

OUR SHORTEST PRAYER: ASHEM VOHU.

Its Meaning, Message and the Thoughts to be

Passed in Our Mind While Chanting It.

On page 2 of this Issue, we have tried to understand what Manthra or Mantra is. In that light, let us now attempt to delve into our common prayer Ashem Vohu. First:

EXPLANATION AND MEANING

Ashem¹ Vohu² Vahishteym³ Asti⁴

Ushta⁵ Asti⁶

Ushta⁷ Ahmai⁸

Hyat⁹ Ashaai¹⁰ Vahishtaaai¹¹ Ashem¹².

The word **Asha** is the foundation of this Manthra-Prayer of 12 words. It is pronounced three times in the words nos. 1, 10 and 12. It occurs numerous times and in various connotations throughout the Avesta Prayers. It has seven meaning or facets. They are:

Law, Order, Beauty, Truth,

Righteousness, Purity,

Freedom.

The whole creation of Ahura Mazda emanates from the Divine Word, Ahunavar and operates on the Divine Law and Order, Asha.

All the beauty of Nature moulded by Ahurmazda expresses itself through Asha. The mountains and oceans and rivers and jungles and gardens and flowers and trees and fruits on earth, and the beautiful sky above are all the expressions of Asha.

The divine Law, Order and Beauty constitute Ahura's TRUTH which is elaborated and explained by the Prophets of all Religions in different words and languages, and through different picturisations. Therefore TRUTH means divine Knowledge-Gnyaan, which comes to us in various levels according to our spiritual capacity and position.

The fifth facet of the word Asha is RIGHTEOUSNESS. Here we have come down to our own self. The word conveys: What is Right and what is Evil, what is Virtue and what is vice, what are good deeds - '**Kerfeh**' - 'ponya' - and what is sin - '**Goonah**', - 'Paap.'. Avesta and all Religions declare all throughout that the Good and Bad are defined by Ahuramazda and proclaimed by the Prophets, Saints, Sages and Seers. It is not for us, the non-saintly mortal humans to define them or think them out. Our life should be a constant effort to discard Goonah and adopt Kerfeh. This is the duty assigned to humans. There is no choice given to them. "Choosing evil" is a contradiction in terms. It is not permitted by God. It is a FALL.

The sixth facet PURITY implies purity of body and mind both. We the humans have within us tremendous impurity woven with purity. "Gava" is the scriptural term for the pure white element in us, and "Druj" for the impure black. It is our duty to alchemise the Druj into Gava through the observance and practice of our Din, Dharma, every moment of our life.

The Righteousness and Purity are thus our Rules of Life and day to day living. They are called 'Tarikat's, which are not just physical or external. They are mental and spiritual too. Trying hard to prevent your mind from drifting away to impure thoughts, is equally a Tarikat.

Impure thoughts, words and deeds drive us away from God. We require spiritual energy to resist them. That energy is invoked within us by the 'Tarikat's like Sudreh-Kushti, Manthra Prayers, Atash Parasti, Meher-Patet, cultivation of Armaiti and Hutoxi in our mind frame.

Those Tarikats, efforts and frame of mind lead to the alchemy of our Druja into Gava. And we are taken nearer and nearer to Ahura and ultimately to FREEDOM which is the 7th facet, nay the final goal to reach, Mukti Salvation.

You will see that the seven facets of Asha is the prescription of life to be led on earth.

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USHTAA - The Ecstasy

Another founding word in Ashem Vohu is USHTAA.

It is translated as "happiness." But it is not the material happiness of having large bank-balances or fine cars or huge properties. Ushtaa is divine happiness, happiness of the heart, happiness of love and devotion.

The seven facets of Asha show us the way of life and our final goal. We are separated from Ahuramazda and are going back to Him. When we will reach Him, we shall have the ultimate divine bliss and ecstasy, the real final Ushtaa. But Ahura has in His Grace provided for us the lamps of Ushtaa all the way. When you eat food, the satiation is a kind of Ushtaa. When you look to the beauty of God you experience Ushtaa. When you feel happiness in feeding a hungry human or animal, or in helping somebody in trouble or in feeling mercy for somebody suffering and running to mitigate it, or to oblige somebody in need or have a surge of love towards anyone, the feeling you experience is Ushtaa.

