

# Cherishing the Ecosystem: Then and Now

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The initial declaration of the Principles of Global ethics proclaimed by the 1993 Parliament of World's Religion reads:

**“The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of the pain may be made clear.**

**Peace eludes us...the planet is being destroyed... neighbors live in fear....women and men are estranged from each other...children die.**

**We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body; the economic disparities that threaten so many with ruin.**

**We condemn the social disarray of the nations; the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking the communities; and the insane death of children from violence. In particular we condemn aggression and the hatred in the name of religion.”**

The above declaration of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, reflects an extraordinary semblance to the lament (Ys 29.1) of the soul of Universe (***Gevush Urvan***) in the verbalization of Zarathushtra some 4000 years ago. In the Gathic scripture, 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 calling of a Divine savior to restore order. The above affirmation of the world body, clearly reveals, the likeness of the misery and the anguish prevailing in the world over an exceptionally long period of time.

The above scenario is an unequivocal confirmation that in the long span of four millennia little has changed in human attitude towards their planet and towards the fellowship of human brotherhood. Today planet earth sustains over six billion human beings. Lives are snuffed out by the thousands, from Mozambique to Somalia through starvation, and from ethnic cleansing in Europe to conflicts in the name of religion and freedom in the Middle East. The disparity of

wealth between 'the have' and 'the have not' feeds fuel to the fire of indiscriminate hatred and terrorism.

One often wonders if it would make any difference to the leaders of the world community in United Nations and to the world in general, what a dwindling group of some 180,000 Zarathushtrians have to say about the behavior of human towards Nature and its ecosystem that sustains them. However, what Zarathushtis have to say only chronicles what the first prophet of mankind, the first Aryan Manthran had declared then and is equally pertinent in 21<sup>st</sup> century of the present day world.

Zarathushtra in his hymns, does not discuss specific issues, he does not provide direct solutions to precise problems we face in the world today for he is oblivious to them. The words of Asho Zarathusht are **the dictate to a Righteous way of life**, They are a **roadmap that points to the Path of Asha**, the path of purity and cleanliness in this physical world. He, through his inspirational message preaches the mankind **TO THINK** and unravel the meaning implicit in his words. The aim of **Daena Vanghui** the Good Religion, is to appreciate and hold sacred, the elements of nature - heavens, water, earth, plant, animal and human, and to use them with **moderation and reverence**. The tenets are unequivocal about never to **abuse the Nature with excess**, or to **defile the elements with pollution**, or to **diminish them with greed** (Ys 32.3-5).

Today we see wide spread devastation around, with the acid rain, the greenhouse effect, the depletion of ozone layer, indiscriminate deforestation of plant kingdom, pollution of our water with chemical waste, and wanton contamination of plant and animal habitat through thousands of gallons of oil spill only because of the **erroneous judgment of human beings**. We are here reminded of the reflections of late Prof. Carl Sagan on a meeting of the "Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders" held in Moscow 1990, when he said, ".....there was a general consensus that humans have become predators on the biosphere, always taking never giving. 'We have not inherited the earth from our ancestors, but have borrowed it from our children'. In bridging creation and religion the professor continues, "...there is nothing in the Judeo-Christian, Muslim tradition that approaches the cherishing of nature as in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition or among Native American. Indeed both western religion and science assert that nature should not be viewed as sacred." He further concedes that , " a poignant metaphor of stewardship has emerged recently.... The idea that humans are the caretakers of the earth, put here for the purpose and accountable now and into the indefinite future, to the landlord."

It is indeed remarkable that highly reputed astrophysicist concludes, on the threshold of 21<sup>st</sup> century then, with the words that essentially resonates the message of the first Prophet of mankind. Zarathushtra initiates his Gathic hymns with an appeal to his God, for " the support of the Holy Mentality/Spirit (**Spenta Mainyu**) so I may perform all action in consonance with Thy divine Law of Asha, to bring wisdom to the Good Mind, to provide solace to the Soul of the living world." (Ys 28.1).

Implicit in the above enduring message is the covenant that the soul of human creation makes with the Creator to preserve and protect the creation against all adversities, before descending to the earth. This is documented in the Younger Avestan Book of Creation, Bundahisn (3.23-24). Humans are thus charged with the crucial responsibility to be the stewards of the creation, to help refresh and renovate Purity, Righteousness and unconditional Love in the material world, to bring it in close proximity to the Spiritual existence (Ys 30.9).

