

June 11, 2007

An Interview with Mrs. Dina G. McIntyre



PART 1:

Dear Dina, Thank you for accepting California Zoroastrian Center's invitation to interview with Chehrenama.

Thank you for having this interview with me.

Please tell us about your background and what triggered your interest in Zoroastrianism?

When I was young, I was very turned off by Zoroastrianism because I did not know anything about it other than the mindless do-s and don't-s, which made no sense to me. I was quite happy with my (non-Zoroastrian) husband, my children, and my law practice and did not have any thoughts about the Zoroastrian community. Then, when I was middle aged, a fellow called Meherwan Irani asked me to do the legal work to create the Zoroastrian Association of Pennsylvania. That started a hunger to know my roots. For better or for worse, I wanted to know what my religious heritage was all about. It was not till I studied the Gathas in depth, that the lights turned on in my mind. I loved the idea of a prophet who tells us to think for ourselves, and search for truth in all aspects of our lives -- men and women alike; that the key to solving problems -- whether in our world or in our selves -- is to use our minds in a way that is committed to goodness. I loved his notion of "God" and the joyful, loving, generosity of his message -- a religion without fear, which unifies all that exists. As concepts, his teachings were exciting, but oddly, they did not bring me inner peace or happiness, until I started putting them into practice in my life. Now, I would love to make all the living aware of these beautiful teachings, so that they too may choose (if they wish) its healing way of living and relating to "God", other people, other life forms, and our world.

Q: Who are Soshyants and how are they different from the Messiahs of other religions.

In the later Zoroastrian texts, the concept of a saoshyant became greatly embroidered and exaggerated to the point of elevating saoshyant to the status of a miraculous messiah of great power who will be victorious over evil, and make everything all right. This notion of saoshyant may well have influenced the notion of Messiah's in other religions. And we are not much different today. Whether it is beloved fictional characters such as Superman, or Yoda, or other omniscient aliens with miraculous powers from another star system, we too hunger for a leader with magical powers who will defeat evil and make everything turn out all right.

This view of the saoshyant you will not find in the Gathas. There is no one savior (or two or three) with magical powers who will come to fix things for us. We have to fix things for ourselves, with Mazda's help, and with the help of each other. According to Zarathushta, each individual is a potential saoshyant -- a potential savior. In the Gathas he says:

"... which men shall stop the cruelty (caused) by the violent deceitful persons? To which man shall come the understanding stemming from good thinking? Y48.11 (Insler translation throughout). And he concludes:

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

The "actions in harmony with good thinking and with truth [asha]," of this Gathic verse, Y48.12, are the actions which bring the divine to life, not only in our spirits, but also in our world and so establish good rule (vohu xshathra). To Zarathushtra, the material and the spiritual are inextricably linked -- each necessary to bring about the desired end. Thoughts, words and actions of asha (the material embodying the spiritual) are the means by which we achieve the desired end (the best asha, the best thinking -- a spiritual state of being), as well as a good society, a better world. Thus the purpose of life -- to realize, or make real, the divine -- is achieved in both existences, in the existence of mind, as well as in the existence of matter, our material world.

Q: Why does the Zoroastrian religion emphasize not being idle, work and being productive?.

To Zarathushtra, the purpose of life is to realize, or make real, the divine -- in our selves, and in our world. We accomplish this two-fold purpose (1) by evolving or growing, individually, from a mixture of good and evil, to a state of being that is completely spenta, pure goodness, Wisdom personified, and (2) by making our world a better place. How do we do this? In the temple of life with our choices in thought word and action. Each time we make choices that

advance truth and the good, we grow ourselves, spiritually, and in the process, make our world a better place, because it is impossible to think, speak or act without either benefiting or harming the people and the circumstances that are affected by such thoughts, words and actions. So in order to fulfill the purpose of life, we have to be pro-active -- find good solutions to the problems that exist, in our selves, and in our world. We cannot do so by being idle. We can only do so by being productive, by making things better. This requirement of thinking, speaking and acting in a good way, is also expressed in the work ethic which is valued in our religion.

Q: Some say, God is nothing more than nature. How does Zarathushtra view this?

