

### The Manthra of Truth, Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu).

In Younger Avestan texts, the name of this mantra is the Asha Vahishta. But after Avestan times, it was called by its first two words, *ashem vohu*, and that is how people call it today. This mantra is studied in depth in other chapters.<sup>1</sup> Here, let us consider some of its highlights, which I think you may enjoy.

This mantra is a melody on truth ~ the true (correct) order of existence (*ašəm*) ~ which is the first and last word of the mantra.

Some scholars think that it is not in poetry because it has no meter. It is true that it is not in the meter of any Gatha. But to conclude that therefore it is not poetry imposes our narrow definition of poetry on an ancient culture.

As any Zoroastrian child who has memorized and recited it knows, the Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) has cadences that are alliterative, rhythmic and repetitive which is indeed the music of poetry. Its rhythmic cadences in my view, are linked to its intended meaning ~ a linkage that discussed in another chapter.<sup>2</sup>

Many scholars think this mantra was composed by Zarathushtra himself. I agree, because it contains core teachings in the Gathas, expressed in ways that are simple (for those who want simplicity) and also multi-dimensional (for those who want an in-depth understanding) ~ dual qualities which are a signature of his thinking and his poetic style.

A few preliminary matters:

In my translation of line a., I use the full definition of *aša*- 'the true (correct) order of existence'. But in line c., I use the short hand 'truth' because the full definition would be too long and awkward in that context.

Next, for students of the Gathas, the diagonal slash / usually marks the poetic break (ceasura),<sup>3</sup> in each line of a Gatha verse. But here I use it to indicate that a given word is used with two or more meanings (double or multiple entendre). And yes, I agree. This makes for awkward reading. But it enriches our understanding of this mantra. So I hope you will find the awkward reading worthwhile.

Finally, in my translation I have added some implied words ~ shown in round parentheses. But I have done so only in accord with normal Avestan usage, in which a word is implied which (previously or subsequently) has been stated. In addition, the verb 'to be' (in its various grammatical forms, such as 'is') routinely is implied in Avestan. Here is the mantra and my translation.

- a. *ašəm. vohū. vahištəm. asī.*
- b. *uštā. asī. uštā. ahmāi.*
- c. *hyat. ašāi. vahištāi. ašəm. Y27:14.*

- a. The true (correct) order of existence (is) good; the most-good<sup>4</sup> (existence) it is,
- b. desire it! /under will it is [*uštā asī*], [double entendre for the first *uštā*]  
happiness ! bliss ! / enlightenment ! (it is) [multiple entendre for the 2d *uštā*]; for that (existence)
- c. which (is) truth, for (the sake of) truth (which is) most-good. Y27:14.

At its most basic level, the Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) stands for the propositions:

- \* That the true (correct) order of existence is intrinsically good, and indeed, is the superlative of intrinsic goodness ~ 'most-good [*vahišta-*].' A 'most-good existence' (*ahu- vahišta-*), is one of Zarathushtra's terms for the state of being that is (what we call) paradise;<sup>5</sup>
- \* That we should desire it, choose it, that it is 'under will' meaning that we can will it into existence, in ourselves and in our world;<sup>6</sup>
- \* That it brings happiness in mortal existence,<sup>7</sup> as well as the bliss, enlightenment that is Zarathushtra's idea of (what we call) paradise ~ a state of being that houses the bliss, the high generated by beautiful music (the 'house of song'); a state of being that houses enlightenment (the comprehension of truth, the 'house of good thinking'); and
- \* That we should desire this true order of existence for its own sake ~ not to be well thought of, not because we want to be rewarded, not because we fear punishment, or 'hell', or 'bad karma', but simply for its own sake ~ truth for truth's own sake (I love that!).

This mantra expresses another of Zarathushtra's most basic teachings ~ the power of goodness. We have come to think of 'evil' as more powerful than 'good' in our world. And sometimes that is true in the short run. But Zarathushtra teaches a different view. He associates 'power' in our existence with the 7 qualities that make a being divine (later collectively called *amesha spenta*),<sup>8</sup> ~ all of which are components of, or equated with, the true order of existence (*aša-*). So a key teaching of this mantra is the recognition that the true order of existence is most good ~ the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness ~ *vahišta-* ~ an idea that is corroborated in the YAv. *Visperad* which says,

... •• *vahištəm īštīm yazamaide yəm ašahe vahištahe*•• Geldner 2P p. 30;

'the most good power/wish<sup>9</sup> [*vahištəm īštīm*] we worship/celebrate ~ that of the most good truth (*ašahe vahištahe*);' *Visperad* 23:1; my translation.<sup>10</sup>

Is this idea valid? Is 'good' powerful in our world? After many years of living (and doubting, and questioning, and rebelling), I have come to the conclusion that it is. But this is something that you have to decide for yourself.

