

## Zarathushtra's Puzzles.

By

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Thank you for your invitation to speak. I am delighted to be here.

Our remote ancestors, the ancient Persians, delighted in puzzles, riddles and word games. Firdausi's epic, the *Shahnameh*, recounting the legendary history of Iran, before the Arab invasion of 647 A.D., is full of instances in which mental games like chess, riddles, and brain-teasers played an important part in the matrix of life in those remote days, when intelligence and courtesy were valued above intolerance and bombast. It is therefore not surprising to find this tradition reflected in the word games, puzzles and brain-teasers of an even more ancient set of poems -- Zarathushtra's Gathas.

To Zarathushtra, life is an on-going search, a quest, for truth (which, you may recall, includes factual truth, as well as the truths of mind and spirit). This is a quest from which he does not exempt himself. He says:

"...as long as I shall be able and be strong, so long shall I look in quest of truth [asha]." Y28.4.<sup>2</sup>

So it is not surprising that he crafts some of his most profound ideas in the form of elegant puzzles, which yield answers to an inquiring mind, thus reflecting in the style of his poems, the quest for truth, which is a fundament of his teachings. The Gathas are full of wonderful, multi-dimensional puzzles. I will touch on just a few of them today. Before getting to Zarathushtra's puzzles, I would like to cover a couple of things.

First, it is important to understand how Zarathushtra uses the term "asha" which Professor Insler and others have translated as "truth". As this word is used in the Gathas, it means, not just what is factually accurate (which is ethically neutral). It's meaning also includes the truths of mind and spirit -- all that is true and good and right. This is not a puritanical, judgmental rectitude, but one that in the Gathas includes such qualities as goodness, love, beneficence, solicitude, friendship, compassion, justice -- all of the values that we consider to be "true"

"good" and "right".<sup>3</sup>

Second, it is important to understand that in referring to the "God" he worships, Zarathushtra does not use the generic word for "god" in Gathic Avestan. According to the late Professor Thieme, Zarathushtra's notion of "God" is personified Wisdom<sup>4</sup>. Specifically, he calls "God" most often "Mazda" (which means Wisdom), and also "Ahura" which means Lord. And he sometimes combines these two nouns into the compound term Mazda Ahura, which, centuries later, became the compound name "Ahura Mazda".

Zarathushtra uses his puzzles as teaching devices -- generating in the student, the excitement of discovery. But he does not identify his puzzles specifically (with the answers upside down at the end of a given poem). So how do we find these puzzles, much less solve them? I started this process of discovery quite by accident.

In studying the Gathas, I came across many early references to "reward", and in the early days of my studies, I (mistakenly) jumped to the conclusion that the "reward" mentioned there must be the reward of the conventional "heaven", or some other form of bribery or control. Indeed, some later Zoroastrian texts have detailed descriptions of different levels of heavenly rewards (some of which, originally, may have been metaphoric).

Yet, in one of the most ancient Zoroastrian prayers, the Ashem Vohu prayer, which is in the same archaic language as the Gathas, we are told that we should follow truth for truth's own sake, that we should do what is right, because it is the right thing to do.<sup>5</sup> So as I studied the Gathas, I started paying particular attention to what Zarathushtra's notion of "reward" might be. And that is when I first discovered the delights of his multi-dimensioned puzzles.

Let me show you a few aspects of this particular puzzle pertaining to the notion of "reward". Let's start with verses 5 and 7 of Yasna 28. In verse 5, Zarathushtra says:

["Truth, shall I see thee as I continue to acquire both good thinking and the way to the Lord?....." Y28.5.](#)

At first glance, what Zarathushtra is saying seems quite obvious. If we make a diagrammatic sketch of this quotation, it would look something like this.



Let us now turn to Y28 verse 7. Here, Zarathushtra says:

“Give, o truth, this reward, namely, the attainments of good thinking.....” Y28.7

At first glance, it seems obvious that Zarathushtra is saying that truth rewards us with the attainments of good thinking. On further reflection, we might conclude that by "the attainments of good thinking", Zarathushtra is referring to wisdom. So a second meaning might be that the reward for truth is wisdom. But this phrase has yet another meaning, which you understand when you read it together with our old friend, verse 5. In that verse, you may recall, Zarathushtra says:

"Truth, shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire [or attain] ..... good thinking....." Y28.5.

In other words, an attainment of good thinking is truth. Now, if we transplant this idea -- that an attainment of good thinking is truth -- into to verse 7, the third dimension becomes clear.

If truth rewards us with the "attainments of good thinking" (verse 7), and if one of the attainments of good thinking is truth itself (verse 5), then in verse 7, the reward for truth is also truth itself. So that simple phrase in verse 7 which, at first glance is one dimensional, actually is three dimensional -- first, the reward for truth is the attainment of good thinking; second, the reward for truth is wisdom (which is an attainment of good thinking); and third, the reward for truth is truth itself (also an attainment of good thinking Y28:5).

I would like to show you in tabulation form, the results of the analysis we have just gone through.

