

D G McIntyre - Leadership, The Common Man & Zarathushtra

The notion of leadership immediately brings to mind people with power and authority – Presidents, governors, high corporate executives, deans and department heads in academia. To Zarathushtra, such high profile positions are public trusts, to be used to advance what is right. As he puts it:

“.....fame is to serve Thee and the truth, Wise One, under Thy rule.” Y32.6.[¹]

Most people tend to see fame and power as an end in itself. Zarathushtra sees it simply as a tool with which to serve.

It is interesting that this idea of power as a public trust, was acknowledged by Darius the Great, a worshipper of Ahura Mazda and an eminently successful leader. In one of the inscriptions he left behind, describing his coming to power, this Achaemenian King states:

“Know that I did this by the favor of *Ahura Mazda*, who bore me assistance because I was not aggressive, because I was not a follower of deceit, because I was not a doer of wrong – neither I nor my family. I conducted myself as befits the truth. Neither to the weaker, nor to the powerful, did I do wrong..... Thou who shalt be king hereafter, do not be a friend to the follower of deceit nor to the doer of wrong.....” [2]

Is the notion of leadership concerned solely with people who enjoy, or aspire to, positions of power and authority? That is the conventional wisdom. But Zarathushtra was a most unconventional thinker. We know from the evidence of the Gathas that he was not a powerful person, as the world defines power. In Yasna 29 he alludes to himself as:

“.....powerless, (merely) the voice of a man without might.....” Y29.9.

In Yasna 46 he admits to Mazda:

“I know that (reason) because of which I am powerless, Wise One: by my condition of having few cattle, as well as (that) I am a person with few men.....” Y46.2.

From the perspective of wealth and power, he was, in fact, a prototype of what we would call today, the common man.

We know that the society in which Zarathushtra lived was corrupt and oppressive. He complains of greedy princes,[3] a thieving aristocracy,[4] and pleasure loving priests who, seduced by power and wealth,

“... chose the rule of tyrants and deceit rather than truth.” Y32.12.

These tyrants and priests used fear to promote the polytheistic worship of many gods, some of whom Zarathushtra describes as “fierce” and “hateful”[5].

Today, we are used to thinking in terms of a benevolent monotheism. But the situation was very different for Zarathushtra. He viewed this pantheon of fierce and hateful local gods and, at great cost to himself,[6] concluded that they were not worthy of worship. But to me, one of his most significant accomplishments was that he went a step further. He concluded that these local gods could not truly be divine, because only pure goodness could lay claim to divinity. Only a God whose attributes were reason, intelligence-committed-to-goodness (*vohu mano*), truth, benevolence, generosity, righteousness – only such a God was worthy of worship. If you think about it, this is an extraordinary proposition.

Zarathushtra, a common man with no power or influence except the power of his mind and spirit, dared to conclude that Ahura Mazda’s claim to divinity derives from His goodness. And Zarathushtra made a choice. He says to Ahura Mazda:

“..... this Zarathushtra chooses that very spirit of Thine which indeed is the most virtuous of all, Wise One.....” Y43.16.

“I choose (only) Thy teachings.....” Y46.3.

That was leadership. His ideas, which were ignored for so many years by his contemporaries, eventually lighted a fire that illuminated his world and, long after his death, influenced the major religions that followed. Impressive, for a man who considered himself “powerless”.

Today, we feel very smug about our monotheism. But in reality, like our remote ancestors, we too are polytheists. We worship such local gods as wealth, power, prestige, appearances, position. Well, by Zarathushtra’s standards, these local gods of ours are not worthy of worship. He invites us to exercise leadership. Just as he did, he invites us to reflect with clear minds, and make tough choices.[7]

