

## DG McIntyre - The Notion of Love in the Gathas

One of the challenges in understanding the world of the Gathas is that we have no hard evidence, other than the Gathas themselves, of either the time or the culture in which Zarathushtra lived. As early as 450 BC, opinions differed about the date of Zarathushtra.<sup>[1]</sup> And various historians and scholars over the centuries have argued for dates between 6,500 BC to 600 BC.<sup>[2]</sup> We have many opinions, but no direct evidence. Add to this the fact that no other contemporary works in the Gathic language have survived, and you begin to appreciate the challenges involved in reconstructing the world of the Gathas.

In short, except for the similarities between the Gathic language and Vedic Sanskrit, the Gathas are a stand-alone work, unconnected by direct evidence, as distinguished from circumstantial evidence, or speculation, to a specific time, or to any contemporary works, or to a specific place, other than ancient Iran. Therefore, while the later Zoroastrian literature, written anywhere from a few hundred to more than a 1,000 years after Zarathushtra, may be useful indeed for purposes of corroboration, I believe that a study of the world of the Gathas, and more importantly, the thought of the Gathas, first must be determined from the direct evidence of the Gathas themselves.

Turning to the Gathas, we are confronted by the tasks of translation and interpretation. In the centuries that followed the invasion of Alexander, when the ancient texts were destroyed, and large numbers of the learned killed, knowledge of the Gathic language died out. Luckily for us, the priests, with extraordinary faithfulness continued to recite these songs from memory, as part of the ritual of worship, even though as centuries passed, they did not understand them, and this is how Zarathushtra's own words have been preserved down to our time. It is only over the past 100 or so years that philologists have had some success in decoding this ancient language. Today, there is substantial agreement on perhaps 80% of the linguistics, but many differences still remain both in translation and interpretation.

I hope you won't let these differences turn you off. To me, it has quite the opposite effect. It sharpens my interest in searching for the truth. We are lucky to live in an age when for the first time in more than two thousand years, we are beginning to understand Zarathushtra's own words. Somehow it seems fitting that we should have to use our minds to try to puzzle out the ideas of a prophet whose most basic teaching is the quest for truth with good thinking.

In short, no one can claim to have all the answers. Honesty requires that we recognize the incomplete state of our present knowledge. So what I give you today, is one perspective. It is the perspective of a student of the Gathas, and a practitioner.

The subject of love raises expectations of a talk that is romantic and inspiring. It would be easy for me to give you my conclusions in a glowing, heart-delighting way. But if I did that, you would never really know whether these delightful conclusions were my ideas, or Zarathushtra's. So I hope you will forgive me if I take a less romantic approach to this subject. I will approach it more like a detective story, showing you the evidence from the Gathas on which my conclusions are based. In that way, you can decide for yourself whether these conclusions are valid. The translation on which I primarily rely (although I like to compare it with the others that I have) is that of Professor Insler.<sup>[3]</sup> And all quotations from, and references to the Gathas in this paper are from his translation, though he may, or may not, agree with some of the inferences which I draw from his translation.

The concept of love appears in the Gathas the way patterns of sunlight appear in a garden – throughout, and in great variety, each lovely in its own way. In the Gathas, love is an ingredient in prayer, in how we worship, in making the right choices, in salvation, in the three cardinal divine characteristics, and in the relationship between God and man. I'd like to show you these patterns of sunlight in each of these areas in the garden of Zarathushtra's thought.

Prayer. Let's start with prayer. "Lovingly" is the word Zarathushtra chooses to describe how he prays. He says: "Thee. Do I lovingly entreat for the best for Frashaoshtra..." (Y28.8).

And he tells us that if a prayer has two ingredients, God will always answer. These two ingredients are good purpose and love. He says:

"... For I know that words deriving from **good purpose and from love** are not to be left wanting by you." (Y28.10).

Worship: As with prayer, love is also an ingredient in the wider concept of worship. To understand that, we need to understand Zarathushtra's idea of God, and how we worship Him.

To Zarathushtra, the essence of divinity is Wisdom. He calls God *Ahura Mazda*, which has variously been translated as "Living Wisdom"<sup>[4]</sup> or Lord of Life and Wisdom,<sup>[5]</sup> or Wise Lord.<sup>[6]</sup> And he intimates that this Divine Wisdom, to the extent that we can understand it, consists of seven characteristics or forces. In the later literature, some of these were collectively referred to as the *amesha spenta* – benevolent immortals. In the Gathas, the three cardinal divine forces are:

A benevolent spirit *spenta mainyu*<sup>[7]</sup>  
Good thinking, or a good mind Truth, what's right, *vohu mano*, and *asha*.