	<b>What earns the reward</b>	<b>The reward</b>
Y28. 5 (and Y33.5)	good thinking	truth

	the way to the Lord the paths of truth		truth
	truth		truth
Y28 verses 7 and 5	truth	the attainments of good thinking (the comprehension of truth)	
	truth	wisdom (the comprehension of truth)	
	truth		truth

If you look at this tabulation, it becomes apparent that in these verses, truth and its comprehension, good thinking, are both what generate the reward, and they are also the reward itself. This to me was a breathtaking discovery. But how could I be sure that I was on the right track, that this is what Zarathushtra really meant. The system of checks and balances that I use to ascertain if my conclusions are accurate, is to look for corroboration. Zarathushtra often expresses the same thought in different ways. In this instance we find corroboration in abundance. Here is one example. Zarathushtra says:

“Therefore, those whom Thou dost know, Wise Lord to be just and deserving in conformity with truth and good thinking, for them do Thou fulfill their longing with these attainments.....” Y28.10.

If you read these words carefully, it becomes apparent that truth and good thinking are both what make a person deserve a reward, and also the reward itself.

If we were to stop with this conclusion, we would have a very incomplete idea of Zarathushtra's notion of reward. If we were to collect all the verses which deal

with rewards and what earns them, in the Gathas, we would see that they encompass, not just truth and good thinking, but also other divine attributes of Mazda.

In the Gathas, Mazda has attributes or characteristics which, in the later texts were collectively called the amesha spenta. There are material differences in the translations of some of these terms. I have explained the basis of the ones I use in footnotes, and would be glad to do so during the Question and Answer period as well. These attributes of Mazda, the amesha spenta, are:

Truth (asha)

Its comprehension through good thinking (vohu manah)<sup>7</sup>

Its realization in thought, word and action (aramaiti)<sup>8</sup>

Its good rule (vohu xshathra)<sup>9</sup>

Its complete and undying attainment or personification (haurvatat / ameretat)

It's benevolent way of being (spenta mainyu)<sup>10</sup>

All of which comprise Wisdom personified (Mazda).

And these divine attributes, the amesha spenta, are attributes that man also can attain. In the Gathas, they are not only divine attributes, they are also the path to Ahura Mazda. They are, in fact, "[the way to the Lord](#)" of Y28.5, indicating that Wisdom is attained, not only through the comprehension of truth, but also through the experiences generated by its realization in thought, word and action, resulting, at the societal level, in good rule, and at the individual level in spiritual completeness or perfection.

Returning to our puzzle pertaining to Zarathushtra's notion of reward, we find that he makes it clear in many verses, that these divine attributes, the amesha spenta, are what it takes to earn the reward, and they are also the reward itself. We cannot take the time to correlate and analyze each of these verses. I'll simply summarize a few examples with the full quotations in footnotes.

The reward for truth and good thinking, is truth and good thinking (Y28.10).

The reward for good thinking, is good rule<sup>11</sup> (which is the rule of truth and good thinking, and the rule of aramaiti<sup>12</sup>).

The reward for good spirit and actions, is good thinking.<sup>13</sup>

The reward for aramaiti (which means making truth real with our thoughts, words and actions) , is truth,<sup>14</sup> and its comprehension.<sup>15</sup>

The reward for truth and aramaiti is good thinking (the comprehension of truth)<sup>16</sup>.

And so it goes.

What does this tell us about Zarathushtra's notion of the identity of, and the relationship between, man and "God"? I will let you ponder that at your leisure.

Many of Zarathushtra's most interesting and profound ideas are derived from inferences. But there is a danger in drawing inferences unless you have all of the underlying facts.

In studying the Gathas, it is all too easy to jump to conclusions based on the evidence of one or two verses, only to find that such conclusions are inconsistent with other verses, as we become more and more familiar with the text.

Let us consider our next puzzle -- Zarathushtra's use of the term "**BEST**" (which in the Gathic language is **Vahishta**). If you gather together, or correlate, each use of the word "**best**" (**vahishta**) you will see that he uses this word primarily in five different ways. I will give you a few examples of each of the five ways, and put the corroborating evidence in footnotes, so that you have the full picture.

First, Zarathushtra uses the word "**best**" (**vahishta**), to refer to "God", Ahura Mazda, and also to His attributes, truth (asha), good thinking (vohu mano), and His benevolent spirit or way of being (spenta mainyu). Here are some examples. He says:

“Thee, **Best One**, the Lord who art of the same temperament with the **best truth,.....**” Y28.8

“.....Thee and the truth and **that thinking which is best** .....  
Y28.9

“Come hither to me, **ye best ones**, ..... **Thou, Wise One, together with truth and good thinking** ..... Let bright gifts and reverence (for all of you) be manifest amid us.” Y33.7

“The priest who is just, in harmony with truth, is the offspring from the **best spirit [mainyu]......**” Y33.6

In the second group, Zarathushtra uses "best" (*vahishta*) to refer to God's Word, His teachings.<sup>17</sup>

"Listen with your ears to the **best things**. Reflect with a clear mind -- man by man for himself....." Y30.2

"Now, I shall speak of what the most virtuous one told me, **that word** which is to be heard as the **best** ....." Y45.5

"Yes, for the person who accepts this, there applies the **best of commands**, which the Lord, beneficent through truth [*asha*], virtuous and knowing, commands, **even His profound teachings.....**" Y48.3

At first, it might seem that there is no connection between the use of the word "best" (*vahishta*) to describe God and his divine attributes, as we saw in the first group, and the use of "best" (*vahishta*) to describe His teachings. But we know from other parts of the Gathas, that His Word, His teaching, is, the path of God's divine attributes -- the *amesha spenta* -- among which are truth (*asha*), good thinking (*vohu mano*), and a benevolent spirit (*spenta mainyu*).

