The Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu), An Analysis.

The Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), the Ahuna Vairya (yatha ahu vairyo) and the Yenghe Haatam are so central to Zarathushtra's thought, that I have devoted three separate chapters to the first two manthras, and two to the Yenghe Haatam, so that each chapter is not too long, and you can decide for yourself what aspects you may wish to read. The three chapters devoted to this manthra are as follows:

In *Part One: The Manthra Of Truth, Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu),* I give you my translation followed by a discussion the beautiful ideas that I think Zarathushtra was trying to convey when he crafted this manthra.

In this chapter (*Part Three: The Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) An Analysis* (which I have reorganized with some corrections), I discuss the architecture of this manthra ~ how its rhythmic cadences are linked to its meanings, and the crescendo of its ideas. I then offer a word by word linguistic analysis. Even if you are not interested in the *Linguistics* section, I hope you will at least skim it, and read the other sections of this chapter, because even the *Linguistics* section has some information which is key to the meanings of this manthra. And I end this chapter by giving you a collection of many other translations and interpretations ~ modern and ancient ~ so that you can evaluate them all and arrive at your own conclusions regarding what the composer had in mind when he crafted this foundational and beautiful poem.

The third chapter on this manthra is in *Part Three: The Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) Ancient Commentaries.* Here some ancient commentaries are given and discussed, including the oldest commentary which is the Younger Avestan (YAv.) Yasna 20.

If you are interested in reading all three chapters, I suggest that you read them together ~ in sequence in the above order. To place information and ideas in context, you will find some repetition, for which I ask your indulgence.

Translations of this manthra vary greatly. Although it is not a part of any of the five Gathas, it is in pure Gatha Avestan (also called Old Avestan), and it is so very much like the Gathas in its ideas and its cryptic, multi-dimensioned style of composition, that some scholars believe it was composed by Zarathushtra himself. I agree 100%. The style and thoughts of this manthra are pure Zarathushtra.[1]

Therefore, when we make choices between (linguistically valid) translation alternatives, we should not just pick the one that most appeals to us. If we want to understand Zarathushtra's intent we should look to the Gathas (and corroborating later texts), in making our translation choices.

In all *Avestan* texts (which appear in SBE and Geldner) that mention this manthra, it is called the "Asha Vahishta".[2] During Sasanian times, it was recited as a prayer at many different parts of the ritual, and in the manuscripts, the notations requiring such recitals call it by its first two words 'ashem vohu', which is how it came to be so called today. The same is true of the Ahuna Vairya. During Sasanian times, it too was recited as a prayer and at many different parts of the ritual, and in the manuscripts the notations requiring such recitals call it by its first three words 'yatha ahu vairyo'.

So it is puzzling that although scholars today call the Yatha Ahu Vairyo by its Avestan name or title (Ahuna Vairya) they do not call the Ashem Vohu by its Avestan name or title (Asha Vahishta). This is unfortunate because the original title of a piece reflects its essence, which should impact translation choices. The title Asha Vahishta more accurately reflects the original meaning of this manthra, and is far more beautiful (in meaning, based on how Zarathushtra uses *vahišta-* words in the Gathas) than the title Ashem Vohu.

Before we get into an analysis of this manthra, let us recall that *aṣa-* means 'the true order of existence ~ in the existence of matter (what is factually correct) and in the existence of mind (all that is right ~ correct in that sense)'.[3] In English translation, that makes for a very long definition for which I will sometimes use the short-hand word 'truth'. But when you see 'truth', please bear in mind that it includes factual truths, as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit.

I have kept the translation of this manthra as close to the original as I can, so that you can see Zarathushtra's own ideas, and also the flavor of his poetry. And yes. Contrary to general opinion, I think this manthra is a poem (discussed below).

Here is the Asha Vahishta manthra.

a. *aṣəm. vohū.   vahištəm. astī.*
b. *uštā. astī.   uštā. ahmāi.*
c. *hyat̰. aṣāi.   vahištāi. aṣəm.* ⟡   Y27.14. Geldner 1P p. 98.[4]

My translation.

a. The true order of existence (is) good; the most-good (existence) it is.
b. Desire it! /under will it is, (*uštā astī* double entendre for the first *uštā*)
happiness! /bliss! / enlightenment! (it is) (triple entendre for the 2d *uštā*); for that (existence)
c. which (is) the true order of existence, for (the sake of) the most good true order of existence.' Y27.14.
Or the short version of line c.,
c. which (is) truth, for (the sake of) the most good truth.' Y27:14.

The centerpiece of this manthra is *aṣa-*, the true order of existence and the fact that the true order of existence *is* intrinsic goodness. The two are equated. So the centerpiece of this manthra is a core teaching of Zarathushtra's, which in later Av. texts became the standard way of referring to truth ~ *aṣa- vahišta-*.

Yet, the first line which establishes this idea has generated many different translations. So too has this manthra as a whole. Insler has not published a translation of it so far as I am aware. But, through his kindness, I have benefitted from some of his unpublished views which I will acknowledge in the course of this discussion.

True, some translation differences are caused by the mind-set of a given translator. But translation differences are also caused by ambiguities inherent in the Avestan language itself ~ the (linguistically valid) different possible meanings and grammatical values of some of its words as well as its syntax (the way in which words are put together to create an intended sentence or phrase).

Some of these ambiguities (in my view) were intended, generating multiple meanings that would have been well understood, and deeply appreciated, by Zarathushtra's contemporaries who were fluent in the language. These are precisely the kinds of things that create the multi-dimensioned architecture of this poem which is so typical of the poetic techniques we find in the Gathas.

Therefore, we should not diminish this manthra by adopting an attitude in translating a given word, that:
If it is this, then it cannot be that.

The translation choices I suggest are linguistically defensible (based on the opinions of eminent linguists) and are consistent with the micro context of this manthra and the macro context of Zarathushtra's thought in the Gathas. You may see dimensions that I have missed, or disagree with my perceptions. And that is

fine. A variety of opinions is nothing to fear, so long as our various alternatives are linguistically accurate, are sound in their reasoning, and are consistent with micro / macro contexts. And if a conclusion is corroborated in later texts, that adds to its probable accuracy.

Architecture of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu).

The Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) is a melody on truth.   In form, it is simplicity itself ~ containing three lines, each of which has four words.   Let us now consider the music of its poetry, and its crescendos, which influence its beautiful meanings.

The crescendo of the first line.

One of the main problems in translations by even the finest modern linguists, is that they translate the first line as one unit of meaning. In so doing (with respect), they have failed to consider a style of expression which is abundant in Younger Avestan texts, and which solves the problems of translating the first line, resulting in beautiful crescendos of poetry and meaning, in the architecture of this poem.

So did Zarathushtra intend:

Two units of meaning (*aṣ̌əm vohū / vahištəm astī*),
Or one (*aṣ̌əm vohū vahištəm astī*).

I think Zarathushtra intended this first line to be two units of meaning.

Line a: *aṣ̌əm vohū   /   vahištəm astī*
'The true order of existence (is) good;   /   the most~good (existence) it is,'

Translating line a. in this way ~ as 2 units of meaning with an implied (is) in the first unit ~ was the syntactic choice of some outstanding linguists of an earlier generation,[5] but it was disputed by other linguists of that generation, and has fallen out of favor with many of today's linguists, who think line a. should be translated as one unit of meaning with *vohū* 'good' used as a noun, and its superlative degree *vahištəm* 'most good' used as an adjective describing *vohū*.   Here are a few such examples (with which I disagree) from the many translations given at the end of this chapter (more detail is given in the *Linguistics* section below).

Humbach 1991: "Truth is the best [*vahištəm*] (part of all that is) good [*vohū*]."[6]
Humbach/Faiss 2010:[7] "Truth is the best/highest [*vahištəm*] good/possession [*vohū*]."

Taraporewala 1951:[8]   "Righteousness is the highest [*vahištəm*] Good [*vohū*]."

Jafarey 1989:[9]   "Righteousness is the best [*vahištəm*]   good [*vohū*]."

The oldest 'translation' is the Pahlavi one. By Pahlavi times, Avestan as a language ~ its grammar, vocabulary, syntactic styles ~ was no longer understood. Pahlavi 'translations' of the Gathas are more in the nature of information, opinions, regarding what a given passage meant, that were handed down from generation to generation.

The Pahlavi translation of the first line is as follows:

"Truthfulness [*aṣ̌əm*] is [*astī*] the foremost [*vahištəm*?] boon [*vohū* ?]." [10]

The word 'boon' means a gift, a wish to be granted. And it is possible that the Pahlavi translator(s) were influenced by *uštā* in the next line (one meaning of which derives from 'wish'). But there is no evidence whatsoever that in the Gathas *vohū* is used to mean a 'gift' or 'wish' in any sense, or that *vahišta-* is used to

mean 'foremost' (which is one of the flavors of meaning for the Av. word *paourvya-* 'first').   Nor (based on my best recollection) do *vohu-* and *vahišta-* have these meanings (without dispute) in YAv. texts.   So, with respect, 'boon' and 'foremost' are not correct translations of *vohū* and *vahišta-*.

With respect, the syntax of all such translations (which translate line a. as one syntactic unit) are incorrect for many reasons. Here are a few.

This syntactic choice which shows *vahišta-* is an adjective describing *vohu-* is not consistent with the title of the manthra, Asha Vahishta, in which *vahišta-* is an adjective describing *aṣa-*. Nor is there any instance in the Gathas, in which *vahišta-* is used as an adjective to describe *vohu-*.

But even more important, this syntactic choice is not consistent with a frequently used style of Avestan syntax in which a positive and superlative adj. in the same line, form 2 syntactic units, with the superlative functioning as a crescendo of expression. For example:

The YAv. *Hormezd (Ormazd) Yasht,* is full of such examples in which the author has Ahura Mazda (purportedly) giving His names (thus the author reveals his perception of the nature of the Divine). Here are a few. There are many, many more in this Yasht, and in other YAv. texts as well (samplings of which are footnoted).[11]

> ... *baēšazya nąma*[12] *ahmi   baēšazyōtəma nąma ahmi*
> '...healing by name am I,   most~healing by name am I';
>
> ... *aṣava nąma ahmi   aṣavastəma nąma ahmi*
> '... truthful by name am I,   most~truthful by name am I';
>
> ... *xᵛarənaŋha nąma ahmi   xᵛarənaŋuhastəma nąma ahmi...*
> '... glorious by name am I,   most~glorious by name am I...'. Yt. 1.12.[13]

In each of these lines (and the additional footnoted examples), the positive and the superlative form 2 syntactic units which are equated ~ with the superlatives functioning as a crescendo.

And indeed we see somewhat the same idea in the Gathas as well (although not in the exact style of the foregoing YAv. examples). For example.

"... those who rule over life at will in the House of Good [*vohu-*] Thinking.   This is equal to the best indeed [*vahištācīṯ* 'the most good indeed'] ..." Y32.15 - 16, Insler 1975. Here, *vohu-* and *vahišta-* are equated, with *vahišta-* representing a crescendo of expression.

