

D G McIntyre - Zarathushtra's Paradise: In this World and the Next

The idea of paradise as expressed in the later Zoroastrian literature,¹ some of it written more than a thousand years after the prophet lived is in many ways quite different from the prophet's teachings as expressed in the Gathas.² And I have to admit that I find the later Zoroastrian literature on this subject of life after death, and heaven and hell, profoundly unsatisfying. In the later Zoroastrian literature, paradise is distinctly geographic in nature, a physical location to go to after death, having many levels, each one more wonderful than the last. And hell is likewise a place in which the 'bad' endures unspeakable agony.

It just doesn't make sense to me that on the one hand God should create man fallible, and then punish him in hell for behaving in the very way in which he was created - fallible. Nor does the very idea of hell make much sense to me what is to be gained by subjecting a person to pure agony, as hell is said to be. Does he learn anything from it? Does his agony undo the wrong he did? Does it benefit his victims? What purpose does the conventional idea of hell serve? I have found none that satisfies me. To me, the conventional ideas of heaven and hell seem to reduce the equation of life and life-after-death to one of controlling human behavior with bribery and fear -- the carrot and the stick approach. Somehow, I just cannot buy the idea that bribery, fear, and torture can be any part of the reality of the wise and loving God who fills my life with so much beauty and meaning. Indeed, one of the things that first attracted me to the Ashem Vohu prayer was its premise that we pursue truth for truth's own sake - a premise that we also find in the Gathas³ -- no bribery, no terror, just the pursuit of truth for truth's own sake. I like that. At this point you well may wonder if this is the way I feel about heaven and hell, why did I pick Paradise as the subject of this essay. The reason is quite simple. The paradise of the Gathas is quite different from that of the later Zoroastrian literature, and to me, infinitely more satisfying.

Zarathushtra does not describe his idea of heaven and hell in explicit detail. To understand his thinking on this subject, we have to first understand certain basic teachings of his, and then pull them together with other clues from the Gathas, to come up with the final picture.

The first basic teaching of Zarathushtra that we need to be aware of is his approach to the spiritual and the material. Zarathushtra does not reject the material world. Rather, he teaches that the material world and the spiritual world are both good - both a part of one over-all harmonious design, "feeding and bleeding"⁴ into each other - each with its part to play in bringing about the desired end. They are complementary. So to Zarathushtra, material things are not "bad". It's how we use them that make the difference.

One of the things I love about Zarathushtra's concept of paradise is that it finds its expression in both realities - the reality of our material world, and the reality of the spirit. Heaven is expressed in these two realities through what Zarathushtra teaches are the ultimate objectives. And what are these ultimate objectives? Well, let us first consider what they are not. Material things, wealth, fame, material possessions, worldly power - are not ultimate objectives in and of themselves. They are useful. They are pleasurable. And if properly used, they can be powerful forces for good. But they are not, in and of themselves, ultimate objectives; they are simply tools. For example, referring to fame, Zarathushtra says:

["Shameful are the many sins by which one attains fame, if at all by such things ...fame is to serve Thee and the truth, Wise One, under Thy rule." Y32:6](#)

If we lose our perspective, if we elevate material things to the status of ultimate objectives, to be pursued for their own sake, happiness eludes us in this world, and in the next. According to Zarathushtra, it is the ultimate objectives alone that bring us joy in both realities, which brings us back to the question: what are these ultimate objectives? Well, to answer that question, we have to understand Zarathushtra's idea of divinity, and of how we worship and attain to God.

To the extent that man can understand God, Zarathushtra describes Him in terms of seven divine attributes or forces, truth and right (asha), good thinking, or good mind (vohu mano), the spirit of goodness, of benevolence, of loving kindness, sometimes called the holy spirit (spenta mainyu), good rule (vohu xshathra), loving service or devotion to God's good rule, (spenta aramaiti), completeness or perfection (haurvatat), and immortality (ameretat).