The next two are variants of the first three:

God's good rule *vohu xshathra*  
(Which in the Gathas is called The rule of truth and good thinking<sup>[8]</sup>)

And benevolent service or devotion to God, to all the living, *aramaiti*<sup>[9]</sup>  
and to these divine values

And the last two are the end results of achieving the first five:

Completeness *haurvatat*, and  
Immortality (or no-deathness) *ameretat*.

Sometimes in his songs, Zarathushtra refers to these divine characteristics as concepts. At other times, he personifies them, referring to them sometimes separately and sometimes collectively with God. When Zarathushtra refers to *Ahura Mazda* as "all of you", or when he refers to "those of your kind", he is referring to God and His immortal characteristics or forces, the *amesha spenta*.

You may have noticed that among the three cardinal forces are both mind and spirit. Unlike the conventional wisdom of today, where spirit and a rational mind are regarded as two opposing perspectives, Zarathushtra sees no conflict between mind and spirit. He teaches that spirituality is not threatened by an inquiring mind. It is strengthened by it. And in turn, it is a good spirit that turns raw intelligence into understanding. (Y43).

The three cardinal divine forces – a good spirit, a good mind, and truth/right – are all a part of wisdom. And how do we attain this state of wisdom? We attain it by worshipping God with his own divine forces. We worship God's truth by being truthful. We worship His good thinking with good thinking. We worship His benevolent and loving spirit by being benevolent and loving. There are a number of verses in which Zarathushtra describes this unique form of worship. For example, he says:

"... I shall always worship all of you, Wise Lord, with truth and the very best thinking and with their rule." (Y50.4).

"I. Shall serve all of you, Wise Lord, with good thinking ....." (Y28.2).

"I shall serve all of you. With truth and with the reverence (worthy) of a sincere person. You, moreover, with the skillfulness of good thinking." (Y50.8).

"Praising, I shall encounter you with such worship, Wise One, and with actions stemming from good thinking allied with truth..." (Y50.9).

This form of worship, the worship of God with His own divine values is expressed in the enigmatical Yasna 51.22, where Zarathushtra gives it an unexpected foundation – a foundation of love. He says:

"I know in whose worship  
there exists for me the best  
in accordance with truth.  
It is the Wise Lord  
As well as those who have existed and (still) exist  
[i.e. God's immortal values or forces]  
Them (all) shall I worship  
With their own names  
[i.e. truth with truth, good thinking with good thinking, etc.]  
**and I shall serve them with love.**" (Y51.22).

This is how Professor Insler translates and interprets this verse, although opinions differ as to both its translation and interpretation. Professor Humbach in his excellent commentary on this verse demonstrates at least seven possible interpretations. One of them sees a reflection of this verse, in a later Avestan text (not a part of the Gathas), that appears in Yasna 70, which says: "I will worship those who (are) the *Amesha Spentas* and I will approach them with love." (Y70.1).<sup>[10]</sup>

Tradition has it that the Gathas verse we have been discussing, Yasna 51 verse 22, served as the basis of the *Yenghe Haatam* prayer which most people believe says, in essence, that we revere all those men and women whom God knows to be good. Yet it is interesting that the earliest commentary on the *Yenghe Haatam*, which appears in the later Avestan text, Yasna 21, expresses the opinion that the *Yenghe Haatam* is addressed to the *amesha spenta*, the Bountiful Immortals, i.e. to God's divine forces.<sup>[11]</sup> Dr. Kersey Antia has expressed the opinion that perhaps Zarathushtra intended in Yasna 51.22 that we revere both God's divine forces (the *amesha spenta*) and those who have attained them. Thus reconciling both conflicting interpretations.<sup>[12]</sup> This insightful conclusion of Dr. Antia does indeed appear to be hinted at in the later Avestan Commentary on the *Yenghe Haatam* which is delivered in the form of questions and answers, and states in pertinent part:

“(Question) To whom is this Yasna addressed?

(Answer) To the Bountiful Immortals. The state of salvation; and with this answer, ‘the state of salvation’ he answered every saint who exists, every one who is coming into existence, and every one who shall exist in the future.....”(Yasna XXI, SBE Vol. 31, page 269.

Returning to the Gathas, in the verses we have been discussing, we see that Zarathushtra's formula for worship includes worshipping God with His own divine values, and, every bit as important, serving them with love:

“...Them (all) shall I worship  
With their own names  
[i.e. truth with truth, good thinking with good thinking etc.]  
**and I shall serve them with love.**” (Y51.22).

In short, it is not enough to simply speak the truth. We worship truth with truth, and serve it with love. It is not enough to simply be intelligent. We worship God's good mind with good thinking and serve it with love. In the same way, we worship God's benevolent spirit by being benevolent and serving it with love – a reflection of the “**good purpose and love**” which are noted as the essential ingredients of prayer in Yasna 28.10.

