

Welcome everyone. I hope you are all doing well. This is Session 6, of the California Zoroastrian Center's Seminar "Liberating Zarathushtra's Relevance".

The title of this Session is:

A Practical Mystic.¹

We all know that Zarathushtra's main focus is on how we should live our lives, day to day, in practical ways that are truthful, kind, good, generous et cetera.

But there is another aspect of his thought ~ his reason based mysticism which (oddly enough) is inseparable from his practical teachings. So, let us first shake off centuries of mental conditioning, and look at the evidence with fresh eyes.

For more than 1,000 years, we have been raised with the mind-set, that 'God' is a being who is inherently separate from other living things; who has always been perfect; and who created all that exists. This gives rise to some troubling questions ~ which are not intended as a put-down of any other belief system. These questions have troubled the mind of man for millennia. For example:

If 'God', is an inherently separate being, who has always been perfect, and if He created everything, where then did imperfection, and evil, come from?

On the other hand, if 'God' created evil, how could He be all good? And, more to the point, would the creator of evil be worth worshipping.

The Divine that I see in the Gathas is not a being who is inherently separate from the rest of existence. Does Zarathushtra specifically say so? No, he does not. But, connecting the dots of what he does say, this is the conclusion I have come to.²

However, by the time of the Pahlavi texts, many centuries later, the notion of the Divine as an authority figure, inherently separate from all the living had taken over the mind-set of the Zoroastrians who wrote those texts (with some exceptions).

I will not at this time, go into how ancient Zoroastrians attempted to resolve the resulting troublesome questions ~ including their idea of Cosmic Dualism ~ the reasoning of which, with respect, is logically flawed, and it is not found in the Gathas. In fact, there is no all-evil entity ~ the "Devil" ~ in the Gathas, other than interpretations that have been read into its verses.

The "Devil" and his subordinate demons first appeared in later Avestan texts in which the Chief Devil is *Angra Mainyu* (in Pahlavi texts, *Ahriman*). Both names mean the same thing ~ **'a hate-filled, harmful, pain-causing, way of being'**. And the names of subordinate demons are various human vices, as you can see.

The demon *Aeshma* 'anger, fury, rage',
The demon *Mitokht* 'false word',
The demon *Arashk* 'malice',
The demon *Aaz* 'greed',
The demon *Frištaar* 'deceiver',
The demon *Spazhg* 'slander',
The demon *Araast* 'untrue' et cetera.

I think the Devil and His demons started out in Avestan texts as a story-telling way of demonstrating that in our selves, a harmful, wrongful, way of being (the Chief Devil) generates all our other vices (the subordinate demons). But, with the passage of centuries, and military invasions in which much knowledge was lost, these allegories came to be thought of as real entities ~ a real Chief Devil and his subordinate demons.³

Zarathushtra's perception of the Divine.

To understand Zarathushtra's perception of the Divine, we have to start with the mind-set of his culture, (because that was the mind-set in which he grew up), and then see to what extent he departed from that mind-set.

In his culture, deities were the spiritual essences of material things. To give you just 2 examples (there are many more),

Haoma (Vedic *soma*) was both the material plant (from which the drink was made), and also its spiritual essence, the 'deity' *Haoma*.

Mithra (Vedic *mitra*) means 'contract' (a material concept). In that ancient culture survival often depended on alliances or contracts for mutual protection, and trade, between families, clans, tribes. And the spiritual essence of the material contract was the 'deity' *Mithra* ~ who personified keeping one's word (keeping the contract), not telling lies (not breaking the contract) ~ but in the Avestan texts, *Mithra* was also a very cruel deity.⁴

In short: In the mind-set of Zarathushtra's culture, material things had spiritual essences which could be a mix of good and bad, beneficial and harmful. So in that culture, there was no inherent separation, or disconnect, between the material and the spiritual, such as we have in many of today's religious paradigms.

But Zarathushtra departed from the perceptions of his culture in certain key ways:

He does not see the Divine as multiple spiritual essences of multiple material things. I think he sees the Divine as one spiritual essence of all that exists ~ but one spiritual essence that is wholly good.

Now existence is a mix of good and evil, so if the Divine is the spiritual essence of all that exists, why isn't the Divine a mix of good and evil? How did It become wholly good, wholly beneficial? To understand Zarathushtra's answer, we have to connect some dots.

Let's start with the notion of "creation". Unlike the Pahlavi texts, he does not give us any creation stories. Nor does he specifically state his ideas on creation. But he says things, from which we can draw conclusions. He says,

"Yes, there are two fundamental⁵ [*mainyu-* 'ways of being'], **twins** which are renowned to be **in conflict**. In thought and in word, in action they are two: the [*vahyah-* 'more good'] and the **bad** [*aka-*] ..." Gathas, Yasna 30, verse 3, Insler translation 1975.

'Yes I shall speak out (about) the two primeval ways of being [*mainyu-*] of existence [*angheush*], of which the **more-beneficial** [*spanyah-*] would thus have spoken to the **harmful** [*angra-*], not our thoughts, nor teachings, nor reasonings [*xratu-*], neither our choices, nor words, neither (our) actions, nor envisionments, nor selves [*urvan-*],⁶ are in accord.' Gathas, Yasna 45, verse 2, my translation.

