

Paradise and Avestan reverence to Ahura Mazda's 4th Creation. An ecological dilemma

The word 'Paradise' is derived from the Avestan word, '*Pairi-daēza*' of our Holy Scriptures dating back to the middle Bronze Age (circa 1800-1500 BCE). Literally, '*Pairi*' means an encompassing boundary / fence surrounding and limiting a circumscribed enclosure in a confined space. The enclosed area is invariably demarcated by a wall. In its original Avestan context any circumscribed enclosure was a Pairi-Daeza. The Āiryānic people's deeply imbibed love of greenery and reverence to Ahura Mazda's 4th Creation - Vegetation thus made the enclosed plots of land, gardens adorned with flower and fruit trees and other green adornments - shrubs and trees. (See Figure 1)

Vāndīdād: Yasna 8.18 talks of apportioning and erecting an enclosure (surrounding his house) for a righteous Mazdayasnian man, who has followed all 'precepts of hygiene in keeping the regulated distance from fire, water and other righteous men.'

Vāndīdād: Yasna 8.18 talks of a righteous Mazdayasnian woman who has, likewise, in her house Followed the righteous order by keeping the plot of land clean, dry of moisture and free of indiscriminate pollution by cattle and draught animals.

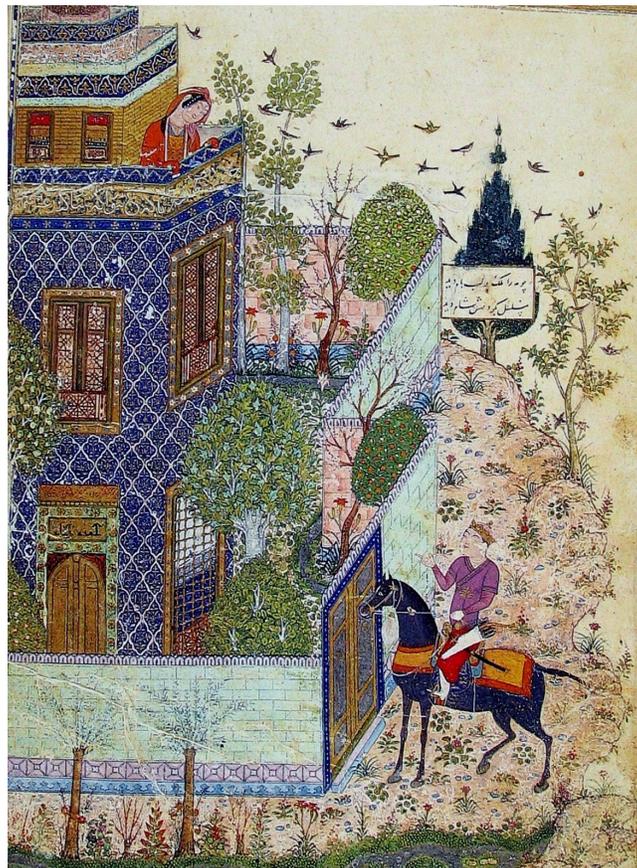


Figure 1 (A medieval Iranian painting of a walled Garden)

It would, from repeated verses, therefore, appear that fencing off with a wall, of the owned property around the house during Avestan times, was a priority requirement before the traditional adornment of the land could be initiated.

Vāndidād 3.4: The earth rejoices when the faithful (among other activities) clears the ground to erect his house when the faithful cultivates corn, fodder, flower & fruit trees and when.....

Vāndidād 3.24: Unhappy is the land that has long lain unsown with the seed of the sower and wants a good husbandman. For him, who would till the earth, O Spitamā Zarathustra, with the left arm & the right, with the right arm & the left, the earth will bring forth plenty of fruit.

Ahura Mazda's fourth Creation – the silent world of the Vegetable kingdom

Parallel with the modern scientific concept of the sequence of development of life on Earth, it is symbolic that, following on the Sky, the Earth and the Waters, our scriptures should emphasise that Ahura Mazda's fourth Creation was Plant Life (**Urvara**) as '**first life**' ahead of his fifth and sixth Creations - Animals and Humans.

Gatha Spəntā Mainyu; Yasna 48.6 '...and Mazda through righteous acts first created and clothed the bare Earth with trees, fodder and plants.