So far we have looked at this mantra ~ the Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) ~ at a basic level.

But this mantra has additional dimensions of thought that are quite lovely. It has 3 words that are used in multi-dimensioned ways which, when applied here, give this mantra a deeper significance as we become aware of the beautiful interplay of meanings in these 3 words. They are:

- ~ *aša-* (of which *ašəm* and *ašāi* in lines a. and c. are grammatical forms),
- ~ *vahišta-* (of which *vahištəm* and *vahištāi* in lines a. and c. are grammatical forms, and
- ~ *uštā* (which appears twice in line b.).

After you see what these multi-dimensioned meanings are, you may (if you wish) read (or recite) the mantra again, with this deeper understanding to appreciate its significance. It probably has more significance than I have discovered, but this is what I have discovered to date.

Here is the first of these 3 words.

*aša-* (of which *ašəm* and *ašāi* are grammatical forms).<sup>11</sup>

First, let me summarize the ways in which Zarathushtra uses 'the true order of existence' *aša-* in the Gathas.

- ~ the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) includes factual truths as well as the truths of mind/heart/spirit; this order of existence is wholly good (*aša- vahišta-*); and includes its comprehension good thinking (*vohu- manah-*), its beneficial-sacred embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its good rule (*vohu- xšaθra-*), its complete attainment (*haurvatāt-*), comprising the beneficial-sacred way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*). The complete attainment of these qualities results in a state of being that no longer is bound by mortality (*amərətāt-* 'non-deathness'), because when these qualities are attained completely by a given soul, the perfecting process of that fragment of existence is complete, and the reason for its mortal existence (the arena for the perfecting process) no longer exists;<sup>12</sup>
- ~ the true order of existence (*aša-*), is the nature of w/Wisdom (*mazdā-*) ~ the Divine; it is the wholly good quality of Wisdom's being that makes It worthy of worship ~ Divine;<sup>13</sup> in other words, it is not *who* a being is that makes it divine; it is *what* a being is; this is one of the ways in which Zarathushtra's new, good envisionment (*vanuhī daēnā-*) differed radically from the religions of his culture, and also from certain dominant religious paradigms which have conditioned our thinking today, so it is important that we keep it in mind;
- ~ the true order of existence (*aša-*), and its components ~ its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule, the beneficial way of being ~ are divine qualities that mortals also have, although sporadically, imperfectly, not completely;
- ~ the true order of existence (*aša-*) (which includes its component qualities) is the path to the Divine (the path of truth); we have what it takes to create and re-create ~ on-going ~ this true good order of existence, bring it to life, in ourselves and in our day to day existence with each truth-possessing choice we make in thought, word and action; and
- ~ the true order of existence (*aša-*) is the reward for taking this path (the complete attainment of the qualities that make a being divine),<sup>14</sup> which is Zarathushtra's notion of salvation, paradise ~ a joyful state of being that is 'the most good existence' (*ahu- vahišta-*) one of his terms for paradise,<sup>15</sup> which is the true most-good true order of existence (*aša- vahišta-*), which is the existence of the Divine. And this state of being that is Zarathushtra's paradise does not begin in an 'afterlife'. It begins in this, mortal life. With each good choice in thought, word and action, we bring a bit of the Divine to life ~ in ourselves and in our world.

Here is this mantra again. See if you can find the foregoing Gatha teachings in its 3 lines.

- a. The true (correct) order of existence (is) good [*ašəm vohu*];  
the most-good (existence) it is [*vahištəm asfī*];
- b. desire it! /under will it is [*uštā asfī*], [double entendre for the first *uštā*]  
happiness ! bliss ! / enlightenment ! (it is) [*uštā*] for that (existence) [*ahmāi*] [multiple entendre for the 2d *uštā*];
- c. which (is) truth for (the sake of the) truth (which is) most good [*hyaṭ ašāi vahištāi ašəm*]. Y27:14.<sup>16</sup>

In this mantra we see an idea that flows throughout the Gathas ~ that the true order of existence (*aša-*) ~ including its griefs ~ is wholly good (*vahišta-*),<sup>17</sup> and indeed, in later texts *aša- vahišta-* became a standard term; which brings us to the 2d of the 3 key words.

