

# Devotion to Wisdom

Asha & the Search for Truth

# A Thought Catalyst

This presentation is part two of a series of talks presented by the California Zoroastrian Center's [Public Relations Committee](#) - it builds off another presentation from October 2021 which provided a brief overview of Mazdayasna per the Gathas - entitled [Devotion to Wisdom](#).

In these subsequent talks, we'll dive deeper into the Divine Attributes, a framework for realizing the Divine and self-realization, starting with Asha and Vohu Manah.

As Mazdayasna encourages each individual to think for oneself and utilize our Good Mind (Vohu Manah) in search of the Ultimate Truth (Asha) - the goal of this presentation is to serve as a ***thought catalyst and spur discussion on improving our existence.***

# The Threefold Mantra of Mazdayasna

Good Thoughts

Good Words

Good Deeds



# What does “good” really mean?

When we say Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds - what does “good” really mean?

As a warm-up - let’s look at the word “good” in English, which has a complex and wide range of meanings as you can see in this table.

In Mazdayasna, “good” is defined more as intrinsic goodness *in relation to the foundational concept of Asha* translated as Truth or Righteousness.

Of a favorable character or tendency	<i>good</i> news
Bountiful, fertile	<i>good</i> land
Suitable, fit	<i>good</i> to eat
Free from injury or disease	one <i>good</i> arm
That can be relied upon	<i>good</i> for another year
Salutary, wholesome	<i>good</i> for a cold
Well founded, cogent	<i>good</i> reasons
Kind, benevolent	<i>good</i> intentions
True	holds <i>good</i> for society at large
Virtuous, Right, Commendable	a <i>good</i> person

# Core Message

Zarathushtra teaches a system, a way of looking at our reality, a way of life that is timeless.

In essence, he teaches:

1. that throughout our lives, we are confronted by choices;
2. that we should use our minds and hearts to *search for the Truth [Asha]*, for what is right and good, in all aspects of our reality,
3. and choose it, with each thought, word, and action, by engaging the world, not rejecting it,
4. thereby perfecting our world and ourselves,
5. until we become one with the Divine, until we become a part of the "Endless Lights."

# A Framework for Realizing the Divine

# The Comprehension and Embodiment of Asha leads to Serenity

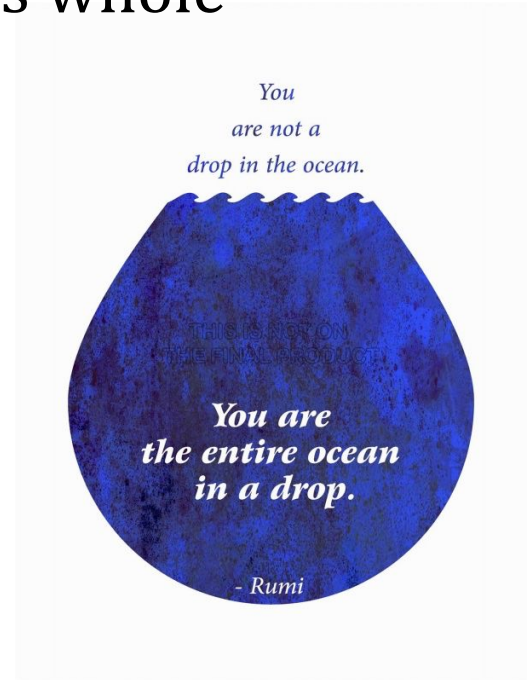
Zarathushtra's philosophy is constructed on six abstract concepts building off of Asha. They are Divine Attributes of Ahura Mazda, and a **framework through which the Divine is known and realized**:

- **Asha (Ultimate Truth)** - the ideal, correct, entirely good, order of existence - in both mind and matter
- **Vohu Manah (Good Mind)** - the comprehension of Asha and recognizing the disparity between the ideal and the real, it is the instrument of moral cognition and our conscience
- **Spenta Armaity (Embodied Truth)** - the embodiment of Asha through one's thoughts, words, and deeds - it is characterized by benevolence and serenity



# Progressing all existence according to Asha, realizes the Divine completely, making us whole

- **Vohu Khshathra (Good Rule)** - the rule of Asha, utilizing it's Comprehension and Embodiment within oneself & collectively creating the ideal progressive society aligned with Asha
- **Haurvatat (Completeness)** - this is the complete attainment of Asha, perfectly and completely for all existence. Realizing the Divine completely and progressing all of existence, making us whole
- **Ameretat (Non Deathness)** - the state of immortal bliss where we transcend mortal existence, we become one with the Divine, and part of the "Endless Lights" -- a metaphor for enlightenment





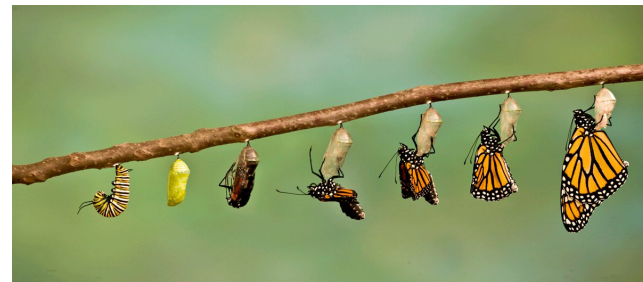
# Our Purpose and Asha

So our purpose is evolve spiritually by *searching for Asha* ...