If Mazda is indeed immanent in all things, then He exists in nature. On the other hand, if Mazda created the material world, as the Gathas tell us, then Mazda could not, logically, be limited to the material world. So I do not think we can accurately say that to Zarathushtra, Mazda is nothing more than nature. As I understand the Gathas, the material world was created to enable the choices and learning experiences that are necessary for the perfecting process of our beings (mainyu) from a mixture of the bad (aka) and better (vahyo) ways of being (mainyu) to one that personifies completely, the benevolent (spenta), truthful (ashavan), way of being, and thus is wisdom personified (Mazda). Once we attain haurvatat, (completeness, perfection), we also attain ameretat (which literally means "non-deathness") because the reason for mortality (and therefore the material world), will then cease to exist. So the material world is a temporary (time-bound) existence for the perfecting process, as I understand the Gathas, whereas Mazda's existence includes ameretat (non-deathness) and is therefore not limited to the time-bound, material, existence, but also exists in a timeless, non-material, dimension. What that timeless, non-material existence may be like, we do not know, and Zarathushtra -- always honest -- does not say.

Q: For Zarathushtra, Is Ahura Mazda a concept or an entity?

I have a good friend who contends that Zarathushtra does not believe in "God" as an entity, and that Mazda is nothing more than wisdom as a concept. (Bear in mind, there are no capital letters in the Avestan script). But, with due respect, I disagree. There are many references to mazda which are not consistent with His being only a concept. For example (Inslar translation throughout): "...Him who is beneficent through His virtuous spirit [His spenta mainyu] to those who exist." Y45.6. Mazda's spenta mainyu is His benevolent way of being. A concept, wisdom, cannot have a spirit or way of being (mainyu) Nor can a concept "be" beneficent. "...Him, the Lord, who is famed to be wise in His soul [urvan]..." Y45.10.

A concept cannot have a soul. However we choose to interpret "urvan" (soul), it is some form of consciousness or being, which a concept is not. "...I realized Thee to be (ever) young in mind..." Y31.8. A concept might be 'ever young', but it cannot have a 'mind' -- the existence of

'mind' as a part of Mazda indicates that Mazda is something more than a concept. But (to my delight) Zarathushtra's notion of "God" is that He is not an old fogey. "...Thy thinking..." Y31.11. A concept cannot think. "...the truthful Lord, [spenta] in His actions..." Y46.9. A concept cannot perform actions. "... Lord of the word and deed stemming from good [mainyu]..."Y45.8. A concept cannot speak words, or perform deeds. "... For I know that words deriving from good purpose and from love are not to be left wanting by you." Y28.10. A concept cannot answer prayer. The examples are legion. These are just a few. To me, the evidence is compelling, that to Zarathushtra, Mazda is a living being.

Q: Is Ahura Mazda a supernatural God?

We tend to define anything we don't understand as a "miracle" or as "supernatural". Hundreds of years ago, people thought that comets, or eclipses of the moon or the sun, were supernatural, whereas today we understand that they are natural phenomena. But there is a lot about our world which we still do not know, or understand. I am inclined to think that the miracles of today may be the knowledge of tomorrow. But what did Zarathushtra think? He states that Mazda created the material world, and the natural order of things in the material world (which is one aspect of asha). And his Gathas contain no stories of miracles or miraculous happenings. So I am inclined to think that Zarathushtra believed that (in our existence, at least) Mazda works within the natural order which He created. Does that mean that Mazda is incapable of acting outside the natural order which He has created? Zarathushtra does not say, which I think is wise, because if we do not understand even our material world, how can we understand all of Mazda's capabilities? Zarathushtra does not specifically limit Mazda's capabilities, based on our own (presently) limited understanding.

Q: What is salvation in Zoroastrianism? Does Ahura Mazda require allegiance to Him for salvation?

To Zarathushtra, there is no concept of eternal hell either for making mistakes, or for failing to give allegiance. There is no concept of damnation, and hence no necessity for "redemption". There is no concept of man being born sinful, and incapable of redeeming himself. True, he is born with the capacity for evil. But he is also born with a capacity for the divine -- truth (asha), good thinking (vohu mano), etc.

