

D G McIntyre - One Design

It is good to be aware of the many similarities between other religions and our own, being mindful of the beautiful Yenghe Hataam prayer which requires us to respect all good men and women, whomever they may be. It also is important to know how we differ.

All religions regard the natural wonders of our universe as divinely inspired -- the elements, organic life, the galaxies of stars that stretch out through space and time. Whether we believe in natural evolution, or in some type of direct creationist theory, a person would be hard pressed to witness the exquisite order which pervades the universe (of which even disorder is a part) and not feel the reality of a Master Architect behind it all. To Zarathushtra, this natural order is a reflection of God's truth -- Asha -- and God's truth is an integral part of God's nature. I believe this was the genesis of our ancestors' reverence for the natural elements. They revered what they believed was a reflection, or an expression, of the divine.

Our ancestors practiced this belief in ways that met the needs of their world, and their state of knowledge. They took elaborate precautions to keep themselves and the natural elements free of the pollutants of their day. Today, with running water and indoor plumbing, the specific precautions that our ancestors took are no longer necessary to keep our world clean and safe. But the wisdom of Zarathushtra's teaching is brought home to us anew in the threat to our environment from industrial and organic pollutants. And we can bring his teachings to life by doing what we can -- each in our own way -- to reduce the dangers to our planet, and to our galaxy, from such pollutants.

But if we view the "environmental" aspect of our religion only from the perspective of the natural elements, I think we would miss a great deal, for that aspect only scratches the surface of Zarathushtra's unique and profound view that the material and the spiritual are both a part of one single design.

Many religions express the view that what is physical or material is "base" -- to be rejected, subdued, conquered, eliminated. Even some secular philosophers, such as Plato, (an old favorite in many ways), teach that spiritual perfection can be attained only when the physical is thoroughly rejected and eschewed.

Zarathushtra's teaching is quite different. In his view, the physical/material world, and the spiritual/mental world, are complementary parts of one single design. In our reality, they are two halves of one whole, each beautiful and having its own worth, each with its part to play in bringing about the desired end. Indeed, far from rejecting the material world, Zarathushtra points out with gentle irony, that it is only through our actions and interactions, using the tools of our material world, that we grow spiritually -- the material world is the medium through which the spirit is perfected -- an interesting paradox.

So Zarathushtra does not teach us to reject the material world. He asks us rather to reject what's wrong, and embrace what's right, in both the physical and abstract aspects of our lives. In short, the criterion for rejection is not whether something is material or spiritual, but whether it is right or wrong, true or false.

Zarathushtra teaches that God exists in all things. This teaching leads us to view the world from a refreshing, new perspective. We begin to understand that God, and we, and the world we live in, are all a part of the same whole. We cannot trash any part of this whole without trashing a part of ourselves, and the divine. Zarathushtra's teaching requires us to cherish our material world, to live in harmony with other life forms, with our natural environment, and with each other. It invites us to promote, with reason and intelligence (vohu mano) what is good in both the material and spiritual aspects of reality.

Down through the ages, our ancestors, like others, viewed their environment through the spectacles of their own needs and fears (as we also are inclined to do). The things in nature that they feared, that they could not control, that wreaked havoc with their crops, or homes, or domestic animals, or way of life, such as wolves, frogs, locusts, et cetera they considered "bad". And since our religion enjoins us to fight what's bad and promote what's good, our ancestors developed traditions which required the destruction of those things in nature which they considered "bad". These later traditions are not reflected in Zarathushtra's poems.

Today we understand that even those parts of the ecosystem that seem noxious to us have their uses, and are necessary to an effective functioning of the whole. But let us resist the temptation of being smug about our ancestors' limitations. Like our ancestors, we too are inclined to view Zarathushtra's original philosophy from the

limitations of our own world view. Today, we may respect the ecosystem. We may no longer exterminate wolves and frogs, we may clearly recognize the environmental dangers posed by industrial and organic wastes, but we face an environmental danger from a more subtle form of pollution. A pollution of the spirit. We are caught up in the rat race. We have forgotten Zarathushtra's prime objectives, and we judge ourselves and others by the prestige of our jobs, the size of our bank accounts, the make of our cars, the size of our houses. Wordsworth put it well when he said:

"The world is too much with us,
Late and soon, getting and spending,
We lay waste our powers.
Little we see in nature that is ours,
We have given our hearts away....."

There is nothing wrong with wealth or high office. These things are not to be rejected simply because they are "material". The trouble arises when such things become ends in and of themselves. This distorted perspective engenders a malaise of the spirit, as we grow out of sync with the overall design. Zarathushtra's antidote for this pollution of the spirit is quite simple – a re-orientation of objectives. We need to cease using the material aspects of our lives as objectives in and of themselves, and start using them as tools to accomplish different objectives, while enjoying the tools we use – our lovely world and its many pleasures – as part of the process. A generous, joyful path.

What then are these objectives we need to accomplish as the antidote to spiritual pollution? They are the objectives that make for divinity (the amesha spenta): To seek out and advance the truth for its own sake, to do what's right, because it's the right thing to do, to extend friendship, to be compassionate, to see God in all things, to advance the good, the perfecting process, (or, as the Pahlavi writers expressed it, to advance the forward progress of creation) – not in the abstract, but choice by choice, using the tools of our material existence. These objectives are a reflection of the divine. Their realization gives happiness, brings us into harmony with our environment – an environment in which the material and the spiritual blend in one beautiful design.