

# **Omnipotence Of Ahura Mazda And The Concept Of Evil In The Zoroastrian Religion**

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(The Zoroastrian Religion and the Parsee Community in India have faced innumerable controversies, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century by some misguided persons - both Zoroastrians and non-Zoroastrians. Countless opinions and counter opinions have been expressed on wide-ranging aspects dealing with Zoroastrian Religion, its basic tenets and customs, such as "dokhmenashini" the sacred fire, sudreh-kushti, "pavmahel" ceremonies, yasnas, etc. But so far no one had ever expressed a view that Ahura Mazda is not omnipotent i.e. all powerful. Hither-to, the fact of Ahura Mazda being omnipotent was being taken for granted – both by the traditional orthodox as well as the most ardent reformists. For some time past, this most basic truth was being eroded by some irresponsible statements by at least one Zoroastrian and two non-Zoroastrians, who claim to be scholars of the ancient Zoroastrian Religion. The impact of their oratory being strong, for the first time, the faith of even some traditional laymen, is being shaken. The impression on the youth is certainly very damaging.

The Council of Vigilant Parsees, an Organisation wholly devoted to the cause of the Zoroastrian Religion therefore, thought it fit to educate the people about the hollowness of the absurd claim of these scholars, and a public meeting was held on Friday 29th March, 1985 at the K. R. Cama Hall, Bombay; where Mr. Adi Doctor spoke on the above subject and gave a resounding reply to them. More than 200 Zoroastrians sat through the entire talk for well past an hour and heard Mr. Doctor's extensive analysis of a complex and top-heavy subject.

They heard him with rapt attention. At the end he was given a resounding ovation, which was well-deserved. Mr. Doctor gave references from Avesta, Pahalavi and Pazend texts wherever necessary.

We reproduce Mr. Doctor's edited speech for the benefit of our valued readers, who could not attend this lecture. We also request our readers to be wary of any fanciful opinions expressed by some so-called scholars, so that they are not misguided in future. -EDITOR)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to make it clear that our purpose in holding this talk is not to run down any individual or institution, nor do we get a kick out of being here this evening. It is just that we deem it our duty to refute the false doctrine and propaganda about the non-omnipotence of God and to warn our co-religionists to be very wary in sending their wards or children to classes where such anti-Zoroastrian dogmas are taught.

Religion is basically a matter of implicit intellectual faith. In the past, if this faith had been rudely shaken by speculative, superficial, philological translations of our texts by some scholars - both foreign and Indian - **today it is being virtually destroyed by a totally new-fangled trend of philosophising theological statements and doctrines, again by some academics - both foreign and Indian. This is a highly disturbing and dangerous trend.**

If a speaker, a little over a month ago, described the various causes, (rightly or wrongly) for the breakdown of the Zoroastrian tradition in the last two centuries, he conveniently forgot to mention this latest cause of the breakdown – the injecting of logic and philosophy into religious beliefs and theological statements, as given by our Prophet and revised by his appointed renovators. The reason for this lapse of memory on the part of the young and enthusiastic Parsee speaker, is that he is one of the chief exponents of the new trend!

I am referring to Mr. Khojeste Mistree and his band of young workers in the Zoroastrian Studies who while preaching, teaching or writing, tell their audiences and readers, both young and old, that among other things (a) Ahura Mazda is not yet Omnipotent but will be so, with the help of man in a distant future, when Angra Mainyu will be completely subdued and vanquished; and (b) that evil has no absolute/real existence, that it arises from and out of nothing, that it is the antithesis of that which is inherently good. The existence of evil in our world reflects the temporary non-omnipotence of God. Death is the temporary triumph of Ahriman.

