

DG McIntyre - The Talisman

A talisman is defined as a charm of great potency, capable of producing extraordinary effects.¹ If anything has been accorded the status of a talisman in the later Zoroastrian literature, it is the Ahuna Vairya – the Yatha Ahu Vairyo prayer. This prayer is composed in the Gathic dialect and is in the same metre as the Ahunavaiti Gatha.² Professors Insler and Humbach both believe it to have been composed by Zarathushtra himself.³

In a later text (not a part of the Gathas), called Yasna 19, which is a later commentary on the Ahuna Vairya, Ahura Mazda is said to describe the Ahuna Vairya as His Word, and is said to have stated:

“.....this word is the most emphatic of the words which have ever been pronounced, or which are now spoken, or which shall be spoken in future’ for (the eminence) of this utterance is a thing of such a nature, that if all the corporeal and living world should learn it, and learning should hold fast by it, they would be redeemed from their mortality!” translation by Mills in Sacred Books of the East, Volume 31, Yasna XIX, verse 10, pages 262 – 263 (Motilal Benarsidas reprint).

While it is unlikely that this is a direct quotation from Ahura Mazda, the fact that the writer of this commentary puts these words in Ahura Mazda’s mouth, indicates the importance this writer ascribed to the Ahuna Vairya.

In the Bundahishn, a later Pahlavi text written, according to E. W. West, some time after the Arab invasion of 651 CE,⁴ we are told that when Ahura Mazda and the evil spirit met, after some preliminary conversation, Ahura Mazda recited the Ahunavar (which is the Ahuna Vairya), and:

“...even so as is declared in revelation, that when one of its (the Ahunavar’s) three parts was uttered, the evil spirit contracted his body through fear, and when two parts of it were uttered, he fell upon his knees, and when all of it was uttered he became confounded and impotent as to the harm he caused the creatures of Auharmazd,.....” translated by West in SBE Volume 5, Bundahishn, Chapter 1, verse 22, pages 8 – 9.

It is significant, I think, that even after the devastation wrought by Alexander and by the later Arab invasion of Iran, the idea survived in what remained of the Zoroastrian community, that the Ahuna Vairya is something that not only enables us to transcend our mortality, as earlier stated in Yasna 19, but also has the ability to defeat evil, as the Bundahishn tells us. A potent talisman indeed!⁵

If the Ahuna Vairya was composed by Zarathushtra, the question arises: did the idea of these remarkable qualities of the Ahuna Vairya originate with Zarathushtra, or was this idea a later invention? And if it did originate with Zarathushtra (the prophet who regarded thought as divine), we are led to wonder: what thoughts or ideas did he encode into the Ahuna Vairya, for defeating evil and for transcending our mortality?

To answer these questions, we turn to the only source we have of Zarathushtra’s ideas – not what someone said he said, as we find in the later literature, but his own words – the Gathas. The translation of the Gathas on which I primarily rely is that of Professor Insler, and all quotations from the Gathas in this paper are from his translation, although he may, or may not, agree with the inferences which I draw from his translation.

If the *Ahuna Vairya* holds the key to defeating evil, the first question we need to answer is: How does Zarathushtra define evil? If you look at each reference to evil in the Gathas, you will find that some of these references are generic – referring to evil either as an idea, or as an entity – the way Zarathushtra refers to truth, good thinking, and good spirit, sometimes as ideas, and sometimes as entities. These generic references to evil, shed little light on how Zarathushtra defines evil. But there are many verses in the Gathas in which evil is referred to descriptively, and if we study these verses, it becomes clear that to Zarathushtra, evil is the product of wrongful choices. For example, his descriptive references to evil include such things as deceit, fury or anger, destruction, violence, injustice, tyranny, oppression, cruelty, murder, ignorance, betrayal, leading people astray, violating truth, abuse of power (or evil rule), stealing, bondage, persecution, opposition to the Wise Lord’s teachings and many such others – all the products of wrongful choices.

The so-called “natural evils” – poverty, illness, death of loved ones, earthquakes, and other disasters, are not identified in the Gathas as evil. There is no evidence in the Gathas that Zarathushtra subscribes to the rather parochial view that anything that causes us grief or anguish or pain is, for that reason alone, “evil”.

The idea that to Zarathushtra evil is the product of wrongful choices is corroborated in Yasna 30. In verse 3, we are introduced to the two opposing mainyu.⁶

“Yes, there are two fundamental spirits, twins which are renowned to be in conflict. In thought and in word, in action, they are two: the good and the bad. And between these two, the beneficent have correctly chosen, not the maleficent.” (Y30.3).

