

THE UNIVERSALITY OF HIS THOUGHTS– a philosophical overview

(This essay is based on a talk delivered to a mainly young audience at the 2nd World Zoroastrian Youth Congress on July 4, 1997 in London)

a as in fun; ā as in far; ã (nasal sound ān) as in ‘āvān’; ə as in fed, ē as in fade; i as in fill; ī as in feel; o as in for; ō as in fore; u as in full; ū as in fool. The nasal sounds are ān as in āvān; ɔn as in the French ‘trés bien’, ĩn as in Ahĩnsā (also pronounced ‘ĩm’ as in Sanskrit Ahĩmsā and as also in Avestan and Gathic languages) and ũn as in Humayũn. The pronunciation of some consonants (as permitted by my software) are ‘ś’ for ‘sh’, ‘š’ for ‘ss’, ‘ř’ for ‘ri’, ‘ñ’ for ‘ni’, ‘ž’ for ‘zh’.

Since the Prophet’s era times have changed. Our languages, our attitudes, our mannerisms and, in some instances, our way of life have altered, but the basic theme of his thoughts remains, as alive and relevant, as when it was articulated. Zarathushtra, in his earthly ordinariness, was a man of extraordinary qualities worthy of a superior man, an intellectual giant, who was able to see what others, during his lifetime, could not. The nomads, then, were faced with a dilemma whether to settle down into an orderly society or to continue the old ways of living, free of the shackles of responsibility to family, home and village settlements. Zarathushtra’s sentiments, not only centred around the choice between these two ways of life, but also on the problems that arose in the settled state. He showed the proper way of overcoming them. He addressed humanity, so directly and pointedly, that his thoughts have continued to influence the minds of intellectuals and philosophers alike for more than three and a half millennia.

Our **JYĀTI – first life (which is on earth)**, he explained, is perception and awareness, with an ability to feel through all our senses while enjoying life to its fullest as **USHTAVANTS**. His thoughts projected a spiritual consciousness, which constantly attempted to attain, with entire sincerity but not without frustration, a state of near-perfectness of our earthly attributes as **ASHAVANS**.

Zarathushtra explained that, when Ahura Mazda created human beings, he bestowed his **Divine (Minō/Cosmic)** attributes on the ordinary **Human (Gəti or Earthly) Body and Mind** as follows: -

The Cosmic **Spənta Mainyu** -His Divine Spirit as the Earthly **human Spirit – CHISTI**.

The Cosmic **Vōhu Manō** - His Good Mind as the Earthly **Goodness/Rationality – KHRATU**

The Cosmic **Āshā Vahishtā** - His Highest Order as the Earthly **Ideal Existence**.

The Cosmic **Spənta Ārmaiti** - His Divine Clear Thought as the Earthly Human **Right-mindedness**.

The Cosmic **Khshathra Vairya** - His Ideal Dominion as the Earthly Human **Harmonious Society**.

The Cosmic **Haurvatāt** - His Divine Completeness of Integrity as our Earthly human **Well Being**.

The Cosmic **Amērētāt** - **Eternal Bliss** promised at the end of time to Earthly mortals

Zarathushtra taught that the power of Chisti – this very personal earthly **human Spirit (Ahura Mazda’s attribute of Spənta Mainyu), through its own spontaneity, translates into **human intention, the motivating, driving force of all human conduct**. (The impulses arise from the sub-cortical centres of the human brain). He pointed out that a threat, while instructing, indicates poor intention while persuasion points towards good intention. Indeed, he named his youngest daughter, Pouru-Chista. (one abounding in the human Spirit)**

Further, he preached that **Rational Thought /Intellect– Khratu** (Ahura Mazda’s attribute of the **Good Mind - Vōhu Manō**) is his special gift to humans (amongst all other living creatures on earth), so that we may remain his collaborators against all that is evil and irrational. (Rational thought arises from the cortex of the human brain that is superior to the brain of all in the animal kingdom).

In *Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 32.4*, we note that the combination of the Good Mind of the Creator and the Rational Thought of humans are, together, able to move more effectively on the path of the Ashavan.

“By distancing themselves from the Good Mind and from rational thinking (bestowed on them by Ahura Mazda) they have moved away from the path of the Ashavan.”

The human brain needs to be gradually cultivated through desires, ideas, interaction, communicable skills and the effects of the environmental surroundings over a long period of time. The accumulated intellect and experience compounds into, what is known as, the **illuminated mind**, which confers on us powers that move towards perfecting our nature. This end point of **complete perfectness, alas, is not reached within our mortal life span on earth**. Still, as each generation looks at the advances gained through the previous generations, the grounds gained by the triumphs of goodness over all evil and irrational obstacles appear quite obvious.

The role of Zarathushtra's thoughts was always to support Persuasive Evolution of his followers with no attempt at the conditioning of their minds or enforcing precepts, commandments or injunctions. It was, indeed: -

- 1. Persuasive Evolution and**
- 2. Progressive Adjustment that, inevitably, lead to**
- 3. Staged Reformation.**

Let us, then, examine how this occurs.