Now, in the first of these quotations, calling these 2 ways of being "**twins**" evokes the image of these 2 ways of being in one container ~ one entity containing 2 ways of being. And these 2 ways of being are "**in conflict**" ~ they are **opposites**. Let us recall, that in the Gathas, Zarathushtra equates the wholly beneficial way of being (*spenta- mainyu-*) with the Divine ~ whom he calls Wisdom (*mazda-*).⁷ So I infer from these 2 verses (and many others), that life started out as a mix of imperfect divine qualities and their opposites.⁸ He does not say *how* life started. That is still an unanswered question (so far as I am aware).

Now, imagine to yourself, the more beneficial part of this original being, wondering how it could change, get rid of, its harmful, cruel, wrongful qualities, which it did not like, so that it could become wholly good, completely beneficial. In the Gathas (in Y44:7), the material existence was made through the beneficial way of being,⁹ ~ presumably to accomplish this beneficial purpose, because in the Gathas, the material existence enables the perfecting process.

In connecting the dots, let me first tell you the conclusions I have drawn ~ mostly from the Gathas. Then I will show you some highlights of the evidence from which I have drawn these conclusions, so you can decide for yourself whether you think these conclusions are persuasive.

I conclude that the original life force infused itself into every aspect of the material existence, ~ temporarily fragmenting itself into material shells to enable the perfecting process. This

accounts for the evil in existence, because the original life force was a mix of imperfect divine qualities and their evil opposites.

Although in Pahlavi texts, the Divine had become an authority figure ~ inherently separate from the rest of existence, they faithfully tried to record earlier traditional knowledge, but they expressed it through this later mind-set. One of these texts says,

"...and Auharmazd [Av. *ahura- mazda-*] produced the creatures bodily for the world; first, the sky; the second, water; the third, earth; the fourth, plants; the fifth, animals; the sixth, mankind. **Fire was in all, diffused originally through the six substances ...**" *Selections of Zad-Sparam*, Chap. 1, §§ 20 - 21, E. W. West translation.¹⁰

Now in the Gathas, 'fire' is a metaphor or symbol for truth and its comprehension, which is Wisdom ~ a wholly enlightened existence. True, at the beginning of the evolutionary process, this fire in all things would be a bit dim, because the divine qualities in us ~ truth, its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule, ~ the beneficial way of being ~ would still be imperfect.

So I conclude that this infusion of the original life force into every fragment of the material existence, was done to enable the experiences necessary to change its wrongful preferences, so that, over a long, long period of time, through an experience-based process of spiritual growth, each fragment of existence, eventually becomes wholly good ~ personifying the true, wholly good, order of existence (*asha- vahishta-*) ~ which is Zarathushtra's perception of the Divine.¹¹

In other words, think of 'existence' as one continuum. At the beginning of the continuum, existence is a mix of qualities that are bad and more good. And all along the course of the continuum, fragments of existence are evolving towards a wholly good, wholly enlightened End ~ Wisdom (*mazda-*) ~ the perfected part of existence. As I understand Zarathushtra's thought, the Divine comprises a re-uniting of all the many fragments of existence that have evolved, progressed, to the perfected end of the continuum.

There are many bits and pieces of evidence in the Gathas which have generated, and corroborate, these conclusions. Here are a few highlights.

Avestan 'creation' words.

In describing the creative act, Zarathushtra uses Avestan *zatha-* words, which (linguists agree) literally means 'to give birth, to generate from oneself'. Thus, a creation by emanation. He also uses Avestan *daa-* words which (linguists agree) means 'to produce, make, establish' etc. But translators have homogenized these words ~ translating them all as "creation" which carries a biblical mind-set that is different from the actual meanings of these words.

The Divine grows.

Next, there is a Gatha verse which puzzled me for a long time.

Here, after referring to truth (*asha-*) and its comprehension, good thinking (*vohu- manah-*) ~ (I have footnoted this introductory phrase),¹² ~ Zarathushtra says,

" ... Through this [*mainyu-* 'way of being'] Wise One [*mazda-* 'Wisdom'], **Thou art to grow,** ..." Gathas, Yasna 31, verse 7, Insler translation 1975.

Does Wisdom (*mazda-*) ~ **grow** as more and more fragments of existence personify truth (*asha-*) and its comprehension (*vohu- manah-*) ~ which is wisdom ~ and thus become Divine?

*The singular and the plural Divine.*¹³

This understanding ~ that the Divine is a union of the perfected fragments of existence ~ also solves another Gatha puzzle ~ the way Zarathushtra alternates between the singular and the plural, when referring to the Divine. Here are 2 examples (there are many, many more).

"... By your [*xshmaka pl.*]¹⁴ rule, Lord [*ahura sg.*]¹⁵ Thou shalt truly heal [*ferashem ... dau sg.*]¹⁶ this world in accord with our wish." Gathas, Yasna 34, verse 15, Insler translation 1975.

