

Gāthās: The Divine Songs of Zarathuštra A Personal Summary

Aša is the central concept of Zarathuštra's teachings.

Aša has two interpretations.

First: *Aša* is a vision of an ideal Creation, a Creation in which all constituents are in perfect harmony. No one prospers at the expense of someone else. For example, if humans do things that cause animal species to die out, or environment to become polluted, that is a violation of *Aša*.

Second: *Aša* is an Eternal Law, a Law governing the spiritual universe, just as Newton's laws of motion govern the physical universe. This is a broad and abstract concept, so to relate to it, we need to find tangible examples of this Law. Two examples are: The principle of Unity of Life and The Law of Karma. The first states that if we harm any part of Mazda's creation, all of creation is affected. "No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of a continent, a part of the man. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less. Each man's death diminishes me, for I am involved in Mankind. Therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." (John Donne). The second, the Law of Karma, states that all our thoughts, words, and deeds, have consequences. If we harm Mazda's creation, that act will come back to us some day.

The concept of *Aša* is analogous to the concepts of *Ṛta* and *Dharma* in Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

It is our mission in life as Zarathuštis to diligently work to restore *Aša*, to restore the state of perfect harmony, when the world drifts away from it. To enable us to do this, Ahura Mazda has endowed us with a faculty called *Vohu Mano*, usually translated as Good Mind. However, *Vohu Mano* is not mind in the ordinary sense of the word. It is not intellect. It is an inborn wisdom that enables us to grasp what is right and what is wrong in any given situation. Once we know what is wrong, we are expected to try to correct it. Thoughts, words, and deeds, undertaken to remove disharmony and restore *Aša* are called Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds.

A person who accepts this vision and this way of life is a Zarathušti. He needs no other qualification to be called a Zarathušti.

A religion, or a way of life, is of little value unless it can be practiced in daily living. To do this with Zarathuštra's teachings, we need to answer some questions.

The first question is, if we all possess *Vohu Mano*, why are some of us unable to tell what is right and what is wrong in many situations? The answer is, while we all possess this faculty, it is

often clouded by negative tendencies such as greed, fear, anger and hatred. For *Vohu Mano* to shine forth, and show us the Right, we need to purify our conscience of these negative tendencies. Before we claim that we have the guidance of *Vohu Mano*, we need to undergo the disciplines of moral living to the best of our ability.

Secondly, *Vohu Mano* only tells us what is Right and what is Wrong. We need to actually decide to follow the Right and resist the Wrong. The decider of how to act, given the importunings of *Vohu Mano*, is called Urvān. Therefore, it is Urvān that gets judged on the *Chinvat Peretu*, the Bridge of the Separator, at the end of one's life. Thus, Zarathuštra teaches us that life consists of choices. *Vohu Mano* guides us through those choices, but we must do the choosing. And we are rewarded according to how we choose, in this life and in afterlife.

When we fight for the Right, we need to be scrupulous not to resort to violence. According to the Gāthās, Zarathuštra was granted the spiritual power, endurance, and "charm of speech," a power of persuasion, to prevail over the Followers-of-the-False. He did not resort to violence.

This way of life can only be understood if one tries to practice it. The Truth (*Aša*) in any given situation, and the way to get to that Truth, need to be found in countless little particulars of life. Therefore, the best interpreters of the Gāthās are not the scholars or linguists, but those who have tried to live by the teachings of Zarathuštra, persistently, sincerely, and with sustained enthusiasm.

A person who devotes his/her life to promoting *Aša*, promoting unity and harmony in Mazda's creation, will be graced with optimum health and security, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This is *Haurvatāt*. What happens after death is beyond the reach of human understanding. But a person who devotes his life to promoting *Aša* loses the fear of death. He does not know what comes after death, but he knows that whatever it is, it is going to be all right. He is ever at peace. This, for me, is *Ameretāt*.

Aevo pantāo yo ašahe, vispe anyaeām apantām.