umar Khayyam, to fix the calendar so as to make it synchronous with the vernal equinox. About this Jalalian calendar Taqizadeh¹⁸ says, "There has been much misunderstanding on the part of Oriental as well as Occidental authors in this matter. The Jalalian year being tropic and beginning always on the Vernal equinox, the commencement of the year was to be found out every year by calculations." The year always began at the exact time when the sun reached the equinoctial point of Aries. For this reason there were neither the rules necessary, nor provided for intercalation of a supplementary day. For the initiation of each calendar year, the system was left entirely dependent on the astronomical calculation each year. Based on the paper by Taqizadeh there is clear uncertainty regarding the names of the months and days of this new-calendar. While some historians believe the names of the months were Yazdegerdian (Zarthushti), others report new names for Jalalian months and days¹⁹. It is important to note that Jalali calendar system had **little in common with the Fasli Calendar**, except for the fact that they both start on the day of Vernal Equinox.

Calendar of Hijra era in Iran:

Islamic Iran in 1925 adopted the solar Hijra era. This was done by the passage of a bill by the Iranian Majlis¹⁶ on March 31¹⁶ 1925. This calendar counts the time elapsed since the *Hijrat* or the flight of prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in September 622 C.E.¹⁶. The names of the twelve months of the old Zarthushtian calendar are retained in this calendar. However the length of the months were variable. The first six months of this new system had 31, next five had 30 and the last month had 29 days respectively in a common year. In case of a leap year the last month was extended to 30 days. The New Year day **always**

coincides with the day of the Vernal Equinox. The days of this calendar had no names, but are only numbered. Thus the first month starts with 1st *Farvardin* and ends with 31st *Farvardin*. The number of the solar Hijri year can be readily arrived at by deducting 621 from the Gregorian year. Thus Gregorian 21 March 1999 will begin the solar Hijri year with 1st *Fravardin* 1378. Zarathushtis of Iran to this day conveniently follow this calendar by simply replacing the numbered days, by the appropriate names of the days of the Yazdegardi year. To this day, and even in North America Iranian Zarathushtis follow this system under the name of the **Khurshidi** calendar. It is important to point out that the week in the months of this Hijri calendar starts with Saturday and ends with Friday clearly defining its Islamic origin.

Fasli era:

In the 20th century, in an effort to resolve the problem of the **disharmony with religious observances**, embodied in the Shenshai and Kadimi calendars, Khurshedji Cama in India lead the way. He founded the Zarthushti Fasli Sal Mandal or Seasonal Year Society in 1906, with a goal to adopt a Zarthushtian calendar that would **synchronize with the spiritual observances**. Learned Dasturs Dr. Framroz Bode, Ervad Navroz Minochehr-Homji, and Dr. Maneckji N.Dhalla saw the light in this resolution. The Fasli group sought to begin the Year on the day of Vernal equinox, by adopting the early ancestral *Vihejakik -Zarthushtian Religious Calendar* and incorporating an extra day *-Avardadsalgah* - every four years in order to fix the day of Noruz in harmony with the Spring Equinox. The Calendar has 12 months each of 30 days, with five supplementary days of *epagomenae* (Gatha) at the end of the last month. The additional day of *Avardadsalgah* is introduced every four years after the *epagomenae* days. The names of the month and days are all identical with those of the Shenshai/Kadimi calendar. The Fasli system also measures the time that has elapsed since the accession of Yadegard III on 16th June 632 C.E. as in case of Shenshai/Kadimi. Therefore Fasli year can be computed by deducting 631 from the Gregorian year. Thus 1999 C.E. would be Fasli A.Y. 1368. **Fasli year differs** from the Hijra year in several

ways. (a) The week in Fasli calendar, does not start on Saturday and end with Friday, (b) the calendar has all 12 months of 30 days each as against the differing lengths of the month in the Khurshidi calendar and (c) the year in Fasli computation is 10 years behind that of the Hijri year. The **Fasli system also differs from Jalali**. While the Jalali system has no specific day for intercalation, the Fasli year always adds an extra day every four years.

From the above it is unambiguously clear that **Fasli system** is the only computation that **fully complies with the spiritual and religious** demands of Zarathushtrian Faith. To say that, a Muslim ruler Sultan Malikshah originally formulated Fasli system in 1079 C.E. is nothing short of total ignorance of facts and a sacrilege.

Objections forwarded to the shift to Fasli system:

1. One-Day Intercalation.

One of the major objections forwarded by Fasli antagonist is the addition of a single day intercalation to the Zarathushtrian calendar. Emotively it is argued that (a) this mode of intercalation has been used by the Gregorian computation and (b) that the single day intercalation is also present in the Jalali system of Seljuk Iran. The adoption of the Gregorian mode of intercalation is considered alien to Zarathushtrian faith, while **in their ignorance** they link the Fasli system of the Zarathushtrian religious calendar with the Islamic sources of the 11th century. It is not only inappropriate but also **entirely wrong** to associate this system with the Jalali calendar. The **Jalali era did not have** an intercalation of a **supplementary day** as documented above. Such spurious irresponsible remarks by reputed Zarathushtis disseminate misinformation, offend the religious sentiments of the people, and particularly cause irreparable damage to the impressionable young minds in the community. The accuracy of the Fasli system has the historical and spiritual ancestry that traces it all the way back to the *Vihejakik* religious year, of the ancient era. That is more than we can say about the Shenshai and the Kadimi systems. However, in the **interest of feasibility**, the mode of intercalation is altered to that of a single day.

It is widely held that this unique **mode of intercalation** of the Fasli system is **proscribed by spiritual texts**. This is certainly debatable. It is a fact, that there are **two historical sources** that cast doubt on this mode of intercalation. (a) Book III of Dinkard and (b) writings of Al Biruni.

(a) Dinkard- "Expositions of the Religion" is the longest extant Pahlavi work, which was composed in the middle of the ninth century (820-890 C.E.) by Adurfarnbag Farrokhzadan and further edited by Adurbad-e-Emedan. This happened in a firmly rooted Islamic era, several generations after the death and destruction by Arabs. These distinguished Zarathushtis pooled together the scattered religious literature to compile an encyclopedia of the historical²⁰ account of the past. The text, while it is an invaluable traditional heritage, **cannot** be classed as **Zarathustrian Scripture** by any stretch of the imagination. In stating a historical fact the book says²¹, "...and it is an admonition of the good faith that the rectification (of the calendar) should not be made till a month is completed". The text says nothing about breaking of the spiritual continuity **nor does it give doctrinal rationale** for an injunction against intercalation of days.

(b) The great Arab historian Al-Biruni, on the point of addition of days, writes²²: "The reason why they did not add ...one complete day... was, that according to their view not the days but only the months are liable to be intercalated, because they had aversion to increasing the number of days". Once again we have here, a statement of a historical fact **unsupported by any doctrinal evidence**. It is indeed interesting to note that generally Fasli antagonists systematically condemn Muslim associations with a Zarathushtrian calendar. However, there is no inhibition to finding support, however weak, from history by a Muslim author of Islamic era.

Neither of the sources cited are **scriptural**, in the true sense of the word. Nor do they provide evidence for the proscription of intercalation of a **single day** on spiritual grounds. Both these references **simply elaborate the historical** state of affairs.

Therefore, it is logical to conclude that, **based on doctrines, there is not a shred of evidence in older or younger Avestan scriptures against the addition of a single day every four years.**

2. Avardadsalgah – the 6th Gatha?

Fasli antagonists have alleged that *Avardadsalgah*, is considered as the 6th Gatha. It is a fact that there are no religious bases to suggest that the added day of *Avardadsalgah*, is the 6th *epagomenon*. This could pose an interference with the religious sentiments of the devout community. It is also claimed that such an intercalation breaks the continuity of spirituality for the devout sector of the community. While spirituality cannot be legislated, this dilemma must be resolved through amicable discussion. An ideal resolution to this enigma should be sought, in finding a suitable designation for that day, through dialog with all concerned.

It is a recorded fact, that 30 days of Month *Spendarmad* (as 2nd *Spendarmad Kabishe*) were incorporated in the early religious year without disturbing the sentiments of the devotionals²³. Following that pattern, the intercalary day can be added as “Second *Hormazd*” and could be introduced before the Gathas, at the end of *Roz Aneran* of the *Mah Spendarmad*. This will retain all prayer with its *Khushnuman* in place, and preserve strong ritual/spiritual continuity.

The modification of the **designation** in this manner will eliminate (a) the **alien nature** of the extra day, (b) shifting of any **religious obligations** and (c) necessity of **designing** the **prayer** for that day. Such a resolution will be entirely compatible with the **needs of the devout** sector and worthy of consideration.

3. Alat.

Alat represents all the consecrated objects used for the inner and outer liturgical ceremonies of Zarathushti religion. These rituals demand, the **highest order of ritualistic purity**. It is believed that Alat from Khorasan was accessible to Zarathushti, who consecrated the first Atash-e-Behram in Sanjan. A consecrated

fire in the Sanctum Sanctorum of a fire temple, is the **Alat of the highest order of ritual purity**.

We are told in a recent article²⁴, that **Alat** entails a known **genealogy** and that generated through one calendar system is vitiated when used for a different system. No reference is cited to support these facts. We have no verifiable doctrinal reference in our early Avestan tradition, to support such a notion. The discussion of the genealogy of Alat is never to be found in any of the historical records, during the observances of the *Vilhejakik* (religious) and *Oshmurtik* (civil) year of the early era.

The paper also quotes²⁴ with no supporting reference, that “the Kadimi priests obtained their Alat from Pars”. Historical accounts of Patel²⁵ tell us that, “on 6th June 1745 a few behdins became Kadimis and commenced to perform Muktd ceremonies one month earlier”. Another report²⁶ tells us, “Jamasp (a mobed) corrected the calendar by **striking out one month from the year 1745**, reckoning the day *Mahrespand* of the month *Aban* as the same day of the month *Adar* in the 1114 Y.Z. corresponding to 6th June 1745”. History goes on to say that the first Kadimi Atash Behram, in fact the very first Atash Behram, was consecrated in Mumbai on 29 September 1783. While **importance of consecrated Alat** should not be undermined, it is indeed unusual, that either Patel or any of the subsequent historians²⁷ make no mention of Alat from Pars or for that matter Alat at all, in their accounts.

Logically, one cannot visualize the question of the **association of Alat** with a **calendar system** arising until the late 18th century when, for the first time, the schism of the Zarathushtis in India to two calendar systems came into being. The notion of the “genealogy of Alat” is wholly based on imaginative conjecture and is advanced solely to influence the spiritual sentiments of the community to further the cause of *status quo*. When one considers the fact, that, **a consecrated fire is an embodiment of All Perfect Ahura Mazda**, the contention that the sacred Fire has more than

one immiscible identity, based on the calendar system used, seems ludicrous.

In fact there are several known cases in Mumbai, India today, where rituals for more than one calendar system are performed within the precincts of a specific consecrated Alat. For example:

(a) Banaji Kadimi Atash Behram, performs Shenshai and Fasli Muktdas prayers for the community²⁸.

(b) The Consecrating ceremony of Banaji Atash Behram was supervised by a Shenshai (Dastuji Jamshedji Jamaspara), and by a Kadimi (Dasturji Bejonji Bejandaru) priests²⁹.

(c) Watcha-Gandhi Kadimi Agiyari has a Shenshai priest as panthaki (organizer) Ervad Aspandiar Dadachanji, and performs Muktdad ritual for Shenshai, Kadimi and Fasli members of the community³⁰.

(d) Bhagaria mobeds who consecrated Shenshai Anjuman Atash Behram in Mumbai had their Bareshnum, to attain their ritual purity, at the Kadimi Dadyseth Atash Behram³¹.

These are some of the instances where intermingling of rituals of more than one calendar systems are carried out within the confines of a specific consecrated Alat.

Speaking of Fasli Alat the article²⁴ says, "There is no known or recorded Alat in the Fasli tradition" and "when their Atash Kadeh was built the Alat used if any do not seem to have been documented". Parsi Prakash³² of March 1940 tells us (translated from Gujarati), "In this (Fasli) Atash Kadeh according to the calculations of Dini Sal (Fasli year), the ceremony for the generation of *nava* (new) Alat continued for two months. After that, on 9th January 1940 the ritual for consecration of New *Varasya* continued for 5 days. These ceremonies were performed by Ervads Maneckshah Khurshedji Panthaki and Rustomji Hormasji Panthaki under the leadership of Dastur Framroze Ardeshir Bode." It must be mentioned that these ceremonies, even at that time, were criticized by Fasli antagonists, **but that does not**

change the fact that there **does exist documented evidence** of Fasli Alat contrary to what we are led to believe.

The highly reputed Master of Zarathushti religion Behramgore Anklesaria has said³³, "Fasli alat is no different from Shenshai or Kadimi". Regarding the spiritual continuity of ceremonies in moving to Fasli system he is quoted³⁴ (translated from Gujarati) as follows. "**It is incumbent to recite Fasli Roz/Mah and Oshmurtik Roz/Mah in the ceremonies.** It, is through this, that all the ceremonies thus far performed following Shenshai/Kadimi system will be valid and remain intact. The religiosity that will follow will be joined with that of the previous ones with a golden chain. Thereby the Fasli ceremonies, the Alat of Roz/Mah, and the spirituality of *bereshnum* will remain strong".

The discussion of a shift to Fasli calendar, is not a question of foisting one set of views on to the others, or a question of non-ritualistic minority against the devout majority. The sole objective of this exercise must be to disseminate truthful information with righteousness, to propagate to the community historical facts without bias, and without influencing their spiritual sentiments. The object should be to give the community an opportunity to make a choice rather than impose upon them biased views to put doubts in their minds. Permitting the people to think without toying with their sentiments is the only way to resolve this issue and arrive at an informed judgment. The early calendar reforms, were commanded by the ruling monarchs, and were implemented with little freedom of choice to the community. Today as in the case of schism between Shenshai and Kadimi in the 18th century, it is up to the community to make the choice of a calendar system. take up the cudgel and direct the way. It is the duty and an obligation of the priesthood to satisfy and fulfill the religious needs of the community.

It is not an easy task to uproot human spirituality rooted in a calendar system, however erroneous. Sincere spiritual dedication to the religion of Zarathushtra cannot and should not ignore the **errors of history** in the name of observance of religiosity.

Regardless of the barriers, efforts must continue to revive the **Zarathishti Religious Calendar**, restore harmony between the ritual practices and the events of Nature as it once was. A righteous judgment will be the choice of **Asha**, that will restore true religiosity to fulfill the Divine Will.

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PROPHET ZARATHUSHTRA COMMEMORATION DAYS

Zadsparam, son of Mobed Yudan-Yim, and brother of Manuschihr (the author of Dadistan-i-Dinik, and the Epistles) was High-Priest of Sirkan, south-east of Kerman in the late 8th century C.E. In a treatise, known after his name, "Selections of Zadsparam"¹ the clergy speaks about the demise of prophet Zartathushtra in Ch. 23 verse 9 in the following terms:

"IN THE 47TH YEAR DIED ZARATHOSHT WHO WAS AGED 77 YEARS 40 DAYS, IN THE MONTH OF ARTAVAHISHT (ARDIBEHESHT) ON THE DAY KHUR (KHORSHED). BY EIGHTH MONTH VAHIZAKIK IT HAS BEEN CARRIED TO THE MONTH DADVO (DAE) AND THE DAY KHUR, WHICH VAHIZAKIK MONTH IS THE SAME MONTH ARTAVAHISHT" (Translated by Prof. H.R. Baily²)

Buried within the above statement is the rich history of the early Zarathushtrian Calendar. The complexity of this history is tightly interwoven with time. Only a careful study over a long period allows a clear revelation of some of the strands of history with time. In a lecture given by Taqizadeh³, to honour Prof. Minorsky in Tehran (June 1 1952), he outlines the history briefly.

Going back almost to the time of the prophet, we had a calendar that came to be known as **Old Avestan** tropical year, of 6 unequal seasons starting with vernal equinox. The means by which the seasons were kept in harmony with their astronomic position is not well documented. Around the late 6th or early 5th century B.C.E. Iranian Zoroastrians adopted another computation from the Egyptian system, which later came to be known as **Younger Avestan Calendar**. A third system of time reckoning that prevailed **only in the North Western and central Iran** was known as the **Magian Calendar**. This, according to Taqizadeh³, "has been the calendar of people who revered Mithra, Anahita, etc. i.e. old Aryan but not Zoroastrian deities; and who perhaps did not believe in or respect sufficiently Ahura Mazda".

It was around 441 B.C.E. that many of the Magian beliefs and pre-zarathushtrian deities were incorporated into the Zarathushtrian religion. It was at that time that the Young Avestan Calendar was merged with the Magian system to synthesize a new system known as the **Civil Calendar** or the **Civil Vague Year** (also known as *Oshmurtik* Year), with its civil feasts for the use of common people and for all day-to-day affairs. The reason why it was known as **Vague Year** was that it was a 365-day system that neglected the intercalation of the appropriate one-quarter day of the solar year. This calendar was never intercalated and continued to drift through time. This is exactly the system that is embodied in the Shenshai and Kadimi system today.

Rev. Higgins in his dissertation⁴ tells us that, "this calendar was unsuitable for dating religious feasts, originally bound up with the seasons. This relationship was lost by the Vague Year". The Zarathushtrian clergies of the time therefore set up a **'Religious year' parallel with 'Civil Vague Year'**. The **'Religious year'** (later known as *Vahizakik* year) was identical in all respect with the vague year, **but with one important difference**. The Religious year was fixed and prevented from drifting by a consistent system of intercalation of 30 days every 120 years. This fact is also stressed by Prof. Hartner in his article⁵ on the Avestan Calendar. From the facts of history discussed above it becomes abundantly clear that today's Shenshai and Kadimi computations are the remnants of the civil vague year, while the Fasli seasonal is the remains of the true Religious year as experienced by the early Zarathushtrians.

With this as a backdrop, let us now explore the rationale within the statement of Zadsparam, mentioned at the beginning of the article. The author says, Zarathushtra passed away on Roz Khorshed (11th day) of Mah Ardibehesht (2nd month). Writing in the 9th century C.E., he tells us that this day of the 'Religious year', was the same as Roz Khorshed of Mah Dae (10th month) of the 'Civil (Vague) year'. We know from our history that the 'Religious Year' was kept in synch with Natural events by **intercalation of 1 month every 120 years**. Thus in this statement we see a

difference of 8 months between the date of the 'Religious' and that of the 'Civil' year.

The studies by Taqizadeh^{2,3}, Rev. Higgins⁴, Hartner⁵, and Bickerman⁶ unanimously agree, that **eight intercalations were performed in the 'Religious Year' between 4th century B.C.E in the Achaemenian era to the 6th century C.E. of the Sassanian times.** This was a conclusion based on the shift of the epagomenal (Gatha) days^{4,5,7} involved in the mode of intercalations. Therefore the date of the death anniversary of Prophet Zarathushtra based on the Religious tradition is on Roz Khorshed of Mah Ardibehesht.

A question directly coupled with this anniversary is the date of birth of the prophet. We note, from the statement by Zadsparam, that Zarathushtra passed away 40 days after his 77th birthday. As per the **Religious Calendar** that day of demise, was Roz Khorshed of Mah Ardibehesht. Calculating backward 40 days we arrive at the **date of birth** of the prophet, as **Roz Hormazd of Mah Fravardin.** Thus by Religious tradition the prophet was believed to have been born on the first day of the year -the day of Vernal Equinox. Today we observe his date of birth on **Roz Khordad of Mah Frevardin.**

Where is the answer to this discrepancy? Taqizadeh⁸ explains that *Nausrad* or 'Religious New Year Day' was celebrated on the sixth day of month Fravardin and the day was known as the **Greater Nauruz.** Why the Greater Nauruz? The reason for this was that, "After the first intercalation took place, the Persian (Civil) year and consequently the beginning of the year moved five days back, thus the real New Year's Day became the sixth day of the year". The statement implies that 'Civil Year' moved five days ahead of the 'Religious Year'. Taqizadeh however, gives no distinct reason for this shift of five days. Rev. Higgins in his thesis⁴ elaborates this point further. Speaking of 'Civil Vague Year' moving five days ahead of the 'Religious year', he says, "The explanation for this anomaly is obvious. The *epagomenae* (the Gatha days) were suppressed in the 'Civil' but maintained in the Religious Calendar" during the first intercalation.

Thus Roz Khordad/Mah Farvardin of the 'Civil Year' corresponded with Roz Hormazd/Mah Farvardin of the 'Religious Year'. This is the rationale why **Khordad Sal** (Civil year) has always been the Greater Nauruz and celebrated as birthday of Zarathushtra. However, the birthday of the Prophet as per religious tradition is considered, to be on **Roz Hormazd of the 'Religious Year'.**

It is also a unanimous consensus among these great scholars of the Persian calendar that after the eight intercalations, the next one due around 640 C.E.⁹ and subsequent intercalations were never undertaken. Thus **what we observe today under the label of Shenshahi and Kadimi** are in fact the civil computations of the earlier era. In contrast **Fasli computation truly represents the Religious Year** of our early tradition. This explains the discrepancy, why the commemorative days observed for the prophet are **shifted from those of the early Religious Year.**

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DAYS of FARVARDIGAN, NORUZ and VERNAL EQUINOX

Introduction and Meaning:

Early Indo-Iranians observed a High Festival dedicated to Fravashis. This observance synchronized with the ritual of Gahanbar (later Gahambar) Hamaspathmaedaya on the evening of the last day of the year before the day of vernal equinox. With time the ritual came to be known in Iran, as Fravardigan. After emigration to India, the Zarathushtrian community adopted the term Muktaḍ for this festival. Two interpretations are forwarded by Modi¹ for this term. (a) Dastur Naryosang Dhaval has translated the Avestan word "Fravashinam" into Sanskrit as "Muktatmana". Modi states, that word Muktaḍ is a derivative of the term Muktatmana (b) Nariman Hoshung Rivayet on the other hand suggests the Muktaḍ as a corruption of the Farsi word "Mukhtar" meaning the "highest choice". It is interesting to note that Johanna Narten in her work on Haptanhaiti interprets the word Fravashi as "preference or Choice"².

Dating and Length of the Ritual:

This festival dates back to antiquity, in its history, into the pre-zarathushtrian era. Its association with Gahanbar Hamaspathmaedaya is best exemplified in Fravardin Yasht³ with the words "*Yao Visadha Aveyanti Hamaspathmaedaya paiti ratum*" meaning "**who (Fravashis) come to the homes at the time of Hamaspathmaedaya**". In ancient Iran, the festival lasted one evening, starting at the sunset of Roz Aneran of Mah Spendarmad and ending before the dawn of Roz Hormazd of Mah Fravardin (NoRuz day). As the rituals became formalized in the post Gathic era, fires were lit on the roof tops, Avesta was chanted and tables were laid out with food to welcome the Farvashis after sunset, and once again sounds of Avestan prayers resonated through the houses, bidding farewell to the withdrawing heavenly

visitors, as the dawn shattered the darkness on the **New Year day, the day of vernal equinox.**

This tradition of the one-day celebration of Fravardigan was interrupted when the early lunar calendar was changed to a solar computation, with the introduction of the epagomenae (intercalation) of the five Gathas. The one-day Fravardigan was thus expanded to a five days ritual. Concomitantly, the celebration Hamaspathmaedaya Gahanbar moved from Roz Aneran (30th Spendarmad) to Vahishtoishiti Gatha and was celebrated during the five Gatha days. Thus *Rozan Fravardigan* "the Fravashi days" were synchronized with the five days of the Gatha. The introduction of epagomenae also shifted all the **specific gahanbar days** by five days. Four preceding days were added, to each Gahanbar celebrations and each of the Gahanbar festivals was thus expanded to five-day ritual, with the **original specific day** as the **fifth day**. Thus, Maidyazeremaya, which was originally celebrated on the 45th day of the year - Roz Dae-pe-mehr of Mah Ardibehesht - was now performed from Roz Khorshed (41st day of the year) to Dae-pe-Mehr of that month. This explains the five-day celebration of each of the Gahanbars that we have today.

In Fravardin Yasht³ however we recite the words "*at athra vichaenti dasa pairi khshafno..*" meaning "**then they (Fravashis) wander here for ten nights**". This indicates, that the period of **Fravardigan is in fact ten days**. Vendidad⁴ and all the Middle Persian literature such as Dinkard⁵, Sad-Dar⁶, and Persian Rivayat⁷ concurs with Fravardegan being a ten-day Festival.

The ten days referred to here, consist of the last five days of the month of Spendarmad plus the following five Gatha days. With time the first five days became known as the *Panj-e-kasog*, **the lesser Pentad**, and the later five Gatha days as *Panj-i-mas*, **the greater Pentad**⁸. It is difficult to pin point when the five-day ritual was changed to that of ten days. However, the reason for this change can be found in the book, "Old Iranian Calendars" by Taqizadeh⁹. The author raises this discrepancy, and answers it as follows: "Bruin tells us that a controversy having arisen among the

Zoroastrians as to which of the two pentads, the last five days preceding the Gatha days, or the latter group itself was the real Fravardigan, they decided to add both fives together and to make the Fravardigan ten days, and thus the feast became, by compromise, longer than it originally was".

Favardigan Days: Relationship to Vernal Equinox:

The ritual of Fravardigan is historically positioned, to terminate with the dawn of the day of NoRuz. Modi explains the meaning of the term Hamaspathmaedaya as follows: "It seems to signify the time when the path (*pathan*) of the year is the same (*hama*) or in the middle (*madha*). It is the time of the Vernal Equinox when the days and nights are equal, when the heat and the cold are the same". This clarifies the reason why this Gahanbar was carefully inserted before the High Festival of **NoRuz day**, which is traditionally **synchronized with the day of Vernal Equinox**. The Indo-Iranians of the era before Zarathust, divided their year based on the seasons and are believed to have initiated their year from spring¹⁰. The Avestan society of the Gathic era considered the middle of spring (Gahanbar Maidyazaremaya) as their first High Feast of Gahanbar, providing strong support to the fact that the day of Noruz must synchronize with the day of vernal equinox. The later traditional literature of Dinkard¹¹ and Zand-Akasi¹² also make a strong case to initiate the year with the day of spring equinox. The religious New Year day of the early Zarathushtrian community was thus synchronous with the symbolism of the spring season - the resurgence and resurrection of body and life in Nature. This computation also finds the second most important High Festival of Mihragan in its proper location, in proximity with the Autumn Equinox. For the pastoral society of the Avestan era Autumn Equinox, was the time when the sunlight of spring and summer has done its job, bestowed the bounty of rich harvest, and the approach of Gahanbar Ayathrem, that signals the time to return the herd back to shelter. This harmony was maintained by the religious (Vahizakik) calendar. Zand-Akasi¹² attests to that¹² with words "Note this: the Vahizakik month

Fravardin, the month of Artavahest, and the month of Khurdat compose the season of spring; the month Tir, the month Amurdat, and the month Satrivar are of summer; the month Mithra, the month Awan, and the month Atar are of autumn". It is crucial that Zarathushtrians around the world take note of our traditional religious literature, and bring in synch many of the High Festivals that has little relevance when performed in disharmony with Nature following computations that are clearly proven erroneous.

References:

1. J.J. Mody, 'Religious Ceremonies and Customs of Parsis' pg. 421,438
2. M. Boyce, Zoroastrianism- Its Antiquity and Constant vigour, pg 99
3. Yasht 13.49
4. Vendidad VIII.22
5. Dinkard Bk, VIII, Ch. VII. 12
6. Sad-Dar Ch. XXXVII.4
7. Ervad B.N. Dhabhar, Persian Rivayat text, pg 542
8. M. Boyce, Persain Stronghold of Zoroastrianism, pg 213
9. S.H.Taqizadeh, Old Iranian Calendar, Royal Asiatic Society
10. M. Boyce, History of Zoroastrianism Vol. I, pg 172-175
11. Dastur P. Sanjana, Dinkard Vol. IX, pg 565
12. B.T. Ankleseria, Zand-Akasi¹² Ch. XXV. 16,26.

RESOLUTION FOR THE NEW YEAR

This article is written at the request of the editor of *USHAO* (Journal of Informal Religious Meetings) who feels "that people should be reminded at least once in a year that "Fasli Calendar as the Correct Calendar for Zarathushtis". While he is absolutely right about the correctness of the calendar of FASAL, the intellectual community of Zarathushtis should be able to perceive the TRUTH readily when articulately disseminated.

In an earlier detailed article, the historical milestones of the changes in Zarathushti calendar, over the past 1500 years were outlined, the objections raised by the antagonists were discussed in detail and some restorative measures proposed. All the data presented was documented with appropriate references.

The story began with citations from dedicated researchers that conclusively demonstrated that there existed in the early Zarathushtrian era two calendar systems.

- 1) A Civil or Vague year known as *OSHMURTIK*. This year was devoid of intercalation. The first day of the year of this system receded one day every four years.
- 2) In order to ascertain the fix positions of the religious High Festivals, the Zarathushti clergies observed a Religious calendar known in Pahlavi as the *VIHEJAKIK* system of computation. This year had an intercalation built into it. The intercalation consisted of adding an extra one month (*KABISEH*) every 120 years. This adjustment helped maintain a harmony between the religious observances and the annual Cycle of Nature:

a. The **Year always started on the day of the Vernal Equinox** when the Sun entered the constellation Aries.

b. The **High Festivals of Gahambar were all kept in synch** with the annual cycle.

c. The dates for **starting and stopping of the observance of Rapithawin** also remained in consonance with the Path of ASHA.