"... Grant ye [*data pl.*]¹⁷ ... that wish for the desirable condition which is said to exist under thy [*thwami sg.*]¹⁸ rule." Gathas, Yasna 43, verse 13, Insler translation 1975.

Do the many alternating pl. and sg. references to the Divine ~ for which there is no apparent explanation ~ reflect a plurality of the perfected fragments of existence, which have re-united to form One Divine?

*Individual and collective completeness.*¹⁹

Next let us recall, that eminent linguists have translated *haurvatat-* as 'wholeness, completeness, perfection'. In the Gathas, this is a divine quality that we are capable of attaining. And there are Gatha verses which imply that we achieve completeness, wholeness (*haurvatat-*), and the resulting non-deathness (*ameretat-*), individually (a wholeness of quality), and also, collectively. For example,

First: We *earn* completeness and non-deathness. Speaking of Wisdom's Word, Zarathushtra says,

"...Those of you who shall give [*seraosha-* 'listening'] and regard to this ...²⁰ they shall reach completeness [*haurvatat-*] and [*ameretat-* non-deathness] ..." Gathas Yasna 45, verse 5, Insler translation 1975. The word *seraosha-* 'listening' means both 'hearing' and 'implementing' the path of truth.²¹

Second: The Divine gives non-deathness and completeness to us,

"... grant Thou to me [*ameretat-* 'non-deathness'] and completeness [*haurvatat-*], ..." Gathas, Yasna 51, verse 7, Insler translation 1975.

And third: We give completeness and non-deathness to the Divine,

"Through a [*spenta- mainyu-* 'beneficial way of being'] and [*vahishta- manah-* 'most-good thinking'], through both action and the word befitting truth, they shall grant completeness [*haurvatat-*] and [*ameretat-* 'non-deathness'] to Him. ..." Gathas, Yasna 47, verse 1, Insler translation 1975.

If the Divine completes us; and if we complete the Divine; would we not be parts, fragments, of one completed whole?

The path and its end.

This understanding of the Divine ~ as a union of the perfected parts of existence ~ is corroborated in another Gatha teaching. We have seen some evidence of this in previous Sessions.²² So here I will just summarize: The Divine personifies 7 qualities. And these 7 qualities are also our path, and the reward for taking that path: They are:

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1. The beneficial way of being (*spenta- mainyu-*), which is,
2. The true (correct), wholly good order of existence (*asha- vahishta-*) ~ 'truth' for short,
3. Its comprehension, good thinking (*vohu- manah-*),
4. Its beneficial embodiment in thought, word, and action (*spenta- aramaiti-*),
5. Its good rule, (*vohu- xshathra-*), over one's self as well as social units,
6. Its complete attainment (*haurvatat-*), which brings about
7. Non-deathness (*ameretat-*), a state of being no longer bound by mortality, because the perfecting process is complete.

Now, if we can attain the 7 qualities of the Divine completely, then only one of two conclusions is possible.

1. If each being is an inherently separate entity, then when each one attains the qualities of the divine completely (*haurvatat-*), we would have billions of 'gods' running around, or
2. If existence is one unit (one being), temporarily fragmented and infused into each part of the material existence to enable the perfecting process, then when everyone eventually attains these divine qualities completely, we will have one re-united Being.

In the Gathas, there is no evidence that Zarathushtra looked forward to a population explosion of 'gods' (the first alternative above). But we do have a great deal of implied evidence ~ some of which you have just seen (above) ~ that he favors the second alternative. And in addition, he uses 2 beautiful metaphors.

The first is the material metaphor for completeness, wholeness (*haurvatat-*), which is water.²³ Water may exist in many separate bodies ~ raindrops, lakes, rivers, the ocean. But when separate bodies of water are joined, the separateness no longer exists. They become one body of water. So the choice of this metaphor for wholeness, completeness (*haurvatat-*) suggests a union.

Similarly, in the Gathas (and later texts), fire is used as a metaphor for an enlightened existence, which is the existence of the Divine. And when separate units of fire are joined, they also become one fire. The separateness no longer exists. So fire also suggests a union (although before we become perfected, the fire within us might be quite small, and perhaps not as bright).

Which brings us to the next question: This perfected Divine union: Is it only for human beings, or is all of existence a part of this evolutionary process? Well, many applicable Gatha verses do indeed apply to humans. But there are also many hints in the Gathas that this evolutionary process, and its resulting perfected good End ~ the Divine union ~ does indeed include all of existence.²⁴ Here is just one.

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra creates ~ in kaleidoscopic, multidimensioned ways ~ an elaborate network of metaphors, linking the Divine Itself, and each of its 7 qualities, with various material metaphors, including animals, plants, and natural elements. And we have to wonder: Why?

We see the answer in later texts. Let me give you 2 examples.

First example: Both later Avestan and Pahlavi texts describe the fire that exists in all things ~ in man, in animals, in plants, in the earth, in all of existence. And we already know that fire is a metaphor for an enlightened existence ~ the existence of the Divine.