In addition, the house of good [*vohu-*] thinking is one of Zarathushtra's names for paradise (a state of being that houses the comprehension of truth). And *ahu- vahišta-* 'the most good existence' is also one of his names for paradise.[14]   So we see again the equating of *vohu-* and *vahišta-* with the latter functioning as a crescendo of expression, because these two terms do not describe two separate paradises, but just one state of being that is paradise.

I think that the foregoing reasons (all of which are facts) require that we choose the syntax of line a. as two units, with *vohu-* and *vahišta-* equated, ~ both adjectives describing *aṣa-* ~ but in the 2d unit with the superlative *vahišta-* functioning as a crescendo of expression, giving us,

Line a. *aṣəm vohū / vahištəm astī*
'The true order of existence [*aṣəm*] (is) good [*vohū*] / the most good [*vahištəm*] (existence) it is [*astī*];'

This syntax has the following advantages.

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1. It accords with the title of this manthra ~ Asha Vahishta (in which *vahištəm* describes *aṣ̌əm*) which accords with the central role that Zarathushtra gives *vahišta-* in the Gathas, in which *vahišta-* describes the many ways in which *aṣ̌a-* is used in the Gathas ~ for the Divine, the path to the Divine, and the reward for taking that path;[15]

2. It accords with the ways in which *vohu-* and *vahišta-* are used in the Gathas;

3. It accords with a well established style of Avestan syntax in the *Hormezd Yasht,* and many other YAv. texts;

4. It gives each Avestan word its correct grammatical value, and does not require the addition of multiple implied words to make the translation work (other than according to well established Av. usage); and

5. It unites a unit of meaning with a unit of rhythm in lines a. and b., and fits the architecture of the manthra as a whole.

Uniting units of rhythm and meaning.

The rhythm (or meter) of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) is not one of the meters in the Gathas. But that does not mean this manthra is not poetry. It has rhythm and alliteration ~ both hallmarks of poetry.   And (in my opinion) it has a meter which, (as any Zoroastrian child can demonstrate), when recited aloud, or chanted, is as follows:

(x = light beat; l = emphasized beat with the syllables being 9, 8, 9, in lines a., b., and c., respectively.

line a.	x 1	x x	x 1 x	x x
	a šəm	*vo hū*	*va hiš tēm*	*as tī*
line b.	1 x	x x	1 x	x x
	uš tā	*as tī*	*uš tā*	*ah māi*
line c.	x 1	x x	x 1 x	x 1
	hyaṯ	*aš āi*	*va hiš tāi*	*a šəm*

When recited, the first unit of rhythm is *ašəm vohū*.   The second unit of rhythm is *vahištəm astī* which mirrors the two units of rhythm in the next line ~ *uštā astī* and *uštā ahmāi*.

In a recited piece, where the rhythm is as simple as it is here, it would certainly make the recital more meaningful when a unit of rhythm coincides with a unit of meaning. This often does not happen in the Gathas, where the meter and meanings are more complex.[16]   But in a manthra which was intended to be (and was/is) recited by everyone ~ even little children ~ as one of Zarathushtra's most basic teachings (that the true order of existence is wholly good), it would make sense for Zarathushtra to unite a unit of rhythm with a unit of meaning, which would have made its recital more meaningful to a wide range of people who were fluent in Avestan, as they sang or recited it ~ from children, to adults who were not interested in philosophy or puzzles but in the practicalities of living, to those who were interested in philosophy and loved puzzles (and also the practicalities of living).

In addition, in the Gathas, the verb 'to be' is specifically stated where emphasis is intended, or where required to give it the meaning 'to exist').[17] Here, the specific use of *astī* in *vahištəm astī* (line a.) and *uštā*

astī (line b.) is in accord with the emphasis on *vahištəm* and *uštā* ~ an emphasis of rhythm which mirrors an emphasis of meaning.   And it accords with the existence that is *vahištəm* and *uštā* as well.

In light of all these factors (especially the examples of a positive and a superlative being used as two units in one line in YAv. texts, demonstrated above), I think that in line a., Zarathushtra intends *ašəm vohū* and *vahištəm astī* to be two units of meaning, matching its two units of rhythm, which also reflects the two units of rhythm / meaning in line b., as the architecture of the poem demonstrates.

Uniting crescendos and meanings.

The title of this manthra describes truth as *vahišta-* ~ the superlative degree of 'good'. So to understand this manthra, we have to it understand how Zarathushtra uses the word *vahišta-*.

In the Gathas *vahišta-* is used in two ways ~ as a crescendo of expression, and also as a progression to the highest degree of intrinsic goodness. This has been detailed in another chapter.[18] But I will summarize it here:

~ *vahišta-* is used as a name for the Divine, and also describes the 7 qualities that make a being divine (each of which is an aspect of truth, or equated with truth);[19]

~ *vahišta-*   is used for Wisdom's teachings (which is the path of truth, the path of Wisdom's 7 divine qualities);

~ *vahišta-* is used to describe the thoughts, words and actions which (incrementally) implement and personify Wisdom's teachings (which thoughts, words and actions comprise the concept of *ārmaiti-*, ~ truth embodied in thought, word and action ~ a divine quality);

~ *vahišta-* is used for the reward for such thoughts, words and actions (which are the incremental attainment of the 7 qualities that make a being divine); and

~ *vahišta-* is used for the ultimate reward for such thoughts, words and actions ~ Zarathushtra's paradise, the most good existence (*ahu- vahišta-*), the state of being that personifies completely, the beneficial way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*), which is the true, wholly good order of existence (*aša- vahišta-*), and its component qualities ~ its comprehension, its embodiment in thought, word and action, its rule, its complete attainment, resulting in a perfected state of being no longer bound by mortality.

With the foregoing understanding of how the superlative *vahišta-* is used in the Avestan language, and in the Gathas, let us consider what Zarathushtra's intent may have been in crafting the architecture of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) manthra.

The first unit of meaning is the foundation of its architecture.

ašəm vohū 'the true order of existence (is) good' which then is refracted into a gradual crescendo of three units of meaning ~ in all of which, the 'it' stands for truth,

~ *vahištəm astī* 'the most good (existence) it is, (line a.)

~ *uštā astī* 'desire it! wish it! / under will it is, (double entendre for the 1st *uštā*) (line b. first half)

~ *uštā ahmāi* 'happiness! /bliss! /enlightenment! (it is) (triple entendre for the 2d *uštā*) for that (existence) (line b. second half)

which in turn are re-integrated into both the rhythm and the sense of the last line, where *ašāi* and *vahištāi* are equated, which reflects the equating of *ašəm* and *vahištəm* in line a. (as well as the title of the manthra). Thus in line c.,

hyaṯ ašāi vahištāi ašəm

'which [*hyaṯ*] (is) the true order of existence [*ašəm*], for (the sake of) the most good true order of existence [*ašāi vahištāi*].'

Or, using the shorter 'truth' for *aša-*,

'which [*hyaṯ*] (is) truth [*ašəm*], for (the sake of) the most good truth [*ašāi vahištāi*].'

To me, it is a breathtaking example of Zarathushtra's poetic skill, that the only verb expressed (and implied) in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) is *astī* 'is' which expresses 'existence', and the poem is about the true, wholly good, order of existence *aša-* the amount and quality of which increase incrementally in mortal existence represented by the crescendo from 'good' *vohu-* to 'most-good' (*vahišta-*) ~ the most-good existence (*ahu- vahišta-*) which Zarathushtra equates with the Divine, the path to the Divine, and the reward for taking that path, the state of being that is paradise ~ which is exactly the way he treats *aša-* (the nature of the Divine, the path to the Divine, and the reward for taking that path).

Many translators have felt it necessary to fudge the translations of particular words in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), ~ not giving each word its correct grammatical value, or adding many English words that are not in the Avestan textin ~ order to arrive at what they consider to be a meaningful whole.   With respect, I do not think that is acceptable ~ not if we want to arrive at Zarathushtra's intent in crafting this manthra.

Consider this fact. The manuscripts show many, many variations in the words of Gatha verses and other Avestan texts, but the fact that Geldner shows no manuscript variations,[20] in Y27.14, the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), indicates that we probably have the manthra in at least the grammatical form in which Zarathushtra composed it (although there may (or may not) have been evolutions in pronunciation; and regional differences in word forms).[21]   I therefore think, if we want to understand Zarathushtra's intent, it is imperative to translate the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) in a way that is as linguistically accurate as possible ~ accounting for all its words, with no fudging in the way any of its words are translated (both in their grammatical values, and their meanings), and without inserting a lot of implied words to make a given translation work.

In *Part One: The Manthra of Truth Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu)*, and in this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that the result ~ both in the beautiful kaleidoscope of ideas expressed, and in its poetic craftsmanship, is worth the effort.

In summary: The Asha Vahishta manthra contains in a nutshell ~ simply stated ~ some of Zarathushtra's most foundational teachings that even children can understand (and enjoy reciting because of its simple rhythms and alliteration):

   ~ that truth (the true order of existence) is wholly good;

   ~ that we should want it, desire it;

   ~ that we can will it into existence with our choices;

   ~ that truth brings joy in the existence of matter, and bliss, enlightenment, in the existence of mind;

   ~ that we should bring about an existence of truth, for truth's own sake.

And the Asha Vahishta manthra also contains multi-dimensions which encapsulate Zarathushtra's entire spiritual philosophy (for those who have studied his songs) ~ the nature of the Divine, the path to the Divine (how to heal existence from the diseases of falsehood and wrongdoing which are destructive and bring suffering), and the (incremental and ultimate) reward for taking that path ~ all of which are indeed, the true order of existence which is the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness ~ *aṣa- vahišta-*.

But these conclusions are only as good as our linguistics are accurate. So let us now consider in detail, the linguistics of this poem.

Linguistics.

Let us first do a line by line analysis, considering for each word, its grammar, its meaning(s), and how these words should be put together (syntax), including opinions other than mine.

I have already detailed the multi~dimensioned ways in which Zarathushtra uses *aṣa-* and *vahišta-* in the chapter on this manthra in *Part One,* (and, with some repetition, above), so I will not repeat that information here. But the different meanings of *uštā* (lightly touched on there) are linguistic, so I will substantiate my translation choices in more detail here, with references to some YAv. texts.

<center>* * * * *</center>

Line a: *aṣəm vohū vahištəm astī*
'The true order of existence (is) good;   the most~good (existence) it is,'

aṣəm '(the) true order of existence (is)'
aṣəm is the form (in Old Avestan) for both nom.sg. and acc. sg. of the ntr. stem *aṣa-*.[22] Here, *aṣəm* has to be nom. sg. because there is no verb which would support *aṣəm* as an accusative object, and there is no reason (consistent with normal Avestan usage) to imply such a verb. The verb *astī* which does appear in line a. is a form of the verb 'to be' and therefore does not support an accusative object.[23] Its object would have to be nom. So *aṣəm* can only be nom. here.

(is): I have implied the verb '(is)' *astī* in lines a. and c., for the following reasons.

