

The Seminal Contribution of Zarathushtra and His Gathas to the Upanishads

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The Hallowed Legacy of the Gathas and the Upanishads to World Theology.

The Gathas (divine songs) represent the quintessence of Zoroastrian theology. "Their seventeen hymns are the inspired, passionate and only utterances of Zarathushtra himself, linked to a mantric tradition of poetry. They are marked by metaphors, subtleties of allusion, allegorical meaning as well as richness and complexity of style.¹ The Gathas tower over all other Zoroastrian religious literature - Yasna, Yashts, Visperad, and Khordeh Avesta.

"**The Upanishads** represent a great chapter in the history of the human spirit and have dominated Indian philosophy, religion and life for three thousand years. Every subsequent religious movement has had to show itself to be in accord with their philosophical statements."² Attached to the Vedas, the Upanishads have been the theological underpinnings of the Brahmanas, the Bhagavad Gita, the Puranas and the Vedantas. They molded the ethics of India's renowned epics - the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. They were even responsible for the reforms of Buddhism and Jainism.

The Gathas and the Upanishads - A Parent-Child Relationship.

The thrust of this paper is to draw the uncanny parallelism between the lofty theology of Zarathushtra in his Gathas and the mystic philosophy of the Upanishads. There are, however, strong philological, chronological, historic/geographic, reformist and theological ties that support the thesis of a parent-child relationship between the "parent" Gathas and the "child" Upanishads.

The sweep of Hindu Religious Literature

Because the western world is not familiar with the evolution of India's sacred literature, a brief outline of its religious texts is in order. Table 1 lists the principal texts, their dates and their highlights.

¹ Mary Boyce: *Zoroastrianism*; Routledge and Kegan Paul,; London, 1979

² S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*; Harper Collins, New Delhi, 1994

Table 1. The Hindu Religious Texts

Period	Religious Texts / Worship	Highlights
2000 – 1500 BC	Rg Veda	Contemporary with Gathas. Outpourings on the immensity of the universe.
1500 – 500 BC	Yajur Veda Sama Veda Atharva Veda Samahitas Brahmanas Aranyakas Upanishads	Sacrificial formulas Melodies Magical formulas Hymns, Sacrificial formulas, litanies Sacrificial rites and ceremonies Pronouncements of the "Forest Academies" Essence of Vedic Theology
600 – 500 BC	Vaisnavism Saivism	Worship of Naranayana, Vishnu and Krishna Worship of Shiva (evolved from Vedic Rudra)
400 – 800 AD	Tantraism Saktism Devi Kali, Durga, Parvati	Intensive repetition of mantras Worship of Supreme Female force Worship of the Universal Mother Various forms of Devi
300 BC – 400 AD	The Epics Mahabharata & Ramayana Bhagavad Gita Bhagavata Purana	Highest level of moral and spiritual teachings Understood & assimilated by the masses – pervaded through & through with Upanishadic Supreme Wisdom
Medieval 600 BC - Present	Bhakti Literature Vedanta	

The Vedas (Knowledge/Wisdom) were the outpourings of the Aryans as they began to leave their ancestral home in Iran and streamed into India. They brought with them ideas from a common Mazdayasnan faith. Contemporary with the Gathas, the Rg Veda dates back to Zarathushtra's age and earlier - between 2500 to 2000 B.C. Of the four Vedas - the Rg Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda - the Rg is the oldest, simplest and purest. With 1017 hymns of praise, they reflect the devotion of poetic minds awed by the wonders of nature and the mysteries of the universe. The later Vedas, encrusted with sacrifices, litanies and magical formulas are a decided retrogression - a backward slide of the next thousand years.

Each of the four Vedas has four sections: Samhitas - a collection of hymns, sacrifices and litanies; the Brahmanas - prose treatises on rites; the Aranyakas - the mystic pronouncements of sages in forest academies; and the Upanishads.

Vedanta (End of the Vedas) combines the philosophy of the Upanishads with spiritual practices. "Vedanta is the most direct expression of gnosis,"³ meaning the intuitive apprehension of spiritual truths. Its dynamic crusader was Swami Vivekananda, who electrified the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, in 1893, and went on to become the most articulate interpreter of Hindu theology to the Western world.

