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 Gathas but first appears in Yasna Haptingahiti (Y.39.3), a post-Gathic 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 (Armaiti), in order that he may experience an inexplicable moment of cosmic harmony. The experience of this harmony lies in the Perfection (Haurvatat) 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 (Ameretat).

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.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>AMESHA SPENTA</strong></th>
<th><strong>MEANING</strong></th>
<th><strong>ROLE</strong></th>
<th><strong>PROTECTOR OF</strong></th>
<th><strong>ORDER OF CREATION</strong></th>
<th><strong>REFERENCES</strong></th>
<th><strong>MAN’S TASK</strong></th>
<th><strong>DEDICATION</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Ašewa Mainyana</td>
<td>Bounteous Spirit</td>
<td>Is God’s active, creative, motivating force.</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>“...to discern Thee to be the creator of every thing by reason of Thy Bounteous Spirit...” (Y.44.7)</td>
<td>Man must learn to integrate the physical and the spiritual worlds, in order that he may recognize the essence of God.</td>
<td>1st 8th 15th 23rd</td>
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<td><strong>Ph. Spena Mênag</strong></td>
<td><strong>(Bahman)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“...Thou, the Wise One, hast come into the world with Thy Bounteous Spirit...” (Y.43.6)</td>
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<td>Ašewa Vanahman</td>
<td>Good Mind</td>
<td>Enables man to comprehend and intellectually, in order that he may discern and choose correctly.</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>“...I know the Wise One who created it, to be the Father of the effective good mind...” (Y. 45.4)</td>
<td>Man must recognize the ethical and moral dimensions of life, in order to care for the well-being of other creatures and his environment.</td>
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<td>Ašewa Vahishta</td>
<td>Best Order, Truth and Righteousness</td>
<td>Regulates order on a physical level, truth on a psychological level and righteousness on a spiritual level.</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>“...Thou shalt give, through the heat of Thy truth-strong fire...” (Y. 43.4)</td>
<td>Man must imbibe the truth to bring about harmony and happiness through the recognition of the principle of ashe which is pure and un-defined like the fire—the symbol of Zoroastrian veneration.</td>
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A DIAGRAMMATIC PRESENTATION OF THE AMESHA SPENTAS

THE ETHICAL MAN

G. AMERETĀT (Amurdād) Immortality
4. Plants

Fravashi (Guardian Spirit)

HAURVATĀT (Hordād) Perfection 2. Water

F.

Kehrpa (Prototype Image)


B. VOHU MANAH (Vahman) Good Mind 5. Cattle

C. ASHA VAHISHTA (Ardvahisht) Best order/Truth/Righteousness 7. Fire

Urvan (Soul)

D. USHTANA (Vital Breath)

KHSHATHRA VAIYRA (Shahrevar) Desirable Kingdom 1. Sky

Passive Qualities

Active Qualities

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

THE UNETHICAL MAN

ANDAR Disorder/Untruth/Wickedness
7. Pollutes the fire
d. SAVUL Undesirable Kingdom
1. Pollutes the sky

AKOMAN Evil Mind
5. Destroys the animals

CORRUPTED MAN
e. TAROMAT Impiety
3. Pollutes the earth

AHRIMAN Evil Spirit
6. Destroys man

f. TARICH Imperfection
2. Sullies the waters

g. ZAIRICH Mortality
4. Destroys the plants

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

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