

## DG McIntyre - Reflections on Y48.8, Reward, Power, Rule (and Terrorism!) <sup>[i]</sup>

Some of you might think (with a groan): “Is this another heavy discussion?” Well, you have to understand, that in Zarathushtra’s day, they had no TV, no movies, no radios or CD players. Puzzles, riddles and word games were one of the ways in which our remote ancestors entertained themselves. In the Shahnameh, we are told that when Zal, who was abandoned as a baby and raised by a griffon (simurgh), rejoined the world of man, the elders of his community tested him by asking him the meanings of six riddles. (Today we have the SAT, the LSAT the GMAT and other rites of adolescent passage administered by the Princeton Testing Service of New Jersey – not nearly as interesting as Zal’s riddles).

Firdowsi’s epic is full of instances in which mental games like chess, riddles and brain-teasers played an important part in the matrix of life in those remote days, (when courtesy and integrity were valued above bombast and chicanery). So it is not surprising to find this tradition of brain-teasers reflected in the word games of an even more ancient set of poems – the Gathas. As we navigate through Zarathushtra’s notion of “reward”, “power” and “rule” don’t think of it as “heavy”. Think of it as a glimpse into one of the entertainments enjoyed in ancient times.

Here is Y48.8.[ii] Insler translation. Round parentheses ( ) in a quotation indicate an insertion into the text by Insler. Square brackets [ ] in a quotation indicate an insertion by me, sometimes by way of explanation, and sometimes to show you the applicable Gathic words, but for convenience, usually without their grammatical variations. A string of dots indicates a deletion by me of some words from the text. Often a verse contains many strands of thought. Deleting from the verse those strands not under discussion enables us to focus on the strand of thought under discussion.

“What is the power of Thy good rule, Wise One? What of Thy reward for me, Lord? What (reward) of Thine is to be sent by truth [asha] to those who are certainly sincere as an incentive for actions stemming from good spirit [mainyu]?” Y48.8.

Y48.8 consists of three questions, as you can see. Let us discuss it in three parts.

### Part 1, Reward

In this Part 1, I would like to discuss Zarathushtra’s notion of “reward”, and ask you what you think the answer might be to the second and third questions in this verse.

There are lots of mentions of “reward” in the Gathas, and when I first came across these repeated mentions, it was a real turn-off. I have always been turned off by the religious view that if we are “good” we will be rewarded by going to heaven, and if we are “bad” we will be rewarded by being punished in hell. That’s kid stuff. Surely thinking persons should make their choices for reasons other than being paid to be good or punished for being bad (to say nothing of the lack of integrity inherent in such an approach to spirituality).

Silly me. I was reading “reward” with the spectacles of pre-conceived thought. That is always a mistake when studying the Gathas. I should have realized that the person who wrote the [ashem vohu](#) prayer, (where we are introduced to the notion of doing what’s right because it is the right thing to do, of being truthful, for truth’s own sake, and not for any ulterior reason), might have something in mind for “reward” other than the conventional wisdom on the subject.

Returning to the verse under discussion, Y48.8 signals that Zarathushtra’s notion of “reward” is different from the conventional wisdom, in that we are told (through questions) that the reward mentioned in this verse comes from *asha* (truth / right). (“...What (reward) of Thine is to be sent by truth [asha] to those...”)

To understand what Zarathushtra means by “reward”, let us check out some other examples of how he uses “reward” in the Gathas. Here is Y28 verse 10. As you read it, ask yourself two questions: what is it that earns the reward? And what is the reward?

“Therefore, those whom Thou dost know, Wise Lord, to be just and deserving in conformity with truth [asha] and good thinking [vohu mano], for them do Thou fulfill their longing with these attainments.” Y28.10.

If you read this verse carefully, it becomes apparent that truth [asha] and good thinking [vohu mano] are both what makes a person deserve a reward, and also the reward itself.

Here are a few other examples:

Good rule is the reward for good thinking (“[Lord of broad vision, disclose to me for support the safeguards of your rule \[xshathra\], those which are the reward for good thinking \[vohu mano\]...](#)” Y33.13). And we already know that good rule is the rule of truth and good thinking (“[...to this world He came with the rule \[xshathra\] of good thinking \[vohu mano\] and of truth \[asha\]...](#)” Y30.7).