I wish I were an artist. I would love to paint a visual image of that idea. Imagine to yourself, each part of existence ~ trees, waterfalls, lakes, grass, flowers, leaves, animals, birds, fish, man, the earth, the sky, everything in existence ~ each with glimmers of light within it, expressing the idea of the Divine in all that exists.

Second example: The word *fravashi* appears only in later Avestan texts. It is thought to mean the Divine within (although not everyone agrees).²⁵ And each element of existence has a *fravashi*.

An Avestan text celebrates the *fravashis* ~ not just of humans, but also of other life forms as well as natural elements,

"... tame animals, wild animals, animals that live in the water [probably includes fish], animals that live under the ground, the flying ones, ... the running ones, the grazing ones ... [*yazamaide* 'we celebrate']²⁶ their Fravashis." *Farvardin Yasht*, § 74, Darmesteter translation.²⁷

"... That of the sky, that of the waters, that of the earth, that of the plants," *Farvardin Yasht*, § 86, Darmesteter translation.²⁸

When I first discovered in the Gathas, this perception of the Divine (as a union of the perfected parts of existence), my immediate reaction was negative. The idea that 'God' ~ my Security Blanket ~ had to make choices too, had to go through the perfecting process to become wholly good, shocked me!

But, if we think about it, is there any merit to being perfect if one cannot ever be anything else? Is perfection worth anything, if it is not earned?

Once I got over my shock, I have come to appreciate that Zarathushtra's notion of the Divine is so much more meaningful. It means the Divine Itself has gone through, and done, what the rest of us have to go through, and do. It means that until everyone makes it, no one makes it. It helps me to understand that differences of culture, language, skin color, appearances, are simply the differences of our temporary material shells. There is no 'us' and 'them'.

And it helps me to understand that I can hate and oppose the lies, and the wrongful conduct of a person, but I must not allow myself to hate the person. For me, that's really hard. But if I can do it, it helps to break the cycles of hatred and division that we so often get caught up in. If the Divine is a part of all that exists, we cannot trash any part of existence without trashing ourselves and the Divine. Is all this really true? Well, we cannot *prove* it. But this teaching strikes a chord in me.

Zarathushtra's reason based mysticism is more satisfying than any other paradigm of existence that I have come across. It provides a holistic, framework through which to view existence, while being a part of it, so that we mutually benefit, help, each part of existence, while we all evolve towards the perfected end.

True, it still leaves some unanswered questions. And it is not completely practical. We still have to kill to eat. Even vegetarians kill plants to eat. But at least we can be as humane as possible.

If you do not find it persuasive that the Divine is a part of all that exists, don't worry about it. Zarathushtra does not tell us that we should be truthful, and be good to each other, and heal existence, because the Divine is a part of all that exists. He tell us ~ more than once ~ to be truthful for truth's own sake, to do what is beneficial, right, good, for its own sake. And he tells us to think, to decide for ourselves, so that each of us can grow spiritually in our own way, in our own time, to the certain good End that is the Endless Lights.

I used to think these ideas of Zarathushtra were unique. It was only much later that I found out that many other religions also include schools of mystical thought, although some include a mysticism that renounces the material existence; and some include only humans, whereas others include the whole of existence. I am not an expert in comparative religions. So let me simply offer you a few of the things that have come my way.

In England in the 16th century, when someone died, the church bells were rung, and people would send to find out who had died. John Donne who lived at that time, wrote some words which **Ernest Hemmingway** later made famous. He said,

"... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; and therefore never send to know **for whom the bell tolls**; It tolls for thee." John Donne, *Devotions*.

We find mysticism in Hindu spiritual philosophy, (which includes more than just humans). Rabindranath Tagore expressed the idea,

"...we all belong to a divine unity...". Tagore 1931 *The Religion of Man*, p. 55.

The Persian poet Jami said,

"Each essence is a separate glass
Through which the sun of being's light is passed,
Each tinted fragment sparkles in the sun,
A thousand colors, but the light is one." *Jami*,
Translation by Dr. S. H. Nasr; provided to me by Dr. Daryoush Jahanian.

And indeed, a Native American wise man of the Sioux nation called Black Elk, is reputed to have said, (in a rather lovely way):

"We should understand well that
all things are the work of the Great Spirit.
We should know that He is within all things:
the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains,
and all the four legged animals,
and the winged peoples..." *Black Elk*, (Quoted in an Oglala Sioux greeting card).

I would like to leave you with a question. Put it on the back burner of your mind, and let your mind play over it. In this, and past Sessions, I have already given you a lot of information which may assist you in answering this question. But I would like you to experience the joy of an "AHA !" moment. A "Eureka !" moment ~ when you put it all together. The question is:

If you had to capture the whole of Zarathushtra's spiritual philosophy in one sound byte, what, in your view, would it be?

I would love it if you would email me your answers, so that we can discuss all your ideas in the next Session, which will be our last Session. If you would rather I did not use your name, just tell me, and I will discuss your ideas anonymously.

With that, I welcome any questions you have today.

¹ See on my website, <https://gathasofzarathushtra.com>, the chapter in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*.