Third, Zarathushtra uses the word "best" (*vahishta*) to refer to words and actions which implement God's teachings,<sup>18</sup> For example:

"Wise One, therefore tell me the **best words and actions**, namely, those allied with good thinking and truth....." Y34.15

Words and actions which bring truth and good thinking to life, give them substance, is the concept of *aramaiti* -- another divine attribute (*amesha spenta*).

Fourth, Zarathushtra uses "best" (*vahishta*) to refer to the reward for such thoughts, words, and actions.<sup>19</sup>

".....those who are yoked with truth have yoked their conception on the **best prize** ....." Y49.9.

"And through this very virtuous spirit, Wise Lord, Thou hast promised for the truthful person what indeed are **the very best things.....**" Y47.5

“..... at the end, the worst existence shall be for the deceitful, but the **best thinking** for the truthful person.” Y30.4.

"Best thinking" in this last verse is a synonym for the House of Good Thinking, which is one of Zarathushtra's terms for paradise, or heaven<sup>20</sup> -- a state of being which is Wisdom personified. In the Gathas, "house" and its variations are often used as a metaphor for a state of being. Thus the House of Good Thinking is a metaphor for a state of being that comprehends truth, that is Wisdom personified.

Fifth, Zarathushtra uses the term "**best**" (*vahishta*) to refer specifically to paradise. He does this in a number of ways: In Y32.15 and 16, he equates the "**best**" with being brought to the House of Good Thinking. Referring to evil priests and princes, he says:

“.....They shall not be brought to those who rule over life at will in the House of Good Thinking.” Y32.15

“**This is equal to the best....** [Professor Insler's footnote: 'Namely, to be brought to heaven.'<sup>21</sup>]” Y32.16

In Y46 verse 10, Zarathushtra describes what is "**best for existence**" as "**truth for the truth and the rule of good thinking.**"

In Y44 verse 2, Zarathushtra links the "**best existence**" to salvation.<sup>22</sup> He asks Ahura Mazda:

“.....Is the beginning of the **best existence** in such a way that the loving man who shall seek after these things **is to be saved?**.....” Y44.2

And how does Zarathushtra define salvation? As truth and good thinking. Addressing Mazda and His divine attributes, the amesha spenta, allegorically, he says:

“All ye (immortals) of the same temperament, let **that salvation of yours** be granted to us: **truth allied with good thinking!**.....”Y51.20.

In other words, in Zarathushtra's thought, the concept of salvation -- what we are saved from -- is not being saved from damnation. It is being saved from error, from that which is false, from that which is not the truth.

It is interesting that in the later Avestan texts, the "best existence" (ahu vahishta) is the term for the heaven above the endless lights.<sup>23</sup> And in the later Persian language, the word behesht, is used as a synonym for heaven. Behesht is a later linguistic form of the Avestan word vahishta. We can summarize this fifth group of verses as follows:

"the best thinking" equals "the House of Good Thinking" [heaven] (Y30.5).

"the best" equals "the House of Good Thinking" [heaven] Y32.15 -- 16.

"best for existence" is "truth for the truth and the rule of good thinking." Y46.10

"best existence" is linked to salvation. Y44.2

"Salvation" is "truth and good thinking" Y51.20

#### Later Avestan Texts:

"best existence" (ahu vahishta) is the heaven above the endless lights.

#### Later Persian:

"behesht" (the later form of "vahishta"), is heaven.

What inferences can we draw from these five ways in which Zarathushtra uses "best" (vahishta). Once again, it may help to look at the evidence in tabulation form:

- |                    |           |  |
|--------------------|-----------|--|
| 1. Best (vahishta) | refers to | Ahura Mazda, and His attributes of truth, good thinking, and good spirit.  |
| 2. Best (vahishta) | refers to | Ahura Mazda's teachings, which are the path of His divine attributes, which include truth, good thinking, a benevolent spirit. |
| 3. Best (vahishta) | refers to | words and actions of truth and good thinking, (which words and actions come from good spirit Y45.8 <sup>24</sup> ).            |

- |                       |           |   |
|-----------------------|-----------|---|
| 4. Best<br>(vahishta) | refers to | the reward for truth and good thinking (which comes from good spirit Y47.5 <sup>25</sup> and which is truth, the rule of good thinking, <sup>26</sup> and other divine attributes). |
| 5. Best<br>(vahishta) | refers to | the best existence, the best thinking, the House of Good Thinking, paradise, salvation, which is truth, and good thinking (Y51.20).   |

No.3 and No.4 are an echo of the idea we came across earlier, that the action (No.3) and the reward for the action (No.4) are the same.