Salvation: So far, we have looked at the concept of love in both prayer and worship. Let us move on to the role it plays in salvation. In 1993, at the WZO's Gatha Colloquium, in London, I attempted to demonstrate, with evidence from the Gathas, that Zarathushtra's idea of salvation is a state of being which is achieved when we have attained completely, God's divine values. I will not re-state all that evidence here. I will simply start with that premise, and take it a step further. If you look at the verses in which Zarathushtra mentions salvation, you will see that in many of them he links salvation to “beneficence” and love.

Before we look at these verses, let us consider what the word “beneficence” means. The dictionary defines “beneficence” as: “..... active goodness, kindness, charity; bounty springing from purity and goodness.”<sup>[13]</sup>

The Gathas word which Insler translates as “beneficent” or “blessed”, Humbach translates as “generous” and “munificent”.<sup>[14]</sup> Both perspectives add to an understanding of the idea Zarathushtra is trying to express. If you think about the ideas behind these labels, you will see that you cannot be good, you cannot be kind and generous, you cannot have charity in your heart for others, without being loving. So the idea of “beneficence” includes within it the notion of love. There is an old-fashioned word, which captures very well the idea of “beneficence”. It is “loving kindness.”

There is universal agreement that in Zarathushtra's view, we cannot achieve salvation without first making the right choices. So it is significant that the word he chooses to describe those who make the right choices is “beneficent.”

“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).

In some verses, Zarathushtra links “beneficence” and “love” directly to the attainment of salvation. For example, he says:

“Therefore, let us reverently give an offering to Thee, Lord, and to truth, all of us creatures under Thy rule whom one has nourished with good thinking. Indeed, **let salvation be granted to the beneficent man** by all those among your kind [i.e. the *amesha spenta*], Wise One!” (Y34.3).

Consider also Yasna 31 verses 21 and 22 where Zarathushtra says:

“*The Wise Lord, shall give the permanence of good thinking's alliance to him, the one who is **His ally in spirit and actions.***” (Y31.21).

“These things are clear to **the beneficent man** who accepts them along with the effort in harmony with good thinking. He serves truth, during his rule, with good word and good action. **Such a person shall be Thy most welcome guest, Wise Lord.**” (Y31.22).

In Yasna 44.2 “loving” is the way Zarathushtra describes the person who is a world healer and God’s ally in spirit, and he asks God if such a person will be saved.

“...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).

In these verses, there is an exquisite interplay between salvation, beneficence, love and God’s cardinal attributes, truth, good thinking and good spirit. In these verses, the person who is loving (Y44.2) and beneficent (Y31.22) is God’s ally in spirit (Y31.21-22, Y44.2). He serves truth with good word and good action (Y31.22) and is virtuous through truth (Y44.2). He makes the effort in harmony with good thinking (Y31.22), is nourished by good thinking (Y34.3), and receives the permanence of good thinking’s alliance (Y31.21). This loving man watches over the heritage for all (Y44.2), is a world healer (Y44.2), and achieves salvation or paradise (Y34.3, Y44.2) which is the attainment of God’s divine attributes. (Y51.20).

Once you become very familiar with the Gathas, you will find that the interplay in the way Zarathushtra expresses his ideas is quite remarkable. On the one hand, he does it with the precise beauty of the point-counter-point technique that we find in certain kinds of music. And at the same time, he does it with the abstract loveliness of an impressionist painting. These two techniques, point-counter-point, and abstract impressionism, are completely different, yet, like the ideas in his vision, Zarathushtra somehow harmonizes them into a meaningful whole.

When we were youngsters, grinding away at algebra, one of the things we learned early on was that:

If  $a = b$ , and

If  $a = c$

Then there must be some equivalence between  $b$  and  $c$ .

Applying that principle to the ideas we have been discussing, you well may wonder:

If salvation is the attainment of God’s divine forces, the *amesha spenta*, and

If salvation is obtained by being loving or beneficent,

wouldn’t there have to be some equivalence between love/beneficence and the *amesha spenta*? The question often has been asked: Where in the *amesha spenta* does the concept of “love” exist? Professor Insler sees it, among other things, in God’s benevolent spirit – *spenta mainyu*.<sup>[15]</sup> Professor Kaikhosrov Irani’s father, the late Dinshaw Irani, a respected lawyer and Gathas scholar, sees it in *spenta aramaiti*. Taraporewala sees it in *vohu mano* – a good mind.<sup>[16]</sup> At the risk of sounding wishy-washy, I think there is evidence in the Gathas which warrants the conclusion that the concept of goodness, of lovingkindness, of beneficence, exists in all of the *amesha spenta*. For our purposes today, let’s take a look at the three cardinal forces – a good spirit, a good mind, and truth/what’s right.

The concept of love certainly exists in *spenta mainyu* – the spirit of goodness, of lovingkindness, which finds its highest expression in the benevolent and loving spirit of God. For example, Zarathushtra says:

“Now, I shall speak of the Greatest One of all, praising with truth **Him who is beneficent through His virtuous spirit [spenta mainyu] to those who exist....**” (Y45.6).

