

Love in the Gathas.

by

Dina G. McIntyre

Those of us who love the Gathas sometimes tend to intellectualize our religion – to concentrate on the fact that it values intelligence and righteousness, which it does, and it is good that we should remember that. But we tend to forget the central role that lovingkindness plays in our religion. And yet, it is a fundament of Zarathushtra's thought.

The concept of love appears in Zarathushtra's thought the way patterns of sunlight appear in a garden – throughout, and in great variety, each lovely in its own way. In the Gathas we see that love is a part of God's nature. Love is the basis of the relationship between man and God. Love is an ingredient in prayer, in how we worship, in making the right choices, in salvation. I'd like to show you these patterns of sunlight in each of these areas in the garden of Zarathushtra's thought.

The Nature of the Divine.

Let us start with Zarathushtra's understanding of "God". He sometimes calls "God" Ahura which means "Lord", but most often Mazda, which means "Wisdom". To Zarathushtra, the essence of divinity is personified Wisdom¹. And he intimates that this Divine Wisdom, to the extent that we can understand it, has attributes or characteristics which in the later texts were collectively called the amesha spenta. These attributes of Divine Wisdom are:

Truth, the true order of things (asha)²

Its comprehension through good thinking (vohu manah)³

Its embodiment in thought, word and action (aramaiti)⁴

Its good rule (vohu xshathra)⁵

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

All of which comprise a benevolent spirit or way of being (spenta mainyu)⁶

All of which comprise Wisdom personified (Mazda).

We see from this list of Mazda's attributes, that truth (asha) is the foundation of Zarathushtra's notion of Wisdom, in that each other amesha spenta is some aspect of truth. So to understand Zarathushtra's notion of "God", of Wisdom personified, we have to understand what he means by truth (asha). If we look at the ways in which he uses truth in the Gathas, we see that it means not just factual truth, but also the true order of things in the existence of mind, and a central quality of this true order is the notion of "beneficence" -- a generous lovingkindness. He describes Ahura Mazda as:

"... the Lord, beneficent through truth [asha]," Y48.3.⁷

If beneficence comes through the true order of things (asha) then clearly, it must include the idea of beneficence.

In the same way, Zarathushtra also describes Mazda's benevolent spirit, His good way of being, as beneficent. He calls Mazda:

"..... Him who is beneficent through His [spenta mainyu] to those who exist....." Y45.6

The dictionary defines "beneficence" as:

"..... active goodness, kindness, charity; bounty springing from purity and goodness."⁸

A moment's reflection makes it clear that one cannot be good, kind, generous, one cannot have charity in one's heart for others, without being loving. So the idea of "beneficence" includes within it the notion of love. There is an old-fashioned word, which captures very well the idea of "beneficence". It is "lovingkindness."

To summarize: If the true order of things in the existence of mind (asha) is at the foundation of Mazda's divine attributes, and if beneficence, lovingkindness, is a part of this truth (asha), then we see that Zarathushtra's understanding of Wisdom personified (Mazda) includes the notion of beneficence, lovingkindness.

Mazda's Relationship with Man.

Let us next consider the notion of love in the relationship between man and the Divine. There are many references in the Gathas to the Wise Lord's love for man. It is expressed in terms of solicitude, mercy or compassion, support, protection and friendship. For example, Zarathushtra describes Mazda as:

"..... Him, the One who offers solicitude....." Y45.7.

"..... the glories of Him who offers solicitude (to us), the Wise Lord....." Y46.17.

"Solicitude" means loving care or concern.

In the Vohu Xshathra Gatha, Zarathushtra shows us that Mazda's good rule is, among other things, caring, compassionate. He says, teaching through questions:

"Where shall there be protection instead of injury? Where shall mercy [mərəždikā⁹] take place? Where truth [aša-] which attains glory? Where [spənta- ārmaiti-]? Where the very best thinking [vahišta- manah-]? Where, Wise One [mazda-], through Thy rule?" Y51.4).

There are numerous verses in the Gathas in which Mazda's love is expressed in terms of protection, support and help. But what is truly interesting, is *how* he protects, supports, and

helps. He does it with His divine forces – truth (asha), and its comprehension (good thinking). For example:

"What help by truth [asha] hast Thou for Zarathushtra who calls? What help by good thinking [vohu manah] has Thou for me....."49.12.

And the beautiful Y34.7.

"Wise One, where are those sincere ones who, through their possession of good thinking, make even immoral decrees and painful legacies disappear? I know none other than you. Therefore protect us in accord with truth." Y34.7.

In other words, the protection and help which Mazda offers is not the comforting certainty of a pacifier. He does not wrap us in a germ-free bubble – a harm-free environment, safe and protected. His love in this respect is a kind of tough love. He gives us the weapons, the tools, to help ourselves, and each other. If the enemy is deceit, He gives us truth. If the enemy is ignorance, He gives us good thinking. If the enemy is evil, He shows us an alternative – benevolence.