*vahišta-* (of which *vahištəm* and *vahištāi* are grammatical forms),<sup>18</sup>

*vahišta-* means intrinsic goodness in the superlative degree, ~ literally 'most good'. In the Gathas, the superlative is used sometimes as a crescendo of expression, and sometimes as a difference in degree. The superlative *vahišta-* is used in both these ways.

Translators generally translate *vahišta-* as 'best', both in the Gathas and in this mantra the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu). Now it is true that in English 'best' is the superlative degree of 'good' (as in *good, better, best*). But 'best' has long since acquired a competitive meaning in English that has nothing to do with intrinsic goodness, (*this horror movie is the best; those fashions are the best; that pizza was the best*). A preference amongst horror movies, fashions, and pizza, has nothing to do with the notion of intrinsic goodness in the superlative degree. There is no evidence in the Gathas that *vahišta-* is used in any sense that is unrelated to the concept of intrinsic goodness (except for interpretations personal to a translator). Therefore (with respect) Zarathushtra's thought is not accurately conveyed when *vahišta-* is translated as 'best' ~ neither in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), nor in the Gathas.

So let us think of *vahišta-* in its literal sense, as 'most good' ~ the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness ~ when understanding this mantra.

In Avestan, *vahišta-* is an adjective which can also be used as a noun 'most good (thing)', or 'most good (one)', or 'most good (existence)', indicating a thing, or a being, or an existence, that exemplifies the quality of intrinsic goodness in the superlative degree. In the Gathas, *vahišta-* is used in multi-dimensioned ways, almost as a word of art, (detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle Of The Most-Good, Vahishta*). Here, I will summarize. You will see that these ways echo the ways in which *aša-* is used (shown above).

*vahišta-* 'most good' is used in the Gathas as a name for the Divine, *θwā vahištā* "Thee, Best One..." Y28:8, Insler 1975, or more literally, "Thee, Most Good (One)...".

*vahišta-* 'most good' is used in the Gatha to describe the true order of existence (*aša- vahišta-*), and various words that express the idea of intrinsic goodness are used for the component qualities of the true order of existence ~ its comprehension good thinking (*vohu- manah-*), its beneficial-sacred embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti-*), its good rule (*vohu- xšaθra-*), comprising the beneficial-sacred way of being, (*spənta- mainyu-*);

*vahišta-* 'most good' is used to describe Wisdom's teachings, and the words and actions which implement these teachings, which Zarathushtra calls the path(s) of truth, which is the path of Wisdom's divine qualities (amesha spenta), the path of the beneficial-sacred way of being (*spənta- mainyu-*);

*vahišta-* 'most good' is used for the reward for taking the path of truth, which reward is attaining completely (*haurvatāt-*) the true order of existence (*aša-*), and its component parts (amesha spenta) ~ each of which is described at least once as the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness (*vahišta-*); and therefore, not surprisingly,

*vahišta-* 'most good' is equated with Zarathushtra's notion of (what we call) paradise ~ a wholly good state of being (not a place). Specifically,

~ *ahu- vahišta-* '(the) most good existence' ~ an existence that is the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness ~ is one of his terms for paradise in the Gathas (and is so used even more often in the YAv. texts). It is the state of being (the existence) that embodies the true order of existence which is most good (*aša- vahišta-*) in the Gathas and later texts. So Zarathushtra's paradise *ahu- vahišta-* the 'most-good existence' *is* the most-good, true (correct) order of existence *aša- vahišta-*, in the Gathas, the two are equated.

~ *vahišta-* is equated with another one of Zarathushtra's names for paradise. He speaks of "... the House of Good Thinking. This is equal to the best [*vahišta-* '(the) most-good']..." Y32:15 - 16, Insler 1975. In the Gathas, 'house' is used as a metaphor for a state of being that houses certain qualities ~ here *good thinking*, the comprehension of truth, which is (what is) *most-good*. And indeed the (much later) Pazand word *vahesht-*, and the (even later) Persian word, *behesht* mean 'heaven'. Both these words derived from the Avestan *vahišta-* ~ an existence that is the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness (but which later came to be thought of as a place).

There are other descriptions of the existence that is *vahišta-* (the state of being that is Zarathushtra's paradise) in the Gathas and in later Avestan texts (that are consistent with the Gathas) which help us to understand the flavors of meaning (in Zarathushtra's mind) are a part of what is 'most good' *vahišta-*, and therefore are relevant to its use in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) manthra.