It is an established fact that the *VIHEJAKIK* religious system existed for almost a thousand years (**eight cycles of intercalations**), before it was interrupted due to political disturbances during the Sassanian era, when the Zarathushtrian Religious calendar ceased to exist. In contrast, the civil *OSHMURTIK* system continued beyond the Sassanian times, the remains of which are vested in the present day *SHENSHAI* and *KADIMI* years. Even today we can readily visualize the proof of the eight cycles of the religious year, by observing the difference between the *SHENSHAI* and *FASLI* year. For example on Jan 13 2002 it was *Shenshai*: Mah Amurdad, Roz Ashtad Y.Z. 1371 and *Fasli*: Mah Dae Roz Mahrespamd Y.Z 1370

From the above one readily perceives that the *Shenshai* year has drifted by almost eight months since the demise of the Zarathushti Religious calendar. It is also **IMPORTANT TO NOTE** that the **FASLI SYSTEM IS THE ONLY ONE** among the three modes of computation we have today, that **FULLY COMPLIES WITH THE SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS DEMANDS OF THE ZARATHUSHTRIAN FAITH**. The reason for this compliance is that it is **THE ONLY SYSTEM THAT HAS A BUILT IN INTERCALATION** of one day every four years. The early *VIHEJAKIK* religious year, was intercalated by a cumbersome system of adding one month every 120 years.

Why is it so difficult to understand TRUTH?

a) Articles, such as this, are published over intervals only to recall the attention of the community members to the information already disseminated earlier. The bustle of daily life for external goals such as jobs, status, wealth and physical happiness leaves little time for people to carefully scrutinize the TRUTH of Nature that is embodied in this matter.

b) Furthermore, it is indeed very difficult to extirpate the spirituality rooted over millennium of unenlightened following of a tradition, despite the clear visibility of the error. Over the period of past 50 years many learned Dasturs: Dr. Maneckji N. Dhalla, Dr. Framroze Bode, Ervad Navroz Minochehr Homji as well as religious scholars such as Behramgore T. Anklesaria and others have made concerted efforts to bring this error to the attention of the community. It is indeed a **CHALLENGE** to the community to evaluate the proof of the facts disseminated and to arrive at a rational conclusion. More particularly the issue must stimulate the thinking of the younger sector of the community.

c) Arguments such as the proscription of the one day intercalation, 'genealogy of Alat' and Avardadsalgah-the 6th Gatha are all carefully contrived by tradition to play upon the spiritual emotionality of community members. These objections were fully discussed in the detailed account and wherever possible resolutions were suggested. It is indeed crystal clear that those in the leadership position have chosen to keep the **TRUTH** of this matter away from the community members. In contrast, basic fear is inbred in the minds of the people that changing the calendar system is a violation of religious ritual code.

d) It is also apparent that the members of the community unfortunately lack the spiritual strength to see the **TRUTH** presented to them. While presenting themselves under the guise of dedicated Zarathushti, little do they realize that through the practice of erroneous computation of Shenshai and Kadimi they are in fact violating the basic order of ASHA - the Immutable law of Nature - and causing utter chaos and disharmony in the Zarathushtrian ritual performances.

Those who feel the angst of moving to the Calendar system of Fasal must feel at ease and peaceful, that in doing so, they are **choosing the TRUTH, doing what is Righteous**, to correct an error of the past. Those who have concern about changing the Roz/mah of **memorial prayers** of their dearly departed must recognize that the souls of their loved ones, are in unison with

Mazda and are omniscient. These righteous souls will only welcome the harmony that such a change will restore. In the name of Ahura Mazda all the memorial prayers should be shifted to the **Roz/Mah** of Fasal Sal that coincides with the Gregorian date of their demise, for to do that is to change **the wrong to right**, to change **the bad to the Good**. That is what religion of **Zarathusht teaches us to do**.

In the 18th century schism between the Shenshai and Kadimi it was the **PEOPLE POWER THAT LED THE WAY**. Nothing short of the same historic courage of the **WILL OF THE PEOPLE** can pave the way to correct this error of history. Looking to the leadership to find a resolution of this matter is futile and fruitless. True spiritual dedication to the religion of Asho Zarathusht resides not in ignoring but in correcting the wrongs to set right the religiosity of our sacred observances. The Priesthood is duty bound to perform the services to satisfy the spiritual needs of the community.

May Mazda be our guide, to light the Path of Asha, to the Righteous choice.

CHAPTER 3

Prayers and Spirituality

HAOMA YASHT

The Haoma cult was inseminated in our religion from the pre-zarathushtrian era. The concept is analogous to that of soma in the Vedic scriptures of Hinduism. Soma of the Vedas is believed to be a plant of genus *sarcostemma viminalis*, the mythical tree of life. This is described in the Rig-Vedic hymn as follows:

We have quaffed the Soma bright
and are immortal grown, we've entered into light
And all the gods have known.

The plant is collected by the moonlight (also known as moon plant) taken to a place of sacrifice, crushed between stones with water and the resulting liquor strained and consecrated for an offering to the gods and is ingested by the priests.

In Zarthushtrian tradition, the term haoma has similar implications as soma and is also associated with immortality. However, the term does not appear in the Gathas, have no place in the pantheon of divinities that evolved in the Younger Avesta, do not have a day dedicated to it, or have any festival in its honor, and yet, Haoma Yasht has evolved as one of the central sacramental act in Zarathushtrian tradition. Yasna 9,10 and 11 are dedicated to the Haoma ritual, and the contents of the text clearly suggests it to be a pre-zarathushtrian concept, perhaps reincorporated after the adoption of the faith by the magi. Haoma is one of the only two divinities that are honored with a liturgy, which is included in the Yasna recital.

In the liturgy of Yasna the term Haoma appears in the sense of a divinity under the epithet- Haoma *Duraosha*, and *Ferashni* and the haoma plant as an appellation of Haoma *Zairi* (golden, or yellow or even interpreted as green by some). A fourth epithet Haoma *Khvarenangha*, appears in the Fravardin Yt.¹ where a long list of fravashis are revered. This, however, is not referred to in the Haoma Yasht therefore, it is concluded that *Khvarenangha* must

have been an individual whose fravashi is commemorated in the yasht and is unrelated to the deity under discussion.

Bundahisn² refers to haoma as the chief of plants with the words:

Hom-i-huta bajakan aurvaran rat

The squeezed haoma is the chief of the pounded plant

Some scholars also interpret Hoama as the angel presiding over the plant kingdom. Often in liturgy, the actions of haoma the divinity and haoma the plant are so anthropomorphized, that they are intertwined and it is difficult to distinguish them.

In a temporal sense, the plant has been associated with a species of genus *Ephedra* (a specie collected from the shrine of *pir-i-sabz* in Yazd) identified³ by the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in England. A chemical known as ephedrine has been isolated from the plants of this family. This substance, in fact, has been demonstrated to have beneficial cardiovascular effects as well as central nervous system stimulant properties. This has often prompted Zarathushtrians to make a temporal connection with the divine concept of haoma, Often we hear, "modern medicine appears to be discovering now, what our forefathers knew centuries ago". A recent case in point, was the beneficial effect of ephedrine in an instance of congenital myasthenia gravis that appeared in the Toronto Star of Feb 10 1995.⁴ Largely, sentiments rather than facts drive such relationships of temporal with the spiritual.

The composition of the liturgy in its early part clearly demonstrates the notion that Hoama the Plant of Immortality was not introduced by prophet Zarathushtra. In the liturgy of Yasna 9 a distinct effort is made by the composer to bring the concept in a very personal contact with the prophet and pledge its adoption by the prophet.

At the very initiation we note a scenario in the Yasht where prophet Zarathosht performing his morning communion with Ahura Mazda, by the sacred fire, invoking the Gathic hymns, as Haoma draws closer to him. The Prophet asks,

"Who art thou, o man? Who art, of all incarnate world, the most beautiful in thine own body, of those whom I have seen, glorious and immortal".

(Translation from SBE XXXI pg 231 by L. Mills).

Haoma replies that he is the righteous, and the dispeller of death, and requests the prophet to pray to him, and prepare from his plant form, the consecrated drink and consume it. The Prophet rather than blindly following the instructions of the divinity questions further. He asks, "what man, Hoama, first prepared thee for the corporeal world? How was he blessed, and what was his reward?" We are told, in the liturgy, Vivanghvant was the first man who performed the Haoma ritual for the incarnate world. This provides the first unequivocal clue, to the antiquity of the Haoma ritual. It is clear from this statement that the Haoma ritual was practiced in the legendary Pishdadian era long before Zarathushtra appeared on the scene of this planet. Vivanghvant we read further, was blessed with a son Yima Khshaeta- the well-known Pishdadian king Jamsheed. The reward for this service rendered by Vivanghvant to Haoma was that Jamsheed, the brilliant, was endowed with a kingdom in which animals and men were immortal. There was neither aging nor death, neither hot nor cold, with a boundless supply of water, plants, and food. In other words: there was no evil and absolute righteousness prevailed, perhaps the ideal state that we believe will return with Frashokereti.

Not being fully convinced, prophet Zarathushtra continues his inquiry, asking, who were the second, and the third and the fourth individual who performed the haoma ritual on this planet⁵? The response to the second performer was Athwya who was blessed with the illustrious son Thraetaona - familiarly known as Faridoon. This was the king who is believed to have fought the evil dragon, in the person of the tyrant Zahak (phl. *Az-i-Dahak*). Those of you who are familiar with the legend of *Drafsh-i-Kawayani* know very well, how Kawa, the blacksmith was instrumental in the revival of the Peshdadian Empire by eradicating the evil of Zahak and ascension of Faridoon to the throne of Iran. The high festival

of the Jashan of Meheragan on the 16th day of the 7th month of the Zarathushtrian year is associated with this event.

The third individual who performed the Haoma ritual was Thrita whose ancestry is somewhat uncertain however, it, lies in the Kyanian lineage of Sam the grandfather of the great paladin Rustom. He was blessed with two illustrious sons Urvakhshaya and Keresaspa. The latter was instrumental in eliminating the evil that harassed mankind.

The last and the fourth person who prepared haoma in the corporeal world was Pourusashpa of the Spitama family. He was blessed with you righteous Zarathushtra, says the Yasht. The great reward for this service of Pourusashpa to Haoma, was that the righteous Zarathushtra, of the house of Spitama, chanted the *Ahuna Vairya*, and opposed all the evil that tormented and persecuted mankind. We note several analogies to this in the Gathas. One that seems most appropriate is in Yasna 29 that pronounces the selection of Zarathushtra⁶ as the leader of Mankind. Here the Soul of Universe addresses Ahura Mazda praying, "Grant ye, O God, to him and his people the strength and power through Righteousness and Good Mind to create peace and tranquility on earth". The praise of Zarathushtra continues in the Yasht. Saying, "you have been created most powerful, most vigorous, and energetic to act according to the law of Ahura and spread the word of Ahura Mazda"⁷. To this we have a Gathic analogy⁸ where the prophet affirms, "I, as a priest who is the invoker of righteousness perceive you with best mind" and asks for guidance from Ahura Mazda.

In summary this portion of the Yasht **unambiguously establishes** that all the three performers of the Haoma ritual before Pourusashpa were of the pre-zarathushtrian era, and hence the primordial nature of the ritual.

The prophet is now convinced of the authenticity of haoma and proclaims his recognition of the divinity in verse 9.16 in the following words:

"Praise to Haoma good is Haoma, well-endowed exact and righteous in nature...healing, beautiful of body, good in

deeds.... golden hued with bending sprouts".(SBE Vol. XXXI, pg 235)

At this point in the Yasht the Prophet makes demands and pleads to the deity to grant him blessings. He appeals for (a) best life, (b) best health and to drive death afar, (c) long vitality of life, (d) ability to overwhelm the assault of hate and lies, (e) to be victorious over evil, (f) to have premonition of evil.

It is particularly striking to note the contrast in the manner in which Zarathushtra is depicted in this composition compared to that in the Gathas. In the Gathas Zarathushtra unequivocally demonstrates his entire commitment to Ahura Mazda, through the guidance of Amesha Spentas, whereas in this liturgy we visualize him seeking specific boons from the deity -- two completely different personalities – the tone depicted here is more commonly found in Younger Avestan texts.

An analysis of the Yasht to this point, clearly demonstrates two major characteristics that Haoma, the divinity, is associated with and revered for: (a) the ability to give illustrious progeny and (b) the gift of good health and immortality. This has linked Haoma in turn with fertility and the ability to bestow renowned offspring. These are the basic thoughts on which the Zarathushtrian tradition of the later era, particularly the Pahlavi culture, have capitalized. The devotion to Haoma Yasht, is prescribed, for women during pregnancy with the potential promise of progeny with brilliance.

The next section of the Yasht⁹ notes the establishment of a direct link of Haoma the divinity with Ahura Mazda. Mills translates verse 9.26 as follows:

"Forth hath Mazda borne to thee, the star be-spangled girdle, the spirit-made, the ancient one, the Mazdayasni faith. So with this thou art begirt on the summit of the mountains, for the spreading of the precepts and the headings of the mantras" (SBE Vol. XXXI, pg 238).

This appears to suggest that Ahura Mazda charged Haoma with the responsibility to spread the Mazda-worshipping religion. However, that would be an illogical conclusion in the light of the Gathic revelation to Zarathushtra. The verse, however, depicts Haoma as a high priest of the Wise Lord. This is further substantiated from Meher Yasht.¹⁰ Here we read Haoma paying homage to Mithra on mount Haraberezaiti, and is addressed as one "whom Ahura Mazda has established as a priest, quick in performing sacrifices." We also note a similar sacrificial ritual offered by Haoma Ferashni on the summit of the same mountain in Sraosh Yasht,¹¹ in Ashishvangh (*Ashi Vanghui*) Yasht,¹² and in Gosh (*Dravashpa*) Yasht.¹³ In the last two Yashts, Haoma pleads for blessings from both these Yazatas, to bring the Turanian Afrasiyab in fetters to King Husravah at Chaichista Lake. It is thus clear from these citations that Haoma is depicted in these liturgies as a high priest of Ahura Mazda. Despite that, Prof. Zehner extends his generosity by addressing Haoma as the son of Ahura Mazda.¹⁴

The following section of the Yasht is focused mainly on the Haoma *Zairi* the plant and the habitat where the plant flourishes. The first six to seven verses pay homage to the Creator and the creations for the gift of Haoma, that spreads righteousness. This praise and reverence promotes the growth and strength of the divinity (Haoma) helping to destroy and defeat evil thoughts¹⁵. One finds here, the general trend, which appears in several of the Yasht liturgies where the divinities find their strength in the reverence and worship¹⁹ of the laity.

The Haoma plant is believed to flourish on the summit and gorges of mount Haraberezaiti, later known as mount Alburz¹⁶, disseminated by the wisdom of Ahura Mazda through birds. We note here a resemblance to the Vedic scripture¹⁷, which describes soma growing freely on mount Mujavat, also brought there by birds. In the scriptures of *Brahmanas* the bird is identified with a special species of eagles called *Gayatri*. The liturgy also refers to different kinds of Haoma plants, e.g. the white one and the golden hued¹⁸ all bringing forth their healing liquor for the righteous. It is

here that we read the first mention of Haoma juice that is termed *madha* in Avesta. This potion prepared during the Haoma ritual is believed to have properties that rout evil. Prof. Mills translates the words of Zarathushtra describing the Haoma drink as follows²⁰:

"As it is the best for drinking, so (through sacred stimulus) is it the most nutritious for the soul" (SBE XXXI, pg 235)

The preparation and consumption of the Haoma drink in the Yasna ritual has been the subject of intense discussion. The condemnation of the Haoma cult by the prophet originates in the Gatha Ahunavaiti²¹. The liturgy here reads as follows:

"Those in power helping the deceitful and being intoxicated through drinking of Haoma permits the destruction of the world."

It is important to note that Yasna 32 is the only hymn of the Gathas where Zarathushtra repudiates all the evil that existed among the priesthood and the rulers in power at the time and before him. The actual phrase interpreted as drinking of Haoma in the Gatha is "*ye duraoshem saochaiiat avo*". The word Haoma does not appear in this Gathic verse. It is the term *duraoshem* that is associated with Haoma *Duraosha* in a derogatory manner. The Avestan term *Duraosha*, has been interpreted by most of the scholars as "death dispelling" or as Zehner says, "from whom death flees". However, according to Sir H. Baily²² *duraosha* can be interpreted as "pungent in taste". The only other reference²³ to the intoxicating drink and its association with the deceitful priests and ruler is found in Gatha *Spentamainyu*. Here the term *muthrem ...madahiia* is used meaning the filthy urine-like intoxicant. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the Gathas associate intoxicants with evil. This Gathic repudiation, thus, stands in sharp contrast to what Zarathushtra says about the Haoma drink in Yasht 9.16. It is intriguing to note that the composer of the Yasht attempts, in fact, to make a clear distinction²⁴ between other intoxicants and drink of Haoma, when the liturgy reads, "*vispe zi anye madhaongho aeshma hachinte khravi-dravo*".

All other intoxicants (madha - extracts or drinks) are associated with rapine of the bloody spear

“aat ho yo haomhe madho asha hachaite urvasman”

But Haoma's stirring power goes hand in hand with friendship. (SBE XXXI, pg 241)

We also read these lines once again in Ashi Yasht.²⁵ It is apparent, that the composers of the Haoma Yasht were, perhaps, fully aware of the Gathic repudiation and protected themselves from the critics by making this distinction in the liturgy.

As mentioned earlier, Ahura Mazda has inducted Haoma as the priest who also offers sacrifice, and called in the Meher Yasht as "quick in performing sacrifice". This association of Haoma, the priest, with the performance of sacrifice brings into the focus of scrutiny, the entire concept of blood-sacrifice in Zarathushtrian faith. **The question arises as to how and where do blood-sacrifice in general fit into the Gathic religion of Zarathushtra** - I specifically qualify the Gathic religion. Highly reputed Iranists, such as Profs. Zehner and Boyce, present arguments attempting to establish a clear lack of condemnation and at times even the performance of sacrificial rituals by prophet Zarathushtra.

There is no question about the fact that in the era of the Yasht, animal-sacrifices were fully in vogue. This can be readily discerned from the readings of these liturgies. For example we note in Aban Yasht²⁶ in the very inception of the liturgy we read, "Ahura Mazda spake unto Spitama Zarathushtra: offer up a sacrifice, O Spitama Zarathushtra, unto this spring of mine Ardivisura Anahita...who obeys the law of Ahura." Then in the later sections the Yasht, goes on to describe how various pre-zarathushtrian personalities Hoshang, Yima, Thraetaona (Faridoon) and others made sacrificial offerings to Anahita with hundreds and thousands of horses, cattle and lambs.

The immense prestige of Mithra is perceived in the very beginning of the Meher Yasht²⁷ where Ahura Mazda speaks to Spitama Zarathushtra. "I created him as worthy of sacrifice and worthy of prayers as myself, Ahura Mazda", and in verse 10.119, the liturgy says, "offer up a sacrifice unto Mithra, O Spitama! And order thy pupils to do the same. Let the worshippers of Mazda,

sacrifice unto thee". Thus the text of the Yasht clearly implants the notion of the blood-sacrifice within the religion. This is a clear departure in the thinking of the Younger Avesta, relative to the Gathic era.

Dastur Dhalla writes,²⁸ "up to the middle of the last century the priest consecrated the fresh tongue, the jaw, and the left eye of the sacrificial animal to the angel haoma". This is precisely what we read in Yasna 11, which is the important prelude to the first Haoma offering in Yasna ritual. Here in verse 4, the liturgy says, "forth my father gave an offering, tongue and left eye chose Ahura: set apart for Haoma's meal" (SBE Vol. XXXI, pg 245). The later part of the liturgy indicates the anger of the divinity towards those who refrain from setting aside the priestly share of the offering, saying "quick cut off then Haoma's portion, gift of flesh for brave Haoma! Heed, lest Haoma bind thee fettered..." (SBE Vol. XXXI, pg 245) for not setting aside the portion. Dhalla continues, "it was similarly the practice, until very recently with the officiating priest to slaughter a goat with his own hands on the third day after the death of a person, and to dedicate the fat to the fire on the dawn of the fourth day". Zehner also refers to the immolation of the sacred bull, and the Haoma plant and both being consumed by the sacrificial priest²⁹.

Today we still have the remnants of these sacrificial rituals left in the Yasna and Baj ceremonies. The only vestige of the animal sacrifice is found in the few hairs of the consecrated bull - *varecya* - used by priests in India, in the Yasna ritual. They are tied around a golden ring to constitute a sieve through which the pounded Haoma drink is strained. The consecrated bread, or *dron* or *darun*, (a term derived from the early Avestan term *dromeaning* 'to be strong') made out of wheat flour, together with water, milk, fruits and flowers are the representations of the plant and animal product that remain as the symbolic sacrificial offerings in the Baj ceremony.

So how do we accommodate the concept of blood sacrifice in the Gathic Zarathushtrian faith? Prof. Boyce³⁰ makes a rather stark statement saying, "Blood sacrifice is by no means

incompatible with a highly ethical faith, and by Zoroastrian doctrine, represents indeed a respect for animal kingdom". It is extremely difficult for one to find the doctrinal principal in the Gathas which satisfactorily relates Zarathushtra with the practice of such sacrificial rituals.

The professor has attempted to justify the view, in her discussion of creation³¹ as follows: "The pagan concept of the world was...most probably...that it was static and empty, except for one man, one plant, and one animal; ...it was brought into movement by the threefold sacrifice by the gods. This doctrine underwent a radical and somewhat awkward change in Zoroaster's teaching according to which the original static world was perfect, alterations coming through the assault of the malicious hostile spirit (angra mainyu)...killing gayomaretan, the uniquely created bull, and the destruction of plant", all spenta creations." The text continues, "the power of good snatched advantage creating, from what had perished, more men, plants and animals. Thus through the sacrifice of life more life was produced". Then to support the compatibility of sacrifice, later a statement appears saying, ".in this state of things devout sacrifice has a *spenta* function...".

There is a major misconception in this argument. The entire myth of Gayomaretan with the bull and all, are the innovations of the Median magis of the Younger Avestan era after their adoption of the Zarathushtrian faith and has no relevance to the Gathic religion. **To present the doctrine as Zarathushtra's teaching under that global umbrella of mythical creation is a misrepresentation and is misleading.** Those who religiously (and I use the term religiously, literally) follow the study of the Gathas, readily note, that at no place in the Gathas does the prophet reveal any indication of gayomaretan, or the sacred bull. Nowhere do we note the slightest hint of prophet endorsing of animal sacrifices. In fact, the highest degree of the self-reflective and ethical character of teachings of our prophet and highly spiritual conception of Ahura Mazda would be entirely incompatible with the acceptance of blood sacrifice.

I believe, it is extremely important to precisely understand, and put in the proper perspective, the Gathic teachings of Zarathushtra. This is not to accept or reject any of our tradition. For tradition will endure on its own strength and merits. It is, however, critical to focus our attention as a community on **how the syncretic Zarathushtrian religion that we have inherited** has evolved in our history and particularly in the Younger Avestan times. Many of these myths were instituted for economic or political reasons, long after the time of the prophet. It is not only unfair, but more importantly, unrighteous to bundle all the later developments into one package and present it as the doctrine of the religion of Zarathushtra.

In conclusion Haoma Yasht and the cult of Haoma are the products that have endured the changes that evolved in the Younger Avestan era. The principle elements: *hadhanapatam* or *urvaram* (twigs of the pomegranate plant), *geush jivam* (fresh milk of cow), and the *parahaoma* (haoma juice) are all crushed even today in the *havanim* (the mortar used in the ritual) in the Yasna ritual, as they were perhaps more than 3000 years ago in the pre-zarathushtrian era. However it is enlightening to recognize, that despite the fact that it will continue to remain a part Zarathushtrian tradition, it was a practice that was not inducted by Zarathushtra, it was not the part of his revelation. Rather it was a reconstitution of an ancient ritual in syncretic Zoroastrianism and happened long after the time of the Prophet. This greatly enriches and elevates our understanding of the Gathic religion of the prophet to a higher level.

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YASNA HAPTANHAITI

The bedrock of the Zarathushtrian scriptures -the Gathas are preserved within chapters 27 and 54 of the Yasna prayers. Nestled between the end of Gatha Ahunavaiti (Ys 34) and the beginning of Gahta Ushtavaiti (Ys 43), is the Yasna of Seven Chapters - **Yasna Haptanhaiti** -represented by *Haas* (sections) 35 to 42. In actuality, Haptanhaiti is made up of eight chapters. It is considered by the scholastic community that the last chapter was a later addition.

While Brockhaus and Westergard editions use the numbering of 42 for the last chapter, the Spiegel edition combines the last two chapters as 41, to preserve the integrity of the title. Mills¹ on the other hand suggests that, "this chapter should neither be incorporated in chapter 41, nor numbered as a separate one, it should be noted as a supplement". These eight sections of the Yasna also constitute the eight kardas of the Haptan Yasht (Yasht II).

While the archaic dialect of the Gathic language continues to be felt in this liturgy, the fundamental teachings of Asho Zarathushtra are invoked in the worship. We often find in the text significant deviations from the Gathic scriptures and there are several features that appear for the first time in this Old Avestan composition. In contrast to the poetic verses of the Gathas, according to some scholars, **Haptanhaiti is composed as a prose.**

In the Gathas, prophet Zarathushtra offers his homage to the Lord of Wisdom - Ahura Mazda, individually as a worshipper. In contrast, in the "yasna of seven chapters" one notices the devotions being predominantly offered by a group of priests, or by a community of worshippers. For example Ys 28.1 Ahunavaiti Gatha starts with a prayer:

*Ahya yasa nemanghaha
ushtana zasto rafedhrahya,
mainyesh mazda, pourim spenthya:
asha vispem shayothna,
vangheush kharatum manangho*

"With my hands uplifted I pray...I ask for guidance...I pray that I may perform all my actions based on the wisdom of the good mind".

In sharp contrast Ys. 35 – the first chapter of *Haptanhaiti*, commences with the words of a collective prayers:

"We worship Ahura Mazda.... we worship bountiful immortals... we worship the righteous creation in the spiritual and material world..." and the supplement of the last section 42 ends with the words:

"We worship the running waters...we worship the bountiful immortals".

For the first, time the word "*yazamaide*" meaning "we worship" pervades through every single paragraph of all chapters of this Yasna. The scripture constitutes the oldest prayer of worship, expressing the characteristic devotion of a community, as distinct from the prophetic tone of the teachings of the Gathic verses.

The Question of Authorship

This different approach is one of the many reasons that has led the scholastic community to question the authorship of these chapters of Yasna. Was this a composition of prophet Zarathushtra or that of his immediate followers remains an open question. Professor Boyce in her recent publication² has attempted to make a case, for this yasna to have been composed by Asho Zarathosht, despite acknowledging, that Greschevitch tends to assign only parts of the liturgy to the Prophet. In contrast Zaehner³ unequivocally states, "it would ... seem fair to conclude that it was composed not long after the prophet's death and therefore earlier than all the other Avestan material that has come down to us".

Yasna 35

In the beginning of the first verse of the 1st chapter, and in the ending verse of the last chapter, we see veneration offered to the Bounteous Attributes of the Lord of Wisdom. For the first time

in older Avesta one notices the term *Amesha Spenta* collectively used for these attributes. As against the Gathas⁴, nowhere in this Yasna are all these attributes invoked upon by their name. For that matter, the attributes *Haurvatat* -wholeness, completeness, or perfection and *Ameratat*, a state of everlasting bliss, implying the Gathic theology of immortality of soul, are conspicuous by their total absence in this Yasna.

Vohu Manah - the Good Mind, is the corner stone and guiding light in the Gathas⁵ to perceive the profound pathway to *Asha Vahishta*, the basis for righteous thinking. In *Ushtavaiti Gatha*⁶ it is *Vohu Manah*, through which the prophet chooses to please the Lord of Wisdom and is inspired to follow righteousness. In the most important Zarathushtrian manthra "*Ahuna Vairya*", we consistently recite

*"vangheush dazda manangha shyothnanam
angheush mazdai"*

Through good thinking the
acts of life are performed for the wise one.

This important value associated with the creator, is clearly overshadowed and dominated by Righteousness in this yasna. This is noticeable in the very first line of Ch.35 that begins with the words:

We worship Ahura Mazda, the righteous
master of righteousness.

In principle, there is nothing wrong with the above, except that its link with *Vohu Manah* is missing. This direct association of the Lord of Wisdom with truth continues to recur in verses 3, 5, 9, 10 of Ys 35, and culminates in the devotion to the moral commitment⁷ under the leadership of Righteousness, for the best life, in both the worlds.

Zarathushtrian theology recognizes *Mainyava* (Ph. *Meno*) absolute in its purity, absolute as per the immutable order of *Asha*, undefile-able and conceptually perfect. From this evolved the

world of actuality - Gaethaya, which is infected with evil, against which the Prophet declares his struggle. We see no special reverence attached to the **pristine and absolute spirituality** of Mainyava. Repeatedly, references⁸ are made to "both the worlds" without distinction. This is particularly, noticeable where homage is offered, in one breath,⁹ to the average material creation and Amesha Spentas that epitomize a vision of perfection.

In Ys 35.2, we notice the **triple axiom** good thoughts, good words, and good deeds that we identify as the basic formula of the faith, actually mentioned for **the first time**, in this worship. This is described as follows:

Humatanam , hukhtanam, huvreshtanam

Good thoughts, good words, good deeds

yadacha anyadacha

here and elsewhere

varejyamananamcha vaverezananamcha

are performed and have been performed.....

This paragraph has been incorporated in Afringan prayers, and is recited twice particularly during the flower exchange ritual, between Zaotar and Raspi, that marks the culmination of the communion between the spiritual and the physical world, in the Afringan ritual..