(1) In the Gathas, various conjugations of the verb *ah-* 'to be' almost always are implied,[24] (except when expressly stated for some particular reason, such as when the context requires it, or for emphasis, or when used as 'to exist'); and
(2) In normal Avestan usage, a word sometimes is implied which has been (previously or subsequently) stated. Linguists call this elipsis.
In line a. I think the verb *astī* 'is' is first implied, and then stated to achieve the crescendo (explained above).
In line c. I think *astī* 'is' is implied because the line needs a verb, as almost all translators agree (and many of them have also chosen an implied 'is').

vohū 'good'
vohū is nom./acc. ntr. sg./pl. of the adjective stem *vohu-*.[25] Here *vohū* is nom. for the same reason that *aṣəm* is nom. (discussed above). And *vohū* is ntr. sg. because it describes *aṣəm* , a ntr. sg. noun (in Av. an adj. has to be in the same case, number, gender as the noun it describes).
vohū is an adjective 'good', which in Avestan can also be used as a noun 'good (thing)', or 'good (person)', indicating a thing or person that has the qualities of the adjective.

<center>8</center>

In English, the adj. 'good' when used as a noun ~ 'good (things)' ~ can mean abstract things (like qualities or concepts), and also material things, physical property that can be bought, sold, and owned (as in *a shipment of goods*). And (based on English usage) some translators have translated *vohū* in this manthra as a noun meaning physical property. With respect, I do not agree for the following reasons.

In the Gathas *vohu-* means intrinsic goodness. Zarathushtra sometimes uses *vohu-* as a noun for a person or thing which has the quality of this adjective.[26]   But I have seen no evidence in the Gathas of *vohu-* being used as a noun for material 'property' (as in the English *goods*) or as any noun that has nothing to do with the quality of intrinsic 'goodness'. Each Gatha verse in which *vohu-* is used as a noun (in the Insler 1975 translation) is footnoted here, so you can see for yourself.[27]   We therefore are not justified in ascribing to Avestan *vohu-* the English meaning 'possession', 'acquisition', 'wealth', 'goods', 'property', 'estate',[28] (as some translators have done).

So the questions arise: In the context of line a., did Zarathushtra intend to use *vohū* as an adj.? A noun? And if a noun, as a thing? a concept? a being? Let us set these questions on the back burner until we consider line a. as a whole (syntax).

vahištəm 'most good'
vahištəm is the form for both nom. and acc. sg. ntr. of the adjective stem *vahišta-* in Old Avestan.[29] Here, it would be nom. sg. ntr., (the same grammatical value as *ašəm*) because there is no verb in line a. which would support an acc. object.
vahištəm is the superlative degree of *vohu-* 'good', and therefore means 'most good'.
Many translators have translated *vahištəm* as 'best', which is not an accurate English equivalent because the English 'best' has acquired a competitive meaning which has nothing to do with intrinsic goodness, as I have already demonstrated.[30] Therefore (with respect) I do not think Zarathushtra's thought is accurately conveyed when *vahišta-* is translated as 'best' ~ not in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), nor in the Gathas. So let us think of *vahištəm* in its Avestan meaning, as the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness ~ 'most good'.

As an adjective, *vahištəm* (like *vohū* and other Av. adjs.) can also be used as a noun 'most good (thing)', or 'most good (one)', indicating a thing, or a being, that exemplifies the quality of intrinsic goodness in the superlative degree.

So the questions arise: In the context of line a., did Zarathushtra intend to use *vahištəm* as an adj.? A noun? And if a noun, as a thing? a concept? a being? Let us set those questions on the back burner until we consider line a. as a whole.

astī   'it is'
astī means 'it is'. The word *astī* is 3p sg. present tense (indicative) of the verb *ah-* 'to be' ~ the 3d person pronoun 'it' being part of the verb form.[31] Here the subject of this verb is the previously mentioned ntr. noun *ašəm*, hence the pronoun '(it)', which is a part of the 3p sg. form of the verb *astī*.

Returning to the two back-burner questions (above) regarding whether Zarathushtra intended either of the adjectives, *vohū* and *vahištəm* to be treated as nouns: I have treated them both as adjectives describing *ašəm* ~ with *vahištəm* functioning as a crescendo, and as the highest degree of the quality of intrinsic goodness, which is Zarathushtra's conception of the nature of true order of existence; which (in a nutshell) is his conception of the nature of the Divine, the path to the Divine, and the reward for taking that path.

Thus, line a: *ašəm vohū vahištəm astī*
'The true order of existence [*ašəm*] (is) good [*vohū*];   the most~good [*vahištəm*] (existence) it is [*astī*],'

How these four words ~ *ašəm vohū vahištəm astī* ~ are put together in English, in a way that gives each word its correct grammatical value, significantly affects their translation and the meaning of the manthra as a whole. So (now that you know the grammatical values of each word), fool around with these 4 words, the way you would with 4 pieces of a jig saw puzzle, and see how you can put them together in a way that is grammatically accurate, and also consistent with the Gathas.

* * *

Line b.   uštā astī   uštā ahmāi
b.   desire it! /under will   it is, (*uštā astī* double entendre for the first *uštā*)
happiness ! bliss! / enlightenment ! (it is) (triple entendre for the 2d *uštā*);   for that (existence)

uštā
uštā   is used twice in line b. In Old Avestan (as in English) some words have more than one meaning, and can be used with double (or multiple) entendre, ~ a well known technique of Zarathushtra's. And I think that *uštā* in this manthra is one of these words.   And it is a word that also has multiple grammatical values ~ as verb forms, as noun forms, and also as an interjection.

1.   *uštā* 'desired' is a past participle ('desired') of the verb *vas-* 'to wish, to desire',[32] which can be used as a noun, generating the meaning 'desired (things)', (*uštā* being the nom./acc. pl. form when the past participle is used as a noun ~ Skjaervo Old Avestan Index).[33]

Humbach 1991 translated *uštā* in this way in line b.
"As desired (all) the desired (things) are available (as) truth".[34]
I find this translation troubling. I am puzzled about the meaning of the line (when so translated). In addition, in line b., the verb *astī* is 3p sg. It expressly governs the first *uštā*, and impliedly governs the 2d *uštā*. In the Humbach 1991 translation, the verb expressly governs the 2d *uštā*, and there is no place for it with the first *uštā* ~ although expressly stated there in the Avestan text.   Nor can *uštā* be pl. "desired things" if the verb is sg.   A pl. *uštā* would require a pl. verb form (which *astī* is not). To make it work, this translation adds the word "available" which is not in the GAv. text of line b., (and does not fit the normal usage for implied words in Avestan). And of course, the words "(as) truth" do not appear in line b.

The translation of Humbach/Faiss 2010 suffers from the same objections. The only differences are that they see a double entendre for the first *uštā*, they place "(available)" in round parentheses to indicate an interpretative addition and they omit "(as) truth", which they place in line c.
Humbach/Faiss 2010: "As desired/at will [*uštā*] the (things) desired [*uštā*] are [*astī* ?] (available)".

2.   *uštā* is the imperative form of the verb stem *vas-* 'to wish, to desire, to will,' ~ thus 'wish (it)! desire (it)!' and I think this is part of a double entendre for the first *uštā* in line b. I am indebted to Professor Insler for this insight.[35]

3.   *uštā* is also the loc. sg. case form of the noun *ušti-* 'desire, wish, will', (Skjaervo Old Avestan Index). As loc. sg. it could mean 'at wish/will,' or 'under wish/will'; thus *uštā astī* 'it (truth) exists [*astī*] under (our) will' i.e. we can achieve it, we can will into existence our wish for the true order. I am indebted to Professor

Insler for this insight as well. And I think this is one of the meanings which Zarathushtra intended for the first *uštā*.

4. *uštatāt-* (a state of '*ušta*~ness') in YAv. has been translated as a state of 'happiness', 'blessedness', a 'benediction'.[36] The suffix *-tāt* '-ness' stands for a condition or state of being (as in *amərətāt-* non-deathness). The Younger Avestan commentary on the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) explains that the line *uštā astī uštā ahmāi* describes this state of being, *uštatāt-*.[37] Now it is true that in line b. of this manthra, *uštā* is not a form of the stem *uštatāt-*. But the commentary is not a translation (being in a younger version of the same language). It is intended as an explanation, expressing the opinion that *uštā* in line b. describes a state of being that is both material happiness and spiritual bliss ~ *uštatāt-*. That idea is corroborated by another meaning of *ušta* which is an interjection 'happiness!', described next. And I think these meanings also add flavors of meaning to the 2d *uštā* in line b.

(5) *ušta* (in YAv. texts) is an interjection. As such, it has no case forms.[38] An interjection is an exclamation (like "Cheers!"). In the YAv. *Tir Yasht*, Yt. 8.29, the author uses *ušta* as an interjection which means 'happiness!' The long final vowel in GAv. (*uštā* and *ahurā mazdā*) is shortened in YAv. (*ušta* and *ahura mazda*).

> "... *ušta mē ahura mazda ušta āpō urvarãsca ušta daēne māzdayasne ušta ā.bavaṯ daińhavō* ...

> "... Happiness for me, O Lord, Wisdom! happiness, O waters and plants! happiness, O wisdom-worshipping envisionment! happiness O lands!", my translation.

And the happiness (*ušta*) mentioned in this passage of the *Tir Yasht* is described by the author of the Yasht as *uštatāt-* ~ giving us the flavor of happiness that is both material and spiritual ~ 'happiness! /bliss! /enlightenment! (which I have explained in this footnote).[39] It is important to be aware that the Gathas do not mention the YAv. deity *Tishtrya,* (the spiritual essence of the star associated with bringing the rains), nor any of the other deities (or spiritual essences) of Zarathushtra's culture. The Gathas mention only Wisdom (and the qualities that make a being divine) as the object of worship. But in the *Tir Yasht* (and in almost all other YAv. texts) we also see some of Zarathushtra's metaphors and ideas mingled in with the henotheism of his culture, which he rejected.[40]

Whether the YAv. interjection *ušta*, was also a GAv. interjection *uštā*, we cannot say for certain. But it would be reasonable to conclude that it was, because the YAv. commentary (Yy20.2) on the GAv. Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), explains *uštā* as a state of *uštatāt-*,[41] which the *Tir Yasht* equates with the interjection *ušta-*.

And in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), *uštā* has indeed been translated as 'happiness', (although not always as an interjection) by Spiegel, Kanga, Dhalla, Irani, and Dadachanji; Mascaro translates it as 'joy'; Haug as 'a blessing', Mills and Anklesaria as "weal", which means 'well-being' ~ another (slightly different) perspective of the state of being that is 'joyful blessedness', and Khabardar as "Eternal Light (or Bliss)".