- ~ Paradise is called the 'House of Song', indicating a state of being that houses bliss ~ like the high we experience when listening to, or creating, or singing, beautiful music;
- ~ Paradise is called the 'House of Good Thinking', indicating a state of being which houses the comprehension of the true, wholly good order of existence ~ a state of enlightenment; and
- ~ In YAv. texts, paradise is also called *anayra- raocah-* 'endless *light(s)*', a metaphoric way of indicating a state of *enlightenment* ~ one that personifies the true, most good order of existence (*aša- vahišta-*), recalling that in the Gathas and later texts light, glory, fire, are material metaphors for truth (*aša-*) and (less frequently) its component divine qualities (*amesha spenta*).<sup>19</sup>

These uses of *vahišta-* 'most-good' are corroborated in the *Visperad*, a later YAv. text.<sup>20</sup> And indeed, in the Younger Avestan Yy19:6, each of these three things ~ *ahu-* (existence), *aša-* (the true order of existence), and *raocah-* (light) ~ is used in a context that today would be called 'paradise' or 'heaven'.<sup>21</sup> And each of these three things is called *vahišta-*.

Thus we get the idea that to Zarathushtra, paradise is the bliss of an enlightened existence ~ an existence in which there is no taint of evil, an existence which is wholly good, the superlative degree of intrinsic goodness (*ahu- vahišta-*) ~ which is the wholly good true (correct) order of existence, (*aša- vahišta-*) ~ the existence of the Divine (w/Wisdom personified *mazdā-*), the path to the Divine, and the reward for taking that path ~ the state of being (paradise) that all the living can (and will!),<sup>22</sup> attain. A state of being that begins in mortal existence.

Although at first it shocked me, I now think it is beyond cool that to Zarathushtra, 'God' is not a being who was always perfect, separate and apart from us. What I see in the Gathas, is that the Divine and all the living are parts of the same 'being', so what we call 'God' is simply that part of the being that has become perfected, that has reached enlightenment (wisdom) through understanding, choosing and becoming truth personified *aša-*. This means that the being that is now 'God' had to choose too, that it had to earn 'heaven' (the state of being that is divine) too.<sup>23</sup> There is a remarkable (luminous) verse in the Gathas which expresses

this thought quite clearly. Referring to himself in the 3d person (as so often happens in ancient poetry) Zarathushtra says,

"What prize Zarathushtra previously promised to his adherents ~ into that House of Song [Insler's footnote: "Metaphor for heaven"] did the Wise Lord come as the first one.<sup>24</sup> This prize has been promised to you during the times of salvation by reason of your good thinking and truth." Y51:15, Insler 1975.

This idea ties into the 3d key word of this mantra.

*uštā*

*uštā* is used twice in line b. of this mantra ~ each instance referring to *aša-* the 'true wholly good order of existence' mentioned in the preceding line a. and in the following line c.

In Avestan, as in English, a word may have two or more different meanings, which sometimes can be used with double entendre in a play of words. For example, 'holiness' can mean something that conforms to religious dogma. It can also mean something that is full of holes (am I being wicked?). Well, let's take another example.

The English word 'light' means visual radiance (*the light of dawn*). It also means something that is not heavy (*light as a feather*). As a verb, 'light' can mean to ignite (*light a fire*), or to illuminate something with happiness (*a smile lights up his face*). Now if a poet intends to use 'light' in a play of words with double or triple or multiple entendre in connection with (for example) an angel, s/he might use 'light' more than once in the same verse ~ to indicate radiance, weightlessness, and a being alight with happiness. Since we are fluent in English, we would immediately understand (and enjoy) this word-play.

In the same way, some GAv. words have more than one meaning, and the use of double and multiple entendre is a well known technique of Zarathushtra's poetry. I think *uštā* in line 2 of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), is one of these words. Let us consider 3 of its different meanings, which fit the context of line b.

*uštā* is an imperative verb form which means "desire it! wish it!".<sup>25</sup>

*uštā* is the locative case of a noun which means "under will".

*uštā* is an interjection which means "happiness!".<sup>26</sup>

And the 'happiness' that is *uštā* has also been translated as spiritual bliss (from *uštātāt-* ~ a state of "happiness, blessedness"),<sup>27</sup> and "illumination".<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, with *uštā* we have an interplay of meanings, some of which echo the multi-dimensional ways in which Zarathushtra uses *aša-* and *vahišta-*.

So which of the foregoing meanings does he intend when he uses *uštā* twice in line b.?

I think the first *uštā* is used with double entendre, (I am indebted to Professor Insler for this insight).

First, as the imperative verb 'desire it! (referring to *aša-* in the preceding line) in the sense that we should have a passion for truth, want it ~ a conclusion that seems to be corroborated in the YAv. *Visperad*, and

Second, as a locative noun "under will it is" (*uštā asfī*), meaning that we can will the true (correct) order into existence, create it (in ourselves and in our world), achieve it, attain it, personify it.