Another unique idea of Zarathushtra which impacts on the notion of leadership is what I call the paradox of the Zarathushtrian partnership. Many religious systems describe God’s relationship to man in patriarchal or authoritarian terms. Not so with our unconventional prophet. According to a majority of the translations, the Gathas do not describe the relationship between Mazda and man as that of a Father to a child.[8] Mazda is described as the Father or truth,[9] as the Father of good thinking,[10] and the Father of aramaiti,[11] but never as the Father of man. In the same way, no place in the Gathas is the relationship between Mazda and man described as that of a Master to a servant. Mazda is described as the master of good thinking,[12] and as the master of completeness (haurvatat),[13] but never as the Master of man.[14] Instead, Zarathushtra describes our relationship to Mazda as that of a friend,[15] an ally, a partner. For example, referring to the loving man, he says:

“...For such a person, virtuous [spento] through truth [asha], watching over the heritage for all, is a world-healer and Thy ally in spirit, [mainyu], Wise One.” Y44.2.

We are all well pleased with Zarathushtra’s teaching that Mazda requires our help to bring about the victory of good over evil. But this is not a matter of stroking our egos. We need to understand the necessity of this partnership between Mazda and man as a component of a larger framework. The Gathas tell us that Mazda gives us the freedom to choose between good and evil.[16] In the Gathas, evil in existence, is described as the product of wrongful choices.[17] We create evil, we bring it to life, when we choose it with our thoughts, words and actions. And the converse also is true. When each one of us stops choosing it, when we stop bringing evil to life with our words and actions, it will cease to exist, in thought, word, and action.

So you and I – prototypes of the common man – with the words and actions we choose, either retard Mazda’s efforts, or be become His allies, His partners in this central conflict of existence.

Now admittedly, in this rather lop-sided partnership between infinite Wisdom personified, and man with his many limitations, Mazda is the Senior Partner. But the interesting thing is, that in exercising His leadership, as the Senior Partner, His effectiveness depends, at least in part, on the actions of His junior partners – us. Zarathushtra understood that you cannot have leadership in a vacuum. To be an effective leader, a leader needs committed co-workers. It is the good helper, the good server, that makes a good leader effective, that gives a leader his power: an interesting paradox – that service generates power.[18]

We see this idea throughout the Gathas in the subtle way in which Zarathushtra complements xshathra (rule) with aramaiti (devotion or service to that rule).[19] He tells us that devotion or service (aramaiti) gives life and substance to Mazda’s good rule, which Zarathushtra defines as the rule of truth and good thinking. For example, in Yasna 30 he says:

“But to this world He came with the rule [xshathra] of good thinking and of truth, and...[20] enduring [aramaiti] gave body and breath (to it)...” Y30.7.

In Yasna 44, he says:

“...Through its actions, [aramaiti] gives substance to the truth.....” Y44.6.

And in the famous Yasna 47 verse 1, he says:

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

Thus Zarathushtra teaches us that effective rule depends on service to the ideals that comprise good rule. Or, stated another way, such service is both the source of power and defines its quality. Not only power for Mazda, but also for

us.[21] The quality of our service, defines the quality of our lives, it defines the rule we create, the rule under which we live. In the Vohu Xshathra Gatha, Zarathushtra says:

“...Grant thou, [aramaiti] your rule [xshathra] of good thinking...” Y51.2.

When we serve ourselves, and Mazda, by bringing to life His values with our choices, with our thoughts, words and actions, when we serve with good thinking, with reason and understanding, when we serve with truth and what’s right, when we serve with compassion and benevolence, with such service we create the very rule which we serve – the rule of truth and good thinking. We create an environment where Mazda’s power becomes real. So in this partnership between man and Mazda, the Senior Partner and the junior partners are both creators, leaders, through service.

