

ASHEM VOHU

A GLIMPSE INTO THE TRUTHS HIDDEN IN THIS SHORT PRAYER

Mantra is not merely language. It is the Prayer formulae based on the Laws of Stoot Yasna. On its recitation the Prayer assumes a certain shape and form according to the laws of colour and vibration and reaches and invokes the Yazad. It actually returns to the reciter with the divine blessings of that Yazad. IIm-e-Khshnoom has thrown tremendous light on Mantric prayers and has shown the power that lies in each and every Avesta word. The humble attempt of this article is to show what great divine truths are hidden in one of our ancient and exalted prayers, the ASHEM VOHU.

Our most exalted and oldest prayers are the three prayers of Yatha, Ashem and Yenghe Hatam. Yatha and Ashem are considered as the prayers of Daadaar Ahura Mazda (Vacho Ahurahe Mazdao) and Yenghe Hatam is the prayer of Paigambar Saheb.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE PRAYERS :

The Importance and exaltedness of these three prayers is explained in depth in Haas 19, 20 and 21 of the Yazashne, which Haas are in the form of a commentary on these prayers. In these prayers are interwoven all the truths from the time of beginning of creation till the end.

WHEN SHOULD 'ASHEM' BE PRAYED:

All Zoroastrians know that Ashem is prayed on various occasions like (i) awakening from sleep and placing one's feet on the ground (ii) before undertaking any activity (iii) after a sneeze (iv) when bad thoughts pass through the mind (v) in the ears of a dying person. On the completion of several prayers, the words 'Staomi Ashem' - meaning 'I am invoking the power of Ashem' - will appear. It can be said that with this last Ashem, a kind of seal is put on the whole prayer with a desire that this prayer which is lawfully completed be converted into Stoot and the rewards of that prayer be reaped.

When a person gets a bad thought, it assumes a form in nature. Before this form becomes denser and creates disturbance in

nature, an Ashem is prayed, so that its disturbing force or effect is broken.

PHILOLOGICAL MEANING:

Is it that the meaning of 'Ashoi' is just the truth and purity of body and mind?

The beauty of Avesta lies in its technical words. 'Asha' is a technical word like 'Gava'. Today the meaning of Gava is restricted to 'cows and cattle' only. The beauty of Avesta cannot be understood by such translations. They create doubts in ones mind.

This ancient prayer comprises of three lines containing twelve words. The word to word translation of this prayer would be "Ashoi is good, it is the greatest gift; it is the highest form of happiness; happiness belongs to he who is 'Asho' for the sake of Ashoi".

This is a grammatical translation, but behind each word lie deep truths which can be unravelled in the light of IIm-e-Khshnoom.

ASHEM VOHU VAHISHEM ASTI:

In the above words, the first and second word join together to make 'Ashem Vahisitem'. In the Khshnooman of the Ardibehesht Yasht are found the words 'Ashem Vahisitem Sreshtem Ameshem Spentem Yazmaide'.

This implies that in the words 'Asha Vahishta' reference is being made to Ardibehesht Ameshaspand and 'Vahishta' does not merely mean highest.

Now the second word is 'Vohu', the meaning of which is good. Here, we find a reference to 'Vohuman' meaning Behman Ameshaspand. Thus you will notice that Behman and Asha are words which go together.

YAZADS, AMESHASPANDS - ARE THEY QUALITIES OF DAADAAR OR ARE THEY CONSCIOUS BEINGS MADE OF DIVINE LIGHT?

European philologists and those of our Avesta-Pahlavi scholars who merely rely on these philologists believe that Yazads and Ameshaspands are merely attributes or qualities of Daadaar.

In the light of IIm-e-Khshnoom, let us see

how this confusion can be sorted out. Without understanding the plan of Cosmogogenesis, it is not possible to understand Avesta.

Man and woman join together in wedlock and produce offspring. Can we say that these offsprings are merely qualities? Are they not living beings with the nine parts?

THE SECRETS OF THE WORDS MASHYA-ARSH-NAR-NARI (N-NA):

We are ordinary human beings for whom the word 'Mashya' is used. When an ordinary human being, with the help of his or her Ustad, begins to develop the divine element of 'Gava' which is embedded within himself or herself and makes an effort to dissolve his 'Dravao', then such a human being is called 'Arsh'.

When an 'Arsh' begins to climb the 72 steps of Ashoi one by one and becomes a Nar Ashawan or a Nari Ashawan of 3 Kash, 6 Kash or 9 Kash, then for such a complete Nar or Nari Ashawan the words 'N' or 'Na' is used.

When ordinary humans like us do an act or deed no Kehrp i.e. 'Kerdaar' arises from it. Only a kind of shadow gets created. After death, such a shadow takes an actual form and there appears a Kerdaar before the Ruvan. But that is a different matter.