And I think the 2d *uštā* is used with triple entendre,



First, as material happiness, reflecting Zarathushtra's (profound) thought that happiness in the material existence can be found (in the long run) only when we are in sync with the true order of existence,<sup>29</sup>

Second, as spiritual bliss, and

Third, as illumination.

These 3 ways include mortal and non-mortal existence ~ bringing the Divine (*aša-*) to life in mortal existence, and eventually becoming Divine, a blissful / enlightened state of being ~ which is Zarathushtra's idea of paradise ~ the House of Song (bliss), the House of Good Thinking (the comprehension of truth), the 'endless lights' (enlightenment), the most-good existence (*ahu- vahišta-*) ~ which echo some of the multiple ways in which Zarathushtra uses *aša-* and *vahišta-* in lines 1 and 3 ~ a conclusion that is re-echoed in a YAv. text, which describes one of Zarathushtra's terms for paradise ~ *ahu- vahišta-* the 'most good existence' as follows,

... *vahištəm ahūm ašaonqm yazamaide raōcaṇhəm vīspō.x'āθrəm* ...

'... the most-good existence [*vahištəm ahūm*] of the truth-possessing [*ašaonqm*] we celebrate, light-filled [*raōcaṇhəm*], all-good/happiness/enlightenment [*vīspō.x'āθrəm*] ...'.<sup>30</sup>

A few additional thoughts:

There is a lovely interplay between the 'existence' that is *aša-* and the only expressly stated verb in this mantra which is *asfī* '(it) is' or '(it) exists'. In GAv., the verb *ah-* 'to be' is also used for 'to exist'.<sup>31</sup>

In the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu), *asfī* '(it) exists', reflects the 'existence' that is *vohu-* and *vahišta-* in lines a. and c., and *uštā* in line b., which are dimensions of the true wholly good order of existence, *aša-vahišta-* ~ the centerpiece of this poem.

The ways in which Zarathushtra uses these three words in the Gathas ~ *aša-*, *vahišta-* and *uštā* ~ show an interplay between the human and the Divine ~ an interplay which is echoed in the most ancient commentary on this mantra (Yy20:4).

Now if we factor our understanding of these 3 words ~ *aša-*, *vahišta-* and *uštā* ~ into the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) mantra, what does it tell us?

A signature of Zarathushtra's thought is that he expresses beautiful, multi-dimensioned ideas which he resolves into a simplicity. We have looked (briefly) at the multi-dimensions of this mantra. Let us now consider its simplicity. It tells us that:

*aša-* the true (correct) order of existence, is an existence that is wholly good; that we should desire it, choose it; that we can will it into existence; that it brings happiness to mortal existence and is the bliss of enlightenment; and that we should choose it, will it into existence, personify it, for its own sake. It is an existence that is divine, the way to the divine, and the paradise of becoming one with the divine, a joyful, enlightened state of being which is wholly good, an existence that is truth for truth's own most good sake.

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<sup>1</sup> See in *Part Three: Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu), An Analysis*.

<sup>2</sup> The idea that the cadences of the Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) are linked to its meaning, is discussed in *Part Three: Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu), An Analysis*.

<sup>3</sup> In Latin, Greek and Old English poetry, a 'caesura' is a pause or break within a line of poetry required by rhythm, syntax, or sense. McArthur, *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*. We also find this kind of line break in the Gathas, which is usually required by the meter, and linguists have adopted the Latin term 'caesura' for it (because we do not know what it was called in Avestan). Avestan, Latin, Greek and English are all within the Indo-European family of languages.

<sup>4</sup> You may notice that in line a., truth is described as 'good' in both its positive (*vohu-*) and superlative (*vahišta-*) forms. This is typical of a crescendo of expression which is a well established style of syntax in Avestan texts (discussed in more detail in *Part Three: The Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu), An Analysis*). Here are just two examples from the YAv. *Hormezd (Ormazd) Yasht*, in which the author has Ahura Mazda purportedly giving Its names (as a way of revealing Its nature) using a word first in its positive form, and then in its superlative form, in the same phrase.

... *baēžazya. nqma. ahmi. baēžazyōtama. nqma. ahmi.*  
'...healing by name am I, most-healing by name am I';  
... *ašava. nqma. ahmi. ašavastama. nqma. ahmi.*  
'... truth-possessing by name am I, most-truth-possessing by name am I';  
Yt. 1:12, my translation; Avestan words from Geldner 2P p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> Detailed in *Part Two: The Houses Of Paradise & Hell*.

