

Significance and Philosophy of the Vendidad

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[Continued from Vol. 1 Issue 3]

Section 4: The encounter between Zarathushtra and Angra Mainyu

Frakart XIX: Zarathushtra & Angra Mainyu; Zarathushtra's message to mankind

Section three of the Vendidad ranging from Frakarts III to XVIII revealed to man the tools of Zarathushtra to help him combat Angra Mainyu, and fight the various pollutant threats that are manifestations of the evil work of Angra Mainyu. They contain within them the implements which man can use to convert the polluted, bitim state of the earth to the pristine pourvim state. As man progresses through the innumerable Zravane Daregho Khadata periods within the fourth Hazaara of the fourth Zravaane Akarne of the Present of the Present tense, he slowly but steadily begins gaining an upper hand over Angra Mainyu. Despite numerous temporary setbacks, creation moves ahead indomitably towards Frashokereiti.

This state of affairs is unacceptable to Angra Mainyu, who seems himself without a role. In his limited mind, Angra Mainyu realises that the core reason for his helplessness is the Vi-Daeva-Daataa which the Prophet has revealed to man. He therefore comes to the conclusion that the earth would be a better place for Angra Mainyu without the presence of Zarathushtra and his teachings. Having reached this conclusion, Angra Mainyu decides to take upon himself the task of ridding the earth of Zarathushtra and starts planning for this mammoth task. The details of his preparations and his encounter with Zarathushtra are detailed in the fourth section of the Vendidad comprising of the nineteenth Frakart. Within the encounter, Zarathushtra delivers his final message to mankind, pointing out the now straight road to Frashokereiti.

The Frakart begins with the preparations of Angra Mainyu for his plan to do away with Zarathushtra. To this end, he commands one of his most trusted lieutenants, the evil *Buiti*, the bringer of death, to go confront Zarathushtra. The evil *Buiti* rushes

forth, trying to enter the body of Zarathushtra and do his nefarious work – generating intense heat and fever, causing the body to heat up such that Zarathushtra would perish. Little does the intellectually challenged Buiti realise that the body of Zarathushtra is vastly different from that of any human. The supercharged atoms of the Yazata in human form do not allow Buiti to even come near the perimeter of Zarathushtra's body. Hence Buiti goes on whirling around the body, trying his best to enter in some way.

At this point Zarathushtra chants aloud the Ahuna Vairya – the Will of Ahu, singing the word of the Lord in such a way that it affects even the dim-witted Buiti. The closeness of Buiti to the Frashokereiti leading light of Zarathushtra's supercharged body influences Buiti to go on the right path. The dazzling brilliance of Zarathushtra opens the real eyes of Buiti, who immediately perceives that there is no death for this Yazata. Converted to the right path, the reformed Buiti rushes back to his former mentor Angra Mainyu and cries out to him: 'See the real light, O accursed one! There is no death for Zarathushtra!'

Dismayed, Angra Mainyu decides to take matters in his own hands. He takes the path of fear first, throwing the most confounding and faith breaking thoughts towards Zarathushtra, attempting to break his conviction and belief in Ahura Mazda and the Will of Ahu. These fear inducing and faith shattering thoughts were as powerful as boulders hurled onto a mortal man.

These thoughts have no effect on Zarathushtra. This is the right time, Zarathushtra realises, to forever limit the influence of Angra Mainyu on the earth and the minds of man. This is the time to use the weapons handed down to him by his father, who received them from the Lord, and forever seal the entry points of Angra Mainyu on this earth. He thus gets up and using the power of the Lord, wielded through the nine-knotted stick, the *Navgreh* – the same stick which the priest uses in the Bareshnum ceremony to draw the *Karshas* or boundaries to limit the spread of pollution, draws a talismanic circuit across the entire Earth, joining the four sides and four corners of the earth, creating an impregnable fortress of Maanthric power through which the evil one cannot enter till the end of the Zravane Daregho Khadata cycle. This boundary limits the amount of destruction that Angra Mainyu can inflict in one Zravane Daregho

Khadata cycle, and severely curtails his powers. In such a way, Zarathushtra makes the evil one realise that there is very little he can do now. He shows Angra Mainyu how, slowly but surely, even he will be converted to ultimate good.