I am aware of only one use of the word "best" (vahishta) in the Gathas, which does not appear to be linked to God and his divine attributes in one form or another. It appears in Y46 verse 6. I do not know if this inconsistency requires some particular insight which, as yet, is not clear to me, or if there is some other reason for it.

But setting aside, for a moment, this one inconsistent use of the term "best" (vahishta), what conclusions or inferences would it be reasonable to draw from this body of evidence. To me, one of the most startling conclusions is Zarathushtra's idea of the nature of heaven, or salvation. The above verses suggest, among other things, the conclusion that paradise is the state of being that we achieve, when we attain completely, or when we perfect, God's divine attributes -- a conclusion that is corroborated, not only in the Gathas, but also in the later Avestan use of the term "ahu vahishta" -- the best existence -- for heaven, and also by the linguistic evolution of vahishta to the later Persian word behesht, which is a synonym for paradise.

Again, you may wish to ask yourselves: what does this tell us about the nature of, and the relationship between, man and "God"?

This brings us to the last puzzle that I would like to discuss with you. It also entails one of Mazda's attributes, (an amesha spenta) -- specifically the concept of completeness or perfection (haurvatat). In the Gathas, haurvatat is most

often (though not always) paired with another divine attribute, ameretat, which has universally been translated as immortality. With due respect, in my opinion, the selection of "immortality" for ameretat is not consistent with a contextual analysis of its use in the Gathas. A discussion of ameretat in the Gathas is beyond the scope of this paper. I mention it, just so you will not take the word "immortality" at face value, in the quotations that follow.

Returning to our last puzzle, as with all of Mazda's attributes, haurvatat -- completeness, or perfection<sup>27</sup> -- is something that man also is capable of attaining. If we collect and study all the verses in which this term haurvatat appears, some unusual things become apparent. The Gathas suggest that first, we achieve completeness or perfection through our own endeavors. Second, God gives it to us. And third, we give it to God.<sup>28</sup> Here is the evidence:

First we earn it. Zarathushtra says:

**“Now I shall speak of what the most virtuous one told me, that word which is to be heard as the best for men. 'Those of you who shall give obedience and regard to this (Lord) of mine, they shall reach completeness [haurvatat] and immortality [ameretat]'.....” Y45.5**

Second, it is given to us by God.

**“.....grant Thou to me immortality and completeness [haurvatat], those two enduring forces which are to be praised with good thinking.” Y51.7**

Third, we are told that when we follow the path of God's divine attributes, we give completeness to God.

**“Through a virtuous spirit and the best thinking, through both action and the word befitting truth, they shall grant completeness and immortality to Him.....” Y47.1;**

**“Yes, both completeness and immortality are for Thy sustenance. Together with the rule of good thinking allied with truth, (our) [aramaiti] has increased these two enduring powers (for Thee).....” Y34.11;**

".....Whatever one has promised to Him with truth and with good thinking is to be **completeness and immortality for Him** under His rule, is to be these two enduring powers for Him in His House." Y45.10.<sup>29</sup>

It would be reasonable to infer from this collection of verses, that by following the path of God's divine attributes, man not only achieves completeness for himself, but in so doing, both receives and gives completeness to God -- requiring the conclusion that man is not complete without God, nor God without man.

To date, I have found no "smoking gun" corroborative evidence in the Gathas, of this extraordinary conclusion (although it well may be there),<sup>30</sup> and we are now entering the realm of speculation. However, this conclusion -- that man is not complete without God, nor God without man -- is echoed in a widely (but not universally) acknowledged idea of Zarathushtra that is implicit throughout the Gathas, and also in certain later texts --- the idea of the in-dwelling God, the idea that the Divine is immanent (present) within each person. If this is so, then although Mazda is perfect and complete at His level, as long as He is a part of us too, it stands to reason that He cannot achieve ultimate completeness until we do too.

If this idea is true, it has a significant and compelling corollary. If God is not complete without man, nor man without God, then it needs must follow (as the night the day), that man cannot be complete until his fellow man also achieves completeness.<sup>31</sup> There is some evidence that the progression towards completeness and perfection is not reserved for the human race alone, but extends to all the living, but I will have to resist the temptation to explore that tangent here.

Returning to our puzzle, I have no direct corroborative evidence of this last conclusion -- that man is not complete without his fellow man -- although there are verses in the Gathas that hint of this idea, and I have footnoted them for your information.<sup>32</sup>

When this conclusion first hit me, my immediate reaction was negative. When I come across ideas in the Gathas, I like to see how they play out in what we optimistically call the "real" world, -- the material world in which we live. In our world, we have some wonderful people, and we also have some real jerks -- megajerks and minor jerks. There was no way I could imagine my completeness having anything to do with theirs -- to say nothing of the unfairness of the

situation. If sanctimonious little me makes all those tough choices, and attains perfection or completeness at an individual level, why should I be denied ultimate completeness with God just because some other jerk can't make it? But the more I thought about this idea, the more I appreciated its validity in a number of ways. I'll give you three examples.