This creation of **first life** on Earth, a green mantle of freshness/flourishing greenery of vegetation (Avesta: 'Varena' meaning 'an exquisite garment') cladding the naked Earth, was well planned to initiate the life-giving atmospheric capsule of air (our environment with the precise proportion of Oxygen, Carbon Dioxide and Nitrogen). This was ordained by Ahura Mazda for the welfare and sustenance of his fifth and sixth Creations - Animal and Human life to last until the end of Zravane Daraegho Khadate (limited Earth time).

Vāndidād 9.46: '...and the Druj shall flee, like an arrow well darted, as hastily as would the previous season's green freshness covering the Earth'.

In a painting found on a tomb wall of ancient Egypt dating back to 1,500 BCE there is the record of a garden, a nobleman's garden. In a hot, dry and dusty land, gardens in the desert greenery had to be limited to the palaces of the Pharaoh and his noblemen. There are no records of the laying down of Parks for the enjoyment of the commoners. **Xenophon**, the Greek historian c. 430-354 BCE, who learnt about the aesthetics of gardening during his travels in Asia called it '**Paradeisoi**'. This word then enters the first Greek translation of the original Hebrew 'Old Testament' of the Holy Bible. **Socrates** c. 469 BCE-399 BCE learnt of the splendour of Iranian Gardens at the palace of **Cyrus (the rebel Prince) 407-401 BCE** (younger brother of the ruler, Xerxes II) in Sardis (capital of Lydia).

By 1000 BCE the Medes and later the Achaemenians had developed the first concept of **parks for public enjoyment** in the form of reserves for the first time. With ornamental and fruit trees, well-tended green meadows, flowers and game, these parks with their ornate pavilions. The great abundance of fruit and ornamental trees, meadows, flowers and game also became their playgrounds. Here, within the idyllic landscape where the mind and body could be refreshed, they could legitimately hunt and relax. Games such as **Chogan (Polo)** originated. The influence then spread to Greece and Rome between 300 and 400 BCE. The Gathic/ Airyanic peoples would have been among the '**first greenies**' known. Such, indeed, was their reverence for vegetation that they nurtured it with affectionate care.

Originated in their '**Primal Homeland – Airyana Vaeja**' and carried to the Classical World, the **Cypress tree- 'dērakht-e-sarv'** is loved for its rich evergreen colour, luxuriant foliage and longevity (up to 3-4000 years) In the dry crisp pollution free air of the middle east. In comparison the Cypress trees carried to Italy by the romans to decorate their stately homes have withered away from pollution and cancer. In Yazd, Zarathushti villagers will vouch their Cypress reflects a certain silent affection - "the tree grows on us" / "we are attached to it"- as it shares their life, hopes and aspirations. Their deep affection for greenery reflect their naming trees after children/people and admiration of the colour green.

*Fravardin Yasht XIII.79: "Yazamaidē, nāmēni, āpō; Yazamaidē, nāmēni, urvarō"
(reverence, by name, to the waters; reverence, by name, to the trees)*

Rashnā Yasht XII.17: Rashnā, Yazata of Truth/Justice is called 'upairi-urvarānm' (highly affectionate).

It is quite symbolic that Ahura Mazda created Plant life (Urvara) ahead of Animals and Humans and designated Amēsha Spēntā, Amēretiat (Lord of Immortality) as its protector. Hādōkht Nask, verse 13: “....., withholding charity to the needy, cutting down treesthen, one feels obliged to chant the Gathas.”

The infamous cutting down of the Cypress ‘*Tree of Zaradust*’ (Sarv e Kashmar) in the village of Kashmar (Khorāsān) by Caliph Jā’far al-Mutāwāqqil (861CE) is a fine example. When the Caliph heard of the famous tree the Caliph indicated he wished to see the tree but ordered the tree be brought to him. With a public outcry thousands of people in the district gathered to plead it be spared and offered all that they possessed in return. The trunk was so bulky it could not be tilted on to carts. The trunk, hacked to pieces and the branches took 1,300 camels to carry them in stages. One station before the procession could reach the Palace the palace guards and attendants revolted on the night of December 10, 861 CE. al- Mutāwāqqil did not live to see the tree. This incidence prompted Zarathushti villagers all over Iran to plant and nurture a Cypress ‘taller and greater than any other in the land of Iran’.