Good thinking is the reward for a good way of being and actions (“[The Wise Lord ... shall give the permanence of good thinking's \(vohu mano's\) alliance to him, the one who is His ally in spirit \[mainyu\] and actions.](#)” Y31.21).

Truth is the reward for aramaiti (“[Therefore, do thou reveal to me the truth \[asha\]... Being in companionship with \[aramaiti\], I have deserved it...](#)” Y43.10).

Good thinking is the reward for truth and aramaiti (“[Since thou, truth \[asha\], didst arise among the noteworthy children and grandchildren of Friyana, the Turanian, the one who prospered his creatures with the zeal of \[aramaiti\], therefore did the Wise Lord unite them with good thinking \[vohu mano\],...](#)” Y46.12). This verse could equally be read that truth and good thinking are the reward for aramaiti. A neat verse, as puzzles go.

If you think about the above “rewards” and what generates them, you will see that the process of spiritual growth is incremental, with each divine value [amesha spenta] leading to another, and each other one in turn increasing the attainment of the first ones.

But that’s not all. It gets better. Consider two phrases in verses 5 and 7 of Yasna 28. In verse 5 Zarathushtra says:

[“Truth \[asha\], shall I see thee as I continue to acquire both good thinking and the way to the Lord?...”](#) Y28.5.

At first glance, what Zarathushtra is saying seems quite obvious.

(1) As we acquire good thinking we see truth [asha]

(2) As we acquire the way to the Lord we see truth [asha]

The meaning of the first part is quite clear. An attainment of good thinking [vohu mano] is truth [asha]. But in the second part what does Zarathushtra mean by “[the way to the Lord?](#)” One answer may be found in Y33.5: where, Zarathushtra speaks of: “[...the paths straight in accord with truth wherein the Wise Lord dwells.](#)” Y33.5

If you read these two verses together, it would be reasonable to infer that “[...the paths straight in accord with truth wherein the Wise Lord dwells](#)” in Y33.5, is what Zarathushtra means when he speaks of “[the way to the Lord](#)” in Y28 verse 5. So if we read verse Y28.5 in light of Y33.5, it would say: As we acquire the way to the Lord [i.e. the paths of truth] we see truth. Or, stated another way: the reward for the paths of truth is truth itself.

Before going on, let me leave you with a question: If the “way” leads to truth, and if the “way” also leads “to the Lord”, is Zarathushtra equating God and truth?

Let us now turn to Y28.7. Here Zarathushtra says:

[“Give o truth, this reward, namely the attainments of good thinking...”](#) Y28.7.

At first glance, it seems obvious that Zarathushtra is saying that good thinking is the reward for truth. On further reflection, we might conclude that by “[the attainments of good thinking](#)”, Zarathushtra is referring to wisdom. So a second meaning might be that wisdom is the reward for truth -- which makes good sense.

But this phrase has yet another meaning, which you understand when you read it together with our old friend Y28 verse 5. In that verse, you may recall, Zarathushtra said that as we acquire [or attain] good thinking, we see truth. In other words, an attainment of good thinking is truth. Now, if we transplant this idea -- that an attainment of good thinking is truth -- into to verse 7, the third meaning becomes clear. If truth rewards us with the “[attainments of good thinking](#)” (Y28:7), and if an attainment of good thinking is truth itself (Y28:5), then in verse 7, the reward for truth is truth itself.

Since the amesha spenta are variations of the search for, and the personification of, asha, and the consequences of so doing, I think we can see from the above, that the attributes of the divine (the amesha spenta) are the reward for following the path of the amesha spenta (the path of the divine attributes).

With this understanding of "reward", what do you think are the answers to the 2d and 3d questions that Zarathushtra asks in 48.8?

## Part 2. Power, Rule (and Terrorism!)

In this part 2, I would like to discuss Zarathushtra's notion of power, rule, and ask you what you think the answer might be to the first question in this verse, which is :

"What is the power of Thy good rule, Wise One?..."Y48.8.

We are inclined to think of "power" as a control thing. In the conventional wisdom, power means you have what it takes to control people and circumstances, to dominate, to impose your will on society. As with "reward", Zarathushtra's take is very different from the conventional wisdom regarding power.