In this verse, both mainyu are referred to as “primordial” or “fundamental” (*paouruye*). Both manifest themselves in thought, word, and action. And both relate to choices.

In the verses that follow, we see that when such choices are implemented in thought, word and action, good and evil come to life, they acquire substance, they become real (as we understand reality). For example, referring to the consequences of evil choices, Zarathushtra says:

“.....Since they **chose the worst thought**, they then rushed into fury, with which they have **afflicted the world and mankind.**” (Y30.6).

And, by contrast, the beautiful Yasna 30 verse 7, where he describes good choices as follows:

“But to this world He came with the rule of good thinking and of truth, and (our) enduring [aramaiti]⁷ gave **body and breath (to it)**.” (Y30.7).⁸

In short, we can summarize the inferences that it would be reasonable to draw from these verses regarding how Zarathushtra defines evil, as follows: Evil, as a force, is primordial. Zarathushtra does not specify its origins. But he does say that in existence, in our world, we bring it to life, we give it substance, we make it real, when we choose it with our thoughts, words and actions.

So it would be reasonable to conclude that at least one way to defeat evil⁹ is to stop choosing it, and instead, to choose good, with our thoughts, words and actions. Therefore, a key to the destruction of evil, is making the correct choices: which brings us back to the Ahuna Vairya – the prayer of choices.

Professor Gershevitch has expressed the opinion that the *Ahuna Vairya* specifies three things that are to be chosen: the ahu, the ratu, and the xshathra-¹⁰. Perhaps these three choices are what the writer of the Bundahishn had in mind when he stated that the first part made the evil one contract in fear, the second made him fall to his knees, and the third rendered him harmless. Let us consider the three parts of the Ahuna Vairya, in light of Zarathushtra’s ideas as expressed in the Gathas.

Translations of the Ahuna Vairya vary widely. And I readily concede that reasonable minds may differ. So what I give you is just one of many perspectives – both in translation and interpretation. The following translation is that of Professor Insler. However he may, or may not, agree with all of my interpretations, or with the inferences which I draw from his translation.

[FIRST CHOICE] “Just as the Lord [ahu] in accord with truth must be chosen,

[SECOND CHOICE] so also the judgment [ratush] in accord with truth.

[THIRD CHOICE] In consequence of (this) good thinking, institute ye the rule [xshathra-] of actions stemming from an existence of good thinking for the (sake of the) Wise One and for the lord whom they established as pastor for the needy-dependent.”¹¹

Let’s start with the first choice: What does Zarathushtra mean by choosing the Lord in accord with truth? To understand the significance of this choice, we have to think back to Zarathushtra’s time period.

Today, we are used to thinking in terms of a benevolent monotheism. But the situation was very different for Zarathushtra. We know that the society in which he lived was corrupt and oppressive. He complains of greedy princes,¹² a thieving aristocracy,¹³ and pleasure loving priests who, seduced by power and wealth,

“.....chose the rule of tyrants and deceit rather than truth.” (Y32.12).

These tyrants and priests used fear to promote the worship of many gods, some of whom Zarathushtra describes as “fierce” and “hateful”.¹⁴

He viewed this pantheon of fierce and hateful local gods and, at great cost to himself, concluded that they were not worthy of worship. But to me, one of his most significant accomplishments was that he went a step further. He concluded that these local gods could not truly be divine, because only pure goodness could lay claim to divinity. Only One whose attributes were reason, intelligence-committed-to-goodness (vohu mano), truth, benevolence, lovingkindness, righteousness – only such a One was worthy of worship, was worthy of being God. If you think about it, this is an extraordinary proposition. That God has to merit worship through His goodness. Zarathushtra, an ordinary man with no power or influence except the power of his mind and spirit, dared to conclude that Ahura Mazda’s claim to divinity derived from His goodness. And Zarathushtra made a choice. He says to Ahura Mazda:

“.....this Zarathushtra chooses that very spirit [mainyu] of Thine which indeed is the most virtuous [spenishta] of all, Wise One.....” (Y43.16).

“I choose (only) Thy teachings.....” (Y46.3).

Now we know from the Gathas that the spirit of goodness, spenta mainyu, which finds its highest expression in God, derives its virtue from truth – asha. For example, in Yasna 28 verse 1 Zarathushtra describes spenta mainyu as:

“.....the spirit virtuous through truth [asha].....” (Y28.1)¹⁵

So this choice that Zarathushtra made, reflects the first choice of the Ahuna Vairya – choosing the Lord in accord with truth.