Salvation according to Zarathushtra is not, being redeemed by someone else's suffering and death, rather it is the end result of living in accordance with divine values (truth, good thinking, et cetera) – thought by thought, word by word, action by action, choice by choice -- a long process of growth and evolution (as we become what we choose). Zarathushtra defines salvation as truth allied with good thinking ("...let that salvation of yours be granted to us: truth allied with good thinking!..." Y51.20). In other words, salvation is not being saved from damnation. It is being saved from that which is false, from that which is not the truth. It is

also important to remember that Zarathushtra describes the person who attains salvation as "beneficent" (Y34.3), as "loving" (Y44.2) and as a world-healer (Y44.2).

Allegiance: In the Gathas, there is no concept of allegiance to a "God" named Ahura Mazda. No rewards are promised for such allegiance (like the reward of the conventional "heaven"). No punishments are promised for failure to give such allegiance (like damnation in hell). Allegiance is irrelevant except for allegiance to the values which make for divinity (truth, good thinking, etc), which are their own reward. And we are told to revere all good men and women -- not just good Zarathushti men and women. Zarathushtra enlarges the notion of "belonging" from that of family, tribe, or religion, to all the living.

Q: Is Ahura Mazda a judge? Does He judge us?

On the one hand, Zarathushtra does indeed speak of Mazda as one who judges us. For example, in Y46.17, he says: "... the Wise Lord who, together with His clever advisor, truth, has judged the just and the unjust." Y46.17. However, we see from this verse that Mazda's judgment of us is not punitive, because the quality that informs His judgment is "asha". Asha is truth, goodness, beneficence, all that is right. There is no concept of punishment in asha. Asha (which literally means "what fits") does include within its meaning, justice, and the law of consequences. However, its object is not punishment, but enlightenment, through a process of changing minds and preferences.

On the other hand, Zarathushtra also introduces the concept of self judgment. For example speaking of those who act wrongfully, he says: "...But their own soul and their own conception [daena] did vex them when they reached the Bridge of the Judge,..." Y46.11; "... His soul shall vex him at the Bridge of the Judge surely, in that he has disappeared from the path of truth by reason of his own actions and (the words) of his tongue." Y51.13. This notion of self judgment we also find in stories in later texts, where the soul, crossing Chinvat Bridge, meets his own thoughts, words and actions which (for purposes of the story) are in the form of a beautiful damsel if they are good, and an ugly hag if they are wrongful. The bridge is a metaphor for the process of transition from the material world where good and evil are mixed, to a pure spiritual state which is solely spenta. During this process of transition, it is the soul itself, and no other entity -- not even Mazda -- to whom the damsel symbolizing the souls past thoughts, words and actions, looks beautiful or ugly. So here too, as in the Gathas, we have the concept of self judgment.

How do we reconcile these two concepts of judgment -- where Mazda judges us, and where we judge ourselves? Actually, if we believe in the notion of immanence -- that Mazda is a part of us, and we of Him, then this apparent conflict is resolved. Because the judgment by Mazda is simply a judgment by our best selves -- the perfected part of the one life force of which we all are a part.

Q: What is asha? Is it truth? righteousness? order?

Asha literally means "what fits". It has been variously translated as "truth" "order" and "righteousness". Which is correct? They all are. You well may think: No way. How can one word -- asha -- have three such different meanings? Well, Zarathushtra did not think in English or Persian, so to understand a given word in Gathic, we have to sometimes think outside the conventional box of these languages. Zarathushtra sees reality in terms of the material and the abstract -- what he calls the existences of matter and mind (Y28.2, Y43.3). In the existence of matter, "what fits" (asha) is what is correct, factually accurate, hence truth. It includes the true order of things in our physical universe, the laws that order the way our physical universe functions. This physical truth / order is ethically neutral. In the existence of mind, "what fits" is also what is correct, hence what's right -- not a puritanical, judgmental rectitude, but one that in the Gathas includes such qualities as goodness, beneficence, solicitude, friendship, compassion, justice -- all of the values that we consider to be "true" "good" and "right", which is the true or correct way in which the abstract existence has been ordered. So in essence, "asha" comprehends the truth of things, or the true order of things, in the existences of matter and mind. There is no one English word that captures the full meaning of asha. "Truth" is the closest in my view, but this is not just factual truth. It also includes the truths of mind and spirit -- all that is good, beneficent, right.