But Mr. Mistree and the Zoroastrian Studies workers are not the only ones to propound these dogmas. At least two other young foreign philologists, Dr. Allan Williams and Prof. James R. Russell have also recently come out with similar ideas. One can understand these students of our Religion discussing such matters in academic workshops and seminars. But when they come out in public and impart these heretical concepts to the gullible, lay-Parsee and particularly to our youths and children it is time not only to sit up and take notice, but to refute them with all the emphasis at our command. **What is really galling and shocking is that for the first time in the history of the Parsee Community, a Parsee Zoroastrian openly and vehemently preaches that Lord Ahura Mazda is not Omnipotent!**

As mentioned in the beginning, all the three of them, arbitrarily philosophise and rationalise religious tenets and doctrines.

Prof. James Russell

Prof Russell is most explicit about it. In a paper submitted to the recently concluded 4th World Zoroastrian Congress, entitled "On The Necessity of Dualism", he justifies "freedom to practise philosophy in religion". Therein he asks a question: "Is it proper to challenge the basic tenets of religion at all?" He answers it by saying, "Most existing religions have come into being because philosophically minded men questioned the beliefs of the communities into which they were born or else subjected them to radical re-interpretation e.g. Buddhism, from Hinduism, Christianity from Judaism". He further adds: "Reform and debate are positive virtues provoking a lively re-reading of texts and a re-examination of customary held beliefs and a critical evaluation of one's habitual actions". These practices.....are the basis of the practice called philosophy.

"It is most salubrious for those who would lead others in religious thought to scrutinize their own convictions with an open mind."

"Prophet Zarathushtra shattered the essential tenet of his native faith to create another (sic)". In other words, in the first place, Prof. Russell considers Prophet Zarathushtra to be a philosopher who, like some philosophers, questioned "the beliefs of the community into which he was born". Secondly, to buttress his argument, Prof. Russell cites an illustration from a 'Pahlavi text' "Selections of Zadsparam": Therein is a story about Prophet Zarathushtra, who goes to an assembly of the learned and asks, "What is more embellishing for the soul"? The reply was, there are five things

necessary for the good of the soul: nourishing the poor, providing pasturage to the cattle, offering fuel to the fire, pouring **Haoma Juice** in water and offering praise into the **daevas** (demons). Zarathushtra accepted the first four but rejected the last.

From this apocryphal story, Prof. Russell draws a startling conclusion. He says, "Zarathushtra broke with his co-religionists". "It was the question of evil that separated Zarathushtra from Iranian paganism (sic) and it is the answer to that question in his revelation that is what distinguishes Zoroastrianism from any other religion".

"In the Gathas, there are two fundamental spirits, co-eternal and utterly opposed to each other. One is Ahura Mazda the Lord Wisdom with his hypostasis Spenta Mainyu. The other, distinctly inferior to Ahura Mazda is Angra Mainyu." Then Prof Russell talks of what can be called qualified dualism. He states: "The dualism is not the balanced opposition of two Gods. It is the Cosmological doctrine of God the Creator of all the good, Who is far superior, to but separate from his demonic opponent. The presence of evil in the world is proof that our good God has not yet defeated his opponent."

Dr. Allan Williams

Dr. Williams gave a talk on 27.9.1984 at this very venue (K. R. Cama Hall). In his lecture, he first talked of the Zurvanite heresy. According to him, "In the modern world too, a version of the Zurvanite heresy has insinuated itself into the minds of many Zoroastrians." Zurvan is considered as the father of both good and evil and the source of all.

"The very idea that Angra Mainyu comes from within Ahura Mazda or that evil is indispensable for the preservation of creation, contradicts the whole Zoroastrian tradition".

But Williams also talks of qualified dualism when he says that: "Nowhere in the Gathas or Avesta, Pahlavi or Zoroastrian Persian tradition is Angra Mainyu/Ahriman projected as an independent God of evil".