Zarathushtra’s idea of a benevolent monotheism eventually lighted a fire that illuminated his world and, long after his death, influenced the major religions that followed. A crucial choice – this first choice of the Ahuna Vairya prayer.

Today, we feel very smug about our monotheism. But in reality, like our remote ancestors, we too are polytheists. We worship such local gods as wealth, power, prestige, appearances, position. We worship another local god whom we respectfully call “The Bottom Line”. Now, anyone who has been in business for herself, can tell you that if you don’t pay attention to your cash flow and to the bottom line, you won’t stay in business long. But there is a difference between a healthy attention to the bottom line, and elevating it above all other considerations, in effect, worshipping it. The worship of this local deity – The Bottom Line – has seriously eroded the professionalism of the legal, medical and teaching professions. And in business, its worship may be an effective short-term fix, but can only erode the vitality and resilience of a business in the long run.

Well, by Zarathushtra’s standards, these local gods of ours are not worthy of worship. In the Ahuna Vairya he makes it clear that the choice of who we worship must be made “in accord with truth [asha]”. The false gods that Zarathushtra rejected are somewhat different from the false gods we must contend with, but this first choice of the Ahuna Vairya is as important today as it was a few thousand years ago. We too need to choose the object of our worship “in accord with truth [asha].”

Let us consider the second choice of the Ahuna Vairya. What does Zarathushtra mean by “so also the judgment in accord with truth.”? The choice of the judgment in accord with truth immediately brings to mind the choice between the two mainyu which is reflected in Yasna 30. This second choice of the Ahuna Vairya is also echoed in Yasna 31 verse 2, where Zarathushtra speaks of:

“.....that judgment between the two alternatives by which we are going to live in accordance with truth.” (Y31.2).

Now we already know that the good alternative, spenta mainyu, derives its virtue through truth (asha) (Y28.1), so choosing spenta mainyu includes choosing asha – the “judgment in accord with truth”.

But let us think a bit more about this second choice. What is the “judgment in accord with truth” of the Ahuna Vairya. It is good thinking (vohu mano) is it not? It is through good thinking that we grasp the truth. It is good thinking that enables us to make the correct choices. “...Reflect with a clear mind – man by man himself – upon the two choices of decision....” (Y30.2). In Yasna 31 verse 4, referring to God and his divine forces, Zarathushtra says:

“...(And) through the very best thinking, I shall seek for myself their rule of strength, through whose growth we might conquer deceit.” (Y31.4).¹⁶

In Yasna 29, it is good thinking that provides the solution to the complaint that is made to the Wise Lord.¹⁷ This key role that is played by good thinking is also reflected in the allegorical story in the later Pahlavi writings of Zadsparam who casts good thinking in the form of an angel, and tells us that the angel Vohuman (Good Thinking) led Zarathushtra to Ahura Mazda and the other archangels – (i.e. the other amesha spenta).¹⁸ If you look past the imagery, the idea is quite clear. Good thinking enables us to access God and the attributes that make Him divine.

So this second choice of the Ahuna Vairya – the “judgment in accord with truth” – involves all three of the cardinal divine forces of Ahura Mazda.¹⁹ It is the choice of good thinking (vohu mano) which entails choosing the virtuous way of being (spenta mainyu), which in turn derives its virtue through truth (asha). This second choice of the Ahuna Vairya is the choice of the values that make for divinity. Just as God must be chosen for these values, so too must these values be chosen – the “judgment in accord with truth.”²⁰

The third choice of the Ahuna Vairya is choosing God’s good rule (vohu xshathra). In the Gathas this rule is called the rule of truth and good thinking (which is another way of saying the rule of the values or attributes which make for divinity). We find this third choice also specified in the Gathas. In the very first verse of the Vohu Xshathra Gatha we are told:

That good rule must be chosen.....” (Y51.1).

And in verse 18 of that Gatha, Zarathushtra says:

“ ‘One chooses that rule of good thinking allied with truth in order to serve...’ ” (Y51.18).

But how do we choose it. The Ahuna Vairya tells us that we choose this good rule by bringing it to life, by establishing it, with “actions stemming from an existence of good thinking,” an idea that is echoed numerous times in the Gathas in a variety of ways. For example, Zarathushtra says:

“.....The Wise One is Lord through such actions stemming from good spirit.” (Y45.5).