But Angra Mainyu still resists. He now tries to lure Zarathushtra to his side with the promise of unheard of riches and earthly power and dominion. He beseeches Zarathushtra to leave the Path of the Good Religion and come work for him. He reminds Zarathushtra that he is a mere mortal, born of Pourushaspa and *Dughdow*. What can he achieve against Angra Mainyu – the Prince of Darkness?

Zarathushtra replies to the evil one, reminding him that though he is born of mortal parents, he is of Yazatic stature. His body is superhuman. The whole Augmented Nature is contained within him. His thoughts, words and deeds are in direct harmony with the thoughts of the Supreme Lord, and are of the highest inspiration¹. Hence just as it is impossible for anyone, including the Prince of Darkness, to do any harm towards the body of Zarathushtra, in the same way, it is inconceivable that Zarathushtra would stop working for Ahura Mazda, according to the plan of Ahu.

Yet Angra Mainyu scorns Zarathushtra: ‘with what weapons will you harm me, O Zarathushtra? With what will you strike me, O mortal? How will you destroy the multitude of my evil creations?’

The Prophet replies: ‘The sacred mortar, the sacred cups, the Haoma, the Word taught by Mazda, these are my weapons, my best weapons! By this Word will I strike, by this Word will I repel, by this weapon will the good creatures strike and repel you, O evil-doer Angra Mainyu!’ Here Zarathushtra reveals the true essence of his religion and the message of Ahura Mazda. The combination of the *Thought* of the Lord, put in verbal form as the *Word* of the Maanthra, and implemented as the *Yasna*, the kinetics of Zarathushtra create a force so strong that they will destroy Angra Mainyu and his entire creations. Zarathushtra uses this awesome combination to destroy Angra Mainyu’s influence on the earth and the minds of men. And in a final display of his power, Zarathushtra now turns away from this combat, and enters a period of communion with Ahura Mazda, beginning with the recitation of the Ahuna Vairya to once again become one with the Lord after this temporary distraction.

Zarathushtra now enters into a prolonged period of communion with Ahura Mazda. In this period Ahura Mazda instructs Zarathushtra on the various ways in which he should strengthen the spiritual institutions on earth through the combination of the Thought, Word and Deed of the Lord. Zarathushtra realises that with the failure of Angra Mainyu to kill him or lure him away from the path of the Good Religion, Angra Mainyu will now turn his attention more towards corrupting the minds and souls of men on the earth. Hence, Zarathushtra makes preparations to awaken the minds of man to this ploy. He reminds man that the mortal life is but a short hotel-stay in his long journey to Frashokereiti and the Creator. There is another, much longer life for him after the life on earth. The state of this life after earthly death will depend on the thoughts, words and deeds of man on this earth. Hence the next section of the nineteenth Frakart gives the details of the state of the Urvan after death and the two different paths an individual can take – the path of the Good Religion, leading to the good after life; or the Path of Angra Mainyu leading to untold misery and suffering².

Now Zarathushtra resumes his mission of ensuring that the evil influence of Angra Mainyu is kept within acceptable limits. This work of Zarathushtra of establishing and strengthening the great spiritual institutions which will protect, sustain and nourish the Earth and man is now described in allegorical terms in the next section of the Frakart³, along with a listing of the other spiritual entities which help Zarathushtra in this task.

In the meantime, Angra Mainyu licked his wounds and became increasingly despondent. As the mission of Zarathushtra progressed, Angra Mainyu found himself more and more constrained. Every day, more and more men gave up their evil intents, and went over to the side of the Good Religion. His followers started deserting him in large droves. Soon it became apparent that the world was well on its way to Frashokereiti. This infuriated Angra Mainyu to such an extent that he gathered together his entire army of fiends. He collected all his powers in concert. They gathered, that motley lot of darkness-causing evil ones. Within themselves they had the power to destroy the world. Yet they saw the damage that Zarathushtra had inflicted on Buiti and Angra Mainyu. Their minds wavered; their hopes surged up and down as they gathered together for one final assault against Zarathushtra.