### **K. P. Mistree**

Mr. Khojeste Mistree maintains that evil in Zoroastrianism is not a reality in itself but is an existential paradox experienced by man through imbalance reflected in the physical world. According to Mr. Mistree, evil is ex-nihilo - it arises out of nothing. "The prophet saw the need for a fundamental dualism in the relative world. This absolves God from any taint of evil. A perfect, all-wise Being cannot create that which is imperfect. If He does, He cannot be worshipped as a Perfect Being. Since evil is imperfect, it follows that evil does not stem from God." This he considers the intellectual strength of Zarathushtra's teachings!

Then Mr. Mistree, as usual, plays on words which confuses the layman, for he says: "God is latently omnipotent. A temporarily non-omnipotent God should not be seen to be a weak or powerless Being. A distinction, however, should be made between a Being who is all powerful at all times and a Being who is very powerful.....but yet not all powerful to prevent the onslaught of evil, eventually culminating in death .....Man, by recognizing God to be temporarily non-omnipotent, in no way implies that evil is equal to and, therefore, as powerful as God....."! !

Mr. Mistree, in his enthusiasm to press his point, quotes Yasna Ha 31.7 and says that "God

grows ..... (Through this spirit, O wise one, Thou art to grow") and further states: "Zarathushtra did not see his God as an Omnipotent Being, for he declared in his hymns that God must grow, through the cumulative power of man's good thoughts, words and deeds ..... "! It may be noted that the words in 31.7 "uxshyo" has been erroneously translated by S. Insler as 'grows'. The more correct meaning of the term is "to be exalted" - "does Thou exalt".

As I have shown by now, the common factors amongst this Trinity are:

- (1) Recourse to logic and philosophy.
- (2) Qualified dualism leading to the theory that Ahura Mazda is not Omnipotent,
- (3) Dependence on mainly one Pahlavi text i.e. **Shkand Gumanik Vichar**.

Now, I shall quickly make a brief examination of each of these premises.

### **Logic & Philosophy**

"Logic" said Elbert Hubbard, is "an instrument used for bolstering a prejudice". This is very apt in our case, when we are asked to believe that it is logically impossible for an omnipotent God to be the progenitor of evil. Now, in the first instance, can we apply the laws of our manmade logic to the will of God? According to them, Ahura Mazda means "The Omniscient Lord". In other words, the moment we ask "How can an all powerful Lord permit any evil anywhere?", we question his omniscience too! How do you know what is God's desire and will?

Secondly, man is only a three-dimensional pygmy in the vast Cosmos. How can he then probe or fathom the Mind or Thought of Ahura Mazda, or for that matter, the mysteries and secrets of the multidimensional Universe?

Thirdly, if you stretch this logic further, you will end up being an atheist, for even the seemingly sound argument of theistic philosophers like St. Augustine and Descartes have been dubbed as positively irrational by philosophers like Hume and Russell!

Again taking recourse to Hubbard, "A philosopher is one who formulates his prejudices and systematises his Ignorance". Or as Montaigne said "One who doubts is a philosopher." Our doubting Thomases would do well to remember Henry Adam's definition of philosophy as, "Unintelligible answers to insoluble problems". In other words, as you have seen, logic carried to its logical conclusion results in madness!!

**But the most important question to be asked by us Zoroastrians is: Are we to go by logical and philosophical arguments of some latter day students of our religion or by what our Scriptures tell us?** Before I go on to actual Scriptural evidence, let me touch upon the question of death.

### **DEATH**

Death is not destruction but a transformation. When the spiritual elements go out of human body, a man dies. Death of man is explained in the Avesta as "Separation" of spiritual elements from the human body (Yasna 55.2). The Avesta word for 'Separation' - used in the sense of death – is **vi-urvistic**. The Pahlavi word for the same concept is **be-vartishnih** - turning off. The Sanskrit term is **Viyoga Kala** "the time of separation". In the Pazand extract, called **Aogemadaecha**; the inevitability

of death is emphasised and man is admonished to practise righteousness. There is no escape from death.

Now let us examine what the actual facts are wherever possible, with the help of textual references regarding Evil and Ahura Mazda.