*Gardens have the potential to satisfy nine basic human needs (subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, freedom) across four existential states - being, having, doing and interacting.
- Mike Steven, Lecturer in Landscape Studies, University of Western Sydney*

*The healing power of being in a garden is now being documented by medical studies, which show that hospital patients who look out on a garden take less medication & go home quicker than those who look out on a parking lot or other buildings.
Alzheimer's patients are no longer agitated when placed in a garden.
- Judith Handlesman 1997*

The Biblical word ‘*gan*’ as in ‘*gan Eden*’ meant ‘*a walled garden*’. The ‘*sanctuary*’ that Cyrus the Great provided for the Jewish refugees after freeing them from Babylon and their repatriation to Jerusalem motivated the Jews to insert in the Torah the title of ‘*Messiah*’ for Cyrus the Great. The references by their *Prophet Isaiah (c.760-690 BCE)* to their own *Garden of Eden* to mean the ‘*sanctuary*’ that they found in their movement back home to the mythical ‘*Garden of Eden*’.

Isaiah 45.13: Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up also; I Yahweh have created it.

Isaiah 51.3: For Yahweh will comfort Eden; will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like the Garden of Eden, her desert like the garden of Yahveh; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

The adopted word “*Pardes*” in Hebrew then became “*an Orchard*”. The Garden of Eden with its trees and angels is thus associated with the various visions of the earthly and heavenly paradise. Today, in the Israeli city of Haifa there exists a Persian Garden in honour of Cyrus the Great.

The Arabs after conquest readily embraced this garden concept. Their affinity with the descriptions of the ‘Paradise’ in the Holy Qur’an, a place that held all the delights inhabitants of burning desert regions would long for - fountains, shades of decorative trees, flowers and fruit. Marco Polo described a real Persian garden as “a paradise planted with the finest fruit of the world with four conduits: one flowing with wine, one with milk, one with honey, and one with water.” This garden concept spread further throughout the lands conquered by the Moslems in the 7th Century.

The sacredness of the **Tree of Life** said to be deeply rooted in the primitive religious ideas of the human race life is depicted by all cultures and in every form of spirituality as a widely recognised symbol from prehistoric

times. Indigenous peoples on all Continents had sacred locations identified by distinct landmarks - their 'sacred sites' for their spiritual secrets. There are several later paintings and drawings of the Tree of Life, but this Sumerian Clay tablet below is one of the earliest. It is among the original Sumerian Cylinders and clay tablets excavated circa 2,500 BCE (See Figure 2). This 4,500 year old clay tablet shows a man and a woman seated below the Tree of Life. Behind the woman is seen a serpent allegedly 'tempting' the woman. This concept was expurgated in the Bible as the 'Tree of Life' in the Garden of Eden. The *Book of Genesis 3.22* mentions such a tree as 'the giver of eternal life.'



Figure 2

From the 'Holy Bible'-The Reader's Digest Association Inc., Sydney 1971

Scientific studies of plant life

They have revealed that plants *possess over 20 sensory perceptions*. But because they are different from our own, we are unable to recognize them readily. It is not all absurd to speak about the consciousness of **plants**. We already know about the sensitivity of **plants** (akin to neurological feelings in animals). But more than that, it is possible to distinguish not only *responsiveness to light* but also *attraction to and affection towards certain persons* - human psychic energy. It has been observed how **plants**, in order to please/attract a beloved person, even bloom out of season. The sensitivity of **plants** was for long considered to be just instinct, but after investigations one now can attribute this "instinct" to the *domain of thought*.

Humans seem to exhibit a callous superiority in presuming they have the exclusive ability to think. Not only do **plants** serve *beneficial effects on humans by their extracts*, but also *the plant emanations produce a strong effect on the surroundings*. One may see how man can be helped by a bed of flowers consciously relaxes the mind. **Plants reach out toward the light**. Many noble hymns have been written, but people recite them without heartfelt feeling. Up to this point experiments have been carried out between people and objects; further experiments will be made with plants and animals. By broadening the investigations, one can arrive at a study of the exchange of subtle energies. Thus, all animals have served in experiments for the benefit of cures of human diseases. *Magnetism of the Earth's gravity* and its effect on the roots of trees, as well as **Prana**, can also explain why *plant emanations* have effect of purification and cure of human ailments. Before the experiment of transfer of sensitivity one should study *the manifestations of Agni Yoga*, for only subtle receptivity of such currents of the spirit will yield a subtle understanding of plant potencies. In India it has been noted that on those days when there is singing and chanting of hymns with accompanying musical instruments in the Temples, the flower buds in the surrounding gardens bloom profusely