Sometimes, with poetic grace, Zarathushtra personifies these attributes. At other times, he treats them as concepts. For example, in one verse, referring to truth as a concept, he says:

"...so long as I shall be able and be strong, so long shall I look in quest of truth." Y28:4

Then in the very next verse, he personifies truth. He says:

"Truth, shall I see thee, as I continue to acquire both good thinking and the way to the Lord...." Y28:5

Sometimes Zarathushtra refers to these divine attributes separately, at other times collectively with God, the Wise Lord, Ahura Mazda, shifting from the singular to the plural in his references to God, indicating through these techniques that these seven values are not just ethics, but that they are indeed divine - an integral part of God's very nature.⁵ It is small wonder then that in the Gathas, these divine values are referred to, often together with God, as objects of reverence, praise and esteem.⁸ In short, it is the attainment of these divine values, this essence of divinity, that is Zarathushtra's ultimate objectives.

And how do we achieve them? According to Zarathushtra, the means and the end are the same. We achieve truth by being truthful. We achieve what's right by doing what's right. We achieve good thinking by good thinking. We achieve a benevolent and loving spirit by being benevolent and loving. This is how we serve with love, (*aramaiti*). This is how we bring about God's good rule here on earth, with such loving service. This is how we achieve completeness and immortality in spirit. In other words, we perfect our material world and our spiritual souls - the material and the spiritual - by serving, by worshipping God, with his own divine values, by bringing these values to life in our world with each thought, with each word, with each action. There are a number of verses in which Zarathushtra describes this lovely form of worship. For example:

".....I shall always worship all of you, Wise Lord, with truth and the very best thinking and with their rule...." Y50:4

"I ...shall serve all of you, Wise Lord, with good thinking..." Y28:2

"I shall serve all of you ... with truth and with the reverence (worthy) of a sincere person. You, moreover, with the skillfulness of good thinking. Praising, I shall encounter you with such worship, Wise One, and with actions stemming from good thinking allied with truth..." Y50:8-9

It is this beautiful form of worship, the worship of God with his own divine values, that brings into effect the complementary interplay between the material and the spiritual, in a point counter-point fashion. Specifically, these divine values are spiritual. But the only way in which we can bring them to life, is in the medium of the material world - with our thoughts, with our words, and with our actions. And conversely, it is these spiritual values that in turn give life and meaning to our material words and actions. In the time available today, we cannot explore Zarathushtra's view of these divine values in depth. But I'd like to sketch a few of the practical aspects of this blue-print for living and attaining to God, which Zarathushtra has given us. A blue-print through which we can bring a touch of paradise to our material world.

The first divine value is **Truth and Right** (*Asha*). You might wonder how one word, *asha*, can mean both truth and right, because in English those words have two separate meanings. Well, let me confuse you even more. *Asha* actually means a great deal more than just truth and right. This is a problem of translating ideas from one language to another. There often is not one word in a given language which accurately reflects the meaning of one word in another language. To appreciate the full breadth of the term, *asha* you have to look at the different contexts in which Zarathushtra uses it. But there is an underlying thread of unity in all the different ways in which *asha* is used. Let me explain. Literally translated, *asha* means "**what fits**", "**what is ordered**."⁷

In the material world, what fits is what is accurate -- truth, knowledge, the natural laws that order the universe -- the laws of astronomy, physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, et cetera. I believe this is why our remote ancestors valued knowledge so highly. They saw knowledge as an expression of God's truth.

The natural world, our environment, is also seen as an expression of God's truth. I believe this is one reason why the practice was incorporated into the Zoroastrian religion of showing reverence for the natural elements, and not polluting them.⁸ The pollutants that preoccupied our remote ancestors are very different from the pollutants that concern us today, but the underlying principal is the same. Being true to the concept of *asha* requires us to advance

knowledge, and respect our environment and other life forms. It requires that we not trash the earth, the waters and the air. These things, and we ourselves, are part of one harmonious whole. We cannot damage one part of the whole, without damaging ourselves.

The concept of asha, also finds expression in the spiritual or moral world. You may recall, the literal meaning of the word asha is "what fits". In the spiritual or moral world, what is fitting is what's right. Truth, justice, integrity, friendship, kindness, compassion, liberty, freedom from oppression - these are some examples of what Zarathushtra describes as right in the Gathas. By contrast, hatred, cruelty, uncontrolled anger, oppression, corruption, loss of freedom, ignorance, and above all, deceit, -- these are some examples in the Gathas, of what Zarathushtra complains of as wrong. We don't have one word in English that integrates the material and moral aspects of the word asha. Insler's translation uses the word "truth", but I ask that you bear in mind, whenever you hear the word "truth" in connection with Zarathushtra's teachings, that he intends at a minimum, both truth and what's right.