Dina G. McIntyre, is a Zoroastrian who was born in India and came to the United States to attend college. She received a bachelor of science degree from Carnegie Mellon University (then Carnegie Institute of Technology), and a law degree from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Law. Dina has practiced law in the United States since 1963. She has two sons who also are practicing lawyers. Prior to her retirement she was a member of the bar of all federal and state courts in Pennsylvania, as well as the United States Supreme Court. She has been a student of the teachings of Zarathushtra since the early 1980s, and was the Editor of a 12 lesson course on the Gathas called "An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra", which she distributed world-wide in 1989-90. She has lectured on the teachings of Zarathushtra at various conferences and seminars in the United States, Canada, England, India, Venezuela, and at the World Parliament of Religions in 1993. Her writings on the teachings of Zarathushtra have appeared in various Zarathushti Journals and on the following websites: www.vohuman.org and www.zarathushtra.com

An Interview with Mrs. Dina G. McIntyre

PART 2.

Q: Of what significance is Zarathushtra's name for God -- Mazda Ahura?

In referring to the "God" he worships, Zarathushtra does not use the generic word for "god" (baga) in Gathic Avestan.

Mazda: Zarathushtra most often calls "God" "Mazda" which means Wisdom personified -- a state of being whose characteristics are truth (asha, which includes the truths of mind and spirit -- all that is good and right), its comprehension (vohu mano), its realization in thought, word and action (aramaiti), its complete and undying attainment, or personification (haurvatat / ameretat) all of which comprise the benevolent way of being (spenta mainyu), all of which comprise Wisdom personified (Mazda). It is significant that man also has, or is capable of achieving, all of these divine attributes (later called the amesha spenta).

Ahura: Zarathushtra also sometimes refers to "God" as Ahura (Lord). But Zarathushtra's idea of Lordship is quite unique. Mazda's lordship is not a control or domination over man or other life forms. He is described as having lordship, or mastery, over the attributes that comprise divinity -- the amesha spenta. For example, Zarathushtra describes the Lordship of Mazda in the following ways (Insler translation throughout): "...the very Wise Master [ahurai] of good thinking...." Y30.1; "...Lord [ahurem] of the word and deed stemming from good spirit..." Y45.8, see also Y51.3, [such words and deeds comprise the concept of aramaiti]; "...Thou didst receive for Thyself immortality [ameretat], truth [asha] and mastery [or rule, xshathra] over completeness [haurvatat] ..." Y34.1; "...His abounding authority of rule over completeness [haurvatat] and immortality [ameretat] and over truth [asha],..."Y31.21.

So we see that Zarathushtra's notion of Divinity, of "God" is that of a being who has attained lordship, or mastery, or rule, (i.e. complete possession) over the attributes of divinity, and therefore is Wisdom personified -- Mazda Ahura. It is significant that "ahura" (Y29.2 and Y31.10) and "ahu" (Y29.6) are also used to refer to a person who is to be pastor of the good vision (the vision of a world governed by truth and good thinking), indicating that we too can achieve lordship or mastery over the attributes that make for divinity.

Q: How does Zarathushtra say we should worship Mazda, and what reward can we expect for such worship?

The only physical attitude of worship described in the Gathas is worshipping with outstretched hands: ("With hands outstretched in reverence..." Y28.1; "... we ... pray to the Lord with outstretched hands..." Y29.5; "With hands outstretched, Wise One, I shall serve ... you..." Y50.8). Zarathushtra does not specify any rituals that we must perform to worship Mazda. He says that we should worship Mazda with His own divine attributes, the amesha spenta: ("...I shall always worship all of you, Wise Lord, with truth [asha] and the very best thinking [the superlative of vohu mano], and with their rule [xshathra] ..." Y50.4; "I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers of [aramaiti]..."Y45.10 [i.e. with prayers of thoughts, words and actions of truth, asha]; "... Your enduring worshipful offering has been established to be immortality [ameretat] and completeness [haurvatat]." Y33.8). In other words, we worship Mazda in real life situations, with thoughts, words and actions that bring His divine attributes to life. And these divine attributes, are also the reward for such worship. For example: the reward for truth and good thinking, is truth and good thinking (Y28.10; Y51.21). The reward for good thinking, is good rule (Y33.13) (which is the rule of truth and good thinking Y30.7). The reward for a good way of being [mainyu] and actions, is good thinking (Y31.21). The reward for aramaiti (making truth real with our thoughts, words and actions), is truth (Y43.10). The reward for truth and aramaiti, is good thinking (Y46.12). The reward for following Mazda's path (which is the path of the amesha spenta) is completeness (haurvatat) and non-deathness (ameretat) (Y45.5). So we see that this form of worship and its reward, is an incremental process of growth -- the more we choose to think, speak and act with asha, the more we become what we choose. In conclusion, Mazda does not ask us to worship Him by kneeling, or prostrating, chastising, or humiliating ourselves, proclaiming our inferiority, in order to establish His superiority. The worship He asks for is our self-realization, which is its own reward.