Throughout the pdf copies of these Sessions, I have used the stem forms of Avestan words, because most people are not familiar with their grammatical forms. But in this talk, I have used the grammatical forms of a given word, where its grammatical value (like *sg.* and *pl.*) are key to the argument.

² You may recall, in Session 4 (of this Seminar), I explained why (in my view) Zarathushtra does not come right out and openly express his idea that the certain good End is being one with the Divine. If you feel frustrated that none of the ancient texts (of which I am aware) specifically state this conclusion, bear in mind the huge loss of knowledge that occurred after the fall of the Achaemenian Empire, and later, after the Arab invasion of Iran. The texts that were lost may have helped to dispel some of this uncertainty. We are immensely lucky that at least some of Zarathushtra's own words have survived (the Gathas) from which we can connect dots and draw conclusions.

According the Pahlavi *Dinkard* Vol. 8, (written after the Arab invasion) there were 3 volumes of Avestan commentary on the Gathas (E. W. West commenting on *Dinkard* 8, SBE Vol. 37, p. 4, ft. 2). None of these commentaries has survived.

A Pahlavi text records the following traditional knowledge: That questions put to Zarathushtra, and answers given by him, were written down at the order of Vishtasp (Av. Vishtaspa) who was Zarathushtra's friend and king. This Pahlavi text says,

"... By asking questions (of him) and by listening (to his answers), the first pupils of this (Zarduxsht) of revered Fravahr (obtained) manifest knowledge and information of the good religion regarding all subjects, in the same way as splendour (is emanated) from a basic light. The sagacious Kay Vishtasp, the exalted ruler, arranged for a basic (text) of those questions (and answers) to be written down. Then he arranged that all the basic (texts) be laid down in the Royal Treasury. Then he gave the order to disseminate properly (written) copies of it. Thereafter he send a copy to the National Archives in order to store the information there." *Dinkard* Vol. 4, Humbach 1991 translation, Vol. 1, p. 51.

If these writings did indeed exist, no copy has survived.

³ *Cosmic Dualism*: For evidence that Cosmic Dualism (and its flawed thinking) is not in the Gathas, see the chapter on my website, in *Part One: The Beneficial Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu*;

The Devil/Demons: For evidence that there is no Devil in the Gathas, see on my website the chapter in *Part One: Does The Devil Exist?*

⁴ Examples of the cruelty of *Mithra* in YAv. texts are detailed in a footnote in *Part One: Truth, Asha*. None of the deities of Zarathushtra's culture are mentioned by name in the Gathas. Zarathushtra speaks of them collectively (with disapproval) as *daeua* which in his culture was one of the words for 'deity' (Vedic *deva*). However we know that *haoma* (Ved. *soma*), *mithra* (Ved. *mitra*), and certain other deities mentioned in YAv. texts were the deities of Zarathushtra's culture because they also appear in Vedic texts, and so would have been the deities of the Avestan and Vedic peoples when they were one tribe (Indo-Iranian), and before they split up into two tribes ~ Iranian and Indic. The word *arya* appears only in Avestan and ancient Indic texts (detailed in *Part Four: Ancient Origins & Homelands*). In the Gathas, the word *arya* (in its various grammatical forms) is a generic word for 'tribe' (in the Insler 1975 translation).

⁵ In both these verses (Y30:3, and Y45:2), the same Avestan word *paourvya* has been translated as 'fundamental' by Insler, and as 'primeval' and 'in the beginning' by other linguists. The stem *paourvya* literally means 'first'. But in Avestan (as in English) 'first' can have more than one flavor of meaning ~ first in time, first in quality, first as in foundational, etc. In these 2 verses, Insler translates *paourvya* words as 'fundamental' (although in other verses he translates *paourvya* words differently). Other linguists translate *paourvya* words in these 2 verses as first in time 'in the beginning', 'primeval' etc. (detailed in a chapter on my website in *Part Six: Yasna 30:2 and 3*). But I do not think these differences are fatal ~ both convey a valid meaning, and indeed, in Zarathushtra's typical multi-dimensional technique, he may have intended both meanings ~ *paourvya* 'first' as in foundational ('fundamental'), as well as *paourvya* 'first' as first in time ('in the beginning', 'primeval').

⁶ In this verse, (Y45:2) Insler 1975 translates *urvan* as 'soul'; but he comments (under another verse ~ Y28:4) that *urvan* appears in the Gathas, meaning both 'self' and 'soul' ~ a usage which he says parallels the Vedic *atman*. Insler 1975 p. 123). I have been told (by people who are not Sanskrit scholars) that certain Vedic texts (or possibly the Vedanta texts) speak of an individual soul that is part of a universal soul. I do not know if this accurately represents what is in those texts. However, this is indeed what I see in the Gathas. Based on the evidence of the Gathas, I think the 'soul' is the non-material part of the original life force that was fragmented and infused into each part of the material existence to enable its perfecting. So each (non-material) 'soul' is also each (non-material) fragment 'self' that is evolving to a wholly good, perfected existence, at which time 'self' (the fragment) becomes irrelevant, because the fragment (self/soul) is necessary only for the perfecting process. So once the perfecting process is complete, there is no need for the fragments (souls/selves) ~ which re-unite with other perfected fragments/souls/selves to form the Divine union (the universal soul).

