

NEW ENLIGHTENMENT ON THE GATHAS I

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|| THE RELIGION OF ZARATHUSHTRA [CONTD]

The religion Zarathushtra called forth is lively agitation of the mind, that it even gave occasion to bloody combats and wars, is easily understood from the contents of the Gathas. It broke away almost entirely from all ideas extant before the Gathic period, and offered in fact something quite new. It placed itself in a conscious opposition to the religion of nature which had been handed down from the old Aryan times, and was still cherished by the people ; and it rejected the nature- worship and his religion ,was exalted into a far higher moral sphere and penetrated with its spirit ; and thus the form acquired a new substance.

Here we speak of the Gathas and their contents, not of the entire Avesta, because It seems to me " and all the Gathic chapters will prove it that the Gathas plainly preserve Zoroastrianism in its purest and most original form, as the founder of this sublime religion had thought out and imparted it.

If the present Parsees, the modern followers of the Zoroastrian religion, would learn to be familiar with its contents and spirit, as it originated directly from the prophet, they would always have to refer to the Gathas and they ought to endeavor to penetrate deep into the meaning which is indeed is difficult.

I further believe that it will also have an important practical effect in increasing their love and esteem, and in preserving in a pure state this religion as a rare and valuable possession. The prophet, too, qualifies his religion as "unheard of words " *agushta vachao* [Yasna 31, 1 - Ahunavaiti Gatha], or .as a " profound teachings " *guzra sanghaanghoo* [Yana 48,3-Spentamainyu Gatha], because he himself regards it as a religion quite distinct from the belief of the people hitherto. The revelation he announces, is to him no longer a mere matter of sentiments, no longer a merely undefined presentiment and conception of the Godhead, but a matter of intellect, of spiritual perception and knowledge.

This is of great importance ; for there are probably not many religions of so high an antiquity in which this fundamental doctrine, that religion is a knowledge or learning of a science of what is true, Zarathustra's religion is so precisely declared as in the tenets of the Gathas. It is the unbelieving that are unknowing ; on the contrary, the believing are learned, because they have penetrated into this knowledge [Yasna 30, 3]. Every one that is able to distinguish even spiritually between what is true and what is untrue, will enlist himself on the side of the prophet [Yasna 46, 15-Ushtavaiti Gatha]. Between the truthful and the liars there is strictly the same antithesis as between the believers and the unbelievers, the adherents and the opponents of the new religion [Yasna 31,15-Ahunavaiti Gatha ff]. It is thereby expected from every individual that he or she should take a place in the great question, and come to a decision on the one or the other side. " Man for Man " shall the people examine or test whatever the prophet has announced to them [Yasna 30, 2 -Ahunavaiti Gatha], and learn thereof the truth. Clearly enough it is an open breach with the old national religion.

To the follower of Zarathushtra, the religion is no longer an unknown and more or less unintelligible higher powers; it is to him rather a "freedom" of the spirit, an exemption from all superstitions and false notions, an independent penetration into the perception of the divine truth which was to him a mystery. That the religion should develop from a feeling of dependence into that of freedom, is the most important step that could be taken generally in the sphere of religious life.

The Zoroastrian religion, clearly emanates from the Gathas. It exists in the preponderating monotheistic character of this religion. Its founder has got rid of the plurality in which the Godhead had been split up by the popular belief and naturalism, and elevated himself to the preemption of the divine unity which pervades nature in manifold ways.

It is sufficiently known that in the Zoroastrian religious system Ahura Mazda is conceived as the Ruler and Commander in heaven and on earth, and as the Highest and the First. This double name in the given consecutive order, occurs in the later Avesta as the constant and established designation of God.

Exceptions to this use are not found in it, or are certainly met with very seldom only. The case is different in the Gathas, and I come thereby to a most highly significant distinction between the old hymns and the younger fragments of the Zoroastrian religious documents. Such a name as became afterwards stereotyped for the Godhead, does not yet exist in the Gathas. We find sometimes Ahura, Sometimes Mazda, sometimes Ahura Mazda, and sometimes Mazda Ahura applied to the Deity. God can be designated by " Lord " [Ahura] as well as by "All-wisdom or Omniscience " [Mazdao]. It seems even that in the Gathas the appellative signification of the two names had been felt still more than in the later writings. This is proved by the passages wherein Ahura Mazda [Yasna 30, 9 ; 31, 4], or Mazda alone [Yasna 33, 1 ; 45, 1], and is also used in the plural number. The Ahuraongho that evidently form the totality of the heavenly spirits. If we further consider the fact that in the old Persian Cuneiform Inscriptions of the Achaemenian dynasty occurs the name of God, Auramazda, as a single word which is only inflected at the end, it certainly follows hence that we have to deal here with the results of development in different historical epochs. Generally speaking, Zarathushtra had not found out originally any exact proper name for the Godhead. He designated Him sometimes by one, sometimes by another name, but we can translate most of the different names, which are used in the Gathas, simply by " God." Later on the name Ahura Mazda was strictly adhered to exactly in the same relation and succession of the two words, and therewith now for the first time created a real or definite name of the Deity. In a still later period the two names blended into one, because they were continually used in the same succession as though they formed a compound. Nevertheless, both the component parts are still discernible from the name Auramazd, since they are both declined in one passage only of an inscription of Xerxes. The last phase of development is represented by the forms of the name used in middle and modern Iranian dialects:

Pahlavi Ohrmazd/ 𐬵𐬀𐬯𐬭𐬀𐬎𐬀, and modern Persian Ormazd/Hormuzd. The blending of the two words is here so complete that they do no longer bear an independent meaning in the final form.