### **What is Dualism?**

In the first place, dualism is supposed to mean a religious system, wherein the existence of a power working in opposition to the good-creating Godhead is also assumed besides Him, when both the good and evil principles stand one against the other with equal rights and are equally mighty. Men should evidence the same veneration to the evil spirit as to the good spirit. They are neither co-eternal nor co-equal. They form the antithesis of each other.

Ahura Mazda is never shown as pitted against Angra Mainyu in the Gathas. Therein, the word Angra Mainyu occurs only once, as the name of the Evil Spirit (Yasna 45.2). And Spanyao Mainyush and not Ahura Mazda is mentioned as his opponent. As far as the exposition of the relations in which the Good Spirit stands to the Evil Spirit, there is no regular counterpart principally of the name of Ahura Mazda. The names which serve as designations of the Evil Spirit stand rather as counterpart of the name Spenta Mainyu or Vohu Mano **What is very important for us to remember is that, according to the Gathas, they are twins (Yasna 30.3). They do not exist alone for themselves, but each in relation to the other. Both are absorbed in the higher Unity, Ahura Mazda.** They existed before the beginning of the world, their opposition is exhibited in the visible world. **The two Spirits are not "self-created".**

Angra Mainyu is a **Mino**, a spiritual Force, but he does not have a Fravashi. The guidance of Fravashi is missing and hence he works as the Mino of destruction.

**Prophet Zarathushtra admitted no other at Ahura Mazda's level.** The corresponding reference to **Gatha 30.3** is in Pahalavi Dinkard's text **the Varsht Mansar Nask**. This Nask's 4th and 5th paras give the essence of **Ha 30.3**. **Here the two spirits are referred to as two brothers, who are born in the same womb (aeval, ashkomb).**

The purport of **Yasna Ha 30.3** is amplified in the next stanza **Ha 30.4**. The pertinent words used are **Hem jasaetem** and **dazdey**, thereby conveying the idea that, "The two spirits met as much as they could.....".

Ahrirman ignorantly and unwittingly fulfils the counsels of the Infinite. All this is done in the interest of the great Law of the development of the Soul. The polarity of good and evil is a primal, necessary means for the Soul's experience, exercise and growth.

### **AHURA MAZDA IN AVESTA**

**The Religion of Zarathushtra recognises Ahura Mazda as the SOLE CREATOR AND ABSOLUTE RULER OF THE UNIVERSE.** He is the creator of the spiritual and material worlds and all creations and creatures therein. He has fixed the Laws of Nature and all creations have to work according to them. Ahura Mazda is undecivable. He is observing and watching all creatures. In Yasna 44.3/5/7, Ahura Mazda appears as Almighty God who created the Universe, who maintains

it and rules over it. **"What great Architect fashioned the (Realms of) lights and also the (Realms of) darkness?" -(44.5)**

Ahura Mazda is named "Infallible" one, **Adhavi** (Yasht 1).

Ahura Mazda is also referred to as Ruling at will (Yasna Ha 32.16 and 51.17 - **Khshayans** i.e. ruler) and (Ha 43.1, 44, 45 and 46 – **Vase – Khshayans**). Unless Ahura Mazda is named the "Infallible" one, **Adhavi** (Yasht 1)

Again, in the Hormazd Yasht, Ahura Mazda is referred to as **"eese Khshathro and eese Khshathrotemo"** i.e. **King ruling at will, the king who rules most at will.**

Let us now turn to references in the Pazend Setayashes.

### **Pazend Setayashes**

(a) **Namaaz-i-Daadar Ahuramazda, Rayomend, Khorehmend, Harvespa aagah, dana, va tawaan-i-tawaan - (most powerful of the powerful).**

(b) Similar words also appear in the 4<sup>th</sup> **Setayash, Naam-i-Khavar,**

(c) **In Setayash-i-Ahuramazd,** He is referred to as **Vispa-tawaan** i.e. all powerful.