The Upanishads - Jewel of the Crown. Etymologically, "Upanishads" means "sitting down near;" i.e., at the feet of illumined teachers in intimate sessions of spiritual instruction in an ashram or forest academy. While nominally tagged on to the Vedas, they come from an altogether different world. "The Vedic gods no longer satisfy and the ritual of the priests is made fun of."⁴ The Vedas are treated as lower knowledge, the Upanishads viewed as the high road. The Vedas look outward in awe of the physical world. The Upanishads look inward to the awe-inspiring powers of human consciousness.

The Upanishads teach "that the human being, by an effort at inner evolution, can attain stages where he or she is unaffected by desire and fear; birth and death; space and time; where there is complete understanding of the nature

³ Fritjof Schuon: *Gnosis, Divine Wisdom*, John Murray, London, 1959.

⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Meridian Books, London, 1951.

of existence; of the rising and passing of the world and the universe; and where there is Oneness - Oneness with the totality of Existence."⁵ This Oneness goes by various names - 'Reality', 'Brahman', and 'God'!

With this background of the sacred Hindu scriptures, we can now develop the ties that link the Gathas of Zarathushtra and the Upanishads.

The Philological Ties

"Linguistically, the Gathas of Sanskrit and the Rg Veda are so close that it is possible to find verses in the Gathas which, simply by phonetic substitution, can be turned into intelligible Vedic Sanskrit."⁶

Jawaharlal Nehru, in his landmark book: "The Discovery of India" states categorically that the Gathic Avesta is nearer to Vedas (ancient Sanskrit) than the Vedas are to the later classical Sanskrit."⁴ It was left to a brilliant German philologist - Martin Haug - in the 18th century A.D. - to trace the language of the Gathas to the better known Vedic Sanskrit, providing a virtual Rosetta stone to unlock the pristine message of Zarathushtra in his Gathas. Since the Upanishads are a part of the Vedas, a close relationship - from a philological point of view - exists between the older Gathas and the Upanishads.

The Historic, Geographic and Chronological Ties

In the long history of India, the oldest and most persistent external influence has been that of Iran - especially ancient Iran and its pre-Islamic people. The similarity of language has been traced. The similarity of race - a common Aryan stock - is an anthropological fact. The similarity of theology is the main thrust of this paper.

Historically, there were contacts between Iran and India even before the great Achaemenian Empire. India is mentioned in the Avestas and there are several references to Iran in the Rg Veda. Zarathushtra's own ministry extended from East Iran to Central Asia, Afghanistan and Northwest India.

With Cyrus the Great we have records of further contacts with Zoroastrians in Afghanistan, Baluchistan and India.

Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, an off shoot of the former, influenced Buddhism, just as the Upanishads influenced Buddhism and Jainism. These parallel faiths traveled along the Silk Road to China, so much so that Zoroastrianism even became a state religion in China, from 800 AD to 900 AD.

Further recent research indicates that both the Upanishads as well as India's great epics go back in time much, much earlier than when they were written down a millennium later. "The Upanishads present us with a spiritual consciousness so far beyond the Vedas and express in such a remarkably consistent symbolic form that they cannot have sprung from the Vedas - a fact which Indians have always insisted on and which archeology is beginning to detect the traces of - going back far earlier than the written texts on the Indian subcontinent."⁷

Furthermore, Indian scholarship has harnessed Western type chronological reasoning to argue for an even greater antiquity for the Upanishads and the Rg Veda than Western philologists. Two great figures - H. Jacobi and B. R. Tilak - in Indology have used references to the immovable nature of the pole star in Vedic literature to determine, from an astronomical point of view, that the Rg Veda (and, by inference, the Gathas as well) was created around 2780 BC - a thousand years before conventional dating.^{8,9} This puts the Upanishads almost contemporary with the Gathas.

Reformist Ties

Zarathushtra and the Upanishads represented dramatic reform and uplifting of the polytheic religions they inherited.

The ancient faith of the Indo-Iranian people was the Mazdayasnan religion. The principal gods were Ahura (Iran) and Varuna (India); Mithra (Iran) and Mitra (India) - meaning heavenly light; Atar (Iran) and Agni (India) - meaning fire. These spawned other gods and the masses of Aryans moved on to polytheism.

⁵ Klaus G. Witz, *The Supreme Wisdom of the Upanishads*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1998.

⁶ T. Burrows, *The Sanskrit Language*, Faber & Faber, London, 1973.

⁷ Michael N. Nagler, *Reading the Upanishads*, Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, Berkeley.

⁸ N. N. Law, *Age of the Rg Veda*, Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1965.