1. PERSUASIVE EVOLUTION

Evolution is distinctly different from revolution. Since, in our beliefs, there is no threat of excommunication or of danger to life through violence, there is no need for intimidation or of revolutionary activities. Besides, revolution is merely an over-reaction without much understanding, leading to illusions, self-indulgences and groupism. Each group develops a set of ideals to compete with the other. The two create new patterns of thought, against which a subgroup then needs to revolt, in return. Groupism, for self-righteous reasons, is ultimately harmful both to the initiators and to the followers, because it promotes anti-individualism, affiliation and blind allegiance. Further, it leads to dilution, distress, separation, waywardness and destruction. The smaller the community the more telling is the dilution. We are, certainly, not in the millions. We are only a few thousand left on good earth, widely scattered in small pockets throughout the world. **What, then, is the answer?**

Firstly, avoid anger leading to strife.

*Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 48.7, the prophet advises: "Keep furious anger afar.
Keep yourself free of strife and determined to
remain under the influence of the Good Mind."*

Secondly, attain a state of tranquility/self awareness and apply it in real life.

*Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 30.2, Zarathushtra advises: "Listen attentively to the best,
(with your ears), the highest Truth and contemplate in your illumined mind.
You will, then, be able to decide on the better path, each to your own selves."*

Thirdly, make your activities meaningful experiences.

Zarathushtra used the words Shyaōthnā and Hushyaōthnā to indicate meaningful experiences (not just mundane action) which are a blend of all our 5 senses involving accuracy of judgment, promptness of decision making, sharpness of self-control, agility, endurance and fairness.

*Gatha Vohu Khshathra, Yasna 51.1, Zarathushtra states: "Gainful experience alone,
O' Mazda, is the highest achievement"*

Fourthly, involve yourself in the Spēnta Function of life.

Spenta Ārmaiti, Ahura Mazda's holy attribute of Right-mindedness is a form of spiritual correctness of thinking, which will guide your mind to promote amicable speech in good taste and aim at higher achievements.

*Gatha Vōhu Khshathra, Yasna 51.21, Zarathushtra talked of the right-minded
'who are indeed holy. 'Why? - Because "their Spirit (Chisti), direction,
meaningful experiences, and their Inner Selves (Daēnā)
guide them along the path of the Ashavans."*

Finally, expel any doubts you may have by questioning and reasoning.

*Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 30.9, Zarathushtra states: "May mind and heart
Be one with thee, when thy Spirit is confused and in doubt."*

The role of Education in Evolution

Everyone needs a Ratu because, although the human Spirit is present in everyone, it lies in a dormant state waiting to be awakened. We all need advice. To my mind nobody is self-made. The so-called self-made person was once a student, too. It was the keenness and motivation to listen that made the person more successful.

*Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 31.2, Zarathushtra called himself a ratu: -
"To ye, sent by Ahura, I come as a ratu that I may instruct both groups
to follow, in life, the path of the Ashavan."*

Which were the two groups?

The first group was comprised of his followers, **the Mazdāyasnis**, who trusted him implicitly. The other group was comprised of **people who had grave doubts**, but arrived of their own free will to listen to his sermons. The third group which was made up of the Karapans, the Kavis and the Usigs, who would not bother to listen to him, was not countenanced by Zarathushtra.

What, may we ask, is Education?

It is the sum total of information (of facts) and counseling, which should, by the proper gaining of knowledge, awaken ones capacity to become self-aware.

What, then, is knowledge? Is it truth? Not entirely.

If it were to entail only truth we would never be able to attain knowledge. The criteria, for what is known to be true, are very strict. Knowledge gained in a particular time frame and place can turn out to be quite different in another. **Knowledge is merely justified true belief of the time.** Truths are only the sign of the times. These, of course, do not include Divine Revelations, which are Eternal Truths.

What is counseling? It is, indeed, an integral part of the Ratuship.

He is the best Ratu who awakens **the dormant Spirit in his pupil** by encouraging a sense of discrimination, inquiry, doubt and, even, disbelief and, thus, sparks the **Inner Fire (*Mainyu Áthra of Yasna 31.3*)**. The imagination of the pupil is so fired that the dormant human Spirit is kindled. The human Intellect, then, takes over to make the pupil dedicated to a worthy cause. Since the path for the right cultivation of the Insight/Self Knowledge is, then, clear, a joyous feeling of understanding (freedom of thought and expression) is bound to follow without the fear of intimidation or unreasonable emphasis on any one single aspect of life.

*Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 34.14, Zarathushtra talked of the very purpose of education:
“They best serve humanity who seek integration of thy Divine Spirit with Earthly Intellect.”*

Intellect acquired through learning, however, can never lead to the whole, that is, to near-perfectness on earth. The pupil, therefore, needs further guidance from his Ratu.