To Zarathushtra, truth is a divine force -- a part of God's nature. So in our own world, when we choose knowledge over ignorance, when we respect and protect our environment and other life forms, when we choose what's right over what's wrong, kindness over cruelty, friendship over hatred and prejudice, truth over deceit, we choose more than just ethics. We bring to life a divine force.

Sometimes, with such choices, we make our world a happier place to be in. Sometimes, with such choices, we make the people around us feel happy to be with us. Always, with such choices, we increase this divine force in ourselves. We come a step closer to being one with God.

The next divine force is a **good mind, or good thinking (vohu mano)**. (vohu mano). In its practical application, the concept of good thinking requires us to address the problems that confront us, day to day, with reason and understanding. It involves using our minds to search for truth and what's right in every aspect of our reality -- not for the sake of some reward, but for its own sake; truth for truth's own sake (Y46.10). When we use our minds to search for truth, we gain understanding, and with understanding comes wisdom. The importance that Zarathushtra places on wisdom may be seen from the fact that his name for God is Ahura Mazda, which has been translated as "living wisdom" or "Wise Lord", or "Lord of Life and Wisdom."

One of the Gathas, Yasna 29, is cast in the nature of a drama. Among the cast of characters is God himself, and his cardinal attributes, truth, good thinking and his benevolent or holy spirit. A complaint is made to the Wise Lord, about the cruelty, violence and oppression which in those days was ravaging Zarathushtra's world. The Wise Lord's benevolent spirit is troubled by this and asks truth if this is a true and correct way for things to be. But truth, by itself, has no way of solving the problem. It cannot abolish evil by divine edict, as it were. There has to be another solution. So God turns to good thinking, and asks if good thinking has found someone to bring the solution to the mortals below. Good thinking replies that it has found, not a man of worldly power, but a man of understanding, Zarathushtra, who has listened to the commandments of the divine forces.

The moral of this drama is the recognition that God's promised solution to the problem of overcoming evil, are his divine forces, and the key to accessing his divine forces is good thinking, or reason and understanding. The process starts at the level of the individual. Zarathushtra tells us to:

"... Reflect with a clear mind - man by man⁹ for himself – upon the two choices of decision." Y30:2

We can also seek guidance from our leaders, so long as we do not abdicate our duty to think for ourselves. For example, Zarathushtra says:

"... As world-healer, promise us a judge [or teacher] and let obedience to him come through good thinking-...." Y44:16

In other words, not blind obedience to any human authority, but obedience through good thinking. Even when Zarathushtra prays for divine guidance, he knows that it is through understanding, that God will instruct him. He says:

"... instruct through good thinking (the course) of my direction, In order to be the charioteer of my will and my tongue." Y50:6

With a helping hand from God (Y50.1), it is through understanding that we grasp what is true and right. It is through good thinking that we can find solutions to the problems that beset us -- both material and spiritual - whether its a cure for the AID's virus,¹⁰ or a cure for hatred and prejudice, or a solution to the problems of drugs and violence. It is through understanding or good thinking that we can, in Zarathushtra's words, "deliver deceit into the hands of truth." (Y44.14). It is the growth of this divine force -- good thinking - in man that enables us to bring to life God's good rule here on earth. As Zarathushtra says:

"... Through good thinking the Creator of Existence shall promote the true realization of what is most healing according to our wish. Y50:11

"Therefore may we be those who shall heal this world!..." Y30:9

The next divine force is spenta mainyn - the benevolent or holy spirit, the spirit of goodness, of loving kindness -- a spirit which finds its highest expression in God, and which Zarathushtra also sees in man.¹¹ Zarathushtra teaches that this spirit of God lives in each one of us. It is our built in guidance system. It is this benevolent spirit of God that generates good thinking in man.¹²