Zarathushtra also believes that service or devotion to Mazda’s values – truth, good thinking, benevolence – are not only spiritually significant, but they increase material well-being. They bring happiness and prosperity.[22]

Now this does not mean that if we are good, only good fortune will be our lot. That’s obviously not true. If it were, how would we grow? How would we mature spiritually. It is through our responses to the difficulties of life that we gain understanding and spiritual strength. However, an insidious belief exists among humankind – in Zarathushtra’s day and today as well – to the effect that to be successful, to be a powerhouse, to be a real leader, to be prosperous, one has to forget about being good. One has to bend the truth, be ruthless, manipulative, without regard to how our actions may affect others. Such actions may be a short term fix, but Zarathushtra suggests that they cannot truly bring happiness or lasting success,[23] and that conversely, using intelligence, knowledge, reason, and doing what’s right and good, (while at the same time not allowing the wrongdoers to outwit us) can indeed result in happiness, prosperity and success. At the risk of sounding naïve, if we look at the facts of human experience, we see many examples that vindicate his ideas. For example:

Long before the labor movement became established in the west, the House of Tata in India, came to the conclusion that a worker who was not debilitated by hunger, and who had access to good health care for himself and his family, would not only be happier, but would be more productive, more creative, and give a better quality of work than one who had to subsist on starvation wages, and whose mind was distracted by anxiety for the survival of his family and himself.

Henry Ford believed that to enjoy a high volume of sales, companies had to pay their workers enough that they could afford to buy the products that they made.

The flip side of this argument is demonstrated in the case of Eastern Airlines. At Eastern, management didn’t treat labor right, and labor didn’t treat management right. Both sides were greed driven. Each side used its power to harass the other. They certainly did not engage in good thinking. As a result, the company went bankrupt, both labor and management were destroyed and everyone involved experienced considerable loss, chaos, and unhappiness.

By contrast the late Professor Deming proposed a theory of business management that operates on the premise that if employees are treated fairly and humanely, and are allowed to use their creativity, their good thinking, to do a better job, not only will they be happier, but they will work better, and productivity and profits will increase – a win-win situation. Deming’s ideas were, for many years, ignored here, in his own country, but they have been credited with having a major role in rebuilding the Japanese economy after World War II, and they are now revitalizing our own. Many corporate giants who have re-tooled their business management policies along the lines advocated by Professor Deming have been impressed with the results. Well, the Deming theory of business management is a good illustration of the concept of good rule, vohu xshathra, and the kind of service, aramaiti, that brings it to life. And you don’t have to be a corporate giant to benefit from it. As our own Shahriar Shahriari of Transformations Unlimited, has stated: techniques now preached by motivational experts are straight out of the Gathas, a modern packaging of our own old teachings.”[24]

To summarize, like a true Zarathushtrian paradox, the concept of good leadership, or good rule, includes within it the requirement of benevolent service. And those who so serve, are, in a very real sense, the creators of good rule. Indeed, it is service that generates and defines power or rule.

“...Grant thou [aramaiti] your rule [xshathrem] of good thinking for the glory of the Mighty One.” Y51.2

“...Give thou, o [aramaiti] power to Vishtaspa and to me...”Y28.7.

One of the most interesting references to leadership in the Gathas appears in the concept of the saoshyant – the redeemer, the one who saves. In the later texts, the concept of saoshyant became greatly embroidered and exaggerated to the point of elevating saoshyant to the status of a miraculous, messiah-like leader of great power who will make everything all right.[25] It seems we really have not changed that much. Whether it’s Superman, or Yoder, or other omniscient aliens with miraculous powers from another star system, we too hunger for a leader with magical powers who will make everything turn out all right.

This view of the saoshyant you will not find in the Gathas. According to Zarathushtra, each individual is a potential saoshyant.[26] There is no one savior who will come to fix things for us. We have to fix things for ourselves, with Mazda’s help, and with the help of each other. It is you and I who bear the responsibility for saving our world from the misery and destruction caused by wrong choices. Admittedly, few of us will ever be in a position to do something that will save the entire world in one fell swoop. But all of us have the ability to improve the little patch of the world in which we find ourselves.