(d) Also in **Setayash-i-Daepmeher** - the references are to "Daadar-i-Veh Vespa tawaan", i.e. all powerful creator of the Universe.

### **Yashts**

**In the Yashts;** in the **Fravardin Yasht** para 76, the Fravashis are said to "enter the creation of the two Minos. one of whom is the benevolent Mino and other is the one with deficiency. When they made their creation, the high status Fravashis stood there like a **Sirdar**"!

So also, in **Raam Yasht,** para 43 - Vayu says he is spread everywhere, in both the creations of **Spena** and **Gana.** **"Without me they both cannot do. I reach both of them and provide both of them whatever they want."** In para 44, he says: "My victory is over the creations of both the Minos".

If Ahura Mazda cannot vanquish Ahriman at present, as we are told, what about **Vendidad** Chapter XIX and **Zamyad Yasht** - Karda 6 wherein (a) Ahriman is categorically told by Zaruthusthra that he (Z.) will smite him (A.) with **Haavan, Tasht,** etc., (b) Peshdadian King Tehmurasp rode Ahriman for 30 winters (years) respectively?

The 101 names of Ahura Mazda has **Harvesp tawaan,** (all powerful) as the second name. These names have been recited for centuries by **Bareshnoom** priests (**yaodzathregars**) in the **Yazashne** ceremony. Yet Mr. Khojeste Mistree says they are of "recent accretion"!

### **Pahlavi Texts**

Further, the preamble and introduction to most of the Pahlavi Texts begin with a dedication and prayer: "In the name of Ahuramazda, the Lord, **the greatest and Almighty.....** ". In fact the words **"the all-ruling, all knowing and Almighty"** also appear in all Pazend and Sanskrit Mss of **Shkand Gumanik Vichar** itself!

### **ZS To Note**

Here I would like to give a friendly warning and advice to Zoroastrian Studies. The very thought that Ahura Mazda's powers are limited is Satanic; Ahrimanic!

According to the **Sudkar Nask** (for **Yasna 48 - Gatha Spenta Mainyu**) **"In this**

**manner, O, pure, Holy Zarathushtra, those who run down Ahura Mazda, belittle their own religion and the natural strength and authority of Thy holy disciples** (i.e. their lives will also be wasted).

### **Shkand Gumanik Vichar**

In my talk I have often referred to the Pahlavi text, **Shkand Gumanik Vichar** – "the Doubt Dispelling Decision" which has been often taken recourse to by the - Trinity. A brief word about this work will not be out of place here. It is a polemical, controversial work compiled by Mardan Farrokh son of Ohrmazd-dat, about the end of the 9th Century. The author criticises the theological and philosophical views of all other religions, particularly in connection with the doctrine of the origin of evil. He writes in favour of the belief that there are two separate sources - one of good, the other of evil. He criticises also atheism, materialism etc.

The book was written specially to 'dispel the doubts' of a sceptic Mihryar, son of Mahmud of Ispahan. The name indicates that Mihryar's father had embraced Islam, when his son was a grown up man Mihryar appears to be sceptical about his ancestral faith.

### **Warning to Parsees**

Finally, this imaginary and untrue concept of non-omnipotence of Ahura Mazda is also incorporated in the proposed film "A quest for Zarathushtra" along with other fads of Mr. Mistree and Zoroastrian Studies, eg. Freedom of choice etc. **I would like to give a warning to parents that such non-Zoroastrian ideas, infiltrating the young and impressionable minds of their children are bound to have very adverse effects. Hence, parents should be discreet and careful in selecting the organizations and tuition classes where they send their wards for religious education.**

If "Zoroastrian Studies" wants to live up to its credo of shedding light in darkness, it will have to eschew the anti-Zoroastrian dogmas it preaches. Let it not in its enthusiasm extinguish even the oil lamp, of devotion and faith of some Parsees that's burning at present!