But the sublimest Ushtaa is experience when you loose yourself in the sea of devotion towards Ahuramazda or Asho Zarathushtra or your Din. In the present pangs of separation from our Khodaa - God, curiously and poetically we experience ecstasy, a feeling of divine bliss, a hope, a dream, nay a certainty that one day we will meet Him, be with Him, merge in Him. When you recite Manthra or stand before Atash-Padshah, or sit at a ceremony for your dear dead, or hear the sound of bell in the holy Fire Temple , may your eyes moisten with tears of devotion. Very curious thing these tears are; they pour out in pain, yet have the coolness of some divine pleasure! Therefore they pour out in pleasure also.

Now, with this background, you are ready to understand the meaning and message of Ashem Vohu.

Ashem¹ Vohu² Vahishteym³ Asti⁴

Ushta⁵ Asti⁶

Ushta⁷ Ahmai⁸

Hyat⁹ Ashaai¹⁰ Vahishtaai¹¹ Ashem¹².

The word **Asti⁴⁻⁶** means IS. 'IS' conveys existence, truth, reality actuality. "Here IS a mountain", we say, and mean that look at this mountain, it is there, it exists, it is a reality, we can see. Here in Ashem Vohu the first 6 words convey that there are in reality and truth, three entities: (i) Asha Vahishta, (ii) Vohumano-Vahishteym Mano, and (iii) Ushtaa.

"Asha Vahishta" has 'Asha' in it, - Asha with the seven facets.

"Vohu Vahisthem" has hidden in it "Vohu Mano", the Divine Consciousness of Ahura.

"Ushtaa" means divine ecstasy, bliss.

The first six words proclaim that these three are the Truth in Nature, Truth of Ahura.

7th and 8th words proclaim that he who follows Asha and Vohuman, will attain Ushtaa. Asha means righteousness, purity, alchemy of Druj into Gava. If you lead your life on the Path of Asha i.e. Divine Law, Order, Beauty, Truth as ordained and prescribed by Asho Zarathushtra your present limited consciousness will expand and you will be in communion with the presently unobservable regions of Nature. Your Ako-man i.e. the impurity-mixed mind will become purer and purer, and you will go nearer and nearer to Vohu Man i.e. the Divine Consciousness of Ahuramazda.

Having said this, Ashem Vohu further proclaims: it is therefore the bounden duty of Ye, the humans to tread on the Path of Asha, so that you will attain Freedom, Frashogard, Mukti, Vohuman.

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Now let us summarise and shorten the meaning of Ashem Vohu.

There are⁴⁻⁶ three entities (or existences) in Nature: Asha¹⁻³, Vohuman² and Ushtaa⁵.

The Path of Asha leads anyone to Vohuman and Ushtaa⁷.

It is the bounden duty of the humans to follow that Path of Asha-Vahishta¹⁰⁻¹¹ and attain FREEDOM¹².

You, my dear reader, can, while reciting Ashem Vohu at any time, pass in your mind the above meaning.

Please note that the last (12th) word 'Asheyam' means **freedom**.

"Asha Vahishta" occur in Hoshbaam Prayer as :

"Asha Vahishta

Asha Sraeshta

Dereysaam Thwaa

Pairi Thwaa Jamyaam

Hameym Thwaa Hakhma."

Here the message of Ashem Vohu is elaborated - thus :

Asha is most Beautiful,

(Oh Asha!) Give us your Darshan (Vision),

Reach around us,

(And) May we reach Your Friendship.

[This is elaborated in our Gujarati series on Hoshbaam].

Yazashney Haa 20 reveals many secrets hidden in Ashem Vohu Prayer. (This is beyond the scope of this article). The Path of Asha is described as "Ereyzoosh Patho"- the Path of Truth in Gatha Haa 53-2 (which also includes the word "Khshnoom").

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THE PRAYER - THOUGHT IN ASHEM VOHU

Every Prayer is an address to Ahuramazda and asks for a bounty from Him. If you want to pass the thought in the form of a devotional address while reciting Ashem Vohu, here it is :

Oh Ahuramazda! Asha, Vohuman and Ushtaa are Thy divine Entities. Lead me on the Path of Asha.

Let my heart ever be immersed in Devotion and Bliss.

Give me strength to tread on Thy Divine Path of Asha, so that i may attain Freedom (Mukti, Salvation, Frashogard).

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Courtesy : Neville Joshi