Yasna 36

This chapter is focused on the worship of fire. Fire as an incarnation of the principle of Asha is a unique theological concept of Asho Zarathusht. In Gathas a constant¹⁰ relationship pervades between fire and truth or righteousness. For example in Ys 34.4 we read:

"Thy fire O lord, mighty through righteousness...be of clear help to the supporter bring visible harm to the deceitful".

Zarathushtra saw in this element, the absolute purity, the absolute truth, the divine immutable order of nature, and moral justice, and raised it to the highest level of divinity. Dr. Mehr in his book¹¹ refers to Asha as **Will of God**. Our prophet visualized "God's will" in fire, and presented it as the epiphany of the physical corpus of Ahura Mazda.

In Yasna 36 of Hapatanhaiti we note the worshipers approaching Ahura Mazda, through the agency of Spenishta Mainyu (holiest mental aspect), which is compared with his fire and admonishes harm to those who contaminate it. However, that intimate association of "divine fire mighty through righteousness" is conspicuous by its absence. It is indeed striking to note that righteousness is so vigorously revered in Ys.35, and fire is venerated in Yasna 36 and yet the profundity of the Gathic link between the two - **Vohu Manah** - is completely missing. This deviation in style casts further doubts about Zarathushtra as being the author of this composition.

Another point of particular interest here, is that throughout this chapter the reference is made to the creator as **Mazda Ahura**, rather than Ahura Mazda suggesting **Mazda - wisdom** - as the focus of the worship rather than Ahura, the Lord. We shall return to this topic in the later part of this essay.

Yasna 37

This Yasna is identical with Yasna 5, another post-gathic composition. The first verse of this section is dedicated to the creation in following words.

Itha at yazamaide ahurem mazdam

Here we worship Ahura Mazda

ye gamcha ashemcha dat

the giver of the righteous earth

apascha dat urvaoscha vangheush

the giver of the good waters and plants

raochooscha dat boomemcha vispacha vohu

giver of luster to the entire earth.

Homage is offered to the creation of righteousness that diffuses through the earth, waters and plants. Traditionally this verse is recognized as grace to the Creator before the act of eating or drinking.

In verse 4, of this Yasna, for **the first time**, the concept of righteousness is broadened from just truth to cover **the brilliance** of the holy immortal Asha Vahishta.

"We worship Asha Vahishta that is most beautiful, that is holy immortal, that is brilliant and all good." (Ys 37.4)

This is the **only time** in this entire Yasna, that we note an indirect association between the concept of Asha and the Sacred fire (referred as brilliant).

In the last verse of this chapter, we note the expression of reverence for *Vohu Manah*, the Good Mind. But even in its veneration, this **prime attribute** of Mazda appears to have lost its primal order of divine dignity that it enjoys in the Gathas. In Haptanhaiti, *Vohu Manah* is venerated with *Vohu Khshthrem* the good rule, *Daena Vanghuhim* the good conscience and *Vanghuhim Aramaiti* (good right-mindedness) with no link to Asha.

In the third verse of this section a reference is made to the worship of **Fravashis** of righteous men and women in the following words:

*Tem ashaonam fravashi naremcha
nairinamcha yazamaide*

We worship those fravashis of righteous men and women

Prof. Johanna Nartan, has interestingly argued for these line to be genuine, based on **older Avestan** interpretation of Fravashi as **preference or choice**. Other scholars such as Boyce, Humbach-Ichaporria and Zaehner consider this to be a later interpolation, which appears reasonable to this author.

This is particularly interesting, as there is **no authentic reference** in the old Avestan literature, to the term Fravashi. The word Fravashi **does not appear in the Gathas**. In Younger Avestan, however, in most of the Yashts, and particularly in Fravardin Yt. (13.49), we note the festival of Hamaspathmaidaya dedicated to them.

yao visadh avayanti hamaspathmaidaya paiti ratum

They return to their earthly precincts
the time of Hamaspathmaidaya.

Yasna 38

Yasna 38 is dedicated in general to the creations, and in particular to the waters. However, the language used in this worship is particularly unique. Here the waters are venerated as the feminine of Ahura Mazda. Thus first verse interestingly pays homage to the women of the Wise Lord in following words.

"We worship this earth together with the women that bear us. We worship these women of Ahura Mazda (wives¹² of Ahura Mazda) who are righteous."

The 3rd verse starts with "*apo at yazamide*" - we worship the waters. Water is identified as Ahuranish, a term that is again interpreted as wives of Ahura Mazda. The worship ends with the homage to water, as the essence of life in both the worlds, and water is praised as "the mother of our lives".

This linguistic deviation is uniquely different from anything we see in the Gathas. Historically this relates to the Indo-Iranian cultic religion of the pre-zarathushtrian era.

In order to fully comprehend the impact of Ahuranish - wives of Ahura - mentioned in this Yasna, we have to drift back briefly into a discussion of the history of the old Indo-Iranian religion as elaborated in a very interesting paper¹³ by Paul Thieme and also by Prof. Zaehner¹⁴.

The oldest evidence of the existence of the Indo-Iranian divinities comes to us from an inscription in a village in Eastern Anatolia that memorializes a treaty of 14th century B.C.E. between, an Aryan ruler of Mittani and a Hittite king. In there, besides other gods, the names of Mithra, Varuna and Indra are recorded. With the passage of time Mithra-Varuna emerges as an inseparable pair of deity in the Rig-Veda belonging to the highest pantheon of Asuras, a Vedic connotation, synonymous with Iranian Ahuras. Concept of **Rta (Truth)** is a Vedic notion that represents the impersonal and powerful force that maintains the order of the universe. This definition stands in intimate analogy to the Zarathushtrian concept of **Asha**. In the early Vedic branch of the Aryan society Varuna is recognized as supreme divinity and the guardian of the law of Rta. Mazda Ahura of Haptanhaiti also emerges as the creator and preserver of **Asha (Righteousness)**, bringing Ahura Mazda of Yasna 38, in close divine analogy with Varuna. Thus it appears that the under-emphasis of *Vohu Manah* mentioned above was, perhaps by design, in order to bring out the strong association between Asha with Ahura Mazda.

Water, next to fire, has always represented an important manifestation of divine power in Avestan history. The intense homage to the waters at the level of Ahura in Ys 38 can also be traced, to link with Varuna. Varuna, once worshipped as the supreme God over all nature in the early Vedic era, has in time lost that dignified position of the supreme divinity, and was later revered as a water-deity. In the younger Rig-Veda (2.32.8, 7.34.22) as well as in later evolved Yajur-Veda (5.5.4.1) we encounter references to water as Varunani implying the female partners of Varuna. The Ahuranish of Ys.38 thus represents the second analogy with the Indo-Iranian pre-zarathushtrian concept. With the passage of time Varuna evolved, in the Avestan tradition, as the divinity Vouruna which was recognized by later Avestan society with the epithet Apam Napat meaning "son of water".

Lommel, in his discussions of the water refers to another Indo-Aryan goddess Sarasvati. In younger Avestan society she was

recognized as Yazata Harahvaiti. In time, assimilation of Apam Napat with Harahvaiti evolved, through the cult-epithet of *Aredvi Sura Anahita* - moist mighty and immaculate - as a powerful and dominant water divinity¹⁵.

It would appear that the text of Yasna Haptanhaiti, while adhering to the message of Zarathushtra, through these subtle linguistic deviations inseminates a syncretic trend to amalgamate the Gathic Zarathushtrian thoughts with the pre-zarathushtrian notions of that era.

As a corollary, it is tempting to rationalize the seminal role that this composition could have played in the spread of the formidable cult of Anahita, in the mid - Achaemenian era¹⁶.

It is recorded history that both Dariush II (424-405 B.C.E.) and his queen Parysatis vigorously promoted cult worship of Anahita through erection of temple edifices of the highest opulence and splendor, to promote idol worship of Anahita, a concept, unacceptable to Zarathushtrian tradition. It is therefore not surprising that their second son Artaxerxes II was the first monarch, in Achaemenian genealogy, to deviate from the exclusive veneration Ahura Mazda, and pay tribute to the trinity of Ahura Mazda, Anahita and Mithra. One of his inscriptions at Susa reads, "By the will of Ahura Mazda, Anahita and Mithra I built this palace, may Ahura Mazda, Anahita and Mithra protect me from all evil, and that which I have built they not shatter or harm."

To return to the emphasis on the term Mazda mentioned earlier, Yasna Haptanhaiti is perhaps an unique liturgy in older Avesta that so pointedly reveals the importance of the term Mazda interpreted as Wisdom.

The very first verse of Yasna 35 concludes with the words "*daenyao vanghuyao mazdayasnois*" meaning the "benevolent Mazda worshipping religion". In Yasna 36 and 41, the creator is consistently addressed as Mazda Ahura. Of the 19 references made to the God in Yasna Haptanhaiti, 13 are described as Mazda Ahura. We observe the use of the term Mazda in many of our later Pazend

prayers. e.g. the prayer of confirmation - *Razistyao*, where we recite:

Razistyao chishtyao mazda daityao

The most truthful knowledge bestowed by wisdom

ashaonyao daenyao vanghuyao mazdayasoish

is righteous good mazda worshipping religion.

Also in the prayer of confession, Mazda is invoked as follows:

jasa me avenghe mazda

come to my aid o wisdom

mazdayasno ahmi mazdayasno zarathushtris

I am a Mazda worshipper, a Mazda worshipping Zarathushtrian.

These examples, clearly suggests, that the religion of Asho Zarathusht is more a "worship of wisdom (Mazda)". The title Ahura meaning the lord has been in use, for a whole class of deity before the time of the Prophet. In the Gathas Asho Zarathosht, while he does not completely ignore this multiplicity of Ahuras,¹⁷ vigorously affirms his prime innovation of the one and only Supreme God in Mazda Ahura -Wise Lord or Ahura Mazda- Lord of Wisdom.

In the younger Avesta however, the title Ahura is used not only in conjunction with Mazda, but also in association with Mithra¹⁸ as well as with Apam Napat¹⁹. This is a re-incorporation of the pre-zarathushtrian notion in later liturgies. According to Prof. Zaehner "the term Mazda (wise) as applied to Ahura (lord) was added to the divine name by the prophet himself, and that his religion thereby came to be called 'worship of Mazda' rather than the worship of Ahura". Thus the worship of wisdom and true knowledge is primal to the religion of Asho Zarathusht.

Yasna 39, 40, 41

In the last three Yasna the worshippers pay homage and veneration to souls of the universe, of righteous men and women and to the divine with little distinction for the spiritual domain. This is where Yasna Haptanhaiti ends.

Yasna 42

As mentioned in the beginning, the last section Ys.42 is a supplement. Regardless of when and why that section was added, the fact that it is there makes it interesting to examine its content. Of particular interest in the second verse is the use of the phrase:

Payuscha thworeshtara yazamaide

we worship the preserver - creator

mazdanmcha zarathushtramcha yazamaide

we worship Wisdom and Zarathushtra

In the entire Yasna Haptanhaiti there is no reference made to Asho Zarathusht. It is only in this added supplement the name of the prophet appears for the first time, as a preserver.

We also note, in verse 5 reference made to the worship of haoma, a pre-zarathushtrian ritual that was assimilated in the Zarathushtrian Yasna liturgy. Here haoma is referred to with the divine epithet of *Duraosha* and *Ferashni* as well as with its plant name *Zairi* (golden or yellow).

Conclusion

In conclusion the 'Yasna of Seven Chapters' while retaining the basic essence of the teachings of the Asho Zarathusht, partly deviates, in the finer aspects, from the Gathas of Zarathushtra.

1) The Righteousness is profoundly venerated as a creation of Mazda Ahura, with essentially no association with *Vohu Manah*. The importance of *Vohu Manah* is compromised significantly.

2) Asho Zarathusht spends the entire Yasna 32 of the Gatha *Ahunavaiti*, and a good part of Yasna 49 of Gatha *Spentamainyu*, vigorously repudiating the characteristic way of life of kavis and karapans (wicked rulers) leading humanity towards evil. We see no mention, in Yasna Haptanhaiti, of combat against or conflict with lying, deceitful, or with *daevas* worshippers.

3) That aura of reverence, that veneration for the spiritual creation seems to fade away. The absolute devotion for Holy Immortals that pervades through Gathas, appears to decline markedly.

4) Fire is held holy, but its association with Truth, which is the focus in the Gathic religion, is absent.

5) Worship of water at the highest level of Ahuranish, wives - feminine - of the Wise Lord (Ys 38.3), is a major departure from the Gathic scriptures.

6) This oldest liturgy does bring into focus, the crucial importance of the **term Mazda** in the religion of Zarathushtra.

7) The language of the text clearly implies insemination of pre-zarathushtrian pagan thoughts within the Gathic religion of Zarathushtra.

Some of these differences raise a question regarding the authorship of the composition by Asho Zarathusht. It could have been composed around the time when the syncretic Zarathushtrian faith emerged after the dissemination of the Gathic religion in western Iran.

Despite all that, Yasna Haptanhaiti adheres to the fundamental principals of the Gathic religion, provides a crucial historical link, and remains for us an important part of our early scriptures, as the first devotional worship ever composed by the early disciples of Asho Zarathusht.

Acknowledgement:

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HUMANITY *and* PRAYER

In simple terms prayer is understood as a vehicle of communication with the divinity. To a savage of the ancient time prayer could be a fervent desire perhaps for the death of an enemy, for a nomadic peasant it could be the desire for rain or fertility of his crop! The prayer of an average human of these early civilizations lacked the notion of purification from sin, or craving for guidance to find the path of righteousness. This was primarily, a consequence of a limited thought process that was still embedded in fetishism and magic.

Manthra

Prayer is a universal phenomenon in the religions of the world and must, necessarily, exhibit a range of variation in its form and spiritual caliber. A religion lending dignity to prayers through the formula of holy words (manthra) and sonorous cadences of an ancient language ultimately finds that the formula and the cadences are retained long after the actual implication and the significance of the words are dead. A prayer, by definition, is directed to a higher divinity; in the case of Zarathushtrians to Ahura Mazda. Regardless of the immense desire for physical benefits, or for avoidance of temptations, or for guidance to the right path, without a clear vision of the goodness and wisdom of God the prayer passes into a one sided exercise leading to nowhere. Michael Novak in his book 'Belief and Disbelief' says, "It is in prayer that one comes to know God best."

The routine quest is, WHY SHOULD ONE FULFILL THE OBLIGATION OF PRAYING TO GOD? This question can only find an answer, if one believes in God. The belief in God can only evolve through persistent efforts of daily prayers. One pervades this paradigm by formulating a clear vision of Ahura Mazda.

Vision of the Creator

A clear vision of the Creator is a prerequisite, for a true dialogue through the vehicle of prayers. Ancient civilizations

visualized their God in their own human image. Even in the Gathas Zarathushtra, despite his personal ingenuity, projects an anthropocentric notion of the Supreme Divinity to the primitive society of his time. He speaks of His penetrative eyes (Ys 31.13), the rewards from His hands (Ys 43.4), words from His mouth (Ys 31.3) and Mazda residing in the House of Song- *Garo Damane* (Ys 45.8).

Only some 2,400 years later that the 9th century text of *Shayast ne-Shayast* (The proper and the improper, Ch. 15.1, 2) transcends this rudimentary image, to portray a realistic concept of the Lord of Wisdom. Here, Asho Zarathust is portrayed as praying to Ahura Mazda, "Thy head, hands, feet, hair, face, and tongue are in my eyes, give me a hand so that I may grasp thy hand" and the Divine voice responds, "I am an intangible **SPIRIT**, it is not possible to grasp my hand." (Sacred Book of East, Vol. V, page 372). The voice goes on, "In the world that which is mine, who am Ahura Mazda, IS the righteous man..." (Ch.15.5). These words unambiguously state both the KEENLY PERSONAL as well as the UNIVERSALLY APERSONAL nature of Ahura Mazda. Furthermore they clearly imply the presence of the Divine Spirit within the physical framework of the human.

Spenta Mainyu

Zarathushtrian theology recognizes, the creative spiritual Will, an active principal of the thought process of Ahura Mazda, by the term *Spenta Mainyu*. The great modern thinker Dastur Dhalla states, "Spenta Mainyu symbolizes the ideal or perfect existence as conceived in thought by Ahura Mazda". *Spenta Mainyu* thus represents the supreme mental mechanism through which the Wise Lord operates the Universe. Despite the interpretations of philology viz., Progressive Mentality, or Good Mental aspect, the profundity and immensity of God has prompted most theologians to interpret it, as the Holy Spirit of Mazda. Zarathushtra initiates his prayers in the profound hymn of Gatha Ahunavaiti (Ys 28.1) asking for support of the Holy Spirit to affirm, that he may perform all his actions through Good Mind and Righteousness.

It is a basic assertion that all the major religions practiced today have two components – the **physical** and the **spiritual**. The former involves a careful, analytical study and understanding of prayers through sustained scholastic thinking. The latter, however, must be believed through faith and prayers offered through a peaceful and devotional mind. The fact is that both the physical and the spiritual component involve thinking. The former demands active analytical thinking, while the latter requires quiet and peaceful thinking. The Prayer, therefore, is a type of thinking. A thinking that requires a special state of mind in order to commune effectively with the entity beyond the physical.

True prayer is a fundamental human instinct that brings to life the passionate, compassionate, responsible and grateful thinking that is deeply rooted in humanity. It is a commonly held erroneous belief, that prayer is a “flight or escape from Reality”. In actuality prayer enlivens that existential experience of “dwelling with the Reality”.

Spenta Aramaiti

Prayer, therefore demands a state of mind that can recognize the presence of the innate Divinity within, in order to relate to the Divine reality that pervades through the existence.

It must be realized that the human mind in today's technocratic world is under a constant state of stress imposed upon by material forces. These tensions often pose an insurmountable barrier to attain the holy state of mind that can recognize and attune with the Divine Spirit in prayers.

Zarathushtrian theology recognizes that the Holy state is facilitated by *Spenta Aramaiti*. The term *Spenta* is interpreted by various scholars as progressive, holy, or bounteous. Although philological interpretation progressive is best suited, in reference to Ahura Mazda- the Supreme Spiritual Master- of infinite progress, Holy is more appropriate. Similarly, *Aramaiti* has been interpreted as wisdom, serenity, devotion, benevolence, piety, universal love, or tranquility. Dinkert (Bk. IX, Ch 12.25, 31.17,43.2,60.4) appropriately defines *Aramaiti* as “the Will” or “Complete

Mindfulness”. Humbach/Ichaporria in their recent publication, Heritage of Zarathushtra (pg.23, 31, 36, 47, 49) has interpreted the term as “Right-mindedness”. *Spenta Aramaiti* is, therefore, best interpreted as the devotion, piety or the Will, that promotes THE HOLY STATE OF MIND. It is in this pious mental state, that one can commune with the Holy Spirit of Ahura Mazda.

We note Asho Zarathusht in his effort to commune with Mazda, prays “Rise up within me” and pleads for the Right-mindedness to harmonize with the Holy Spirit (Ys 33.12)

Spiritual Quest

It is in prayer that the human, in a pious mental state harmonizes with the Holy Mentality; it is in prayer that the human will synchronizes with the Divine Will to attain spiritual manifestation. This is a state that brings one out of one's self, stand alongside with others and share their feelings and aspirations. Recognition of this extra dimension of the Divine within permits one to explore fully the freedom and creativity, not only for oneself but also, for humanity at large. Through prayers the spiritual dimension deepens, as one transcends beyond oneself, bringing the person closer and in likeness to Ahura Mazda.

In this spiritual quest, one cannot emphasize enough, the power of example by adults, nor can one underestimate the strength and will within the four walls of a Zarathushti Family unit. Where there is will to pray, the flame of an oil lamp in a consecrated corner, commands the same respect for the Lord of Wisdom as the incarnation of the sacred fire in Atash-e-Behram.

This spiritual odyssey must start with a daily willful devotion through prayer, for a short period. A consistent commitment to pray must clear the thought, free the mind and bring alive the consciousness of the Divine within and without in the viable world. THAT IS THE BEGINNING, the beginning of the fulfillment of *Vohu Manah*, the realization of *Asha Vahi:hta*. That is the recognition of the Holy Spirit within, that can lead to *Khshthra Vairya* - the Divine kingdom in this physical world.

A POSSIBLE METAPHOR OF YATHA – AHU- VAIRYA IN THE GATHAS

All religious scriptures are endowed with prophetic words (manthras) that carry with it varying orders of spiritual values. In the religion of Zarathusht there is no manthra that has greater sacred merit than the words of *Yatha-Ahu-Vairya* or *Ahuna-Vairya*. These words are elaborated in the early recordings of Bagha Nask, which speaks of the title of the liturgy, as derived from the name of the creator, Ahura Mazda¹. The prayer is believed to embody the complete philosophy of the Religion, and was "produced on the appeal of Vohu Manah... so that the poor are helped"². We are told³ that these were the words that Wise One uttered before the creation of the universe. The mysticism of this liturgy is entrenched in the belief that these *Manthra Spenta* (Holy words), when chanted several times, can replace other prayers depending on how many times they are recited. An extreme example of such a ritual is, its recital 120,500 times for the peace and tranquility of a departed soul during the first year. Profundity of the grammatical gymnastics cannot deliver the inherent spiritual reverence vested in the words of *Ahuna-Vairya*. The spiritual communion must reveal itself to the devotee only through the deepest feelings of religion.

If these are the Holy words of Ahura Mazda, does the prophet in the Gathas elaborate upon them? Does the poet-prophet tell us anything about them? A cursory look of his poetic hymns, reveals that the name of the first Gatha, *Ahunavaiti* appears to suggest a clear connection. The words *Ahunavaiti*, *Ahuna-Vairya*, *Ahuna-Vairim* all imply the "Choice of the Lord". *Ahu* through its Avestan root meaning of life or being; implies the Lord, while *Vairim* and *Vairya* are derived from Avestan root *Var* meaning to choose. Thus the first Gatha, which consists of seven Haas or

chapters (Ys 28-34) is about choosing the Lord, as in the *Yatha-ahu-Vairya*.

A closer look at the second chapter (Ys 29) discloses a further similarity between these two liturgies. The style of poetry in this song takes the form of a drama, unique in the Gathas. Few Gathic teachers have recognized the importance of the metaphor implicit in this Yasna. Irach Taraporewala⁴, Lawrence Mills⁵, Jatindra Mohan Chatterji⁶ and Geldner⁷ recognizing the importance of this Yasna, have actually changed the order and put Yasna 29 before Yasna 28. They consider this Yasna, in the words of Taraporewala, "a sort of 'prologue in Heaven' describing the preparations made there, for the advent of Zarathushtra upon Earth". The hymn is a prelude to the teachings of Ahura Mazda by Zarathushtra, just as *Ahuna-Vairya* manthra is a prelude³ to the sacred creation of Mazda. The theme of the appointment or choice of the Righteous spiritual savior is a subject that is prominently displayed in both Ys 29 and *Yatha-Ahu-Vairya*.

This Yasna appears to depict, in a dramatic way, the suffering that prevails in the Universe; focus then turns to Righteousness (Asha) as the only way to salvation. The sequel then moves to the appointment of Spitama Zarathushtra as a Righteous leader, and a Divine protector, through Good Mind; to spread the word of Vohu Manah and Asha, to restore order in the Universe. The underlying Gathic message is essentially identical with the meaning of the liturgy of *Ahuna-Vairya*.

The major players in this play of Ys 29 are, a suffering Universe and the Theological triad of Mazda Ahura, Righteousness and Good Mind. These are the same outstanding features, that are prominently displayed in the Manthra of *Yatha-Ahu-Vairya*. We note in this text words *dregubyo* (the ones oppressed) *Ahu* and *Mazda* (the Creator), *Ashat* (Righteousness) and *Vangheush Manangaha* (Good mind or Good thinking). The liturgy of *Yatha-Ahu-Vairya* with its interpretation is given below:

Yatha Ahu Vairya atha Ratus Ashat chit hacha

Both *Ahu* (Lord) and *Ratu* (judge or protector) are chosen in conformity with **righteousness**.

Vangheush *dazda* Manangho *Shyothnanam angheush* Mazda
Actions generated through Good Mind promotes a life dedicated to Wise One.

Khshthrem-cha Ahurai aa Yim dregubyo *dadat Vastarem*

The chosen one, through Power of the Lord, protect and rehabilitate the oppressed.

If now, we look through the play described in Ys 29 and compare the implications in the acts, with the above interpretation of this Holy Manthra, we begin to see a clear analogy emerging between these two liturgies.

Yasna 29.1: In this verse, the soul of the Universe laments to Ahura Mazda about its oppressed state, through anger (*aeshemo*), fury (*hazas*), outrage (*remo*), aggression (*deres*), and rapine (*tevis*), and pleads for the appointment of a Divine savior to restore order.

The Message: Evil prevails in the world. There is an acute need to protect the honest and innocents to restore the Divine order of Asha (line 3 of *Ahuna-Vairya*).

Yasna 29.2.3.4: The next three verses depict a dialogue between the Creator and Righteousness. We notice Mazda asking Righteousness (Ys 29.2), "who do you know in this world who is powerful enough, who can offer protection to the world from anger and violence of the deceitful?" Righteousness replies (Ys 29.3), "There is none among the noble mortals who understands how to resist the evil. If there was a strong one present he would have called upon me and I would have responded to the call." Righteousness at this point turns to Mazda and continues: (Ys 29.4) " He (Mazda) is the all-knowing creator who knows what the evil gods and their followers have done and will do. Wise Lord is the best judge, so let it be; whatever he decrees."

The Message: Mazda is the creator and preserver of Righteousness. In choosing the Savior He exercises judicious discretion through Truth (**line 1 Ahuna-Vairya**). Only a Truthful leader (**line 1 Ahuna-Vairya**) can restore the Divine Immutability Order of Asha. No human on earth has chosen the True path. They can be Righteous through communion with the spirit of Asha. Verse four emphasizes the supreme authority of Mazda, saying His Will must prevail.

Yasna 29.5.6.7: These verses describe a prayer by the soul of the Universe and spirit of Righteousness to the Wise Lord, supplicating, "Let no harm come to the honest and pure at heart, at the hand of the evil ones" (Ys 29.5). The Wise Lord affirms that Righteousness knows no noble master (*Ahu*) or spiritual leader (*Ratush*) who is Truthful and worthy of the appointment (Ys 29.6). The **Wise One**, with his attribute of Truth, prepares for the propagation of his Holy Words that can protect His creation in the Universe. He now approaches the **Good Mind** asking, "who can deliver the message of Truth to the mortals on the earth?" (Ys.29.7).

The Message: After much deliberation with Truth, the Wise Lord prepares his message with His Good Mind (line 2 *Ahuna-Vairya*) and ponders through Good Thinking, over, who can disseminate the Message to the humanity:

Yasna 29.8: The Wise Lord continues deliberation with Good Mind and announces: "There is but one person who has earnestly listened to our commandments, and that is Zarathushtra Spitaman. He is the only one who can disseminate the message of Wisdom and Righteousness, if he is granted the gift to herald the proclamation of Ahura Mazda."

The Message: Here we see the announcement by the Ahura Mazda, of a leader or savior. The person who is judged Righteous, (line 1 of *Ahuna-Vairya*) and is recognized to perform his actions with the Good-Mind, (**line 2 Ahuna-vairya**) is the one chosen as a protector of the world.

Yasna 29.9.10.11: The last three verses display the reaction of the Soul of the Universe to this choice. The soul expresses discomfort (Ys 29.9) at the choice saying, "Do I have to be content with a feeble human to protect me? I sought for a powerful ruler. Will there ever be a strong one who can help me?" As a reconciliation, (Ys 29.10) the Soul of the Universe, prays to Mazda to grant the spiritual strength of Good Mind and direct Zarathushtra and his followers to the path of Asha, so that peace and goodwill may spread on earth. With these words, the appointment, of the prophet Zarathushtra, by Mazda, is accepted in the Universe. The last verse (Ys 29.11) is a continuation of the prayer for the Good Mind and Righteousness to prevail, so that the Divine rule of Wisdom can predominate in the Universe.

The Message: In here we have the verbalization of the desire to spread the Divine dominion "Khshtremcha" in the physical world through good thinking and honest actions (line 2 of *Ahuna-Vairya*).

There are some difference of opinion among the scholastic community as to who utters verses 10 and 11. Some consider them as a prayer by Asho Zarathushtra while others consider them as a continuation of the invocation by the Soul of the Universe. Ignoring the artistic articulation of the dramatics, it is intriguing that the poet Prophet appears to deliver, in a unique fashion, the crucial message of Manthra Spenta, through oral transmission, to an illiterate society of his time. Deciphering of the dramatic mysticism of Ys. 29 yields a distillate that is in spirit superimposable with the *Manthra Spenta of Ahuna-Vairya*.

References:

1. Dk. Book IX Sanjana ed. XVIII, Pg. 43
2. Dk. Sanjana ibid. Pg44
3. Ys.19.2.3
4. Irach J.S. Taraporewala, Divine Songs of Zarathushtra, Pg. 34
5. Jotindra M. Chatterji, The Hymns of Athravan Zarathushtra Pg. 13
6. Sacred Books of the East Vol. 31, Pg. 3
7. See footnote Pg. 13 ref. 5

SACRED SPACES *and* SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION

The Gathas, believed to be the prophetic words of Zarathushtra amply reveal the importance of the Universe as a Sacred Creation. In Yasna 29.1 we hear the Soul of the Universe lament to the Creator over the torment of the fury, rapine, hatred, greed and other vices it experiences, and pleads to Ahura Mazda for a Saviour. Verse eight of the same hymn speaks of the revelation by *Vohu Manah* -the Good Mind - of Zarathushtra Spitama as the one, best suited to emancipate the Universe from its agony.