First example: take a look at the savage hatreds that exist in our world, and the violence they generate -- reflecting the prejudices of people who perceive others as somehow "different" from themselves for whatever reason, or because they are caught up in a cycle of revenge and recrimination. If each of these opposing factions were to come to the understanding that if everyone doesn't make it, no one makes it, the futility of what they are doing to each other might become clear to them.

A second example. If we cannot achieve ultimate completeness unless everyone achieves it, it becomes clear to us that we cannot be smug and self-satisfied with our own individual accomplishments, although they are a necessary first step. We have to use our minds and spirits to help each other make it. It sometimes seems that there is no limit to the problems that chain our souls -- crimes of violence, drugs, the greed for power and wealth that translates into destructive corporate scandals, to name a few. But there is also no limit to the ingenuity of the human mind in breaking these chains for all of us. This might be done by finding global solutions to global problems, or by simple acts of friendship, one-on-one.

A third example of the significance of this idea -- that we cannot achieve ultimate completeness unless everyone achieves it -- is that it requires us to separate the person from what he does. It suggests to me that I can hate and oppose the wrongful conduct of a person, but that I must not hate the person. That's tough. At least it's tough for me. But if I can do it, it helps to break the cycle of hatred and recrimination that we so often get caught up in.

Do I believe that God is not complete without man, nor man without God? Or that man is not complete without his fellow man? I don't know, but it strikes a responsive chord in me. However, if we wish to study Zarathushtra's thought with integrity, the question is not what I might believe. The question is: what did Zarathushtra believe.

You and I, we can agree or disagree about what Zarathushtra said, or what he meant. But fortunately, he has given us an excellent formula for winning out -- the quest for truth with good thinking, and its realization in thought, word and action, by each person individually -- a formula that, of necessity, requires tolerance for

a diversity of views. I can do no better than to quote his own words. He says:

“.....Through good thinking  
the Creator of Existence shall promote  
the true realization of what is most healing  
according to our wish.” Y50.11

“Therefore may we be those who shall heal this world!.....” Y30.9

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<sup>1</sup> I welcome comments, questions, agreement and disagreement. You may email me at [dinamci@aol.com](mailto:dinamci@aol.com). The website [www.vohuman.org](http://www.vohuman.org) referred to herein, is not owned or operated by me. It is an educational Zoroastrian website which is currently undergoing transition from one server to another, and therefore access to it's inventory of articles may not be readily available for a while.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from, and references to, the Gathas in this essay, are to the translation by Professor Insler, as it appears in Insler, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra*, (Brill 1975), although he may, or may not, agree with the inferences that I draw from his translation. Round parentheses ( ) in a quotation indicate insertions by Professor Insler as interpretive aids. Square brackets in a quotation indicate insertions by me, sometimes to show the applicable Gathic word (although for convenience, without its grammatical variations), and sometimes to give an explanation. I have consistently left "aramaiti" untranslated because its meaning defies translation into one English word. It therefore always appears in square brackets in a given quotation. A string of dots in a quotation indicates a deletion by me. Often a verse will contain several strands of thought. Deleting the strands that are not under discussion, helps us to focus on those that are. Bold print represents emphasis added by me.

<sup>3</sup> **Asha** literally means "what fits". It has been variously translated as "truth" "order" and "righteousness". You well may wonder how one word can have three such different meanings. Well, Zarathushtra did not think and speak in English, so to understand a given word in Gathic, we have to sometimes think outside the box of the English language. Zarathushtra sees reality in terms of the material and the abstract -- what he calls the existences of matter and mind (Y28.2). 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 underlie the way our physical universe functions. This physical truth is ethically neutral. In the existence of mind and spirit, what fits is also what is correct, hence what's right. 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, and many scholars, including Professor Insler, have chosen "truth" for "asha", although it should be remembered that "truth" in the Gathas is not just factual truth, but also includes the truths of mind and spirit -- all that is good and right.

<sup>4</sup> Thieme, *Reflections on the Vocabulary of Zarathushtra's Gathas*, in the *Proceedings of the First Gatha Colloquium*, (WZO 1993, published in 1998), p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> For a translation and discussion of the Ashem Vohu prayer, see *Three Prayers and the Name of God* which appears on [www.vohuman.org](http://www.vohuman.org).

<sup>6</sup> See Y50.11 where Zarathushtra refers to Mazda as truth, in parallel references: " [Yes, I shall swear to be your praiser, Wise One, and I shall be it, as long as I shall have strength and be able, o truth.....](#)" Y50.11.

<sup>7</sup> "Vohu" means "good". And according to Professor Insler, "manah-" means the faculty 'mind', its process 'thinking' and its object 'thought'. Insler, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra*, (Brill 1975), page 118. Needing to select one English word for the Gathic word "manah-", Professor Insler has selected "thinking". For a contextual analysis of the full meaning of vohu manah, as used by Zarathushtra in the Gathas, see *Harmony in Paradox: The*

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*Paradox of the Material and the Spiritual*, which appears on [www.vohuman.org](http://www.vohuman.org)

<sup>8</sup> Scholars who are linguists are in substantial disagreement regarding the translation of aramaiti. For example: **Insler** translates the word as "piety" (ibid., page 25 et seq.).