With the power of Ashoi, a Nar Ashawan can create a Kehrp with his thoughts, words and deeds, which Kehrp is a conscious Being, like a Kerdaar, having the nine components. These Kehrps are like offsprings full of light and lustre and having all the nine components. They are ever ready to carry out the orders of their creators. The so-called offsprings of Zarathushtra Saheb were of Kehrps. These offsprings are attached to the Aipee of such Ashawans and receive the blessings of Daadaar, which are called 'Khoreh'. The Aipee with the divine light and blessings of Daadaar is called Khoreh.

We have diverted a little from our topic but that was necessary to have an understanding of the Yazads. Thus, the Yazads, Ameshaspands, Mino, Dae, Farrokh, the Geushs, Gathas, the Nabanazdisht Ravaans - all these divine beings, full of light and lustre, are like the channels of Daadaar's blessings who ceaselessly carry out the order of Daadaar

to lead the whole creation towards salvation.

Now let us go back to the meaning of Ashem Vohu. Let us see the meaning of the first line 'Ahem Vohu Vashistem Asti'.

Ashoi is good, it has the goshpandi quality. This means selflessness, to serve others without caring for oneself. Ashoi has the quality of selflessness because the divine force of Behman Ameshaspand (Vohuman) is interwoven in it.

Now, Behman Ameshaspand is the conscience of Daadaar (Vohuman - Good Mind - the Divine Consciousness, and Ashoi has therefore the power to lead to Daadaar's conscience.

Then, Ashoi is said to be "Vahishtem" - it is perfect, i.e. it carries out the function of Behman in the best way. Without Ardibehesht the function of Behman cannot be so carried out.

One meaning of Asha is Divine Order. Asha is the foundation of cosmogenesis. The divine Intelligence of the Yazads is called 'Baod', which is infallible. Man's intelligence is fallible. When prominent men make big mistakes society suffers. Man's intelligence is limited and full of faults. That intelligence which has the force of Asha is called Baod. Thus it is said that because of Asha the function of Vohuman is performed perfectly.

THE MEANING OF 'ASHA':-

The word 'Asha' has various meanings. Asha means Ashoi, Truth, Order, Freedom i.e. freedom from the clutches of carnal desires.

The first line of Ashem Vohu thus shows the force of Asha Vahishta and Behman. One who prays to them reaches the conscience of Ahura Mazda, through them. Then it says - Ushta Asti Ushta Ahmai - meaning Ashoi gives divine bliss. Happiness is his who has the power of Ashoi. Thus the second line says that Ashoi brings forth the divine happiness of a very high order. It is the happiness of the body, mind and soul. (This secret is found in the "Ahmai Raescha" prayer).

HYAT ASHAI VAHISHTAI ASHEM

The third line contains admonitions. Ushta i.e. divine bliss belongs to he who practises Ashoi. Therefore it says, 'Oh human! It is required of you that to attain this 'Ashai Vahishtai'

the power of Ashoi - you should be free' (Azad). This means that man must free himself from the darkness of the Druj - the evil force that arouses carnal desires and leads towards sin.

ASHA AND AKA

One of the several meanings of Asha is "Order". The word 'order' implies that there must be some disorder at some places. Let us try to probe into the origin of this disorder.

There are two sides to all humans - one good and one bad. Sometimes man becomes like an Angel and adorns himself with various virtues, but sometimes the forces of carnal desires make him behave like an animal. Such animal-nature shows its full growth during the times of wars.

Thus Ilm-e-Khshnoon teaches that the source of evil was embedded somewhere in the Ruvaan itself. The very fact that the Ruvaan rebelled against Daadaar shows that there was some darkness and faults in itself. The whole aim of creation is to purify that dirt which is called 'Dravao'. If that dirt is not purified, the evolution of the creation will come to a grinding halt.

When the Ruvaan implored Daadaar to purify this monstrous Dravao, He infused the element of Gava, the divine element of goodness, in the Dravao and turned it into "Vohun" whereby the evil in the Dravao was controlled to some extent. In this manner Dravao-Gava got together to form Vohun, which is the improved form of Dravao.

WHAT IS GAVA?

Gava is the celestial seed but less exalted in degree than Noor. We can think of Daadaar and the Divine Lights which emanate from Him only in the form of Noor. Gava Chithra is less exalted than Noor. The whole of creation is the product of this seed. In the study of Ilm-e-Khshnoon you will find references to Asha Chithra, Vaha Chithra and Gava Chithra.

That which has within it Asha Chithra is in direct communion with Daadaar Ahura Mazda.

Hasti is made of 7 Aasmaans. When these Aasmaans are in motion they produce Chithra. When these Chithra fall on the first Aasmaan where Maah Yazad reigns, then Maah Yazad converts these Chithra into Gava,

which is why Maah is known as 'Maongahem Gaochithrem'.

The word Gava is also used to mean cow, cattle because of the selflessness in their character. These Gava Chithra who make others live at their own cost are very precious. It is because of this Gava Chithra that man is able to do good. The beauty in Man is also thanks to Gava Chithra. Today it is the element of Gava which bears the weight of the physical world.

