

“ASHEYM VOHU”, THE SMALLEST PRAYER. ITS EFFECT AND CONTENT

Our Prayer Book, Khordeh Avesta starts with a small composition of just twelve words: "Asheym Vohu Asheym".

Every prayer, big or small, be it a Gah or Niyash or Yashta or Nirang or Seytaayesh, ends with an Asheym Vohu.

Almost every prayer begins with the words: "Khshnaothra Ahurahey Mazdaao, Asheym Vohu"

Different number of Asheym Vohu's are to be recited at different places during our Khordeh Avesta Prayers.

The tradition teaches us to recite one Asheym Vohu on several occasions like : when we sneeze; when we hear about somebody's death; when we change side in the bed; when our mind tends to lose its composure or becomes depressed or worried; when our thoughts go astray or become polluted or impure.

There is a not-much-known Avesta composition titled: "Hadokhta Nusk", wherein a highly interesting dialogue takes place between Ahura Mazda, the Creator and Asho Zarathushtra. The Prophet asks: which is the occasion when the recitation of one Ashem Vohu has the effect of 10 Asheym Vohu's? Ahura Mazda answers: when one who has infused in oneself good thoughts, words and deeds and has discarded evil thoughts, words and deeds, recites one Asheym Vohu while eating his meal.

Asho Zarathushtra then goes on asking : when is the effect of one 'Asheym' equivalent to 100 Ashem's Ahura Mazda replies : when such a 'good' human recites one Asheym while drinking the sanctified Haoma.

Ahura Mazda further answers that when such a good human recites one Asheym while changing side during sleep, the effect is equivalent to 1000 Asheym's. And when he or she recites one Asheym while waking up from sleep, the effect is of 10,000 Asheym's.

In the Holy Scripture, "Yazashney" of 72 'Haa's (Chapters), one full Haa (20th) is devoted to Asheym Vohu. It brings out the inner and deeper levels of meanings hidden in Asheym Vohu.

What is this little Avesta composition of just twelve words which seems to be the foundation of all Avesta Prayer; which is even the subject matter of a Divine Dialogue, and which requires a full chapter of a Scripture to set out its inner content?

If we look to the modern philological, etymological and grammatical translations, you will find something like: "righteousness for righteousness's sake", and that will just keep you wondering and a bit baffled.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

There are a few Divine Truths about the Holy scriptures of all Religions, whether Veda or Gita or Koran or Bible or Avesta, which should be always kept in mind while trying to understand their effect, message and meaning:

1. Vibrations of Divine light are the basis of God's whole creation. They are called "Staota Yasna" and are too subtle to enter into the domain of our experiences. The Holy Scriptures are the

transmutations of those divine vibrations into such words as can be pronounced by the human tongue.

2. The transmutation is brought about by those Prophets and Saints who are in direct communion with the Divine Vibrations through their spiritual exertions and authority.

3. The transmutation is, therefore, not an ordinary writing or literature or poetry. It is the Divine Composition of Manthra.

4. The recitation of the Manthra, with due preparation and observance of certain ordained rules, generates spiritual currents of divine energy and has specified effect in nature as also within the reciter.

5. In the very nature of things, Manthra Compositions are not subject to the human rules of grammar and the science of ordinary human languages, but have the power to attune us with God and His Divine Energies.

6. In addition to its power to attune us with the Divine Energies, every Manthra composition has various levels of meanings and messages. These are not revealed through etymological scholasticism, but require certain keys to decipher. These keys known as "taavil" have a special spiritual science of their own. Without that science of "taavil" the grammatical translations become dry, and often meaningless and even absurd, and the situation is like the blind leading the half blind! That situation is rampant in the Western oriented studies of our Religion and is squarely responsible for the decline of faith amongst the Parsis.

7. The levels of meanings inherent in a Manthra composition have three main phases: (i) Divine knowledge or Science; (ii) practical lesson for our second-to-second life on Earth; and (iii) an expression of devotion. In every Avesta passage, some element of the spiritual knowledge and sacred science is interwoven with some practical instruction of living and an outcry of love and devotion towards Ahura Mazda or His Divine Channels (called Yazata's) or Asho Zarathushtra.

With this background let us enter a little in the message of Asheym Vohu.

Two words are predominant in Asheym Vohu : "Asha" and "Ushta". Asha is woven into the words "Asheym" which is the first and the last word, and also in "Ashai" the 10th word.

ASHA, THE DIVINE LAW, ORDER AND BEAUTY

'**A**sha' indicates the Divine Law, Order, Beauty and the Divine Goodness or Righteousness.

The whole Creation is governed by Ahura Mazda's Divine Law and Order. That Law and Order itself is one of His Divine Channels and is named as "Asha Vahishta" or "Ardibeheshta Ameshaspand".

Beauty, in whatever form, is the physical expression of "Asha Vahishta". Be reminded of Ahura Mazda's Divine presence whenever you see beauty.

The Channel of Asha Vahishta pours down in the human heart and inspires goodness or righteousness in it. Goodness is defined as a craving to give, to serve, and to love, all creation. Selflessness is the prime virtue leading us to God. Its opposite, selfishness, is the prime vice dragging us away from Him. So, be selfless and humble and not selfish and egoistic. Love to give, not to take. This is one of the messages of Asheym Vohu.

USHTAA, THE DIVINE ECSTASY

The other key word is "Ushtaa". Its surface meaning is "happiness". But it does not refer to any material or physical happiness. Ushta means bliss, ecstasy, divine happiness. Material happiness and physical pleasures are temporary and illusory. 'Ushtaa' is eternal and real.

The fountain source of Ushtaa is Ahura Mazda Himself. We, the mortal, non-saintly humans are 'away' from Him, separated from Him. The feeling of this separation is ever present in our hearts. We burn in separation from our Love. That burning is called 'Devotion' or 'Bhakti' which is also a form of 'Ushtaa'. We are in bliss when we burn for Him, because in our thoughts we are in His divine company. Our heart throbs at His thought. The heart throb inspires confidence in us that we will one day stand in the presence of our Divine Lover.

The message of Asheym Vohu can thus be summarised as :

Asha, the Divine Law, Order, Beauty and Truth of Ahura Mazda prevails in all Creation, physical, non-physical and divine. Its channel flows down in every human heart and manifests itself as goodness, righteousness, selflessness, service, love and devotion.. Let every human be good, selfless; let him or her give away rather than snatch away. Let every human adopt the law of Asha in minute-to-minute life on this Earth. Let every thought, word and deed emanate from the Divine fountain of Bliss and Devotion and Love ever flowing in our Heart. Let us be ready to meet Him; Let us prepare ourselves to be lost in His Ushtaa.

As a Manthric composition Asheym Vohu has power to infuse order wherever there is disorder. **When thoughts go astray, when the mind is depressed, when the evil tries to overpower us, when we are in a state of disorder in thoughts, words and deeds, we recite an Asheym Vohu, praying that may order be restored.** When we sneeze or yawn, some pollution is shot out, some disorder is caused. Let Asheym Vohu restore the order. When we hear about someone's death, by reciting an Ashem Vohu, we emanate a wave of Manthric power to help the departed soul (Ruvan) to restore order.

Life is full of disorders of all sorts. Let us recite an Asheym and immerse our thoughts in its divine message, every time a disorder appears.

When you wake up in the morning, when you close your eyes to sleep, when you turn your side in bed, when you see any beauty, when you wish to do some good, when you wish to thank Ahura Mazda for anything, **RECITE AN ASHEYM VOHU.**

Smallest but Loftiest

- Cheraag

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