Comprehend it, embody it, be aligned with and governed by it ...

And Asha leads us to enlightenment, wholeness, and the Divine ...

So, what then, is Asha?



Asha - Ultimate Truth

# Asha literally means “what fits”

Asha is the foundational concept upon which Zarathushtra constructs his philosophy in the Gathas.

It is an Avestan word literally meaning “what fits” as in the correct truth of how things fit and are ordered in a system. It is related to the Sanskrit “R'ta” and Old Persian “Arta” which translate as Truth.

Asha is translated as truth, righteousness, universal order, and law. However, no single English word fully captures the complex and multi-faceted meaning of Asha.

Asha is the **Ultimate Truth: the entirely good, correct, ideal order of existence as envisioned by Ahura Mazda**. It is the relationship of all things in perfect harmony - in the existences of matter and the mind. Let's learn more together ...



# The Search for Truth

In the Gathas, the Divine is the source of all goodness and the creation that Ahura Mazda conceives of, in his wisdom, is called Asha. It is a perfect existence, in purely ideal terms. This mental ideal was then actualized in the world of matter.

Zarathushtra views the existences of mind and matter as two complementary parts of our reality. Mortal existence, including mind and matter, is the matrix for our spiritual growth through Free Will.

And this *spiritual growth comes from the search for Truth (Asha)* in both dimensions: the physical and material, and the mental and spiritual.

But what is Truth? How do we seek it?



# How do we search for Asha?

The answer in the Gathas is ***Vohu Manah***: our ***intrinsic*** ability to comprehend and understand Asha!

*Grant me, O Truth [Asha],  
the blessing which is the fruit  
of the Good Mind [Vohu Manah].*

Gathas Y28.7 (DJ Irani)



# Vohu Manah - Good Mind / Good Thinking

The Avestan “vohu” translates as “good” with a focus on “intrinsic goodness” - something that is good-in-itself. Manah translates as “mind”, or “thinking”.

Good is in reference to Asha: the entirely good, correct order of existence. Throughout the Gathas, we see Asha accompanies Vohu Manah and vice versa.

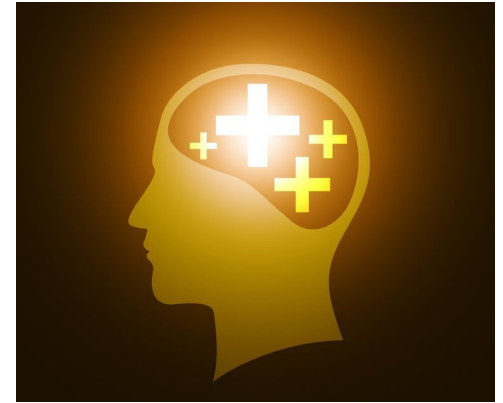
Vohu Manah is our ability to comprehend Asha. It is an attribute and activity of the Divine and also of humankind which Gathas Y28.2 highlights well:

*“O Wise Lord, by virtue of the Good Mind [Vohu Manah], may I reach Thy Presence.*

*Grant me the blessings in both worlds, the corporeal and the spiritual,  
attainable through Righteousness [Asha];*

*Thy rewards which bring beatific happiness to the faithful blessed with them.”*

Gathas Y28.2 (DJ Irani)



# Vohu Manah is the instrument of moral cognition

So Vohu Manah is our instrument of moral cognition, it enables us to understand “what fits” in the ideal, correct, entirely good existences of mind and matter - Asha.

It allows us to comprehend Asha in relation to our own thoughts, words, and deeds. Thus enabling us to partner with the Divine in improving/perfecting/healing existence!

So how do we know if we've found Asha or that we are aligned with it?



# Insights from the Gathas

Zarathushtra speaks of the existences of mind and matter in the Gathas. It's helpful to keep this context in mind when we think about Asha and its characteristics.

So what does the Gathas\* tell us about Asha?

