

2022 Essay Contest

Topic: According to the Gathas, can one be a Zoroastrian without a belief in God?

Zarathushtra called his message *Daena Vanghuhi* meaning the “good conscience”. Later it was also known as *Mazdyasni* meaning “celebration of Wisdom”, *Din e Behi* meaning “the good religion” and today commonly known as Zoroastrianism or Zarathushtrian.

What kind of life is led by one who lives his/her life according to the Gathas or to the doctrine of “good conscious”?

Below are some of the characteristics of such a person:

1. Practices good thoughts or *Vohu Mana* and rejects *Druj* meaning wrongfulness, deceit and lie.
 - a. Our actions or deeds follow our thoughts therefore if one practices good thoughts then good deeds will follow.

However, Wise One, this has been put as a choice
that righteousness is for the promotion of the doctrine, and wrong is for harming it.

Therefore, I long for union with good mind,
and disavow all association with the wrongful.

Gathas: Song 14.3 (Yasna 49.3)

Translated by AA Jafarey

2. Lives according to Asha.
 - a. Asha is living in harmony with the natural world, in accordance with universal Truth, good order of existence, and with Righteousness. Asha is also translated as order, precision, and Truth.

**Mazda, Wise God, with a bow and uplifted arms, I pray,
First, I ask for support through progressive mentality,
Then I pray that I may perform all my actions,
Based as they are on the wisdom of good mind,
Precisely according to the laws of righteousness (Asha)
So that I please You and the soul of the Living World.**

Song 1.1 (Yasna 28.1)

Translated by AA Jafarey

3. Upholds what is just, stands against the wrongful and defends the oppressed

**Every teaching of the talented
is the best to listen to.
Wise Lord, I am powerful enough
to meet the two-fold threats,
and restrain the crime of the wrongful
directed against friends.**

Gathas: Song 5.16 (Yasna 32.16)

Translated by AA Jafarey

**Wise One, I am the one who venerates away
inconsideration and evil mind for You;
perverse mind from the family;
related wrong from the fellowship;
revile from the fellowship;
and extremely evil counseling from the world settlements.**

Gathas: Song 6.4 (Yasna 33.4)

Translated by AA Jafarey

4. Corrects the wrongful with peace

**Put down fury, check violence, you who wish to strengthen
the promotion of good mind through righteousness,
because a progressive man is associated with this
God, his associates are in Your abode.**

Gathas: Song 13.7 (Yasna 47.7)

Translated by AA Jafarey

5. Practices wisdom, listens without prejudice, and makes decision using good mind and free will.

**Hearken with your ears to these best counsels,
Reflect upon them with illumined judgment.
Let each one choose his creed with that
freedom of choice each must have at great events.
O ye, be awake to these, my announcements.**

Gathas: Yasna 30.2 (Song 3.2)

Translated by: DJ Irani

**Lord, one who listens and realizes the truth,
Becomes a life-healing wise person.
He controls his tongue
To express the right words when he wills.
He, O Wise One through Your radiant light
Proves good to both parties.**

Gathas: Song 4.19 (Yasna 31.19)

Translated by AA Jafarey

6. Practices *Spenta Mainyu* meaning progressive mentality, renews, builds, and improves the world for all living.

And may that person get much good
who teaches us the straight paths of progress.
May he, in his physical and mental life,
truly attain the existence where God dwells,
for Wise One, he is like You;
sincere, noble, and progressive.

Gathas: Song 8.3 (Yasna 43.3)

Translated by AA Jafarey

7. Is just to all, the righteous, wrongful, and in between.

**In accordance with the Primeval Laws of this existence,
The Ratu (Judge) shall deal perfect justice to all;
To the good who chose the Truth,
To the evil who chose Falsehood,
And to those in whom good and evil are mixed.**

Gathas: Yasna 33.1 (Song 6.1)

Translated by DJ Irani

8. Spreads joy

**Happiness be the lot of him who works for the happiness of others.
May the Lord grant him health and endurance.
For the effort to uphold Truth, I beseech these very gifts from Thee!
Mayest Thou, through Armaity, the Spirit of Rightmindedness,
Bless me with the perfection of a life guided by the Good Mind!**

Gathas: Yasna 43.1 (Song 8.1)

Translated by DJ Irani

God as described in the Gathas of Zarathushtra?

What is God? Different religions describe the nature of God differently. Hence, we need to be careful to put aside our preconceptions and think independently of the Semitic and other concepts of God found in major religions as we live in an Abrahamic religion dominated world and are influenced by our understanding of God from an Abrahamic point of view.

We need to understand Ahura Mazda as it is described in the Gathas then ask ourselves if believing in God is an essential part of being a Zoroastrian. How much of being a Zoroastrian is dependent on our belief in God?

Zarathushtra in the Gathas calls God, Mazda, Mazda Ahura and Ahura Mazda (in respective frequency). Today we commonly call God, Ahura Mazda. Mazda means supreme wisdom, super intellect and Ahura means being, lord, what exists or is. Ahura Mazda is thus translated as the Wise Being, Lord Wisdom, and at times collective Wisdom. Zarathushtra came to realize Ahura Mazda through his good mind and not through a supernatural miracle or heavenly sent angel.

Ahura Mazda is all good, ever progressive, a friend, has created the living world and Asha (rules and order to best existence), has granted good mind, and freedom to choose. Zarathushtra chooses the doctrine of good conscious, it is a personal choice and not a divine one. We are part of Ahura Mazda and have the capability of acquiring divine qualities.