⁷ Some people (Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians) do not see *spenta-mainyu* as a quality of the Divine (amesha spenta). However, in the Gathas, there are many verses in which the Divine (Wisdom) is specifically called *spenta* 'beneficial'; and Its way of being is specifically called *spenta-mainyu* '(the) beneficial way of being'. Here are a few examples:

Wisdom is *spenta*

In Y43, Zarathushtra professes ~ six times (in almost identical wording) ~ his understanding that the Lord Wisdom is *spenta*. In verse 5, he says, "But, I have already realized Thee to be [*spenta*], Wise Lord [*mazda* ... *ahura* 'Wisdom, Lord,] ..." Y43:5, Insler translation 1975. This phrase is repeated at the start of verses 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15 of Yasna 43, indicating perhaps (in addition to poetic alliteration) that Zarathushtra really wants us to get the point that the nature of the Divine (the essence of the sacred) is *spenta* 'beneficial'. And the Lord Wisdom is described as *spenta* in other verses as well. Here are a few examples. There are many more.

"...He is [*spenta-* 'beneficial'] to the needy..." Y29.7, Insler translation 1975.

"...the truthful Lord, [*spenta-* 'beneficial'] in His action..." Y46.9, Insler 1975. Notice, here Zarathushtra equates being truthful (*ashavan-*) with being beneficial (*spenta-*) ~ and he does so throughout the Gathas in lovely alternating equations. This is easy to understand, because *asha-* (the true (correct) order of existence is a most-good, beneficial, order of existence (detailed in *Part One: Truth, Asha*, on my website).

spenta-mainyu is Wisdom's beneficial way of being.

"...Him who is beneficent through His [*spenta-mainyu* 'beneficial way of being'] to those who exist..." Y45:6, Insler 1975,

"And through this [*spenta-mainyu* 'beneficial way of being'], Wise Lord, Thou hast promised..." Y47:5;

"... Thy [*spenta-mainyu*] ..." Y44:7;

"...Thy [*spentishta-mainyu*]..." Y33:12. *Spentishta-* is the superlative degree of *spenta-*, thus 'most beneficial'. In Avestan, the superlative often functions as a crescendo of expression.

And man too is called *spenta-* 'beneficial', and has *spenta-mainyu* 'a beneficial way of being.' Additional examples (for both the Divine and man) are given in the chapter on my website, in *Part One: The Beneficial Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu*.

⁸ Parenthetically we know that these 2 verses (Y30:3 and Y45:2) do not express the idea of Cosmic Dualism because, even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that the 2 *mainyu-* are two separate entities (instead of 2 ways of being) we would have one entity that is bad (*aka-* Y30:3), harmful (*angra-* Y45:2) and one that is only comparatively good (*vahyah-* Y30:3), comparatively beneficial (*spanyah-* Y45:2) ~ hardly consistent with the all-good and all-bad uncreated entities of Cosmic Dualism in the later texts.

However, these 2 verses do raise a puzzling question. In these 2 verses, the opposite of the 'bad', 'harmful', way of being is not described as 'good (*vohu-*)', or 'beneficial (*spenta-*)'. It is described as the comparative degrees of these two words ~ *vahyah-* 'more-good'; and *spanyah-* 'more beneficial'. Yet in other verses, Zarathushtra specifically shows that (imperfect) man has a beneficial (*spenta-*) way of being ~ without using the comparative degree (*spanyah-*). To give you just one example, (there are many, many more), he says,

"...by the action of the [*spenta-* 'beneficial'] man whose soul is in alliance with truth [*asha-*],..." Y34.2, Insler 1975.

In the same way, other qualities of the Divine ~ truth (*asha-*), its comprehension good thinking (*vohu-manah-*), its embodiment in thought, word and action (*aramaiti-*), its rule (*xshathra-*) ~ are not stated in their comparative degrees when they are mentioned as qualities of imperfect man. In fact, the comparative degrees of truth, good thinking, embodied truth and good rule do not appear in the Gathas (see Beekes, *A Grammar of Gatha Avestan*, para. 35, pp. 135 ~ 136).

So we have to wonder: Why? Why does Zarathushtra use the comparative degree of *spenta-* only in Y45:2, but not in other verses referring to divine qualities in imperfect beings.

Zarathushtra does not specifically say why. I speculate that he does so in Y45:2 because this verse (and Y30.3) expresses his ideas about the beginning of the process of spiritual evolution. And I think, in other verses, he does not use the comparative degrees of *spenta-* 'beneficial' as well as other divine qualities (*amesha spenta*) in connection with man ~ even though man has such qualities imperfectly ~ because he wants to make it clear that these divine qualities are not restricted to one Being ('God'), but are found in, (and can be attained completely by) man, and each part of existence (detailed in the many chapters in *Part Two* of my website).

