

GATHAS
THE MESSAGE OF ZARATHUSHTRA
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The Quintessence of Zarathushtra's Revelation

Gathas or the Divine songs of Zarathushtra are valued as the most sacred and the oldest portion of Zoroastrian scriptures. They are regarded as the Fountainhead of Zoroastrian religion. Zarathushtra's revelation and 'visionary' discourse with the Supreme God Ahura Mazda is recorded in these compositions. The Gathas are Prophet Zarathushtra's own original devout utterances. They are the devotional outpourings through which the experience of his revelation is communicated to mankind.

They teach pure monotheism, some of the noblest conceptions of God and the most sublime morality. The Gathas consist of five hymns composed by Zarathushtra in the form of exalted poetry, profoundly instructive and embodying fundamental universal truths. They are highly philosophical in nature, incorporating ethical principles which provide man the infra structure to lead a righteous life and thereby achieve everlasting happiness. This message of Zarathushtra is a document of Universal Salvation for all the righteous and lays down the laws which should regulate all civilized life. These laws are not only declared like the Ten Commandments but are made and shown to be Ahura Mazda's very characteristics and nature - He is made up of them. By assimilating these values and virtues in one's life, one works out his own, as well as the collective salvation of mankind.

Language and Vintage

The Gathas are composed in the richly developed Avestan language, which is a sister language to Sanskrit. A comparative study of the Gathas is extremely difficult, as the poetry is very enigmatic and intricate in style and syntax. Furthermore, the dating of the Gathas poses a problem since it is difficult to ascertain Zarathushtra's date of birth accurately. However, mainly from philological and archeological evidences available, a tentative date around 4000 B.C. may be postulated as the date of the Prophet. Thus, it may be deduced that the Gathas date back to that period.

To date, there is no standard translation of the Gathas, although the expertise of many scholars, eastern as well as western, has been considerably taxed in an attempt to accurately translate them. Perhaps the most accurate and acceptable recent translations are by Professor Stanley Insler of Yale University and another one by Dr. Irach Taraporewala.

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The Hymns

Zarathushtra's Gathas were faithfully preserved and initially transmitted orally from generation to generation for many centuries as there was no written tradition in those days. The Gathas were probably first systematically written down at a much later date when the Avestan alphabet was invented. The Gathas with other early Avestan scriptures were written on embossed leather sheets. Tradition has it that when Alexander defeated the Persian Empire, around 330 B.C., he burnt and destroyed the Royal Palace and the Treasury at Persepolis and with it destroyed most of the written Avestan scriptures. Some 600 years later, King Ardeshir Papakhan commanded his High Priest Dastur Tansar to collect the remnants of the lost Zoroastrian texts. All that could be recovered was only that the priests had retained in their memory. The remnants of the Avestan scriptures formed the compositions collectively called the Yasna.

Embedded in the Avestan Yasna, was a set of poems with a distinctive meter and a language even more ancient than Avestan, a language which was a sister language to Vedic Sanskrit.

The Five Gathas

The five Hymns of Zarathushtra's Gathas have seventeen chapters - Has. These 17 Has form part of the 72 Chapters or Has of the Yasna. The Gathas are not in chronological sequence but appear to follow a poetic meter, according to which they have been arranged.

The five Gathas are

1. **A-hu-na-vaiti** consisting of seven Has, Ha 28 to 34
2. **Ush-taa-vaiti** consisting of four Has, Ha 43 to 46
3. **Spentaa-Mainyu** consisting of four Has, Ha 47 to 50
4. **Vohu-khsha-thraa** consisting of one Ha, Ha 51 and
5. **Vah-ishtaa-ishti** consisting of one Ha, Ha 53.

Their Paazand names and their meaning are

Paazand	Meaning
1. A-hu-na-vad	Divine Song of Self Sacrifice
2. Ush-ta-vad	Divine Song of Inner Light
3. Spento-mud	Divine Song of the Holy Spirit
4. Vohu-ksha-thra	Divine Song of Loving Sacrifice
5. Vah-ishto-isht	Divine Song of Life's Fulfillment

Core Teachings of the Gathas

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Gathas teach us that there are six Supreme Attributes or Qualities of Ahura Mazda. These Supreme Qualities of Ahura Mazda are commonly referred to as Amesha Spentas. Amesha means Everlasting and Spenta means one that promotes growth.

The purpose of this life is for our Urvan -- soul to grow and progress. We can attain this goal in our life, by imbibing and developing these Amesha Spentas into our daily life.

Asha is a very important Quality of Ahura Mazda. I realize this, when I read the five Gathas and count the number of times each of the Amesha Spentas is mentioned. The word Asha is mentioned 157 times. The word Vohoo Mananghaa occurs 130 times. Khashathraa Vairya is mentioned 56 times, Spenta Aramaiti is mentioned 40 times and Haurvataat, Ameretaat is mentioned 14 times. Thus, I see that Asha is the most stressed concept in the Gathas.