Prophet Zarathushtra in proclaiming his Message, at the early dawn of civilization, some 3700 years ago, unfolds a radically innovative concept of the preservation of the Creation. At the very beginning of the Gathic scriptures, he asserts his commitment in no uncertain terms: "*With hands outstretched high, I pray in veneration to Mazda that I may perform all actions based on the wisdom of Good Mind in keeping with the law of Righteousness and bring harmony to the Soul of the Universe*"(Ys. 28.1). Here the world and its environment are perceived as a **Sacred Space**. Humanity, as a steward of Creation has an obligation and responsibility to ensure its progress towards perfection. This principle is clearly echoed in the prayer "*And may we be among those who makes the Existence Brilliant.... you lords of Wisdom, who bring happiness through Righteousness*" (Ys 30.9). This fundamental notion of preservation of the Divine creation coupled with the profound concept of Asha - the immutable law of Nature - has become the *focal tenets of the subsequent evolution of the sacred spaces in the Zarathushtrian Faith*.

From Elements of Nature to Objects of Veneration

With the advent of time, the elements of Nature gained prominence in their reverence and veneration. Hymns were composed to pay homage to natural creations, such as the sun (*Khorsheed*), the moon (*Maahbokhtar*), water (*Aban*), and fire

(*Aataar*). Eventually, these natural elements became associated with specific divinities, whose names were incorporated into the Zarathushtrian Calendar as days and months of the year. Consequently the recital of these hymns became fixed on the day dedicated to the divinity.

For example, the ancient Cult of *Anahita* that pervaded the Middle Persian era emerges as *Aban* - the divinity guarding the water - in the Zarathushti calendar. Thus *the coastal regions became the sacred spaces* on the day of Aban and, especially, when the day and the month are superimposed in the computation of the annual calendar. Open spaces are rendered sacred sites, to pay homage to Khorshed and Mithra or Meher - divinities associated with Sun and light - in communion offered during the daytime. In contrast, veneration to Maah - associated with the moon - is part of the prayers offered after sunset.

Fire and its Consecration in Temples

What made Fire so special to Zarathushtra? The prophet visualized within this element more than what meets the eye. He saw in it the *Absolute Truth and Absolute Purity that is embodied in the fundamental concept of Asha*. He thus presented *Fire as an attribute and a physical corpus or epiphany of Ahura Mazda*.

The archeological finds of the early nomadic and pastoral Avestan society have yielded no precise records of the edifices that housed sacred fires. As Cicero mentions, Zarathushtrians considered it wrong, "to keep shut up within walls, Gods whose dwelling place was this whole world". However by the fourth century B.C.E. almost a millenium after the era of Zarathushtra, in the mid-Achaemenian time; temple worship was overridden with veneration of icons of Anahita. That prompted a strong reaction among the faithful, who responded with the installation of consecrated Fire, and thus initiated the temple cult of Fire. Since then, in the Zarathushtrian devotional life, *new sacred spaces have emerged as places of worship in which the Sanctum Sanctorum is a consecrated Fire, the incarnation of Ahura Mazda*.

Tradition evolved to distinguish the fire temples, based on the process used to consecrate the fire it housed. In time, the *Fire of Verethraghna* (Ph. Varahran or Vahram; Persian, Bahram), the fire associated with *a pre-Zarathushtrian divinity of victory* evolved as the most highly consecrated fire, and the temples where it was enthroned, came to be recognized as Aatash-e-Vahram (Per. Aatash Bahram). For its consecration, fires were collected from sixteen different sources: including those from lightning (nature), crematorium, the household of various artisans, soldiers, and priests. Elaborate rituals were formulated to kindle and rekindle these fires with fragrant sandalwood, accompanied by the offerings of Higher liturgical prayers, symbolically transforming these smoldering embers to the *Holy and Sublime state of Ritual Purity* worthy of the expression of the Lord of Wisdom - Ahura Mazda. The Consecrated Fire is then enthroned, traditionally with the highest pomp and pageantry in the sacred space.

Similar consecration ceremonies have evolved for fires that adorn the lesser grade of sacred spaces of Aatash-e-Aderan and Aatash-e-Dadgah. Unfortunately, these aesthetic evolutions greatly compromised the profound Gathic insight, into the identification of Truth and Righteousness, in its moral and social sense - the very essence of Ahura Mazda - with Fire. Zarathushtra's vision of the ethical code of Life for humanity in this temporal world, symbolized in the Divine Fire of Ahura Mazda, was significantly overshadowed.

"Outer Liturgies" - Jashan

The Gathic concept of veneration for creation also appears in a number of outer liturgies performed by Zarathushtrians today. The one most frequently performed is the Jashan. The term has its origin in the Avestan root "Yasn" meaning to worship or to praise. Physically the sacred space for a Jashan may be created in a House of Worship or a prayer hall or even in a private home. The designated area is covered with a white sheet symbolizing the purity and cleanliness of the enclosure. All the utensils and implements used in this sacred space are thoroughly cleaned. As a point of interest, in earlier times as cleanliness of water supply was

uncertain, temples were equipped with wells to provide naturally filtered, unpolluted water for ritual purposes. The center of this sacred space is ordained with a fire vase in which dwells a Fire that is continuously fed with fragrant wood and incense which symbolically radiates the force of Mazda Ahura. The surrounding space is shared by the offerings that represent each of the elements of creation: luminaries, earth, water, plant, animal and human (see fig.1). Traditionally the worship requires a minimum of two priests, however, in the event of shortage one can suffice. The service involves the chanting of Afringan recital that praises the glory and invokes the participation of the Lord of Wisdom. The recital culminates in a flower exchange ritual between the two priests. Symbolically this is the moment that constitutes a linking of the Temporal with the Eternal, of the physical (Getig) with the spiritual (Menog) world.

"Inner Liturgies" -Yasna

In addition to the outer liturgy of Afringan, in the syncretic Zarathushtrian Faith, several "Inner liturgical ceremonies" have evolved. Among the most widely performed is the ritual of Yasna or Yazashne meaning 'Worship'. The Yasna service of 72 chapters is a blend of the scriptures of Gatha, with those of the older Avesta. Some of these are ascribed to the pre-zarathushtrian Divinity. The basic objective of the Yasna performance is the recognition of praise and Majesty of Ahura Mazda and His Benevolent attributes responsible for the sacred Creation.

Traditionally these higher liturgies are classed as "Paaw Mahal" (clean or pure Space) ceremonies and require the construction of special enclosures known as "Paawi". These areas which, are about six-and-a-half feet by eleven-and-a-half feet, are believed to demarcate a sacred space within which the two performing priests are located, and every implement is kept clean, pure and consecrated. These demarcations are built into the floor of the temples as furrows during their construction (see Fig.2). The rationale behind conserving this high order of purity, is to meet with the absolute immaculateness of the Supreme divinity - Ahura

Mazda, that is solemnly invoked at the beginning of the ritual, for the Holy communion.

At the south end of this consecrated space is located a fire vase mounted on a stone pedestal. The pedestal is first thoroughly cleaned, and is finally consecrated by the performing head priest with the recital of Ashem Vohu (a declaration affirming "Righteousness is good") while rinsing with water. A stone seat is kept at the north end of the "paawi", on which the head priest seats with his back to the North. Traditionally Zarathushtrian sacred spaces avoid northern orientation for any kind of reverence, due to the legend and history of the early Avestan migration southwards, to escape the drastic living conditions. Later syncretic Zarathushtrian tradition (Videvdat Ch.7.2.5) has overstated this concept by identifying north as a source of evil.

In front of the head priest is a table on which are laid out various implements and metal utensils for use during the service. These have a theological significance: in that, they represent the earth, water, plant and animal creation in the physical world. These elements, coupled with the consecrated fire, and the human dimension provided by the priests, is the sacred space which depicts a microcosm of the archetypal reality of the temporal existence. Through the ritual acts of purification and consecration, the liturgy portrays in words and gestures the responsibilities of Humanity. These commitments are to bring the Cosmic combat with the forces of Evil, to a state of absolute Good, in purity and righteousness that prevails in the Divine Dominion. The act symbolizes the resurrection of Perfect existence consonant with immutable cosmic Law of Asha known in Zarathushtrian theology as Frashokereti.

The dominant influence of the Younger Avestan era in reinforcing the pre-Zarathushtrian concepts in the syncretic Zarathushtrian Faith is clearly noticeable in the introduction of the Haoma ritual in Yasna liturgy. The cult of Haoma, the sacred plant of immortality, has its origin in the Vedic Soma, a plant highly revered by the early Aryan society. The climactic gesture of sipping of *parahom*, prepared during the Paragna (pre-Yasna)

service, at the recital of section (Haa) 9-11 of the Yasna, is an example of the changes gradually incorporated in the Gathic Zarathushtrian religion.

The Sacred spaces in Zarathushtrian tradition focus on the sacred creation, its preservation, and its ultimate redemption, in concordance with the principle of Asha. The total eradication of the Evil Mentality is the marker of Frashokereti--the resurrection of Absolute Perfection, the Divine Dominion in temporal world.

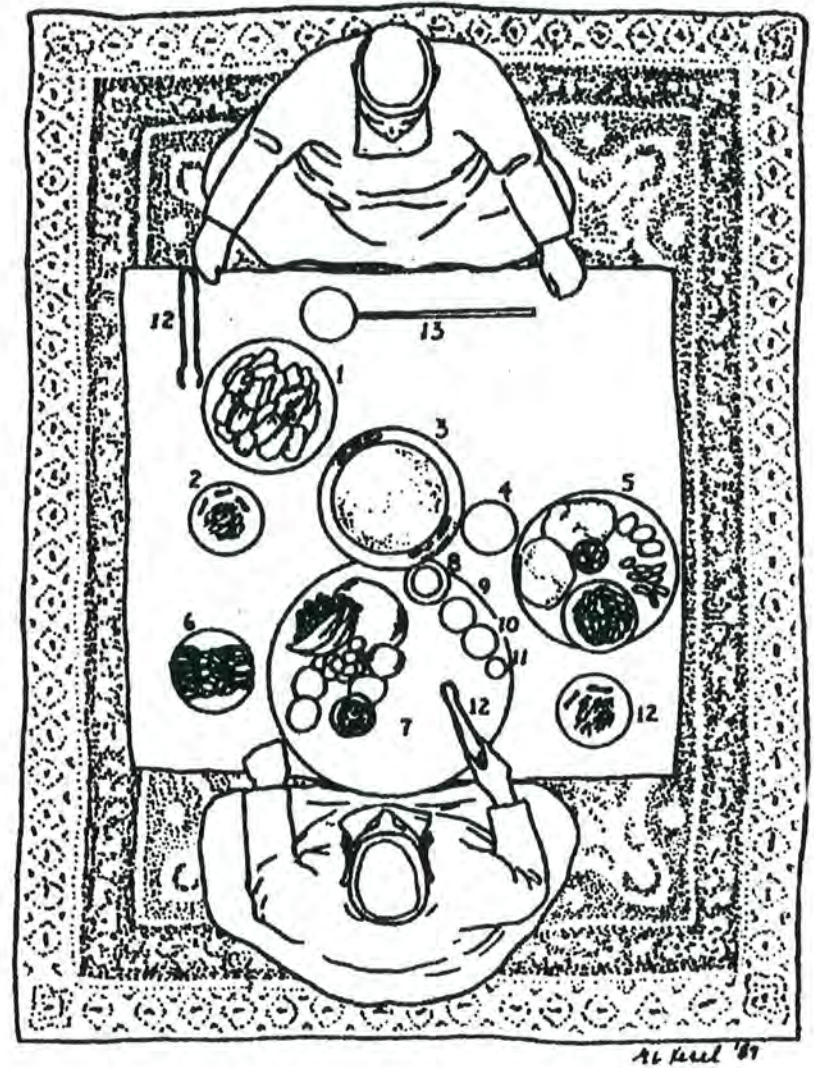


Figure 1. The Afringan. 1. Sandalwood, 2. Frankincense, 3. Fire vase, 4. Oil lamp, 5. Tray with eggs, bread, coconut, dried fruit and halva, 6. Bowl with roses and tube-roses, 7. Tray with fresh fruit, 8. Water, 9. Sharbat, 10. Milk, 12. Tongs, 13. Ladle.

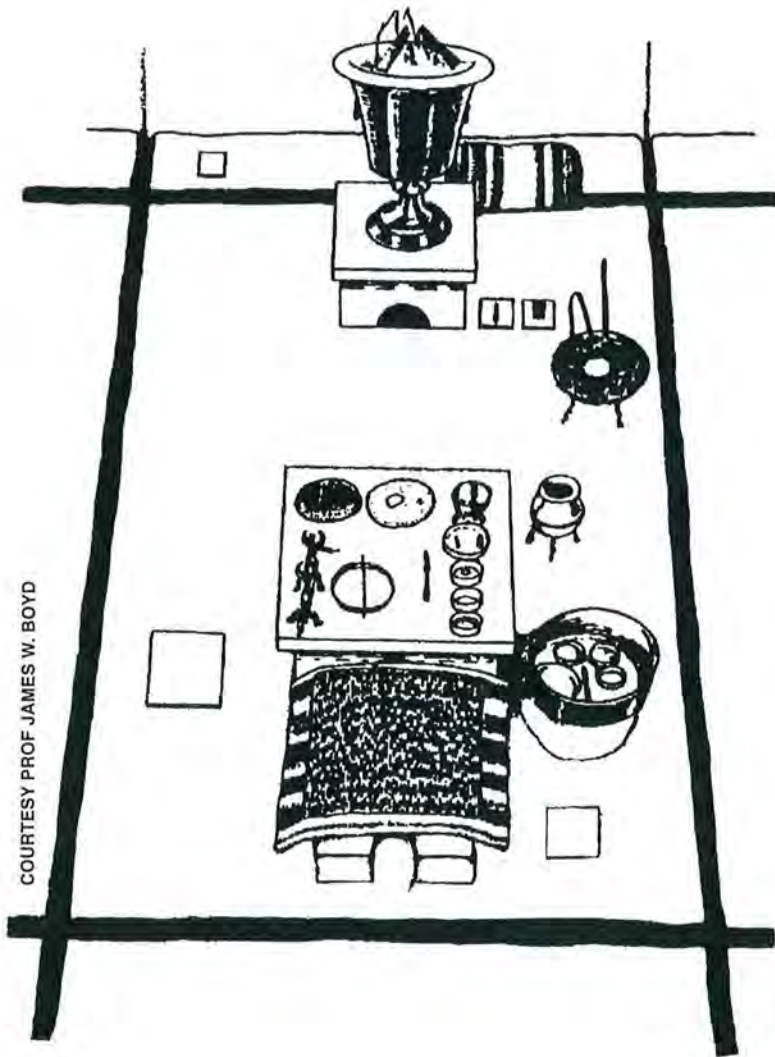
SPIRITUALITY *and* OTHER TRADITIONS

"Righteousness and Wisdom are commended, unbeliever and idolaters are denounced, and God overtakes the worshippers of false gods and the wicked generally....Rewards in a future life for the Good, and punishment for the wicked....immortality of the soul".

No, these are not the words from Zarathushtrian scripture. This is what is said in "Wisdom" a book accepted by Roman Catholics as a part of the canon of Old Testament. Despite the fact that there are specific reasons why one finds commonalities among Judaic, Hindu and Zarathushtrian traditions, it must be realized that, often common pattern of human thoughts in metaphysical aspects, could emerge independently. The book of "Wisdom", believed to have been composed about a century before Christ, either by King Solomon or by a Jew of Alexandria, contains apostolic pronouncements similar to those found in the Gathic scriptures by Zarathushtra.

In this respect it is of interest to explore the **views of religiosity** of the other early traditions. One of the most complex terms *Ch'i* pervades through the Chinese philosophy and religion of the early era. Taoist philosopher Chuang-tzu in 4th century BCE wrote: "When the Great Earth exhales breath, it is called wind". By this time *Ch'i* was identified with "breath". During the classical age of the Chinese Philosophy (481-221 BCE) the concept of breath merged with the "Vital Spirit"- a life force of all creatures. It is of interest to note that Older Avestan literature (Ys 55.1) as well as middle Persian Pahlavi works Bundahisn (Ch 3.13) refers to one of the constituent of the human body as "vital life force" known in Avesta as *Ushtana*, or Ph. *Jan*. Bundahisn tell us that after death this vital life force combines with the wind -*Vayu*, a divinity that is identified as Govad (Farsi, Bad).

With the passage of time *Ch'i* was expounded upon as the "flow of energy" within the body. Traditional Chinese art of



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Figure 2. The Ritual Space (*pavi*) and its furnishings.

acupuncture evolved as means to control the flow of Ch'i. For mind to have perfect control over the body, Ch'i must be ideally regulated. East Asian martial arts, therefore, have a strong spiritual component to achieve absolute physical mastery of the body.

In the Neo-Confucian revival of the Sung era, Ch'i acquired a radically new meaning. This was the era responsible for the formative concept of T'ai-chi the "Great Ultimate" signifying the origin and basis of Heaven and earth and of all beings. Chou Hsi (1130-1200) who evolved the Neo-Confucian metaphysics insisted that the truth of the Great Ultimate must be personally realized through moral self-cultivation. Truth is not the knowledge about some external reality, but a personal knowledge rooted in self-awareness in the ethical-religious sense, thus defining human spirituality of the Innate Self in terms of that notion. In the folk tradition, the mysterious creativity of Ta'i Chi is implied in the spiritual and physical exercise known as 'ta'i-chi chuan' practiced to this day. This slow, firm and rhythmic exercise disciplines the body and purifies the mind through coordinated movements and regulated breathing. It is a remarkable translation of cosmic force into a physical and mental display for practical spiritual existence.

The philosophical credo of Hinduism is embodied in the principle of Yoga meaning to "hold fast". The practice of yoga in the Indian religion involves the ascetic technique of meditation. The system signifies "the diversion of senses from the external world and concentration of thought within". The doctrine of Yoga assumes that the Divine soul is inextricably woven with absolutely pure matter, and is endowed with supreme wisdom and goodness. God, thus lives in eternal bliss, within the matter, free of all earthly impulses and misery that burden the living. This concept stands in intimate analogy with the Zarathushtrian concept of Divinity of Ahura Mazda innate in the Human Being (Ys 55.1, 26.4).

The practice of the yogic art of attainment of spirituality is the ability to reduce to absolute tranquility the mental function, which is largely under the influence of external worldly forces. To begin with, it is crucial to focus ones thought process on a single

entity, thus restraining the organ of thinking. This restraint is then coupled with strict discipline of bodily attitudes, such as posture, rhythm of respiration, emancipation of sensory activity from domination of the worldly forces. The perfection of this technique of "suppression of psycho-mental state" requires prolonged effort of coordinating physiological practices and spiritual exercises. This puts the thinking mechanics in complete consonance with the Inner Self, a convergence of the individual self (soul) with the Ultimate Self. In Zarathushtrian terms, it is the recognition of the Fravahar (Divinity) within. The final result of this endeavor is attaining of a state of mind that can recognize the "absolute knowledge" the state of Wisdom or Enlightenment--recognized in Zarathushtrian theology as the "Mazda", and known in the Yogic doctrines as *Samadhi*. a stage of revelation of the Supreme Self by the intuitive perception.

SPIRITUALITY-HEALTH *and* HEALING A ZARATHUSHTI PERSPECTIVE

Healing and God

The word 'to heal' is derived from an Old Saxon root 'hale' meaning 'Whole'. A person who is healthy is generally accepted as a 'whole person'. The 'wholeness of Health' of an individual is a summation of several components. They are the physical, the intellectual, the emotional, and the mental/spiritual. Hence any discussion on health and healing must necessarily include a careful consideration of all these components. While physical and the intellectual health can be manipulated by external powers such as the diet, drugs and study, emotional and the spiritual healing is strongly influenced by the state of Mind. Zarathushtrian theology invokes *Haurvatat* as 'wholeness or completeness'. What is Asho Zarathusht trying to convey? He is teaching us of a state of integrity that one can reach through Serenity or Right-mindedness (*Spenta aramaiti*). Integrity of what? It is the integrity of one's inner self with one's physical self, the unity of the spiritual with the material, the oneness of the Mind and the body. "The appropriate sense of *Haurvatat* would be well-being including Health and Happiness"¹, the wholeness and perfection through Good Mind - *Vohu Manah*².

For most traditions, the entire cosmos, spanning from the recent findings of the Galaxies by Hubble telescope in the space above, down to human consciousness within, is an incarnation that humanity recognizes as the Supreme Intellect - GOD. This infinite massive glow that we often term Divine Enlightenment ramifies to points of sparks and pervades through the animate and inanimate creation. Every single human being regardless of his physical, emotional or intellectual level is believed to have the Divine spark within, waiting to be discovered. When Zarthushti recite in the *Atash Niyesh*³:

Yesnyo Ahi vahmvo yesnyo buyao vahmvo

Namnahu mashyaknam ushta buyat

Ahmai naire Yase thva badha frayazaite

The above lines are addressed to Fire, the Fire that our prophet has given to us as the physical incarnation of Mazda, the Fire that is the essence of Mazda –literally called son of Mazda. This essence we are told, in the above verse, is worthy of adoration and reverence, and more particularly, "may it adore the House of man, and bring happiness to him who reveres it". The 'house of man' referred to here, metaphorically implies the human body. The message here is that the Divine Essence of Mazda adorns the body of man. This is in full consonance with what we read in Older Avesta⁴ about the soul, *fravashi* and *ushtana* as the divine elements of the human constitution. The human body therefore is the House of Divinity and it is incumbent upon us to learn how best to treat it with care, respect and reverence.

Studies at the University of Miami conducted by Dr. Antoni, and at the UCLA school of medicine by Dr. Fawzy, has demonstrated self-care as an essential component that helps improve coping skills in certain illnesses⁵. Self-care is emerging in western medicine as an essential component to surgical intervention and drug therapy. Learning muscle relaxation, assertive skills, and stress management techniques can induce positive thinking that can markedly improve health benefits.

A patient Tom Long, who was stabbed in the heart, stomach and spleen, returned to Georgetown University Hospital for more surgical intervention after having undergone seven surgical treatments. When asked by a first year intern during an interview: "How did you find your source of strength?" He answered there is something beyond the excellent medical care he received that he credits for his life. It's God⁶.

Mind and Body

Unfortunately in recent history, it was the pioneering **but erroneous work** of the 17th century French mathematician and philosopher Rene Descartes, that inseminated the two-substance

view of duality of mind and body. As Dr. Damasio in his book *Descartes' Error* says, "the abysmal separation...between the sizable, dimensioned...infinitely divisible body stuff, on the one hand, and un-sizable, undiminished, non-divisible Mind stuff ...might exist separately" is fallacious. With time however, Mind and Matter came to be regarded as complexes of a common theme that are only structured differently. Spinoza rejected the Cartesian view in favour of the idea that Mind and Matter are finite entities of the single infinite substance God that is the universal essence or nature of everything that exists.

The attitude of Mind/Spirit is inextricably related to body and therefore to health and sickness. Consequently, the Spirit-body relationship should also be a concern for health care and health-care providers. Dr. Herbert Benson, a researcher at Harvard Medical School and founder of the Mind/body Medical Institute at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, is among the major contributors to bring spirituality within the sphere of Global therapy. In his books *Your Maximum Mind*, *Beyond Relaxation Response* and *Timeless Healing*, he brings forth sufficient evidence to demonstrate how he has worked with patients through trying times, to open the doors for a spiritual component as a complimentary part of holistic therapy.

To one of his female patients undergoing the trauma of a recent surgery, Benson advised about the way in which a relaxed physical condition can be elicited. He says, "I explained that she needed to focus silently on a word for a period of 10 to 20 minutes...gently brushing aside any thoughts that distracted her ...this was the mental exercise...to ease the body's usual alert mode...letting it calm down and rest..." As a point of focus for their mind, many of his patients choose a religious word or phrase. These little prayers acted as an effective balm to calm down the chaos within. The patients emerged from this mental focusing with a clearer mind and sharper thoughts. In calming down the brain, the lowered metabolic response slows down the overall function of the body, and restructures negative thinking, to interpret the events more positively.

From a vantage point of Zarathushtrian theology the *relaxation response*, as Dr. Benson calls it, is resetting the Mind in a state of 'Serenity' or 'Complete Mindfulness' – *Spenta Aramaiti* – to refresh and renovate it to the state of *Vohu Manah*. When practiced daily with 'Complete Mindfulness', either in the form of silent meditation or through chanting of the Holy mantras it can have a profound influence on mental and physical activities. Healthy individuals through this exercise can benefit, to sustain harmony between the physical and the spiritual that in turn will reflect into physical health and facilitate the revelation of *Asha* in day-to-day activities.

Spirituality

The term Spirituality is derived from the Latin word *spiritus* meaning the breath of life. The book of Genesis⁸ affirms breath as the Divine spirit when it says: "God...proceeded to blow into his (man's) nostril the breath of life and the man came to be a living soul". Asho Zarathusht in his Gathic hymns, made a similar assertion⁹ when he said, "Wise Lord, you fashioned this world for us and put the vital life-breath -*Ushtanem*- into the physical body." Several traditions have focused on that rhythm of the human respiration as the invisible, yet palpable, entity that distinguishes the living from dead, as the manifestation of Divinity in the human.

Despite this evidence western medicine has until recently, considered Spirit and Spirituality as a concept out of their domain, based on an erroneous notion, that the idea is synonymous with religion. According to Brian Seaward,¹⁰ spiritual development is an expansion of the conscious to the unconscious Mind, which occurs through the relationship of our Self with the Divine. The acts of prayer and meditation stimulate one's imagination, creativity, and synthesis of ideas. This internal relationship of wholeness and, well being in turn paves the way to the sense of love and interconnectedness, within a spiritually healthy person, for the Creation and human fellowship. Seaward's analysis echoes the Zarathushtrian teaching that a calm and peaceful *Vohu Manah*, in a devotional state of *Spenta Aramaiti*; permits one to tap the creativity, not only to shape one's own life, but also to touch and

affect that of the living world around, to reveal the path of *Asha*. This harmony of the physical and mental/spiritual health that brings forth the attainment of *Haurvatat*, transcends the human mentality, bringing it closer to the divine likeness of *Ahura Mazda*.

The guarded approach of the western medicine to Spirituality is best summed up in the words of Esther Sternberg of the National Institute of Mental Health who says, "The person in me says 'Of course, I believe emotions have something to do with the disease,' but the scientist in me says 'Prove it to me.'" A major barrier to the acceptance of spirituality as a part of the healthcare is its unpredictability. Science demands that prayer if it heals one terminally ill patient, should heal all. Reproducibility is a crutch that science has used since time immemorial to bring acceptance of a concept. It is a fact that, Mind, human consciousness, will, imagination and thought, are entities that cannot be apprehended by senses or by sciences. In their efforts to explain Mind in terms of biology, and neurology, the professionals have simply uncovered their own limitations. Little worth reading has been written about it.

It is important to understand that **prayers are not magic potions** that can produce their effect upon recitation, and translates into cures. The results of this phenomenon are markedly dependent on the sensitivity of the state of Mind under which the offering is made. The term 'extra sensory perception' invented by J.B.Rhine, the pioneer in scientific paranormal research, includes the faculties of telepathy and clairvoyance. These notions have also failed to gain full acceptance of the pure sciences, due mainly to their non-reproducibility. The results of the experiments designed to prove their validity, also have a strong bearing on the mental receptivity of the subject at the time of their performance. It is easy to question the intervention of prayers, on behalf of some innocent suffering humans. However one often overlooks the fact that the suffering also provides means through which humans can express moral qualities of care, kindness, compassion, tolerance and unconditional love, and be more God-like.

It is of interest to note, that from among the diverse spiritual traditions existing in the world today, it was Zarathustra, the first prophet of the Aryan society, who revealed the crucial nature of *Manah* - the Mind and its importance to maintain it Best - *Vahishta* at all times. In the teaching of Asho Zarathust *Vohu Manah* is the closest cohort of Ahura Mazda, through the control of which flows values such as *Asha* and *Khshthra Vairya*. It is only through the peaceful mind, free of the chaos of the worldly disorder, that the brain can transmit signals, to generate a physiological response to well being. The end result of the concentration of mind is the same, regardless of a person focusing ones devotion using a prayer, or cherishing a masterpiece of art or music. Prayer, thus, represents the means to penetrate the barriers between the spiritual and the physical, to bring forth the harmonization of the two, leading to the value that Zarathustra defines as *Haurvatat* - perfection or completeness.

Benson's relaxation response mentioned above is one such technique that aids calming of the mind, by focusing on a theme religious or otherwise, to ease the physical tensions caused by physiological disorders ranging from headache to hypertension. Since most patients choose a religious prayer as means of devotion, the resulting physical well being, is often attributed to divine intervention; a consequence of spiritual healing.

Psychologist Joseph Cyclic, of Loyola University Chicago explains¹¹ the phenomena of Spiritual Healing by interpreting it as an effect of the immaterial entity, the Mind on the material entity, the Body. He further elaborates, "What is physical and what is non-physical is an arbitrary distinction". This differentiation of the physical and spiritual is relative depending upon the level of the spiritual attitude of the person. Spiritual in a most general sense, involves positive directed thinking by and for human beings.