We already know that beneficence means active goodness, kindness, charity, bounty springing from purity and goodness. So this verse tells us that God expresses His goodness, his lovingkindness, his generosity, his beneficence, through His virtuous spirit [*spenta mainyu*]. This conclusion is corroborated by the fact<sup>[17]</sup> that Zarathushtra frequently uses the words *spenta*- (and its related forms) and *vohu*- (and its related forms) interchangeably, when describing *spenta mainyu*. For example, in the following two verses, Zarathushtra substitutes a form of *vohu*, good, in place of *spenta* in describing *spenta mainyu*. He speaks of:

“... The (correct) thinking stemming from **good spirit...**” (Y34.2).

“... The word and deed stemming from **good spirit...**” (Y45.8).

So we see that the concept of *spenta mainyu* contains within it, beneficence, goodness.

Let’s look at *asha*. *Asha* is translated as “truth” by Humbach, Ichaporia, and Insler, and as “righteousness” by Jafarey, Mills, Moulton, T. R. Sethna, and Taraporewala.<sup>[18]</sup> But we see added dimensions to the meaning of *asha* when we consider how Zarathushtra uses the word. Confining ourselves to the notion of love, allow me to demonstrate.

We already have seen the evidence which warrants the conclusion that God’s good spirit, *spenta mainyu* is beneficent – i.e. generous, charitable, good, full of lovingkindness. Now, keeping that in mind, take a look at the evidence of the next two verses.

In the first verse, Zarathushtra describes this **beneficent spirit** as:  
 “... The spirit **virtuous [spenta] through truth [asha]**. ....”(Y28.1).

In the second, he describes the loving man in exactly the same words:  
 “... **The loving man** .... For such a person, **virtuous [spenta] through truth, [asha]**, watching over the heritage for all, is a world-healer and **Thy ally in spirit, Wise One.**” (Y44.2).

Notice the inter-play in these two verses between the spirit, virtuous through truth, and the loving man, virtuous through truth, who is God’s ally in spirit. But even more significant is this: if the virtue of the beneficent spirit, and the loving man, both derive from *asha*, would it be reasonable to conclude that the concept of *asha* includes within it something of goodness, of beneficence, of lovingkindness? When this idea first suggested itself, I thought perhaps I might be jumping to an unwarranted conclusion. But then I came across this verse which expresses the idea directly. In this verse, Zarathushtra describes God as:  
 “... the Lord, **beneficent through truth [asha]**, virtuous and knowing.....” (Y48.3).

If beneficence comes through *asha* then clearly, the concept of *asha* must include within it something of beneficence, of goodness, of lovingkindness. This conclusion is even more interesting when you compare:

“..... the Lord, **beneficent through truth [asha]**, virtuous and knowing.....” (Y48.3),

with

“.....Him who is **beneficent through His virtuous spirit [spenta mainyu]**.....” (Y45.6).

Clearly, in Zarathushtra’s view there is some equivalence between beneficence, goodness, *asha*, and *spenta mainyu*.

This equivalence is also suggested, though in a slightly different way, in Yasna 30 verses 3 and 5, where Zarathushtra uses the word “good” and the word “truth” [*asha*] interchangeably.<sup>[19]</sup>

Verse 3: “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).

Verse 5: “Of these two spirits, the deceitful one chose to bring to realization the worst things. (But) **the very virtuous spirit**, who is clothed in the hardest stones, **chose the truth [asha]**, and (so shall those) who shall satisfy the Wise Lord continuously with **true** actions.”(Y30.5).

In verse 3, what is the object of the right choice? It is the “good”. In verse 5, what is the object of the right choice? It is “truth”. In verse 3 those who make the correct choice are described as “beneficent.” In verse 5 the correct choice is made by the most virtuous spirit, who we know from other parts of the Gathas, is beneficent. Finally, in an unusual turn of the kaleidoscope, in verse 3, “the good” which is the object of the choice is the spirit of good. In verse 5, it is this good spirit which brings *asha* to life by choosing it. Once again, in Zarathushtra’s view, there appears to be some equivalence between beneficence, goodness, *asha* and *spenta mainyu*.

Before we move on, I’d like to show you, in schematic form, the inter-play between these concepts in the verses we have just gone through.

			[Spenta]
45.6	[God is]	beneficent through	virtuous spirit
48.3	[God is]	beneficent through	truth
34.2	good	is interchangeable (with spenta)	spirit
45.8		in describing	
30.4, 5	good	interchanged with	truth
28.1	God’s spirit is virtuous through	through	truth
44.2	the loving man is virtuous [spenta]	through	truth
44.2	a man who is loving	is	God’s ally in spirit

A small glimpse of the many-splendored patterns of sunlight in the garden of Zarathushtra's thought.