According to Taraporewala, *uštā* can mean more than 'happiness'. He thinks it also means 'illumination', implying a state of bliss which is the illumination of the soul in the fulfillment of earthly life (which accords well with the meaning 'joyful blessedness'. This also accords with one of Zarathushtra's names for the joyful enlightened state of being that is paradise ~ the house of song, representing the high we experience when singing or listening to beautiful music). And it accords with Zarathushtra's idea that paradise is a state of

joyful enlightenment (which later texts call 'endless lights').[42]   Taraporewala recognizes the other meanings of *uštā*, including 'wish', et cetera in various verses of the Gathas, but he thinks that in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) and certain Gathas verses, *uštā* is nom. sg. fem. and means 'illumination', deriving from the root *vah-*, *uš-*, 'to shine'.[43]   Unfortunately, Taraporewala does not identify the fem. noun stem which he says generates *uštā* as its nom. sg. form, so it is difficult to analyse or corroborate his conclusion. But his opinion is certainly corroborated by the context in which *uštā* is used in this manthra. Specifically:

In the Gathas, both *aša-* and *vahišta-* are used for Zarathushtra's notion of paradise, ⁓ also called the house of good thinking (a state of being that houses the comprehension of truth), an enlightened existence.[44]   Light is specifically used in the Gathas (and later texts) as a material metaphor for (and sometimes a symbol of) the true order of existence (*aša-*) and its comprehension good thinking (*vohu-manah-*) ⁓ an enlightened existence.[45]   In later texts, the state of being that is the ultimate good end (what today is called 'paradise') is called 'endless light(s)'. And in a Pahlavi text, a name of the Divine (who is Wisdom personified ⁓ an enlightened existence) is 'Endless Light'.[46]

Applying these facts to the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), *uštā* in line b. refers to *aša-* and *vahišta-* (in lines a. and c.). I therefore think that the happiness/ bliss/ enlightenment which the true order of existence brings ⁓ in imperfect mortal existence and in perfected existence which no longer is mortal (paradise) ⁓ is a meaning Zarathushtra intends for the 2d *uštā* in line b. ⁓ as an interjection 'happiness! /bliss! /enlightenment!'

astī   'it is'
astī   has the same meaning in line b. as it does in line a., discussed above 'it is' / it exists' ⁓ 3p sg. present tense (indicative) of the verb *ah-* 'to be'. The verb 'to be' represents a way of expressing 'existence' as (millennia later) Descartes did in his famous philosophical conclusion *I think, therefore I am* (meaning *I think, therefore I exist*).   In many verses of the Gathas, various forms of the verb *ah-* 'to be' have been translated by Insler (1975) as forms of the verb 'to exist'.[47]   And indeed, one of the Av. words for 'existence' is *sti-*, a fem. noun derived from *ah-* 'to be', Skjaervo Old Av. Index.   The other Avestan word (in stem form) for 'existence' is *ahu-* (and *ahu-* is also the stem word for 'lord').

In my view, in line b. the first *uštā* coupled with *astī* includes the meanings 'Desire it! /under will/wish [*uštā*] it exists [*astī*]' ⁓ the 'it' referring to *ašəm* in the preceding line a.

And the 2d *uštā* with an implied *astī* describes an existence that is happiness, bliss, enlightenment 'happiness/bliss! enlightenment! (it is)' ⁓ referring to *ašəm* ⁓ the true order of existence ⁓ in the preceding line a. In my view, this meaning for the 2d *uštā* includes happiness in the material existence (when we live in sync with *aša-* the true order of existence) as well as the bliss of enlightenment (when we have attained completely ⁓ when we personify ⁓ the true order of existence *aša-*). And in my view, this is exactly the way in which the word *uštā* is first used in the first line of Gatha verse Y43:1, (although not everyone agrees with me).[48]

ahmāi   'for that (existence)
ahmāi can have more than one meaning. It is the dat. sg. masc./ntr. form of the demonstrative pronoun *a-*.[49] In English, the dat. sg. is indicated by adding before the pronoun the word 'to' or 'for'. Thus *ahmāi* could mean 'to/for this, or 'to/for that'.
In GAv., demonstrative pronouns are also used for 3d person pronouns,[50] so the dat. sg. masc./ntr. *ahmāi* could with equal accuracy mean 'to/for him, to/for it'.[51] Thus in line b. *ahmāi* could mean generic man.

And many translators have so translated *ahmāi*.   However although 'to/for him' might fit the context of *uštā ahmāi* in line b., It does not tie in to the context of line c. which has the noun *ašəm* 'truth', and not the adj. *ašavan-* 'truthful' (which would be required if a person was intended ~ as in 'for him [*ahmāi*] who (is) truthful for truth's own sake').

Some translators have translated *ahmāi* as dat. pl., but the dat. pl. form would be *aēibyō* (Skjaervo Old Av. Index).

I therefore translate *ahmāi* as 'for that (existence)' referring to the existence which is *ašəm* and *vahištəm* in line a., and *ašāi* and *vahištāi* in line c.   And this I think fits Zarathushtra's intent. We see the same use of *ahmāi-* (referring to an implied 'existence') in the Gatha verse, Y30.7.   In the preceding verse (Y30.6), Zarathushtra mentions one of the Avestan words for 'existence' *ahu-* (in its acc. sg. form *ahūm*).[52] And in the next verse (Y30.7) he starts with *ahmāicā* ~ a demonstrative pronoun dat. sg. which many translators (including Insler 1975, and Humbach/Faiss 2010) think refers to *ahūm* 'existence' in the preceding verse, thus literally *ahmāicā*   'but to this (existence)...'. Y30.7.[53]

Returning to the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), line b. *uštā. astī.   uštā. ahmāi.*
'desire it! /under will [*uštā*] it is [*astī*];   happiness ! bliss! / enlightenment ! [*uštā*] (it is); for that [*ahmāi*] (existence),

Line c. *hyaṯ ašāi vahištāi ašəm*
'which (is) the true order of existence, for (the sake of) the most good true (correct) order of existence',
Or using the shorter form,   'which (is) truth for (the sake of) the most good truth.'

It is readily apparent that line c. *hyaṯ   ašāi   vahištāi   ašəm* contains no verb.   Many translators have supplied an implied '(is)', and in the context of line c., I agree.

hyaṯ   'which (is)'
hyaṯ means 'which', (among other meanings),[54] a relative pronoun which stands for the subsequent *ašəm*, thus 'which (is) the true order of existence [*hyaṯ ... ašəm*] ...'.   These two words therefore belong together ~ the pronoun *hyaṯ* stands for *ašəm* ~ they are equated.
Thus the first word in line c. [*hyaṯ*] and the last word in line c. [*ašəm*] encapsulate or frame the words in between ~ *hyaṯ ašāi vahištāi ašəm*. In Zarathushtra's compositions (thanks to Insler's insight), when two words which belong together frame or encapsulate one or more other words, the framing and framed words form a unit of thought. Examples in the Gathas are legion.[55] So the four words comprising line c. would have to form one unit of thought (unlike the four words in each of lines a. and b.)

ašāi vahištāi
ašāi vahištāi are dat. sg. of the ntr. noun *aša-* and its adjective *vahišta-*, and therefore (literally) mean 'for (the) most good truth'. As such *ašāi vahištāi* would be an indirect object of the implied verb '(is)'.

ašəm
ašəm means the true order of existence. In the context of line c. it is nom. sg. of the ntr. stem *aša-* because it is the only word in line c. that could be the subject of the implied verb '(is)' (the only other words, *ašāi vahištāi* are indirect objects ~ dat. sg.).

It is a function of Zarathushtra's poetic art that he starts and ends this manthra with the same word *aṣ̌əm* which is the centerpiece of this manthra.

Thus *hyaṯ aṣ̌āi vahištāi aṣ̌əm*
'which [*hyaṯ*] (is) truth [*aṣ̌əm*] for (the sake of) the most good truth.'

Or more literally, 'which (is) the true order of existence, for (the sake of) the most good true order of existence.'

Now you may object that the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) is famous for expressing the idea of truth for truth itself. So why isn't the word 'itself' in the GAv. text? Well, Old Avestan (GAv.) has no reflexive pronouns such as 'itself, himself, herself'.[56]   So when the sense of the GAv. text requires it, translators sometimes add an implied reflexive pronoun (although not always in round parentheses).   And in line c. some translators have indeed added the word 'itself' (as implied).   And I have no problem with that. It is simply a matter of personal preference. I think to capture Zarathushtra's intent in fluent English we need to add the implied words '(the sake of)'. And if we also add an implied '(itself)' we would get:

Using the short definition of *aṣ̌a-*:
Line b.   '... for that (existence)
Line c. which (is) truth [*hyaṯ … aṣ̌əm*] for (the sake of) the most good truth [*aṣ̌āi vahištāi*] (itself).'

Using the long (more literal) definition of *aṣ̌a-*:
Line b.   '... for that (existence)
Line c. which (is) the true order of existence [*hyaṯ … aṣ̌əm*] for (the sake of) the most good true order of existence [*aṣ̌āi vahištāi*] (itself).'

* * * * *

Let us now look at the ways in which this manthra has been translated in both ancient and modern times. I am puzzled by what some of these translations actually mean.   But you now have the grammatical and linguistic information to evaluate these translations, so you can decide for yourself. You will doubtless notice that in some of these translations, added words (that are not in the GAv. text) are not always placed in round parentheses.

a. *aṣ̌əm vohū vahištəm astī*
b. *uštā astī   uštā ahmāi*
c. *hyaṯ aṣ̌āi vahištāi aṣ̌əm*

My translation.
a. The true order of existence (is) good, the most-good (existence) it is,
b. desire it! wish it! / under will it is;   happiness ! bliss ! /enlightenment! (it is) for that (existence)
c. which (is) the true order of existence, for (the sake of) the most good true order of existence.
Or, more fluently
c. which (is) truth, for (the sake of) the most good truth.

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The Pahlavi translation.[57]

The translation from Pahlavi into English is by Humbach 1991. Words in square brackets represent explanations by the Pahlavi author(s). Words in round parentheses have been added by Humbach, as implied in the Pahlavi translation.

"Truthfulness is the foremost boon.
 [Righteousness] is a virtue; virtuous (is) he
(he) who practises truthfulness (with regard to) foremost truthfulness."

Humbach 1991.[58]

He offers 3 alternative translations for line c.

"Truth is the best (part of all that is) good.
As desired (all) the desired (things) are available (as) truth
for (that) which (is) the best truth.
Or: for (him) who (is) Best Truth
Or: for (him) who (represents) best truth."

Humbach/Faiss 2010.[59]
"Truth is the best/highest good/possession
As desired/at will the (things) desired are (available)
(as) truth to Him who (is) the Best Truth".

It is interesting that in line c. they see here the personification of the most-good truth as the Divine (indicated by their capital letters). Humbach 1991 comments that alternatively, it could also represent human beings,[60] (although in 2010 he does not offer alternative translations of line c.). I also see an interplay between the human and the Divine in the existence that is *ašǝm/vahištǝm* (line a.) and *ašāi/vahištāi* (line c.), although I arrive at it differently.

Jafarey 1989.[61]
"Righteousness is the best good. It is radiant happiness. Radiant happiness comes to the person to whom righteousness is for the sake of the best righteousness alone."

Sethna 1980.[62]
"Purity is good, it is the best,
it is happiness, happiness to him
(who is) pure for the sake of best purity."

Boyce 1975.[63]
"Asha (is) good, it is best,
According to wish it is, according to wish it shall be [*hyaṯ* ?][64] for us [*ahmāi* ?].[65]
Asha belongs to Asha Vahishta.

Taraporewala 1951.[66]
"Righteousness is the highest Good,

is the Illumination (of life), (this) Illumination (comes) to that (life),
which (is) righteous for-the-sake-of-the Highest Asa."

Bartholomae.[67]
"Right is the best good;
it falls [*astī* ?] by desire, it falls by desire, to our lot [*ahmāi* ?]
even our Right to the best right."