How does Zarathushtra see Mazda's power? Zarathushtra's answer is a little like a kaleidoscope. Each time you turn it, the crystals fall into different (and beautiful) patterns, but the patterns always comprise the same crystals. Take a look.

We start with his notion that Mazda (Wisdom personified), having the awesome ability to create the material universe and everything in it, nevertheless chose to recognize our freedom to choose. ("...Him who left to our will (to choose between) the virtuous and the unvirtuous..."Y45.9; "...I choose (only) Thy teachings, Lord." Y46.3).

So we see at once, that coercion, domination, control, is not how Zarathushtra sees the power of Wisdom's rule, which brings us back to his question: "What is the power of Thy good rule, Wise One?..." Y48.8.

We see a hint of the answer in Y46.16 where Zarathushtra says: "Hither, ... where sovereignty is in the power of good thinking, where the Wise Lord dwells in maturity." Y46.16. Here we see 2 things – that good thinking is a "power" – not just an attribute, not just a value, but a power. And we also see that when the Wise Lord is present, this good thinking (vohu mano) is the basis of sovereignty, rule, power.

Truth [asha] also is a component of the power of Mazda's rule. Zarathushtra describes Mazda as: "...Thee, the Most Mighty One, the truthful [ashavanem] Lord..." Y46.9. And we see a reflection of this power of asha in man as well "...That the soul of the truthful person [ashaono urva] be powerful in [ameretat – non-deathness],..."Y45.7.

The above verses show us that good thinking [vohu mano] and truth [asha] are components of the power of Mazda's good rule, which is corroborated by the fact that His rule is often referred to as the rule of good thinking and truth ("...the rule of truth and good thinking..."Y29.10; "...the rule of good thinking and of truth..." Y30.7; "...rule of good thinking and of truth."Y33.10).

And it is worth noting again, that (unlike the conventional wisdom, which sees goodness as somehow weak, powerless), Zarathushtra describes truth [asha] and good thinking [vohu mano] as having "power" ("... Let me see the power of good thinking allied with truth!" Y46.2).

And what of aramaiti? It also is a component of the power of Wisdom's rule. In Y47.1 Zarathushtra says: "...The Wise One in rule [xshathra] is Lord through [aramaiti]". In Y51.2, [the vohu xshathra Gatha], Zarathushtra says: "...Grant thou [aramaiti] your rule [xshathra] of good thinking for the glory of the Mighty One." In Y51.18, he says: "Glorious Jamaspa Haugva (has displayed) this understanding of His power: 'One chooses that rule [xshathra] of good thinking allied with truth in order to serve...'..." And how do we serve if not with thoughts, words and actions of truth and good thinking – which is the concept of aramaiti?

Thus we see yet another interesting Gathic paradox – that such service [aramaiti] creates the power of His good rule [xshathra], and that one rules [xshathra] in order to so serve [aramaiti]. Exquisite point counterpoint.

And we understand that His good rule is not only the rule of truth [asha] and good thinking [vohu mano], but also the rule of aramaiti (: "...Grant thou [aramaiti] your rule [xshathra] of good thinking..."Y51.2).

In Y28.7 Zarathushtra says:

“...Give thou o [aramaiti], power to Vishtaspa and to me. And do Thou give, Wise Ruler, that promise through which we may hear of your solicitude (for us).” Y28.7.

This verse affirms that Zarathushtra’s notion of power includes aramaiti [thoughts, words and actions of asha], and that solicitude is a component of His rule. The concept of solicitude is a part of asha [what’s right]. The comprehension of solicitude is a part of vohu mano. And putting solicitude into practice with thoughts, words and actions is a part of aramaiti. Thus His rule is both wise and loving.

The above verses demonstrate that asha, vohu mano, and aramaiti are components of the power of His rule, and of man’s good rule as well. And that thought is beautifully corroborated, for man, in Y50.4 where Zarathushtra says: “...I shall always worship all of you, Wise Lord, with truth [asha] and the very best thinking [vahishtacha manangha] and with their rule [xshathra] through which one shall stand on the path of (good) power...” The concept of worshipping the Wise Lord with truth and with good thinking and with their rule, is of course, the notion of aramaiti.