But more than that, if God lives in you, and if God lives in me, there is a unity or a kinship between us. Well, when I first came across this teaching, many years ago, it stunned me. I couldn't get it out of my mind. When I walked around town, I looked at the different people on the street, and I thought to myself: If Zarathushtra is right, God lives in that crazy looking kid with long hair and funny beads. God lives in that person carrying a briefcase. God lives in that shabby man polishing a brass sign outside the bank. God lives in that elegant person walking into the Bank. God lives in that homeless person sitting on the sidewalk. And God lives in me. And for the first time, a concept that I had often heard about, but never really appreciated, -- the idea of the brotherhood of man -- became real to me. And a touch of good thinking helped me to understand, for the first time, how superficial were the standards by which I automatically categorized people -- wealth, social standing, how they looked, how they dressed, what schools they went to, what jobs they held. I realized that if God lives in each of them, and if God lives in me, there is a unity or a kinship between us, for all our differences. A Persian poet, Jami, expressed it in this way:

"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."¹³

It is interesting that in searching for God, Zarathushtra discovered as well, the brotherhood of man.¹⁴

The next divine concept is spenta aramaiti. This concept has been translated in quite a few different ways, and it is difficult to reconcile all of the different translations. Based on linguistic evidence,¹⁵ and also on the way in which Zarathushtra uses the word in the Gathas, I believe the concept of spenta aramaiti means bringing to life God's divine values, with each thought, with each word, and with each action. I believe "loving service" or "loving devotion" to God's cardinal values, is the most accurate translation of the word.¹⁶

At the human level such loving service involves Zarathushtra's idea of how we must worship. We worship God with His own divine values. And we do it in the temple of life - in the hustle and bustle of our world. Whether teaching children, or trying a lawsuit, or building a house, or doing medical research, or, billing a client, if we act with integrity, if we act with understanding, if we do what's right, it is an act of worship. This concept of worship through loving service includes what we used to call "charity" -- lending a helping hand to a fellow human being in need without being condescending about it. Not all of us have the financial means to found hospitals or orphanages. But we can be generous in so many other ways -- by a simple act of friendship, by giving our time and our understanding -- all of which are acts; of aramaiti - acts of worship. I love this form of worship. It warms my heart and delights my mind. It lends an excitement, a challenge, to the way in which I work and play, and relate to people. It gives beauty and meaning to what would otherwise be mundane acts and an empty, purposeless existence.

Now you might question: how can the concept of loving service, or loving devotion (aramaiti) be a part of God? Wouldn't that be man's part to play, rather than God's? Well, the interesting thing is, that Zarathushtra teaches that man and God are partners, allies, co-workers in bringing about, or promoting, God's good rule. Just as He promotes the truth and what's right, with His Thoughts, with His Words, and with His Actions, He asks us to do the same. It's a joint, a mutual, and a loving service to the values that God represents.

The last of the seven values that I would like to sketch today is good rule (vohu xshathra). Good rule is what occurs when authority or power is exercised with reason and intelligence (good thinking), and is committed to what is true and right (asha). In the Gathas, it is called the rule of truth and good thinking. The concept of good rule relates to how God uses his power. Like the others, it is a divine force. And like the others, it also applies to us. It relates to how we are required to use our power. Included in this concept is the idea of good government. The idea that public office is a trust, to be used to advance what's true and right, and not for personal gain.

A few years ago, some of our business schools promoted a "survival of the fittest" theory of business management. The idea was, that two or three people at the same level of management would be encouraged to compete with each other in a dog-eat-dog, no holds barred, fashion, for advancement. The idea was that the fittest would survive and the company would benefit by having such a superior survivor as an employee. What actually happened was that these "superior survivors" were obsessed only with 'their own interests. And their dog-eat-dog, dirty tricks tactics created so much havoc in these companies, that they became terrible places in which to work. Productivity nose-dived, and profits fell. Well, experience is a good teacher. Now there is another theory of business management. It operates on the premise that if employees are treated fairly and humanely, and are allowed to use their creativity, their good thinking, to do a better job, not only will they be happier, but also they will work better, and productivity and profits will increase -- a win-win situation. One of the greatest and most successful proponents of this theory of business management is that great American, Professor Dineen. This theory of business management has been credited with rebuilding the Japanese economy after World War II, and it is now revitalizing our own. Well, this theory of business management is a good illustration of the concept of good rule, vohu xshathra, in practice. It works.