Physical world - existence of matter:

- Asha is truth - what is accurate about our physical existence, the laws that govern the universe - physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, and factual truths
- Asha is harmony, balance, evolving, refreshing, the universal law of our physical existence



\* For references to specific Gathas verses and a much deeper analysis, please see Dina G. McIntyre's outstanding work on Asha at <https://gathasofzarathushtra.com/1-4-truth-asha/>



# More insight from the Gathas

In the Gathas\*, Asha is the best good and what is right for all existence. It is the relationship of all things in perfect harmony such that nothing occurs at the expense of something else. This includes such notions as social justice and also speaks to the interconnectedness of all life.

Spiritual or abstract world - existence of mind:

- Asha is righteousness, is the right thing to do in accordance with the universal order of all existence
- Asha is the best good, beneficial, loving, beneficent, the way of the Divine and the way to the Divine
- Asha is happiness, generating peace and tranquility, it is the way to improve/perfect/heal existence
- Asha is just - not punitively but learning through cause and effect - expanding our understanding, growth
- Asha is the opposite of fury, cruelty, violence, destruction, deceit



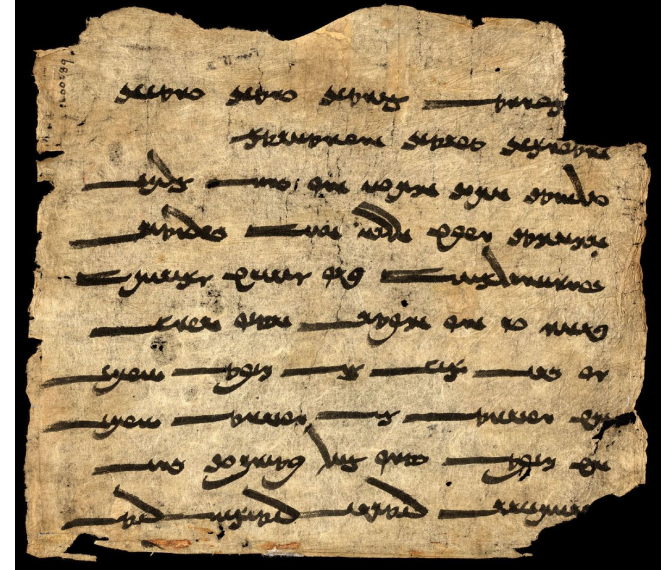
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# Asha is Radiant Happiness

This search for Truth [Asha], when desired for the sake of Truth alone -- not to go to “heaven” or some other reward, not from fear of “hell” or “bad karma” -- but simply for its own sake, leads to true, radiant happiness [ushtā] - an enlightened state of being that radiates naturally to all existence.

This is emphasized in the foundational Ashem Vohu prayer:

*“Righteousness is the best good. It is radiant happiness. Radiant happiness comes to the person to whom righteousness is for the **sake of the best righteousness alone.**”*



The oldest extant Zoroastrian text, [this Ashem Vohu](#) dates from the 9th century from Dunhuang, China, and is written in Sogdian, a medieval Iranian language.

# One more insight from the Gathas

Let's look at one more verse from the Gathas which gives us a sense of what is included in our Search for Truth!

*This I ask Thee, tell me truly, O Ahura;  
What is the source of the Best Existence?  
How shall one who seeks it, receive the blessed recompense?  
Surely such a holy one through Righteousness [Asha],  
Is a healer of existence, beneficent unto all,  
a genuine friend, O Mazda?*

Gathas Y44.2 (DJ Irani)



# A Beautiful Thought

As we close, I'd like to share with you a beautiful thought from the Yasna Haptanghaiti. This is a later text composed in Gathic Avestan, it gives you a sense of what ancient Zoroastrians understood of Asha:

*'We worship / celebrate, then,  
the true (correct) order of existence [Asha],  
(which is) most-good  
which (is) most beautiful,  
which (is) beneficial, non-dying  
which (is) light-filled  
which (is) all good.*

Yasna Haptanghaiti 37.4  
(translated by Dina G. McIntyre)



# ultimate truth

the way of the Divine

loving refreshing beneficial

way to heal existence

evolving the way to the Divine

expansive tranquility science

best good **Asha** truth  
beneficent

expands our understanding

universal order just harmony balance

happiness

peace compassion

laws that govern our universe

radiant happiness

righteousness

# Sources and Acknowledgements

This presentation brings together various works from:

- Dina G. McIntyre - [Gathas of Zarathushtra](#) and [CZC Seminar Liberating Zarathustra's Relevance](#)
- Dr. Kaikhosrov D. Irani - [Introduction to the Gathas](#) and [Zarathushtrian Philosophy](#)
- Dr. Ali A. Jafarey - <https://zoroastrian.org/articles/salient.htm>

With immense gratitude, I have learned so much from these amazing scholars 🙏

You may also find the California Zoroastrian Center's [Public Relations Website](#) as a useful resource.

Wishing you all radiant happiness 🔥 ushtā!

Navid Mansourian

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# Discussion