

DG McIntyre - The Web of Immanence

Fans of the original Star Trek series may remember Ensign Chekov. When the series first started, for every technological marvel that came up in the course of any discussion, Chekov claimed a Russian inventor. It became a standing joke. I am beginning to feel that I have a Chekov-complex, because for just about every ill that plagues our world, I (an unabashed Gathicist) find real time answers in Zarathushtra's thought. Allow me to give you a bird's eye view, with a few examples.

Consider the great divide that currently exists between religion and science. In Zarathushtra's thought, the two are seamless, because to him, truth – asha – finds expression in the worlds of both mind and matter, as two sides of the same coin. And religion is an on-going quest for truth.

For those who are concerned about a society in which blaming everyone and everything else for their own actions, has become endemic, Zarathushtra offers an effective antidote – individual responsibility. We can have the best form of government in the world, we can enact the best laws, we can have the best organizations or corporate charters, but they don't mean a thing unless they are implemented from day to day, by individuals making the right choices. We can confer. We can advise. But when all is said and done, it is individual responsibility that saves us from the collective cop-out.

For those who worry about the ego-centric rat-race we sometimes get caught up in, Zarathushtra implies that “completeness” (haurvatat) is achieved at both an individual and a collective level. Perfecting ourselves is a necessary first step, but completeness is ultimately attained when everyone makes it. So at each step along the way, in order to make it, we must both give and receive help. It is the paradox of the individual and the community – individual responsibility, and mutual loving help; each concept flowing seamlessly into and out of the other; both essential to realizing the desired end.

It is sobering to think how many people in the world live under dictatorships, deprived of basic human rights. According to Zarathushtra, even the object of our worship is to be chosen in accord with asha (yatha ahu vairyo.....). Logically then, people should also have the right to choose their temporal rulers in the same way. If this idea of Zarathushtra were to be believed and held, worldwide, it would solve not only the problems of dictatorship, but also those of democracy.

In matters of governance, whether of nations, or corporations, or even community boards, we often are beset by abuses of power. The wealth of some nations gets siphoned off into the pockets of corrupt politicians, leaving little or nothing to spend on needed infra-structure, such as schools, roads, water and sewage systems, electricity, telecommunications, urban planning – the infrastructure needed to form the foundation of a thriving economy. In our own country, corporate management sometimes exploits workers, and workers' unions sometimes exploit management, each locked in a destructive struggle which reduces productivity, damages the business, and if not checked, eventually puts both management and labor out of work. Zarathushtra's solution is vohu xshathra – the rule of asha and vohu mano; the idea that power and authority are a trust to be exercised in a way that promotes asha; the profound realization that, to be effective, an essential ingredient of power is service (another interesting paradox);

[“...fame is to serve Thee and the truth, Wise One, under Thy rule.” Y32.6¹](#)

In a world where so many live below the poverty level, where we have seen the children of Bangladesh and Africa haunt our TV screens, where we have read of the victimization of women in Afghanistan, where on a lesser scale, poverty, adult illiteracy, drugs, crime, prejudice and environmental pollution afflict North American communities, Zarathushtra's “can-do”, action oriented teaching provides a powerful remedy. He teaches that it is not enough to think good thoughts, and speak good words. We have to use our minds and hearts to search for solutions, and take action, so that each of us becomes a co-worker with Ahura Mazda, a benefitter, (“saoshyant”), a savior of our world, solving one small problem at a time. He says:

[“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 with truth, Wise One....” Y48.12.¹](#)

I love the teaching of a prophet who tells us that on the path of spiritual evolution, a good first step is justice, being fair, but an even higher step is generosity (“...the beneficent have correctly chosen...” Y30.3¹). If we could commit to generosity in our dealings with each other, what a happy difference it would make, as generosity often (though not always) begets a corresponding generosity from the recipient.

On the other hand, Zarathushtra does not teach us to be willing victims. He encourages us to fight wrongful actions, but with truth and good thinking, not with anger or hatred or prejudice. If we fight hatred with hatred, or anger with anger, or prejudice with prejudice, we simply create more hatred, anger and prejudice. By showing us the path of the amesha spenta, Zarathushtra helps us to realize that a good end can never be accomplished through wrongful means.

In the final analysis, there is one teaching of Zarathushtra that links into all the others, and provides a solution for so many of the ills that plague us. It is the idea that the divine is immanent (present) in all things, and that therefore, we are all part of one whole. If, when making our choices, we could remember that teaching, just imagine what the consequences would be. How would we speak or act in a given situation, if we remembered that the divine is present in the object to which our words or actions are directed – whether it is a human being, or another life form, or our environment?

Can this teaching be carried to its logical conclusion? Probably not. Do I swat mosquitoes? Sure I do (with a mental apology). Would I eliminate a colony of ants that were lunching on my house? As humanely as possible, yes I would. Would I wage war against tyranny or terrorism? Yes I would (to the extent necessary and without indiscriminate killing). Should we kill to eat? We have to, if we want to survive. Even we vegetarians kill or cut plants. I do not know why our world is ordered in such a way that we have to kill to survive (although I have some ideas). However, we can use our minds/hearts to ensure that we don’t victimize. If we believe this teaching of Zarathushtra – that the divine is present in all things – we would understand that we are all inextricably linked in a web of existence – an interdependent ecosystem. We would understand that whether it is another human being, or another life form, or our environment, we cannot victimize it, we cannot trash it, without harming ourselves and God. If we could turn this thought into actions, its Light would flood our lives and make our world a brighter, happier place. “...Therefore may we be those who shall heal this world...” Y30.9.1

All quotations from the Gathas in this paper are from the Insler translation, as it appears in: Insler, The Gathas of Zarathushtra, (E.J. Brill, 1975).