You well might ask: Why did Zarathushtra play games like this? Why didn't he just come right out and say what he meant? Quite apart from the sheer beauty of these techniques, and the intellectual challenge and excitement of discovery which make them such effective teaching techniques, I can think of several reasons why, but let me give you just three.

First, our remote ancestors, the ancient Iranians, delighted in mental games like chess, riddles, and brain-teasers, as the Shah Nameh so frequently demonstrates. So it is not surprising to find this tradition reflected in the word games, puzzles and brain-teasers of an even more remote set of poems – the Gathas.

Second, it may have been that the vocabulary available to Zarathushtra was too limited to express the breadth of his ideas. And by using these techniques of interchangeability, parallel references and many others, he was able to expand the meanings of the words available to him.

Third, Zarathushtra's thinking is always multi-dimensional, and his poetic techniques often tie in to his underlying philosophy. I am inclined to think that the techniques we have just seen, are Zarathushtra's way of demonstrating that there is a unity of identity in these immortal forces, that they are, in fact, different aspects of the same Whole.

Let us move on to consider whether the notion of love exists in the third cardinal immortal – *vohu mano*. As with *spenta mainyu*, and *asha*, goodness is also an integral part of *vohu mano*. The term *vohu mano* itself makes it clear that it is not just intelligence that is valued here, but rather intelligence committed to goodness.

The best thinking, (which perhaps is another way of describing Wisdom), is Zarathushtra's idea of paradise<sup>[20]</sup> - what he sometimes metaphorically calls the House of Good Thinking.<sup>[21]</sup> Paradise is another way of describing salvation. And we already have seen that beneficence and love are a part of what it takes to attain salvation.

Good thinking is how we access God and His divine forces (Y29). For example, Zarathushtra says:

**“..... through the very best thinking I shall seek for myself their [referring to God and His divine characteristics] rule of strength, .....” (Y31.4).**

If *asha* and *spenta mainyu* contain within them the notion of beneficence, of lovingkindness, then the comprehension of these concepts – which is good thinking – would, by definition, have to include the comprehension of beneficence and love. So beneficence and love would, of necessity, be a part of good thinking.

Similarly, Zarathushtra intimates in Yasna 43 that good thinking or understanding, comes from good spirit. And that idea is expressly stated in Yasna 34 verse 2 where Zarathushtra speaks of:

**“..... the (correct) thinking stemming from good spirit.....” (Y34.2).**

It stands to reason that if good thinking comes from a beneficent or loving spirit, it must contain within it something of beneficence and love.

So we see that all of the three cardinal *amesha spenta* contain within them something of goodness, of beneficence, of lovingkindness.<sup>[22]</sup> And we begin to appreciate the foundation of love on which Zarathushtra bases the worship of God with His own divine forces.

**“..... Them (all) shall I worship  
with their own names  
[i.e. truth with truth, good thinking with good thinking etc.]  
and I shall serve them with love.” (Y51.22).**

God's Relationship with Man. Let us move on to considering the notion of love in the relationship between man and God. There are many references in the Gathas to God's love for man. It is expressed in terms of solicitude, mercy or compassion, support, protection and friendship. For example, Zarathushtra describes God as:

**“..... Him, the One who offers solicitude.....” (Y45.7).**

In another verse, he speaks of: “..... the glories of Him who offers solicitude (to us), the Wise Lord.....” (Y46.17).

In the *Vohu Xshathra* Gatha, Zarathushtra shows us that God’s good rule is, among other things, merciful and compassionate. He says:

**“Where shall there be protection instead of injury? Where shall mercy take place? Where truth which attains glory? Where virtuous [aramaiti]? Where the very best thinking? Where, Wise One, through Thy rule?” (Y51.4).**

God’s love for man is expressed in the fact that He brings us knowledge of His divine forces as a means of salvation, a way out of the misery created by violence, oppression, deceit, and the other products of wrongful choices. In Yasna 30 verses 6 and 7, after referring to the wrongful choices that have afflicted the world and mankind, Zarathushtra says:

**“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). He shall be here for the protection of these (faithful).....” (Y30.7).**

There are numerous verses in the Gathas in which God’s love is expressed in terms of protection, support and help. But what is truly interesting, is how he supports, protects and helps. He does it with His divine forces – truth, and good thinking. For example:

**“What help by truth hast Thou for Zarathushtra who calls? What help by good thinking has Thou for me.....”(49.12).**

**“Yes, throughout my lifetime I have been condemned as the greatest defiler, I who try to satisfy the poorly protected (creatures) with truth, Wise One. .... come to me and give support to me. Though good thinking find a means of destruction of this.” (Y49.1).<sup>[23]</sup>**

And the beautiful Yasna 34 verse 7.