⁹ K. C. Verma, *The Kaliyuga Era and the Ignored Glimpses of Indian Antiquity*, Abori, Diamond Jubilee Volume, 1977-1978.

Zarathushtra's was a revolutionary reform of this polytheism. He uplifted Ahura Mazda to a Supreme Being - a point of origin of the universe and its sole architect. He introduced other lofty principles as well.

The Upanishads - as do Zarathushtra's Gathas - achieve a distinctive and profound reform of the Vedas. "The focus shifts from the objective to the subjective; from a wonder of the outside world to a meditation on the significance of the self. The Upanishads detailed the path of the inner ascent, the inward journey by which the individual soul experiences the Ultimate Reality."²

The Uncanny Parallelism of the Two Theologies

Having traced the close ties between Zarathushtra's Gathas and the Upanishads, in terms of philology, chronology, history, geography and reform movements, we can now turn to sketch how closely the Upanishads parallel the older Gathas in the all important area of theology.

Parallelism No.1: The Concept of a One High God - A Resplendent Monotheism

Zarathushtra's Ahura Mazda is the sole creator and preserver of the universe - both primordial and eternal. Zarathushtra articulated a cataclysmic break from the timid polytheism of his times. But his grand concept of a monotheic, with his demand for high moral endeavor, were too intellectual, philosophical and introspective for the general public. "Humanity at ordinary levels, needs a Deity whom they can understand with less effort, whom they can personalize, to whom they can pour out their hearts."¹⁰

So the decades after Zarathushtra's passing saw a retrogression - not back to polytheism, but to henotheism, i.e., a belief in one god, without denying the existence of others. The beautiful cosmological attributes of God that Zarathushtra enumerated, were transformed into personalized archangels - the Amesha Spentas or 'Holy Immortals' and the Yazatas or the lesser 'Adorable Ones' in the post-Zarathushtra era. Mithra, an older Mazdayasnan god (common to the Hindus) was rehabilitated to a status quasi-equal to Ahura Mazda. "In fact, Mithraism spread to the far comers of the then civilized world in the centuries before and after Christ; and were it not for an accident of history, it might have perpetuated its dominance over the Roman Empire, in place of Christianity."¹¹

Upanishads Reach for Monism. The Upanishads, as did Zarathushtra, jettisoned the polytheism of the Aryans and formulated a robust monotheism. But its concepts of the unity of the individual, the external world and God were too high-brow for the masses to comprehend; and Hinduism descended, in popular usage, to a psychological henotheism, where a particular favorite god fills the spiritual needs of an individual worshipper.

But the Upanishads extended the concept of monotheism to monism, i.e., a metaphysical experience, created through mysticism, in which Reality - the individual self, the external world and God - is considered a unified whole. The Sanskrit word for the soul of man is 'Atman' and for the soul of the universe, or God, is Brahman. God's dwelling placer says India's towering philosopher, Professor Radhakrishnan, "is the heart of man. The inner immortal self and the great cosmic power are one and the same. Brahman is the Atman and the Atman is Brahman."²

Parallelism No. 2: The Search for the Vision of God and the Meaning of the Universe

Both Zarathushtra, in his Gathas, and the Upanishads explore, in beautiful poetic language and in identical thought-processes, the mysteries of the Creation. (Table 2). What symmetry of thought, of language, of quest for the origin of creation, of yearning for enlightenment do these exquisite passages invoke. It is difficult to believe that the more ancient Gathas did not influence and penetrate the Upanishads and their outlook on the origin of the Universe and their yearning for a vision of God.

Table 2: The Search for the Meaning of God and the Universe

Ushta Vaiti Gatha: Yasna 44 ¹⁰

"This, do I ask, Ahura, tell me true:
What great Creator Asha's place assigned?
Who was First Father of the Eternal Law?
What Being laid down paths for sun and stars?
Who made the moon to wax and wane betimes?"

Nasadiya Sukta: x 129.1.4 of the Upanishads ⁷

"At first there was neither Being nor Non-being.
There was not air nor yet sky beyond.
What was it wrapping? In whose protection?
Was water there, unfathomable and deep?
In the beginning Love arose,

¹⁰ Irach J. S. Taraporewala, *The Religion of Zarathushtra*, Bombay Chronicle Press, Bombay, 1926.

¹¹ Keki R. Bhote, *The Theological and Historical Legacy of the Gathas to the Religions of the World*, Second International Gatha Conference, Houston, 1996.