<sup>6</sup> An idea that is echoed in a Gatha verse, detailed in *Part Six: Yasna 43:1*.

<sup>7</sup> Detailed in *Part One: Joy, Happiness, Prosperity*.

<sup>8</sup> Detailed in *Part Two: A Question Of Power*.

<sup>9</sup> The noun *īšīm* appears in two Gatha verses (Y32:9 and Y46:2) in which Insler 1975 translates this word (acc. sg.) as 'power'. But Skjaervo in his *Old Av. Index* (2022) translates it as "wish, ritual(?)" ~ the question mark is Skjaervo's. In using *vahištqm īšīm* the author of this YAv. text *Visperad* 23:1, may have intended a double entendre ~ that truth (*aša-*) is 'most good power' (as repeatedly stated in the Gathas), as well as the most good wish (as in 'Desire it/wish it' in the 2d line of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) mantra).

<sup>10</sup> This passage in *Visperad* 23:1 is further discussed in a ft. in *Part Three: Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu), Ancient Commentaries*.

<sup>11</sup> *ašəm* 'truth...' is the form for both nominative sg. and accusative sg. of the ntr. noun stem *aša-* but in this context, it can only be nom. sg.

*ašāi* 'for truth...' is the dative sg. form of the ntr. noun stem *aša-*. The **dative** is expressed in English as 'to/for \_\_\_\_'.

<sup>12</sup> See in *Part One*:

*The Beneficial-Sacred Way of Being, Spenta Mainyu;*  
*Truth, Asha;*  
*Good Thinking, Vohu Manah;*  
*Beneficial-Sacred Embodied Truth, Spenta Aramaiti;*  
*Good Rule, Vohu Xshathra, & Power; and*  
*The Nature of the Divine.*

<sup>13</sup> Detailed in *Part One: The Nature Of The Divine*.

<sup>14</sup> See *Part Two: A Question of Reward and the Path*.

<sup>15</sup> See *Part Two: The Houses of Paradise & Hell*; and *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*.



<sup>16</sup> Professor Insler has pointed out a special technique which Zarathushtra uses in the Gathas (discussed in detail in *Part Three: The Ahuna Vairya (Yatha Ahu Vairyo) An Analysis*, with Insler's insight referenced, and with many examples). Zarathushtra sometimes makes two words that belong together, frame or encapsulate other words, to show that the framing and framed words form a unit of thought. For example, the words *vohu-/vahišta-* *manah-* belong together (because *vohu-* and *vahišta-* are adjectives which describes the noun *manah-*). In the following 2 examples, *vohū /vahištā* and *managhā* are instr. sg. ('with/by/through \_\_\_\_') of the stem words *vohu-/vahišta-* and *manah-*.

*vohū šyavāi managhā* Y33.8a ("...I shall enact with good thinking"). Here *vohū ... managhā* 'with good thinking' frame or encapsulate *šyavāi* 'I shall enact', showing that Zarathushtra wants these three words to be taken as one unit of thought ~ that the enacting is done with good thinking.

So also: *vahištā išasā managhā* Y31.4b ("...through the most-good thinking I shall seek..."), showing that the 'seeking' is done with thinking that is most-good.

Sometimes, more than one word is encapsulated. For example, the *Kemna Mazda* prayer includes a quotation from the Gathas, Y44:16, a part of which includes this framing or encapsulation technique.

Line d. ... *aṭ hōi vohū sərəaošō jantū managhā* ... Y44:16;

Literally 'then [aṭ] to it [hōi] let come [jantū] listening [sərəaošō] through good thinking [vohū ... managhā]'

Or in more fluent English 'then to it, let listening come through good thinking'. Y44:16, my translation.

And that framing technique is exactly what we see in the last line of the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) mantra.

Line c. *hyaṭ aṣāi vahištāi aṣəm*

c. "which (is) truth [hyaṭ ... aṣəm], for (the sake of) most-good truth [aṣāi vahištāi]." Y27:14, my translation; ~ that we are truthful for its own most-good sake.

<sup>17</sup> Detailed in *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>18</sup> *vahištəm* 'most-good' is the nominative sg. ntr. form of the adj. stem *vahišta-*.

*vahištāi* 'for-(the)-most-good...' is the dative. sg. ntr. form of the adj. stem *vahišta-*. Because dat. sg. *vahištāi* is an adj. which describes dat. sg. *aṣāi* 'for truth...' the dat. 'for' in English translation is used only once before the adj. and its noun. Thus, *aṣāi vahištāi* 'for (the) most good truth.'