Led by the constant prodding of Angra Mainyu, this awesome army of evil-causing potentialities gathered strength; and screaming encouragement to each other, rushed onto the house of Pourushaspa, where Zarathushtra awaited. They attacked with full force, in a terrifying display of malevolent power. As they attacked, Zarathushtra, armed with the Thought, Word and Deed Incarnate of the Lord repulsed them, turning their weapons on themselves, inflicting crushing blows to their evil minds. They scampered away, then gathered again, and with their hearts in their mouths attacked Zarathushtra once more, using different tactics. But the Body of Divine Light could not be touched. Once again they fell back, and yet again they attacked in one last show of bravado. Yet again, Zarathushtra used the Word of the Lord, and tore their attack apart. He beat them with the boulders of the Ahuna Vairya, smashing their pitiable skulls, removing the filth of ignorance from them, and replacing it with the essence of devotion towards the Lord and his Plan.

Utterly routed, demoralised and thoroughly defeated, the hordes retreated, shouting to Angra Mainyu: 'there is no death for Zarathushtra. He beats us with the Word Incarnate. How can we procure his death? He is the weapon that fells the fiends: he is a counter-fiend to the fiends; he is a Druj to the Druj. Vanquished are the evil ones, the Law of the Evil One no longer runs, truly we are finished!' Thus bemoaning their fate, Angra Mainyu and his hordes retreated to their rightful place - the underworld, Hankana.

Thus ended Angra Mainyu's final attack on Zarathushtra and the world. His back was forever broken. He realised that there is nothing in the Universe that can harm Zarathushtra. The Vi-Daeva-Daataa was now complete. The Daeva was vanquished. The earth was saved. Man could now work fearlessly towards his own and the world's Frashokereiti.

Section 5: The defeat of evil and the march to Frashokereiti

Frakart XX: The role of the fore-runners of Zarathushtra; Maanthric remedies

The preceding Frakart gave us a deep look into the final battle between Zarathushtra and Angra Mainyu, and the utter rout of Angra Mainyu at the hands of Zarathushtra.

However, the Zravane Daregho Khadata cycle is of 81,000 years. For the first four thousand years before Zarathushtra descends, Angra Mainyu and his cohorts have a free hand causing untold destruction and evil on the earth. At this time, there are several formidable and highly evolved souls who put up a fierce resistance to Angra Mainyu. It is necessary to understand that evil and destruction can be of various ways, both subtle and upfront. One of the subtle forms of the destructive powers of Angra Mainyu is the spread of disease and epidemics in man. When man is bodily weak, his propensity to do good is severely curtailed. At this time, Angra Mainyu gets the upper hand and can corrupt the mind of even the most faithful followers of the Good Path. In order to avoid this, several of the most highly evolved souls of this pre-Zarathushtra period devised remedies to alleviate the pain and suffering of the common man. These were the grand health givers. Foremost among them was the towering personality of *Thrita*. The twentieth Frakart begins with the description of this highly evolved soul and the different types of remedies he designed to alleviate the pain and suffering caused by the subtle destruction of Angra Mainyu⁴. He was one of those charged with the great spiritual responsibility of holding the fort of the Good Side till the descent of Prophet Zarathushtra and the rout of evil.

Four thousand years into the Zravane Daregho Khadata cycle, Zarathushtra descends and severely curtails the activities of Angra Mainyu. After completing his mission, Zarathushtra leaves the physical world. Over a period of time, the emboldened Angra Mainyu makes furtive attempts to enter the earth, but the boundaries drawn by Zarathushtra prevent that. He therefore tries to corrupt the minds of men once again. He succeeds to some extent, and the cycle of evil begins once more.

Zarathushtra has foreseen this and provided suitable remedies in the form of Maanthric compositions which can be used to alleviate the pain and suffering arising from the revitalised evil. The second part of the Frakart details these Maanthric compositions and extols their virtues⁵. The disease-free condition of the earth and man is now known as *Airyamaa*.

Frakart XXI: The onward march to Frashokereiti; the role of Nature

As man moves on the path to the disease and pain-free existence, his progress towards Frashokereiti becomes faster. In the same way, the Earth too moves towards its own Frashokereiti, cleansing the effects of evil heaped on it over the years. The Augmented Nature now moves in, showering manifold blessings on Mother Earth. These blessings come in the form of the bounteous clouds of rain. Rain is not only the physical saviour of the Earth, leading to crops and prosperity, but also the medium of the Augmented Nature to shower those blessings on the Earth which will take it and her inhabitants onward to Frashokereiti.