Moulton 1912.[68]
"Right is the best good:
it falls [*astī* ?] by desire, it falls by desire to us [*ahmāi* ?]
even [*hyaṭ*] our Right [*ašəm*] to the best right [*ašāi vahištāi*]."

Moulton's translation is very close to Bartholomae's (below), as is Moulton's translation of the Gathas in general.[69]

Haug 1878.[70]
"Righteousness is the best good,
a blessing it is; a blessing be to that
which is righteousness towards Asha-vahishta (perfect righteousness)."

His comments are footnoted.[71]

Mills 1887.
Puzzlingly (and without giving any reason for the omission) Mills does not translate the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) at Y27.14.[72] However, he starts his translation of § 1 of the YAv. commentary (Yy20:1) on the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), with what appears to be his own translation of this manthra,[73] which is what I give here.

"A blessing [*vohū* ?] is Righteousness (called) the best;
there is weal, there is weal, to this man
when the Right (helps) the Righteous best [*ašāi vahištāi* ?],
(when the pious man serves it in truth)."

Darmesteter 1887.[74]
"Holiness is the best of all good.
Well is it for it, well it is for that
holiness which is perfection of holiness."

Kanga 1880.[75]
"Righteousness is the best good
(and it) is happiness. Happiness (is) to him
who (is) righteous for the sake of the best righteousness.

Taraporewala 1951 gives us for comparative purposes, additional translations by other scholars,[76] whose works are out of print and not available to me.

Dhalla
"Righteousness is man's best acquisition.
It is happiness. It is his happiness.
When he is righteous for the sake of Best Righteousness."

Irani, D. J.
"Truth (Righteousness) is the highest Virtue.
It is Happiness.   Happiness for him or her
who stands for the Best Righteousness."

Khabardar
"Righteousness is the greatest wealth;
it is Eternal Light (or Bliss). Eternal light for him
who is righteous for the sake of Supreme Righteousness."

Mascaro, Juan
"Holiness is the greatest good;
it is eternal joy. He
who seeks holiness finds joy.

Spiegel
"Purity is the best good;
happiness,   happiness is to him
namely to the best pure in Purity."

Talati,
"Righteousness is the best good,
it is blessedness.   Blessed is he
who is righteous for the sake of the Supreme Truth.

Many of these translations were done when the decoding of Avestan was still in its early stages. I am eternally grateful to all those professional linguists who spent time and effort to de-code Avestan. And regardless of agreement or disagreement, I honor each and every one of the many people who have devoted time and effort in trying to translate the Asha Vahishta manthra.   The differences are only steps in the search for truth ~ each step benefiting (in one way or another) the on~going search.

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[1] This manthra is in pure GAv. Humbach 1991 comments that because of its style, its multiple possible meanings, and its deliberate ambiguities, the Ashem Vohu is typical of Zarathushtra's poetical technique and of the style of the Gathas as a whole, and therefore was composed by Zarathushtra himself. Vol. 2, pp. 12, 13. I agree. Taraporewala 1951 thinks the Ashem Vohu is of later origin than the Gathas, p. 25. But the earliest commentary (Y20, in YAv.) on the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) ends with the statement

"And every word (in its detail), and the entire utterance in its proclamation, is the word of Ahura Mazda." Y20.3, translated by Mills in SBE 31, p. 267;

probably indicating that the unknown author(s) of this YAv. commentary saw it as a manthra given to Zarathushtra, to transmit Wisdom's teachings.

It is interesting that although the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) is not a part of the Gathas, the author(s) of the very late YAv. text *Vendidad* Ch. X, §§ 7 - 8 (composed long after Avestan times) considered the ashem vohu to be a part of the Gathas (SBE 4, p. 135), indicating perhaps that there was a well established ancient tradition that it was composed by Zarathushtra himself.

I think that Zarathushtra composed the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) and the Ahuna Vairya (yatha ahu vairyo) as two stand-alone pieces ~ primers which encapsulate his teachings. And with his consummate skill, he crafted them so that they would be easily understood by everyone, even children (at one level); while also containing multi-dimensioned ideas for those interested in puzzling them out.

[2] Here are some examples of the Ashem Vohu being called the Asha Vahishta in YAv. texts. The most ancient commentary on it states, in Mills' translation,

> "...We sacrifice to [*yazamaide* 'celebrate'] the heard-recital of the Asha Vahishta, to its memorising, its chanting, and its sacrificial use [*frāyastīmca* 'and its worship-forwarding (use)'?]." Yy20.4 (last paragraph), SBE 31, p. 268. Avestan words are from Geldner 1P p. 81, where this passage is shown as § 5.

The Younger Avestan Yy61.1, (referring to the three primary prayers) states in Mills' translation,

> "Let us peal forth the Ahuna-vairya in our liturgy between heaven and earth, and let us send forth the Asha Vahishta in our prayer the same, and the Yenghe Hâtām..." Y61.1, SBE 31, p. 312.

The YAv. *Aban Nyaish* says, in Darmesteter's translation,

> "... he from whom she will hear the Ahuna vairya [ft. 1]; he from whom she will hear the Asha-vahishta [ft. 2] ..." Ny. 4.8, SBE 23, p. 355 - 356.

Darmesteter's ft. 1 says "The Yatha ahu vairyo prayer." SBE 23, p. 356
Darmesteter's ft. 2 says "The Ashem Vohu prayer." SBE 23, p. 356.

[3] The fact that Zarathushtra sees *aṣa-* as the order of existence ~ in the existences of matter and mind ~ is detailed in *Part One: Truth, Asha,* with evidence from the Gathas. And we see the same (implied) in the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*.

[4] Geldner has a footnoted comment under the Ahuna Vairya (Yatha Ahu Vairyo, Y27.13) to the effect that the two prayers, Yatha Ahu Vairyo and Ashem Vohu (Y27.14) are here given in full only in the mss. J2, K5, and Pt4. He states that they are seldom written in full [indicating perhaps how well known they were], but also appear in certain Introductions, and in the Introductions of certain Khorda Avesta manuscripts.   Geldner 1P p. 97, ft. (1) under Y27.13. (Words in square brackets are my comment).

[5] Humbach (1991) in his commentary on the Ashem Vohu, Vol. 2, p. 10, shows the translations (in German) of Andreas and Lentz which seem to divide the first line into two units of meaning, and also the translation of Mary Boyce, (in English), which does so as well.

Andreas in Lommel's 1927 work, p. 9. "Die Wahrheit ist das Gute, (ja) das Beste;" (it should be noted that Andreas was Thieme's teacher. Thieme was Insler's teacher).

Lentz as it appears in his 1968 work, p. 167, "Die Wahrheit (ist das) Gut(e). Sie ist das höchste Gut(e)."

Mary Boyce as set forth in *History of Zoroastrianism I, (1975),* p. 262, "Aša (is) good, it is best."

Humbach (1991) expresses the opinion that these translations (which divide line a. into 2 syntactic units are not appropriate translations. Vol. § (9) p. 12.

F. K. Dadachanji translates the first line as two units of meaning, "Ashem (righteousness, Sat) is good. Righteousness is best." quoted in Tarap. (1951) p. xxxiii.

Sethna translates the first line as two units of meaning, "Purity is good, it is the best,". Sethna (1980), *Khordeh Avesta*, p. 3.

[6] Humbach 1991 Vol. 1 p. 115.

[7] Humbach/Faiss 2010 p. 73.

[8] Taraporewala 1951, p. 23.

[9] Jafarey 1989, *The Gathas, Our Guide*, (Ushta Inc.) p. 27.

[10] This Pahlavi translation is in Humbach 1991 Vol. 2, p. 9. He cites as his source Dhabar's *Zand i Khurtak Avistak*, 1929, 1. But I do not know if the rendering in Dhabar is in Pahlavi (with Humbach translating the Pahlavi into English) or if the translation given by Humbach is Dhabar's.

[11] Here are a few additional examples. In all of the following Avestan passages (as in the *Hormezd Yasht*, quoted in the main part of this chapter ~ and there are other examples as well), the positive and the superlative form 2 syntactic units, which are equated, with the superlative functioning as a crescendo of expression ~ not as a difference in kind ~ requiring the conclusion that this use of the positive and superlative was a well established style of expression in Avestan. Parenthetically, the titles of Yashts in manuscripts often are in Pahlavi, but their contents are in YAv.

In the YAv. *Bahiram (Bahram) Yasht*, the following phrases appear in § 3. Verethraghna (an allegory for the Victory of good over evil) is the speaker. The Avestan has been transliterated (by me) from Geldner 2P p. 206; the English translation is mine.

§ 3. "... *ama ahmi amavastəmō*   'strong I am, most-strong,'
vərəϑra ahmi vərəϑravastəmō   'victorious I am, most-victorious,'
xᵛarənaŋha ahmi xᵛarənaŋuhastəmō   'glorious I am, most-glorious,'
... *baēšaza ahmi baēšazyōtəmō•*   '...healing am I, most-healing.'

Here is the YAv. *Ram Yasht*, Yt. 15.46, (the speaker is the spirit of the Wind, Vayu). Pahlavi *Ram* is the Avestan ntr. noun *rāman-* 'peace'.

§ 46 *aurvo nąma ahmi   aurvōtēmo nąma ahmi•* "My name is Valiant; my name is Most Valiant."
tax mō nąma ahmi   tax moṯēmā nąma ahmi• "My name is the Strong; my name is the Strongest."
dərəzrō nąma ahmi   darəjištō nąma ahmi•... "My name is the Firm; my name is the Firmest..."
English translation by Darmesteter, SBE Vol. 23, p. 259; Avestan words have been transliterated by me from Geldner, 2P. p. 225.

Here is the YAv. *Ardibehesht Yasht*, Yt. 3.5 - 6; my translation; Av. words from Geldner 2P p. 74.

§ 5 ... *mąϑranąm sraēštəm mąϑranąm sraēštōtəməm* '... of precepts the most beautiful, of precepts the very most beautiful,
mąϑranąm uγrəm mąϑranąm uγrōtəməm   'of precepts the strong, of precepts the strongest,
mąϑranąm dərəzrəm mąϑranąm dərəzrōtəməm   'of precepts the firm (one), of precepts the firmest,
mąϑranąm vārəϑraγni mąϑranąm vārəϑraγnyōtəməm 'of precepts the victorious (one), of precepts, the most victorious (one),
mąϑranąm baēšazəm mąϑranąm baēšazyōtəməm• 'of precepts the healing (one), of precepts the most healing (one).'

§ 6 *mąϑranąm ašō.baēšazō ...*   'of precepts the truth-healing (one) ...'
Although this last phrase does not include a superlative, the notion of 'truth' being 'healing' (a notion we find in the Gathas as well) is so beautiful, that I could not resist including it.

[12] Jackson (1892) describes *nąma* as an adverb 'by name' § 731, p. 202. Here it is an adverb that describes *ahmi* 'I am'; Skjaervo 2003 also shows the meaning of *nąma*, *nāma* 'by name'.

[13] The translation is mine. Avestan words are from Geldner 2P p. 62.