**Hanns-Peter Schmidt** states: "For *armaiti* and *taremaini* I have substituted 'respect' and 'disrespect' for the awkward 'proper thought' and 'perverse thought' I used previously (1974). 'Respect' is less specialized than 'devotion' and 'humility' and lacks the overtones of the present-day usage of 'piety' (Insler) and the negative connotations of 'conformity'....." *The Form and Meaning of Yasna* 33, (American Oriental Society, 1986), page 4.

**Humbach** translates aramaiti as "right-mindedness". *The Gathas of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts*, (Heidelberg, 1991), Part I, page 13.

**Jafarey** translates the word as "serenity, stability, tranquility" (Jafarey, *The Gathas our Guide*, (Ushta Publications 1989), page 116.

**Moulton**, translates it as "piety" or "devotion", *Early Zoroastrianism, Hibbert Lectures delivered at Oxford*, (AMS reprint of the 1913 original), page 344.

**Sethna** translates it as divine wisdom (Sethna, *The Teachings of Zarathushtra*, (1978), page 17 et seq.).

**Taraporewala** translates it as "Faith and Devotion" (Taraporewala, *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, (Hukhta Foundation Reprint, 1993) page 100).

**Thieme**, rejecting such translations as "fittingness", "submission" and "humility", suggests that aramaiti means an attitude "characterized by satisfying intention." (Thieme, *Reflections on the Vocabulary of Zarathustra's Gathas*, in Proceedings of the First Gatha Colloquium, (WZO 1993, published in 1998), pages 207 -- 208, expressing the opinion that as an attribute of Ahura Mazda, it is characterized by care/solicitude, and as an attribute of man, by loyalty/devotion. (page 206).

Clearly, linguistics alone has not provided an answer for the meaning of aramaiti. So we turn to a contextual analysis. The way in which Zarathushtra uses the word in the Gathas suggests that aramaiti means the realization (or making real) of truth (asha) with thoughts, words and actions of truth. For example: "[But to this world He came with the rule of good thinking and of truth, and \(our\) enduring \[aramaiti\] gave body and breath \(to it\)...](#)" Y30.7. How do we give "body and breath" to the rule of truth and good thinking? We cannot do so with right-mindedness, or piety, or respect, or devotion or serenity alone. We can only do so by bringing these concepts to life with our thoughts, words and actions. Similarly in Y44.6, Zarathushtra says "[...Through its actions, \[aramaiti\] gives substance to the truth...](#)" Y44.6, indicating that actions are included within the concept of aramaiti. And a person of aramaiti is described in the following way: "[Virtuous \[spenta\] is a man of \[aramaiti\]. He is so by reason of his understanding, his words, his action, his conception \[daena\]....](#)"Y51.21, indicating that the meaning of aramaiti includes all of these activities – good understanding, good words, good action and good vision [daena]. For a more detailed contextual analysis of the meaning of aramaiti, see *Harmony in Paradox: The Paradox of Service and Rule* on [www.vohuman.org](http://www.vohuman.org)

<sup>9</sup> Good rule (vohu xshathra) is described in the Gathas as the rule of truth and good thinking ("[...the rule of truth and good thinking...](#)"Y29.10 and 50.3; "[...the rule of good thinking and of truth...](#)" Y30.7 and 33.10; ) and the rule of aramaiti ("[...Grant thou, \[aramaiti\] your rule of good thinking...](#)" Y51.2). In this last verse, aramaiti is addressed allegorically, the idea behind the allegory being that thoughts, words and actions of truth (asha) create a good society -- good rule.

<sup>10</sup> "Spenta" means benevolent, virtuous. "Mainyu has been translated as "spirit" (by Insler and many others), and also as "mentality" (by Jafarey). A contextual analysis is helpful in determining Zarathushtra's meaning. In Y30.3 Zarathushtra says: "[Yes, there are two fundamental \[mainyu\]....In thought and in word, in action, they are two...](#)" indicating that the concept of "mainyu" includes thoughts, words and actions. Similarly, in Y45.2, describing a hypothetical conversation between the good mainyu and the bad mainyu, Zarathushtra says:"[Yes, I shall speak of the two fundamental \[mainyu\] of existence, of which the virtuous one would have thus spoken to the evil one: 'Neither our thoughts, nor teachings, nor intentions, neither our preferences, nor words, neither our actions nor conceptions nor our souls are in accord.'](#)" Y45.2 indicating that the concept of "mainyu" includes the totality of a way of being, comprehending thoughts, teachings, intentions, preferences, words, actions et cetera. Clearly, "mentality" is only a part of the meaning of "mainyu". "Spirit" in my view, is accurate in the sense of a way of

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being, the way we say, for example, the spirit of friendship, the spirit of independence, indicating various ways of being. Thus spenta mainyu would mean a benevolent spirit, or a benevolent way of being, a way of being that is in accord with truth, that derives its goodness from truth ("...the spirit [mainyu] virtuous [spenta] through truth [asha]..." Y28.1; ).