All this and more I fain would ask, O Lord.

This, do I ask, Ahura, tell me true:
Whose might doth hold the Earth & Sky apart?
Who keeps the Waters and the Planets in place?
Who guides the Winds in their uncharted course?
Who wafts from far the dark clouds charged with rain?
And who inspires Vohu Manah's love:

Which was the primal germ of the mind.
The seers, searching in their hearts with wisdom
Discovered the connection of Being in Non-being.
Who really knows? Who can presume to tell it?
Whence was it born? Whence issued this creation?
Even the gods came after its emergence.
Them who can tell from whence it came to be?

This, do I ask, Ahura, tell me true:
What architect did fashion realms of light,
and also realms of Dark? Who wisely planned
for us both sleep and waking - Rest and Work?
Who hath created Dawn and Day and Night,
To teach the Wise the purpose of all life?

Parallelism No. 3: Zarathushtra's "Asha" and the UpPanishadic "Rta"

The Indo-Iranians, in their common Mazdayasnan faith had recognized a universal order prevailing around them. They called it "Rta." To them, despite the casual freaks and caprices, the laws of nature – the unfailing seasons, the unfailing sun, the unfailing rise and fall of the tides - seemed immutable, everlasting. They also sensed some connection between this universal order in nature and human activity.

Zarathushtra elevated the concept of "Rta" in the physical universe to a lofty reflected order in the spiritual world of man. He called it "Asha" - from the Vedic "rta" and its Iranian variant "Arta." He made Asha, the pivot around which his ethics revolves. Just as Ahura Mazda created the physical laws that govern the universe, so did he set in motion the spiritual laws that govern the universe. Good and evil, as well as a symbolic heaven and hell are in reality, adherence to or a deviation from the Law of Asha.

"In the Gathas, truth, goodness, compassion, loving kindness, generosity, benevolence, a complete absence of evil are the qualities connected with the word Asha. In the Gathas, evil is described as the product of wrongful choices - deceit, cruelty, greed, murder, fury, violence, bondage, oppression, etc."¹²

The Upanishads also accept the Vedic concepts of the "rta"- a harmony in the material order and extend it to the subtler dimensions of human existence. The stress on either is prominent, with the Upanishads deeply influencing the Mahabharata to create "an encyclopedia of moral teaching."¹³ But the Upanishads do not make that spiritual order the very foundation of their faith. It is an inward directed concept dealing only with the individual self. "The duties and obligations imposed in life were to be carried out, but in a spirit of detachment. Probably the ethic of individual perfection was over-emphasized and, as a result, the social outlook suffered."⁵ The robustness of Zarathushtra's all encompassing, outward-looking Asha stands in contrast to an individualist, inward-looking rta of the Upanishads.

Parallelism No.4: The Mind and Heart at Center Stage

Zarathushtra's Asha, spiritually equated with righteousness, has two attributes - Vohu Manah and Armaiti. Vohu Manah, the Good Mind imparts knowledge. Good words and good deeds proceed from good thoughts; and good thoughts are inspired in man by Vohu Manah. Armaiti, meaning love and devotion, deals with the heart and soul of man. "The blending of the virtues of Vohu Manah and Armaiti make the individual righteousness. Vohu Manah purifies the mind; Armaiti sanctifies the heart. Vohu Manah's knowledge enlightens the world; Armaiti's devotion ennobles it. Without knowledge, man is poor; but without love and devotion, he courts death in spirit.... The wise knows Mazda, the devout owns Mazda and the blending of the virtues of both makes man the consummate one, the saint, the 'ashavan' or righteous one."¹⁴

¹² Dina G. McIntyre: Three Prayers and the Name of Gods; Gatha Studies Trust, Glenshaw, PA. 1999

¹³ Eknath Easwaran: "the Upanishadsn; Penguin Books, New Delhi, India, 1996

¹⁴ Dr. Manekji N. Dhalla: History of Zoroastrianism. K.R.Cama Oriental Institute, Bombay, India, 1963.

The Upanishads also equate "rta" with righteousness or "dharma" - an ethical concept which includes the moral code and a whole range of man's duties and responsibilities. Similarly, knowledge or "gnyana" is stressed as part of righteousness and devotion, through the heart, and is given full play. The great Rabindranath Tagore captures this Upanishadic philosophy. "This is the God who is the world-worker, the supreme soul, who always dwells in the heart of all men; those who know him through their mind, and the heart that is full of the certainty of knowledge, become immortal."¹⁵

Parallelism No. 5: "The Search after Truth"

Even though Truth is included as a synonym in the broad definition of Asha as righteousness, truth has had a special and honored place in Zoroastrianism. Truth was a paramount virtue among the ancient Iranians.