But the concept of good rule, vohu xshathra, has all kinds of practical applications in our world that extends far beyond the idea of good business & management or good government. It does not apply just to business executives, Senators, or people in authority. It applies to all of us. Everyone has some power. If you can hurt someone, you have power. If you can help someone, you have power. The concept of good rule, requires us to use whatever power we have for good, to advance what's true and right. In the Vohu Xshathra Gatha, there is a very lovely verse in which Zarathushtra, teaching through questions, sets out some of the components of good rule. He says:

["Where shall there be protection instead of injury? Where shall mercy take place? Where truth which attains glory? Where \[aramaiti loving service\]? Where the very best thinking? Where, Wise One, under Thy rule?" Y50:4](#)

In other words, we bring God's good rule to life, each day, at home, in the workplace, in politics, in academia, by offering protection instead of injury, by being merciful and compassionate, by questing for "truth which attains glory", by loving service to man and God and to the values God represents, and above all, by the use of reason and understanding -- the very best thinking (vohu mano). The environment we would create with such actions, would indeed be a heavenly one.

To summarize Zarathushtra's idea of how we bring a touch of paradise to our material world, he teaches that when we bring God's divine values to life in our world, with each thought, with each word, with each action, we create something of heaven here on earth. It is interesting that an Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, who was a great admirer of Zarathushtra, expressed the same thought in one of his Balaka poems. He said:

["...Mingling darkness with light You have created your earth; To that earth you send me, Empty-handed.... You command me to transform it Into heaven](#)

Tagore, [A Flight of Swans](#), (poems from Balaka, No.28, translated from the Bengali by Aurobindo Bose).

At this point you might think, "It's all very well to say that you create a little bit of heaven when you bring to life God's divine values, but what about good people to whom bad things happen? What about good people who experience the unhappiness of illness, poverty, the death of loved ones? What about people, who are fair and decent in their dealings with others, yet experience great injustice at the hands of others? Is this fair? Where is their little bit of heaven?" I don't have all the answers. I can tell you that we know from the evidence of the Gathas that Zarathushtra himself suffered great unhappiness and great injustice. He was hounded and persecuted by a corrupt priesthood and by cruel princes. They drove him out of the country of his birth. They wouldn't allow him to stay with his family and his clan. They accused him of defilement, of being impure. At one point he cries out to God:

"To what land to flee? Where shall I go to flee? They exclude (me) from my family and from my clan..... I lament to Thee. Take notice of it, Lord, offering the support which a friend should grant to a friend...." Y46:1-2

Driven from his home, he wandered and traveled, friendless, for years. He was so ruthlessly ostracized, that at some places, he even was denied shelter in bitter cold weather, as he says:

"...although his two draft animals were trembling from wandering and from the cold." Y51:12

Why should Zarathushtra, a good man, have suffered such injustice? Well, a cardinal teaching of Zarathushtra's is that man has been given the freedom to choose. And that being the case, there are those who will choose the way of cruelty, violence, ignorance, and deceit. And since God does not interfere with the freedom to choose, He cannot prevent us from experiencing the consequences of such choices. But He can give us understanding. And he can give us strength. With these weapons, he can help us to cope. The Gathas do infer that all life is a learning experience, a progression towards spiritual perfection. I don't fully understand why bad things happen to good people. I can only tell you that from my own experience, each time some serious crisis or calamity has befallen me, although at the time I couldn't see how any good could possibly come from such a bad situation, in the long run, sometimes the very long run, inevitably I learned from the situation, and in the long run good did come from it. So when we find ourselves in such a situation, we ask for understanding, we ask for help. And it will come. As Zarathushtra said:

"For I know that words deriving from good purpose and from love are not to be left wanting by You." Y28:10

In short, when confronted by a crisis in our own lives, with God's help, we can learn from the experience. But it is important to remember that when confronted by misery or injustice in someone else's life, we cannot just sit back and say: "They deserve it. They are undergoing a learning experience." It is not for us to judge what others do or do not deserve. Zarathushtra's teaching is action oriented. He requires us to act to right the wrong with good thinking (vohu mano), and with the courage, compassion and generosity of a benevolent spirit (spenta mainyu). In so doing, we become God's partners in defeating what's wrong, and promoting what's true and right (asha).