Zarathushtra uses the word saoshyant in various forms, several times in the Gathas. In one of these instances, the reference, according to the Insler translation, appears to be to Ahura Mazda.[27] In two other instances, the reference appears to be to Zarathushtra.[28] The remaining references refer generically to man. For example, in one generic reference to man, Zarathushtra speaks of the road of good thinking as being

“...the conceptions of those who shall save [saoshyantam]...” Y34.13.

In another generic reference to man, he says:

“...The intentions of those who shall save [saoshyantam] are in accord with Thy mature teachings!....” Y46.3.

But what is it about these human “saviors” that makes them so special? What is it that makes them “saoshyant”? We find the answer to that in Yasna 48, in yet another generic reference to man as saoshyant. In this Yasna, Zarathushtra first expresses his concern about some of the problems that were troubling him. He says:

“Let fury be stopped. Cut away cruelty, ye who wish to attract the attention of good thinking, along with (that of) truth...” Y48.7.

He asks:

“When, Wise One, shall men desist from murdering? When shall they fear the folly of that intoxicating drink, through the effects of which the Karpans [a type of priest] as well as the evil rulers of the lands torture our (good) intentions in an evil way?” Y48.10.

He asks:

“...which men shall stop the cruelty (caused by) the violent deceitful persons? To which man shall come the understanding stemming from good thinking?” Y48.11.

And he concludes:

“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. These indeed have been fated to be the expellers of fury.” Y48.12.

So there you have it. To Zarathushtra, the *saoshyant* are those who move beyond thoughts and words, to actions in harmony with good thinking and truth – a thousand and one good actions – in the home, in the workplace, in academia, in the professions, in the media, in politics, in the marketplace, in all aspects of the theatre of life. Some of these actions will undoubtedly go unnoticed, some well may be applauded. It makes no difference. All of them, in one way or another, create an influence, and, act by act, will contribute to bringing about the salvation from misery and unhappiness that we all hunger for.

Like *Ahura Mazda* (the divine savior (*saoshyant*) referred to in Yasna 45.11), the human savior (*saoshyant*) is the person who promotes those values with which Zarathushtra defines divinity – the *amesha spenta* – the attributes that make for divinity.[29]

So let us not look for a magical leader, a savior, a *saoshyant*, who will give us all the answers and make everything turn out all right. Let us rather use the magical, divine, gift of good thinking, of reason, of understanding (*vohu mano*) and translate it into words and actions to bring about change. In Zarathushtra's view, the ultimate leader is the common man who accepts the difficult challenge of a partnership with Mazda, and who, with a thousand and one acts of loving service, brings the divine to life in our world, and, in so serving, becomes a leader. A *saoshyant*. A friend and ally of Mazda.

[1] See also the words ascribed in the Gathas to Jamaspa, the vizier of King Vishtaspa:

“Glorious Jamaspa Haugva (has displayed) this understanding of His power: “One chooses that rule of good thinking allied with truth in order to serve.....” Y51.18

All quotations from the Gathas in this paper are from the translation of Professor Insler in **The Gathas of Zarathushtra**, (Brill 1975), unless otherwise indicated, although Professor Insler may or may not agree with the inferences I draw from his translation. Round brackets () appearing in a quotation are in the original and indicate an insertion by Professor Insler, indicating his understanding. Square brackets [] indicate an insertion by me. Such insertions by me are provided by way of explanation. A string of dots in a quotation indicates a deletion from the original. Often a verse contains many strands of thought. Deleting from a quotation those strands of thought that are not relevant to the discussion at hand enables us to focus on the strand of thought under discussion.

[2] Quoted from Insler, The Love of Truth in Ancient Iran, *An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra*, No. 7, page 9.

[3] “Even the Kavis [princes] have continually fixed their intentions on capturing and plundering the riches of this world, since they have begun to aid the deceitful one.....” Y32.14.

[4] “Those deceitful ones who appear in grandeur as lords and ladies, even they have ruined this life by stealing the property of the (true) inheritor...” Y32.11.