**“Wise One, where are those sincere ones who, through their possession of good thinking, make even immoral decrees and painful legacies disappear? I know none other than you. Therefore protect us in accord with truth.” (34.7).**

In other words, the protection and help which God offers is not the comforting certainty of a pacifier. He does not wrap us in a germ-free bubble – a harm-free environment, safe and protected. His love in this respect is a kind of tough love. He gives us the weapons, the tools, to help ourselves, and each other. If the enemy is deceit, He gives us truth. If the enemy is ignorance, He gives us good thinking. If the enemy is evil, He shows us an alternative – benevolence. In the later literature, God’s divine forces the *amesha spenta* were called angels. We are used to thinking of angels as fluffy messengers with wings. But Zarathushtra shows us angels in a new light. He tells us that God’s messengers, God’s angels, are His thoughts.<sup>[24]</sup> His angels are His divine forces. And perhaps those who bring these forces to life with their thoughts, words and actions. So, in addition to His solicitude and generosity, this is how He helps. This is how He protects.

Finally, the concept of love between God and man appears in the way Zarathushtra characterizes the relationship. Unlike the conventional wisdom on the subject, it is interesting that no place in the Gathas is the relationship between God and man described as that of a Father to a child.<sup>[25]</sup> God is described as the Father of truth (Y44.3, Y47.2), the Father of good thinking (Y31.8, Y45.4), the Father of good spirit (Y47.3), and the Father of *aramaiti* (Y45.4), but never as the Father of man. In the same way, no place in the Gathas is the relationship between God and man described as that of a Master to a servant. God is described as the master of good thinking (Y30.1), and as the master of completeness (*haurvatat*) (Y34.1), but never as the Master of man.<sup>[26]</sup> In other words, the relationship between man and God is neither patriarchal, nor authoritarian. Rather, Zarathushtra describes this relationship as that of a friend to a friend, or a beloved to a beloved. Here are two examples:

**“This I ask Thee. Tell me truly, Lord. Someone like Thee, Wise One, should declare to me, his friend, how reverence for your kind is to be from the reverent person, and how friendly associations with truth are to be established by us, in order that it shall come to us together with good thinking.” (Y44.1).**

**“..... I lament to Thee. Take notice of it, Lord, offering the support which a friend should grant to a friend. ....” (Y46.2).**

Humbach, Insler, Jafarey and Sethna translate the applicable Gathas word as “friend”. Taraporewala translates it as “beloved”. Bode and Nanavutty translate it sometimes as “friend” and sometimes as “beloved.”

Once again, if you think about the idea behind the label “friend” you will see that it includes within it the concept of love. As William Bennett says in his Book of Virtues:

**“Friendship is a deep thing. It is, indeed, a form of love. And while it may be, as C. S. Lewis said, the least biological form of love, it is also one of the most important.” p.269.**

“Friendship .....speaks the language of the heart.” p.284.

We have considered the notion of love in the relationship between God and man. What of the notion of love in our relationships with each other, and with other living things? This is a vast subject. I couldn't do it justice in the time that I have, so I will simply say that on this subject, as in so many others, Zarathushtra's ideas are unique and beautiful. For the moment, I'll leave it at that.

To summarize the analysis we have gone through, the concept of love in Zarathushtra's message, is expressed variously through the words love, solicitude, mercy, beneficence, goodness and friendship. And we have seen, through Zarathushtra's own words, that he considers love in its various manifestations to be an essential ingredient in prayer, in how we worship, in making the right choices, in salvation, in the three cardinal divine characteristics, and in the relationship between God and man.

It is small wonder then, that in the sixth book of the Dinkard, written more than 1,000 years after Zarathushtra, but which is said to be a collection of the sayings of ancient Zoroastrian sages, it is written, not once, but in two separate places that the law of Ohrmazd is love of mankind.<sup>[27]</sup>

These words are also found in the Zoroastrian Wedding Ceremony. In a part of this ceremony, the priest gives the bride and groom advice on how to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of the religion.<sup>[28]</sup> Among other things, the priest says (as translated by Shahin Bekhradnia):

“.....worship God by doing charitable works. ....”

“..... The law of the Wise Lord, the Omnipotent, ..... is the law of loving mankind. So do not harm people neither in thought nor word nor deed. When a stranger arrives, give him food and shelter. Protect good people from hunger and thirst, from cold and heat. Be kindly to those under you or younger than you. Respect your elders, ..... so that the Wise Lord will delight in you.”

In conclusion, lovingkindness, in its various manifestations, permeates each aspect of Zarathushtra's teaching, the way sunlight fills a garden, giving life and beauty to whatever it touches, making everything worthwhile. And so it is when we bring that teaching to life with our thoughts, words and actions. For as Zarathushtra reminds us, it is the beneficent person who makes the right choices (Y30.3). It is the loving person who is a world healer, and God's ally in spirit (Y44.2).