Gatha Ushtavaiti, Yasna 43.2, Zarathushtra preached that Spənta Mainyu, the Divine Spirit and Vōhu Manō the wisdom of the Good Mind offers support of the highest order “to the student seeking progressive enlightenment during his long life.”

2. PROGRESSIVE ADJUSTMENT

The word “**Change**”, somehow, triggers off an alarming reaction as soon as it is uttered. We tend to become defensive and, even, resentful. Yet, change on earth is all-pervasive. We begin to alter physically and physiologically the moment we are born. There is a progressive alteration in our physique, our attitudes, our thoughts, our interactions with those around us and with our surroundings. The world is in a constant state of flux. Mary Boyce describes the “end of time” as the “cessation of all change” on earth.

Zarathushtra preached that at the end of Earthly time, our first life - Jyāti (which is on earth) changes into a refreshed State of ‘Frasha’-kar to enter a second (essentially static) life, which will be eternal.

This is where my phrase **Cyclicity of Being until the end of time on Earth** comes. Everything in the Universe seems to be turning round and round until it runs out of steam, so to say. Imagine a bicycle moving forwards with each turn of the pedal and the wheels. Let us call this cyclical forward movement of a bicycle by a more acceptable term - Progressive Adjustment. Religious thought, too, is subject to a cyclical law of growth and decay, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse, sometimes from a thinking of a bygone era to a somewhat different thinking of a new age.

Zarathushtra taught that a “change for the better or the worse” is positive.

Whereas absence of change, that is staying as is, only leads to stagnation.

To my mind, he seemed to be saying, “since all life is change but growth and stagnation are optional, please choose wisely.”

*Gatha Spenta Mainyu, Yasna 48.4, he addressed humanity quite pointedly:
“He who makes his thinking better, Mazda, or worse, verily, promotes his inner Self through gainful experience, amicable speech, free will and free choice to guide his own intellect and lead him to his destiny.”*

3. STAGED REFORMATION

It is not possible to enforce uniformity or legislate in religious beliefs. Those, in power, who have tried to impose legislation and to implement it by force, have realised this, does not work. Ideals and blueprints aimed at a utopia can never bring about a radical change of heart without first fostering an integration of the human spirit with the human intellect. The new thinking of reformists always appears suspicious and distrustful because the old traditional thinking has taken deep root in the mind and, therefore, appears safe. Human history has shown that those who lack the motivation to adjust and progress through mutual respect have, ultimately, managed to reform through one of two methods: -

1. by co-operation enforced through fear or
2. by interference from outsiders (conquest, subjugation, imposition).

Did not Zarathushtra himself experience strong opposition when he first tried to preach his reforms? He succeeded because he aimed at a harmonious blend of the body, spirit, mind and soul.

1. There was no hidden agenda, threat or intimidation in his mind.
2. The basis of his teachings was that a virtuous, moral and righteous life is the common goal.
3. He appealed to the Spirit of the inquiring mind and only of those, willing to listen.

The ancient Indo-Iranian society of Zarathushtra's time, composed of the land owners and those who looked after the livestock and tilled the land, had a slow pace of life in a land based economy. In modern times, however, with the incredibly fast pace of life a dilemma arises. How do we fuse our spiritual Consciousness (and individual expectations) which, in each one of us is an intensely personal feeling with the fast pace, which is a collective experience?

Let us, here, consider Zarathushtra ethical concept of the law of cause and effect.

In *Gatha Vōhu Khshathra*, *Yasna 51.8*, he seems to be saying

'to thine own self, be true.'

*"Evil fate awaits those who are untrue to themselves
while blissfulness is for those who remain true."*

It is the will of the **"Chistivant"** and the **"Khratuvant"** that, ultimately, helps to overrun the imperfections of life through a constant, ongoing process of creative Evolution. Humans are the fighters, chosen to spearhead this evolution through the recognition of a strong ethical policy to preserve and enjoy the goodness of the seven creations, as *Ashavans*.

There are no simple answers to all the problems. History has shown that the **reformation of each age**, during our long march southwards from the Primal Homeland and, later, during our long Exilic Period, **has always come from within**. After all, if we had not introduced reform, when we reached each cross road, we would not have gathered here today adopting western dress and mannerism, without our traditional head-dress and we would not be speaking in an adopted language and relish an adopted cuisine. We can hope to continue to apply, as individual Ashavans, the principles of Āshā of the Highest Order in our modern-day living, without necessarily introducing radical and revolutionary impositions.

We can, individually each one of us, promote amicable speech in good taste and aim for the highest achievements through meaningful experiences. Let no one here underestimate the tenacity of the **Zoroastrian Spirit**. I am positive we will continue to remain determined in maintaining our culture and progress, with entire sincerity and grit, in spite of our small numbers in a relentlessly expanding world population.

*"And, may we (all, all of us) be among those who will
bring about the transfiguration of this existence."
(Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 30.9)*

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