*The healing power of being in a garden is now being documented by medical studies, which show that patients in hospitals who look out on a garden take less medication and go home earlier than those who look out on a parking lot or on other buildings.
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Vedic Concept

In Vedic cosmology Hindus believe humans have spiritual superiority over creatures of the earth. God the Father - (Brāhmā) is the efficient cause and Nature, Prakṛti, is the material cause of the universe. The Vedic

Prakṛti is the source of life. It offers sustenance and endurance. **Shakti** is the power and energy of life. However, beyond plain sustenance Shakti can only offer speed leading often to a breakdown of endurance. There is now a strange new force on earth called ‘world economy’, which has been made to appear as the only way (one way) to progress. It does not take into account (or, deliberately ignores) the consequence that flows from it, which are side-tracked to be borne by the voiceless and the oppressed. The real challenge, say the Vedas lies in the practice of **‘Rta’** – the Right Order (Avestan equivalent - **Asha**). That is, to put Prakṛti – the sustenance and endurance of life at the centre of all life decision making. Preservation of life is the ultimate sustainability of a proper ‘Universal Order’ for subsequent generations. In real life there is no such thing as an instant answer. So, where is the answer? I would say it is in the mind of the victim. The victim is the expert. There have been incidences in which large areas of tribal forestry have been felled to provide timber for personal gain. No notice of the objections of the tribal people is countenanced. It is amazing how often we can pretend we can look into someone else more than we can into ourselves (our own ‘conscience’ - Daēna).

The **R̥g Veda** regarded trees and plants as possessing divine healing properties, and it is still popularly believed that every tree has a Vrikṣa-dēvatā, a spiritual nature. They are ritually worshiped with prayer, offerings, and the sacred thread ceremony. The Vrikṣa-dēvatā are not worshiped as divinities, but as manifestations/attributes of the Divine. Tree planting is considered a religious duty. The Chipko Movement of March 1973 in Gopeshwar, India was initiated by villagers who formed a human chain and hugged trees to prevent loggers from cutting down trees in an area marked for the development of a sports equipment factory. Since then, the **Chipkō Āndolān** (movement to hug trees) has grown as a Hindu ecological movement. **Despite western assertion that Hinduism is polytheistic in nature, this sort of polytheism (personalisation of the attributes of the Creator) is actually monotheistic in nature.** While the Divine is manifest in many, the many are all and no less than, but not equal to the Divine.

R̥g Veda 3.55.1:

Samidhē arnāb kṛtam iti vadēm I

...mahata dēvanām assuratvam ēkam II

‘Before this burning Fire, I shall speak nothing but the truth.

...there is but only one Creator among all the divinities.’

Athārvā Veda 10.191.4:

*‘Peaceful be the earth, peaceful the ether, peaceful the heavens,
peaceful the waters, peaceful the herbs, peaceful the trees. May all Divinities bring
me peace. May there be peace through these invocations of peace. With these
invocations of peace which appease everything, I render peaceful whatever
here is terrible, whatever here is cruel, whatever here is sinful. Let it
become auspicious, let everything be beneficial to us’.*

Ecology is predatory in its very core:

Just as our powerful political institutions and heavily armed nations in reality operate from the principle of "might makes right", so the ecology of our world reflects this in its *de facto oppression of the weaker* by the stronger, and is based upon the fundamental question. When all life forms (say, compared to a stone) have the ability to feel and react, the question arises - **"Who should be eating who, in order to remain alive?"** In the Religion of Zarathushtra it is quite clear. Ahura Mazda ordained that **His previous five Creations were created as being specifically beneficial to the last Creation - that is, Humans. They were to benefit from and remain sustained until the end of the limited Earthly Time as His co-workers to assist Him in the ultimate elimination of all Evil. This Apocalypse, on the last Earth day of ‘Frashā-kar’ (‘making afresh’ - Avestan: Frashō-karati; Pahlavi: Frashēgard), will commence with Resurrection followed by a Renewal of all life. The Renovation of the world will occur with the total destruction of all who were judged evil during the first Judgement.**

Indeed, Zarathushtra in Gatha Ahunavaiti; Yasna 30.9 clearly indicates this concept:

‘May we be among those who will bring about the transfiguration.’