- 
1. Xanthus the Lydian placed Zarathushtra's date as 6,000 years before the Achaemenian emperor Xerxes, which would have placed him at about 6,500 BC. Moulton, Early Zoroastrianism, The Hibbert Lectures delivered at Oxford, May 1912, (AMS reprint), (“Moulton” hereinafter) page 77. Moulton describes Xanthus as a contemporary of Herodotus (id page 77); Herodotus was born at or about 484 BC, according to Francis Godolphin's Introduction (p xx) to Rawlinson's translation of Herodotus, The Persian Wars, (Random House's The Modern Library: New York, 1942).
  2. See Humbach, The Gathas of Zarathushtra, Volume 1, pages 24 et seq for a detailed discussion of various historical views, and the views of Professor Ilya Gershevitch in Approaches to Zoroaster's Gathas, Iran XXXIII, 1995, published by the British Institute of Persian Studies
  3. Insler, The Gathas of Zarathushtra, Acta Iranica, (E. J. Brill, 1975). In this essay, the use of round brackets ( ) in a quotation indicates parentheses appearing in the original quotation (Insler translation). The use of square brackets [ ] in a quotation indicates an insertion by me. Such insertions are provided by way of explanation. A string of dots ..... in a quotation indicates a deletion by me. Often a verse contains many strands of thought. Deleting from a quotation strands of thought other than the one under discussion, enables me to provide a better focus on the strand of thought under discussion.
  4. Windfuhr, Vohu Manah: A Key to the Zoroastrian World Formula, (Michigan Oriental Studies in Honor of George Cameron), page 270.
  5. Dastur N. D. Minochehr Homji, Lecture.
  6. Insler, Moulton.
  7. There is some difference of opinion regarding whether or not *spenta mainyu* is one of the divine attributes. An analysis of the later literature is beyond the scope of this paper. But based on the evidence of the Gathas alone, the conclusion is compelling that to Zarathushtra, *spenta mainyu* enjoys the same status as the other divine values. Here are some reasons why:

First, Zarathushtra specifically describes a virtuous spirit (*spenta mainyu*) as an attribute of *Ahura Mazda* (Y43.16, Y33.12, Y43.2, 6, Y44.7, Y45.6, Y47.2, Y51.7), just as he does with regard to other *amesha spenta*.

Second, *spenta mainyu* is described, together with *Ahura Mazda*, and the other *amesha spenta*, as the objects of worship, praise or esteem. Y28.1, Y47.2.

Finally, in Yasna 29, *spenta mainyu* is referred to, along with *asha* and *vohu mano* as one of the three cardinal attributes of God. Yasna 29 does not refer directly to *spenta mainyu* by name, rather, it refers to “the fashioner of the cow [cow is a metaphor for the good vision]”. And in Y51.7, the “fashioner of the cow [good vision]” is identified as the benevolent spirit (*spenta mainyu*) of the Wise Lord.

This evidence is not consistent with the argument that *spenta mainyu* is something apart from, and different from, *Ahura Mazda* and His divine attributes. This argument sometimes is made to refute the idea that Zarathushtra believed in two uncreated and equal gods, one good and the other evil. I agree wholeheartedly that such dualism does not exist in the Gathas. This can be proved clearly and logically from the evidence of the Gathas themselves. I disagree, with great respect, that the way to disprove such dualism is to demote *spenta mainyu* to the status of something other than an attribute of *Ahura Mazda*. The evidence of the Gathas is to the contrary.

8. “But to this world He came with the **rule [xshathra] of good thinking and of truth, .....**”(Y30.7).

“Lord, grant .....

strength and the **rule [xshathra] of truth and good thinking.....**”(29.10)

“.....One chooses **that rule of good thinking allied with truth** in order to serve.....”(Y51.18).

9. Bode & Nanavutty translate *aramaiti* as devotion,

Haug, as the personification of prayers, Essays on the Language, Writing & Religion of the Parsis, page 150, note 2, (Philo Press reprint),

Humbach, as right-mindedness (as do the Pahlavi writers),

Mills as piety,

Inslar as piety or (more recently) respect,

Dinshaw Irani as love,

Jafarey as serenity,

Moulton as piety or devotion,

Windfuhr as humility,

For the evidence on which I base my conclusion that *aramaiti* means loving service or devotion, see An Introduction to the Gathas, No 4.

10. Humbach, The Gathas of Zarathushtra, Part II, page 236, quoting from Yasna 70.1.

11. See Sacred Books of the East, Volume 31, page 269 (Motilal Benarsidas reprint) (hereinafter referred to as “SBE”).

12. See Antia, God’s Good Rule, appearing in An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra, No. 5. (Feb. 1990), pp 3-4).