The Upanishads follow suit in elevating truth as the central feature of rta or righteousness. Mahatma Gandhi captured it best. "If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I should simply say: Search after truth through non-violent means. Truth is God."⁴ We can see how Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha (non-violence) movement - the most peaceful liberation movement in the history of the world - had its roots deep in the philosophy of the Upanishads, and in its predecessor, the Gathas of Zarathushtra.

Parallelism No.6: Reason, Free Will, and Freedom

Zarathushtra formulated a religion with no dogmas, no commandments, no compulsions. Man is endowed with reason, with freedom of thought, word and deed. In one of the most often repeated quotes from his Gathas, he enjoined his followers:

"Do you listen with your own ears, do you look with the best inspiring divine intelligence
At the creed of your own choice, each man himself

In order to instruct himself, through our sages, before the magnificent events."¹⁶
(Y. 30.2)

Man is indeed, free to choose between following the path of Asha or stray from it. But with the gift of Vohu Manah, the Good Mind, he can be guided to adhere to Asha.

The Upanishads, too, cherish free will. Dogma is passed over as something for lesser minds. Freedom is extolled. The Upanishads ask: "What is the universe? From what does it arise? Into what does it go?" The answer: "In freedom it rises; in freedom it rests; and into freedom it melts away. The authors of the Upanishads were passionately attached to freedom."⁴

Parallelism No.7: Consequences- Cause and Effect; Karma

A superficial evaluation of all this freedom - moral and physical - might lead the skeptic to label it as individual license and public anarchy. But Zarathushtra warned that freedom of action goes hand-in-hand with responsibility for the consequences of such actions. If he chooses the wrong path, he suffers inner angst, insecurity and depression. The law of Asha does not gift redemption to repentance and wipe the sin slate clean. By contrast, if man chooses the right path of Asha, he is flooded with the warm glow of inner tranquillity, peace of mind and happiness.

The Upanishads addressed the subject of consequences by introducing the cryptic word "karma" - the ethical or spiritual result of every act. As a logical principle, Karma is the link between actions and their effect. As a moral principle, it explains the diversity of man regarding their births and fortunes. As a metaphysical principle, it exposes the immortality of the soul.¹⁷ In later centuries, Karma evolved into a deep pessimism "That this world is illusory and soaked in suffering. Upon such a purgatorial world, man's desire for happiness brings him to dreary rounds of births and deaths, to live out the Karma of his past lives, until divested of actions and their consequences, he may, at a dim and distant date, win liberation from this labyrinth of life and re-birth; and escape to rest his world-weary head on the breathless bosom of Brahma."¹⁴ This contrast between the joyful existence and optimistic outlook on life on earth, characteristic of Zarathushtra's Gathas and the early Vedic/Upanishads periods, and the later Hindu cycle of

¹⁵ Rabindranath Tagore: "the Philosophy of the Upanishads"; Harper Collins, New Delhi, 1994

¹⁶ Framroze A. Bode and Pilo Nanavutty: Songs of Zarathushtra, Allen & Urwin, London, 1952

¹⁷ "R. K. Garg: Upanishadic Challenge to Science; Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1978.

re-incarnation is the great divide between the religions of the West (of which Zoroastrianism is one) and those of the East (including Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism).

Parallelism No.8: The Inner Conscience

But how is man to distinguish between good and evil, between adhering to or deviating from the path of Asha? Consequences, or Karma, may not be apparent or have a delayed reaction. Zarathushtra again states that in the spiritual world there are sensors - of the mind (Vohu Manah); of the heart (Armaiti); of the inner conscience (Sraosh). It is this collective spark of the divine, this deep-down God thought that resides in every person. It is the guiding compass that tells right from wrong. But it has to be developed and nurtured through study, through reflection and meditation.

The Upanishadic conscience is contained in the term "Atman" or self, i.e., the innermost soul in every creature, which is divine. Man is not a puny speck in this cosmos, which he must be from a physical perspective. With the discipline of "bhakti" (prayer), of suppressing the ego, of sacrifice (yajna), of meditation, the Atman can advance to a stage of mysticism and gnosis where he (it) can visualize and experience Brahman (the Ultimate Reality).