“.....for I have just now, knowingly through truth, seen the Wise One in a vision to be Lord of the word and deed stemming from good spirit.....” (Y45.8).

“By his action stemming from good thinking, a man of good determination has expressed his understanding and his virtuous [aramaiti],.....” (Y34.10).

“Praising, I shall encounter you with such worship, Wise One, and with actions stemming from good thinking allied with truth.....” (Y50.9).²¹

The importance of this third choice in the Ahuna Vairya is reflected in Zarathushtra’s view of what it takes to be a saoshyant – a savior, a redeemer.

In the later literature, the concept of saoshyant became greatly embroidered and exaggerated to the point of elevating saoshyant to the status of a miraculous, messiah-like leader of great power who will be victorious over evil, and make everything all right.²² It seems we really have not changed that much. Whether it’s Superman, or Yoda, or other omniscient aliens with miraculous powers from another star system, we too hunger for a leader with magical powers who will make everything turn out all right.

This view of the saoshyant you will not find in the Gathas. There is no one savior who will come to fix things for us. We have to fix things for ourselves, with God’s help, and with the help of each other. According to Zarathushtra, each individual is a potential saoshyant.²³

Which makes one wonder: What is it that makes an ordinary individual a saoshyant? We find the answer to that in Yasna 48. In this Yasna, Zarathushtra first expresses his concerns about some of the evils – the products of wrongful choices – that were troubling him and his world. He says:

“Let fury be stopped. Cut away cruelty, ye who wish to attract the attention of good thinking, along with (that of) truth.....” (Y48.7).

He asks:

“When, Wise One, shall men desist from murdering? When shall they fear the folly of that intoxicating drink,²⁴ through the effects of which the Karpans [a type of priest] as well as the evil ruler of the lands torture our (good) intentions in an evil way?” (Y48.10).

He asks:

“.....Which men shall stop the cruelty (caused) by the violent deceitful persons? To which man shall come the understanding stemming from good thinking?” (Y48.11).

And he concludes:

“Yes, those men shall be the saviors [saoshyanta] of the lands, namely, those who shall follow their knowledge of Thy teaching with actions in harmony with good thinking and with truth, Wise One. These indeed have been fated to be the expellers of fury.” (Y48.12).

So to Zarathushtra, the saoshyant are those who move beyond thoughts and words, to actions in harmony with good thinking and truth – actions which bring to life the rule of truth and good thinking. The rule which renders evil impotent. That is the third choice of the Ahuna Vairya.

We can summarize the talismanic virtues of the Ahuna Vairya as a formula for defeating evil quite simply: When we create light, the darkness ceases to exist. We create light by bringing the divine to life with our choices – our choices of who and what we worship, our beneficent choices in thought and action.²⁵ When we stop choosing evil, we deprive it of substance in word and action. It becomes impotent, unable to harm, as the Bundahishn tells us.

But what of the promise of Yasna 19, that if we learn the Ahuna Vairya and, learning, hold fast by it, we will be redeemed from our mortality. In the later literature, we are told that the Chinvat bridge stretches from the material to the spiritual. I take the imagery of the bridge to represent a transition from the material to the spiritual. In the Gathas, Zarathushtra tells us how we make that transition. He says:

“Wise Lord, whoever – be it man or woman – would grant to me those things which Thou dost know to be the best for existence, namely, the truth for the truth and the rule of good thinking (with that person) as well as those whom I shall accompany in the glory of your kind – with all these I shall cross over the Bridge of the Judge.” (Y46.10).

This Gathic verse echoes the Ahuna Vairya formula, that when we attain, for ourselves and for each other, the forces with which Zarathushtra equates divinity – truth for truth’s own sake²⁶ and the rule of good thinking, we make the transition from the material to the spiritual – in the glory of God’s divine attributes, (“in the glory of your kind”). Or, as the author of the later Yasna 19 states, we are redeemed from our mortality.

This brings us to the last line of the Ahuna Vairya, that we establish the rule of actions stemming from an existence of good thinking, “for the sake of the Wise One [mazda] and for the lord [ahura] whom they established as pastor for the needy dependents.” It is interesting that in the Gathas, Zarathushtra uses “pastor” and “ahura” to refer to Ahura Mazda, to the divine aspects, as well as to the person who has attained these forces (whether in whole or in part). For example:

In Yasna 29.1, “pastor” refers to Ahura Mazda and his divine forces, asha, vohu mano, and spenta mainyu.²⁷ The soul of the good vision on earth cries to them for help, saying,

“...the cruelty of fury and violence, of bondage and might, holds me in captivity. I have no pastor other than you. Therefore appear to me with good pasturage.” (Y29.1).

