

A BRIEF REVIEW OF AHUNAVAITI GATHA

Dr. Kersey H. Antia

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Ahunavaiti Gatha is the first and the longest of the five Gathas, consisting of the seven Has (chapters) of the Yasna namely Has 28 to 34. It is the prayer to be recited at the funeral. However, it is unique in the sense that it superbly relates the ideas and principles that should strictly govern our conduct in this world with the consequences that follow us when we pass over to the other world which the Gathas repeatedly instructs us does exist and also forms the very basis of the Gathic teachings which as we will soon see could be found also at the very foundation of other religions, especially the Abrahamic ones. But besides how much the Indo-Iranian roots of the Gathas have influenced the Judeo-Christian belief, one also wonders how Asho Zarathushtra could have developed such astounding, intricate, highly sophisticated and yet perfectly and profoundly logical theology that have also entered into all other major religions, at least 3400 to 3600 years ago when mankind was still engaged in nature worship, shamanism, and all sorts of devious cults, some of which are still practiced today in some remote parts of the world! It is also acclaimed as the only religion that shares some relationship with other major religions of the world. I for one was fully convinced even as a very young teenager that Asho Zarathushtra had to be (and indeed was) divinely inspired to obtain such an inspired and thorough understanding of God's design for mankind. And if anyone really tries to understand the Gathas, hardly anyone will fail to see it. Indeed Zarathushtra often states that he had envisioned God and had mentally conversed with him and found the ultimate truth about God and was inspired to share it with us.

So, let us discuss what the Ahunavaiti Gatha teaches us. The very first chapter, Yasna 28, is such a sublime hymn to Ahura Mazda that even though it was written in prehistoric times it still would rank among the best of hymns ever written in praise of God as well as for explaining what He really does for mankind so as to be deservedly called "God". Any attempt at explaining this Gatha (or any other Gatha) within a limited time and space structure) will naturally leave out more notions and comments than it can possibly cover. Nevertheless, we will try to hit the major ones as much as possible. Yasna 28 begins with homage to Mazda and manifold aspects of Mazda that are essential for the working of God in this world as well as in the next. It informs us right away about His Spenta Mainyu, His Beneficent or Holy Spirit which represents the positive and progressive aspect and direction of life as against a Mainyu, (Spirit, Mentality or Tendency) that is Angra,

negative retarding, regressive, destructive and the like. Later step by step Zarathushtra explains more about these two Spirits governing the universe. Thus in the very next paragraph Zarathushtra informs us of the existence of two worlds – one of matter and the other of mind, and how we can attain happiness in both. Like a modern psychologist he announces that actions have consequences at the time of Judgment. Zarathushtra unequivocally declares that “Ahura Mazda is the strongest and all the powers and mastery of the world belong to Him,” a point so often brought out by him in the Gathas, but is most often neglected by most scholars who consider or underrate Zoroastrianism as a dualist and not as a monotheist religion. Zarathushtra ends Yasna 28 by cogently entreating Mazda to instruct him about how the “foremost existence” (later Frashokereti, Frashgard) will come about when the world will attain perfection and will get renovated and resurrected. In this hymn he succinctly refers to how this will be brought about by practicing Vohu Mana (Good Mind), Asha Vahishta (Best Righteousness), Khshathra Vairya (God's chosen power/rule), Armaiti (Right Mentality; Piety) Khratu (Divine Wisdom) and later Zarathushtra expounds how this will lead one to Wholeness (Haurvatat), Immortality (Ameretaat).

At a time (and even much later during the Gnostic and Indo-Aryan periods) when the earthly existence was played down as sinful or as Maya (illusion), Zarathushtra emphatically lays down at the very beginning in para 3 the importance of this world to carry out our mission, an emphasis that has lasted to this day.

In Yasna 29, Zarathushtra answers the question raised by Zarathushtra in the last stanza of Yasna 28 – Yaaish aa Anghahat Pauoryo Bavat – How the existence first came into being? Yasna 29 begins with the Soul of the Universe, Geush Uravan, Vedic Goratma complaining to God: “For whom did you create me? Who fashioned me? Because the cruelty of fury and violence, of bondage and might, tightly holds me in captivity.” The same is echoed in the *Bundahishn* (IV A). Ahura Mazda first responded that a “master has not been found by a single one of us” but on conferring with Vohu Mana and his recommendation, Zarathushtra is found to be the only candidate for it. But the Soul of the Universe cries out in protest as the world then (if not ever) needed a powerful man. This signifies the uniqueness of Zarathushtra's theology – A powerful man or even a powerful God will not do for men what men have to do for themselves by following God's precepts. Finally the soul of the Universe apprehends this significant fact in Zarathushtra's mission, which reaches its climax in 34.1. In the last stanza of Yasna 29, the Soul of the Universe asks Mazda to grant her Asha, Vohu Mana and Vohu Khshathra (Good Dominion) and the response attaining them is given in Yasna 30 which indeed is a

continuation of Yasna 29. Despite being chosen as Ratu (leader) on this earth, Zarathushtra makes it clear that each one has to use the light of their own mind and choose between right and wrong, which will indeed have consequences. Choosing right will usher in “the joys which are seen through the luminaries”, which Cherado Gnoli interprets as the evidence for a mystical experience in Zarathushtra's Gathas, albeit when one follows his precepts arduously.