The Creation myth of the ancient societies reflect the values that have developed in their interaction with the environment. This is particularly true for the Native Indians of North America. While these values did not converge into the worship of a single deity with Supreme Wisdom; their fundamental principal of the unity and interconnectedness of all creation is astonishingly compatible with the primordial Zarathushtrian concept on the one hand, and the modern

understanding of the emergence of the Universe on the other. Their reverence for their planet is profoundly expressed as McDonagh quotes Chief Seattle of Duwamish Indians in his book '**To Care for Earth**' saying,

“ The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst...the air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath – the beast, the trees, and the human”

The traditions that followed Zarathushtrian, era, apparently had lost this profound kinship with Nature. Western church has to some degree lost the global vision of the need for harmony or oneness in the cosmos. Harold Oliver, professor of Philosophical Theology at Boston university says, “ The awakening of ecological consciousness in the 1960s had an immediate effect on theology, because the theorist of the new movement laid the primary responsibility for the ecological crisis at the door of Christianity itself. It was argued that the wanton exploitation of nature in the name of technological progress was rooted in Judaeo-Christian doctrine of creation which mandated the human subduing of the earth.” It was the sermon of Joseph Sittler in 1964 on the “**The Care of the earth**” that revealed to a wider public, the enhanced sense of ecological consciousness which was extrapolated to an appeal for a renewed theological accountability for the natural world.

In contrast many earlier traditions such as the Hindu, Buddhist and even Platonic secular philosophy, encouraged renunciation of the material, and path of ascetic life style as a course to spiritual evolution. We note that in the history of our own religion when some two thousand years after the time of the Prophet, in the early Sasanian era, rose the prophet Mani, an Iranian of Noble Partian descent, to proclaim a heterodoxy that amalgamated Zoroastrianism with the fundamental tenets of Judaeo-Christian and Gnostic tradition. He portrayed his credence for the material creation as evil and held that the best course for mankind was to lead a gentle, ascetic life, dying as a celibate for the salvation of their soul. This was in **fundamental violation to the Zarathushtrian doctrine** which declared a life of fullness with **moderation and care for the environment** through Righteousness, to evolve spiritually in harmony with Nature.

Despite its antiquity, the teaching of Asho Zarathusht in this respect is unique. He postulated that spiritual and physical are the two complements of the Single Oneness and that it is through the preservation and protection of the material world, through respect and reverence for the Creation of Ahura Mazda, that humans will attain the spiritual perfection. The view of mankind in covenant with the Creator, assumes that when humans violate any part of the created order –the immutable order of Asha – it is harmful to the whole. Depletion of ozone layer and the acid rain are the glaring examples of human negligence that has markedly perturbed the order of Nature. Charles McCoy in his essay **Creation and Covenant** elaborates that:

“God makes covenant in creation with the **whole of the natural order** (Jer.33.20-25). Humanity is created within the same covenant of creation, a covenant that Adam breaks beginning the faithlessness of humans to God (Hos.6.7). God upholds the covenant and makes anew with Noah, with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.”

McCoy further develops an understanding of the covenantal theology and ethics by expressing the process of creation historically when he says:

“ The world created by God ‘in the beginning’ is not complete, but is created in process towards increasing fulfillment and towards final consummation. Humanity as a part of this created order is also created incomplete and in process towards further growth and towards fulfillment.”

Writing in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century McCoy is inadvertently reflecting a paraphrase of Zarathushtrian tenet. As per the Zarathushtrian theology the Universal Mind in consonance with the Progressive/Holy Mentality first created the perfect Spiritual existence, **Mainyava** (Phl.

Menog) absolute in purity, absolute in the order of Truth, perfect in unconditional Love, compassion and beyond defilement. Along the same pattern, followed the creation of the other complement - the world of actuality – the **Gaethya** (Phl. Getig) with one exception. Included within the corporeal creation, was the pivotal genesis of mankind, gifted with the **spark of the Divine** - the Good Mind – and endowed with **absolute Freedom of choice**, to be exercised with **moderation**. Mankind, through the benevolence of the Creator and following the *Spenta Mainyu* must evolve to comprehend the material creation and to preserve it. Even to an average intellect, it is apparent that mankind has **FAILED MISERABLY** in their mission to link their **Good Mind, Freedom of choice, and Moderation** efficiently and effectively. For if they had the state of the world would not be unchanged over 4000 years. It is in the misuse/abuse of the Good Mind – **Vohu Mananh** – that lies at the very basis of the ethical duality of Good and Evil that has flawed and contaminated the otherwise flawless physical creation.

The challenge that was put to the mankind by Asho Zarathusht, and that other traditions in recent times has come to realize, is to be the Guardian, the Custodian; not just of the creations around but first and foremost of the creation within. Only through the recognition of the wholeness, only through spiritual harmony of mind and body within, that human can progress spiritually to effectively combat the pollution, of the cosmic waste without.

Mankind in general, over time is unfailingly caught up in a race of greed and ego, terminating in mistrust and distortion. Though many are unaware of Zarathushtra's primal message, those who should be conscious have largely forgotten the fundamental objective of his tenets. The Make of car, size of Bank account and footage of the Living area, has become the markers for judging of prestige. While nothing is wrong with all of the above, as the tenets uniquely endorse a full life, these markers engender a potent malaise of the spiritual, when these material excesses, become ends in themselves.

In order for human to acknowledge the wholeness and interdependence with their universe, it is a prerequisite, that one identifies first, with oneness of the body and mind, of the physical with the spiritual, in the little 'world' within oneself. This can then serve as the focal point for convergence to perceive the Spirit in the world at large. What brings an environment of harmony within – a Microcosmic Haurvatat -will lead to harmony with the environment without –the Macrocosmic Haurvatat.

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