Parallelism No.9: Science and Environmentalism

Zarathushtra was not only concerned with the spiritual part of the law of Asha, but its physical part as well. The physical Law of Asha fosters a spirit of inquiry, making Zoroastrianism one of the most scientific religions in the world. The development of astronomy was a logical outcome, going back to the star-gazing of the Proto-Aryans. The conversion from nomadism to settled agriculture was another. In the voluminous literature that had developed by the time of the Achaemenid Empire were treatises on philosophy, mathematics, medicine and other scientific subjects.

Zarathushtra was also the world's first environmentalist - almost five thousand years before UN conferences on the environment. He urged that Mother Earth, its land, water and air, should not be contaminated and polluted by human abuse. As the world's first animal rightist - Zarathushtra enjoined his followers to be the protectors and guardians of the animal kingdom.

Given this Zoroastrian focus on science, it is not surprising to find an Upanishadic resonance in Vedic India. "By the Christian era, it was in full flowering. Indian mathematicians developed modern numerals, the decimal place system, zero and basic algebra and trigonometry; surgeons performed operations as sophisticated as cataract surgery and cesarean section."¹³

Parallelism No. 10: Service to the Community - Especially to the Down-Trodden

Zarathushtra did not want man to be sequestered in some mountaintop monastery or forest grove to meditate. He urged his followers to take full part in the arena of life. Long before the Puritan work ethic was developed in the seventeenth century, Zarathushtra stated that material work was intrinsically good; that prosperity was not anti-religious, if not squandered in hedonistic pleasures. Justice is important, especially social justice and is worth fighting for. Education is important, so that people can better partake of a richer and more meaningful life.

Most important of all are charity and help to the downtrodden. This spirit of service is so central to Zarathushtra's teachings that it is deeply ingrained in all Zoroastrians. It is not enough to be good but to do good. Only by helping the poor, the less fortunate through sympathy, friendship, charity and active, concrete help is man liberated from fleeting pleasures and self-aggrandizement. In one of the more famous quotes of his ministry, Zarathushtra stresses "Happiness to him who gives happiness to others."

In terms of service, the Upanishads present a paradox. On the one hand they espouse a joy in life and promote a metaphysical democracy. "He who sees the one spirit in all, and all in the one spirit henceforth can look with contempt at no creature." On the other hand, the Upanishads abhor becoming a slave of life. "Indulge in right action with all your strength and energy, but keep above it and do not worry about the results of such action." Thus, while they do not advocate an abstention from life and action, they harp on detachment from them. This is the message that Krishna gave Arjun on the eve of the famous battle, so beautifully captured in the Bhagavad-Gita.

The concept of "dharma" - obligations and the discharge of one's duties to oneself and others - is enjoined. But the Upanishads do not stress service to society, the hallmark of Zoroastrian ethics. This inward-looking individualism has atrophied the social outlook in India to this day.

The Ultimate Vision - A Point of Departure between the Two Faiths

-Despite the uncanny parallelisms between Zoroastrianism and the Upanishads there is a fundamental difference between the two when it comes to the purpose of life and a vision of the future.

Zarathushtra's long-range vision is of a world moving toward perfection. It is a centerpiece of the Zoroastrian faith that our world is indeed getting better - slowly but nevertheless surely. And man's role - through Zarathushtra's epitome of good thoughts, good words, good deeds - is to leave it a little more perfect than when he enters it; to encourage adherence to the Law of Asha.

By sharp contrast, the Upanishadic goal of realization and enlightenment can be described as simultaneously "transcendental" and "integral." "Their teachings are "transcendental" in the sense that they deal with experience, being reality that transcends mind and matter, that is incomparably greater than these; but at the same time includes them. They are, at the same time, "integral." The Being or the Reality includes all major categories of human understanding - realism; idealism; mind; consciousness; self and other; internal and external; individual; society; nature and cosmos; human, divine and Absolute - in short, Brahman. The aim of human life and existence is to realize that and become that Brahman."⁵

Conclusion

The Western world is mostly unfamiliar with either the Gathas or the Upanishads. The Eastern world is more familiar with the Upanishads and draw almost a total blank on the Gathas. But as both worlds pursue the study of comparative religions, they will come to a realization that the bedrock of theology is to be found in the Gathas of Zarathushtra and in its seminal contribution to the Upanishads, to Buddhism, to Judaism and through the latter to Christianity.