Dr. AA Jafarey, describes Ahura Mazda in the Gathas:

He (Ahura Mazda) is progressive, the most progressive. He is the continuous creator, maintainer, and promoter of the universe and all that is in it-the sky, stars, sun, moon, earth, everything. It means that He is not a static god who has finished with his creation and is only maintaining or guiding it to a given destiny. He regulates the universe through "*asha*," the law of precision. His "*spenta mainyu*," progressive mentality, continues to create and promote his creation. He possesses "*vohu manah*," good mind, the wisdom that maintains it. He establishes "*khshathra*," the divine dominion, in which all is well and everything is good and every creature enjoys "*âramaiti*," serenity. He grants "*haurvatât*," wholeness, and "*amaretât*," immortality, to the creation. He is in continuous contact with those who want to listen to His voice, "*seraousha*," the inner-voice.

For us, God has created the joy-bringing world. He has created the living world and bestowed it with free will. He has created body, conscience, and intelligence, and he has infused life into the physical frame. He has then granted it freedom of thought, speech, and action so that one is free to choose one's convictions. The freedom is for all, the righteous and the wrongful, wise or unwise.

God is of oneaccord with *asha*. He does not violate the very laws he has so wisely ordained. His laws entertain no exceptions. It means no unexplained freaks, no never-understood miracles.

God is the judge. He upholds prime laws. He is the lord of life. It is God who has ordained that good deeds produce good rewards and evil deeds have bad consequences.

The Laws is not to be broken, not even by mercy.

God is kind. He is friendly, a good friend, an ally. He is loving. He is loved.

God is the guide. He is the teacher. To him all ultimately return.

Dina McIntyre gives a summary of the nature of Ahura Mazda:

In his (Zarathushtra's) thought, there is one spiritual essence of all existence which (to be worthy of worship Divine) is wholly beneficial, wholly good -- one that comprehends and embodies completely, the wholly good true (correct) order of existence (*aSa- vahICTa-*) -- the wholly beneficial way of being (*speNTa- maINYU-*), a way of being that is the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness (*vahICTa-*), that is wisdom personified (*mazdA-* -- his most used name for the divine). In that sense, Zarathushtra was a monotheist. But his monotheism was the wholly good spiritual essence of the whole of existence.

DJ Irani in Understanding the Gathas says:

The offering of faith to Ahura Mazda is to live by the principles He has declared. In such a life Zarathushtra asks for the Lord's protection and support. Later on there are some very moving verses where Zarathushtra asks the Lord how we may worship him, how we may learn and teach all to promote the Great Cause, that is, The Path of Renovation and the Perfection of Existence leading to Immortal Bliss. All along the verses of this Ha there is a constant sense of a deep religious dedication to the Lord and expression of veneration for the Divinity who has given humanity the religion of the Good Life.

Irach Taraporewala in Gathas of Zarathushtra writes:

In the Gathas, this Fundamental Power, the One Supreme Being bears the name of AHURA-MAZDA. This is a double name – it means “The Lord of Life” [Ahura] and the “Creator of Matter” [Mazda]. The Supreme Being is thus recognized as the Lord of Life as well as of Matter. In the Gathas He has been described as being “of one accord with Asha”. The Supreme is also pictured as journeying along the Path of Asha at the head of all His Creation. Only one conclusion can now be possible as to the meaning of ASHA, Viz. that Asha [as also Rita] is the CHANGELESS ETERNAL LAW OF GOD. The First plan according to which this Universe has come into being and obeying which, it is progressing towards its destined fulfillment. To realize this ASHA in all its fullness, requires the highest Spiritual Wisdom.

Below are a few verses from the Gathas:

**I shall seek to exalt Him for us with veneration of serenity.
Who, by a new name, is known as Mazda Ahura, the Wise God.
He grants, through righteousness and good mind,
Wholeness and immortality in His dominion.
May He grant us steadfast strength and endurance.**

Gathas: Song 10.10 (Yasna 45.10)

Translated by AA Jafarey

**Ever since I have held Thee (O Ahura Mazda!) in (my) eye
I have always regarded Thee O Ahura Mazda as the first of all.
As worthy of worship with pure thought, as the Father of
Vohu Manah Good Mind as the real origin of Truth
(and) as the Lord over (all) the actions of this world.**

Yasna 31.8

Translated by KE Kanga

**I also realized, Wise Lord,
that serenity is Yours,
and O Creator of the Living World,
that wisdom of mind is Yours,
which has given the world the choice
to go either to a settled person, or to the one who is not.**

Gathas: Song 4.9 (Yasna 31.9)

Translated by AA Jafarey

**By Thy perfect Intelligence, O Mazda
Thou didst first create us having bodies and spiritual consciences,
And by Thy Thought gave our selves the power of thought, word, and deed.
Thus leaving us free to choose our faith at our own will.**

Gathas: Yasna 31.11 (Song 4.11)

Translated by DJ Irani

**Therefore, Wise God, I, Zarathushtra choose for myself
the very mentality of Yours, which is most progressive.
May righteousness breath a strong life in body.
May serenity prevail in the sun-bathed dominion.
May the reward of actions be given through good mind.**

Gathas: Song 8.16 (Yasna 43.16)

Translated by AA Jafarey

Link to the article: God in the Gathas by AA Jafarey

<https://www.zoroastrian.org/articles/God%20in%20the%20Gathas.htm>

Link to article: The Nature of Devine and Identity of the Devine by Dina McIntyre

<https://gathasofzarathushtra.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/1.9-The-Nature-of-the-Divine-2.pdf>

<https://dinamci77.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/1.10-The-Identity-of-the-Divine.pdf>

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