[5] “**But ye gods** – as well as the one who worships you – all of you are the offspring stemming from evil thinking, deceit and disrespect. **Hateful too are your actions**, by reason of which ye have become renowned in this seventh part of the earth.” Y32.3

[Referring to Ahura Mazda and His Divine attributes]. “..... ye are above all others, be they fierce gods or mortals.” Y34.5.

[Referring to the local gods and / or their followers] “..... Since they chose the worst thought, they then rushed into fury, with which they have afflicted the world and mankind.” Y30.6.

[6] “To what land to flee? Where shall I go to flee? They exclude (me) from my family and from my clan...” Y46.1

“Yes, throughout my lifetime I have been condemned as the greatest defiler, I who try to satisfy the poorly protected (creatures) with truth...” Y49.1.

[7] “..... Reflect with a clear mind – man by man for himself – upon the two choices of decision, ...” Y30.2.

[8] 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 Ichaporja and Humbach, although their position is not 100% clear to me) the term “father” in this verse refers to the good man who opposes evil. According to the translation of Bode & Nanavutty, Haug, and T. R. Sethna, however, the word “father” in this verse refers to Ahura Mazda.

[9] “... the Wise One is the **Father of truth**.” Y47.2.

[10] “.....I realized Thee to be (ever) young in mind, Wise One, when I grasped Thee in a vision to be the **Father of good thinking**...” Y31.8.

[11] "...I know the Wise One who created it to be the Father of effective good thinking. **And His daughter is [aramaiti] of good actions.....**" Y45.4.

[12] "...praise and worship for the very **Wise Master of good thinking...**" Y30.1.

[13] "By whichever action, by whichever word, by whichever worship, Wise One, Thou didst receive for Thyself immortality, truth, and **mastery over completeness**, let these very things be given by us to Thee, Lord, in the very greatest number." Y34.1.

[14] In Y48.9 Zarathushtra asks Ahura Mazda if He has "**mastery through truth [asha] over anyone whose threat is inimical to me.**" But this is different from Mazda having a master-servant relationship with his followers. The law of consequences is a part of asha, and I believe that it is through this aspect of asha, as well as the benevolence that is inherent in the notion of asha, that Ahura Mazda has mastery over those "**whose threat is inimical**" to us.

[15] For example, in Yasna 46, he says: "**.....I lament to Thee. Take notice of it, Lord, offering the support which a friend should grant to a friend...**"Y46.2. See also: "**This I ask Thee. Tell me truly, Lord. Someone like Thee, Wise One, should declare to me, his friend, ...**"Y44.1.

Humbach, Insler, Jafarey, Mills, Moulton and Sethna translate the applicable Gathic word as "friend". Azergoshab and Taraporewala translate it as "beloved". Bode and Nanavutty translate it sometimes as "friend" and sometimes as "beloved".

[16] "**...Him, who left to our will (to choose between) the virtuous and the unvirtuous...**" Y45.9.

[17] All **descriptive** references to evil in the Gathas describe the product of wrongful choices. For example, deceit, fury or anger, destruction, violence, injustice, tyranny, oppression, cruelty, murder, ignorance, betrayal, leading people astray, violating truth, abuse of power (evil rule), stealing, bondage, opposing Mazda's teachings, and many such others. Zarathushtra was too intelligent to subscribe to the parochial view that anything that displeases us, or causes us anguish or grief is, for that reason alone, evil. There are no references in the Gathas to the so called "natural evils" –earthquakes, floods, illness, poverty, death of loved ones, and other things that cause us grief but are not intrinsically "evil".