Q: Some say that Mazda is immanent (present) in all things. Others say He is immanent only in humans, and others say that only His attributes are immanent in humans. What is Zarathushtra's view?

Zarathushtra frequently states that man has, or is capable of attaining, Mazda's divine attributes, the amesha spenta. So it is accurate to say that Mazda is immanent (present) in man through his attributes. Yet we find that these Divine attributes are present in things other than man alone. The Gathas speak of "... the creatures of truth [asha]..." Y31.1; "... the creatures allied with truth [asha] ..." Y43.6; "...the world of truth [asha]....."Y46.3. Similarly, Zarathushtra also tells us that Mazda shares other qualities, not only with man, but also with other life forms. For example: Mazda himself has mainyu ("... the eloquence befitting Thy

[mainyu]..." Y28.11). And so does man ("... I lament these words of my [mainyu] (to Thee) Wise One,....." Y32.9). Mazda himself has mind ("...I realized Thee to be (ever) young in mind, Wise One..." Y31.8). And so does man ("...Reflect with a clear mind -- man by man for himself..." Y30.2). Mazda himself has soul ("...Him, the Lord who is famed to be Wise in His soul....." Y45.10). And so does man ("...the spenta man whose soul is in alliance with truth,..." Y34.2); And so does the representative cow or world ("... the soul of the cow lamented..." Y29.1. Some translate the word "gao-" as "cow, others translate it as "world". The "soul of the cow" (or the soul of the world if you prefer that translation) is also mentioned in Y28.1, 29.9, 31.2). The difference between Zarathushtra's treatment of man and his treatment of other life forms, in the Gathas, is that for man, he specifies a way of life -- the purpose of life, the path to achieving that purpose, etc., whereas for other life forms he does not -- an eminently honest approach, since we have no way of knowing what the path of such other life forms may be in the overall order of things (asha) (although we may enjoy speculating about it). Which brings us to the final question: Did Zarathushtra also believe that Mazda is immanent (present) in being, in all things, including all of nature? In the early years of my studies, I contemptuously thought that the reverence for nature displayed in some of the later texts was some sort of primitive, pre-Zarathushtrian, nature worship -- inconsistent with Zarathushtra's thought in the Gathas. Now, (after years of study) I think I was wrong. Now I think that this reverencing of nature may have originated (even though later forgotten) as a recognition of the Divine within all things -- an immanence which I see implied in the Gathas and some later texts. Let us consider the evidence.

Yasna 17.11 (a later, Younger Avestan text), and the Bundahishn (a much later Pahlavi text), speak of the fire in all things -- in man, animals, trees, plants, clouds, in the world itself. I think this was a metaphoric way of describing the divine in all things, because in the Gathas and the later texts, fire is used as a metaphor for truth (asha), and Mazda is truth personified. In the later texts, Mazda and His divine attributes are each linked with some aspect of the material world -- Mazda with man, asha with fire, vohu mano with cow, aramaiti with earth, vohu xshathra with metals, haurvatat with water and ameretat with plants. In the Gathas, we also see this same linking of the Divine with various aspects of the material world -- but in a much more variegated, multi-dimensioned, kaleidoscopic and integrated way -- except for the linking of xshathra with metals, which I have not seen in the Gathas. Naturally one wonders: Why did Zarathushtra link, and indeed sometimes integrate, Mazda and His attributes with so many natural things, in such multi-dimensioned ways? Was he implying that in our reality, there is no separation between Mazda and the natural world, each being an integral part of the other? Was he demonstrating the interconnectedness of all things, the immanence of the divine in all things? I am inclined to think he was, in light of the later texts which speak of the fire in all things -- not just in humans, or other life forms, but in all things -- in man, animals, trees, plants, clouds, the world itself, and every particle of it.