The working of these blessings, the different ways in which they rain down are described in the twenty-first Frakart. The Frakart alludes to the spiritual forces behind the seemingly natural working of the elements, and details the amount of effort involved in sustaining the earth. The lessons of this Frakart are not only of ecological importance in that they show the symbiotic relationship between man and nature – rendered so fragile today; but they also hold lessons for the so-called advanced man of today, who in his ego and arrogance claims to control the forces of Nature, and in doing so destroys the delicate equilibrium that allows all of us to exist. As man lives in harmony with nature, in his disease free existence, he moves along, reaching the onset of Frashokereiti.

Frakart XXII: The onset of Frashokereiti

As man reaches the onset of Frashokereiti, the message of Zarathushtra is once again relayed to him, in the last Frakart of the Vendidad. The twenty-second Frakart alludes to creation of the earth in the very beginning, and the attack of Angra Mainyu on it, both through subtle and direct means, through the spread of disease and destruction. It then refers to the spiritual agencies that work to prevent the spread of this contagion and disease.

The final part of the Frakart details the working of the various spiritual institutions setup by Zarathushtra and shows how the final Frashokereiti cannot take place in the absence of these institutions.

The Frakart and the Vendidad end with one of the most powerful Maantric compositions of Zarathushtra, which carry the triumphant clarion call of the Good Path. ‘Evil has been defeated! Angra Mainyu has been converted! Man has earned his salvation! The Earth has attained its salvation too! Glory and power to Ahura Mazda!’

With that optimistic and glorious call ends this great scripture. Frashokereiti has set in! We are going back to our Lord! Ahura Mazda awaits us, eager to take us back in His Abode of Eternal Songs! And we shall go in, singing the Ahuna Vairya, the Will of the Lord. Thy will be done!

“Righteousness and the Pursuit of Truth is the best of all good!

Truly it leads to Frashokereiti and ecstasy!

Frashokereiti and ecstasy to that man who is Truthful and righteous for the sake of Perfect Righteousness!”⁶

Conclusion

Such is the significance and philosophy of the Vendidad. Our brief overview of the scripture has revealed to us that there are several levels of comprehending them. We have tried to present here a technique of interpreting the scripture that goes beyond mere philological research. This process of revelation has been mentioned in the scriptures as *Khshnoom*⁷ - the ecstasy-bringing knowledge which will be presented to the world by the *Saoshyants* – the great Restorers of the Faith. A miniscule part of this wisdom was revealed, under exceptional circumstances, to our Master, *Ustad Behramshah Nowroji Shroff*, over a hundred and thirty years ago, and put in written form by his disciple *Dr. Framroze Sorabji Chiniwalla* during the period 1920-1962. We have based our paper on this body of knowledge, coupled with the systematic application of Avesta grammar and philology.

We do not claim to have understood it all. Nor do we have the arrogance of sitting in judgement on the Word of God. All misunderstandings and errors are ours. All glory is His. What little we understand, we revere. What we do not understand, we still revere. We do not run down His Word; nor do we term it ‘corrupt’, ‘interpolated’, ‘later’ or ‘younger’. We pray for the light of His Glory to shine on us, to remove the cobwebs from our pathetic minds, to awaken us. We dream of that day when we can

be in communion with Him, when we may see through our spiritual eyes the real working of His manifold agencies. Till then we resign ourselves to rest content in our meagre attempts to condense the Word of God in human language. We offer humble thanks to our Creator for giving us this opportunity to present His Word to the world, and pray that it will be understood in its right context. We are grateful to the Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture for organising the seminar on Zoroastrianism where this paper was presented. We reconfirm our vow to tread on the Path of the Vi-Daeva-Daataa revealed to us by Prophet Zarathushtra, which we know will lead us to Frashokereiti.

In all humility, we lay this paper at the feet of our lord Ahura Mazda and His Prophet Zarathushtra as our feeble and entirely ineffective attempt to further the world to its Frashokereiti.

May it lead to our own salvation.

¹ Yasna 28.0

² Frakart XIX. 28-34

³ Frakart XIX. 34-42

⁴ Frakart XX. 1-8

⁵ Frakart XX. 9-10

⁶ The Ashem Vohu prayer

⁷ Gatha Spentā Mainyu, Yasna 48.12; and Gatha Vahištāišti, Yasna 53.2