

DG McIntyre – Renewal

Novruz, March 21st, is the day of the spring equinox, the day when the sun's center crosses the equator and re-enters the northern hemisphere. On Novruz, day and night are everywhere of equal length.

The significance of Novruz as the beginning of the new year, is that it marks the point after which the days become longer than the nights in the northern hemisphere, and we emerge from the cold and dark of winter, to a period of warmth, light and growth.

So Novruz marks the beginning of renewal. But its roots go back to December 22 – the winter solstice – the day celebrated in ancient Iranian traditions as Yalda. On this day, the sun reaches its southernmost point – the tropic of Capricorn – and starts its journey back to us in the north.¹

December 22 (Yalda), is a time when we are in the grip of winter, with many weeks of winter still to come. Yet, after December 22, when the nights are still longer than the days, the daylight hours imperceptibly but surely, start to grow longer. A paradox that is reflected in the worlds of both mind and matter – that the seeds of renewal and light are born in the midst of darkness and despair.

Navruz is the budding of that process – the day after which there is more light than darkness. So it is a good time to think about our own renewal. I sometimes think that on my own path, I am closer to Yalda than to Novruz, but that does not matter. Yalda is a good beginning. And whether we are at Yalda, or at Novruz, or beyond, with each step, the light increases.

But unlike the movements of the sun and the resulting seasons, our renewal is not automatic. We have to figure out how to bring it about.

In the very first Gatha, Zarathushtra asks Ahura Mazda for a blue-print:

“...instruct me...through the eloquence befitting Thy spirit...the things by means of which the foremost existence shall come about here.” 2 (Y28.11)

The path which Ahura Mazda reveals to Zarathushtra is eloquent indeed. And it befits His spirit, because it is the path of His spirit. Renewal, and the path to renewal, are the same, as you will see.

In the very next Gatha, Zarathushtra reveals the first key – good thinking (**vohu mano**). Given the freedom to choose, God cannot abolish evil and the suffering it causes, by divine edict, as it were. There has to be another solution. That solution is understanding. Intelligence committed to goodness. It is through understanding or good thinking that we can comprehend the divine force, truth, [**asha**] and God's other attributes, (the **amesha spenta**)³ which are the path of renewal. This thought is repeated throughout the Gathas.

“...Through good thinking the Creator of existence shall promote the true realization of what is most healing [ferasho.temem] according to our wish.”(Y50.11).

In the next Yasna, Zarathushtra gives us the second key: individual choice – in thought, word and action. It is not enough to have good understanding. We have to do something about it. And it is not enough to do what others tell us. We must think and choose for ourselves. In Yasna 30, Zarathushtra says:

“..... Reflect with a clear mind – man by man for himself – upon the two choices of decision.....” (Y30.2)

“Yes, there are two fundamental spirits, twins, which are renowned to be in conflict. In thought and in word, in action, they are two: the good and the bad. And between these two, the beneficent have correctly chosen, not the maleficent.”(Y30.3).

It is interesting (and enlightening) to note that while in Yasna 30.3, the good spirit, spenta mainyu is the object of a good person's choice, in Y30.5 spenta mainyu itself makes the choice.

“...(But) the very virtuous spirit,chose the truth.....” (Y30.5).

And in Y28.1, spenta mainyu is described as the “...spirit virtuous through truth...”. So spenta mainyu both chooses **asha** and derives its virtue through **asha**. And we know from other parts of the Gathas, that spenta mainyu lives not only in man,⁴ but is also the spirit of God himself. See for example:

“...understanding through Thy most virtuous spirit [**spenishta mainyu**], Wise One” (Y43.2)

“...Thou, the Wise One, hast come into the world with Thy virtuous spirit [**spenta.....mainyu**] (and) with the rule of good thinking,.....” (Y43.6).

“...Him who is beneficent through his virtuous spirit [**spenta mainyu**] to those who exist.....” (Y45.6).

“...Therefore, Lord, this Zarathushtra chooses that very spirit of Thine which indeed is the most virtuous of all, Wise One [**mainyum.....spenishta**]...” (Y43.16).

What does this tell us about the nature of God?⁵

Returning to Yasna 30, which gives us the second key – individual choice in thought, word, and action – Zarathushtra points out in that Yasna, that wrong choices cause suffering and affliction, whereas choices made with truth and good thinking bring about renewal.

“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).

“Therefore may we be those who shall heal [**ferashem**] this world!.....” (Y30.9).

The healing referred to here is the renewal of the world afflicted with the results of wrongful choices. The healing is accomplished through **aramaiti**, through thoughts, words and actions⁶ which bring to life (give “body and breath to”) the rule of truth and good thinking as Y30.7 states. So again we see that both renewal, and the path to renewal, are the same. They are the **amesha spenta**, the divine forces. This is confirmed in the next Yasna, 31.