In the later texts, Mazda's divine attributes were called angels. This shows us angels in a new light. Mazda's angel-messengers, are His thoughts.¹⁰ His protecting angels are His divine aspects, truth and its comprehension (good thinking) -- and perhaps those who bring these aspects to life with their thoughts, words and actions (part time angels, but all moving towards full time). So, in addition to His solicitude and generosity, this is how He helps. This is how He protects.

Finally, the concept of love between Mazda and man appears in the way in which Zarathushtra characterizes the relationship. It is interesting that no place in literal translations of the Gathas (as distinguished from interpretive translations) is the relationship between Mazda and man described as that of a Master to a servant, or even as a Father to a child.¹¹ In other words, the relationship between man and Mazda is neither patriarchal, nor authoritarian.

You well might wonder: if Mazda's name includes the word "Lord" (Ahura) wouldn't that mean he is the Lord of all things? That's about as authoritarian as one can get. Well, the Gathas show us "lordship" in a different light. Zarathushtra tells us that Mazda is "lord" of the qualities or attributes of divinity (the amesha spenta). For example he is described as

"..... the very Wise Master [ahura-] of good thinking..... " Y30.1;

and as:

"... Lord [ahura-] of the word and deed stemming from good [mainyu] ..." Y45.8. Such words and deeds are the concept of aramaiti, so here Zarathushtra tells us that the Wise Lord has lordship over the attribute of aramaiti.

Similarly, Zarathushtra says:

"... Thou art the Lord [ahura-] by reason of Thy tongue which is in harmony with truth [asha] and by reason of Thy words stemming from good thinking [vohu manah]....." Y51.3. Words which embody truth are a part of the meaning of aramaiti, so here again, He has lordship over the characteristic of aramaiti.

We are told that Ahura Mazda has "...mastery over completeness [haurvatat]..." Y34.1.

And Zarathushtra speaks of

"...His abounding authority of rule over completeness and immortality and over truth ..." Y31.21).

Now it is true that Mazda is often referred to as a Ruler. And again, one might jump to the conclusion that this establishes Him as an authority figure over man, until we realize that His rule is the rule of truth, aramaiti, and good thinking (Y51.4).

In other words, Mazda's lordship, His mastery, His rule, is over the attributes that make for divinity -- truth (asha), its comprehension (vohu manah), its realization in thought, word and action (aramaiti), its complete and undying attainment (haurvatat / ameretat).

So getting back to Mazda's relationship with man, it is not that of a master, or ruler, or even a father. The relationship is that of a friend to a friend, or a beloved to a beloved. Here are two examples:

"..... I lament to Thee. Take notice of it, Lord, offering the support which a friend should grant to a friend." Y46.2.

" This I ask Thee. Tell me truly, Lord. Someone like Thee, Wise One, should declare to me, his friend, how reverence for your kind is to be from the reverent person....." Y44.1.

Some scholars translate the applicable Gathic word as "friend", others as "beloved".

Prayer.

Let's start move on to consider the notion of love in prayer. "Lovingly" is the word Zarathushtra chooses to describe how he prays. He says:

" Thee . . . do I lovingly entreat for the best" Y28.8.

And he tells us that if a prayer has two ingredients, Mazda will always answer. These two ingredients are good purpose and love. He says:

"... For I know that words deriving from good purpose and from love, are not to be left wanting by you." Y28.10.

Notice, he does not say that we will get exactly what we ask for. He says that such prayers will not be left wanting.

Worship:

As with prayer, love is also an ingredient in the wider concept of worship. Zarathushtra tells us that we should worship Ahura Mazda with his own divine attributes. For example, he says:

"... I shall always worship ... you, Wise Lord, with truth [asha] and the very best thinking and with their rule." Y50.4.

"I...shall serve all of you Wise Lord with good thinking [vohu manah]...." Y28.2.

"I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers of [aramaiti]..." Y45.10; "prayers of aramaiti" are prayers of thoughts, words and actions of truth.

And in the Gathas, Zarathushtra gives this kind of worship a foundation of love. Referring to Mazda's divine attributes, the amesha spenta, Zarathushtra says:

"...Them (all) shall I worship
With their own names
and I shall serve them with love." Y51.22.

How do we worship Mazda's divine attributes with their own names?

We worship truth with truth -- by being truthful.

We worship good thinking with good thinking -- by using our minds to search for the truth, and understand it.

We worship aramaiti with aramaiti -- by bringing truth to life with our thoughts, words and actions.

We worship good rule with good rule -- by using whatever power we have to perfect the amesha spenta in ourselves, and create a good society.