Q: What is the nature of God? There is a verse in the Gathas which states that Ahura Mazda came into the House of Song, as the first one. What does this mean?

These are tough questions. At one of my talks, someone asked: "Did Ahura Mazda create Zarathushtra? or did Zarathushtra create Ahura Mazda? A wonderful question! Because even if we believe in revelation, the human mind which receives such revelation is like a lens - - imperfect, subject to error, and the product of cultural and environmental conditioning, so that the revelation is received and transmitted through the perceptions of such an imperfect lens. Our understanding of Ahura Mazda today is complicated by another factor. From childhood, our notions of "God" have been conditioned and formed by the conventional thinking of the major religions by which we are surrounded, most of which see "God" as a being, separate and apart from us, an authority figure, who was always perfect, yet who creates man imperfect, and then punishes him with the tortures of hell for behaving in the very way in which he was created -- imperfect. Is this just? Is this benevolent? Is this even intelligent (let alone Wisdom personified)? In trying to understand Zarathushtra's notion of "God", it is helpful to remember, that the major religions which have this understanding of "God", did not exist in Zarathushtra's time. His thinking was not influenced by such perceptions. What then was Zarathushtra's view of the nature of "God"? Let us consider what he explicitly states, and what he implies, and then see what conclusions we can reasonably draw from such evidence. These conclusions still leave us with some unanswered questions, but not nearly as many as the conventional notion of "God".

In the Gathas, the local gods and their religions were characterized by tyranny, fury, violence, oppression, cruelty -- a state of affairs that deeply troubled Zarathushtra, who concluded that "gods" with such evil characteristics were not worthy of worship. He rejected their "godhood" and found himself re-thinking the whole notion of divinity -- of what it is that makes a being worthy of worship. If the evil way of being, is not worthy of worship, then, logically, neither could a deity who generates both evil and good, be worthy of worship. He concludes that only a being who is all good, all wise, is worthy of worship. And what are the attributes of such a being? They are truth (asha), its comprehension (vohu mano), its realization in thought, word and action (aramaiti), its good rule (vohu xshathra) , its complete and undying attainment (haurvatat / ameretat) -- the benevolent way of being (spenta mainyu), Wisdom personified (Mazda) -- a being who has attained lordship or mastery over (or complete possession of) these attributes of divinity, and therefore is Mazda Ahura. In short, Zarathushtra's conception of the Divine moved away from one that was fear-based, (requiring acceptance of whatever oppression, cruelty and violence the deity might dish out) to one that is pure goodness, a personification of truth and wisdom, and therefore worthy of worship. A significant step in man's quest for the Divine.

And Zarathushtra sees that these divine characteristics (the amesha spenta) also exist in man, and concludes that man also is capable of attaining them completely (not a facsimile, but the real thing). Then he takes us a step further. The uncreated soul (urvan) of Mazda exists in man, and the cow (or world). And as we have already seen, Zarathushtra implies that this life