Here Zarathushtra first says in verse 3:

“...that commandment which is for Thy adherents – speak, Wise One, ... in order for us to know (all) that, by means of which I might convert all the living.” (Y31.3).

He follows this with the enigmatical verse 4. In the first sentence of verse 4, he suggests a unity of identity between the Wise Lord and his divine forces. In the second sentence, he makes it clear, that the divine forces are also the path and the solution.

“...When I might call upon truth, the Wise One and the other lords [good thinking and good rule] shall appear: also reward [**haurvatat, ameretat**] and **aramaiti**.⁷ (And) through the very best thinking I shall seek for myself their rule of strength, through whose growth we might conquer deceit.” (Y31.14).

It is worth noting, as Yasna 31.3 reminds us, that it is not enough for each of us to achieve renewal for ourselves, although that is a necessary first step. We also must share this precious knowledge with “all the living” (while respecting each person’s freedom to choose), so that all the living can also achieve renewal. We will return to this thought later.

In Yasna 31.8, Zarathushtra again refers to the consequences of wrongful choices. He says that the deceitful person has not listened to the Wise Lord’s precepts and instructions, and has:

“...placed house and settlement and district and land in strife and destruction.....” (Y31.8).

By contrast, referring to himself as a “world-healer” Zarathushtra says:

“This knowing world-healer has listened, he who has respected the truth, Lord.....” (Y31.19).

The next key is what I call the law of consequences. Taraporewalla called it the law of action and reaction. Some people call it karma. It is hinted at in Y30 and 31, and expressed more clearly elsewhere in the Gathas. It is part of the law of **asha**.⁸

Asha literally means, “what fits”. What fits includes (among other things) truth, what’s right, goodness, beneficence. It also includes that perfect justice which generates the law of consequences – that what we do comes back to us – the good and the bad. The objective of the law of consequences is not punishment. The objective is enlightenment. The idea being, that when we experience the consequences of our own wrongful choices it helps us to understand why we should not make such wrongful choices again. Zarathushtra says it results in distributing “the good” to both factions.

“...those rewards Thou shalt give, through the heat of Thy truth-strong fire, to the deceitful and to the truthful...” (Y43.4).

“...when the distribution in the good shall occur to both factions through Thy bright fire, Wise One.” (Y331.19).

“Wise Lord, together with this virtuous spirit, Thou shalt give the distribution in the good to both factions through Thy fire, by reason of the solidarity of [aramaiti] and truth. For it shall convert the many who are seeking.” (Y47.6).

It is important to remember that not all of the hardships and difficulties which we experience are the consequences of past wrongful conduct. If life is a spiritual evolution towards perfection, as Zarathushtra teaches, then it stands to reason that we will have to experience many different experiences for this learning and perfecting process to be realized. The difficulties we experience – earned or unearned – are the refiner’s fire, without which pure gold would not be possible. As such, they are heavy blessings, but still blessings.

However, the refiner’s fire alone is not enough to bring about renewal. Sometimes those who are exposed to abusive behavior, repeat in their own lives and actions, the abusive patterns to which they have been subjected. Clearly, something more is needed to break that pattern, which brings us to the final9 key. It is mutual and loving help. None of us can make it on our own. Each of us, to make it, must both give and receive help.

Often in the Gathas, Ahura Mazda is described as a friend (or beloved), as a source of solicitude and help. He also gives “enduring strength” when requested. (Y43.1).

In the Gathas, we are told, repeatedly, that God helps with truth and good thinking.¹⁰ The angels¹¹ God sends to help us are His thoughts, His understanding. Other angels come to help as well. They are those angels – some full time, some part-time – who express these qualities, in whatever degree, with their thoughts, words and action. So, with the loving help of these assorted angels – God, His divine forces, and each other – we make it through the refiner’s fire, and also become “world-healers”. In the Gathas, the term “world-healer” is used to describe Ahura Mazda himself (Y44.16), and Zarathushtra (Y31.19), and also the loving man who watches over the heritage for all and is God’s ally in spirit.

“This I ask Thee. Tell me truly, Lord. Is the beginning of the **best existence** in such a way that the **loving man** who shall seek after these things is to be saved? **For such a person, virtuous through truth, watching over the heritage for all, is a world-healer and Thy ally in spirit, Wise One.**” (Y44.2).

So, a world-healer is one who is loving (Y44.2), one who does not cause suffering with wrongful choices, and stops cruelty, violence and deceit (Y48.7, 48.11). This concept of a world-healer is also reflected in Zarathushtra’s idea of a redeemer, a savior (**saoshyant**) as being one who turns good thinking into actions:

“Yes, those men shall be the saviors [saoshyanto] of the lands, namely, those who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and truth, Wise One.....” (Y48.12).

In this way, we bring about God’s good rule.