Up to this point, we have considered Zarathushtra's idea of heaven, expressed in the material world. But there is the other part -- the spiritual part -- to this equation. When we have succeeded in perfecting these divine values, in ourselves, and have learned all the lessons life has to offer, we ultimately achieve completeness and immortality. We become one with God. We attain the prize --paradise. Zarathushtra's paradise of the spirit is not a geographic location. In the Gathas heaven is not a physical place to which we go after we die. It is the state of being that occurs when we have achieved completely, God's divine values. There is some disagreement as to whether man becomes "one with God" or simply "God-like"

- retaining his individuality. It is an old philosophical debate of many years standing -

- not just in Zoroastrianism -- and will doubtless continue for many years more. To me, this debate is not of great moment. If you examine Zarathushtra's treatment of the concept of completeness, the conclusion is compelling that completeness is achieved at both an individual and a collective level. In other words, even upon achieving individual completeness or perfection, man is not complete without God, nor God without man.¹⁷ And if that is so, can man be complete without his fellow man?

Not everyone agrees that to Zarathushtra, heaven is a state of being.¹⁸ Many of us still cling to the conventional wisdom of the later Zoroastrian literature. But in my view, the evidence of the Gathas is compelling.

We see it in Zarathushtra's idea of reward. In verse after verse, he makes it clear that the rewards of bringing to life God's divine values are God's divine values.¹⁹ In other verses he identifies this reward or prize as heaven.²⁰ If this is true, if divine values are the ultimate reward, then, by definition, the reward, heaven, is a state of being, not a place.

Zarathushtra also refers to heaven as the "best thinking" (Y30:4), and to hell as the "worst existence" -- both clearly states of being, and not physical locations.

This idea that heaven is a state of being is reflected in the Hadokht Nask, an early Zoroastrian text written roughly a couple of hundred years after the Gathas, which states that a good person attains paradise in 4 steps:

"The first step...placed him in the Good-Thought Paradise; The second step...placed him in the Good-Word Paradise; The third step... placed him in the Good-Deed Paradise; The fourth step... placed him in the Endless Lights."²¹.

These descriptions of paradise all relate to states of being, rather than physical locations. And according to another later text (Yasht 12), above the paradise of the endless lights is the paradise of ahu vahishta, the best existence²² -- once again, clearly a state of being. In the Hadokht Nask, by dividing heaven into strata or levels, I think the unknown author of this Nask was attempting to demonstrate that good thoughts alone are not enough, they have to be translated into good words and good actions. Thus, the first level of achievement is good thoughts. A higher level of achievement is attained when good thoughts are translated into good words. And an even higher level of achievement is attained when good thoughts and good words are translated into good actions.²³ In other words, each stage is a progressively higher or better state of being. One might ask, if this is so, then why does Zarathushtra describe heaven as the "best thinking". Why not as the "best action"? Perhaps the answer is that the first three stages of heaven described in the Hadokht Nask are achieved in the medium of the material world - with our thoughts, our words and our actions. Whereas, ultimate perfection exists in the reality of mind and spirit. Thus we start with good thinking in the material world, and end with the best thinking when we have made the transition to spiritual perfection.

Finally, in addition to calling heaven the "best thinking", Zarathushtra also calls it the "House of Good Thinking" and the House of Song". In my opinion, he uses the word "House" as a metaphor for a state of being. This conclusion may be inferred from a number of verses. For example, in Y33.5 Zarathushtra speaks of:

"the ... rule of good thinking and the paths, straight in accord with truth, wherein the wise Lord dwells 33:4

Clearly, "dwells" here does not refer to a physical location where the Wise Lord lives. He could "dwell" in the rule of good thinking and the paths of truth only in a metaphoric sense, indicating His condition or state of being. Similarly, in another part of the Gathas, Zarathushtra refers to the divine values as existing in the House of Song, his other name for heaven (Y50.4). If these divine values are attributes of God, then the "house" in which they live can only be His state of being.²⁴ Thus, the House of Good Thinking would be a state of perfect wisdom, and the House of Song, a state of bliss.