force which is divine (Mazda), is immanent in all things. It is the fire which energizes the material creation. Finally, we need to consider one other piece of evidence -- Zarathushtra's enigmatical use of pronouns that are sometimes singular and sometimes plural, in referring to Mazda -- often in the same sentence. It is true that in some examples, the plural pronouns could be references to Mazda and one or more of his divine characteristics (the amesha spenta). But in many, many other examples, the amesha spenta cannot account for Zarathushtra's use of such singular and plural references to Mazda. Here are a few examples: "...Let us be Thy [singular] messengers, in order to hold back those who are inimical to you [plural]." Y32.1; "...By your [plural] rule, Lord, Thou [singular] shalt truly heal this world in accord with our wish." Y34.15; "...And do Thou [singular] give, Wise Ruler [singular], that promise through which we may hear of your [plural] solicitude (for us)." Y28.7. Why does Zarathushtra use this technique of alternating between the singular and the plural, in referring to Mazda? What conclusions would it be reasonable to draw from all of the above evidence, as to Zarathushtra's understanding of "God"? Putting all these pieces of the puzzle together, we see that originally (before the creation of the material world), the bad (aka) and the better (vahyo) ways of being (mainyu) existed side by side in whatever being (or life force) then existed, the way "twins" (Y30.3) exist in one womb. And one of the purposes of life is to grow or evolve from a way of being that is such a mixture of good and evil, to a way of being that is pure goodness, pure wisdom. I think, to Zarathushtra, Mazda and all the living are one being, one life force -- the life force that existed primordially, and contained within it the capability for both good and evil. This life force, through its good way of being, created the material creation, and infused itself into this creation, to enable the choices and experiences that are necessary for the perfecting process, so that the being (in all its parts, infused throughout the material creation) could change from a mixture of good and bad, to a state of being that is pure goodness -- the spenta way of being, the state of being that is a personification of the amesha spenta (which is Zarathushtra's notion of paradise). Each part of this one life force that is Mazda (Wisdom personified) is the part that has, through its choices and experiences, attained haurvatat, as all the other parts of this one life force will eventually do as well. There are a few verses in the Gathas which suggest this, but, as your question points out, one verse in particular: "What prize Zarathushtra previously promised to his adherents -- into that House of Song did the Wise Lord come as the first one. This prize has been promised to you during the times of salvation by reason of your good thinking and truth" Y51.15. (Remember, Zarathushtra describes salvation as the attainment of truth and its comprehension, good thinking "... let that salvation of yours be granted to us: truth allied with good thinking!..."Y51.20).

If Mazda is a part of all the living, then it stands to reason that He also would have to be part of the perfecting process. He would, of necessity, have made choices, and earned the state of being that is Wisdom personified (The House of Good Thinking) and bliss (the House of Song). I know this may be shocking and upsetting to those whose mindset has been formed by the conditioning of conventional religious thought, which has placed "God" on a pedestal -- separate and apart from us, an authority figure who was always perfect. But is perfection

worth anything, if it is not earned? Zarathushtra's notion of "God" is so much more worthwhile. It is that of a "God" who is a part of all the living, and who has Himself done what we are required to do. It is an affirmation of what we all are capable of achieving. It is a conception of "God" in which the key to defeating our evil inclinations focuses on transformation -- not on condemnation, torture and punishment. It is a conception of "God" which unifies us with the Divine and all the living. Mazda Ahura is the fire within -- in us, a part of us, a part of all things, and thus, of necessity, a part of the perfecting process. The being which Zarathushtra calls Mazda Ahura consists of the perfected parts of this life force -- the parts that personify asha completely, and thus have attained haurvatat at an individual level, and have joined and become one with other perfected parts, the way drops of water (the material metaphor for haurvatat) join to become one body of water. This explains the use of the singular and the plural in referring to Mazda -- in that Mazda contains within it, all of the perfected parts (plural) of the one being (singular). In attaining haurvatat, we complete Mazda, and Mazda completes us.

Q: If we have the freedom to choose right or wrong, good or bad, how can Zarathushtra be sure that everyone will finally make it to haurvatat and completeness with Mazda?

The answer to that is one of the neatest paradoxes in the Gathas. In fact, according to Zarathushtra, the more free we are to choose, the more certain it is that everyone will finally make it -- without compulsion. The freedom to choose good and evil is absolutely necessary to the inevitability of the good end. For the answer to this seemingly irreconcilable paradox, see "Harmony in Paradox: 5. The Paradox of the Freedom to Choose and the Inevitable End" on www.vohuman.org.

Dina G. McIntyre, is a Zoroastrian who was born in India and came to the United States to attend college. She received a bachelor of science degree from Carnegie Mellon University (then Carnegie Institute of Technology), and a law degree from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Law. Dina has practiced law in the United States since 1963. She has two sons who also are practicing lawyers. Prior to her retirement she was a member of the bar of all federal and state courts in Pennsylvania, as well as the United States Supreme Court. She has been a student of the teachings of Zarathushtra since the early 1980s, and was the Editor of a 12 lesson course on the Gathas called "An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra", which she distributed world-wide in 1989-90. She has lectured on the teachings of Zarathushtra at various conferences and seminars in the United States, Canada, England, India, Venezuela, and at the World Parliament of Religions in 1993. Her writings on the teachings of Zarathushtra have appeared in various Zarathushtri Journals and on the following websites: www.vohuman.org and www.zarathushtra.com