<sup>11</sup> "Lord of broad vision, disclose to me for support the safeguards of your rule, those which are the reward for good thinking....." Y33.13.

<sup>12</sup> Good rule (vohu xshathra) is described in the Gathas as the rule of truth and good thinking ("...the rule of truth and good thinking..."Y29.10 and 50.3; "...the rule of good thinking and of truth..." Y30.7 and 33.10; ) and also as the rule of aramaiti ("...Grant thou, [aramaiti] your rule of good thinking..." Y51.2). Aramaiti means making truth real, giving it "body and breath [i.e. life]" Y30.7, giving it "substance" Y44.6, with our thoughts, words and actions. Thoughts, words and actions of truth (aramaiti) is the way to bring about the rule of truth and good thinking -- which is good rule (vohu xshathra).

<sup>13</sup> "The Wise Lord ... shall give the permanence of good thinking's alliance to him, the one who is His ally in spirit and actions." Y31.21.

<sup>14</sup> " 'Therefore do Thou reveal to me the truth, which I continue to summon. Being in companionship with [aramaiti] I have deserved it.' ....." Y43.10.

<sup>15</sup> "...Reveal to me by reason of my [spenta aramaiti] those conceptions in harmony with truth." Y33.13.

<sup>16</sup> "Since thou, truth, didst arise among the noteworthy children and grandchildren of Friyana, the Turanian, the one who prospered his creatures with the zeal of [aramaiti] therefore did the Wise Lord unite them with good thinking, in order to announce Himself to them for their support." Y46.12.

<sup>17</sup> Corroboration: Y31.1.

<sup>18</sup> Corroboration; Y47.2 (words and actions); Y32.12 (actions); Y43.5.

<sup>19</sup> Corroboration: Y31.6.

<sup>20</sup> Insler, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra*, (Brill 1975), page 33, footnote 3. In my view, the terms which Zarathushtra uses for heaven - the House of Good Thinking, and the House of Song, are his way of describing a state of being -the House of Good Thinking being a state of wisdom, the House of Song being a state of bliss. For the evidence on which I base this conclusion see "Metaphor in the Gathas, Part 2, The Houses of Paradise and Hell" which appears on [www.vohuman.org](http://www.vohuman.org). See also "A Question of Paradise." World Zoroastrian Organization Seminar, September 1991, London England.

<sup>21</sup> Insler, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra*, (Brill 1975), page 49, footnote 21.

<sup>22</sup> See also Y46.10.

<sup>23</sup> Yasht 12, as described in Windfuhr, "Where Guardian Spirits Watch by Night and Evil Spirits Fail: The Zoroastrian Prototypical Heaven." American School of Oriental Research, pp. 633, 635. T.R. Sethna translates "vahisstem ahum" in Yasht 12, verse 29 (36) as "(best world) paradise". Sethna, *Yashts*, (1976 Reprint), pages 192 -- 193.

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<sup>24</sup> ".....for I have just now, knowingly through truth, seen the Wise One in a vision to be Lord of the word and deed stemming from good spirit..." Y45.8.

<sup>25</sup> "And through this very virtuous spirit Wise Lord, Thou has promised for the truthful person what indeed are the very best things. (But) the deceitful man shall have his share apart from Thy approval, since he lives by his atones stemming from evil thinking." Y47.5.

<sup>26</sup> "...Virtuous is truth and the rule of good thinking. The Wise Lord created this, (and) I shall entreat Him for this good reward." Y51.21.

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Completeness	Insler, <i>The Gathas of Zarathushtra</i> (E.J. Brill, 1975), page 37 et seq..
Wholeness	Jafarey, <i>The Gathas. Our Guide</i> (Ushta, Inc. 1989), page 118..
Wholeness, perfection,salvation	Jackson, quoted in Moulton, <i>Early Zoroastrianism</i> (AMS reprint) p 295, note 2.
Integrity	Humbach, <i>The Gathas of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts</i> , (Heidelberg, 1991), Part I, page 13 et seq.
Integrity	Ichaporia, <i>The Gathas of Asho Zarathushtra</i> (FEZANA, 1993), page 11.
Perfection	Azargoshasp, <i>Translation of Gathas</i> (CIMNA 1988), page 14 et seq.
Perfection, wholeness, wellbeing	Bode & Nanavutt The Songs of Zarathushtra. <i>The Gathas</i> (George, Allen & Unwin, Ltd.), page 26.
Perfection, wholeness, spiritual completeness	Taraporewala <i>The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra</i> , (Hukhta Foundation reprint, 1993), pages 13, 190 -- 191..
Perfection, Integrity,	Dinshaw Irani, <i>The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra</i> (Center for Ancient Iranian Studies, 1998), page 16.
Welfare	Mills, <i>Sacred Books of the East</i> Volume 31, (Motilal Benarsidas Reprint), page 43 et seq.
Welfare or Salvation	Moulton, <i>Early Zoroastrianism, Hibbert Lectures at Oxford</i> (AMS reprint of 1913 original), page 344.
Self.realization	Sethna, <i>The Teachings of Zarathushtra</i> , (Reprint 1978), page 31 et seq.