Intercessory Prayers

Prayers involve a sort of thinking for the spiritual fulfillment of mankind. It is that intensely passionate thinking that touches the sentiments of the world, and searches for values among

facts. It is established that under appropriate conditions telepathic transfer of thoughts from one mind to the other can occur through space. Consequently intercessory prayers for others are no more mystical a phenomenon than an expression of transfer of one's thoughts of renewed health for others, to their mental receptors that could lead to appropriate wellness. Among the most recognized scientific studies of such prayers is the one carried out by Dr. Randolph Byrd^{12,13} at San Francisco General Hospital. Almost 400 patients of the coronary care ICU were party to this study. About half of them received the benevolence of intercessory prayers. Religious groups were given the first name and brief description of the condition of the patients. The experiment was conducted following strict scientific code, randomized, and double-blinded, in which neither the patients, nor nurses and doctors knew the identity of the group under study. Each person in the experiment had five to seven people praying for the individual. The results for the prayed-for group were so positive that even the skeptics in the medical community acknowledged their acceptance with the remarks such as "...this study will stand up to scrutiny".

The most striking example of intercessory prayer in Zarathushtrian scriptures is in the *Vohukhshthra Gatha*¹⁴ where the prophet venerates not only the Wise Lord, but also the Righteous persons who existed and those who are alive in the following words:

Ta yazai Kha-ish Namen-ish Pairicha jasai Vanta

I shall worship them all with their own names

and shall lovingly serve them. (Ys 51.22)

In the later Zarathushtrian Tradition, prayers of Afringan, Afrin and Tan-dorosti are some of the outstanding prayers where the names of the living as well as the deceased souls are memorialized and blessed

Conclusion

Despite a loose acceptance of a life force or spirit that breaths life into the body, Western Medicine, by and large, does

not acknowledge Human Energy, a concept that nurtures the foundation of holistic healing. The mysterious healing energy, *Parna* as spoken by Indians, and *Chi* by far Easterners has thus far escaped all efforts to measure it using scientific methodology. Zarathushtrian theology recognizes Fire as the energy of life – Ahu - that pervades the human body. Among the Younger Avestan prayers, *Ardibehesht Yasht* is the worship and praise associated with Fire. The liturgy is dedicated to smite all evil and restore Good, including mental and physical health. Verse 6 of this litany describes five different types of healers, including a surgeon who heals with a knife. However, the worship goes on to elaborate that the most potent healer of all, is the one who heals with Holy words- *Manthrem Spentem baeshazyo*- of the prayers.

Health is an aggregate of body, and mind/spirit. In the event of a disorder in health it is important to determine which of these components is out of synch. A belief-based calming of the mind, holding respect for diverse ways of attaining it, must make humanity more respectful of the spiritual quality of life. Such an understanding of health through spirituality can go a long way to demonstrate the notion of God, so badly needed in this world torn apart by discord in the name of religion.

"Your body is nothing more than an energy system. The energy that is life is coursing through your body. You can direct this energy. You can control it."

"If you imagine that you are a body, you will experience life as an expression of the body. When you understand that you are a soul, then you will experience life as an expression of soul. When you acknowledge that your soul and God's are one, then you will experience Life as an expression of One Spirit," and your Oneness with God and with human race¹⁵.

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HAPPINESS OF RECEIVING THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

This is not a topic that can be justly discussed within minutes by any stretch of imagination. The talk will, therefore, touch only the tip of the iceberg.

Those of you who are familiar with the Gathas fully appreciate the fact, that Asho Zarathust in his pioneering hymns constantly communes with his God. Through Spenta Manthra – the Holy words of wisdom - he asks questions to Mazda, (Yasna 44) realizes revelation from the Creator, (Yasna 43) and dedicates his body and vital life-breath (Yasna 33.12-14) to the service of his Master. He succeeded in his quest because through worship, he was able to attune with his clear vision of God.

The prophet is revered by many names, but basically he was a **great thinker**- a MANTHRAN, all the other appellations followed from his conception of a clear vision of the Creator. .

A Vision of God, for any individual, is a sum total of ones intellect and experience. Intellect and experience are both dynamic entities that continue to change with time in a human life. They also change with the BOUNDLESS TIME- *Zurvanhe akarnahe* - in the universe. So the first question I would address, is the following:

Is the God perceived in contemporary theology, a God to whom one can still pray?

or

Has prayer gone out with the early anthropocentric image of God?

In the technocratic world of today, there is immense stress on research. Unquestionably, research implies diligent and sustained thinking. In this age of computer revolution, we build highly complex “thinking machines” that are faster and more

efficient than the human mind. **THINKING** today, is **as much in fashion as PRAYER seems out of fashion**. In contrast the prophet of the first revealed religion of the world unambiguously stresses thinking in his prayers.

He insists in **Yasna 30.2** of the Ahunavaiti Gatha

Sraota geush ais vahista

Listen with your ears, the best,

Aventa sucha manangaha

ponder with an enlightened mind.

So to rephrase the earlier question,

Is there a place for prayer in the technocratic world that we live in?

or more specifically,

What is prayer in this secular modern world?

To resolve this question, we must first understand a **basic assertion**. Any religion is made up of two major components, the doctrinal and the spiritual. The doctrines demand a diligent study of scriptural literature, through scholastic thinking, and its reduction to practice. The spiritual on the other hand must be believed through faith and attuned with the divine through a peaceful and devotional mind.

Thus logically the prayer that demands a quiet and peaceful mind is a type of thinking.

It is a thinking that is different.

Different from utilitarian thinking and, different from the hard thinking demanded by problem solving.

Prayer is a thinking, without which all other thinking, however efficient, degenerates into mere calculation.

Prayer involves a kind of thinking essential for the human fulfillment.

It is that intense and passionate thinking with mantras, that touches the sentiments of the world, that searches for the values among facts, that looks for ideals among the phenomena. Prayer is a passionate thinking that longs for realization of communion with the Ultimate Reality. **The Reality** that is open to and pervades through the world. **The Reality** that all religions recognize, by the term **GOD**.

To think of the world with longing for its perfecting, is to pray for the coming of the divine kingdom, to think of the world with rejoicing for all that is good, is the propitiation of the Creator. We note this in some of our oldest Avestan prayers.

Atchcatoivaem kyamayoim kerenaum ahum

May we be among those who make the world progressive

The hymn ends with

Hyat hathra manao bavat yathra chistish anghat maetha

For, a thinking man finds wisdom, where there is doubt. (Ys.38.9)

In our oldest and most sacred Zarathushtrian gospel of Ahuna Vairya, we recite,

Vangheush dazda manangho

Shyothnanam angheush mazda

Khshthremcha ahurai

Actions generated through Good Mind

promotes a life dedicated to Wise One.

Prayer through passionate thinking brings to life the spiritual experience of **recognition of the divinity within**. It is this experience that nurtures the sentiment of compassionate thinking. One goes out of one's self, stands alongside with others, and shares their feelings and aspirations. It is a commonly held erroneous view, that prayer is a "flight or escape from reality". In fact prayer brings alive the existential experience of "Dwelling with the Reality". Buddhist spirituality recognizes this in the meditative practice of **Brahma-vihara**.

It is through the **compassionate thinking** of prayer, that one directs the mind to radiate goodwill and perform good actions: radiate friendship, compassion, sympathy and equanimity to the family, to friends, to community and to humanity at large.

Daag Hammerskjold, the great Secretary General of UN was a deeply spiritual person. In his "MARKINGS" he says, "The longest journey is the journey inward and the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action".

Intercession in prayer is an experience, that not only sensitizes and stimulates the person worshipping to action, but that power of Mazda somehow relates to the situation. Such an encounter provides an opening into the dense physical texture of the human situation through which one feels the creative and healing power of Ahura Mazda come alive. Such an offering helps make human reality porous to the divine reality. In *Vohu Khshthra* Gatha Yasna 51.22 Asho Zarathusht not only venerates the Wise Lord but also all righteous who existed and who are alive in the following words,

Ta yazai khaish nameranish

Pairicha jasai vanta.

I shall worship them all with their own names
and shall lovingly serve them.

The other such prayers are the *Afringans*, where alive or deceased souls are remembered, and the daily prayer of *Doa Tandorosti* where names of all the friends and family are blessed.

The religion of Zarathusht imposes total responsibility of action on the individual. It is in prayer that one answers to the Lord of the spiritual world. It is in prayer that one acknowledges the responsibility that goes beyond oneself, that goes to the family, to the friends and to the community. In attuning with God, one is drawn further out of one's personality, to express commitment and responsibility to the world around. Zarathushtrians dedicate their **responsible thinking** to Mazda in the confessional prayer of *JASA*

ME AVANGAHE MAZDA, MAZDAYASNO AHMI - I am a Mazda worshipper, **MAZDAYASNO ZARATHUTRISH** – I am a Mazda worshipping Zarathushtian. Asho Zarathusht proclaimed Mazda Ahura as the ultimate Good Creator, and despite the pantheon of Yazatas in later tradition, we experience the ultimate demand and ultimate grace through Mazda to whom we offer all our prayers.

Genuine prayers are far more than the emergency signals one sends out to God in a difficult situation. True prayer is a fundamental instinct that enlivens the passionate, compassionate, responsible and grateful thinking that is deeply rooted in humanity.

This thinking manifests itself not only among true believers but also in some serious-minded individuals who do not profess to a specific religious faith. Following this faculty to pray must finally bring us to the faith in God.

Michel Novak in his book "Belief and Disbelief" Says, "It is in prayer that one comes to know God best". He also raises some very pertinent questions: whether people do not pray because they do not believe in God? Or they do not believe in God because they have given up on prayer.

These are the questions that strikes at the very core of the experience of **Spirituality**. The question we need to address here is:

How does one experiences Spirit?

or more fundamentally

What is Holy Spirit in Zarathushtrian Theology?

This is a question that many traditions have wrestled with over time immemorial. The Spirit, like many other terms in religious vocabulary, is conceived by the ancients, as an image or a picture rather than a concept. To the early civilization spirit was perhaps a stirring in the air, a breeze, or even the human breath. Several early traditions have in fact focused on the term breath as a spiritual component of the physical person.

Breath is something that is invisible, and yet a palpable characteristic that **distinguishes the living from dead**. The most profound definition of life that I have noted, is that: life is a “period in time, between the first breath of the life delivered from the uterus, to the last breath when the physical activity ceases”.

Walter Eichrod in his *Theology of the Old Testament* says,

“No wonder, then, that in the blowing of the wind and in the rhythm of human respiration the ancients detected a divine Mystery, and saw in this element in Nature, at once so near to him and yet so incomprehensible, a symbol of mysterious nearness, and activity of the Divine”.

The Older Avesta as well as later Syncretic Zoroastrian tradition makes references to a term *Ushtana* which is interpreted as, “vital life force” or “life-breath”. We note this term in the profound hymn of Ahunavaiti Gatha, Yasna 33.14. This verse is a culmination of a prayer that Asho Zarathushtra begins in Yasna 33.6 saying I am a Zaotar - an invoker. It is here that the Divine Thinker with the words “*AT RATAM ZARATHUSHTRO TANVASCHIT KHAKHAYAO USHTANEM DADAITI...*” dedicates his “physical body” *Tanvaschit* and his the “vital life – breath” *Ushtanem* to the Creator.

Life-breath is thus conceived as a part of the divine spirit present in the human. The fact is, that the mortal ceases to function when this immortal entity has left the body.

Most traditions give credence to the notion that man is “more than” his physical self, and the environment is “more than” the physical universe. If spirit is understood as that which is, “more than” physical, it is not somewhere in the world beyond, but in this *Getig* world, and even in each one of us.

The spiritual is thus seen as a dynamic reality that expresses itself in the physical. Post-Gathic Yasna 55 that sings the praises of the Gathas, in its opening line unequivocally spells out the concept, where it venerates the physical and spiritual components of a human being and dedicates them to the Gathas.

In an effort to bridge the notion of transcendence of God with that of the innate divinity in each individual, Asho Zarathushtra in his Divine wisdom, innovated a spiritual creative Will, an active principle of Ahura Mazda’s thought process - the *Spenta Mainyu*. That great modern thinker Dastur Dhalla, says, “*Spenta mainyu* symbolizes the ideal or perfect existence as conceived in thought by Ahura Mazda”. *Spenta Mainyu* is thus conceived as the supreme mental mechanism through which the Lord of Wisdom operates the phenomena of Existence. Despite, the philological definitions of *Spenta Mainyu*, such as “Good mental aspect” or “Progressive Mentality” the infinite profundity of God commands the interpretation of this entity as the Holy Spirit of Ahura Mazda.

Traditionally the **Holy Spirit of God** has been understood as the God among humanity, active in the world, as dynamic reality shaping lives and the history of humanity. The Spirit in this sense is not something other than God. Only humans among all the creations of Mazda have the ability to perceive the Spirit of Mazda within; and through that perception, recognize its boundless nature without.

It is a fact of life, that in this physical world the sheer carnal indulgence overpowers and sadly obscures this spiritual endowment. It is also true that perverted thinking of a human mind cluttered with worldly lust, contaminates the soul leading to evil consequence. **Kenneth Leach** in his book *True God* states, “we live, in the West, in an atmosphere of spiritual deprivation, and impoverishment is abundantly clear”.

So the question is; in this present day world full of wastelands of Spirit, is it possible to recognize the innate Divinity?

The answer to this must come from one’s Self. The formation of a clear vision of the Spirit of Mazda, followed by a persuasive effort to attune with the Spirit through Holy Manthra, must attain the quest for spirituality. It is in the recognition of this extra dimension that we can begin to experience first hand the thinking, feeling and willing of the humanity at large. Recognition of this extra dimension of spirit permits one to tap fully the

freedom and creativity not only, to shape ones own life but also that of the world. The spiritual dimension deepens, as one continues to transcend beyond ones self, bringing the person closer and in likeness to Ahura Mazda. As the Gatha says in the first verse of Ys 34.1

Ya Shyothana ya vachangha

ya yasna ameretatem....Mazda

The actions, words and the worship
by which you attain immortality..... Mazda

Aeshanm toi Ahura

ehma pourutemaish daste

These we offer to you Lord, as much as possible.

The words and actions of the person, experience a remarkable transformation in this **spiritual odyssey**, as a human being transcends in life to a likeness of God. Existential spirituality is a demonstration of, the recognition of the way we are with our selves, the way we are with humanity, and that depends on the way we are with our God.

Prayer is to human spirit, what food is to the body, either one, when deprived of proper nourishment, can fall victim to the evil forces of the material world, weaken **Vohu Manah** and lead to tragic consequences. The human mind in today's world is exposed to a phenomenal degree of stress and strain. These tensions often present an insurmountable barrier to obscure and blur a clear vision of the Divine Spirit. The conduct of material life often imposes stringent demands upon humans, to attain a state of purity of mind, that can recognize and attune with the Divine Spirit.

Often, a personal tragedy, a natural disaster, an event beyond comprehension of a mortal mind or the sheer tranquility and awe for Nature, can trigger the feeling of religiosity. **The instant**, which sparks that sentiment, is the moment in time, when the human mind is divorced from the diversions of the material,

and worldly thoughts, words and actions. That is the state, Zarathushtrian theology recognizes as **Spenta Aramaiti - Holy Tranquility** of mind. Humbach/Ichaporria in their recent translation of Gathas, consistently refers to **Spenta Aramaiti as Rightmindedness**. Dinkert of later tradition calls it the "Will" or "Complete Mindfulness". This is value help promote, the state of mind that is essential for attuning with the Spirit of Mazda.

While knowledge evolves the corporeal intellect, **spiritual wisdom** is attainable only to a mind, free of earthly chaos, where **Spenta Aramaiti** - prevails. It is this attribute of tranquility and devotion that aids to harmonize the human mentality with Holy Mentality. The human will with the Will of God to attain Spiritual manifestation.

Why one should fulfill this obligation to commune with God, is a question that can only find an answer if one **believes in God**. And belief in God can only evolve through persuasive efforts of **daily communion** through spiritual discipline. One penetrates this paradigm with Will and determination, to focus the intellect, to ignite that spark of Spirituality.

Converging the mentality on the sacred fire of a Zarathushti household, recognized as **Atash-e-Dadgah**, can and must attain this quest. In search of this spiritual journey one cannot emphasize more, the power of example by the adults, nor can one underestimate the Strength and Will within the four walls of a Zarathushti Family unit.

The flame of an oil lamp or of a candle, in a consecrated corner of a house, commands the same respect for the Divine Spirit, that incarnates the consecrated fire of an Aatash-e-Behram or the fiery sun above. A willful devotion for a short period, can clear thoughts, free the mind, and bring alive the consciousness of the Divine within, and without in the viable world. That is the beginning. The beginning of the fulfillment of **Vohu Manah** and the realization of **Asha Vahishta**. That is the recognition of the spiritual within that leads the way to **Khshthra Vairya**, the

kingdom of the Wise Lord in the physical world. I would like to conclude, with words of Tennyson, who said,

**“For what are men better than sheep and goats,
If knowing god, they lift not hands in prayer
Both for themselves and those who call their friends”.**

**[Presented at the 2nd Avesta conference,
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CHAPTER 4

Theology and Doctrine

VOHU MANAH: THE PRECIOUS GIFT *of* MAZDA

It was the pioneering work of Rene Descartes, in recent history, that inseminated the two-substance view of duality of mind and body. In the years that followed this basic concept fell short of answering the questions raised by the rationalistic school of Europe and Britain. With time, however, the notion lost its importance. Mind and matter came to be regarded as complexes of a common theme that are only structured differently. Spinoza rejected the Cartesian view in favour of the idea that mind and matter are finite entities of the single infinite substance: God, that is the universal essence or nature of everything that exists. These modern day philosophers were sadly thinking in a vacuum, outside the context of the theological thought that preceded them several millennia before.

A question we need to address at the outset is: what is the difference between Mind and Spirit? Referring to the Vedic and Avestan vocabulary, one readily finds that mind and spirit are varying interpretations of the words, philologically arising out of the same basic root Man -to think. For instance terms **Manah**, **Mainyu**, and **Manthran** are interpreted as mind, mentality and a thinker or thought-provoker respectively. While **Holy Manthra** are the Holy words of the scripture. In contrast, **Mainyava**, **Menog and Minoi**, also derived from the same root, are linguistic variations of what we understand as Spiritual World. It is thus clear that Mind and Spirit are interchangeable expressions, depending upon the context of their use, in human experiences.

What is Mind or Spirit? Is it possible to explain this invisible yet palpable entity? Modern science has attempted to explain this entity in terms of objective phenomena that can be quantified and measured. In their efforts to explain Mind in terms of biology, and neurology, professionals have simply uncovered their own limitations. Little worth reading has been written about it.

Human Mind and its attributes such as consciousness, will, imagination and thought, are mystical entities that cannot be apprehended by the senses. They are beyond the bounds of the physical sciences and senses. They clearly fall into the spiritual domain of abstractions. It is for the same reason that telepathy, clairvoyance and other forms of extrasensory perceptions have failed acceptance as pure sciences, because they are at the outer fringes of physical perception, in the gray area between the physical and the spiritual.

The importance of Mind and Divine Spirit was recognized, by the spiritual thinkers of the ancient times, going back more than 4000 years. The early Hindu scriptures not only speak of the importance of Mind, but, the Hindu Gathic scholars, also recognize Zarathushtra as the earliest sage of the Aryan Race. Writings of the Bhagavad Gita that forms the later part of the Mahabharata, were apparently influenced by the teachings of Zarathushtra. They speak of a meditative practice of introspection through fixation of the Mind on one's Self¹. It is the practice of communion with the Divine, that reveals the path of Righteousness².

Asho Zarathushtra recognized, for the first time in the history of mankind, that the thought process of humanity must be Good and Righteous, to be synchronous, with that of its God - Ahura Mazda. This is the principle on which rests the edifice of the Bounteous Immortals - Ameshaspenta. The foundation stone, of this pyramidal structure, is Vohu Manah **the Good Mind**.

Many astute academicians have filled pages, with the writings of what Zarathushtra says in the Gathas about Vohu Manah. The fundamental question is: how does an average human being meet the challenge, **to keep the mind GOOD as created in its ideal state**. How can humanity maintain the GOODNESS of this precious gift of Mazda, in this physical world full of imperfections?

For it is only through the Good Mind that human beings can recognize that immensely complex concept of Asha. That is the **Will of Ahura Mazda**.

For only through **recognition of Asha** that humans can transform the evil in this Getig world, to good, and bring forth the Divine rule - **Khshtira Vairya**.

This Divinely ordained Thinker, preaches that, "Spiritual life -breath implanted by the Creator in the physical human frame, provides intellect and ability to innovate in life. The Wise Lord also grants them the Freedom of expression." (Ys.31.11)

Let us pause here, to understand the above message. If we understand Ahura Mazda as the 'Supreme Intellect', the interpretation, that "the Creator has provided intellect and ability of conception" clearly conveys to us that God has gifted humanity with a part of His Self. To put it in simple terms, the Divine essence of God is within us. We have the obligation to learn to recognize that innate Divinity. For only through recognition of the Divine within, that humans can ascend to the next step of the pyramid to relate to the Divinity in the Universe, and get in closer proximity with God. In that sense, the human body is the abode of Divinity. This clearly imposes a heavy accountability, to keep this House of Divinity Pure and Good and the place to start is the **HUMAN MIND**.

So how can one start to keep the Mind, Good? To keep it free from contamination and flaws of this imperfect world? Asho Zarathusht elaborates several attributes of that personification of Wisdom, we know as Ahura Mazda. One of these characteristics value is **Spenta Aramaiti**.

The concept of **Aramaiti**, has been interpreted, by philologists as devotion, serenity or tranquility³. Dinkert explains this abstraction as the "Will or Complete Mindfulness"⁴. Humbach refers to it as Right-Mindedness⁵. In simple term **Spenta Aramaiti** is the devotional force, that promotes the Holy peaceful state of mind, in the compassionate thinking of prayers, in words and in actions. This attribute is best integrated in daily life by communion with a peaceful Mind through invocations. It is only in this tranquil state, that the **Human Spirit** can be free of the fetters of material and carnal instincts. This is the state that

preserves Vohu Manah, in its ideal form to permit the spiritual manifestation, of the recognition of the innate Divinity.

This is the state of mind that harmonizes:

The Human mentality with the Spenta Mainyu, the Holy Mentality,

The Human will with the Will of God.

Asho Zarathusht in his quest for piety proclaims:

Ys. 28.3..."I shall praise the Wise Lord and those for whom Aramaiti promotes the Divine dominion"

Ys.32.2..."We have chosen your Spenta Aramaiti, May it be ours"

Ys.34.9..."The evil ones lack the Good Mind for they have abandoned Spenta Aramaiti"

Ys.34.10..."The Spenta Aramaiti is the companion and at the root of Righteousness..."

Ys.34.11..."The Holy Aramaiti promotes the Good Mind and Asha that results in Wholeness and Immortality that serves the Wise Lord"

Ys.47.1..."The Wise One in rule is the Lord through Aramaiti"

These are just a few of the Gathic expressions that clearly demonstrate, that **Good thinking** can only proceed from a mind where Holy Aramaiti prevails. That is the value that permits one to commune with, to perceive, the innate Reality and relate with the omnipresence of Ahura Mazda without. This **oneness** of the spiritual with the physical can only become evident through calm and peaceful Vohu Manah.

It is in the recognition of this attunement, that Vohu Manah **reveals the Path of Asha**, that unlocks the doors to Khshtira Vairya -the Divine Rule - in this Getig world.

References:

1. Bhagvad Gita 6.25
2. Bhagvad Gita.18.33
3. Farhang Mehr, The Zoroastrian tradition, pg 27
4. Dinkert, Bk.IX, Ch.12.25, 31.17, 43.2, 60.4
5. Humbach/Ichaporia, The Heritage of Zarathushtra, pg 23, 31, 36, 47, 49

TWIN MAINYUS – THE GATHIC CONCEPT

The doctrine of the Twin Mainyus, is the seminal notion that serves as a nucleus for the genesis of the concept of dualism in Zarathushtrian religion. Basically humanity perceives the structured world in binary opposites. The most profound universal opposites among the human experiences are those of light and darkness. Religious and spiritual traditions have historically associated **light with goodness**, and **darkness with the emanation of evil**. One finds this association starting with the Vedic era (in Upanishad 4.37), through the Hebrew Bible as in Ge.3, Ps.27.1, Is 2.5 ; through Chinese religious traditions, all the way to modern Christianity in the gospel of John 8.12.

Syncretic Zarathushtrian tradition, that evolved out of the early Gathic religion, is no exception to this universal phenomenon. Our later tradition believes in a constant lock of a **cosmic combat** between the two primal principles, Ahura Mazda, representing light and, Angra Mainyu representing darkness.

The specificity of the Gathic dualism in the Zarathushtrian faith, as opposed to the syncretic viewpoint, resides in ethical conduct, in contrast with the opposite ontological principles. It is therefore important to examine, in some depth, the Gathic scriptures, to attempt and understand the thinking of the prophet on this issue. Prophet Zarathushtra, in that early dawn of civilization, appears to sense the basic universal concept of the two opposites at the very core, as the absolute focus, that moulds human conduct, namely: the human mind. The mind, that unique metaphysical entity, gifted by the creator to humans, is the one that has the ability to recognize and choose between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong. Doctrinally speaking, humans are endowed with that most important divine attribute of the creator, Vohu Manah.

Prophet Zarathushtra, in his perception of the two opposing primal principles, appropriately defines them as Mainyus. The

term finds its derivation from the av. root 'man', meaning to **think**.

In Ys.30.2 of the Ahunavaiti Gatha, prophet addresses the entire humanity with the words

Sraota geush ais vahista

Listen with your ears, the best,

Aventa Sucha Managha

Ponder with an enlightened mind,

Averenao vichthya

The teaching of your choice.

Narem narem khakhayai tunye.

Each human being for oneself.

In the very next verse (Ys.30.3) he speaks of what is the best.

At ta maniyu pouruye ya yema

In the beginning two mental aspects, which are **twins**.

Khafna asrvatem manahi-cha vachahi-cha shyaothnoi

Mutually disclosed themselves in thoughts, words, and deeds

Hi vahyo aakhem-cha aos-chaa

The one of them as the better and the other bad.

The key word of importance in this verse is that the two mentalities are **twin** (*yema*) suggesting the **common source** of their origin. What could be the Best common source for the two opposing mentalities? A rational inference from this question has to be **the human mind**. The prophet ends this verse by referring to the choice between them by the intellectuals and the ignorant.

In the subsequent verse (Ys.30.4) the prophet articulates the genesis of existence through these two mental aspects.

Atta-cha hyat ta hem mainyu jasaetem

When these two mentalities came together

Paourvim dazde gaem-cha ajiaitim-cha

At the very beginning they created life and non-living

The prophet continues, "...till the end of time when there will be the worst state of mind for the deceitful and for the righteous the best state (meaning happiness) of mind".

The most crucial terms here that need to be understood are *Gaemcha* and *Ajiaitimcha*. Many translations, western as well as Zarathushtrian, gloss over these together as life and not-life or life and death. At the outset, the term *gaem* appears twice in the Gatha (Ys.30.2, 43.1) and is derived from *Gaya* meaning life. So philologically there appears to be no discrepancy with the translation of *Gaemcha* as life.

There is, however, a clear discrepancy with the translation of the term *Ajiaitimcha*. One can outline clear rationale why 'not-life' or 'death' are unsuitable.

Firstly, a direct negative of *Gaemcha* would be *Agaemcha* meaning not-life, but the Prophet does not use that term.

Secondly the Avestan term for death is derived from the verb '*mar*' meaning to kill. The derivative *Mareta* or *Maretan* (as in *Gayo Maretan*) referring to mortal, implies subject to dying. The actual word for death is *Merethyu* (Ys 53.8), and is used very sparingly - only once- in the Gathas. Thus the translation as death seems clearly incompatible.

Thirdly the term *jiaiti* is derived from *jvas* meaning living. This has been used at least 8 to 9 times (Ys 31.15, 32.5, 32.11, 32.12, 32.15, 33.10, 46.4, 46.8, 53.9) in association with livelihood and way of life. Thus the proper and most suitable translation for the word *ajiaitimcha* should be non-living, or a life not worth living.

Putting all this together we arrive at a paradox, which says, "at the beginning two mental aspects came together to create life and non-living". How do we decipher it?

An examination of Ys 30 clearly reveals:

(a) That verses 2-6 of this Yasna are focused on the mind, thinking, and choice.

(b) The **entire corpus** of the hymn is **directed to humanity** at large.

(c) The Prophet also speaks of humanity, as belonging to the **opposing classes**. One of *ashavan* -the righteous- and *dregvatam* (Ys 30.4)- the wicked- or *hudaongho* the intellectuals, in contrast to *duzdaonghao* (Ys 30.3), the ignorant.

Considering these factors, we can rationalize, that the phrase "creation of life and non-living" must imply that "the better mentality creates a life following the path of Asha while the bad one generates a way of life not worth living". Theologically therefore, *Spenta Mainyu* leads to a life of righteousness while the other Mainyu, (as it is not directly named in the Gathas) generates a worthless way of life.

In summary the Prophet presents:

1) A common source, the human mind, for the two mentalities;

2) That humanity has to choose between them;

3) The better mental aspect leads to a life in consonance with Asha, the bad one generates a life not worth living.

With this as the functions of the two mentalities, let us examine **the** major difference between the Gathic Doctrine and its evolution in the Syncretic religion. In the later tradition the two mainyu enjoy a coequal status, that is, unequivocally, not the case in the Gathas. We note in Ys 30.6 and 7 the Prophet clearly elaborates what the proper choice of humanity should be. He stresses, that "those who made the choice of the "bad mentality"

followed wrath, hatred, and afflicted human existence while those who chose the "better mentality" shall survive the final judgment". In keeping with this, we note that the term *Spenta Mainyu* -selfless or progressive mentality- appears in the Gathas 16 times. In contrast, the other term *Angra Mainyu*, as such, is absent in the Gathas. (Only once in a linguistically modified form the term *Akashcha-mainyu* occurs in Ys. 32.5).

