

The Amesha Spentas

Ahura Mazda's Task Force

Zoroastrian doctrine is based upon a hierarchical order of a heptad of principal divinities who later collectively came to be known as the Bounteous Immortals (*Av. Amesha Spentas, Ph. Amahraspands*). The adjective *spenta* means "possessing power", perhaps even supernatural power, and hence different shades of meaning have been extrapolated from this word which in translation may mean bounteous, incremental or holy. The noun *amesha* in translation means an "undying being" and hence, immortal. The collective term *Amesha Spenta* is not to be found in the *Gāthās* but first appears in *Yasna Haptangh-āiti* (Y.39.3), a post *Gāthic* compilation with many pre-Zoroastrian ideas contained within it.

The *Amesha Spentas* fulfill a dual role. They form the kernel of the ethical infrastructure of the religion, as well as they are the guardians and protectors of the seven good creations which are the sky, waters, earth, plants, cattle, man and fire.

The task of a Zoroastrian is to imbibe the attributes of the seven *Amesha Spentas* in order that one may consciously integrate into one's life each quality of Ahura Mazda, as represented through each of His seven Bounteous Immortals. Every man requires the Wisdom and the Spirit of God (*Spenta Mainyu*) in order to be aware of the Good Mind (*Vohu Manah*). The Good Mind is God's greatest gift to man, for it is from the Good Mind that man learns to develop a perception of the Best Truth (*Asha Vahishta*). The physical concept of truth is order, which is to be found primarily in the structure and workings of the universe. The recognition of this order comes about when man learns to cherish the truth for its own sake. A combination of God's Wisdom balanced by the Good Mind and the Best Truth, gives man the strength or the Sovereign Kingdom (*Khshathra Vairya*) to implement the

will and goodness of God in this world. Man however must learn to accept this will through Piety and Devotion (*Ārmaiti*), in order that he may experience an inexplicable moment of cosmic harmony. The experience of this harmony lies in the Perfection (*Haurvatāt*) of whatever one does. Every thought, word and deed must be created to bring to fruition the final goal of creation, which is the defeat of evil, resulting in the state of undyingness (*Ameretāt*).

The duty of man is to realize the nature of this matrix of abstract principles, which when personified take on the role of becoming the guardians of the seven good creations. An awareness of the sensate world enables man to gain an insight into an intangible dimension, which may be likened to the mirrored reality of the corporeal world. Spirituality therefore is an extension of consciousness from the physical to a subtler dimension of reality. This subtler state is not to be seen as being more important than the physical one, which is but a reflection of the Wise Lord's inherent nature. The true realization that everything good in this world is the affirmation of God, is perhaps the kernel of Zoroastrian spirituality.

Upon following a strict ethical code as well as maintaining a deep reverence for the seven creations, a Zoroastrian begins to gain an insight into the workings of the physical world. Through this insight an awareness of, and a responsibility towards the Wise Lord's creations begins to emerge, resulting in a Zoroastrian championing the cause of ecology against those who are responsible for the pollution and defilement of all that is natural and good in this world. God's world must be kept pure and because of the importance of the general well-being of man in this world, a Zoroastrian is encouraged to live life to its fullest, in order that he may learn to preserve and enjoy the goodness of the seven creations.

Monasticism, fasting, celibacy and mortification of the body, are anathema to a Zoroastrian as it is believed that such practices weaken man and thereby lessen his power to fight evil. Similarly, pessimism and despair are sins and in fact are seen as yielding to evil. The task of man is to learn to combat evil with courage, moral fortitude and affirmation.

Hence a Zoroastrian is urged to lead an active, industrious, honest and above all a charitable life. It is through an existential perception of the Bounteous Immortals that a Zoroastrian learns to formulate an ethical policy of "good living". This awareness brings about a gnosis of what is indeed the right thought, the right word and the right deed—the key unquestionably to becoming an *ashavan*, the possessor of truth.

An Achaemenian gold drinking cup of a winged lion
(5th century B.C.)

