

## D G McIntyre - Harmony in Paradox – Part III

### The Paradox of Being Bad to the Bad <sup>[1]</sup>

In the Gathas, Zarathushtra describes the local gods of his time as "...fierce gods..." Y34.5,[2] and their religions as cruel and oppressive.

"...the rich Karpan [a type of priest] chose the rule of tyrants and deceit rather than truth." Y32.12.

"When, Wise One, shall men desist from murdering? When shall they fear the folly of that intoxicating drink, through the effects of which the Karpans [priests] as well as the evil rulers of the lands torture our (good) intentions in an evil way?" Y48.10.

Zarathushtra himself was on the receiving end of their malice, probably because of his outspoken criticism of their practices: "To what land to flee? Where shall I go to flee? They exclude (me) from my family and from my clan...." Y46.1. Using his own good mind, Zarathushtra concluded that oppression, cruelty and violence could not be divine qualities, and that therefore, those "gods" who embodied such values could not be divine, could not be worthy of worship. He concluded that only a being who is pure goodness -- the spenta way of being -- who personifies wisdom in all its thoughts, words and actions, is worthy of worship, is Divine.

He calls Divinity Mazda, (Wisdom personified), a state of being which includes certain attributes (later called the amesha spenta): **asha** (truth -- factual truth as well as the truths of mind and spirit, including beneficence and all that is good and right), **vohu mano** (its comprehension), **aramaiti** (its realization in thought, word and action[3]), **vohu xshathra** (good rule -- not a rule of cruelty, deceit and tyranny, but the rule of asha, vohu mano and aramaiti[4]), **haurvatat** and **ameretat** (the complete, perfect, undying, personification of asha), all of which comprise a state of being that is Wisdom personified, a state of being that is pure goodness, pure truth, the benevolent way of being -- spenta mainyu.

It is interesting that Zarathushtra also sees these divine qualities in man, although not perfected. And he teaches that the way for us to perfect them, is to worship Mazda with His own divine qualities, choice by choice, in real life situations.

We worship Wisdom by searching for, and understanding the truth (vohu mano) -- the factual truths of our universe as well as the truths of mind and spirit -- what's right (asha). We worship Wisdom by bringing truth to life, giving it substance, with each thought word and action -- prayers of aramaiti. We worship Wisdom by using whatever power we have to advance the good, create a good society (good rule, vohu xshathra). We worship Wisdom by trying to evolve from an admixture of good and evil, to a way of being that is pure goodness, pure truth -- the spenta way of being (spenta mainyu). We worship Wisdom by ultimately personifying the truth (as we become what we choose), attaining it completely (haurvatat), in an undying way (ameretat).

There are many verses in which Zarathushtra speaks of worshipping Mazda with His own divine attributes. For example:

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

"With hands outstretched, Wise One, 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 [which is the concept of aramaiti].

"I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers of [aramaiti]....."Y45.10.

". . . Your enduring worshipful offering has been established to be **immortality [ameretat] and completeness [haurvatat]**." Y33.8.

So we see that Zarathushtra's idea of Divinity is a God of pure goodness, a God who is Wisdom personified. And we see that the path to God is the path of His own divine characteristics, the amesha spenta. A necessary conclusion from this premise is that a good end is achieved through good means. A good end cannot be achieved through wrongful means.

Yet, there are a number of verses in the Gathas which might be (and which by some have been) interpreted to say that we should return evil for evil, or bad for bad.

An interesting paradox.

Some of these verses are simply an expression of the law of consequences – that we reap what we sow. For example: "...Thou didst determine actions as well as words to have their prizes, namely, **bad for the bad, a good reward for the good...**" Y43.5.[5] These verses do not require **us** to return evil for evil or bad for bad. The law of consequences is implemented by Mazda in a manner consistent with good thinking and a benevolent way of being, to bring about a good end.[6] But other verses present more of a puzzle. They clearly involve man as the one who must think, speak and act. Here they are:

"...who shall bring about what is bad for the deceitful one either by word or by thought, or with his hands, ..." Y33.2.

". . .But evils to the person who would deliver us to evil! -- thus satisfying your wish with truth [asha], Wise One. . ."Y46.18.

"...I would do evil to the deceitful one (as) in accordance with the wish of Him who has upheld the truth..."Y51.8.

"Wise One, the deceitful are not able to deflect those who are properly truthful from this virtuous spirit [spenta mainyu].....a man...shall be loving to the truthful person and bad to the deceitful one." Y47.4.

What is Zarathushtra saying here? Is he saying that the end (getting rid of evil) justifies the means (doing anything we want to them, however "bad" it may be)?

Zarathushtra's thought in the Gathas is eminently logical. Yet such a conclusion is not logical. We cannot eliminate evil by acting wrongfully towards wrongdoers. If we act wrongfully towards wrongdoers, we simply create more wrong, we don't eliminate it. Is Zarathushtra being illogical in the above quoted verses?