Taking this in context with the two key attributes of the Creator, *Vohu Mano* (good mind) and *Asha Vahishta* (best righteousness) the Prophet proclaims to humanity that only by choosing *Spenta Mainyu* - the Holy or progressive mentality, - will it succeed in the temporal world, to evolve the good mind that can recognize the immutable law of nature vested in the concept of Supreme Righteousness. Zarathushtra thus clearly defines the importance of *Spenta Mainyu* -the better way of thinking over the bad one.

So, what were the factors that caused this fundamentally reflective dualistic thought to undergo profound transformation with time? As we approach the Younger Avestan era we see the religion of Zarathushtra gradually spreading westward, from its source of origin in northeastern Iran. With this, the religion encountered the early, organized prescriptive faith of Mesopotamian civilization, controlled by that median tribe - the Magi. This powerful priesthood adopted and accepted the teachings of Zarathushtra. In doing so the Magi ensured the transmission and perpetuation of the religion through the entire Iranian world of the time. However, there was a heavy price tag associated with this. This powerful priesthood concomitantly elected to make some profound changes in the philosophical, theological and ritualistic aspects of the Gathic religion, to satisfy their need, for aspiration for power. Many pre-zarathushtrian divinities and rituals were reincorporated in the Gathic religion during this period. The pantheon of Yazatas, non-existent in the Gathas, evolved through the incorporation of Verethraghana, Tishtriya, Mithra, and Ardevi Sura Anahita in this era. The pre-

Zarathushtrian Haoma ceremony could very well have reentered the Yasna ritual at this time.

Among the most significant reinterpretation introduced by the Magi was in the realm of the Doctrine of Twin Mainyus. The Magi, who adopted the religion centuries later, reduced this philosophically reflective concept of ethical duality into a radical one. As Prof. Fox (Fox D. A. J. Am. Acad. Rel. 1967, 35, 133) writes, "Magi added a number of innovations to Zoroastrianism none more significant than their clear-cut rigid dualism in the concept of a deity". They evolved Zurvan -the divinity of time - as the supreme deity, and explained the Twin Mainyu as Ahura Mazda and *Angra Mainyu* emanating from Zurvan. Ahura Mazda, the supreme Gathic divinity, was, thus, reduced to an issue of Zurvan coequal with its adversary. This concept became deeply rooted with time in the evolution of the syncretic Zarathushtrian faith. Even though the reverence to Zurvan has receded with time, the coequal nature of the two mainyus has remained an accepted misconception.

In the texts of the Younger Avesta, particularly in many of the Yashts and in some of the later Yasnas (Yt.13.71,77; Ys 61.2:), the term *Angra Mainyu* was profusely quoted as the demonic spirit responsible for the evil creation. We note this nowhere more pronounced than in Videvdat or Vendidad, (Vd. 19.1, 6, 4). In contrast with the Gathas, where Zarathushtra at no time, refers to a total compartmentalization of creation into two groups; chapter one of Videvdat - a text written circa 2nd century C.E.(almost 1800 years after the time of the prophet) - enlists all the good creation as that of Ahura Mazda against the entire counter creation of *Anra Mainyu*.

The thinking of the Greek philosophers was also highly influenced by the profound re-mythologisation of the Gathic faith by the Magi. This has left a great paucity of the comprehension of the Gathic teaching. As Gerschewitz mentions (Gerschewitz I., Jour. Near Eastern Study 1964, 23, 12) the Greek philosophers of 4th century B.C.E. understood Zarathushtrian faith as a religion of *Oromazdes* and *Areimanios* the two gods, as depicted by the

Magian doctrines. This becomes evident from their writings. For example, Plutarch addresses prophet Zarathushtra as "Zoroaster the magus". According to Theopompos (400 B.C.E.) the two contrasting divinities were alternatively supreme for three millennia each, after which time they are in deep conflict for the next three thousand years, clearly a non-Gathic concept of the Younger Avestan era. Diogenes Laertius quotes Aristotle saying, "...magi are more ancient even than the Egyptians, and according to them there are two first principles ...one called Zeus and Oromasdes and the other Hades and Areimanios" (M. Boyce, History of Zoroastrianism Vol. II, p 281). These expressions have left a profound imprint of **misconceptions of Ethical Dualism** on the Gathic faith even to this day.

As we approach the Pahlavi era the contrast of the Avestan dualistic concept is even more strongly magnified. The efforts of the ninth century theologian Mardanfarrokh -i - Ohrmazddadan, the author of **Shikand Gumanig Vijar**, a profoundly committed dualist, brings the subject to a stage of consummation. The author focuses on the basic premise that Ahura Mazda is All-good and under no circumstances can he be responsible for the creation of evil.

If evil arises from Him that would clearly make Him imperfect and therefore unworthy of worship by the human. This is extensively elaborated in Ch. 11 of his treatise (SGV, Ch. 11, 13-16, 103-11). It must be realized that Mardanfarrokh is clearly developing on the theme, that had by 9th century C.E., become one of the central tenets of the faith, viz: the struggle between the good and the evil symbolized by Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu.

The author is so profoundly obsessed with evil, that he presupposes it to be a creation of a spirit, and ignores entirely the possibility of it, arising from the bad thoughts, bad words, and bad deeds through the wrong choices made by humanity.

The Gathic concept of Twin Mainyus demands a critical evaluation of the truth embedded in the message of the Prophet. Taken in context with the notion of choice, that humans have to

make in this temporal existence, it presents a tenet that defines the responsibility of humanity to Creation.

It is under the influence of the dynamic Iranian cultures, that the Gathic concept of the "**Two mainyu that came together, to create the life and non-living**" (Ys.30.4) was all but forgotten. The notion elaborated by Zarathushtra, that it is only by choosing one or the other mentality, that humanity (as well as divinity) will be directed to good or evil, was completely overshadowed. Gathic dualism coupled with Vohu Manah - the Good Mind, and Asha Vahishta, the absolute Truth, that presents a view of the control by, and responsibilities of, humanity within the creation has thus become ill-defined with time.

Today as we stand on the threshold of the 21st century, it is crucial for us to make a concerted effort to understand what has happened in the long and rich history of our faith. What has caused the Gathic concepts such as that of the Twin Mainyus, of the divine Fire of Ahura Mazda, to undergo this profound erosion? It is absolutely essential that we bring this to the attention of our youth - the generation that will assume the responsibility of perpetuation of our faith in the next century. It is imperative that we build the bridge of knowledge that spans the gap, so that the off-spring of this generation is better equipped to handle the problems of perpetuation than the generation gone-by.

It is thus evident, that the Ethical Dualism of the Gathas resides in close proximity with choice made by humanity through the exercise of Freewill. To make the perfect choice of it's own Freewill is the plane of evolution that will be synchronous with the beginning of **Farshokereti (Ys 34.13)** - the resurrection of absolute perfection.

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THE CONCEPT of ARMAITI

Amesha Spentas are the flagship of the Zarathushtrian values that all humans must imbue. *Aramaiti* among them stands out as the most mysterious one to interpret.

Dr. Abreu has used serenity and tranquility as the guideline to explain *Aramaiti* in his essay; a discourse that is mainly directed towards ethical management of an organization. As a corollary, the theme is worthy of broadening to portray all humans as the managers and the world as the organization.

It is an undisputed fact that tempers, fear, anxiety, pressures from within and without, mentioned in the essay, abound not only in an organization but also in the material world at large. These chaotic forces continuously inflict upon *Vohu Manah*, -that invaluable Gift of Mazda - to corrupt it. This is more true-to-life today, than it was some three thousand seven hundred years ago when Zarathushtra, in his innate wisdom, conceived the pantheon of these values as **Bounteous Immortals**. It is prudent to acknowledge that the great Manthran incorporated *Spenta Aramaiti* in the pantheon of these precious attributes, as a sanctuary to turn to, in order to refresh and renovate (*Ferashem Kerenaun*) the Mind, and free it from the vices and degeneracy that surrounds it. It is only through constant renewal from within, that humans can maintain the mind, **Good -Vohu** - and be "among those who shall heal and refresh Life in this world" (Ys 30.9, song 3.9).

Some, in the scholastic community, have consistently referred to *Aramaiti* as 'Right-mindedness' (Humbach and Ichaporia, *The Heritage of Zarathushtra*, e.g. pg 23, 31, 36, 47, 49). Even the later Zarathushtrian text of Dinkert (Dinkert, Bk.IX, Ch 12.25, 31.17, 43.2, 60.4) interprets *Aramaiti* as "Complete Mindfulness" or "the Will". Dr. Abreu has elaborated holy or progressive *Aramaiti* as "a state of Mind that comes from within". It is through inner peace and tranquility, through communion with

the Divine, that one seeks for Right-mindedness. This frequent renewal of *Vohu Manah* can come through meditation, be it silent or in the form of invocation of a Holy Mantra. It is through *Aramaiti* that we attain, compassionate thinking, that translates into gracious words and actions.

This is the state of Mind that harmonizes:

The Human mentality with the Spenta Mainyu, the Holy Mentality,

The Human will with the Will of God.

Asho Zarathusht in his quest for piety proclaims:

Ys. 32.2 (song 5.2)... "We have chosen your Spenta Aramaiti, May it be ours"

Ys. 34.11 (song 7.11)... "The Holy Aramaiti promotes the Good Mind and Asha that results in Wholeness and Immortality that serves the Wise Lord"

Early traditions have recognized the importance of a clear and peaceful Mind that Asho Zarathusht typifies as *Vohu Manah*. For example Bhagavad Gita, a Hindu scripture of a timeline in the vicinity of the era of Zarathushtra, tells us:

"Little by little through practice, he should gain tranquility by means of purified reason, and fixing his mind on the Self thinking of nothing else. **Bhagavad Gita (6,25)**

"The unwavering firmness by which through yoga one controls the functions of Mind, life breath, senses, that firmness...is *satvic*." **Bhagavad Gita (18.33)**

Over a millennium after Zarathushtra, Buddhism declared the assertiveness of the importance of peace and tranquility of Mind and its attainment through Transcendental Meditation. We are at the point in time, where researchers in the medical profession are beginning to recognize the importance of the **right-mindedness, serenity, piety** that Zarathushtrian theology recognize as *Spenta Aramaiti*.

Herbert Benson, a researcher at Harvard Medical School, and founder of Mind/body Medical Institute at Boston's Deaconess Hospital in his recent book, "Timeless Healing" speaks of **Relaxation Response**. This response, he defines as the opposite of the well-known fight-or-flight response. In a two-step process for eliciting the Relaxation Response he says, "you need to repeat a word, sound, prayer, phrase, or muscular activity. And when common everyday thoughts intrude on your focus, passively disregard them and return to your repetition" (H.Benson, Timeless Healing, pg 133-134). In describing the results of the relaxation response Dr. Benson tells us, "people emerge from mental focusing with clearer Mind and sharper thoughts". He has obtained some remarkable healing effects through this response, however that is beyond the scope of this discussion and can make the subject of a separate paper.

From the vantage point of Zarathushtrian theology, Dr. Benson's 'Relaxation Response' is just another way of refreshing and renovating Vohu Manah through the practice of *Spenta Aramaiti*. Dr. Benson says, "Our bodies are engaged in a kind of tug-of-war, stress on one end of the rope and relaxation at the other". The word 'body' in the above statement can be conveniently replaced with 'Mind' and 'stress and relaxation' as epithet for the two fundamental principles to choose from, propounded by Asho Zarathusht (Ys 30.1,2; song 3.1,2), and it will reflect the truth of the ethical dualism of the Gathas, to which the human mind is continuously subjected.

Zarathushtrian theology strictly denies an ascetic life, however a short period spent to attain **Right-mindedness** (*Spenta Aramaiti*) before starting of the worldly chores, can reap immense returns during the passage of day. It can elevate the *Vohu Manah* to *Vahishta Manangha -Best thinking-* which must enlighten the Path to *Asha Vahishta -Best Truth-* and lead to the generation of **Rule of Wisdom - Khshthra Vairya**. These are the values that in turn can earn the reward of perfect harmony of the physical (body) and spiritual (mind) to bring forth the **Wholeness, and**

Completeness of *Haurvatat* to leave an everlasting legacy of *Ameretat*.

Humans, in the interest of unconditional love and compassion for the rest of the creation, have an obligation to maintain the precious gift of *Vohu Manah* – Good, and make it the Best, in the spirit of Benevolence of the Creator. To be in harmony with one's Self –*the Divinity-* within, is primal, in order to be in concordance with the creation without. It is upto entire humanity to fulfill that commitment; as Dina McIntyre has said, (D. McIntyre, An Introduction to Gathas of Zarathushtra No. 4, pg 1,) by **"Making it Happen."**

With Love and Enlightenment of Mazda to all.

SACRED FIRE *and* WORSHIP OF MAZDA

In the history of the religion of Zarathusht, the cult of the Temple Fire came into being in the Achaemenian era around the middle of the 5th century B.C., more than a millennium after the time of the Prophet. So how did the early devotees of religion and followers of Asho Zarathusht practice their religiosity? They were fully aware of the Spiritual importance of Fire from the words of the Prophet. They had in their own domicile "The Hearth Fire" - a sacred enclosure - (see, Haptanhaiti Ys 36.1,2) that was kept clean and pure. Their devotional prayers of daily communion were offered in front of that fire, which they conceived as the incarnation of Mazda Ahura.

We have perhaps come around a whole circle. Today many people are intellectually beginning to understand the words of the prophet. It would only be fitting to translate this comprehension into spiritual reality. Revival of the practice of having a consecrated fire (oil lamp or candle) burning in a sacred corner of the house, can provide a perfect location to practice daily meditation through the kusti prayers. On festive occasions and for memorial prayers, local Dar-e-Mehrs are accessible for the performance of collective rituals.

The notion of not having a consecrated Temple Fires is attractive on many counts. Firstly, it will save significant time and energy needed to locate suitable real estate. Secondly, it avoids long-term maintenance of the building. Thirdly, it also overcomes the problem of finding suitable person/persons in the vicinity to provide services. Finally, the financial resources redeemed, may be very efficiently utilized to alleviate the education and healthcare needs of mankind in general and of deserving Zarathushties in particular. The last action will truly reflect the practice of the religion to refresh and renovate the world in the true sense.

God does not demand such places of grandeur, but people do. As Cicero said, "Zarathushtrians considered it wrong to keep

shut up within walls, the God, whose dwelling place is the whole world." Undertaking such projects will undoubtedly serve the agenda and satisfy the ego of some individuals. In contrast, avoiding them will most importantly eliminate that acrimonious debate as to who can and cannot have access to these places of worship removing a major divisive factor. Of course, if India is the best place to consecrate such Temple Fires they can continue doing that. However with the decline of the Zarathushti population there, in the near future there will be more historic relics of Fire Temples in India than devotees.

Who can/cannot commune in front of consecrated Fire?

This is a question that needs to be addressed, regardless of whether we have consecrated places of worship or not. An important corollary, which follows from it, is who is/is not a Zarathushti soul?

The answer to these questions depends on ones conception of what Ahura Mazda is, and how extensive is the Divine dominion? In general, Zarathushtra in the Gathas recognizes Ahura Mazda as the creator not only of the world, but of the universe (Ys 44). This should necessarily cover all creations including all races of mankind. Indeed in the ending *khshnuman* of every single Yasht and all the Niyashes in KHORDEH AVESTA we recite:

Ahura Mazda khodae avazunie murdum

Mardum sardegan, Hama sardegan

Hambayeshte vehan

Ahura Mazda, Lord beneficent to mankind

and TO ALL RACES OF MANKIND

and to the entire creation of the world.

This clearly explains, that all human beings are the creation of Ahura Mazda irrespective of their religious belief. The venerated sacred fire is an incarnation of Ahura Mazda in this

CREATION *in* ZARTHUSTI TRADITION

physical world. Why then can human beings, who are dedicated to the teachings of Asho Zarathusht, but born NOT of Zarathushti parentage, not commune, in front of a representation of the Wise Lord -Ahura Mazda - who is responsible for their creation?

Nowhere, in the Gathic scriptures or Avestan texts of later origin including Khordeh Avesta, do we learn about the soul of a Zarathushti being created different from those of human beings of a different Faith. At **no place in any of our prayers** do we notice that the Wise Lord is discriminatory in the creation of humans, causing the souls of the followers of the "First Prophet of mankind" to be different.

Yasna 55 dedicates all the physical and spiritual elements of human beings **without any discrimination**, to the Gathic hymns, implying the equality of all humans.

Atash Niyasht (Ys 62) verse 9, that starts with the words: *Aat yezi-she aem baraiti* tells us that, "if anyone who offers, with true devotion, fuel or bundle of fragrant dried twigs, to the Fire of Mazda, will receive blessings from the Holy Fire." There is **no discrimination implied** in these profound verses. It does not say, "if any born Zarathushti offers.....".

It is therefore not only difficult to comprehend, but extremely confusing to the follower of Zarathushti Faith, when people speak of disintegration of "guiding light of a soul", of a person of non-Zarathushti parentage, in front of a consecrated Fire. If Ahura Mazda, the God of Zarathushtra, is the creator of entire humanity, the very existence of the notion of non-Zarathushti souls is open to question. To think that the vision of a non-Zarathushti soul will in anyway vitiate the consecrated fire is to denigrate the power and strength of that incarnation of Mazda. A **consecrated Fire** demands the highest reverence, for it has the potency, and the **strength to disseminate the enlightenment of Ahura Mazda** and no human of ANY GENEALOGY can take that away from it.

Creation Myths have pervaded through societies over many millennia and they help shape the life experiences individually and collectively. The first known accounts of the creation are found in the mythology of the early civilization of Sumaria and Babylonia. The Creation Story as any other doctrinal topic of Zarathushtrian tradition must emanate from the Gathic Hymns. Early in the Yasna (Ys 29.1,2) we see references to the Soul of the Universe (interpreted by some scholars as "soul of the Cow"), which is a clear reference to the temporal world. In Yasna 44 (verses 3-7) the Prophet, in a rhetorical manner inquires about various aspects of the physical and moral nature of the world and recognizes (Ys 44.7) Ahura Mazda as the creator of the entire Universe including light and darkness (Ys 44.5).

Zarathushtra also makes a clear reference to a dual existence, that of the material, and the spiritual or mental in Ys 28.2. This has led to the theology of the existence of Mainyava (Ph. Menog) - the perfect, absolute Divine world which is beyond defilement, and the temporal world Gaethya (Ph. Getig) - the world that is actuality, the one we live in, the one that is corrupted. The cause of this deterioration of the hitherto perfect material creation is the **single most majestic** creation of Mazda: the HUMAN. It is this creation that is gifted with the GOOD MIND, with the FREEDOM to THINK, CHOOSE and express choice. It is in the exercise of this FREEDOM that humans have fallen far short of the teachings of the Prophet, and their undesirable choices have corrupted the world of actuality. The two worlds together make up the complete creation. They represent the spiritual and the physical counterparts of the universe.

This in Zarathushtrian Faith represents a form of cosmic dualism of the type later elaborated by Plato through his concept of the "World of immutable Ideas" and the "World of Sense". It is

important to note that Zarathushtra follows up the concept of Mainyava and Gaethya with the mention of the *Cinvato Peretu* - the Bridge of the Separator or Sorter (Ys 46.10,11; 51.13). It is here that the Judgment of the Gathic theology, of Reward for the righteous and Retribution for the deceitful, will be made. It is clearly apparent that this is the concept that bridges the spiritual and the corporeal existence, and it is here that the consequence of actions is experienced by the individual soul - the spiritual counter part of the body - as it encounters the Abode of Song (Ys 46.10, 45.8, 51.15) or House of Wrong (Ys 46.11, 49.11, 51.14). This is the stage where *Daena*, the conscience of the physical personality reveals itself to recap the lifetime of the individual and to harvest the fruits of actions of the personality.

We have in this world of actuality, the images of the perfect creations of Ahura Mazda, viz., the majesty of open skies (heavens and luminaries), the lofty mountains (earth), the deep seas (water), the dense forests (plant kingdom), and the wildlife (animal kingdom). All these creations exist in complete harmony complying with the immutable law of Nature. Yasna Haptanhaiti (Ys 37 -39) is dedicated to the reverence and veneration to Ahura Mazda and his creations.

The most highly evolved creation - mankind - mentioned above, is uniquely endowed with the essence of Mazda's own attributes, and is directed to follow his Holy and Progressive Mentality - *Spenta Mainyu*. They are endowed with the ability to be the guardian of all the other creations, to revere them, to protect them from defilement, never to abuse them with excess or diminish them for greed. This is an ecological strand that makes Zarathushtrian tradition, the first one, to hold Creation - **the Ecosystem of the Creator** - as sacred. More recently this view has also been expressed by Christian theologians. C. S. McCoy in his essay "Creation and Covenant" (Covenant for New Creation, Pub. Orbis Books, 1991) quoting Jeremiah (33.20-25) says, "God makes covenant in creation with the whole of the Natural order. Humanity is created within the same covenant of creation". Zarathushtrian tradition holds human beings as the co-workers of

the Creator, and steward of the Creation, as Zarathushtra says: (Ys 30.9) "May we be among those who rejuvenates this world".

The later Zarathushtrian text of the Pahlavi era, Bundehisn - Primal Creation - says (3.24, B.T.Anklesaria) "the Fravahrs of man saw, by means of the Wisdom of all knowledge, the evil that would arrive in the material world on account of the wicked Ahriman, and the final inoffensiveness of the Adversary; and they agreed to go to the material world, in-order-to become perfect and deathless again, in the final material-life, upto eternity and eternal-progress". Based on this rationale humanity is endowed with Freedom of Choice, the choice between the two Primal Mainy's mentioned in Ys 30.3. This is more clearly elaborated in Ys 31.11 where it says: "Wise one, in the beginning, by your Mind, you fashioned for us thinking creatures, conception and intentions, put life in that physical framework whereby Human can make a choice through freewill".

Humanity is therefore clearly unique, in that it is a synthesis of temporal and eternal, of finite and infinite and has immanent within it the power of creation and destruction that operates in the entire universe. Unfortunately, despite this extraordinary benefaction of the Creator, we often note, that humans are ignorant of the potential, either of their immense strength or, their weaknesses. This has brought Creation to its present status. As Jehovah says in the Hebrew Scriptures (Hosea 6.7): "Ephraim and Judah themselves like earthling man have overstepped the covenant. There is where they have dealt treacherously with me". Humanity has clearly strayed away from the trust invested in it by the Creator.

The Zarathushtrian creation story of the later evolved Middle Persian and Pahlavi era has resulted from significant re-mythologizing. Bundahisn written sometime in sixth century C.E. speaks (Bd. Ia.6-13 B.T. Ankleseria.) of the creation of sky, water, earth, plants, animals and human in vivid terms. Furthermore it also assigns the period (Bd. Ia.14-21, B.T.Ankleseria.) in days and provides the names of the days over which each of these creations

came into existence, with precise name of the days by Zarathushtrian religious **Calendar of Fasal**.

We are told:

“ **First** He created the Sky, in forty days, from Roz Hormazd of Mah Fravardin to Roz Aban of Mah Ardibehesht. He rested for five days” these are the days of **Gahanbar Maidyo-zerem**.

Secondly He created the water in fifty-five days, from Roz Meher of Mah Ardibehesht to Roz Aban of Mah Tir; He rested for five days of **Gahanbar Maidyo-shem**.

Thirdly He produced the Earth in seventy days from day Meher of Mah Tir to day Ashishwangah of Mah Shehrever. He rested for five days of **Gahanbar Paitishaya**.

Fourthly He produced the trees in twenty five days from Roz Hormuzd to Roz Ashishwangah of Mah Meher, He rested for five days of **Gahanbar Ayathrem**.

Fifthly He brought forth the beneficent-animals in seventy five days from Roz Hormuzd of Mah Aban to day Dae-pe-mehr of Mah Dae; He rested for five days of **Gahanbar Maidyarem**.

Sixthly He produced Man-that is Gayo-Maretan in seventy days from day Ram of Mah Dae to Aneran of Mah Spendarmad; He rested for five days of **Gahanbar Hamaspathmaidya**.”

It is on this basis, that the High festivals of Gahanbars are fixed in our annual cycle, which displays the starting of the year on the day of the vernal equinox. This is then followed by the High Festivals of the middle of spring -**Maidyo-zerem**, middle of summer -**Maidyo-shem**, harvest time -**Paitishaya**, returning home -**Ayathrem** , middle of winter -**Maidyarem**, and the time of equal Path -**Hamaspathmaidya**.

The eco-system we live in today is continuously devastated and defiled. Acid rain, the greenhouse effect, the depletion of the ozone layer, accelerated deforestation of the plant kingdom, rapid exploitation of our non-renewable resources, spills and burning of

millions of gallons of oil endangering plant and animal wildlife, are but a few examples of the havoc inflicted upon the creation today. In Yasna 29.10 we read the soul of Universe praying, “ Grant ye o Lord, to these mortals strength and power through Righteousness and Good mind, by means of which one shall create peace and tranquility”. If only Humans can listen to the cry of Geush Urva (soul of the universe) today, it would be no different from that at the time when prophet Zarathushtra lived. It is thus entirely logical to conclude that **the Universal Message** of our beloved prophet is **as relevant today** as it was 3700 years ago **when he first proclaimed it**.

CONSECRATED FIRE and CREMATION

It was extremely disheartening and denigrating to see that the responses of learned Dasturs to the plea for guidance forwarded by the community concerning the severe crisis related to *Dokhmenashini*. While we fully respect the position of the Dasturs as custodian of the Zarathustrian Faith, we would value their guidance in elaborating their rationale on the importance of the traditional mode of disposal to other alternatives.

There is no question in my mind, that “Natural *Dokhmenashini*” is perhaps the best mode of disposal of the putrefying matter, when the *Dokhma* towers are located in the desolated wilderness **away from civilization**. It is also clear that Khorshed Nigirishna is without a doubt the ideal mode of cleansing the decomposing organic matter, when an **abundance of sun’s rays are accessible** in the elevated deserted areas.

It must be assumed, that when the estates, on which the *Dokhma* towers were constructed centuries ago, in Bombay, Banglore, Calcutta, Poona and other places, they were significantly distant from civilization in the wilderness. Then, they served their purpose. Time however, does not stand still, even for the oldest tradition and the system today is atrociously inadequate for several reasons: 1) Surrounded by advancing civilization. 2) Changing weather conditions. 3) Depletion of scavenger birds. 4) Shortage of *nassessalars*, and last but not the least, 5) Shortage of funds.

The modalities suggested to strengthen the “venerated time tested system” are (a) Harnessing, solar energy to expedite dehydration. (b) Improve air quality control through the use of ozone gas. (c) Generating a species of microbes using spray of herbal composition; and (d) Breeding vultures in captivity in the aviaries. The colossal inadequacies of, all these modes of

‘strengthening’ has been discussed eminently by Dr. M. F. Disawalla (Readers’ Forum, Parsiana, February 2000, August 2000). He also suggested, “The only logical solution is to erect a modern electric crematorium .at Doongerwadi”. The idea is entirely rational and worthy of discussion from the vantage point of Zarathushtrian theology.

Mention of Fire in the Gathas of Zarathushtra has brought immense sanctity to this element of Nature that was already used in religious rites, long before the time of the Prophet. In fact Asho Zarathust elevated this element, second only to his God Ahura Mazda, and regarded the consecrated Fire as an incarnation of Mazda in the physical world. This we recognize in the metaphor of *Athro Ahuremazdao Puthre* in the liturgy of Atash Niyesh. The liturgy clearly distinguishes the three grades of fires that are worthy of worship viz., Athash-e-Behram, Athash-e-Aderan and Athash-e-Dadgah. These are the consecrated fires that are sanctified through prayer rituals and are elevated to usher in them the credence of the embodiment of Ahura Mazda. Their authenticity must be completely preserved to avoid their pollution in any way. They are the very representation of Absolute Purity and Absolute Righteousness, the very implication of the concept of Asha in the physical. They command spiritual respect in the sacred spaces where they are enthroned.

The generalization that, “fire is sacred in Zarathushtrian religion” and that act of cremation is a desecration of the Holy Fire is an erroneous notion that is grossly overrated and demands understanding. It is a recorded history that fat from sacrificed animals, and pieces of omentum, together with dry wood, was a customary *Zaothra* (offering) made to the hearth fire to keep it aglow (Boyce, History of Zoroastrianism Volume I, pg 153-155). It must be understood, that the fire, outside of Zarathushtrian theology, by its very nature is a preserver and a destroyer. It can destroy good as well as evil. It has the **awesome power** to transmute the organic matter fully to gases and to reduce the inorganic matter completely to ashes.

This duality is also reflected in the Holy Fire of Mazda, mentioned in the Gathas.

The great Manthran, Zarathushtra reveals, in the Gathas (Ys 31.19, 20; 34.4) that the Sacred Fire is the preserver of the Righteous (Good) and the destroyer of the Deceitful (evil).

“Thy fire Lord, which possesses strength through truth and which is the swiftest, force to be of clear help to thy supporter but of visible harm with the powers in his hands, to Thy enemy, Wise One” (Insler, Ys 34.4)

A fire that engulfs a house of another human being does not in any way imbue the sentiment of sacredness by any measure and must be swiftly extinguished. In contrast, a pile of waste matter that is being put ablaze must be allowed to incinerate until all the polluting matter is converted to gaseous element. In these two cases the fire is playing two contrasting roles. The burning house displays the destruction of property and violation of the sentiments of the human who owns it and hence the event must be stopped swiftly. In the second case the fire is also destroying, but in this case it is destroying the polluting matter that is detrimental to the life and living. This must be allowed to continue until the evil matter is fully consumed and the environment is refreshed.