At first, Zarathushtra explains, there were two Spirits – Spenta Mainyu (Beneficent Spirit) and Angra Mainyu [Evil Spirit]– later known as Ahreman), who are twins (Yima). (It must be noted here that later on Spenta Mainyu somehow was identified as Ahura Mazda (or vice versa), leading to an unGathic dualism between Ahura Mazda and Ahreman in the Pahlavi (texts). The two Spirits are never in conformity in their thoughts, words and deeds – one totally good, the other totally wicked. Thus, there is eternal polarism governing the universe from day one. One has to choose between the two – later on the Gathas declare that Zarathustra (Yasna 43.16) and even God (Yasna 32.2) make their own choice. Thus, we all have to choose to bring about the Renovation of the world, “even if our understanding (of Zarathustra's theology) may be false” (para 9).

Long after Zarathushtra, Lord Tennyson echoes this idea when he speaks of “the far-off purpose divine to which the whole creation moves”. It is a tribute to Zarathushtra that the principle of Free Will has become the philosophical foundation of human behavior. As Victor E. Frankel asserts in *Man's Search For Meaning*: “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedom – to choose one's own attitude in any given set of circumstances to choose one's own way.” However, many philosophers who believed in determinism do not believe in Free Will. Even Einstein in our times rejected it. Though otherwise his views are quite in harmony with the Gathic thought. (Pav. p. 6-A).

Yasna 30.11, the last para of Yasna 30, hints at *Urwata* – commandment or doctrine, which is made manifest in the very first para of Ha 31 – there will be happiness to the righteous and prolonged woe to the wicked, thus connecting chapter 31 with the previous one. In its very first sentence Zarathushtra declares that his commandments were hitherto *Agushtaa* – unheard of, and thus, quite new or novel. In the third para, Zarathushtra beseeches Mazda to “declare with the tongue of His own mouth in order for us to know (all) that, by means of which I might convert (Vaurayaa) all the living beings.” The stanza 7 described Mazda as “the foremost mediator” (Mantaa Paouruyo) who is “mingled with the luminaries”, and as someone who is to grow which is such a unique concept and reveals Zarathushtra's uncanny vision that Mazda Himself will grow ever more if the humanity follows the Gathic

teaching to its fullest. In 31.11, Zarathushtra again emphasizes what he revealed in Yasna 30 that even before (*Paorvim*) Mazda created everything in the universe, He created Free Will so that a free person can exercise his choice in the world. I for one find *Bundahishn* 3:23-24 providing us very relevant background information for it.

What Yasna 31.11 expounds is explained so well in its own medieval manner almost 2000 years later by the *Bundahishn*, which means the story of the origin (*Bun*) of the creation (*Dahishn*):

“Ahura Mazda deliberated with the perceptions and immortal souls of mankind, and having brought omniscient wisdom to all mankind said: Which seems more useful to you, that I should create you into material form, so that incarnate you will battle the lie and vanquish it, and that I should resurrect you perfect and immortal at the end, and re-create you in corporeal form, and that you become immortal, unaging, and without enemies forever; or is it necessary always to protect you from the adversary.” The immortal souls of mankind saw, through omniscient wisdom, that the evil from Angra Mainyu would arrive into the material world and [saw also] the final nonopposition of the adversary. They agreed to enter the material world to become perfect and immortal in the final body up to eternity and eternal progress. (3:23-34)”

Thus, Ahura Mazda wants us to combat the forces of Angra Mainyu in every way we can during our lifetime in order to ultimately get rid of evil and imperfection in the world and bring about *Frashokereti*. Men and women are to be *Hamkaars* (collaborators) of God for this purpose and the Gathas often tell us that God Himself “will grow” if we endeavour our best to becoming God's *Hamkaars*. He sacrificed his own sovereignty and omnipotence by granting us Free Will whereby one can choose to follow Him or not. He made such a great sacrifice in putting aside his own omnipotence out of sheer love for helping humanity to ultimately be perfect and free of any limitations in the manner of, say, Christ sacrificing his own life to save his followers. This is not only a concept quite unique in the history of religions but it also explains why absolute and uncompromising monotheism does not provide logical answers to the existence of evil in the world. The principle of Free Will makes the man responsible for all man-made evil in the world. Moreover, not only Mazda (32.2) and Zarathushtra (43.16) made their own choice, but the *Bundahishn* makes it clear that the Fravashis of mankind also made a choice to be perfect like Mazda by voluntarily choosing to give up their eternal shelter in heaven and coming down to live on the earth in order to face all the temptations it provides and yet choose to be good and oppose all evil, instead of continuing to cohabit with Mazda in heaven without knowing and facing the temptations inherent in the material world.