We worship haurvatat / ameretat -- by attaining and personifying truth completely, perfectly (haurvatat), in an undying way (ameretat).

We worship a benevolent way of being (spenta mainyu) by cultivating in our selves the spirit of benevolence, a beneficent way of being.

And we give this worship, a foundation of love. As Zarathushtra says:

"...Them (all) shall I worship with their own names
and I shall serve them with love." Y51.22.

It is interesting that this same concept is reflected in a later text, where it is said:

" I will worship those who (are) the Amesha Spentas [that is, Mazda's divine attributes], and I will approach them with love." (Y70.1).¹²

In short, we worship Mazda in the temple of life, with our thoughts, words and actions of truth (asha) -- with goodness, with lovingkindness, with beneficence. The fragrance of a life so lived, is Zarathushtra's incense of worship.

Salvation:

Let us next consider the role played by love in salvation.

Zarathushtra's idea of salvation is being saved from what is false, wrong. Salvation is a state of being which is achieved when we have attained completely, Mazda's divine attributes.¹³ And if you look at the verses in which Zarathushtra mentions salvation, you will see that in many of them he links salvation to "beneficence" and love.

In Zarathushtra's view, we cannot achieve salvation (as he defines salvation) without making the right choices. And how does he describe the person who makes the right choices? He does not describe him as just, or even as righteous. He describes him as "beneficent." Referring to the choice between what's bad and what's better, he says

"..... And between these two, the beneficent have correctly chosen....." Y30.3.

In other words, in Zarathushtra's thought, on the path of spiritual growth or progress, righteousness, justice, are good first steps. But an even higher step is generosity, lovingkindness, beneficence.

In Y34.3, Zarathushtra links "beneficence" directly to the attainment of salvation:

"..... let salvation be granted to the beneficent man Wise One!" Y34.3.

In Yasna 44.2, he asks Mazda if "the loving man" will be saved, and describes such a person as a world healer and Mazda's ally in spirit. He says:

"...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? For such a person, [spenta] through truth, watching over the heritage for all, is a world healer and Thy ally in spirit [mainyu], Wise One." Y44.2.

And how does Zarathushtra define salvation? As truth and its comprehension, good thinking.

"..... let that salvation of yours be granted to us: truth allied with good thinking!..." Y51.20.

And we have already seen, that the meaning of truth (asha) includes "beneficence" -- goodness, generosity, lovingkindness.

To summarize: we have seen, through Zarathushtra's own words, that love is a part of the Wise Lord's nature. Love is the basis of the relationship between man and God. Love is an ingredient in prayer, in how we worship, in making the right choices, and in salvation. These are just a few highlights.

It is small wonder then, that in the sixth book of the Dinkard, written more than 2,000 years after Zarathushtra, but which is said to be a collection of the sayings of ancient Zoroastrian sages, it is written, not once, but in two separate places that the law of Mazda is love of mankind.¹⁴ -- an idea that is also found in the Zoroastrian Wedding Ceremony.

In a part of this ceremony, the priest gives the bride and groom advice on how to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of the religion. Among other things, the priest says (as translated by Shahin Bekhradnia):

"... worship God by doing charitable works ..."

"... The law of the Wise Lord, the Omnipotent, ... is the law of loving mankind. So do not harm people neither in thought nor word nor deed. When a stranger arrives, give him food and shelter. Protect good people from hunger and thirst, from cold and heat. Be kindly to those under you or younger than you. Respect your elders, ... so that the Wise Lord will delight in you."

Unfortunately, by the time the Wedding Ceremony now in use was written, Zarathushtra's own beautiful words of advice to brides and grooms on the occasion of his daughter's wedding, had long since become unknown to our priests. In the last Gatha, Zarathushtra tells his daughter and the other brides and grooms who were getting married:

"... Let each of you try to win the other with truth [asha] for this shall be of good gain to each ..." Y53.5

Or, if you would allow me to paraphrase it:

"... Let each of you try to win the other with truth (asha) and you will both be winners..."

And we already know that truth (asha) is the true order of things in the existence of mind i.e. truth, goodness, generosity, friendship, lovingkindness, compassion, justice, et cetera.

In conclusion, lovingkindness, in its various manifestations, permeates each aspect of Zarathushtra's teachings, the way sunlight fills a garden, giving life and beauty to whatever it touches, making everything worthwhile.

And so it is when we bring these teachings to life with our thoughts, words and actions. For as Zarathushtra reminds us, it is the beneficent person who makes the right choices (Y30.3). It is the loving person who is a world healer, and Mazda's ally in spirit (Y44.2).

* * * * *

¹ Thieme, Reflections on the Vocabulary of Zarathushtra's Gathas, in the Proceedings of the First Gatha Colloquium, (WZO 1993, published in 1998), p. 201 -- 202.