In conclusion, to sum it all up, Zarathushtra's paradise is divinity. It finds expression in the realities of both matter and spirit. In the reality of the material world, we create something of paradise each time we bring God's values to life, here, with our thoughts, our words and our actions. In the reality of the spirit, paradise is a state of being. It is what we become when we have achieved completely, God's divine values. It is the bliss of rejoining the source, of being one with God. Completeness (haurvatat). It is not a place to which we go when we die. It is within. Rabindranath Tagore, with his poet's' insight expressed the same truth in this way. He said:

"Oh brother, Do you know where heaven is?
It has no beginning, it has no end,
Nor is it any country
In my heart Heaven finds her home,
And in my songs her melodies."

Rabindranath Tagore, A Flight of Swans,

(Poems from Balaka, No.24, translated from the Bengali by Aurobindo Bose).

References:

1 An excellent bird's eye view of the treatment of heaven and hell in the later literature is contained in Dhalla,, History of Zoroastrianism pp. 414 et seq. (K. R. Cama Oriental Inst. reprints 1985).

2 All quotations from, and references to, the Gathas in this essay are from the translation of Professor Insler, of Yale University. (See Insler, The Gathas of Zarathushtra, E. J. Brill, 1975), except as follows:

Throughout Professor Insler's 1975 translation, he translates the term aramaiti as "piety". More recently, he has expressed the opinion that "respect" would more accurately reflect the meaning of aramaiti, explaining that the

Gathic word has long been correctly identified with its Vedic cognate aramati which means "respect". (Linguistically, Vedic and Gathic are sister languages). However, he noted that Vedic also uses the expression aram kr which means "to serve". See [An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra](#). No.4, page 5, footnote 7. Based on the way, in which Zarathushtra uses the word in the Gathas, I think "loving service" is the closest English equivalent for spenta aramaiti. See explanation, Id. pages 1 through 6. And wherever in quotations from Insler's translation, in this paper, the word aramaiti occurs, I have substituted the word "loving service" in square brackets for his original translation "piety".

In this essay, the use of round brackets in a quotation indicates parentheses appearing in the original quotation. (Insler translation). The use of square brackets indicates an Insertion by me. Insertions are provided by way of explanation. A string of dots in a quotation indicates a deletion. Deletions from a quotation are not for the purpose of hiding anything. Often a verse will contain many strands of thought. Deleting from a quotation strands of thought other than the one under discussion enables me to provide you with a better focus on the strand of thought under discussion.

3 Y46.10.

4 Insler, Abstract [Levels of Ritual in the Gathas of Zarathushtra](#), American Academy of Religions, Chicago, November 1988.

5 See the excellent essay by Yasmine Jhabvala-Kansara on this point in [An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra](#) No.8, pages 6 through 9.

6 Spenta mainyu. (The benevolent spirit of the Wise Lord): Y28.1, Y47.2.

Truth (asha): Y33.7, Y34.3, Y34.6, Y43.9, Y50.11.

Good thinking (vohu mano): Y33.7, Y34.6

Good rule (vohu xshathra): Y51.1.

Loving service (aramaiti): Y34.9, Y44.7.

Completeness & Immortality (,haurvatat/ameretat): Y51.7.

7 See linguistic explanation by Dr. Insler in [An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra](#). No. 2, page 12, footnote 1.

8 In the thousands of years that followed Zarathushtra, these practices deteriorated into taboos, and lost their original meaning, but that is another story.

9 I am sure that Zarathushtra's use of the term "man by man" was generic (as in mankind). Any person who valued wisdom, as Zarathushtra did, and named his daughter "Pouruchista" which means "full of wisdom" or "full of illumined thought" just couldn't have been a male chauvinist. As Moulton notes: "His daughter Pourucista... is named "very thoughtful" by a father who regarded thought as great riches, and did not grudge it to a daughter." [Early Zoroastrianism](#), (AMS Press reprint) pp. 82-83.

10 I am indebted to Mr. Pallan Ichaporia for this idea.

11 There is some difference of opinion regarding whether or not spenta mainyu is one of the divine attributes. An analysis of the later literature is beyond the scope of this paper. But based on the evidence of the Gathas alone, the conclusion is compelling that to Zarathushtra, spenta mainyu enjoys the same status as the other divine values. Here are some reasons why:

First, Zarathushtra specifically describes a virtuous spirit (spenta mainyu) as an attribute of Ahura Mazda, (Y28.11, Y43.16, Y31.3, Y33.12, Y43.2,6, Y44.7, Y45.6, Y47.2,3, Y51.7), just as he does with regards to other amesha spenta..

