

DG McIntyre - Perspective on Yasna 46.11 of Zarathushtra's Gathas [i]

"During their regimes, the Karpans [a type of priest] and the Kavis [princes] yoked (us) with evil actions in order to destroy the world and mankind. But their own soul and their own conception [daena] did vex them when they reached the Bridge of the Judge, (there to become guests in the House of Deceit forever." Y46.11.[ii]

Here again, we get a glimpse of the oppressive social conditions under which the people of Zarathushtra's time lived – a combining of religious [Karpan] and secular [kavi] authority to effectuate an oppressive control ("...yoked (us) with evil actions..."). Here again, we see the concept of self judgment, as previously discussed, which is seen in more than one verse in the Gathas, for example: ".....His soul shall vex him at the Bridge of the Judge surely, in that he has disappeared from the path of truth by reason of his own actions and (the words) of his tongue." Y51.13; "...the deceitful persons, bad in rule, bad in actions and words, bad in conceptions and thoughts, them shall their souls continue to encounter with foul food when they shall be the true guests in the House of Deceit." Y49.11 ("foul food" being a metaphor, i.e. just as "foul food" is bad for the body, in the same way the vices of a person are bad nourishment for his soul).

But one of the most interesting aspects of the verse under discussion, Y46.11, is Zarathushtra's description of "hell" as the "House of Deceit". In the Gathas, Zarathushtra frequently uses "house" (and its related terms "abode" "dwelling place" "dwells") as a metaphor for a state of being. Thus the House of Good Thinking (his term for "heaven") is a state of being which is Wisdom personified. And the House of Deceit is a state of being which is ignorance, delusion, wrongheaded, the opposite of enlightened. We see hints of this notion even in some of the later texts. For example:

In an Avestan fragment composed long after the Gathas, hell is said to be reached in four steps: "The first step...laid him in the Evil-Thought Hell; The second step...laid him in the Evil-Word Hell; The third step...laid him in the Evil-Deed Hell; The fourth step ... laid him in the Endless Darkness." (Yasht 22 verse 33, SBE Volume 23, page 320).

A later Pazand work, the *Mainyo-i-khard* states: "[verse 20] And hell is first Dushmat (evil thoughts), and second Duzhukht (evil words), and third Duzhvaresh (evil deeds); [verse 21] with the fourth footstep, the wicked man arrives at that which is the darkest hell.....[verse 31] ... their darkness is such-like as when it will be necessary to hold by the hand" i.e. very thick darkness, where a person cannot see for himself, and needs a hand. (The Book of Mainyo-i-khard, translated by E. W. West, page 141 APA Oriental Press Amsterdam reprint).

It seems clear that these works, at least in part, follow the Gathic conclusion that "hell" is a state of being created by evil thoughts, words and actions, which result in "darkness" of the soul, i.e. a state of being which is the opposite of enlightenment.

It is also interesting that in later texts, hell is described as a place where if a thousand men were closely packed within a single "span" (?), yet "...they [the men] think in this way, that they are alone; and the loneliness is worse than its punishment..." (Quoted from the Bundahish, as translated by E. W. West in SBE Volume 5, page 114) indicating, metaphorically, that the state of being which is "hell" includes the delusion of "aleness" a notion which is far removed from the unity of identity that is implicit in Zarathushtra's notion of completeness (haurvatat).

The Avestan fragment (Yasht 22), mentioned above, does not address the duration of this "hell" of evil thoughts, words and actions. The *Mainyo-i-Khard* does, calling it of "long duration" (pages 141, and also 137) – not eternal or "forever". Which brings us back to Y46.11. What could Zarathushtra have meant by wrongdoers being "...guests in the House of Deceit forever." Y46.11?

"Guests" would seem to indicate a temporary residence. But then why "forever"? Could Z(arathushtra) mean that such wrongdoers would remain in a state of wrongheaded delusion ("House of Deceit") forever? That would be inconsistent with his assertion that "...it has been fated for this world, Wise One, that the truth is to be saved for its (good) preference, that deceit is to be destroyed for its (false) profession..." Y49.3. If wrongdoers were to remain in a state of delusion forever, then evil would be forever with us, and would not be "destroyed" as Y49.3 tells us.

Such an interpretation would also be inconsistent with Zarathushtra's profound realization that evil is defeated by changing minds – by "deliver[ing] deceit into the hands of truth" Y30.8, Y44.14, and that this occurs through the law of consequences (and mutual, loving help), which is a part of the way things have been ordered (asha). In short, the

idea of a permanent state of delusion for wrongdoers is so inconsistent with key aspects of Zarathushtra's thought, that either he was being very inconsistent, or we need to figure out what he might have intended here.

The operative Gathic words in Y46.11 are “yavoi vispai” and their translation as "forever" or its equivalent, seems fairly uniform amongst those who have translated the Gathas. Taraporewala, states, in his commentary to Y46.11: "yavoi vispai – For all time. We have vispai yave in Yasna 28.8. The implication is 'through endless ages'." (T[araporewala]’s big Gatha book, page 611).

Although in Y46.11, Insler translates “yavoi vispai” as "forever", in Yasna 28.8, he translates “vispai yave” as: "for a whole lifetime". Thus we have the possibility of a long duration of time that is something less than "forever". This is consistent with Y31.20, where a parallel thought is expressed, although with different words: "...**(But) a long lifetime of darkness, foul food, the word woe – to such an existence shall your conception, along with its (corresponding) actions, lead you, ye deceitful ones.**" Y31.20. (Darkness, and foul food are metaphoric, indicating that wrong actions lead to an unenlightened, unhappy state of being in which the soul is not nourished).

It is clear that a person who exists in the "hell" of evil thoughts, words and actions can never “cross the bridge” and make the transition to the state of pure wisdom which is the House of Good Thinking. So perhaps what Zarathushtra is saying in Y46.11, is that a person who lives in evil thoughts, words and actions is always in a state of delusion. So the word "forever" would not mean he could never change, but would mean that evil thoughts, words and actions always, at all times (“forever” in that sense), result in the occurrence of a state of being that is deluded – the House of Deceit. Both these conclusions – (1) "long lifetime", as well as (2) that evil thoughts words and actions always produce a state of delusion – are consistent with Zarathushtra's thought, and may provide an answer to his intent in Y46.11.

[i] Based on a posting that appeared on Zoroastrian aliases in July-August 2004. This posting was apart of the online Gatha Studies Group (GSG) started by Mrs. Mahrukh Shroff of Mumbai in 2002.

[ii] Y46.11, Insler translation, except where otherwise indicated.

Round parentheses () in a quotation indicate an insertion by Prof. Insler.

Square brackets [] in a quotation indicate an insertion by the author of this article, by way of explanation, or to give the reader applicable Gathic word.