[14] We see the same idiomatic use of the positive ('good' *vohu-*) and the superlative ('most-good' *vahišta-*) as a crescendo, rather than as a difference in quality, in Zarathushtra's use of 'good thinking' and 'most-good thinking ~ each being used as both the path and its ultimate end (detailed in a footnote in *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise and Hell*).   In the same way, the superlative 'most-good (*vahišta-*)' alone, is also used as the path and its ultimate end (detailed *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*).

[15] Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most Good, Vahishta.*

[16] In the Gathas, where the meters and meanings are more complex, a unit of meaning often does not match a unit of rhythm. For example, in Y51.22, the verb *vaēdā* 'I know' which belongs (in meaning) with line 1, appears at the start of line 2. See *Part Six: Yasna 51.22.*

[17] Here are a few examples of various conjugations of the verb *ah-* 'to be' which are not implied, but are explicitly stated in the text ~ where required for emphasis or where required by the context.

For emphasis: yaϑā vā ahmī "...as I indeed am..."Y34.5, Insler 1975; the word *ahmī* 'I am' is explicitly stated. Insler 1975 favors those mss. (S1, O2, etc.) that have *ahmī*, rather than *hahmī*, p. 222. Beekes 1988 states that *vā* is an emphasizing particle. (p. 146).   Thus literally '...as [*yaϑā*] indeed [*vā*] I-am [*ahmī*]...'Y34.5. The pronoun "I" is a part of the verb form *ahmī* (1p. sg of *ah-* 'to be').

Required by the context: ... ciš ahī   kahyā ahī... which Insler 1975 translates "... 'Who [*ciš*] art thou [*ahī*]? To which side dost thou belong?..." Y47.3; The second question, *kahyā ahī* literally, means 'whose art thou'.   In each of these questions, *ahī* (2p sg. of *ah-* 'to be') is explicitly stated because the context requires it.

[18] Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Most Good, Vahishta.*

[19] Detailed in *Part One: Truth, Asha.*

[20] Although Geldner shows no manuscript variations for the Asha Vahishta as it appears in Y27:14, the well regarded manuscript J2 which was available to Geldner, (and of which I have a copy) does indeed show an additional word *ahmā* in line 2, which reads *uštā ahmā astī   uštā ahmāi*, which undoubtedly was a scribal error, because (a) the added *ahmā* spoils the meter, (b), it is not the way in which any group of Zoroastrians (in Iran or India) are known to have recited this manthra down through the centuries, (c) the additional word *ahmā* is not in the Old Soghdian version of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) discovered in 1976, (given in full in a following footnote), and (d) the added *ahmā* has no meaning (at least in this context). Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index does not show *ahmā* as any conjugation of the verb *ah-* 'to be'.

[21] For example, some linguists think that *vahišta-* was originally pronounced *wahišta-*.   And the oldest surviving version of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) appears, not in any Avestan text, but in a Soghdian text dated at around the 9th or 10th century CE, which was found in 1976 in Dunhuang China (whereas the dates of the oldest surviving Avestan texts are after 1,300 CE).   This Soghdian ms. may be viewed at the website of the British Library at

www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/ashem.html, which also has a worthwhile explanation. (You can also access the site through s-s-z.org under 'Vignettes' and then 'Zoroastrian manuscript'.

Based on Professor Gershevitch's transliteration, this Soghdian Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) reads as follows.

ərtam wahū   wahištam ištī
uštā ištī   uštā   ahmāi
yat ərtāi   wahištāi ərtam

Gershevitch, *Dissent & Consensus on the Gathas,* appearing in *Proceedings of the First Gatha Colloquium, 1993* (WZO 1998), p. 20.

It appears that the Soghdian form of Avestan *aša-* is closer to the Old Persian (*arta-*) and the Ved. *rtá,* and there are linguists today who conjecture that in Zarathushtra's day, the word in GAv. was actually *arta-* not *aša-.* Beekes 1988 surmises original words *ártavan-* 'truthful' (p. 120), and *árta-* (p. 131) instead of *ašavan-* and *aša-.*

[22] Beekes 1988 p. 134; Skjaervo Old Av. Index.

[23] The only verb expressly stated in lines a. and b. is *astī* '(it) is' which does not support an accusative object. Normally, the subject of a verb is in the nominative case, and the direct object of a verb is in the accusative case. But (as in Latin -- a language of inflection and in the Indo-European family of languages) the object of the verb 'to be' is always in the nom. case. To understand why, think of the verb 'to be' as an equal sign. Its object always is equated with (or describes) its subject, and therefore is in the same case as the subject -- nominative.

[24] Examples of various conjugations of the verb *ah-* 'to be' that are implied in Gathic verses are legion. Linguists call this 'metonymy'. Here are a few in the present tense (indicative). As you can see, in just the first two chapters of the Gathas (Y28 and Y29) I was able to collect so many examples that follow.

hvō   vīcirō   ahurō "...He is the decisive Lord..." Y29.4c, Insler 1975. The verb 'is' (*astī* 3p. sg. of *ah-* 'to be') is not in the GAv. text, it is implied. In this instance, the priority is *hvō* "He"; so also in the next example.

hvō   urušaēibyō   spəntō "...He is [*spənta-* 'beneficial'] to the needy..." Y29.7b, Insler 1975. The verb 'is' (*astī*) is not in the text, it is implied.

manascā   hyaṯ   vahištəm "...that thinking which is best ..." Y28.9b, Insler 1975. The verb 'is' (*astī*) is not in the text, it is implied.

nōiṯ   sarəjā   advaēšō   gavōi "...'There is no help free of enmity for the cow.'..." Y29.3a, Insler 1975. The verb 'is' (*astī*) is not in the text, it is implied.

...ϑwā   vahištā   yəm   ašā   vahištā   hazaošəm   ahurəm... "Thee, Best One [*vahištā* 'Most Good (One)'], the Lord who art of the same temperament with the best truth,..." Y28.8, Insler 1975. The verb 'art' (*ahī* 2p. sg. of *ah-* 'to be') is not in the text, it is implied.

yūžəm   zəvīštyåŋhō   īšō   x šaϑrəmcā   savaŋhąm "...ye are the strongest, (and) to mighty ones (like you) belong the powers and the mastery." Y28.9c, Insler 1975. The verb 'are' (*stā* 2p. pl. of *ah-* 'to be') is not in the text, it is implied.

kudā   ašəm   vohucā   manō   x šaϑrəmcā "Where are truth and good thinking and (where) their rule...?..." Y29.11, Insler 1975. The verb 'are' (*həṇtī* 3p. pl. of *ah-* 'to be') is not in the text, it is implied.

[25] Skjaervo Old Av. Index shows that *vohū* is nom./acc. ntr. sg./pl. (he conjectures that the stem should be spelled *vahu-*). The form *vohū* is also instr. sg. masc./ntr. (Skjaervo Old Av. Index). But in the context of line a. the instr. ('with/by/through ___') does not fit.

[26] As discussed in *Part One: Good Thinking, Vohu Manah.*

[27] Here are all the instances in which 'good' (*vohu-*) is used as a noun in the Gathas based on the Insler 1975 translation. In none of them could 'good' [*vohu-*] be used in the sense of 'property', or 'possession' or 'acquisition' or anything that does not exemplify the quality of intrinsic goodness. (The verses in which *vohu-* is used as an adj. in the Insler 1975 translation are not included here).

Y33.2 "... who shall enlighten his guest in the good [*vaŋhāu*] ~ all these shall bring success to His desire and be in the approval of the Wise Lord." Y33.2, Insler 1975; the word *vaŋhāu* is loc. sg. masc./ntr. of the stem *vohu-* (Beekes 1988 p. 19, Skjaervo Old Av. Index). It therefore means 'in-(the)-good' In this verse, 'in the good [*vaŋhāu*]' clearly means what is intrinsically good ~ good teachings (which are concepts). In this context, it cannot reasonably mean *goods* as in 'property'.

Y43.5 "... a good reward for the good [*vaŋhaovē*], ..." Y43.5, Insler 1975; the first good is an adjective (describing 'reward'), the second good [*vaŋhaovē*] is dat. sg. of the stem *vohu-* (Beekes, ibid.), meaning 'for (what is) good' ~ a noun for a type of conduct. It cannot mean *goods* as in 'property'. Parenthetically, it cannot mean 'for the good (ones)' ~ people [pl.] who are good ~ because *vaŋhaovē* is dat. sg.

In the next two verses, 'distribution in the good [*vaŋhāu* loc. sg. masc./ntr.]' is mentioned.

Y31.19 "... when the distribution in the good [*vaŋhāu*] shall occur to both factions through Thy bright fire, Wise One." Y31.19, Insler 1975.

"Wise Lord, together with this [*spənta- mainyu-*] Thou shalt give the distribution in the good [*vaŋhāu*] to both factions through Thy fire, by reason of the solidarity of [*ārmaiti-*] and truth. For it shall convert the many who are seeking." Y47.6, Insler 1975.

In both these verses, the 'distribution in the good [*vaŋhāu*]' is brought about by fire ~ the material metaphor for the true order of existence, *aša-*, and refers to the 'distribution in (what is) the good' a noun representing the good reward. In the Gathas (and later texts), various 'light' words (including 'fire') are used as metaphors and symbols of truth. And truth is both the path and the reward (end) for taking that path (see *Part Two: A Question of Reward & The Path*), and truth in Zarathushtra's thought is wholly good ~ a quality. Therefore "in the good [*vaŋhāu*]" cannot mean 'property'.

This brings us to the last verse in which "goods [*vohū*]" is used as a noun (in the last sentence) in a way that is ambiguous.

Y44.8 "This I ask Thee. Tell me truly, Lord, in order for me to bear in mind Thy (every) precept and those words about which I have taken counsel with good thinking and those things which are to be correctly acquired from an existence in harmony with truth. To what goods [*vohū*], shall my soul proceed in the future?" Y44.8, Insler 1975.

It is clear that the '*vohū*' in the last line is used in the nature of a reward or consequence for keeping in mind the Wise Lord's teachings, speaking in accord with good thinking, and living in harmony with the true order of existence. Now the word *vohū* in the ntr. gender is the form for both sg. and pl. in the nom./acc. cases (as referenced in a footnote above). So the last line could with equal accuracy read "...To what good (existence) [*vohū* sg.] shall my soul proceed in the future?" Y44.8, reflecting the 'existence in harmony with truth' in the immediately preceding sentence (which are both the path and its reward, *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path*). Or, if we assume that Zarathushtra intended the plural *vohū* good (things), we get the same result. because in this verse, *vohū* 'good (things)' are the reward or consequence for "good thinking" and "an existence in harmony with truth" mentioned in the preceding parts of Y44.8 And Zarathushtra's notion of reward for these qualities of the divine is their attainment.

[28] Humbach 1991 gives "property [estate]" as one alternative translation for *vohū*
"... or 'truth is the best property [estate]', or ..." Vol. 2, p. 12 under paragraph (9).

[29] For *a-* stem words (*vahišta-* is an *a-* stem word), Jackson shows the inflection *-əm* for both nom. sg. and acc. sg. ntr. words, Jackson 1892 § 237, p. 70. Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index shows many Gatha verses which have *vahištəm*, but he does not show its grammatical value (declension). 22

[30] Detailed in *Part One: Truth, Asha*, and in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta*.