[18] "**...Grant thou [aramaiti] your rule [xshathrem] of good thinking for the glory of the Mighty One.**" Y51.2

[19] There are wide differences of opinion among scholars of the Gathic language regarding the correct translation of the word aramaiti. For example:

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, 1971),

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

Mills, as piety

Insler, as piety or (more recently) respect,

Dinshaw Irani as love

Jafarey as serenity,

Moulton as piety or devotion, Early Zoroastrianism,, p. 344,

Professor Insler has expressed the opinion, *inter alia*, that the word aramaiti is also related to the Vedic aram kr which means "to serve". See An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra, No 4, page 5, footnote 7. Based on the way in which Zarathushtra uses the term in the Gathas, I think aramaiti means bringing to life the rule of truth and good thinking with our thoughts, our words and our actions. "Loving service" or "devotion" is the closest English equivalent, in my view. For the evidence on which I base my conclusion that aramaiti means loving service or

devotion, see Making it Happen, Aramaiti, in An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra No. 4 (available on www.zarathushtra.com).

[20] "...Give thou, o [aramaiti] power to Vishtaspa and to me..."Y28.7

[21] Insler inserts here in parentheses, the word "(our)", indicating that in his view, that the aramaiti referred to in this verse is mans. I believe that Zarathushtra was referring to aramaiti here as a concept that applies to both man and Mazda.

[22] For example, he notes that Friyana, the Turanian "...prospered his creatures with the zeal of [aramaiti]. Y46.12. See also Y28.2 where he speaks of "...those attainments befitting truth, through which one might set Thy supporters in happiness." Y28.2. See also "...the rule of truth and good thinking by means of which one shall create peace and tranquility..." Y29.10.

[23] ".....happiness has been lost to the deceitful who violate truth." Y53.6.

[24] Parsiana, January 1996, Special Issue, North American Zoroastrian Entrepreneurs, page 36.

[25] See Dhalla, History of Zoroastrianism, (1985 reprint) pp 289, 423 – 428 (with references to Avesta and Pahlavi source materials footnoted).

[26] Dastur Dhalla is in agreement with this reading of the Gathas, Dhalla *ibid.* p 288.

[27] The translations vary greatly. In the Insler translation, in Yasna 45 verse 11, referring to the person who commits to *Ahura Mazda* (as specified in Y45.5 through Y45.10), and opposes the local gods and their followers, Zarathushtra says:

"...such a person, by reason of his virtuous conception, is an ally, a brother, or a father (of Thee), Wise Lord, the Master of the house Who shall save [saoshyanto] (us)." Y45.11.

According to Dastur Dhalla, and Moulton, the reference in this verse is to Zarathushtra. Dhalla *ibid.* p 108; Moulton, Early Zoroastrianism, (AMS reprint) p 372, note 4. In Taraporewala's literal translation, the reference appears to be to *Ahura Mazda*. In his "Free English Rendering" it appears to be either Zarathushtra or any person who follows Mazda's teachings. Taraporewala, The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra, (1993 reprint) p 567. According to Azergoshasb and Jafarey, the reference is to the helpers of the religion. Azergoshasb, Translation of Gathas, the Holy Songs of Zarathushtra, (1988); Jafarey, The Gathas, Our Guide, (Ushta Publications 1989). The reference to *saoshyant* in this verse, in the translations of Mills, and Humbach & Ichaporia are not clear to me.

[28] In Yasna 53.2, Zarathushtra speaks of "...that conception [or vision] which the Lord granted His savior [saoshyanto]." Y53.2. In Yasna 48.9 he says: "...Let the solemn words of good thinking be truly told to me. (For) he who shall save [saoshyas] should know how his reward shall be." Y48.9. Throughout the Gathas, in numerous places, in many ways, Zarathushtra makes the point that the reward of good thinking is truth and good thinking, or the House of Good Thinking. Zarathushtra's idea of the prize, the reward, heaven, is a state of being – wisdom, perfection, completeness, i.e., truth and good thinking personified.

[29] Truth /right (*asha*), good thinking (*vohu mano*), and service to those ideals (*aramaiti*) with each thought, word and action, which bring about Mazda's good rule, the rule of truth and good thinking (*vohu xshathra*), and lead to completeness (*haurvatat*) and immortality (*ameretat*). The spirit or way of being which personifies these attributes, is *spenta mainyu*, the benevolent way of being which personifies the divine values.