You may wish to be aware that in Avestan, the comparative and superlative degrees can be used also as a crescendo of expression, rather than as a difference in kind. For example, in the YAv. *Hormezd Yasht*, the names of the Divine are given in their positive and superlative degrees.

... *baeshazyā nama ahmi* *baeshazyotema nama ahmi*
'...healing by name am I, most-healing by name am I';

... *ashava nama ahmi* *ashavastema nama ahmi*
'... truthful by name am I, most-truthful by name am I';
Yt. 1.12, my translation; Avestan words from Geldner 2dPart p. 62.

⁹ In Yasna 44, Zarathushtra asks many questions about which craftsman/artist (*hwapah*) made, produced (*daa-*), birthed (*zatha-*), fashioned (*tash-*) various parts of the material existence, (as well as the true order of existence *asha-*, its comprehension good thinking *vohu- manah-*, its beneficial embodiment (*spenta- aramaiti-*), its good rule (*vohu-xshathra-*), and in verse 7 he gives his conclusion (which I give you here in 2 translations ~ Insler's and also mine).

Insler translation: "... By these (questions), Wise One [*mazda-* 'Wisdom'], I am helping to discern Thee to be the creator [*datarem*] of everything by reason of Thy [*spenta- mainyu-*]." Y44:7.

My translation: "... I, through these (questions) am helping to discern you, Wisdom, (to be) the producer [*datarem*] of all [*vispanam*] through (the) beneficial way of being [*spenta mainyu*]." Y44:7.

First, the word *vispanam* 'all' or 'everything' refers to the questions in the preceding verses of this Yasna ~ none of which mentions 'evil'. So it would not be reasonable to interpret 'all' or 'everything' [*vispanam*] to include the idea that Wisdom created 'evil' (discussed in more detail in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of Creation*, on my website).

Second, One might (reasonably) object, that in this verse (Y44:7) and throughout this Yasna, the being who in the beginning did all this birthing, producing, establishing and fashioning is consistently addressed by Zarathushtra's two names for the Divine ~ Wisdom (*mazda-*), and Lord (*ahura-*), and in Zarathushtra's thought, the Divine is a being who is wholly good, completely in accord with the true (correct) order of things. How can these facts be squared with the notion that the original creative act of infusing itself into the material existence was done by a primeval being who was a mix of more good and bad (Y30:3), more beneficial and harmful (Y45.2)? Well, consider the following.

If we were addressing the saintly Mother Theresa, (who at the beginning of her career when she entered the convent, was just an ordinary girl ~ whose name then was not Mother Theresa, and whose way of being then may have contained more of a mix of not-so-saintly and saintly qualities), you might say, 'I saw you, Mother Theresa, when you entered the convent...'. In other words, you would address her by the name she had at the time you addressed her ~ the name which reflected her present saintly nature ~ even though that was not her name or saintly nature when you saw her at the beginning (when she entered the convent), when she was not yet a saint.

¹⁰ SBE Vol. 5, p. 159. This Pahlavi creation story appears to have been written a couple of centuries after the Arab invasion of Iran.

There is no mention in the Gathas (or later Avestan texts) of the sequence in producing the material creation stated in the Pahlavi *Zadspāram* text. So for this part of the Pahlavi quotation, I agree with the comment (made by one of the audience) that we see the influence of another religious paradigm, including a perception of the Divine who is an authority figure ~ already perfect at the time of the creative act, and creating the material existence in a specified sequence.

But I think in the last sentence of this Pahlavi quotation ("... Fire was in all, diffused originally through the six substances...") the author was trying to transmit (and so preserve) traditional Zoroastrian knowledge that is consistent with the Gathas (and is not in any of the creation stories of Judaism, Christianity or Islam) ~ the infusion of the original being (who was a mix of divine qualities ~ fire ~ and their opposites) into the material existence.

¹¹ Discussed with highlights of evidence in Sessions 2, 3, 4, and 5 of this Seminar.

¹² Here is my translation of this quotation together with its preceding phrase, so that you can see the context of Zarathushtra's statement that the Divine is to **grow**. In the preceding phrase, which mentions truth and good thinking, Insler has translated the verb *damish* (a form of the verb stem *daa-*) as "he created", whereas a more literal translation is "he produced, made"; and Insler translates *xrathwa* (instrumental sg. of the stem *xratu-*) as 'with this very intention!'; whereas I follow other professional linguists who see the meaning of *xratu-* words as 'reason'. So I have translated the instr. sg. *xrathwa* as 'with reason'. I therefore give you my translation instead of Insler's.

"... *hvo xrathwa damish ashem*

"He [*hvo*] with reason [*xrathwa*], produced [*damish*] the true order of existence [*ashem*],

ya darayat vahishtem mano

through which [*ya*] he has (also) upheld [*darayat*] the most good thinking [*vahishtem mano*]

ta mazda mainyu uxshyo

through this [*ta*] way of being [*mainyu*], Wisdom [*mazda*], Thou art to grow [*uxshyo*] ..." Y31:7.