If these verses tell us that we must return evil for evil, they would be inconsistent with Zarathushtra's rejection of the cruel and evil local gods of his time, and his vision of the Divine as pure goodness, Wisdom personified. They also would be inconsistent with his teaching that the path to God is the path of His divine attributes, that a good end is achieved through good means. Is Zarathushtra being inconsistent here?

Neither illogical or inconsistent, Zarathushtra presents us with a puzzle, a paradox. Puzzles and paradoxes are great teaching devices. They force us to think about all the component parts of the puzzle or paradox, in order to solve it. These "**bad for the bad**" verses themselves give us the key to the solution.

In Y46.18, doing evil to the evil is linked with "thus satisfying your wish with truth [asha], Wise One." In Y51.8, doing "evil to the deceitful one" is linked to acting "in accordance with the wish of Him who has upheld the truth [asha]." So the quality of the act towards the evil or deceitful would have to be something that is in accordance with asha.

Similarly, in Y47.4, Zarathushtra speaks of being "...bad to the deceitful one" right after he states that the deceitful are not able to deflect those who are truthful ["ashaono"] through spenta mainyu (through a benevolent way of being). So the quality of the act of being "bad" to the deceitful would have to be consistent with being truthful through a benevolent way of being (spenta mainyu).

At one level, we might conclude that Zarathushtra simply means we should do "bad to the deceitful" in the sense that we should not do anything that will prosper the deceitful or make them successful. We should actively oppose and retard those who are being evil or deceitful -- bring their deceitful activities to a bad (unsuccessful) end.

At another level, however, these verses, which link being bad to the bad with truth (asha) and the benevolent way of being (spenta mainyu), tip us off that Zarathushtra is playing with words as another way of expressing a basic thought that we often see in the Gathas – that you destroy what is "bad" with what is "good" i.e. "good" being "bad" for (or destructive of) the "bad". To illustrate: imagine, if you would, a person engaged in perpetrating a swindle, a fraud. What would be "bad" for such a person? Revealing the truth of the matter, which would defeat the swindle and expose the fraud. So the truth would be "bad" for the person engaged in perpetrating the fraud (bad). "Bad for the bad" in that sense.

This conclusion (that good is "bad" for the bad) is consistent with the many verses in the Gathas in which Zarathushtra specifically states that we will defeat what is wrong with truth, with the amesha spenta and with goodness. For example:

"If, during the times after this (present) one which is under the workings of evil, **one shall defeat deceit by truth [asha], ...then one shall increase Thy glory, Lord...**"Y48.1.

"...How might I deliver deceit into the hands of truth in order to **destroy it in accord with the precepts of Thy teaching...**" Y44.14, [the precepts of the Wise Lord's teaching is the path of the amesha spenta].

"Those who, with ill will, have increased fury and cruelty...whose evil effects **one has not yet defeated with good effects...**" Y49.4.

All of these verses show us that we defeat what is wrong, with truth, with the amesha spenta, and with goodness -- all of which are "bad" for the bad.

It is important to note, however, that Zarathushtra's teachings do not involve turning the other cheek. They involve using our intelligence, our thoughts, words and actions, to actively oppose and defeat what is wrong, in a manner that is consistent with truth and what's right (asha), and a good way of being (spenta mainyu).

Thus we see that good thoughts, words and actions are the key to being "bad" to the bad, and that the paradox of being "bad" to the bad is in harmony with being all that is good.

[1] This article also appeared in HAMAZOR in 2006, and was posted on vohuman.org on August 18, 2006.

[2] All quotations from the Gathas are from the translation of Professor Insler, as it appears in **The**

**Gathas of Zarathustra**, (Brill, 1975), although Professor Insler may or may not agree with the inferences that I draw from his translation. Round parentheses ( ) in a quotation appear in the original translation and indicate interpretative aides inserted by Professor Insler. Square brackets [ ] in a quotation indicate words that have been inserted by me, sometimes to show the applicable Gathic word (but without its grammatical variations), and sometimes by way of explanation. I leave “aramaiti” untranslated. A string of dots in a quotation indicates that I have deleted parts of the verse which are not relevant to the particular point under discussion. And I sometimes insert bold print in a quotation, to call attention to a given word or idea.

[3] For the evidence on which this definition of aramaiti is based, see The Paradox of Service and Rule on [www.vohuman.org](http://www.vohuman.org).

[4] "But to this world He came with the rule of good thinking and of truth. . ."Y30.7; ". . . the rule of truth and good thinking. . ."Y50.3; ". . .Grant thou [aramaiti] your rule of good thinking. . ."Y51.3.

[5] Other examples of this sort appear in: Y30.8, Y32.12, and Y46.8.

[6] See The Paradox of the Freedom to Choose and the Inevitable End, which appears on [www.vohuman.org](http://www.vohuman.org) for the evidence on which this conclusion is based.