A human dead body is nothing more than decaying waste matter, a source of contagion. Any contagion by Gathic precepts must be removed from the environment of living as it violates the Gathic principle of ASHA. The purity laws of Zarathushtrian religion demand that such a source of pollution be destroyed promptly and with dignity. Historically, in ancient Iran, the corpses were **exposed in isolated high grounds**, to wild animals and the organic matter allowed to be consumed and bodies dehydrated until the danger of pollution and infection were mitigated.

An analysis of the present system reveals that we have been using the natural source of that Eternal Fire – the Sun - that is continuously aglow in the universal space to destroy the evil of putrefying matter. The surface temperature of the sun is 10,000-12,000°F. It is the heat of that natural fire from an average distance

of 93 million miles that carries out a slow degeneration of the decaying matter. The birds of prey only selectively removed some portions of the carcass, while much of the cadaver was left to dehydrate by the heat of the sun. The old tradition of *Khursheed Niragistan* is nothing more than a slow process of cremation.

The modern electric crematoriums are designed to provide sufficient heat to cremate the organic matter to ashes within a short period. The concept that such an act is a desecration of Holy Fire has **no doctrinal bases**. The flames if any, involved is not that of a consecrated fire by any measure. More importantly, any flames emitted, are being fully utilized to destroy the evil of contagion, to prevent pollution, to purify the environment for the living and to refresh the world. All this is entirely **consistent with the Zarathushtrian canon**. The use of the heat of fire in cremation can be visualized as analogous to the fire that will arise out of the molten metal to affect the final purification and resurrection to *Frashokereti* (Bd, Ch 34.18-20).

It is sinful to drag this unhealthy situation to its extreme in the name of Zarathushtrian tradition, to endanger the lives of those who live and work in the vicinity. The distressed community in India needs clear guidance. This must come in unequivocal terms from the custodians of our Faith. In the absence of facility for Dokhmenashini, Dastur Firoze Kotwal, in his true wisdom, has said, “the method of choice should be cremation over burial as Zarathushti tenets forbid the preservation of dead matter ‘*nasa-neganih*’ (FEZANA journal, Winter 1998, pg 11). The facilities in India are fast approaching extinction and it is time here for the prelates to show Divine wisdom in their guidance. May Ahura Mazda enlighten their path!

ZARATHUSHTRA'S VISION: THE INDIVIDUAL MAKING THE DIFFERENCE FROM WITHIN AND OUTSIDE

In the history of mankind, man of wisdom and vision have emerged from tribal bands, to alleviate humanity from oppression and domination.

One such voice of wisdom, arose from among the ancient Indo-Iranian tribes, scouring the Russian Steppes of Asia Minor.

It was a voice that rose against bondage, domination, and tyranny.

It was the voice that hailed freedom in bondage, sovereignty of choice in domination, and moral justice for all mankind.

The voice that fully understood the goodness of absolute truth in the face of evil, was the voice of Asho Spitama Zarathushtra.

Zarathushtra proclaimed, in the infancy of human evolution, the way to harmonize human existence through truth in its moral significance.

It was the first time in the history of mankind, that this Holy Manthran, crossed the immense void between the bloodstained sacrificial rites and the true form of worship through spiritual ideals.

He succeeded in his quest, through realization of the vision of that 'Supreme Intellect', Ahura Mazda.

This he proclaims to the adherents in Ys 45.6

Now I shall proclaim the greatest of all
I shall praise him through righteousness
may the Wise Lord hear through his holy mentality.

With the declaration of the moral and spiritual nature of divinity, Asho Zarathust freed the religion from the confinement of the tribal gods and offered the concept of the Wise Lord to the universal man. The God of Zarathushtra, transcends the borders of race, color, or creed bringing together all humanity under a single banner of spiritual union.

It is under this single purpose, that Zarathushtries should find the basis, of their unity in the new millennium.

Zarathushtra prays for that unity in the following words in Ys 31.3.

Mazda vidvanoï vaocha

hizva thwaya aongho

ya jvanto vispeng vaurya

Reveal unto us O Wise One

with Thy words of wisdom

Help me guide all the living to choose the right.

His, was a sacred mission to disseminate the concept of Asha. A mission that carried with it a heavy responsibility to define the absolute Truth and Moral Justice.

Not the truth that can be manipulated through facts and reason, but the truth that flashed unto him from his spiritual consciousness,

The Truth that was revealed to him by the divine source of wisdom, and carried with it the liability to proclaim it to the people of the world.

He addresses the issue in Ys 31.4

Yada ashem

Zevim anghem mazdaoscha

Ahuraongho ashicha aramaiti

May the wise lords reward
when we invoke Righteousness
with sincere devotion.

In relating the message, he unambiguously puts across the burden of accountability to all those who commit to understand his proclamation.

To all the true followers he addresses as Saoshyants.

The repeated use of the term Saoshyant in the Gathas, is particularly relevant to the theme of this session.

In **Ys 34.13**, he says, "Ahura has revealed to me the religion of saoshyant whose life is a role model through righteousness".

Ys 45.11 "To the enlightened saoshyants who acknowledge Ahura Mazda, the God is a friend, a brother and a father.

Ys 46.3 "When will the days dawn, that will promote the spiritual life of righteousness through the wisdom of the Saoshyants?"

Ys 48.12 "Saoshyants of the world will be those who shall follow the teachings of the Wise Lord" (also **Ys 48.9**); and finally in Gatha Vahishtoishti (**Ys 53.2**) he proclaims the names of king Vishtasp, Frashaoshtra and himself who succeeded as saoshyant, through their Righteous thoughts, words and deeds.

The word Saoshyant literally means "one who bring benefit" – a benefactor. The gathic message clearly defines that those enlightened men and women, who extol the virtues of righteousness, using their good mind, emerge as the benefactors among mankind. It is to them that Mazda is a companion and a friend (**Ys 45.11**).

It is important to qualify that the familiar later traditional myth, of the coming of the three saoshyants, emerged in the Achaemenian time, more than a thousand years after the time of Zarathushtra.

The legend speaks of the coming of 1) *Ukhshyat-ereta* -he who makes Righteousness grow, 2) *Ukhshyat-nemah* - he who makes Reverence grow and 3) *Astvat-ereta* - he who embodies righteousness, (**Ys 43.16**). All three we are told, will be born from the seeds of Asho Zarathusht, preserved miraculously in lake Kasaoya.

This is documented in Bundahisn, Ch. 33 and 34 (Bd. 33.28, 34.2,3,18,19), a text composed more than 2000 years after the era of Zarathushtra. The term Saoshyant, uttered by Asho Zarathusht in his Gathic hymns is unrelated to these mythical personalities. The prophet is oblivious to the myth.

The message of the prophet is crystal clear:

The righteous human beings, by using their Good mind (Vohu Mano) must strive to seek out the path of Asha and be the Saoshyant, be the savior of the creation in general and of less fortunate mankind in particular.

It is an undisputed fact that Zarathushtra was the first savior in the history of mankind. But the challenge he presents to humanity is to be like him, to be like his God.

How can an average human measure up to fulfill this immense task?

The Prophet in his guiding hymns, outlines a path to that goal, for his followers.

Let me briefly retrace it for you.

In his vision of human creation, he proclaims, "the divine wisdom has incorporated intellect and ability to innovate, by implanting vital life-breath in the physical frame. The creator has also granted humans the freedom of expression as they wish"- (**Ys 31.11**)

It is this freedom that reflects in the diversity of good and bad in the physical world.

In the very next verse (Ys 31.12), this divinely ordained teacher invokes the basic spiritual attribute of peace and tranquility -*Spenta Aramaiti*..

Zarathushtrian theology recognizes *Spenta Aramaiti* as holy tranquility of mind, "Complete Mindfulness or Will", as mentioned in Dinkert (Bk IX).

This is the value that permits peace and serenity of the human mind.

This is the attribute of devotion, that frees the human spirit from the fetters of the material world, preserves the clarity of mind, and provides the key, that opens the door to the path of Righteousness.

Spiritual wisdom is attainable, only, to a mind free of earthly chaos and carnal instincts, where tranquility and peace prevails. This is the order of devotion, that must prevail, in the compassionate thinking of prayer and in actions, that aids, to harmonize;

The human mentality with *Spenta Mainyu* - Holy mentality,

The human will with the Will of God- the Path of Asha

That is the fulfillment of the spiritual manifestation.

In the opening verses of Ys 32.1, 2 Zarathushtra leads the family, the community and the entire fellowship in a prayer, reaffirming, that the noble path Asha be revealed to those who fulfill the spiritual dedication through *Spenta Aramaiti*.

As we reach, Ys 33.14 we see Asho Zarathushtra as a primal invoker, a zaotar, fervently in devotion, as he perceives the Wise Lord.

And in a spectacular gesture of profound attunement the Manthran dedicates

His physical body, *tanvaschit khkhaiyao*,

His spiritual life -breath *ushtanem dadaiti*,

His first thoughts of the good mind *paurushtatem managhascha vangheush*,

His deeds and words of righteousness *shyothannahya ashai yacha ukhdhakhyacha*,

He dedicates all these - to the Wise Lord - Mazda.

Through these devotional acts, Zarathushtra reciprocates to Mazda the benevolent gifts he received from the Creator. This sequence of prayers clearly demonstrate that a communion with the divine through peaceful mind is a communion through Vohu Manah -the Good Mind.

That is the path to revelation.

That, it is in this revelation, that one discovers the path of serving.

That, it is in giving, in serving the creation,

That one realizes the true experiences of benevolence of Mazda.

The creation of humans, in Zarathushtrian theology occupy the pivotal position in the creative progression. Divinity in this Getig world manifests itself, through the divine actions of humanity.

It is the sacred duty of humanity to be the steward, and to watch over the physical and moral well-being of less fortunate mankind and other creation. That defines a benefactor.

That is what the last line of Ahuna Vairya prayer reminds us

khshthremcha ahurai aa

yim dregubyo dadat vasta rehem

Ahura empowers him, who

Rehabilitate the less fortunate

That is what the last line of Ashem Vohu prompts us
ushta ahmai hyat ashai vahishtai ashem.

Enlightenment to one, who is Righteous for the
sake of Supreme Truth

That is what the opening line of Ys 43.1 tells
ushta ahmai yahmai ushta kahmaichit

Radiant Happiness to him who radiates happiness to others

The overall message is loud and clear. True happiness of receiving is vested in giving that brings to life, fulfillment of a Saoshyant.

It is through total dedication, that Asho Zarathusht, repeatedly chants in Ys 43 (verses 7, 9, 11, 13, 15)

“I have realized thee, Wise Lord,
to be holy when you revealed
unto me in the good mind...”

It is the conditioning of the mind through Right-mindedness that determines the perception of the Divine.

It is here, that we perceive a Saoshyant, whose human will is in full consonance with the Will of God.

The spirit of God is the formative principle, the life-giving power, that pervades mankind. It is in the realization of this extra dimension of spirituality that one begins to experience first hand the thinking, feeling, and willing of humanity at large.

Recognition of this extra dimension of spirit permits one, not only, to shape ones own life but, to touch and affect that of mankind in its day-to-day existence.

This spiritual dimension deepens, as one continues to transcends beyond one's self, bringing the person closer and in likeness to Ahura Mazda.

As the Gatha says in the opening verse of Ys 34.1

*Ya shyothana ya vachangha, ya
yasna ameretatem...mazda*

aeshanm toi ahura ehma pourutemaish daste
The actions, words and the worship by which
you attain immortality...Mazda

These we offer to you Lord, as much as possible.

In plain language, it tells us, that emulating the thoughts, words and actions of Mazda, humans will reveal the existence of divinity; that they will experience the glow of divine enlightenment.

The good mind that experiences Holy *Aramaiti* is the one that is able to commune. The mind that can commune, is the one that will attune with divinity.

This experience of existential spirituality, is the realization, of the way we are with ourselves, the way we are with humanity, and that is a reflection of the way we are with our God.

The human personality experiences a remarkable transformation in this spiritual odyssey as a human being transcends in life to a likeness of God.

It is only then, that their Good thoughts, words and deeds are transformed to their Best thoughts, words and deeds for the betterment of the world. We read in the opening line of Spenta Mainyu Gatha:

*Spenta Mainyu vahistacha managha
hachat ashat shyothnacha vachanghacha...
.mazdao khshthra aramaiti ahuro.*

One attains best thoughts, words and act
in harmony with the Holy Spirit
The rule of wise one, through Aramaiti.

Most religious traditions perceive human as “more than” just the physical self. The earthly environment as “more than” the physical universe. If divine spirit is understood as “more than” physical, it is not somewhere in the world beyond but in this Getig world and in each one of us.

The post-gathic **Ys. 55.1** that reveres the holy Gathas, dedicates the spiritual and physical elements of a human being to these hymns. The divine elements mentioned there are *ushtana* - the vital life -breath, *keherpa* - the astral form, *urvan* - the soul and *fravashi* - the Divine essence.

Irregardless of the terms, one identifies with the Divine Spirit of Mazda. Humans are the only creation that have the ability to perceive the divine within, and through that perception relate to the omnipresent nature of the divinity without. It is only through the recognition of the innate divinity in our daily pursuits, that humans can link to generate a true vision of the Wise Lord in this world of actuality.

The Wise Lord IS all of us.
each one of us must strive,
TO BE THE DIVINE FORCE.

I would like to conclude this with the words of the great Hindu philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, who said:

“The best in people works for long obscure ages...till it finds a voice which can never again be silenced. For that voice becomes the voice of mankind, no longer confined to a particular time or people....

Zarathushtra’s voice is still a living voice, not a mere matter of academic interest for the historical scholar. It is not a voice to guide a small community of man. He declared that the sun of truth is for all, that its light is to unite the far and the near.

It sends its call to all **men to work together**, with the eternal spirit of good, in spreading and maintaining the **kingdom of righteousness...**

This ideal gives us our place as **collaborators with God** in distributing his blessings over the world”.

[Presented at 7th World Zoroastrian Congress, Houston, Texas
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HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS of THE ROLE of AHURA MAZDA

God of Zarathushtra

Humans perceive God through their imagination, which constitutes a mental image of entities that are beyond the grasp of the physical senses. Individuals visualize God in a personalized fashion based on the scope and level of one's respective intellect. The intellectual level of humanity is a constantly evolving dynamic front, that is subject to the progress of scholarship in various aspects of life. Prophet Zarathushtra, in his innate intelligence recognized Wisdom as an appreciation of knowledge that infinitely pervades through existence, and justifiably chose to name his God, Lord of Wisdom - Ahura Mazda or Wise Lord - Mazda Ahura. In his quest to put this theological symbolism of the uncreated Divinity across to the preliterate masses, some 3,700 years ago, the Master Luminary, in his Gathic songs, resorts to some profoundly anthropomorphic allegories.

We see in these hymns, the Prophet invoking the Wise Lord residing in the Dominion illumined by Sun¹ in the House of Song - *damane garo*², surveying the performance of humanity with his penetrative eyes³. The Prophet longs to hear the commandments from his Lord's very mouth⁴, and bequeathing His rewards with His own hands⁵. It should be clear to Humanity on the threshold of the 21st century, that these are allegorical presentations utilized to convey the notion of the Supreme Divinity, in a rudimentary way, to befit the imagination of the people of 1,700 B.C.E.

A Middle Persian text, *Shayest-ne-Shayest* written some 2,400 years after the time of Zarathushtra in the 9th century C.E.⁶, transcends the mental image, to portray a more realistic concept of Ahura Mazda. Here we see the Prophet pleading to his God, "...give me a hand so that I may grasp your hand" and the Divine voice responds, "I am an intangible Spirit; it is not possible to grasp my hand." The intangible nature of the God of Zarathushtra

puts him beyond the realm of the physical, yet very much within it. In a recent book Dr. Mehr has portrayed⁷ a succinctly articulate depiction of this Supreme Divinity. Suffice it to say that the relationship of Mazda Ahura, in its Immanence, is keenly personal and intensely intimate with humans, as it is boundlessly a-personal and infinitely dispersed through the entire existence.

The material world of actuality, in Zarathushtrian theology, is recognized as the Getig world. Human sentiments, in this world, studded with imperfections, are profoundly influenced through experiences of joy and sorrow. This often directs men and women to that eternal quest of HOW DOES MAZDA FUNCTION IN THIS WORLD? Before going any further, we must recognize the BASIC TRUTH, that Human Mentality is infinitely inadequate, and intensely stained by the evil and pollution of this world, to endeavor an ideal resolution of this question. This handicap however, is a only slight hurdle, rather than an insurmountable barrier, to this search.

Spenta Aramaiti in the Gathas

In an effort to achieve this objective, one must strive to vindicate the mental faculty of its imperfections, to transcend to a level to commune with the Divine - with the Spiritual. This is the state of mind recognized in Zarathushtrian theology as *Spenta Aramaiti*. The word Spenta has been interpreted, by various Gathic scholars as Virtuous (Insler, Ichaporria), as Holy (Taraporewala, Duchesne-Guillemin, Moulton, Bode/Nanavutty) as Bounteous (Boyce, Mills), and as Progressive (Jafarey). From the philological standpoint^{8,9}, the meaning best suited is "progressive or promoting". However Spenta in reference to Ahura Mazda - the Supreme Spiritual Master - of infinite progress, is appropriately defined by many, as Holy.

Theologians have interpreted the term *Aramaiti*, as divine wisdom, serenity, devotion, benevolence, piety¹⁰ and universal love or tranquility¹¹. A particularly relevant interpretation of *Aramaiti* appears in Dinkert of the Pahlavi epoch. The attribute here is explained as "the Will" or "Complete Mindfulness"¹². . Humbach,

in his recent translation of the Gathas, has also consistently translated *Aramaiti* as "Right-mindedness"¹³. . . *Spenta Aramaiti* is therefore best understood, as a dedication to Right-mindedness that promotes and facilitates the Holy State of Good Mind.

But how does one address these words such as Holy devotion, piety, Right-mindedness and weave them into the daily life of Zarathushtis. There are several instances in the Gathas that expound upon the attainment of Good mind, Righteousness and Good rule through *Spenta Aramaiti*. However, on one occasion¹⁴, we note Asho Zarathusht implores, through "Right-mindedness" to the Wise Lord to bless him with Good Mind and Righteousness. Humans with their fragile mentality have to make a concerted effort to attain that Holy Right-mindedness – *Spenta Aramaiti*. Only through that spiritual encounter that one can realize the high order of benevolence, in thoughts, words and deeds, that is essential to commune with the Divine, to preserve and refresh the Sacred Creation. Holy *Aramaiti* is thus best realized as a spiritual manifestation of a condition, that aids to harmonize the human Mentality with that Supremely Divine mental aspect. It is humans who has the obligation of, as Dina McIntyre rightly said, "Making it Happen"¹⁰. . .

Zarathushtra, in his innate eternal wisdom, recognized the shortcomings of the human to fully comprehend God. He, therefore, incorporated in his canonical order physical and mental/spiritual principles that can help the human fully appreciate Ahura Mazda. Zarathushtra chose, as the physical code, the Sacred Fire, and raised this element to radiate the ubiquitous luster of enlightenment of Mazda and incarnates within it the absolute Righteousness of the order of Asha.

Spenta Mainyu in the Gathas

In an effort to bridge the transcendence of God with the immanent divinity in the human, the Prophet innovated a spiritual creative will, an active principle of Mazda's thought process - the *Spenta Mainyu*. Linguistically, the term Mainyu implies a "way of thinking"¹⁵ or a mentality. As mentioned by Dastur Dhalla,

"Spenta Mainyu symbolizes the ideal or perfect existence as conceived in thought by Ahura Mazda"¹⁶. It is Ahura Mazda's mentality that projects the image of Existence. Despite the philology, the profundity and immensity of God – a Reality beyond physical- has prompted most theologians to interpret this entity as the Holy Spirit/Mind of Ahura Mazda.

Zarathushtra initiates¹⁷ his Gathic poems by asking Mazda for support from this Holy Mental aspect to attain Good thinking and Righteousness. He invokes his God to attain spiritual manifestation of the Amesha Spentas through Right-mindedness and this Most Holy Mentality/Spirit of Mazda¹⁸. This realization of innate spirituality enables the Prophet to recognize and relate to the immanence of Mazda in the universe and pledges his choice of this Most Holy Spirit¹⁹. Through his Devotion, the prophet is able to mentally harmonize his physical and Divine Self, in totality, with this Holy Mentality that reveals to him the genesis of the entire creation²⁰.

Convinced through his covenant with the Holy Spirit, Prophet Zarathushtra goes on to dedicate an entire hymn²¹ to this mental aspect. With perfect un-ambiguity, he announces the basic truth, in the first line of the first verse

"Spenta mainyu Vahishtacha Manangaha"

meaning "Best thinking through the Holy Mentality/Spirit" and concludes with the words "Mazda grants Wholeness and Immortality to one with Holy *Aramaiti*"²². Here we see this Mainyu as a source of Divine Light from which all the divine values (Amesha Spentas) of Mazda emanates. The Holy Spirit is, as it were, the radiant White Enlightenment from which emerges the rainbow coalition of *Vohu Manah*, *Asha Vahishta*, *Khshthra Vairya*, *Haurvatat* and *Ameretat*. The prophet credits Ahura Mazda for the very conception of the Holy Spirit²³ and ensures that a realization of this principle through Right-mindedness, will bring enlightenment to all those seeking the Truth sincerely. The Holy Mentality is therefore a pragmatic notion in Zarathushtra's theological system. It is an aid to the understanding and realizing

that immanent Reality of Mazda Ahura within, and in the viable existence without. Choosing this Mainyu is the pathway that can lead humanity, in general, and Zarathushtis in particular, to evolve God-like attitude. The relationship of Ahura Mazda and the Holy Mentality/Spirit, in the Gathas, is analogous to that of a person with his mind, being guided to the realization that AHURA MAZDA WORKS THROUGH SPENTA MAINYU.

There is, however, a subtle difference between the relationship of a person with the mind, in the physical existence; and that of Ahura Mazda with the Holy Mentality in the spiritual domain. A point of distinction here, is that the human take the mind (or mental aspect) for granted. The credit for all good or the blame for all bad actions is exclusively the responsibility of the person. In contrast Spenta Mainyu –the Divine mind-- is essentially credited²⁴ with entire Good Creation of the Wise Lord. As mentioned above, Mazda Ahura who is credited for the conceiving of this mentality, is often addressed²⁵ as Spenta Mainyu (progressive or Holy), but is NEVER synonymous with the Spenta Mainyu in the Gathas.

Spenta Mainyu in Younger Avesta

Despite this clarity in the Gathic scriptures, the later Avestan tradition, and the divergence of scholastic opinions leaves us with ambiguous confusion. This disarray is apparent from the following quotes.

"...Ahura Mazda or Wise Lord came to be identified with the Holy Spirit, though nowhere in the Gathas is such an identification made, and besides Him were six abstractions..." – Zaehner²⁶,

" The Spenta Mainyu here (in the Gathas) is not identical with Ahura, but (it) is, as so often His Spirit." – Mills²⁷

" Ahura Mazda is Spenta Mainyu but Spenta Mainyu is not Ahura Mazda." – Mehr²⁸

"Zoroaster's teaching about Holy Spirit through which Ahura Mazda is the 'Creator of all things'." (Ys 44.7, 51.7) – Boyce²⁹

"...neither here nor anywhere else in genuine Zoroastrian tradition is there ever a smallest indication of doubt that the opposed spirit of Zoroaster's teachings were Ahura Mazda and his great Adversary." – Boyce³⁰

"...Ahura Mazda and Spenta Mainyu are seen as one." – Boyce³¹

"This and.....Spenta Mainyu are used in complex fashion elsewhere in the Gathas; for sometimes they seem to represent the power in Ahura Mazda himself through which he thinks, or perceives, or acts (Ys 33.12, 43.2, 44.7, 51.7), at others an independent divinity who hypostatizes this power." – Boyce³²

"In later Zarathushtrian theology (of Vendidad and Pahlavi works) Spenta Mainyu has been identified with Ahura and Ahura is called Mainyu Spenista; but this is emphatically not the teaching of Zarathushtra in Gathas" – Taraporewala³³

The above spectrum of opinions is a clear manifestation of the scholastic dilemma of the dissociation, or lack of that, between the Zarathushtrian - Older Avestan - and later syncretic - Younger Avestan and Pahlavi - Tradition. The two traditional eras are separated by at least 700 to 800 years. In particular, it is the broadening by the syncretic tradition, of the scope of the notion of the duality (the Twin Mainyu of existence), propounded by Asho Zarathusht in his Gathic hymns³⁴ that is at the root of this unwieldy problem. The later evolved Angra (Av. Anra) Mainyu, the alleged Evil Spirit is in NO WAY ASSOCIATED with God in the Gathas. The Gathic hymns wholly undermine the Evil Mentality/Spirit to the point that only once, in the entire Gathic scripture, Asho Zarathusht mentions the Evil Mentality as Akascha Mainyus!³⁵ in his repudiation of evil. Whereas the term Angra is mentioned several times in the Gathas, the compound word Angra-Mainyu is not to be found in the Gathas.

It is the syncretic tradition of Younger Avesta, that anthropomorphized the Evil Spirit, invested it with the power of creation of evil, and posed it as an adversary to the good-God Ahura Mazda. It is completely logical, that any antagonist of Mazda is an antagonist of His Holy Spirit, *Spenta Mainyu*. This unfolding of the Pahlavi and Middle Persian thought is responsible for casting Mazda Ahura, synonymous with his *Spenta Mainyu*. The Gathic concept of the favored choice of the Holy Spirit by Humanity degenerates in this era into a perpetual combat between the two anthropomorphic spiritual entities of Good and Evil. These are mythically narrated in Zamyad, Ram, Meher, and Tir Yashts³⁶ as delivering, crushing defeat to Angra Mainyu by the mystic powers of monarchs and divinities.

In summary, the only recourse for Humanity to fulfill their covenant³⁷ with Mazda, as stewards of the Sacred Creation, is to attune with the Holy Spirit of the Creator, through the Holy State of Right-mindedness. It is this congruence of the human and the Divine Mentality that led Asho Zarathusht into the web of true spiritual friendship³⁸ with his Master. For he said:

“Rise within me O Lord, grant me vitality through Right-mindedness. Through Holy Spirit the good strength of Retribution, Power through Truth and eternal joy through Good Mind” (Gatha Ahunavaiti Ys 33.12)

What worked for the first prophet of humanity, MUST lead mankind to be God-like. The triumphant quest of genuine seekers³⁹ for the Good rule of Good thinking and Truth will be fulfilled through Holy *Aramaiti*.

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ZOROASTRIANISM AND JUDAISM: THE GENESIS OF COMPARATIVE BELIEFS OF TWO GREAT FAITHS

Zoroastrianism and Judaism have ties that were knotted many centuries before Christianity appeared on the religious stage of this planet. The Zoroastrian way of life has markedly influenced the early Hebrew religious fabric. Just how did this come about both at the social and doctrinal level, is a subject worth exploring and understanding.

The Achaemenian King most intimately associated with these events is Cyrus, the Great, a worshipper of Zoroaster's-God Ahura Mazda. He became the King of Anshan in 558 B.C. and was heralded as the founder of the Achaemenian Empire. In this era Babylon was ruled by a tyrant named Nabonidus. He oppressed Babylonians in general and held the 'people of Israel' as captives in his land, in particular. Historical evidence suggests that learned and skilled Persian agents must have infiltrated Babylon to convince the Marduk (God of the ancient organized religion in Babylonia) Priesthood and the people of Israel, that their only salvation was to allow the takeover of Babylon by Cyrus.

Scholars suggest that the result of the work by Persian agents was clearly reflected in Cyrus's Proclamation that appeared as an oracle from the Gods of Babylonia empowering him to set Babylon free. A striking parallel to this is noticeable in the prophecies found in the Book of 2nd Isaiah. The similarity of the two accounts clearly suggest that the prophet Isaiah was perhaps the first Jew to learn about Zoroastrianism from the Persian Magi. An example of the parallel between the oracle of Babylonian God, and the prophecy of 2nd Isaiah is as follows.

Cyrus' Proclamation portrays Marduk saying, "He (Marduk) scanned and looked (through) all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler...he pronounced the name of Cyrus, King of Anshan. . .to become the ruler of all the world. Marduk the great Lord, a protector of his people beheld with pleasure his (Cyrus') good deeds and ordered him to march against the City of Babylon. He made him set out on the road to Babylon going at his side like a real friend." (Morton Smith, *Jour. of Amer. Ori. Soc.* 1963, 83, 415)

The verses of the 2nd Isaiah reflect a striking parallel of this calling to Cyrus from the Hebrew God Jehovah (Yahweh).

"The One saying of Cyrus, He is my shepherd and all that I delight in he will completely carry out.' Even in (my) saying of Jerusalem, 'She will be rebuilt and the temple...foundation laid" (verse 44.28).

"This is what Jehovah has said to his anointed One, to Cyrus whose right hand I have taken hold of to subdue before him Nations..." (Verse 45.1)

"I myself have roused up someone in Righteousness, He is the one that will build my city and those of mine in exile he will let go, not for a price nor for bribery. (Verse: 45.13).

It is apparent from the above quotes that the Zoroastrian King Cyrus was called upon from two independent divine sources to perform the task of liberating the Jewish people. As expressed by Morton Smith (loc. cit), "To the Judeans they represented Cyrus, as chosen of Yahweh to unite Babylon and restore Israel; to the Babylonian Priesthood they represented him as chosen of Marduk to free Babylon from the tyranny of Nabonidus". It is interesting to note that 2nd Isaiah speaks of violence in the takeover of Babylon (Isaiah 45.2). In contrast, the prophecy of the Marduk priesthood speaks of a totally non-violent entry in Babylon (Morton Smith loc. cit). The facts of history do record that Cyrus made a bloodless coup of Babylon. Professor Boyce notes that "the Verses of 2nd Isaiah are remarkable in that in them alone, out of all the Old Testament, the term 'Messiah' in the sense of an anointed

deliverer of the Jewish nation is used of foreigner, a non-Jew (Cyrus)", (*History of Zoroastrianism. Vol. II, p. 44*).