13. Webster’s International Dictionary, Second Edition (1956).

14. Y31.16, Y31.22, Y34.3, Y34.13, Y44.9, Y50.9, Y53.3.

15. Inslar, Human Behavior and Good Thinking, appearing in An Introduction to the Gathas, No. 1, pp 1 et seq.

16. According to Taraporewala, “If we trace the word *vohu* to its origin, we find it derived from an ancient root, *vah* – (Skt. *Vas-*) to love. And so the one thing essential for “Good Mind” is *all embracing LOVE*.” (Emphasis in the original). I. J. S. Taraporewala, The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra, page (9), (Hukhta Foundation 1993 reprint). Not being a linguist, I do not comment on the accuracy of this opinion, one way or the other, but simply offer it for the reader’s information.

17. As Inslar already has detailed, Inslar The Gathas of Zarathushtra,(Brill, 1975) page 117.

18. Although these two views may seem inconsistent, in fact they are not. My conclusion is based on the following: Zarathushtra sees reality in terms of the spiritual and the material, or as he puts it – the worlds of mind and matter, both of which form part of one inseparable whole (at least in this existence). And each of God’s divine attributes manifests itself in both realities. Professor Inslar has stated that the word *asha*, whose older form was *arta*, derives from a

root *ar* which means “to fit”. (See [An Introduction to the Gathas](#), No. 2, page 12). In the material world, what “fits” is what is accurate, correct – truth. In the moral or spiritual world, what “fits” is what is correct, what’s right, what’s true. Thus, both truth and what’s right are a part of what “fits”, *asha* -- an illustration of how difficult it sometimes is to translate a given thought accurately from one language to another. Hayakawa once asked: “Do the words we utter arise as a result of the thoughts we have, or are the thoughts we have determined by the linguistic systems we happen to have been taught?” Hayakawa, [Language in Thought and Action](#), page 6, (Harcourt Brace, 1940).

19. Just as Zarathushtra uses “good” interchangeably with *spenta* to describe *spenta mainyu*, as shown in Y 34.2, and Y45.8, discussed above.

20. “..... and how, at the end, the worst existence shall be for the deceitful, but the best thinking for the truthful person.” (Y30.4).

21. “..... the House of Good Thinking .....” (32.15).

22. Good rule [*vohu xshathra*] is the rule of truth and good thinking, and benevolent service or devotion [*spenta aramaiti*] is service or devotion to God, man, and God’s divine forces. So those two divine forces are compounds of the three cardinal divine forces – truth, good thinking and good spirit. If the concept of beneficence and love is included within the three cardinal forces, it would have to be a part of their compounds. Similarly, the last two divine forces, completeness (*haurvatat*) and immortality (*amereetat*) are the end results of achieving the other divine forces. If the other divine forces contain within them something of love and beneficence, then of necessity the achievement of them would have to include these concepts as well.

23. See also “.....have ye the power, Wise One, ..... **to protect your needy dependent** – as I indeed am – **with truth and good thinking?.....**”(Y34.5).

24. In Yasna 50.6, Zarathushtra recognizes that when God communicates with us or instructs us, He does it with good thinking:

“.....May the Creator **instruct through good thinking** (the course) of my direction, in order to be the charioteer of my will and my tongue.” (Y50.6).

25. There is a difference of opinion regarding the translation of Yasna 45.11. In that verse, the word “father” appears. According to the translations of Azergoshasb, Insler, Jafarey, Mills, Moulton, Taraporewala, (and possibly Humbach, although his position is not 100% clear to me) the term “father” in this verse refers to the good man who opposes evil, and who, through his virtuous conception (*spenta daena*) is “an ally, a brother, or a father” of the savior, *Ahura Mazda*, (i.e. such a person is of the very nature of the Wise Lord). According to the translations of Bode & Nanavutty, Haug, and T. R. Sethna, however, the word “father” in this verse refers to *Ahura Mazda*.

26. In Y48.9 Zarathushtra asks *Ahura Mazda* if He has “mastery through truth over anyone whose threat is inimical to me” but this is different from God having a master-servant relationship with his followers.

27. “114...The law of Ohrmazd is love of man;”

“E45h.....The law of Ohrmaz is love of people.”

28. [Wisdom of the Sassanian Sages](#), translated by Shaul Shaked, pages 47, and 215 respectively (Westview Press, Boulder Colorado, 1979).

Unfortunately, by the time the Wedding Ceremony now in use was written, Zarathushtra’s own beautiful words of advice to brides and grooms on the occasion of his daughter’s wedding had long since become unknown to our priests. In Yasna 53.5 Zarathushtra tells his daughter and the other brides and grooms who were getting married:

“...Let each of you try to win the other with truth [*asha*] for this shall be of good gain for each.” Insler translation (Y53.5).

or:

“...Let each of you try to win the other with truth [*asha*, truth, goodness, love] and you will both be winners.” McIntyre paraphrase of Insler translation (Y53.5).