<sup>19</sup> Detailed in *Part One: The Fire In All Things*; and in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.

<sup>20</sup> In *Visperad* Ch. 23:1 we have the following. I give you my translation because Mills' translation is a bit free, and does not always follow the Avestan as shown in Geldner.

"§ 1. *vahištəm ahurəm mazdqm yazamaide* ∴

The most-good Lord, Wisdom, we worship/celebrate,

*vahištəm aməṣā spəntā yazamaide* ∴

The most-good amesha spenta, we worship/celebrate, [here I think *aməṣā spəntā* refer to divine qualities, not living beings]

*vahištəm narəm aṣavanəm yazamaide* ∴

The most-good truth-possessing man, we worship/celebrate, ['man' here is used generically]

*vahištəm aṣəm yazamaide* ∴

The most-good true order of existence, we worship/celebrate,

*vahišta ciθra yazamaide yā staota yesnya*

With the most-good lights, we worship/celebrate, what (are) the praise songs worthy of worship/celebration, [a reference to the Gathas, in my view ~ so here we worship/celebrate with our own illumination, the Songs which teach us how to become enlightened ~ w/Wisdom personified);

*vahištqm īšfīm yazamaide yqm ašahe vahištahe* ∴

The most-good power/wish we worship/celebrate, that of (the) Asha Vahishta, (I think both meanings of *īšfīm* are used here with double entendre),

*vahištəm ahūm ašaonqm yazamaide raocanhəm vīspō.xʷāθrəm* ∴

The most-good existence of the truth-possessing (ones) we worship/celebrate, light-filled, all-good/happiness/enlightenment", (this sentence is a frequently used description in YAv. texts of the state of being that today is called 'heaven' ~ a more detailed form of the shorter term for paradise 'most good existence' (*ahu- vahišta-*))

*vahištahe aṇhəuš vahištqm ayanqm yazamaide* ∴

The most-good way of the most-good (existence), we worship/celebrate." *Visperad* 23:1, my translation; Avestan words have been transliterated (my me) from Geldner 2P p. 30.

This beautiful passage from *Visperad* 23:1, its translation and meaning, are discussed in more detail in *Part Three: Heaven In Other Avestan Texts*. The Avestan idea of 'worship' as a celebration is detailed in *Part Two: The Puzzle of Worship*, and a ft. therein.

<sup>21</sup> In Yy19:6, the most-good existence (*ahu- vahišta-*), the most-good true order of existence (*aša- vahištā*), and the most-good lights (*vahišta- raocah-*) in their various grammatical forms are equated ~ as parallel ways of referring to the state of being that is paradise ~ the adj. *vahišta-* describing all three. I will give you first my translation, and then Mills' translation. The author of this text has the Lord Wisdom (purportedly) speaking. Here is my translation.

'... I will convey his soul across the bridge indeed, to the most good existence [*vahištəm ahūm*] ~ I who (am) the Lord Wisdom ~

all the way up to the most good existence [*ā. vahištāṭ. aṇhaōṭ.*],

all the way up to the most good true order of existence [*ā. vahištāṭ. ašāṭ.*]

all the way up to the most good lights [*ā. vahištaēibyō. raocābyō.*].' Yy19:6: my translation.

Avestan words are from Geldner 1P p. 75. This passage is discussed in *Part Three: Chinvat, The Bridge Of Discerning*.

Here (for comparative purposes) is Mills' translation of the same passage. As you can see, it is a bit free. It does not follow the Avestan text accurately. And it ignores the prominent place played by *vahišta-* in each of these 4 lines. Round parentheses are in Mills' translation. I have added nothing.

"... I will bring his soul over the Bridge of Chinvat, I who am Ahura Mazda (I will help him to pass over it) to Heaven (the best life) and to Righteousness the Best and to the lights of heaven." Yy19:6, SBE Vol. 31, p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> Detailed in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*; and *A Question Of Power*.

<sup>23</sup> Detailed in *Part One: The Identity Of The Divine*, and the chapters footnoted therein.

<sup>24</sup> As in English, the GAv. word *paourvya-* is used to mean 'first' in many different senses ~ 'first in time', 'first in quality' etc. In this verse Y51:15, I think *paouryō* 'first (one)' (referring to Wisdom), means first (foremost) in the quality of being.

<sup>25</sup> Insler says that *uštā* is the imperative form of the verb 'to desire, to wish', and also the locative form of a noun 'wish, will', thus "under will" (based on Professor Insler's unpublished translation of the Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) which he was kind enough to let me see).