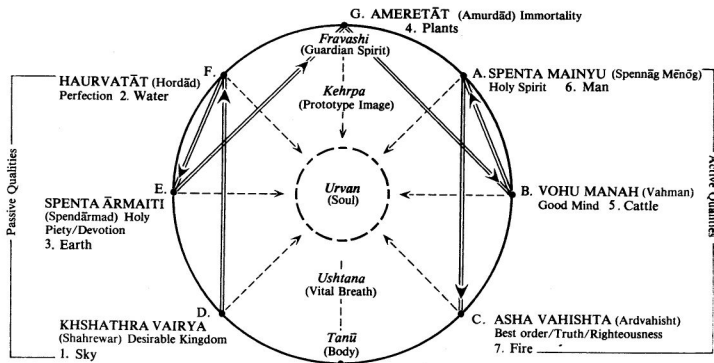


A TABULAR PRESENTATION OF THE AMESHA SPENTAS

AMESHA SPENTA	MEANING	ROLE	PROTECTOR OF CREATION	ORDER OF CREATION	REFERENCES	MAN'S TASK	DEDICATION		
							DAY	MONTH	
Av-Spenta Māiōyu Ph-Spenāg Māiōg	Bounteous Spirit	Is God's active, creative, motivating force.	Man	6th	"...to discern That to be the creator of every thing by reason of Thy Bounteous Spirit..." (Y:44.7) "...Thou, the Wise One, hast come into the world with Thy Bounteous Spirit..." (Y:45.6) "...I know the Wise One who created it, to be the Father of the effective good mind..." (Y:45.4)	Man must learn to integrate the physical and the spiritual worlds, in order that he may recognize the essence of God.	1st 8th 15th 23rd	10th	
Av-Vohu Manah Ph-Vahman (Bahman)	Good Mind	Enables man to comprehend intellectually, in order that he may discern and choose correctly.	Cattle	5th	"...Such is the rule for the Wise One, that one shall increase it for Him through the good mind..." (Y:31.6)	Man must recognize the ethical and moral dimensions of life, in order to care for the well-being of other creatures and his environment.	2nd		11th
Av-Asha Vahishta Ph-Advohisht	Best Order, Truth and Righteousness	Regulates order on a physical level, truth on a psychological level and righteousness on a spiritual level.	Fire	7th	"...Thou shalt give, through the heat of Thy truth-strong fire..." (Y:43.4) "...to thee shall He grant the firm foundation of the good mind and the alliance of truth and of wisdom..." (Y:53.3)	Man must imbibe the truth to bring about harmony and happiness through the recognition of the principle of <i>asha</i> which is pure and undefiled like the fire—the symbol of Zoroastrian veneration.	3rd		2nd
Av-Khshathra Vairya Ph-Shahrewar	Desirable/Sovereign Kingdom	Represents the power and strength in the Kingdom of God.	The Sky and Metals	1st	"...I shall seek for myself their rule of strength, through whose growth we might conquer deceit..." (Y:31.4) "...By your rule, Lord, Thou shalt truly heal this world..." (Y:34.15)	Man must learn to exercise strength and power from within his Sovereign Kingdom, so that with the right discernment he may realize the goodness of his actions which are performed in accordance with proper authority and justice.	4th		8th
Av-Spenta Armaiti Ph-Spendiarmad	Bounteous Piety/Devotion	Maintains the receptive, beneficial and devotional qualities within the Wise Lord's good creations.	The Earth	3rd	"Virtuous is the man of devotion..." (Y:51.21) "...Piety shall come to terms with one's spirit where there has been opposition..." (Y:31.12)	Man must learn to show devotion by caring for the earth and piety in all that he does, in order that he may become virtuous, sensitive and just.	5th		12th
Av-Haurvatā Ph-Hordād	Perfection/Health/Completeness.	Reflects the goodness, completeness and perfection of God in the world.	The Waters	2nd	"Yes, both perfection and immortality are for Thy sustenance..." (Y:34.11) "...by reason of Thy most Bounteous Spirit, grant Thou to me immortality and completeness..." (Y:51.7)	Man must strive towards the perfection and completeness of all that lies within our world, in order that evil may be expelled, resulting in the restoration of a perfect state.	6th		3rd
Av-Ameretāi Ph-Amurdād	Immortality/Undyingness	Bestows the triumph of undyingness in order to maintain the well-being and continuity of God's creations.	The Plants	4th	"...Thou endur worshipful offering has been established to be immortality and completeness..." (Y:33.8) "...Thou didst receive for Thyself immortality, truth, and mastery over completeness..." (Y:34.1)	Man must realize the continuity of life in both the corporeal and spiritual worlds, in order that he may work towards the "Making Wonderful" — when the whole of creation will continue in a state of perfect peace and harmony.	7th		5th

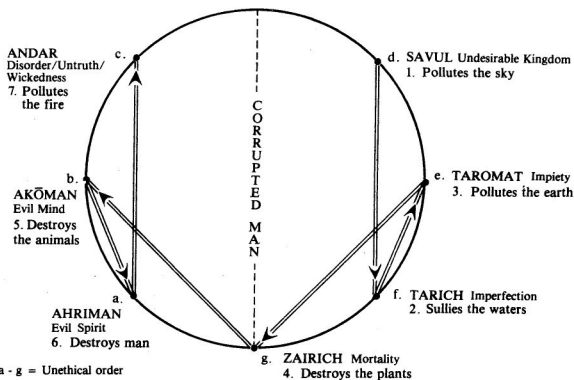
A DIAGRAMMATIC PRESENTATION OF THE AMESHA SPENTAS

THE ETHICAL MAN



Circumference A - G = Ethical order
 Double lines 1 - 7 = Creation order
 Broken lines = Inputs to the soul

THE UNETHICAL MAN



Circumference a - g = Unethical order
 Double lines 1 - 7 = Afflicted creations