Second, spenta mainyu is described, together with Ahura Mazda, and the other amesha spenta as objects of worship, praise or esteem. See citations in footnote 8 above.

Third, Ahura Mazda is described as the father (a metaphor for source, progenitor) of spenta mainyu (Y47.3), just as he is described as the father of asha (47.2), vohu mano and aramaiti (Y45.4).

Finally, in Yasna 29, spenta mainyu is referred to, along with asha and vohu mano as one of the three cardinal attributes of God (see footnote 11 above).

This evidence is not consistent with the argument that spenta mainyu is something apart from, and different from, Ahura Mazda, and his divine attributes. This argument is sometimes made, to refute the idea that Zarathushtra believed in two uncreated and equal gods, one good and the other evil. I agree whole heartedly that such dualism does not exist in the Gathas. This can be proved clearly and logically from the evidence of the Gathas themselves. I disagree, with great respect that the way to disprove such dualism is to demote spenta mainyu to the status of something other than an attribute of Ahura Mazda . The evidence of the Gathas is to the contrary.

12 Y34.2, Y43.2. See also Insler's explanation of Yasna 43 in The Gathas of Zarathushtra, pages 229 to 230.

13 I am indebted to Dr. Daryoush Jahanian for this translation.

14 There is some evidence in the Gathas that Zarathushtra extended this brotherhood to all the living.

15 See footnote 2 above.

16 In Yasna 30, Zarathushtra says:

"But to this world He came with the rule of good thinking and of truth, and (our enduring [aramaiti] gave body and breath to it..." (Y30.7).

This idea is corroborated, in different words, in Yasna 51, where Zarathushtra, referring to God's cardinal values, says:

"...Them (all) shall I worship with their own names, [meaning, I shall worship truth with truth, good thinking with good thinking etc.] And I shall serve them with love." (Y51.22).

I believe this concept of "serving with love" is aramaiti.

17 The verses that suggest this to me, when read in conjunction with each other, are Y45.5, Y45.10, Y47.1, Y34.11, and Y48.1.

18 It is interesting that Moulton, (Early Zoroastrianism, pp. 171-172, AMS Press reprint), Dastur N.D. MinochehrHomji (in his 1984 Chicago Lectures, recorded on cassettes.), and Dr. Farhang Mehr (The Zoroastrian Tradition, Element, Inc. 1991), also seem to have arrived at the conclusion that the heaven of the Gathas is a state of mind, or a state of being, although each of them did so on the basis of a different translation than the one I favor.

19 The reward for truth is good thinking (Y30.8). The rewards of good thinking are truth and good rule (Y33.13). Good rule is the rule of truth and good thinking (Y30.7). We are told that our service (aramaiti) to that rule brings it to life, so the reward for benevolent service (aramaiti) is good rule (Y30.7) and also good thinking (Y46.12) and also truth (Y43.10). And truth and good thinking are Zarathushtra's definition of salvation (Y51.20). Now if all this has you confused, don't feel bad. I too was in a fog when I first collected and reviewed this evidence. The fog clears, however, when you consider that the means and the end are the same, and that each of these "rewards" is in fact a divine value. Zarathushtra may also have been trying to illustrate that in the final analysis, there is a unity of identity between these divine values, a point which he also makes in Y31.20 "All ye (immortals) of the same temperament.."; and Y31.4 "when I... call upon truth, the Wise One and the other lords [good thinking and spenta mainyu] shall appear; also reward [completeness and immortality] and [aramaiti]."

20 See for example Y51.15.

21 Sacred Books of the East, Vol.23, page 317, Motilal Banarsidas reprint.

22 See descriptions of this Yasht in Windfuhr, "Where Guardian Spirits Watch by Night and Evil Spirits Fail: The Zoroastrian Prototypical Heaven." American School of Oriental Research,, pp. 625 to 645.

23 This is an idea that is in harmony with Gathic thought. Y48.12.

24 See also Y31 .4 in conjunction with Y46.14.