“... ‘Such is the rule for the Wise One that one shall increase it for Him through good thinking’ ”(Y31.6).

“...The Wise One in rule is Lord through [aramaiti].” (Y47.1).

“...The Wise One is Lord through such actions stemming from good spirit.” (Y45.5).

And His rule brings frashokereti, renewal.

“...By your rule, Lord, Thou shalt truly heal [ferashem] this world in accord with our wish.” (Y34.15).

Thus, when we follow the path of spiritual renewal, we also heal our world. Just as Novruz has its roots in Yalda, so to the path to spiritual renewal has its genesis in the darkness and suffering caused by the hardships that sculpt our souls. Without it, there can be no growth. Without growth, there can be no perfecting. Just as the buds of Novruz are turned by warmth and sunlight into the glory of summer, so too, with the loving help of the divine and each other, our souls (and our world) evolve into the glory of completeness (**haurvatat**), the “endless lights,” frashokereti. Renewal.¹²

Footnotes:

1. Figuratively speaking.
2. The foremost existence is the time when deceit and its forces will be destroyed and the world will be governed by truth and good thinking. Insler, The Gathas of Zarathushtra, page 27, footnote 11 (Brill, 1975). All quotations from, and references to, the Gathas in this paper are from the Insler translation, although he may or may not agree with all of the inferences which I draw from his translation. Round brackets in a quotation appear in the original. Square brackets indicate insertions by me, except in the case of “aramaiti” which I place in square brackets because I leave it untranslated.
3. This is corroborated in a later work, Selections from Zadsparam, Sacred Books of the East, Volume 47, page 156 et seq. (Motilal Benarsidas reprint), where Zadsparam tells an allegorical story of Vohuman (good thinking) leading Zarathushtra to Ahura Mazda and his assembled attributes. If you look past the images, the story tells us that good thinking leads to God and His divine forces.
4. For examples of spenta mainyu in man, see Y47.1, 47.2.
5. This Gathic puzzle – of spenta mainyu choosing, and still being part of Ahura Mazda, does not make sense until you understand that in Zarathushtra’s view, God and man, (and perhaps all the living) are part of the same Whole. There is much evidence that warrants the drawing of this inference in the Gathas, and understanding it makes many Gathic puzzles fall into place.
6. Aramaiti is translated by many scholars, and also by the Pahlavi writers as “rightmindedness”. That translation fits the way in which Zarathushtra uses aramaiti in some verses. But there are many verses in which “rightmindedness” does not fit the context at all. Moreover, “rightminded” is the same, conceptually, as “good minded” (vohu mano). Zarathushtra would not have had two redundant amesha spenta, especially when, in a number of verses, he uses aramaiti and vohu mano side by side. I think the concept of aramaiti is most clearly expressed in Yasna 51.21, where Zarathushtra says: “**Virtuous is the man of [aramaiti]. He is so by reason of his understanding, his words, his action, his conception.....**” Aramaiti, as used in the Gathas encompasses more than rightmindedness. It encompasses thoughts, words, and actions that are in accord with truth and good thinking. This is consistent with Y30.7. We cannot “give body and breath” to the rule of truth and good thinking with just an attitude – rightmindedness. “Body and breath” means bringing those concepts to life in a concrete way – with understanding, with words, and with actions, as Yasna 51.21 states. I do not know what English word would be the correct linguistic translation of aramaiti. So I leave the word untranslated.
7. Aramaiti, haurvatat and ameretat happen to be feminine nouns.
8. In the later literature, each **amesha spenta** (attribute of God) is paired with some aspect of the material world. Although the pairings of the later literature are not supported in all respects in the Gathas (I have not seen any pairing of **xshathra** and metal), I believe the pairings that do occur in the Gathas are some of the keys to understanding Zarathushtra’s system of metaphors in the Gathas. **Asha** is paired with fire. One of the ways in which Zarathushtra pairs **asha** with fire (though not the only one), is in the law of consequences. Fire is frequently described as the agent of the law of consequences. I believe this was Zarathushtra’s way of demonstrating that this aspect of **asha** i.e. the law of consequences, operates in the material world.
9. Final for the purposes of this discussion only. It is always dangerous to say “final” with respect to anything in the Gathas. Just when you think you know it all, you discover new depths and treasures of thought which take your breath away. And you think: “But it’s so obvious! So clear! How could I not have seen it before!!” If you are a serious student of the Gathas, that will happen to you over and over again, however bright you may be.

10. "...Who has been found to be the protector of my cattle [metaphor for community of the faithful] [Who of me? Who other than truth and Thee, Wise Lord, and the best thinking,...](#)"(Y50.1). See also Y35.5, 46.2, 43.12.

11. In the later literature **amesha spenta** (God's divine attributes) were called angels.

12. And after that? I don't know. Zarathushtra does not say (at least not that I have yet discovered). It should be interesting to find out.