Yasna 31.10 to 17 contain a list of questions, namely, "O Ahura, please tell me the truth about what I ask Thee", which may well be the origin of such twenty stanzas Zarathushtra asked in Yasna 44 of the Ushtavaiti Gatha. Moreover, Yasna 31.10-17 seem to abrogate on the beliefs about the origin and foundation of the religion. The precepts mentioned in 31.18 and 19 are clearly spelled out in 31.20: Heavenliness shall accrue to the virtuous but "a long lifetime of darkness, foul food, the world woe" will befall the deceitful ones. 31.21 encourages us to be "God's ally in spirit and in actions", and 31.22 regards such a person as "Mazda's most welcome guest". Reference to fire in this chapter as elsewhere does not at all refer to the physical fire but to "Mazda's (own) bright Fire" as in 31.19.

Yasna 32 requires an understanding of our ancient history. It seems the reason why the Iranian Aryans and Indian Aryans may have parted company was what the latter worshiped as Daevas came to be disowned and despised by the former in view of Zarathushtra's reform. These Daevas were fully possessed by deceit and are worshiped individually as versus the strict monotheistic worship of Ahura Mazda alone as established by Zarathushtra with a very different ethical emphasis as well as a very different goal of requiring each worshiper to be a *Hamkaar* (collaborator) of Mazda Himself, so as to ultimately bring about *Frashokereti* (Renovation of the world). Zarathushtra disavows King Jamshed, who belonged to the ancient, pre-Zoroastrian Indo-Iranian race, for swearing "The cow is goddess", the cow here being the earth, which Indian Aryans worship as a Goddess. The devas tried but in vain to secure Mazda's service and friendship. Zarathushtra also condemns the Kavis and Karpans, the priests and rulers of the time, who enjoyed complete authority and kingship but "fixed their intentions on capturing and plundering the riches of this world, since they may have begun to aid the deceitful one", the Evil Spirit, per 32.14. In the last stanza (32.16) Zarathushtra asks Mazda "for mastery over each person whose threat is surely inimical to me", especially as he has to protect the righteous from the evil ones.

In Yasna 33, Zarathushtra as a Ratu (prophet) declares that the laws of the foremost existence mentioned in 28.11 will govern the Final Judgment and all those who follow his precepts "shall bring success to Mazda's desire, thus reiterating the need for humans to be Mazda's active assistants. In 33.6. Zarathushtra evinces his eagerness to see Mazda and to counsel with Him. 33.10 declares that all those righteous souls who exist now and had existed in the past and shall exist in the future, really enabled Mazda to "grow Himself – in breath and body, through the rule of Vohu Mana and Asha". Here, as elsewhere, Zarathushtra describes Mazda as "the Mightiest Lord", which rules out any notion of Mazda being ever coequal with Angra Mainyu as stated in

the much later Pahlavi texts. The last three stanzas (33.12, 13, 14) consist of Zarathustra entreating God's grace and assistance as well as for enlightenment about his divine conceptions and finally becoming His *Hamkaar* by offering the breath (meaning life) of his own person to him.

In Yasna 34.1 (as also in 44.18 and 47.1 and 50.4 and 8) I discern the very essence as well as the goal of Zarathushtra's mission – to emulate Mazda and his seven holy aspects in every possible way in order to ensure and expedite his divine plan to shape us in His mold so we become perfect like Him and bring about Perfection of the world. It also shows that the concept of Amesha Spentas is a well-knit harmonious entity which superbly functions as a whole according to its entity, which superbly functions as a whole with its highly integrated divine constituents just as a rainbow embodies all its seven colors. Stanza 4 adores Mazda's Fire and is included therefore in the Atash Nyaesh. 34.11 indicates that Haurvataat (completeness) and Amerataat (No mortality; immortality) stemming from the actions and devotion of the faithful and the truthful “is the only sustenance which Ahura Mazda requires”, meaning, God will attain them all the more fully when the faithful will attain them. 34.13 makes it explicit that “Mazda is the only source of giving,” making it unacceptable to seek anything from any other deity, indeed once again reflecting strict monotheism at work here. In 34.14 Zarathushtra seeks the involvement of the whole community in his mission which is as much needed today as in his own time. The last stanza (34.15) succinctly reiterates Zarathustra's message so well that it is to be recited four times here as well as in the wedding ceremony: “O Mazda! Therefore tell me the best words and deeds, namely those allied with Vohu Mana and Asha, as the just claim for my praises (worship). By your rule, O Ahura, Thou shalt truly bring about *Frashokereti* (Perfection/ Renovation of the world) in accord with our wish”. The last sentence is even included in the daily Kusti prayers which reveals its significance.