And what of haurvatat / ameretat, the two remaining amesha spenta? Let us consider the evidence (bearing in mind that Zarathushtra uses “house” as a metaphor for a state of being). In Y45.10, Zarathushtra speaks of them as “powers” (“...completeness [haurvatat] and [ameretat] ..... these two enduring powers for Him in His house.” In Y45.10 Zarathushtra says:

“I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers of [aramaiti], Him, the Lord who is famed to be Wise in His soul. Whatever one has promised to Him with truth [asha] and with good thinking [vohu mano] is to be completeness [haurvatat] and [ameretat] for Him under His rule [xshathra], is to be these two enduring powers for Him in His house.” Y45.10. And in Y34.11, Zarathushtra says:

“...completeness [haurvatat] and [ameretat]..... Together with the rule of good thinking allied with truth, (our) [aramaiti] has increased these two enduring powers (for Thee). Because of these things, Wise One, Thou dost terrorize the enemy.” Y34.11.

Thus we see that like the other amesha spenta, not only are haurvatat and ameretat described as “powers”, they are also components of the power of His rule.

Which brings us to an interesting question: Who is the “enemy” referred to in Y34.11? The “enemy” is whatever is the opposite of asha [truth / right], whatever is wrong. And how is this enemy metaphorically “terrorized”? Simple (but profound). By the rule [xshathra] of truth [asha] and good thinking [vohu mano], which is created by aramaiti [thoughts, words and actions which give asha and vohu mano substance]. These powers eliminate what is wrong. That is how they “terrorize the enemy”.

Don’t you love this definition of terrorism? Wouldn’t it be a wonderful world if we could persuade all the terrorists who terrorize by killing and maiming, to adopt it?

Finally, we have Y33.12 which shows very clearly Zarathushtra’s notion of divine power, force, strength.

“Rise up to me, Lord. Along with Thy most virtuous spirit [mainyu], Wise One, receive force through (our) [aramaiti], strength through (every) good requital, powerful might through truth [asha], protection through (our) good thinking [vohu mano].” Y33.12.

Which brings us back to the question:

“What is the power of Thy good rule, Wise One?...” Y48.8.

Zarathushtra shows us divine power in a new light. We don’t have a big Pooh Bah Ruler asserting His authority over a bunch of slaves or servants running around on their hands and knees. Wisdom’s power is not coercive. Wisdom’s enemy is not a rival diety or entity, but only wrong choices. Wisdom’s power is the power to change what is false and wrong to what is true and right without coercion. He does so with the power of all the amesha spenta, implemented by Him and by us, through each of our good choices in thought, word and action. What applies to Him, applies to us, (because we are part of the same whole, the same life force). Each effort of goodness, is a source of His power.

In concluding this Part 2, let us remember that it is not just the idea, the concept, of the amesha spenta that makes the difference, although that is an indispensable starting place. It is their personification by all the living, with each good thought, word and action that changes what is false and wrong, into what is true and right.

That is the power of His good rule. That is how He terrorizes the “enemy”.

### Part 3. Parallels

In this, part 3, I would like to discuss the last phrase in this verse, “...actions stemming from good spirit” and show you a collection of other verses that relate to it and shed light on some interesting issues. Here is the last question in Y48.8.

“...What (reward) of Thine, is to be sent by truth [asha] to those who are certainly sincere ..... for actions stemming from good spirit [mainyu – a way of being]?” Y48.8

We have already seen, in our discussion in part 1, that according to Zarathushtra, the path of the amesha spenta generates the reward. And the reward is the attainment of the amesha spenta, the attributes that make for divinity.

This is corroborated in the last question in Y48.8 because, “...actions stemming from good spirit” is a part of the concept of one of the amesha spenta, aramaiti; (aramaiti means giving asha / vohu mano / xshathra, life, substance, with our good thoughts, words and actions (“..... Through its actions, [aramaiti] gives substance to the truth [asha].....”Y44.6; “But to this world He came with the rule [xshathra] of good thinking [vohu mano] and of truth [asha], and ... enduring [aramaiti] gave body and breath (to it).....”Y30.7; “...His daughter is [aramaiti] of good actions...” Y44.10).

So when, (teaching through questions), Zarathushtra asks, what reward of Mazda’s [i.e. the attainment of the amesha spenta] is to be given for actions stemming from a good mainyu, a good way of being, we understand that actions stemming from a good way of being, is a part of the path of the amesha spenta. Please keep this thought in mind, as we proceed with this discussion.