² Asha literally means "what fits" (See Insler's view quoted in *An Introduction to the Gathas*, No. 2, page 12, footnote 1 of the Editor's Note, which may be viewed on www.zarathushtra.com). Asha has been

translated variously 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, accurate, hence truth, it includes the true order of things, in our physical universe, the laws that underlie the way our physical universe functions -- the laws of science, of physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, et cetera.

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, lovingkindness, solicitude, friendship, compassion, justice -- all of the values that we consider to be "true" "good" and "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 -- all that is good, right, loving, beneficent.

³ "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 the meaning of vohu manah, based on the ways in which Zarathushtra uses the term in the Gathas, see *Harmony in Paradox: The Paradox of the Material and the Spiritual*, which appears on www.vohuman.org

⁴ 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.), but more recently, as "respect" See Insler, *Zarathushtra's Genetic System*, which may be viewed on www.vohuman.org.

Hanns-Peter Schmidt states: "For aramaiti and taremaiti 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 the way in which Zarathushtra uses the word in the Gathas, which suggests that aramaiti means embodying the true order of things with thoughts, words and actions. For example: "But to this world He came with the rule of good thinking and of truth, and ... 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 envisionment [daena].

⁵ Good rule (vohu xshathra) is described in the Gathas as the rule of truth, aramaiti, 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; "...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 good rule.

⁶ Insler translates "spenta" as "virtuous" in his 1975 translation, but more recently as "benevolent" (See Insler, *Human Behavior and Good Thinking*, in *An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra*, No. 1, page 2 (which may be viewed on www.zarathushtra.com)).

"Mainyu has been translated as "spirit" (by Insler and many others), and also as "mentality" (by Jafarey). Looking at the way in which Zarathushtra uses the word, is helpful in determining its 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, soul (i.e. self) et cetera. According to Insler, urvan (soul) is used in the Gathas the way atman is used in the Vedas, which includes 'self' (Insler, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra*, (Brill 1975), page 123, in his comment under Y28.4). Clearly, "mentality" is only a part of the meaning of "mainyu".

"Spirit" in my view, is accurate in the sense of a way of 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 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).

⁷ 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, in its root form, 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.

⁸ Webster's International Dictionary, 2d Edition, (1956).

⁹ Insler translates *mərəždikā* as 'mercy', Humbach and Taraporewala as 'compassion'. Taraporewala comments that although his mentor, Bartholomae, translates the word as 'pardon', he also gives the rendering 'compassion', 'grace', or 'kindness', which Taraporewala thinks is contextually more appropriate. See Taraporewala, *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra*, (Hukhta Press reprint, 1993), page 775. I agree with Taraporewala. In Zarathushtra's thought, there is no concept of 'damnation' and therefore the notion of 'mercy' as in a reprieve from damnation has no relevance in his thought. True, there is the law of consequences -- that we reap what we sow -- but that is not for punishment, that is for enlightenment. To give 'mercy' as in a reprieve from experiencing the consequences of our actions, would prevent a soul from growing, from increasing its understanding, which would be counterproductive. But 'compassion' is indeed in accord with Zarathushtra's thought here, because compassion, mutual, loving assistance, is what is needed when a person goes through the refiner's fire.

¹⁰ Zarathushtra recognizes that when Mazda communicates with us or instructs us, He does it with good thinking. "[..... instruct through good thinking \(the course\) of my direction, in order to be the charioteer of my will and my tongue.](#)" Y50.6.

¹¹ There is a difference of opinion regarding the translation of Y45.11. In that verse, the word "father" appears. According to the translations of Azergoshasb, Insler, Jafarey, Mills, Moulton, Taraporewala and Humbach, the term "father" in this verse refers to the good man who opposes evil. According to the Insler translation, such a person, through his good vision (spenta daena) "[... is an ally, a brother or a father ...](#)" of the savior, Ahura Mazda (i.e. such a person is of the very nature of Mazda). According to the translations of Bode & Nanavutty, Haug, and T.R. Sethna, however, the word "father" in this verse refers to Ahura Mazda.

¹² Humbach, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra*, Vol. 2, page 236, quoting from Yasna 70.1.

¹³ For the evidence on which this conclusion is based, see my piece, *Of Means and Ends*, which appears on www.vohuman.org, and on www.zarathushtra.com.

¹⁴ "114. The law of Ohrmazd is love of men;"
"E45h The law of Ohrmaz is love of people."
as translated by Shaul Shaked, in *Wisdom of the Sassanian Sages*, (Westview Press, Boulder Colorado, 1979), pages 47 and 215 respectively. "Ohrmazd" was the later, Pahlavi, form of the Avestan Ahura Mazda.

* * * * *