Thus the Dravao in the Ravaan is mixed with this precious element Gava to form Vohun. Man has to alchemise this Vohun and convert this Dravao into Gava. It is due to the force of Dravao in Vohun that man is tossed about in the sea of passions.

Today, the human body is the abode of lust, anger, greed, desire, pride and jealousy; the powerful enemies, and the slightest slip on man's part enables these enemies to get control over him and ruin him.

Thus, there is a constant battle in the human body between the good and bad element. Due to this continuous battle the body weakens and dies.

To remove this fear of death, to lengthen the span of life and to strike out these enemies from their roots Religion gives the practises of Ashoi.

These passions have to be weakened using Tarikats (practices) and freedom has to be obtained, only then can one walk on the path of Asha. No other path is useful, there is only one path - that of Ashoi.

Due to this reason, the third line of Ashem Vohu teaches man to attain freedom to obtain Ashoi. We have now seen the real meaning of the word 'freedom'. There is no freedom until one is free from passions. Until then he cannot tread the path of Ashoi. Just as there cannot be two swords in one scabard so also when Ashoi enters, passions disappear.

WHEN IS USHTA RECEIVED?

The man who frees himself from the grip of passion receives and experiences divine bliss i.e. Ushta.

Today our concept of happiness is very limited. When we secure various comforts in life, we believe that to be bliss; but that happiness

is not Ushta. Today, even the very wealthy are uneasy and tense. Man is usually harassed by one particular type of worry. The worry which hangs over ones head is that of death. When this worry, this uneasiness, this tension, this acute discontentment is banished, only then does one experience true happiness. What is the cause of this worry and uneasiness in man?

WHO GOVERNS OUR BODY?

At the present stage, our body is governed by the mind. The Ruvan has handed over charge to the mind and is in a state of deep sleep. It can be said that the Ruvan is bound by a sort of chain, due to which the Ruvan is presently unable to guide the mind.

THE WORKING OF THE MIND

The state of our mind is likened by someone to a monkey who is drunk. The human mind, drunk with pride, thinks that it knows all the secrets of this world. This sort of mind jumps from one topic to another and is unable to concentrate on any one thing. Due to this instability, it is unable to comprehend happiness.

PANJE ZARVIKASH-E-JAHER- OUR FIVE EXTERNAL SENSES:-

Like our physical body, we have another subtle body which is called Kehrp. This Kehrp has 16 Chakhras. The Dravao within us is divided between these Chakhras. From these Chakhras, Chakhras nos. 5-6-7-8-9 pertain to the eyes, nose, ears, tongue and throat. Due to the overwhelming presence of the earth element in these Chakhras, they have a high propensity to sin. Our five senses usually lead us towards sin. Our eyes are ever-willing to stray towards women and refuse to see other women as our mothers and sisters. Our ears are ever-ready to pick up gossip and slander and anything bad about others.

Even in the face of minor difficulties, we fall prey to lying and due to the use of the throat for falsehood, our 9th Chakhra is also sullied.

Even our breadth develops a Kharfastri quality and defiles the nose Chakhra. The tongue is unable to leave the craving for sour, salty and spicy delicacies.

In this manner our five senses have within them the power of an ocean which tosses man in its currents and above which man is unable

to rise. Consequently, due to this continuous conflict between good and bad, his life span is reduced.

When one tosses a pebble into still waters one sees ripples forming and the slime at the bottom becomes unsettled and rises to the top. Similarly, within the body and mind, there exist hidden passions, which when stirred by sentiments, rise to the force and taint man by destroying his reputation and scarring him for life. Due to these reasons, man is unable to experience real happiness (Ushta). For this, man must school his senses to seek only that which is righteous, to give more than to take; due to which the throes of passion will slowly subside, he will slowly develop the strength to share the problems of others and his mind will be full of happiness. He will become 'Shato Manao'.

SUMMARY:-

On the praying of 'Ashem Vohu' stoat are created which form a fortress around the one who prays; the goodness in him is enhanced and the evil within him is reduced.

Like this, the prayer of 'Ashem Vohu' has hidden within it great truths in nature. Stoat (colour and vibration) is the language of the Yazads and Ameshaspands.

The first line of Ashem produces blue coloured Stoat due to which the one who prays comes into communion with Ushtaan of Daadaar and also with Asha Vahishta and Behman.

In the second line reference is found to those disciplines i.e. Tarikats which are required for ascending the steps of Ashoi and the attaining of spiritual bliss from these Tarikats.

The second line produces blue Stoat. The third teaches that to attain this high state of Ashoi, man must attain freedom.

Thus, Ashoi is a conscious living force full of lustre. It is the greatest Truth and Truth is beauty. In it lies the salvation of man. Thus, Ashoi is a triangle of Truth, Beauty and Bliss. It is called the nine Gehnas. These nine Gehnas have eight stages, meaning 72 steps, which have to be climbed on the strength of Tarikats and the peak of Ashoi has to be reached. Thus, is found in Ashem Vohu all that is needed for salvation of Mankind.

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