Even though Zarathushtra came from an Indo-Iranian Aryan background, the concepts he expounded have become the very framework of the Judeo-Christian tradition, as I have explained so often. And yet, as Mary Boyce has observed, in so adopting Zarathushtra's concepts the Judeo-Christian tradition loses much of their logical coherence of Zarathustra's teachings, which remain therefore a previous treasure for mankind in general and his followers in particular, so much worth preserving for posterity. Considering the fact that no Vedic seer has ever risen to establish a new faith, Zarathushtra's contribution both to the eastern as well as the western religious thought, therefore, remains unique. There was so much evil prevailing around him per Yasna 29 and 46, however, that he

emphasized the need to combat evil rather than concerning himself with explaining the origin of evil, except that it emanates from the actions of humans and was conspicuous by its absence on the earth until humans came to dwell on it.

Thus, he declared life as a constant battle against evil and the life well devoted to this struggle will find its reward in life after death and albeit its reverse will result if one submits to evil on this earth. Actions of humans on this earth thus has consequences in the life beyond. This is the gist of the funerary prayers so aptly and loudly expressed in the Ahunavaiti Gatha. Let us then prove ourselves worthy of following it.

The Gathic insistence on truth and logicity also paves the way for scientific thinking Albert Einstein as reported by *TIME magazine* (April 16, 2007) maintained that "Science can be created only by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding." and "This source of feeling, however, springs from the sphere of religion." His conclusion became popular: "The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

But Einstein also maintained that science could not accept a deity who could meddle at whim in the events of his creation, but the Gathic God is Himself vehemently against any such meddling by anyone including Himself. "The main source of the present day conflicts between the spheres of religion and of science lies in this concept of a personal God," he argued. Scientists aim to uncover the immutable laws that govern reality, and in doing so they must reject the notion that divine will, or for that matter human will, plays a role that would violate this cosmic causality which clearly the Gathic theology does not.

However, Einstein's belief in causal determinism was incompatible with the concept of human free will even though Jewish as well as Christian theologians have generally believed that people are responsible for their actions.

Einstein, along with Schopenhauer and Spinoza insist that a person's actions were just as determined as that of a billiard ball, planet or star. "Human beings in their thinking, feeling and acting are not free but are as causally bound as the stars in their motions. Everybody acts not only under external compulsion but also in accordance with inner necessity. "Schopenhauer's saying, 'A Man can do as he wills, but not will as he wills,' has been a real inspiration to me since my youth."

Such determinism appalled many of his friends such as Max Born who asserted that it completely undermined the foundations of human morality. "I cannot understand how you can combine an entirely mechanistic universe with the freedom of the ethical individual," he wrote Einstein. "To me a deterministic world is quite abhorrent. Maybe

you are right and the world is that way, as you say; but at the moment it does not really look like it in physics – and even less so to the rest of the world.”

Born saw quantum uncertainty as an escape from this dilemma. Like some philosophers of his time, he relied on the indeterminacy that was inherent in quantum mechanics to resolve “the discrepancy between ethical freedom and strict natural laws.” *TIME* adds that Born's wife Hedwig, who was always eager to debate Einstein told Einstein that, like him, she was unable to believe in a 'dice playing' God,” unlike her husband and rejected quantum mechanics' view that the universe was based on uncertainties and probabilities. But, she disagreed that his 'complete rule of law' means that everything is predetermined, for example, whether she is going to have her child inoculated; as it would mean the end of all moral behavior. Nevertheless Einstein regarded free will as something that was useful, indeed necessary, for a civilized society, because it caused people to take responsibility for their own actions.

“I am compelled to act as if free will existed, “he explained,” because if I wish to live in a civilized society I must act responsibly.” He could even accept that people were responsible for their good or evil actions since that was both a pragmatic and sensible approach to life, while all the while maintaining intellectually that everyone's actions were predetermined.” I know that philosophically a murderer is not responsible for his crime,” he said, “but I prefer not to take tea with him.” Thus, Einstein was not disposed to completely reject the appeal of free will. However, even though miracles are often believed to provide evidence of God's existence, Einstein's belief that it was the absence of miracles that reflected divine providence and the fact that the world being quite comprehensible as it that it followed laws, was worthy of awe, is essentially in harmony with the Gathic thought. Thus the message of Zarathushtra lives on!