

Ashem Vohu is an Old Avestan mantra through which one asks —and is asked — to be fully alive, by recognizing the preciousness of existence. It probably predates Zarathustra, just as it's found in an invocational role before his Gathas in the *Avesta*. It resonantly, reparatively, connects us to the Persian Plateau (today's Afghanistan) as the Indo-Iranian peoples were about to branch away from each other. As a prayer it has held its own for 4000 years against all the deadening forces we potentially bear within. It's often referred to as a riddle, due to our lack of comprehension; i.e., it's a poem, multivalent, inexhaustible, marvelous.

aṣəm vohū vahištəm astī
uštā astī uštā ahmāi
hyaṭ aṣāi vahištāi aṣəm

aṣəm vohu: vahiftəm asti:
uṣta: asti: uṣta: ahma:i
hjat aṣa:i vahifta:i aṣəm

It's by reading the Gathas that the Ashem Vohu mantra becomes interpretable. The manta emanates the Gathas and the Gathas reflect back on the mantra. Each time I reflect on the interrelationships of the words of Ashem Vohu, more notes and further tentative interpretations accrue. I'm captivated all over again.

Zarathustra's innovation was "truth" (*aṣa*). What is clear is that Zarathustra committed himself to the affirmation of life, in contradistinction to his immediate culture. What makes truth true? What makes it more valuable than all else? It's the highest (*vahištəm*) good (*vohū*). Good what? Truth is good thought. It's integral to a quality of our mind. Pure consciousness. It's what is (*astī*). Truth is what is, existence as it phenomenally functions, the cosmos as part of nature — as distinct from nothing having ever come about.

Still too abstract. Zarathustra intended revelation. Good thought is good, as the formula thought/word/deed is the choosing of love of humanity and life over anger, deceit, unjustness and cruelty which desecrate the mind. Good thought does not cause a life of suffering or tortured conscience.

Decisions made that are congruent with existence. Truth that is statement of the natural order that exists only when words according with that order are spoken.

Truth is clear conscience spontaneously congruent with what is while acting as wished. Happiness of the heart. *Not* out of touch with reality as innate love.

To say what is true by formulating thought in keeping with what is as wisdom (as *Ahura Mazda*, Zarathustra's creator, who was also a quality of mind.)

It's said that one needs the help of the truth to recite the mantra.

(I've written at greater length about the Gathas, and the connection between Old Avestan *aša* and Rgvedic *ṛtá*, at the end of this essay:

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