<sup>28</sup> There is a fourth way in which Zarathushtra uses haurvatat. Read Y34.1, Y51.15 and Y30.5 (Insler translation), in conjunction with each other, and see what conclusions you come to.

<sup>29</sup> See also: ".....Your enduring, worshipful offering has been established to be immortality and completeness." Y33.8.

<sup>30</sup> Professor Insler first pointed out the interdependence of man and God in Zarathushtra's thought, in his discussions on the Gathas. Insler, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra* (Brill, 1975).

<sup>31</sup> It is interesting that in the later literature hell is described, in part, as a condition in which the people there are so close together that they seem an indistinguishable mass; yet in the darkness, each ever wails, "I am alone!" Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism* (AMS reprint) page 173; In a later text, the Bundahishn, hell is described as a place where if a thousand men were closely packed within a single "span" (?), yet "...they (the men) think in this

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way, that they are alone; and the loneliness is worse than its punishment..." as translated by E. W. West in Sacred Books of the East ("SBE" hereinafter) Volume 5, page 114. West in his footnote to this quotation, notes the similarity of this passage to a part of the Arda Viraf Nameh, which he translates as follows: "Compare Arda Viraf-namak (LIV, 5-6): 'As close as the ear to the eye, and as many as the hairs on the mane of a horse, so close and many in number, the souls of the wicked stand, but they see not, and hear no sound, one from the other; every one thinks thus, "I am alone." ' ". SBE Volume 5, page 114, footnote 2. This hell of loneliness or isolation is the opposite of Zarathushtra's heaven of haurvatat, completeness. The hell of isolation is in my view a metaphor for the unhappiness of a state of being that perceives itself as isolated, and therefore has no understanding of the idea that we all are inter-connected, part of one whole, one life force, completing each other and "God".

<sup>32</sup> Although there is no corroborative evidence of the "smoking gun" variety for the conclusion that man is not complete without his fellow man, there are some hints of this idea in the Gathas. For example, In Y46.10 Zarathushtra says:

"Wise Lord, whoever -- be it man or woman -- **would grant to me** those things which Thou dost know to be the best for existence, namely, the truth for the truth and the rule of good thinking, (with that person) as well as those whom I shall accompany in the glory of your kind -- with all these I shall cross over the Bridge of the Judge. Y46.10

In short, those who achieve God's divine attributes (which are the best for existence) achieve it not only for themselves, but also for Zarathushtra, representing their fellow man. Crossing over the Bridge of the Judge, in my view, is a metaphoric way of expressing the transition from mortality to "non-death-ness" (i.e. ameretat) -- at the individual level.

In the same way, in Y46.18 and 19 Zarathushtra says.

"The person who (has given) life [ameretat?] **to me**, to him I indeed have promised with good thinking the **best things in my power.....**" Y46:18.

The person who, really in accordance with truth, **shall bring to realization for me**, Zarathushtra, what is most healing..... Y46:19

We see an echo of the idea that man is not complete without his fellow man in the way Zarathushtra complements the individual and the community. Moral choices have to be made, first, at an individual level (Y30.2). Yet, although that is the necessary first step, it alone is not enough. One must in addition, mobilize the family, the community, the clan, indeed the world, to God's service to bring about the desired end. Y32.1, Y50.5, Y30.9.

"At my insistence ..... the family, the community together with the clan, entreated for the grace of Him, the Wise Lord, (saying:) *'Let us be Thy messengers, in order to hold back those who are inimical to you.'* " Y32.1.

"Therefore may we be those who shall heal this world! Wise One and ye other lords [the benevolent spirit, truth and good thinking, addressed allegorically, and perhaps those who have attained these divine attributes] be present to me with support and with truth, so that one shall become convinced even where his understanding shall be false." Y30.9.

"Lord, let wisdom come in the company of truth across the earth!..." Y50.5.

The idea is also echoed in Zarathushtra's anguished cry to Ahura Mazda in Y46.1:

".....The community with which I have associated has not satisfied me, nor those who are the deceitful rulers of the land. How, then, shall I satisfy Thee, Wise Lord?" Y46.1.

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Finally, the idea that man cannot achieve ultimate completeness unless his fellow man does so as well, finds an echo in the concept of the frashokereti of the later texts. In Zarathushtra's scheme of things, salvation, as he defines it (truth and good thinking, Y51.20) will ultimately be achieved by all. This of course raises an interesting question: Given the freedom to choose, also a fundament of his thought, how can we be certain that all the living will eventually choose what's right, and that frashokereti will be achieved? The answer to this question lies in another fascinating Gathic puzzle, for a discussion of which see: *Harmony in Paradox: The Paradox of the Freedom to Choose and the Inevitable End*, which appears on [www.vohuman.org](http://www.vohuman.org).

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