[31] See Skjaervo 2003, *Young Avestan Primer*, Lesson 3, where he shows the conjugations of the verb *ah-* 'to be' in YAv. in which *asti* ends with a short *i*. In the Old Avestan Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) *astī* ends with a long *ī*. An ending vowel that is long in Old Avestan (GAv.), often is shortened in YAv., which accounts for the difference ~ *astī* in Gathic Avestan (in the Asha Vahishta), and *asti* in Younger Avestan. In English, a pronoun in the singular (I, thou, he, she, it), or the plural (we, you, they), appears before a verb to indicate whether the subject of the verb is in the 1st, 2d, or 3d person, sg. or pl., because the verb form for such different persons often is the same ('we *are*', 'you *are*', 'they *are*'). In Gathic Avestan, however, it is the form of the verb itself that indicates whether the verb is being used for the 1st, 2d, or 3d person, sg. or pl. Therefore, in many instances (especially where the context does not require it, or where no emphasis is intended) no pronoun is used before the verb form to indicate the 1st, 2d, or 3d person, sg. or pl. Thus, the verb *ah-* 'to be' would be conjugated as follows in Old Avestan (GAv.) in the present tense (indicative) ~ the pronouns being implied in the verb form:

1st person:	(I) am	*ahmī*	(we) are	*mahī*
2d person:	(thou) art	*ahī*	(you pl.) are	*stā*
3d person:	(he/she/it) is	*astī*	(they) are	*həṇtī*

Returning to the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), Avestan verbs are not gender specific. So in translating the 3p sg *astī*, the gender of the implied 'he/she/or it' would depend on the gender of the noun (or pronoun) which is the subject of the verb *astī* ~ a gender that could be grammatical (if the subject has no intrinsic gender) or real (if the subject does have an intrinsic gender (but the verb form would not change). In lines a. and c. of the Asha Vahishta, the implied *astī* '(it) is', refers to the preceding *aṣəm* 'the true (correct) order of existence', which is a grammatically ntr. noun.

[32]   Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index shows *vas- /us-* (*uš-*) 'to wish', in the following forms (conjugations), words in square brackets are my translation for your convenience.

> *vasəmī*   Indicative (present) 1p sg. ['I wish]
> *vašī*   Ind. 2p sg. ['you wish']
> *vaštī*   Ind. 3p sg. ['he/she wishes']
> *usvahī*   Ind. 1p du. ['we two wish']
> *usmahīcā* Ind. 1p pl. ['and we wish']
> *uštā*   Skjaervo expresses no opinion as to the grammatical value of this word form,
>   but he cites Y29.2 as an instance of its use [where Insler 1975 translates it
>   as "...whom do ye wish..." ~ 2p pl.]
> *ušyāṯ*   Optative 3p sg.
> *uštā*   Past participle, nom./acc. pl. ntr.
> *vasaṯ*   Subjunctive 3p sg. (in Y29.4c Insler 1975 translates it "as He shall wish it").

[33] Skjaervo Old Av. Index under the verb "*vas-/us-* (*uš*), 'to wish' ..." shows *uštā* as a past participle and [when used as a noun], nom./acc. pl.

[34] Humbach 1991 Vol. 2, p. 134 - 135.

[35] Skjaervo Old Av. Index does not show *uštā* as the imperative form of the verb *vas-*. But in Y30.11, Insler translates *uštā* as "...Wish it so" commenting that *uštā* is the imperative form, and he comments that the later usage as 'hail' may simply be a reassessment of the term as a benediction. He concludes that the history of *uštā* is thus parallel to Indic *hánta*, also originally an imperative form. Insler 1975 p. 177. In Y51.16 also, Insler translates *uštā* as an imperative verb form ("The Wise Lord is [*spənta-* 'beneficial']. Therefore wish ye [*uštā*] for Him to announce Himself to us." Y51.16).

[36] Humbach 1991 states that in Yy20.2 (**§** 2 of the YAv. commentary on the Asha Vahishta) the line *uštā astī uštā ahmāi* is described by the commentator as *uštatāt-* which Humbach says means "ushta-ness, i.e. a benediction". Humbach 1991 Vol. 2, p. 11.

Mills translates *uštatāt-* in this Younger Avestan commentary as "blessedness" (Y20.2. SBE 31, p. 267).

In the *Tir* and *Farvardin Yashts* (quotated in this chapter), *uštatāt-* is a state of "happiness". These two meanings ~ happiness and blessedness are simply two flavors of the same quality of being. Happiness, is a core quality of his teachings. It is the happiness/blessedness of following the path of truth in mortal existence. And it is the happiness/bliss of the state of being that is paradise ~ truth personified (detailed in *Part One: Joy, Happiness, Prosperity*). So *uštatāt-* means material and spiritual happiness/bliss. This is confirmed by the metaphors associated with happiness in the *Tir Yasht,* discussed herein.

[37] As Humbach (1991) points out, Vol. 2, p. 11; and see the translations of this commentary Yy 20 in *Part Three: Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) Ancient Commentaries.*

[38] Jackson identifies *ušta* as an interjection, and therefore indeclinable (it has no case forms) Jackson (1892) **§§** 741 - 742, p. 206.

[39] Here is the Tir Yasht, Yt. 8.29, showing how it describes the happy state of being that is *uštatāt-*. Bear in mind, Tishtrya is the star (and its spiritual essence) associated with bringing rain, which is necessary for life, and on which all living things thrive and are joyful, and therefore is the enemy of drought, which withers, starves and kills. But notice the double meaning of 'waters' and 'plants' which are also the material metaphors for completeness and non~ deathness (*haurvatāt- amərətāt-*).

> *... uštatātəm nimravavaite tištryō raēvå xᵛarənaŋuhå*
> *ušta mē ahura mazda*
> *ušta āpō urvaråsca*
> *ušta daēne māzdayasne*
> *ušta ā.bavaṯ daiŋhavō ...* Yt. 8.29, Geldner 2P p. 112

> '...Tishtriya, (full) of radiance and of glory, calls down joyful blessedness [*uštatātəm*]
> happiness for me, O Lord, Wisdom!
> happiness, O waters and plants!
> happiness, O wisdom-worshipping envisionment!
> happiness has become present, O lands!...' my somewhat literal translation.

Here, for comparative purposes is the Humbach (1991) translation,

> "Tishtriya will pronounce for himself [mid.] the following Ushta-ness: Happiness has arisen for me, O Ahura Mazda, happiness, O waters and plants, happiness, O Mazdayasnian religion, happiness has arisen, O lands!" *Tir Yasht,* Yt. 8.29. Humbach (1991) translation, Vol. 2, p. 11 (6).

Darmesteter translates both *uštā* and *uštatāt-* in this passage from the *Tir Yasht* as "Hail" (SBE Vol. 23, pp. 100 - 101); but in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) he translates *uštā* as "well").

uštatāt- also appears in the following YAv. texts, which I give you in Darmesteter's translation. In these quotations, *uštatāt-* appears in various case forms. However, an interjection (like Hail!) is indeclinable (it has no case forms), Jackson (1892), **§§** 741 - 742, p. 206. So Darmesteter's translation of *uštatāt-* words as an interjection "Hail", cannot be correct. But if *uštatāt-* is translated as the state of being that is 'happiness' replacing Darmesteter's "Hail", you can see how well it fits the context in which *uštatāt-* is used in these texts.

In the *Farvardin Yasht,* Yt. 13.93, which Darmesteter translates as follows. The reference here is to Zarathushtra.
yehe ząϑaēca vax šaēca urvāsən āpō urvaråsca

yehe ząϑaēca vax̌šaēca ux̌šin āpō urvarå̊sca ∴
yehe ząϑaēca vax̌šaēca uštatātəm nīmravaṇta vīspå̊ spəṇtō.dātå̊ dāmąn∴ transliterated from Geldner 2P p. 188.

"In whose birth and growth the waters and the plants rejoiced;
in whose birth and growth the waters and the plants grew;
in whose birth and growth all the creatures of the good creation
cried out, Hail !" SBE 23, p. 202;

As you can see, in the last line, *uštatātəm* is a 'state of happiness/blessedness' not an interjection 'Hail !' And notice the waters and plants ⁓ material symbols of completeness and non-deathness ⁓ here, standing for those who have attained (or are growing) these qualities ⁓ suggesting that the happiness that is *uštatātəm* is not limited to material happiness, but also includes the ultimate bliss of a perfected state of being (which is Zarathushtra's idea of paradise ⁓ a state of being that houses bliss (the house of song), a state of being that houses the complete comprehension of truth ⁓ enlightenment (the house of good thinking, the endless lights), and therefore no longer is mortal (non-deathness, *amərətāt-*).

In the *Farvardin Yasht,* we have Yt. 13.94, which Darmesteter translates as follows.

ušta.nō zātō āϑrava yō spitāmō zaraϑuštrō∴ ...   Geldner 2P p. 188.
"Hail to us ! for he is born, the Athravan, Spitama Zarathushtra. ..." § 94, Darmesteter translation SBE 23, p. 202.

Here, the interjection 'happiness!/bliss! /enlightenment! for us [*ušta.nō*]' ⁓ caused by Zarathushtra's advent is a good fit (because his teachings bring us material joy and the spiritual bliss of enlightenment). The interjection "Hail to us!" makes no sense contextually.

[40] That Zarathushtra rejected the henotheism of his culture and envisioned a new conception of the Divine, is demonstrated in *Part One:*
The Nature Of The Divine, and
The Identity Of The Divine.
And in *Part Four: Zarathushtra, Originator Or Reformer?*
That the YAv. texts often contain a mix of the henotheism which Zarathushtra rejected, as well as many of Zarathushtra's ideas and metaphors, is demonstrated throughout the YAv. texts (including the example shown in a ft. above, regarding the use of the metaphors waters and plants in the *Tir Yasht*).

[41] Detailed in *Part Three: Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) Ancient Commentaries.*

[42] Referenced in the chapter entitled *Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds,* on the Home Page of this website.

[43] Tarap. (1951) p. 25. Skjaervo Old Av. Index shows *vah-* as follows:
"*vah-*, pres. *vəṇgha-* act.: to shine(?)",which he thinks may derive from Vedic "*vī*: to illuminate" (without adding a question mark). See also Reichelt's opinions. Detailed in *Part Six: Yasna 43:1.*

[44] Detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of the Most Good, Vahishta;* and *The Houses of Paradise & Hell.*

[45] Detailed in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire.*

[46] Referenced in the chapter entitled *Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds,* on the Home Page of this website.

[47] Here are examples of forms of the verb 'to be' translated by Insler (1975) as 'to exist'.

43.6 a: *yahmi spəntā   ϑwā mainyū urvaēsē jasō*
     b: *mazdå̊ x̌šaϑrā   ahmī vohū manaŋhā*
"(But) at this very turning point in which I exist [*ahmī*], Thou, the Wise One, hast come into the world with Thy virtuous spirit [*spəntā ϑwā mainyū* 'with Thy beneficial way of being'] (and) with the rule of good thinking,..." Y43.6

lines a.b. The word *ahmī* '(I) am, (I) exist' is 1p sg. of the verb 'to be'. Insler comments (in pertinent part) "...Zarathushtra means, on the one hand, *yahmi ... urvaēsē ... ahmī* 'at which turning point I exist (am)' ..." Insler (1975) p. 233. In the context of this verse, the English '(I) exist' is more accurately captures Zarathushtra's meaning.