In the Gatha verse Y30:11, Insler translates *uštā* as "...Wish it so." And he comments that *uštā* is an imperative verb form. p. 177. In Y51:16 he translates *uštā* as the imperative 'wish ye' ("The Wise Lord is [*spənta-* 'beneficial']. Therefore wish ye [*uštā*] for Him to announce Himself to us." Y51:16). Parenthetically, "to announce Himself to us" Updated 2025

means to tell us about His nature (which is the true most-good order of existence, refracted into its comprehension, its embodiment, its rule ~ the wholly beneficial way of being ~ the nature of the Divine).

In the Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) Barthomae translates *uštā* as 'desire' (Taraporewala 1951 p. xxxiii).

<sup>26</sup> Jackson 1892 in his Avesta Grammar identifies (YAv.) *uštā* as an interjection, §§ 741 - 742, p. 206. Here in the Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) *uštā* is translated as an interjection 'happiness' by B. T. Anklesaria, F. K. Dadachanji, Dastur Dhalla, D. J. Irani, Kanga, Juan Mascaro, Mills, and Spiegel (according to Taraporewala p. xxxiii).

Perhaps this translation choice was based on the YAv. *Tir Yasht*, in which *uštā* is an interjection "Happiness!" and is equated with *uštātāt-* ~ a state of blissfulness, blessedness.

The linguistics of *uštā* with comparative translations are detailed in *Part Three: The Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu), An Analysis*.

<sup>27</sup> Haug, and K. M. Talati (quoted in Taraporewala 1951 p. xxxiii). The YAv. commentary on the Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) explains that the line *uštā asfī uštā ahmāi* describes this state of being *uštātāt-* 'happiness, blessedness', which Humbach says means "ushta-ness, i.e. a benediction". (Humbach 1991 Vol. 2, p. 11).

Mills translates *uštātāt-* in this YAv. commentary as "blessedness" Yy20:2. SBE 31, p. 267.

This commentary Yy20 is discussed in *Part Three: The Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu) Ancient Commentaries*. The idea that *uštātāt-* is a state of 'happiness, that is blessedness' is corroborated by one of the meanings of *uštā* which is an interjection 'Happiness!'

<sup>28</sup> Taraporewala 1951 p. 23. He states that *uštā* (in one of its meanings), means more than 'happiness'. It means a state of bliss which is the illumination of the soul in the fulfillment of earthly life. His opinion fits the use of *uštā* /*uštātāt-* in the *Tir Yasht*, especially when we consider that the 'waters' and 'plants' in the *Tir Yasht* (with double entendre) are also material metaphors for completeness *haurvatāt-* and non-deathness *amərətāt-* respectively.

<sup>29</sup> Detailed in *Part One: Joy, Happiness, Prosperity*.

<sup>30</sup> This phrase for the state of being that is paradise is found in many YAv. texts, detailed in *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*. In the Avestan word *vīspō.xʷāθrām*, the first member *vīspō* simply means 'all'. The second member *xʷāθra-* has routinely been translated as 'happiness'. But 'happiness' is an inadequate translation to capture the many flavors of meaning of this Avestan word *xʷāθra-* (which includes the notion of fire, a symbol of 'truth' in the Gathas and later texts). These flavors of meaning are detailed and explained (linguistically) in *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*. After you read that explanation of *xʷāθra-* you may (if you wish) come back to this chapter, and see how those multiple flavors of meaning add depth to your understanding of 'the most good existence' (*ahu- vahištā-* 'paradise') and the enlightenment that is *uštā* in the Asha Vahishta (ashem vohu) mantra.

<sup>31</sup> Here are two examples from the Gathas of the verb *ah* 'to be' translated by Insler as 'to exist'. Many more are given in *Part Three: Asha Vahishta (Ashem Vohu), An Analysis*.

Y43:6 a: *yahmi spəntā θwā mainyū urvaēsē jasō*  
b: *mazdā x šaθrā ahmī vohū mananḥā*

Y43:6a-b "(But) at this very turning point in which I exist [*ahmī*], Thou, the Wise One, hast come into the world with Thy [*spəntā ... mainyū*] (and) with the rule of good thinking,..." Insler 1975.

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 this context, the English '(I) exist' for *ahmī* more accurately captures Zarathushtra's meaning than '(I) am' would have done.

Y45:6b *yā hudā hənfi*

"... Him who is beneficent ... to those who exist [*hənfi*]..." Y45:6b, Insler 1975. In the Old Avestan text of this verse, the word *hənfi* '(they) are' (3p pl. of the verb *ah-* 'to be') is translated by Insler as 'exist', which more accurately captures Zarathushtra's meaning in this context.