Returning to the last question in Y48.8, we see that it clearly relates to man.

“...What (reward) of Thine, is to be sent by truth [asha] to those who are certainly sincere ..... for actions stemming from good spirit [mainyu – a way of being]?” Y48.8

Yet it is interesting to consider a few parallel verses which as clearly relate to Mazda (Wisdom personified). As you read them (quoted below), please compare them with the last question in Y48.8 (quoted above), to look for the parallels.

“...The Wise One is Lord through such actions stemming from good spirit [mainyu].” Y45.5

“...for I have just now, knowingly through truth [asha], seen the Wise One in a vision to be Lord of the word and deed stemming from good spirit [mainyu]...” Y45.8.

“... (For) Thou art the Lord by reason of Thy tongue (which is) in harmony with truth [asha] and by reason of Thy words stemming from good thinking [vohu mano], .....” Y51.3

These last three quotations (Y45.5, 45.8, and 51.3) make it clear that Zarathushtra uses the word “Lord” [ahura] to mean that Mazda’s “Lordship” consists of having acquired mastery or lordship over, the word and action stemming from a spenta way of being, from truth [asha], from good thinking [vohu mano, which is the comprehension of asha]. “Lord” in that sense – not “lord” in the sense of one who has mastery over people or other life forms which is the conventional notion of “lord” (see also: “...the Wise One in rule is Lord through [aramaiti]...” Y47.1; “...the very Wise Master [ahurai] of good thinking...” Y30.1). And this thought is corroborated by the way he uses “power” as discussed in Y48.8 Part 2, above.

Thus when you think about the parallels between Y45.5, 45.8 and 51.3 quoted above [which pertain to Mazda’s lordship], and the last question in Y48.8 [which pertains to the reward for a person whose actions stem from a good way of being], we see once again, the potential in man, for attaining this same lordship.

Before concluding, I would like to bring to your attention Zarathushtra's notion of "religion". What do all of the verses above tell us about the "religion" of Mazda? They tell us that it is a way of thinking, speaking and acting.

Today, unfortunately, it has become fashionable to denigrate "good thoughts, good words and good actions" as being simplistic, as being generic to all religions, and as having nothing to do with the distinguishing elements of Mazda's religion.

But we see again and again that it is the source of Mazda's lordship (quotations above), and is also the very heart and soul of Mazda's teachings (quotations below).

Bearing in mind that vanguhi daena is used by Zarathushtra to denote Mazda's good vision – the vision of a world governed by truth [asha] and good thinking [vohu mano], and that the word daena became synonymous with the religion in the later texts (evolving linguistically to "deen"), take a look at how Zarathushtra sees the components of Mazda's good vision, His daena, His religion.

Y44.10 shows us that His good vision consists of words and actions of aramaiti: "...Have they truly seen that vision [daena] which ... would prosper my creatures ... through words and acts stemming from [aramaiti]? ..." Y44.10

Y53.1 shows us that His good vision consists not only of good words and actions, but also includes accepting that vision, and teaching it to others; "...those who have accepted and taught the words and actions stemming from His good conception [daenayao vanghuyao]." Y53.1 [See also: "...I choose (only) Thy teachings, Lord." Y46.3).

Y50.4 and 9 tell us that such good words and actions are an act of worship. "Yes, praising, I shall always worship all of you, Wise Lord, with truth [asha] and the very best thinking [vahishtacha manangha] and with their rule [xshathra] through which one shall stand on the path of (good) power..."Y50.4; "Praising, I shall encounter you with such worship, Wise One, and with actions stemming from good thinking allied with truth..." Y50.9.

Y45.10 shows us that such words and actions are prayers. "I shall try to glorify Him for us with prayers of [aramaiti], Him, the Lord who is famed to be Wise in His soul..." Y45.10.

As with "reward", "power" and "rule" Zarathushtra shows us Mazda's "daena", His vision, His religion in a light which does not accord with the conventional wisdom, but which is, oh so beautiful.

[i] This article was posted on vohuman.org on March 8, 2005.

[ii] All quotations from the Gathas in this paper are from the translation of Professor Insler as it appears in Insler, The Gathas of Zarathushtra, (Brill 1975).