Y44.16 b: ... *ϑwā pōi sānghā yōi həṇtī*
      c: *ciϑrā mōi dąm ...*
"... in order to protect, in accord with Thy teaching, (those) pure ones [*ciϑrā* 'bright (ones)'] who exist [*həṇtī* literally 'are'] in my house..." Y44.16b-c. The translation is from Insler's commentary (p. 250). In line b. of the Gathic text, the words *yōi həṇtī* '(those) who are' (*həṇtī* = 3p pl. of the verb 'to be') is translated by Insler as "(those) ... who exist...", which is more fluent and accurately captures Zarathushtra's meaning in this context. This Gatha verse is the 2d paragraph of the Kemna Mazda prayer, and is discussed and detailed (with my translation, among others) in *Part Six: Yasna 44:16.*

Y45.6b *yə̄ hudå̄ həṇtī* "... Him who is beneficent ... to those who exist [*həṇtī*]...". In the first part of the Gathic text, the verb 'is' is not specifically stated. It is implied (which is common for the verb 'to be' in Gathic Avestan). In the second part of this quotation the word *həṇtī* 'are' (3p pl. '(those) are' of the verb *ah-* 'to be') is translated by Insler as 'exist', which more accurately captures Zarathushtra's meaning in this context.

Y51.10b *tā duždå̄ yōi həṇtī* "... thereby maleficent (to those) who exist [*həṇtī*]...". In the Gathic text, the word *həṇtī* is 3p pl. '(those) are' of the verb 'to be'. Insler's 'exist' ~ is a more accurate English equivalent in this context.

Y51.22b *yōi å̄ŋharəcā həṇticā* "those who have existed [*å̄ŋharəcā*] and (still) exist [*həṇticā*]...". The Gathic words *å̄ŋharəcā həṇticā* are both 3p pl forms of *ah-* 'to be', (although in different tenses, with *cā* 'and' tacked on). Insler's translation "have existed [*å̄ŋharəcā*] and (still) exist [*həṇticā*]", more accurately captures Zarathushtra's meaning. This Gatha verse is believed to have been the genesis of the Yenghe Haatam, and is discussed and detailed (with my translation and others) in *Part Six: Yasna 51:22.*

[48] The words *uštā ahmāi* also appear in the Gathas (Y43:1a) which is discussed and detailed (with my translation and others) in *Part Six: Yasna 43:1.*   Here is a comparison which shows the translation of *uštā ahmāi* in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), and in the Gatha verse Y43:1 (in my translation).

In the Asha Vahishta: *uštā ahmāi* 'happiness! /bliss! /enlightenment! for that (existence) ...'
In the Gatha verse Y43:1: *uštā ahmāi* 'happiness! /bliss! /enlightenment! for that (one) ...'

[49] Skjaervo Old Avestan Index.

[50] Beekes 1988 p. 137.

[51] Beekes 1988 p. 137.

[52] Skjaervo Old Av. Index shows *ahūm* as the acc. sg. form of the stem *ahu-*, one of the meanings of which Insler translates as 'existence, life'.

[53] Insler 1975, "But to this world..." and his comment on p. 168.
Humbach/Faiss 2010 translate more literally "... to this (existence/world)...", p. 82.

[54] *hyat̰* is one of those flexible GAv. words that serve more than one function and have more than one meaning. As a relative pronoun, (nom./acc. ntr. of the stem *ya-* Jackson 1892 § 403, p. 115), it means 'which, that, who' etc.. And *hyat̰* is also a conjunction, which can mean 'when, because, (so) that,' (Beekes 1988 p. 146); or 'that, because, as' (Skjaervo Old Av. Index). In the context of the 3d line of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), the function of *hyat̰* is a relative pronoun, nom. sg. masc./neut., meaning 'which' or 'who' depending on how one translates *ahmāi* in the context in the preceding line b..

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(1) *ahmāi* ['for that (existence ~ masc. noun)'] *hyaṯ* [which], or

 (2) *ahmāi* [for him] *hyaṯ* [who]. But translating *ahmāi* as 'for him' in line b. does not fit the context of the words in line c. which we would have to translate as 'for him who is truthful [*ašavan-*]'. But Zarathushtra does not use *ašavan-* in line c. he uses *ašəm* 'truth'. Whereas translating *ahmāi* as 'for that (existence)' in line b. fits the context of line c. perfectly. 'for that [*ahmāi*] (existence) which [*hyaṯ*] is truth [*ašəm*] for (the sake of) the most-good truth [*ašāi vahištāi*]'.

[55] This technique of 'framing' or 'encapsulation' in the syntax of Zarathushtra's compositions, to express one unit of thought, is discussed in the following chapters, with actual examples:
In *Part Three: The Ahuna Vairya (Yatha Ahu Vairyo) An Analysis* (discussed in great detail, with Insler's insight referenced, and with many examples from the Gathas).
And in the following chapters in *Part Six*:
Yasna 28.5 (discussed in some detail);
Yasna 30.7 (which has a double framing ~ one within another);
Yasna 32.7 and *Yasna 51.9* (in which the framing extends over the ceasura);
Yasna 28.1 (discussed briefly); *Yasna 32.9* (discussed briefly); *Yasna 44.16* (discussed briefly); and
Yasna 54:1, The A Airyema Ishyo (which is in Old Avestan) ~ multiple framings ~ 5 in this verse of three lines; I am inclined to think that Zarathushtra composed the *A Airyema Ishyo,* but scholars generally do not think so; detailed in *Part Six: Yasna 54:1, The A Airyema Ishyo.*

[56] Beekes (1988) p. 137. Beekes thinks that the pronoun *x^va-* is YAv. But Skjaervo's Old Avestan Index shows:
"*x^va-* 'own', which is used in the sense of one's own, and which (Skjaervo thinks) is found in various grammatical forms in the Gathas, as well as the YHapt.

[57] This Pahlavi translation is in Humbach 1991 Vol. 2, p. 9.   He cites as his source Dhabar's *Zand i Khurtak Avistak,* 1929, 1. I assume that the Pahlavi is from Dhabar but the English translation given by Humbach is Humbach's own translation. Humbach also adds a Sanskrit version, which he does not translate. He cites as its source, Bharucha, *Collected Sanskrit Writings I,* 1906, 1.

[58] Humbach 1991 Vol. 1, p. 115, and Vol. 2, pp. 8 - 12.

[59] Humbach/Faiss 2010 p. 73.

[60] Humbach 1991 Vol. 2, p. 12, paragraph (9), section c.

[61] Jafarey, *The Gathas, Our Guide*, (Ushta Inc. 1989) p. 27.

[62] Sethna 1980 *Khordeh Avesta*, p. 3.

[63] Mary Boyce 1975, as set forth in *History of Zoroastrianism I,* p. 262, and referenced by Humbach 1991 Vol. 2, p. 10.

[64] Humbach 1991 is of the opinion that instead of the relative particle *hyaṯ*, which forms the first word of line c., Boyce conjectures *hyāṯ (a form which Humbach states is unknown elsewhere) meaning 'may it be'. He does not approve of the Boyce translation. Vol. 1, p. 10. (I do not know if Boyce was an Indo-Iranian philologist).

[65] Boyce seems to translate *ahmāi* as 'for us' (i.e. 1p dat. pl.). But demonstrative pronouns are not used for 1p personal pronouns ~ only for 3p pronouns.   And *ahmāi* is dat. sg. masc./ntr. (Skjaervo Old Av. Index). As a demonstrative pronoun it would be translated 'to/for this', or 'to/for that';   as a 3p sg. masc./ntr. personal pronoun it would be translated 'to/for him', or 'to/for it'.

[66] Taraporewala 1951 p. 23.

[67] For Bartholomae's translation originally was in German. For his translation (in English) I have used the translation given by Taraporewala 1951 at p. 25.

[68] Moulton 1912, p. 390.

[69] In Moulton 1912, pp. 343 et seq., acknowledges that his translation is close to that of Bartholomae, but cautions that he has not followed Bartholomae "slavishly".

[70] Haug 1878 *Essays*, p. 141, ftn. 2.

[71] Haug comments "It is to be understood that 'righteousness' here and elsewhere where it translates *ashem* means 'what is right or meritorious' in a ritualistic or materialistic sense, and does not necessarily imply holiness..." Ibid. I have great respect (and affection) for Haug, but there is no instance in any GAv. text in which *aša-* is used in a context that could mean what is right or meritorious in a ritualistic sense ~ although *aša-* applies to (and exists in) both the material and spiritual existences. Indeed, the Gathas do not require, describe, nor even mention, any rituals. Zarathushtra only mentions certain elements of the ritual, such as milk, butter, and the bread offering, which he uses as metaphors for truth, good thinking, a person who has these qualities, and for worshipping with completeness and non-deathness, see in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*; and *The Puzzle of the Cow and Its Network.*

Even in the later YHapt. which is in Old Avestan (GAv.), there is no ritual use of *aša-* ~ quite the contrary as the following few examples demonstrate.

> YHapt.35.3, *ahurā mazdā aṣā srīrā*   Geldner 1Pt. p. 129;
> '...O Lord, Wisdom, beautiful through truth...'Y35.3, my translation.

> YHapt.37.4, *aṣəm at vahištəm yazamaidē hyat sraēštəm   hyat spəṇtēm aməšəm hyat raocōṇŋhvat hyat vīspā vohū*   Geldner 1P p. 133;
> 'We worship/celebrate the most good truth, which (is) most beautiful, which (is) beneficial, non-dying, which (is) light-filled, which (is) all good.' Y37.4, my translation.

> YHapt. 40.3, "Do Thou grant (us) O Wise Ahura, men (who are) truthful [*aṣāunō*], loving truth [*aṣacinaŋhō*], good-natured herdsmen [*vāstryāŋg* 'pastors'], (with a view) to a long-lasting, abundant, (and) permanent fellowship, (men) who offer (support) to us and who enjoy (support) from us." Humbach 1991 translation, Vol. 1, p. 149.

As you can seem these YHapt. examples are not ritualistic uses of *aša-*.

Mills also, in his translation of many Avestan texts often translates *aša-* by adding the word 'ritual' to its meaning.

I can only surmise that the many rituals in the YAv. texts influenced both Haug's and Mills' interpretations of worship in the Gathas and other GAv. texts ~ which simply is not borne out by the evidence in those Old Avestan texts.

[72] As given in SBE 31, p. 281. Mills' translation of Y27.14, which he places in round parentheses, is not a translation of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu). He footnotes these words in parentheses with a reference to a Gatha verse Y34:15, and says "The Ashem follows." But his words in parentheses bear little resemblance to Insler's translation of Y34:15, (or to the Avestan words of that verse). I do not know what manuscript(s) he may have relied on to insert Y34:15 here. Nor do I know why he places these words in parentheses.

[73] Yy20.1 SBE 31, p. 266.

[74] SBE 23, p. 22.

[75] Kanga 1880, *Khordeh Avesta,* (1995 reprint) p. 1.

[76] All these translations (except Bartholomae's) appear in Taraporewala 1951 p. xxxiii.