It is worth noting that in the Gathas, not only the perfected part of existence ~ the Divine (Wisdom) ~ produces/makes truth (*asha*). The rest of existence does so as well. Each time we think, speak, act, in a way that is beneficial, truthful, right, good, we produce, we make, we create, the true (correct, good) order of existence (*asha*) ~ even though we do so imperfectly, incrementally.

¹³ Detailed in the chapter on my website, *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Singular & The Plural*.

¹⁴ I give you the following Avestan words in this footnote (and a few that follow) in transliterated form, which shows their correct grammatical values which are of key importance. For how these transliterated symbols should be translated, see (in the *General Orientation & Introduction* part of my website, the chapter entitled *Avestan Script: Pronunciation & Genesis*.

x šmākā 'your' is a possessive pronoun, 2d person pl. Skjaervo, 2006, Glossary.

¹⁵ *ahurā* is the vocative. sg. form of the noun stem *ahura-*. Skjaervo, 2006, Glossary.

¹⁶ *fərašəm ... dā* linguists differ. In his commentary (on Y34:15, p. 228) Insler translates *fərašəm ... dā* as 'thou shalt heal', referring the reader to his comment under Y30:9, where (pointing to a Vedic parallel) he explains that in the Gathas *ahum fərašəm kar-* or *dā-* is an idiom that means 'to heal, repair the world' (p. 172). The word *ahum* literally means 'existence'. In other verses, Insler translates this word, sometimes as 'world' and sometimes as 'existence'.

¹⁷ Skjaervo's 2006, Glossary, shows *dātā* as a 2d person pl. form of the verb stem *dā-*, thus Insler's translation "Grant ye". In Avestan, the form of the verb indicates the person and number (I/we; thou/you; him/her/it/they), so Avestan verb forms do not normally have a separate pronoun (unless the author wishes to accomplish a specific purpose ~ for example, emphasizing the pronoun). To illustrate: the verb *ah-* 'to be' would be conjugated as follows in the present tense (indicative) ~ the pronouns are included in the verb form:

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1st person: | <i>ahmī</i> | I am | <i>mahī</i> | we are |
| 2d person: | <i>ahī</i> | thou art | <i>stā</i> | you (pl.) are |
| 3d person: | <i>asī</i> | he/she/it is | <i>həntī</i> | they are |

¹⁸ *θwahnī* 'thy' is a possessive pronoun, 2d person sg. Skjaervo, 2006, Glossary.

¹⁹ Detailed in *Part One: Completeness & Non-deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*, on my website.

²⁰ In this verse, [Y45:5](#), following the pronoun 'this' Insler has added the word '(Lord)' in round parentheses, indicating that he thinks 'this' stands for the Lord (*ahura-*), and he translates the *seraoshem* as 'obedience' expressing the (biblical) mind-set of obedience to the deity being required to obtain the reward. Here is the full verse,

"Now I shall speak of what the [*spento.temo* 'Most Beneficial One'] told me, that word which is to be heard as the [*vahisstem* 'most good] for men [*maretaeiby* 'for mortals']. Those of you who shall give 'obedience' [*seraoshem* 'listening'] and regard to this (Lord) of mine, they shall reach completeness [*haurvatat-*] and [*ameretat-* non-deathness] ..." [Y45:5](#), Insler translation, 1975.

I think 'this' stands for Zarathushtra's teachings ~ the previously mentioned 'word' of the Most Beneficial One ~ the Divine. But interestingly, there is no real difference because the Word of the Divine is the path of truth, which the Divine personifies. So the Divine is a personification of Its Word.

²¹ Detailed in *Part Three: Seraosha*, on my website.

²² Discussed with highlights of evidence in Sessions 2, 3, 4, and 5 of this Seminar.

²³ See *Part Two: Earth, Water, Plants*.

²⁴ This unity of identity is discussed throughout the chapters on my website, and particularly in the following chapters:

Between the Divine and man:

~ In the beautiful Younger Avestan text [Yy60:12](#) discussed (on my website) in *Part One: Seven Gems from the Later Texts* (and applicable footnotes), and

~ In *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*;

Between the Divine and all existence

~ In *Part Two*:

Light, Glory, Fire;

A Question Of Immanence;

The Puzzle of the Cow & Its Network;

Earth, Waters, Plants;

The Puzzle of the Singular & The Plural;

The Puzzle of the Parallels;

The Puzzle of Creation;

Did Wisdom Choose Too?

²⁵ I hope to finish and upload a chapter to my website, in *Part Three: Fravashi*, which examines the meaning(s) ascribed to the word, how it has been used in the ancient texts, and why I think it means the divine/Divine within ~ in quality and being.

²⁶ The Avestan word *yazamaide* in this section of the *Farvardin Yasht*, is quoted from Geldner's *Avesta* (p. 184, which Geldner writes in the Avestan script). Avestan *yaz-* words (like *yazamaide*) have been routinely translated as "worship". But in Avestan, *yaz-* words are worship in the sense of a celebration (as Humbach 2010 agrees), detailed in a footnote in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*, (on my website).

²⁷ SBE Vol 23, pp 197-198.

²⁸ SBE Vol. 23, p. 200.