Terrestrial predation will remain unarguably cruel. In real life, animals eat each other as well as plants; humans eat animals and plants; plants also eat animal life and persistently parasitise on other plants for survival, such as strangler trees and parasitic and insect-eating plants. In most cases the host plant suffers all its life and dies

exsanguinated earlier. Also the victimized animal life-forms are eaten alive by the plant. For humans, it would then appear, being a vegetarian or otherwise must remain a personal choice based on individuality of thought rather than an argumentative decision-making allegedly based on cruelty or compassion.

Yet, there are deeply symbiotic pockets of co-existence even within this predatory ecological system. The superior human brain devises new technologies. Added to this, over population has exacerbated this predation into one overwhelming struggle between humans and all other life forms. But, uncompromising nature has always been not only one step ahead, but an endless series of steps beyond the human characteristic of devising new and, sometimes devious ways. The repair of our damaged ecology no longer seems to be in human hands, and that is going to become more and more evident as human population increases to unsustainable levels.

Is there a way out of our Ecological predicament?

Our predatory ecology (certainly not within the capacity of any human to devise), is hence directly traceable to fallible Faiths, fallible leaders and fallible governments. As an old and wise Chinese proverb says, "Even the gods and the immortals may make mistakes." Humans are spiritual animals. They are the only members of the animal kingdom that form spiritual groups, each one having a 'true' Faith. So, there are several 'true' spiritual dogma-like set of precepts. Humans, too, are the only animals that claim they love their neighbour as themselves and 'do him in' if his theology is not allegedly 'right'.

The basic tenet of the Religion of Zarathushtra emphasises that *all life, not just the human, has a higher destiny*. Indeed, at the '*end of time of the long domination of evil*' all life (Zarathushtra's '*ḡyāti*' as opposed to '*not-life*' - '*ajyāti*' - say, a stone), extending not only to animals but to plant life as well on earth, is due to be transfigured on the last day, at the end of Earthly Time. Our weary Earth has reached its half-life of about 6.5 billion years (so the scientists say, now). The end could occur in another (about) 6.5 billion years, only if there is no earlier collision with a wayward Comet or similar object (or ? invasion and destruction by aliens). As the present knowledge goes, our Sun, when it runs out of its depot of hydrogen will expand as a 'Red Giant' and consume most of the planets in the Solar System until it can no longer do so. It will then suddenly collapse into a dense mass, a shiny metallic object - a 'White Dwarf', about the size of the Earth.

Among the many helpers on the day of *Frashā-kar*, in the presence of the *Saoshyant*, will be *Zāmyād*, the feminine Yazata in charge of the welfare of our planet, the Divine Mother along with *Yazata Sraōša*, the Earthly representative of Ahura Mazda, *Spōntā Ārmaiti*, (*who also appears as Ārshūt and Arēdvi Sura Anāhītā* 'the splendid, overflowing with power, not impure one) who nurtures and dispenses the living fire of immortality, the glorious, divine aura - the '*khvārenāh*', created by Mazda. The '*khvārenāh*' is believed to be in the form of a luminous, non-molecular substance-energy (*Zāmyād Yasht, 19.8. & Yasna 5.7*). In other Faiths it is shown as a visible '*halo*' adorning the region of the head and neck. *Zāmyād* is also called *Savō-gaētha* - one who will make the world glorious/afresh, prosperous in the new '*Kingdom*' to come (*Sarosh Yasht Hādōkht 11.16 & Visparad 7.2*). The later Pahlavi commentary, the *Dinkard*, which preserves many ancient and even pre-Zoroastrian teachings, tells us (*Book 9, Fargard 10*) that, in its final metamorphosis, our transfigured earth will be transported to a higher starry sphere by the power of the ever-living fire, the '*khvārēnāh*', 'the divine glory which can never be seized by force'.

Clearly, the Ecological code governing evolution dictates our future stakes at large. They, indeed, seem high. The human species may not necessarily be the ultimate sole beneficiary, let alone be the only favourite, as it was during Creation. *It therefore seems, we, humans need to cultivate a more admirable and noble humility in our differences in spirituality, as well as a more realistic appraisal of our place in the overall scheme of things.*