The evidence of the contact of 2nd Isaiah with a Persian (Zoroastrian) source is further augmented by the presence of various theological expressions in this scripture not frequently noted in the early Hebraic literature. Not only are these utterances foreign to the Hebrew tradition, but they also bear a marked resemblance to the character of the Zarathushtrian tradition. Concerning these similarities Smith remarks that it is rarely possible to establish the absolute genesis of a theological idea. However, the author adds, "What can be seen clearly is the way in which certain ideas formerly sporadic and unimportant suddenly finds frequent expression and are made central concern of important work" (Morton Smith loc. cit. p. 418).

A case in point is the notion that 'Yahweh created the world'. In traditional Hebrew literature this plays no conspicuous role. The insistence in the book of Isaiah to utter this concept repeatedly, led Morton Smith to conclude that this was a result of an outside influence on the traditional Judaism. This she describes by saying, "...the fact that Isaiah got his political program from Persian propaganda of Cyrus, makes it plausible to look for the source of this influence in Persian (Zoroastrian) material...".

Yasna 44 of Gatha Ushtavaiti - a passage often used by some of the scholars to support the notion of the omnipotence of Ahura Mazda - consists of a series of profound questions by Prophet Zoroaster to Ahura Mazda. The obvious answer to these may be formulated as "I am" or "I do" from the Wise Lord, Ahura Mazda. One finds a striking resemblance both in the style and in the substance of cosmological account of 2nd Isaiah in verses 40 and 45, with those of Yasna 44. To quote but one such example, we read in Yasna 44.5:

"This I ask Thee. Tell me truly which craftsman created the luminous bodies and the dark spaces? Which craftsman created both sleep and activity?..." (S. Insler, *Gatha of Zarathushtra p. 67*)

The above passage parallels remarkably well with verse 45.7 of 2nd Isaiah which says: "Forming light and creating darkness, making peace and creating calamity, I Jehovah am doing all these things." Taking into consideration the historic chronology, a strong case for the influence of Zoroaster's teaching on the thinking of Isaiah, can be made.

The Book of EZRA, believed to have been written ca. 460 B.C.E. starts by relating the decree of Cyrus (EZRA 1.1, 1.2). It begins by saying that Yahweh, the God had commissioned Cyrus to build him a house in Jerusalem. History records that the task was unfinished at that time. We read in verses 5.1 and 6.14, 15 of the Book of EZRA, a request by prophets, Haggai and Zachariah to the Jews to build the 'House of Yahweh'. It is believed that after a search in the Royal records, Darius, then the ruling Zoroastrian monarch of Persia, complied to fulfill the decree of Cyrus. In the Hebrew scripture EZRA records this event (verse 6.15) by saying, 'And they completed this House (of Jehovah) by the third day of the lunar month of Adar - that is in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the King'. It must be mentioned at this point, that Darius - the Zoroastrian ruler in aiding the Jews apparently gained two major concessions:

- 1) The loyalty and gratitude of his Jewish subjects, and
- 2) A safe passage to Egypt, since Palestine is strategically located on the road between Persia and Egypt.

Over half a century later we arrive at the Achaemenian King Artaxerxes whose name also appears in Hebrew Scriptures of EZRA (verses 7.7, 7.12). Artaxerxes followed the tradition of benevolence towards the Jews as set by his ancestors. He appointed Nehemiah, one of his loyal servants to govern Jerusalem. We are told Nehemiah, who followed the Zoroastrian purity code rigidly, was responsible for the transition of the Jewish purity code that solely concerned the cultic matters to the purity in the individual's daily life. Prof. Boyce observes, that the purity laws were no longer restricted to the Temple, but had to be exercised in 'the

fields, the kitchen, the bed and the street (History of Zoroastrianism Vol. II, p. 190).

The works of 'EZRA the scribe' - knowledgeable in the law of the God of Heaven (EZRA 7.12) and in the Law of Moses (EZRA 7.6) - are primarily responsible for the parallels in the beliefs between Zoroastrianism and Judaism. EZRA was commissioned by emperor Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem and to investigate the law of their God. The letter giving that decree is preserved in the Book of EZRA (7.11, -14), which says, "And this is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to EZRA, by me an order has been put through that everyone in my land of the people of Israel and their priest and Levites that is willing to go to Jerusalem with you, should go. In as much as from before the King and his seven counselors (an order) was sent to investigate concerning Judah, and Jerusalem in the law of your God..."

The 'seven counselors' referred to in the letter above reflects the Zoroastrian Doctrine of Heptad. The monarch, in those days, commanded the same degree of respect on earth as the Creator in the Spiritual domain. The King, then, was the earthly reflection of Ahura Mazda. He thus constituted with his 'seven counselors' the 'The Heptad' as represented by Ahura Mazda and the Amesha Spentas (Boyce, History of Zoroastrianism, Vol. II, p. 94).

Of the first five books of the old Testaments known as the PENTATEUCH, the post-exilic accounts are largely in 'Priestly code'. According to the modern scholars, Prophet EZRA is associated with these accounts. The 'Holiness Code' of the Book of Leviticus and the first chapter of the Book of Genesis are attributed to these writings. They show profound Zoroastrian influences.

It is important to note that the account of cosmogony in GENESIS Chapter I is markedly different from the story of the Garden of Eden in Chapter II. The account of the first chapter bears marked resemblance to the Zoroastrian description. We read in Genesis, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth. Let light come to be... and God began calling the light Day but the darkness he called Night" (verse 1.3-5). This is followed by the

creation account of the other elements culminating in (verse 1.26-28) the creation of humans. The stark similarity of the above account to that of Zoroastrianism is not surprising. The reason being, that by this time, knowledge of Zoroastrianism had become known to clergy and theologians of other faiths in that part of the world.

In the early Hebrew writings such as Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy the concept of resurrection is indeed embedded. However, the influence of Zoroastrianism on the eschatological aspect of Judaism is overtly noticeable in the post-exilic scriptures. For the first time in 2nd Isaiah one sees expressions as:

"Your dead ones will live, they will rise up. Awake and cry out joyfully. The earth will bring those long dead to birth again" (Verse 26.19).

An even closer resemblance to Zoroastrian writings (Ys 48.1) can be seen in verse 60.20-21 which says,

"Jehovah himself will become for you an indefinitely lasting light...the days of your mourning will have come to completion....your people all of them will be righteous..."

These expressions are clear overtones of the Zoroastrian revelations in this area. As concluded by Prof. Boyce, "it is difficult not to concede to Zoroastrianism both priority and influence; the more especially since elements of Zarathushtra's teaching can be traced far back in the ancient Indo-Iranian religious traditions, whereas those of Jewish apocalyptic first appear after the time of contact with the Persian faith".

Another interesting point is the reference in 2nd Isaiah to the concept of Righteousness, the fundamental ethical code of human life in the teaching of Zarathushtra. In the five books of the Old Testament this term appears just once in the Genesis (15.6). In contrast in the book of 2nd Isaiah alone it appears eight times. The concept culminates in verse 26.7 where we read,

"The path of the righteous one is uprightness. You (Yahweh) being upright, will smooth out the very course of a righteous one."

Finally, the later Zoroastrian concept, of the 'Finite Time'; at the end of which 'evil' will be totally eradicated and the true kingdom of Ahura Mazda will prevail on this earth, is wholly unique to his faith. Even this concept appears to have permeated in the writings of 2nd Isaiah where we read:

"He will actually swallow up death forever and the Lord Jehovah will certainly wipe the tears from all faces" (Verse 25.8)

It is indeed interesting to note that in the above passage, and in many others, Jehovah takes the supreme responsibility of genesis and eradicating evil. He is, thus, held absolutely Omnipotent. The concept of omnipotence of Ahura Mazda embedded in the Gathas, has grossly eroded in the Younger Avesta. This later evolved notion, believes in the Omnipotence of Ahura Mazda only at the time of FRASHO KERETI (period of eternal bliss).

From the above it clearly evident that 2nd Isaiah was the first Jewish Sage who had heard of Zoroaster's teachings. The influence of Zoroastrianism thus spread over the people who were ruled by Zoroastrian Monarchs. These emperors were not only dedicated believers in the teachings of Zoroaster but also were committed to spread those teachings across their vast Empire with extreme tolerance.

CHAPTER 5

Socio Religious Topics

TRAINING THE PRIESTS *of* THE FUTURE

Introduction

In a Diaspora that is so obtusely motivated by technological materialism, what are the chances of survival of the Zarathushtrian Faith that evolved almost 3,700 years ago? The fact is, that it has survived and, in this age of “reason”, in this 3rd millennium C.E., is gaining momentum. Would the religion have outlasted, in the absence of that group of knowledgeable people of the early era we choose to call today “the priest”? Would we have the most revered Scriptures, 'The Gathas', without the oral transmission by these dedicated people? The answer is that this precious philosophy would have never seen the light of the day, as a distinct religious identity, in the absence of these spiritual ‘invokers’.

Although institutionalized priesthood evolved later in the history of the Zarathushtrian religion, the initiation of a priestly class, can be traced back around the 6th century B.C., when the Magi took over the reigns of the religion of Zarathushtra from the Athravans of the Eastern Iran. It was not until the Sassanian era (226-641 C.E.), that a clergy was empowered to interpret and administer religious measures, sometimes at the expense of the laity¹. The clerics continued to enjoy the respect of the laity even after their migration to India. It was a series of events, coupled with the advent of western education and increased affluence of the lay community, around the late 18th to mid 19th century in India that charted the downfall of priestly dominance. The collapse of the priestly hegemony left behind a class of ritual performing priesthood, which in time, was at the mercy of the grass-root community for their livelihood. The Iranian Zarathushti community and their priesthood, till the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century were still suffering in a dismal state of poverty under the late Qajar regime.

Priestly Function

A Magi is described by Pseudo-Lucian as 'an order of seers who are dedicated to the service of Gods.... their profession as Magi makes it incumbent on them to observe strict rules of life.'². Doctrinally, the life of a Zarathushti priest should be in tune with precepts outlined by the Prophet in his profound hymns³.

The priesthood of the early migrants to India continued the Sassanian tradition of rigorously and rigidly enforcing the purity laws⁴, in an effort to maintain and reflect, what they sincerely perceived as a necessary constituent of religiosity. While they expected the laity to follow strict purity laws, their own observance of these rules was even stricter. This led them to focus solely on the ritual, essentially to the exclusion of intellectual understanding of the various facets of the duties of a professional clergy. Even those in the position of leadership, have essentially restricted their intellectual efforts, in the area of philology and need for the observances of rituals. Furthermore, heredity, poor remuneration, and lack of respect for the clergy are the major reasons for failing to attract intellectuals to the priestly profession. Ironically, however, most notable Parsi Zarathushtis such as the Tatas, Dadabhoy Naoroji, Godrej, Phirzshah Mehta, Dinshaw Wachha, Homi Bhabha, Homi Sethna all hailed from the priestly class.

Mobeds in the western world in general, and in North America in particular, have faithfully served, their religion, on a voluntary basis, despite their professional commitments, and often sacrificing their family obligations. These services are largely limited to the performance of the rituals, and special prayers. Nevertheless, many of these dedicated individuals, despite their ardent volunteerism, take little time or interest to reasonably familiarize themselves with the philosophy, history, spirituality and/or theology of the religion they help perpetuate.

The changing socio-cultural fabric will compound the job of the future priesthood to bridge the vacuum in a worldly society with notions of spirituality and piety. In the western world, and to some degree globally, advances in biotechnology coupled with

genetic engineering, adds a new dimension to the responsibility of priesthood in general, and Zarathushtrian clergy in particular. Issues such as organ donation, abortion, euthanasia, use of fetal tissues or stem cells, cloning, and different modes of procreation have significant socio-psycho-religious ramifications that will greatly accentuate the need for proper priestly guidance.

There is essentially nothing in the history, through Achaemenian, Parthian, Sassanian and post-Sassanian era, to indicate that a Zarathushti priest interacted with laity any more than to fulfill their ritual needs and his responsibility to perpetuate the religion. The present 'age of reason', **particularly on this continent, specifically demands a broadening of that role.** An ideal Zarathushti priest of the future must play a unique role to assist in leading the 'moral and spiritual consciousness' of the Zarathushti community.

Training

By any guideline, the instruction for priesthood in general, and of a Zarathushti Mobed in particular, is a prolonged process that must involve an intensive training period. It demands self-sacrifice, dedicating oneself to the priestly calling, and a commitment to serve Ahura Mazda spiritually. It entails service to fulfill the spiritual needs of the community, to propagate and perpetuate the religion, and to spread the message of Zarathushtra, not only to the community, but also to humanity at large, to refresh the world as Asho Zarathushtra implores us in Yasna 30.

The *rivayats* spanning from that of Nariman Hoshang in 1478 to the last one brought by Ervad Mulla Kaus in 1780, clearly demonstrate some striking differences between the Zarathushti priests of Iran and India, in their theological comprehension of religious issues such as those of , acceptance of a person of non-Zarathushti origin, and importance of rituals. The focus of the Iranian priesthood has remained on the Gathic scriptures and finding their religiosity in living a life following the Zarathushtrian philosophy as elaborated in the Gathas. Rituals are perceived as a means to an end. In contrast the Parsi priesthood regard rituals as

means to attune with the Divinity and, find therein, the sole source of spiritual strength. In turn these differences have reflected in the training of Iranian and Parsi priests.

Training of Parsi priests at the seminaries (Madressas) in India is, at present, directed primarily toward producing Ervads capable of performing inner and outer liturgical ceremonies. In contrast, the responsibility of training of priests in Iran rests with *Kankash-e-Mobedan* (An Association of Iranian Priesthood). They have a training program for lay youth as Mobedyar who in time can evolve to be full-fledged priests of the future. Both the Indian as well as the Iranian training involves several years of study and memorizing of prayers. However, Iranian priests often choose to read their prayers, instead of learning them by rote.

Presently, Iranian Mobeds in North America follow the training pattern that evolved in Iran. Laymen are invited to come forward, who are trained as Mobedyar, following a prescribed curriculum of prayers and the Message of the Prophet. It is hoped, that some of these youth will evolve to be the priests of tomorrow. In contrast Parsi families induct only the sons of priestly heredity into the priesthood, **regardless of their personal interest, the majority of whom hardly practice after becoming an Ervad.**

While a heredity principle has the advantage of replenishing the ranks of the priests, it hardly guarantees the quality. This in time has emerged as one of the major reasons for loss of respect by the laity for the profession and its practitioners. The intellectual community in North America must understand that this criterion that was introduced in the era when the Median tribe of Magoi seized control of Zarathushtrian religion back in 6th century B.C. The heredity principle has become **a part of the tradition, but has absolutely no doctrinal bearing.** It has served its purpose, and the time is here for it to go.

It is of little practical value to induct our youth into the priesthood whose heart and soul is not in tune with the commitment, but are inducted into it to appease and satisfy parental ego. A North American youth, ordained as a priest in India

just for the sake of being ordained, has explicitly no knowledge of how to perform even the common outer liturgical ceremonies of Navzote or Jashan. They have no alternative, but to learn to perform these rituals, with other knowledgeable priests. Without such training, they are only priests in name, unable to satisfy the spiritual needs of the community.

The training of a Zarathushti priesthood in North America should be open to all Zarathushti men and women, who innately get the calling. The question of gender in serving the religion has been debated *ad nauseum*. Many research articles have already been written to demonstrate that doctrinally and theologically men and women are a part and parcel of the same whole - the fellowship of mankind. Despite an egalitarian position clearly propounded by Asho Zarathushtra in the Gathas, and despite, the significant religious contribution of women⁵ historically documented over centuries, the **tradition has chosen to retain the patriarchal character of the past and dragged it into the core of the religion.** The basic principle for maintaining ritual purity as expounded in the Sassanian Vendidad is in fact gender-free. Ritual purity must be maintained, as the principle is based on regarding as *Nasu* (impure) anything that parts from the body of man or woman.

A decision regarding an important commitment such as this, cannot be expected of a child 10-12 years of age. Just as a child goes through the process of choosing a professional career at a mature age, the decision to undertake a religious commitment should also follow the same pattern. While the process of imparting knowledge of the religion should be initiated at an early age, the decision for priestly commitment must wait at least, till 16-18 years of age and must evolve as a gradual, but deliberate, choice.

At the outset it must be realized that every individual is a different and unique entity, and among those who do commit themselves there will be broad variations in ability, as well as in degree, of their dedication and enthusiasm. While some will find satisfaction in serving the community through ritual performances, a select few will continue to evolve through scriptural studies to

find the deeper meaning of the teachings of the Prophet. This may result in different grades of priests. Regardless, all should have the opportunity to be exposed to the same training curriculum.

The needs of the North American community are also diverse, based on its cultural background. Religiosity of some members may be anchored more to rituals and prayers, while for others the expression of religiosity may focus on the message of Asho Zarathust. A priest of the future must cultivate **tolerance for harmonizing** such differences. Furthermore, even among the priests, there will be differences in the understanding of certain aspects of rituals and/or theology. It is, however, imperative to imbue in a Mobed of tomorrow the sense that:

- “There is great healing in acknowledging **mine is not a better way, mine is merely another way**”⁶ to the same spiritual goal.
- A priest should be able to **discern, the crust of the tradition, from the kernel of the Message**. This is not to imply, that the crust be discarded. In fact, the priest should gradually evolve, the ability to evaluate rationally the adequacy of the tradition and discover its theological basis.
- A priest must be intellectually capable **of imparting the spiritual rationale implicit in the ritual**.

In the coming decades, effort should be directed, in concert with Iranian and Parsi priesthood, to intertwine and unify the various modes of instruction, to evolve an infrastructure for investiture of young priests in the western world. The knowledge of the actual languages, such as Avesta, and Pahlavi is desirable, but the proper accent and intonation of the recitation of the prayers are essential. The past and present generations have done an excellent job of making accessible English translations/interpretations of much of the Older and Younger Avestan literature. Besides the history, theology and philosophical aspects; the future priest must have some exposure to the study of Comparative Religion, in order to appreciate the unique features of

various Faiths and how they compare with the contemplation of God, and Spirituality in the Zarathushtrian religion. To equip them to deal with contemporary ethical issues, some exposure to psychology and sociology as they relate to the prevailing way of life on this continent should also constitute a part of their training.

This is a tall order and would require the organization of a body of priests and laity, Parsis and Iranian, with sufficient expertise in various disciplines to work in concert and harmony to evolve a curriculum for such an undertaking. The group will constitute an advisory council to formulate the Curriculum for Training of Zarathushti Priest (CTZP) or of Mobed (CTOM).

It will require proper coordination of time and effort, to bring together the teachers and the disciples at suitable locations, two to three times a year to impart the knowledge of both theory and practice for a Zarathushtrian Priesthood in North America.

A process such as this will take varying length of time for different persons. It will be the responsibility of the individual to display the preparedness for the commitment. A Committee, selected from among the Advisory Council may best render the unbiased decision of the candidate’s ability to serve the religion. As an **interim measure**, such training should be offered to those ordained priests who wish to further their knowledge and ability to better serve their community.

All this cannot be achieved without inspiration and sacrifice. That sacrifice must come, not only from the priests-to-be, but also from the community. This can only happen if the community wants it to happen. In order for the community to express their motivation, the grass-root must lead the way. The community must vitalize the fiscal base. Yes, it is time consuming to think, and even more so to put the thoughts into words, but all that is far, far cheaper than **putting it all into action**. To generate the ecclesiastical infrastructure of this new millennium, **to furnish the spiritual enlightenment for the generations to come**, can be a monumental task -the project of the millennium. Nothing short of a healthy endowment which can feed a constant stream of funds

can fulfill such a dream. For project of this magnitude, the need, the desire and the financial contribution to make it happen, must come from the grass root community. **If the community wishes**, it shall happen.

In this world charged with the intense stress of materialism, spiritual guidance to realize the Divine within often escapes humanity in general, and Zarathushtis in particular. The need of Zarthushti priests trained to expound upon the communal harmonization, to attune the physical with the spiritual elements of life, to bring into **focus the wholeness or completeness - Haurvatat** - of a Zarathushtrian way of life is more real in this technocratic age than ever before. One cannot think of a better legacy for the present Zarathushti community to leave, for the enlightenment of generations to follow, than to bring an insightful and erudite priesthood into reality.

Atha Zamyat yatha Afrinami

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IMPACT OF ZARATHUSHTRIAN ASSEMBLY ON ZARATHUSHTI PSYCHE

Introduction:

Historically, the Rivayats, spanning over four centuries (1478-1780), trace some of the fundamental differences in the understanding of the religion of Zarathusht, between the Iranian and Parsi priesthood. A major focus of the difference rests on the **importance of the words of Asho Zarathusht** in the Gathas relative to the beliefs of the later Avesta and the ritual performances. The Iranian psyche clearly emphasizes Gathic teachings, giving **lesser importance to the Younger Avesta** with rituals playing a secondary role.

The Iranian Zarathushti community visualized a silver lining of hope, during the later Qajar rulers in the early part of the 20th century, to regain their religious freedom. They were then thrust into modernization by the late Reza Shah Pahlavi. in the later half of the century. This burst of prosperity kindled among the community the zeal to study their history and religion.

Two men, among others, played a major role in this explosive renewed interest in the religion. One of them was a remarkable Zarathushti, Arbab Kay Khoshrow Shahrokh from a learned family in Kerman, who then represented Zarathushtis in the Iranian Majles. The other man - an ardent patriot, who played a key role in this awakening, was Ibrahim Pur-e-Davud, a son of Muslim parents. This Muslim scholar translated the Gathas into Persian and presented the Religion of Zarathusht to the Iran of 20th century as preached by Zarathushtra, free of the syncretism that we have today. This reinforced the early psyche of the Iranian priesthood and the understanding of the religion by the community. Pur-e-Davud's efforts were also widely applauded by Parsi Zarathushtis of India at that time. In summary, the Iranian Zarathushtis evolved believing that the religion of Zarathusht is universal for all mankind, and the impact of rituals was secondary

for mankind's Spiritual existence. The beliefs that evolved in the Younger Avestan era (5th century B.C. and later) and the later texts such as Bundahisn, Vendidad and other compositions of the Middle Persian origin were of secondary importance.

The Parsi Zarathushti community, since their arrival in India 936 C.E., by design, adopted a strict exclusionary attitude linked with some rigid ground rules. One of these was not to accept a non-Zarathushti as a member of the Zarathushti community. Secondly, their priesthood followed the ceremonial practices that evolved in the Sasanian epoch, heavily laden with rituals. For them, the Gathas fulfilled the role of a fountainhead of all Younger Avestan, and Middle Persian texts. To summarize, Parsis came to regard the Zarathushti religion and teachings as their racially inherited treasure, not to be contaminated by the rest of the humanity. They regarded their rituals as a serious means of attunement with the Divinity and they draw spiritual power through their performances. They see a **precise continuity of a firm link** in the Younger Avesta as well as Middle Persian texts, **with the Gathic message** of Asho Zarathusht.

The Assembly and The Mindset:

It is against this back drop of history that we must examine the genesis and influence of the Zarathushtrian Assembly, on the Zarathushti psyche in North America and globally.

The Zarathushtrian Assembly was founded in Los Angeles, California 1990 by a team of seven dedicated individuals led by Dr. Ali Jafarey, a learned Zarathushtrian theologian, born of muslim parents. Dr. Jafarey was inducted into the Zarathushtrian faith through Navjote ceremony, by Mobed Rashid Shahmerdan of Iran. The major objective of the Assembly is to study and disseminate the knowledge of religion of Zarathushtra and to promote Zarathushtrian fellowship.

The Assembly believes, among many other aspects of Zarathushtrian theology, that **caste, color, race, and nationality do not play any discriminatory role** in the universal message of

Zarathushtra. Furthermore, all beliefs in false gods, goddesses and similar imaginary beings, and the performance of rituals, to appease them should be abandoned and all irrational ideas and practices should be discarded.

Zarathushtis, both Parsis and Iranian have always respected and appreciated the Zarathushti scholarship of Islamic literary men such as Ibrahim Pur-e-Davud, Abol-ghaasem Hasan Ferdowsi Tusi and many others. It is for the first time in the long history of Zarathushtrian religion, that the Parsi community is faced with a Zarathushtrian scholar of Islamic parentage, who has taken up the **cudgel to revive the Daena Vanghui** to its **Gathic purity** and Zarathushtrian Universality. The Assembly firmly asserts that it does not convert people. It disseminates the Divine Message of Zarathushtra and **accepts** those, who after due consideration, decide of their own free will, to **choose the Good Religion**, and recognizes them as Zarathushtis through their Navjote (Sadreh Pooshi) ceremony.

It is important to point out that the Assembly **does not reject rituals** outright. In fact Navjote, Wedding and Funeral (Porshe) ceremonies are essential parts of the religion as practiced by the Assembly. The prayers for the ceremonies are, however, carefully composed to emphasize the Older Avestan Gathic prayers in preference to those formulated in the later Sasanian times. It is generally believed, particularly by traditional Zarathushtis, that the Assembly rejects all the Zarathushtrian texts in favour of the Gathas. This has led to dubbing the assembly as a **"Gatha - alone cult"**. This is a misconception. The fact is that, while the Assembly regards the Gathas as the true Scriptures and the actual words of Asho Zarathust, it has publicly asserted the younger Avesta and Middle Persian literature as valuable texts of the Zarathushtrian tradition.

It must be emphasized that the exclusionary socio-religious attitude followed by the early settlers from Khorasan in India, was perhaps essential under the prevailing circumstances for their very survival and that of our Glorious Faith. They deserve due credit

for their action. However, following that mind-set for over a thousand years, has invariably entrenched the sentiment, as a dogma of the religion. The undisputed fact is that the Gathic vision of Asho Zarathusht radiates the universal message of Salvation for all mankind without reservation.

Consequences:

The actions of the Assembly are extremely distressing for some Parsis of North America, and those around the world, who are indoctrinated into non-acceptance of those born of non-Zarathushti parents. To add insult to injury, it is sentimentally devastating for them to see that the organization is led by a **Zarathushti of non-Parsi parentage**. On the other hand, there are many Parsis who consider the Message of Zarathushtra as one for all humanity, and are quite sympathetic to the work of the Assembly. While these Parsis may not entirely comply with the ritualistic and spiritual brand of Zarathushti practices of the Assembly; at least on philosophical and rational grounds they are in consonance with the views of the Assembly. This has drawn a new wedge in the North American and global Parsi Zarathushti community. Ironically, from a philosophical and rational vantage point, the Assembly has bridged the inherent cultural gap between Iranian and Parsi Zarathushtis by bringing them closer with a commonality of greater consequence. In actuality, the Assembly has firmly institutionalized, the views that Iranian Zarathushtis and their priesthood have held for a long time.

In North America we live in a highly dynamic social fabric, continuously influenced by technological advances. In theory, the Human, the Civil, the Affirmative and the Religious Rights of people to live in freedom, irrespective of caste color, or creed within the constraints of the law, are protected. For the emerging generation, entrenched in this culture of secure Human Rights it is extremely difficult, even ironic, to accept that the Good Religion of Zarathusht is a religious heritage of a tribe of people. The thought that **no one else has a right to the religion of Good Conscience** and that the presence of a non-Zarathushti would vitiate our Holy

sacrament, may seem to the youth, as a violation of Religious Rights of some human beings.

The actions of the Assembly tear through the sentiments of those who sternly uphold that the traditional ground rules of the 10th and 11th century should and must apply in the 21st century even in the materialistic socio-cultural environment of the West. Furthermore, to mount a debate on a scholarly basis, to demonstrate that these exclusionary measures are in harmony with the doctrine of the Zarathushti religion is not easy. For there is little by way of theological armament available for Parsi Zarathushtis to argue the case of preserving their traditional notion, in the face of changing climes. Their serious resistance is causing them to turn to attributes that clearly demonstrates their paranoia.

Countenance over Confrontation:

It is a fact that the Zarathushtrian Assembly, that celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, is here to stay. Calling names and accusing them of alleged violation of the Zarathushtrian doctrine, and scriptures leads to acrimonious debate that only promotes disharmony. The Assembly has always maintained, that it is not interested in being a party to any organization, or demanding anything of other Zarathushti organizations. The energy that is spent in negative publicity can be best utilized in consolidating the unity within.

In their rage of intolerance, Parsi Zarathushtis ignore the fact that they are providing valuable publicity to the Zarathushtrian Assembly that would otherwise need extra efforts to make its existence known. Callous remarks such as "Gatha-alone cult...has thrown open the doors of our sacred religion to any Tom, Dick and Harry that wants to waltz in", show a clear sign of desperation of traditionally oriented Parsis. They would perhaps benefit greatly by turning their frustrations towards **convincing the Zarathushti youth**, why the brand of Zarathushtrian practices promoted by the Assembly are inconsistent with their idea of Zarathushti religion in a rational manner. Such efforts can go a long way to positive thinking and preservation of the traditions of the Faith.

It must be realized that all Zarathushtis strive for guidance and enlightenment from the Supreme Intellect, Mazda, as they understand it best. While the mode of perception may vary the **final goal of salvation remains common.** In the name of the Wise Lord, through tolerance and respect, it is prudent to terminate the rancor and acrimony. For the sake of harmony within the community at large, the best and the only recourse is **to be benevolent and unselfish enough** to permit the worship and veneration of Ahura Mazda by all, in whatever way they choose to follow. Let peace and tranquility prevail to allow all Zarathushtis, young and old to address more important issues to preserve the Good religion and refresh the world.