Out of the six Amesha Spentas, the first four are sequences that I must develop within myself:

1. Asha Vahishta -- Righteousness, Truth and Order
2. Vohoo Mananghaa -- Good Loving Pure Mind
3. Khashathraa Vairya -- Life of Benevolence and Self -sacrifice
4. Aramaiti -- Insight and Wisdom

When these four Supreme Attributes of Ahura Mazda are integrated into my daily life, my Urvan begins to experience the last two Amesha Spentas:

5. Haurvataat -- Perfection and
6. Ameretaat -- Immortality

The first four Amesha Spentas are the **sequences** that I must cultivate in my life and the last two Amesha Spentas are the **consequences** of my sequences. **There are no rewards or punishments in life.** What seems so are the consequences of the sequences that I have lived in this life.

God, Ahura Mazda does not reward or punish. I reap what I sow.

Ahunavaiti Gatha

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The 7 Gathas cover a variety of topics and sermons. Zarathushtra extols the complete supremacy of Ahura Mazda. He rejects all other deities. "Hear with your ears the Highest Truths I preach, and with illumined minds weigh them with care, before you choose which of the two paths to tread, deciding man by man, each one for each." Yasna 30.

He expounds the doctrine of Self Sacrifice. "Through Love of man, through Service and through Truth, Raise Thou our souls into Thy Realms of Light." Yasna 33.

Ushtaavaiti Gatha

Zarathushtra expounds on the doctrine of Inner Light. Secondary meaning of Ushtaa is Happiness, which is a result of the Inner Light. May the Light from Fravashi project clear into our souls. Light naturally comes to him, who transmits it to others. Pure in mind and pure in heart shall see God.

Spentaa Mainyu Gatha

Spenta Mainyu is the Fravashi that is within me. In every bosom, there is a spark of God. It is the Divinity in man. It is the Holy Spirit permeating in a human being. He thinks and acts because of this Holy Spirit within.

Vohu Khashathraa Gatha

Vohu Khashathraa teaches the concept of loving service of mankind. We may acquire knowledge and wealth, but if we do not use them for the service of the needy, they are useless. We must perform deeds of service. Holy strength comes to those that live for the others. Only by actions good, only by actions benevolent, the highest conditions of the Soul can be achieved.

Vahishtoishti Gatha

If a man lives a life of self sacrifice,
if he is conscious of Inner Light Ushtaa,
if he is conscious about Holy Spirit, Spenta
Mainyu, that guides his soul,
if he is dedicated to the Service of man,
then the consequence is Fulfillment of Life.

Uniqueness of Zarathushtra's Message

Zarathushtra was the first person in the world's history who dared to think what real religion was and to say it plainly, he was the first recorded puritan. His message founded the oldest of the world's religions and it has probably had more influence, directly or indirectly, on mankind than any other single Faith.

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He was the first to teach the doctrine of One Supreme God, Individual Judgment of the Soul, Heaven and Hell, Future Resurrection of the body, Last Judgment and Life everlasting for the reunited soul and body. He taught that the Free Will to choose is the God given right of each man. We must exercise this right judiciously, within an intellectual framework. This is the Charter of Spiritual Liberty for all mankind. Man is given absolute freedom in the choice of the path he wants to take, because he possesses the most precious gift of God - Mind - which enables him to distinguish Good from Evil. Equality of sexes is inherent in his teachings.

In Zarathushtra's scheme of things, salvation is not a matter of Grace, to be dispensed thru a discretion that is beyond our control. He teaches that we have the keys to our individual and the collective salvation in our own hands. And, that the salvation is brought about by our own efforts.

To sum up the Gathic teachings

I must acknowledge and worship one Supreme God, Ahura Mazda.
I must do all goodness in His Name.

I must cultivate and realize Wisdom, Virtue and Love in my Good Mind, Vohu Mano.

I must with my Good Mind strive to understand the eternal Law of Truth, Order and Righteousness, Asha. I must try to incorporate Asha in my daily life. I must try to remove the Disorder that is within me, so that I can have order in my life.

Next, I must translate this Truth and Good Mind thus realized into Acts of Service, Life of Benevolence and Self Sacrifice, Khashathraa.

All thru, I must develop Devotion and Faith, Insight and Vision, Aaramaiti.
When Aaramaiti works within me, it helps me avoid mischief and urges me to do Good.

If I fully realize the above five sequences into my daily life, then the consequence will be that my soul will attain Perfection, Haurvataat and Immortality, Ameretaat.

As stated in the Gathas, Vohoo Ukhashaya Manangahaa, Khshathraa Asshachaa Ushtaa Tanum. Governed by the concept of Love, actuated by the activity of Virtue, attuned to Truth and Righteousness at every step in my life, dedicated to the life of Service and Self Sacrifice, May I elevate my being in the Higher Realms of Light.