In Yasna 33.6 “pastoral duties” are mentioned in connection with a priest “...who is just, in harmony with truth [asha]...the offspring from the best spirit.” In Yasna 53.4, “pastors” is also used to refer to persons.

Similarly, in the Gathas, “ahura” is used in four ways. First, it is used to describe Ahura Mazda. Second it is used to refer to the aspects of divinity (unspecified amesha spenta) which are metaphorically called “lords” (Y30.9, Y31.4). Third, it is used to describe God’s mastery (or lordship) over the divine aspects.²⁸ Fourth, the words ahura (Y29.2, and Y31.10) and ahu (Y29.6) are used to refer to the person who is to be pastor of the good vision on this earth.²⁹ And Zarathushtra was chosen for this task (Y29.8).

In the last sentence of the last Gatha, Ahura Mazda is referred to as the one who helps the needy dependent who lives honestly.

“.....Such is Thy rule, Wise One, through which Thou shalt grant what is very good [i.e. the best³⁰] to Thy needy dependent who lives honestly.” (Y53.9).

In Y29, it is Zarathushtra who is selected as the pastor.

The identity of the ahura who is the pastor for the needy-dependents in the last line of the Ahuna Vairya, is ambiguous. I am inclined to think that the ambiguity is intentional – embracing both Ahura Mazda and each person who brings the divine to life with his choices – just as Zarathushtra did – both of whom, in turn, nurture those who have not yet made it.³¹ It is not enough to attain the divine forces for ourselves. God, and we, have to help each other make it. That is how we defeat evil. That is how we (individually and collectively) are redeemed from our mortality.

In closing, you might question: if the Ahuna Vairya involved three choices – the choosing of the Lord, the judgment and the rule, why is it just called the Ahuna Vairya – the choosing of the Lord. Why not the choosing of all three.

I think it is because all three choices, in the final analysis, reflect the same thing – the choosing of what makes for divinity, the ahu. The first choice is to choose the object of worship because of His attributes, which are what make Him divine – worthy of worship, the ahu. The second and third choices reflect, in thought and action, the individual’s choice of these attributes or values, which are what make for lordship, divinity, that which is worthy of worship (the ahu). When we choose good thinking, we choose the divine (the ahu).³² When we choose the spirit of goodness, we choose the divine, (the ahu). When we bring these forces of divinity to life with our actions, in that instance we act in a divine way. And when we eventually perfect these choices, we cross over the bridge “in the glory of His kind”. We make the transition. We are redeemed from our mortality.

Footnotes:

Webster’s International Dictionary, unabridged, 2d edition.

Sacred Books of the East, (Motilal Benarsidas reprint) (“SBE” hereinafter), Volume 31, page 259 – 260, footnote 5 (on page 260); Humbach, *The Gathas of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts*, (“Humbach” hereinafter) (Heidelberg, 1991), Volume II, page 2.

Insler, *The Ahuna Vairya Prayer*, *Acta Iranica*, Monumentum H. S. Nyberg, (Brill, 1975), page 420; Humbach, Vol. II, page 1.

SBE, Volume 5, Introduction by West, page xli et seq.

Discussions on the Ahuna Vairya in the later literature reveal certain similarities. For example:

It was revealed by Ahura Mazda (Y19.1, 3, SBE Vol. 31, p. 260; Selections of Zad-sparam Ch. I, verse 12, SBE Vol. 5, p. 157);

It belongs to Ahura Mazda (Y19.5, SBE Vol. 31, pp 260-261);

It is the quintessential formula for the defeat of evil (Bundahishn Ch. I, verses 21, 22, SBE Vol. 1, pp 8-9; Zad-sparam Ch. I verse 20, SBE Vol. 5, p. 159; Srosh Yasht Hadokht Ch 1, verse 3, SBE Vol. 23, p. 160);

It is the path to heaven (which heaven is described, inter alia, as the “best life” the “best righteousness”) (Y19.6, SBE Vol. 31, p. 261);

It increases strength and victory in one’s soul (Yasht Fragment XXI verse 4 (sometimes colloquially called the Hadokht Nask) SBE Vol. 23, p. 311).

The above commentaries on the Ahuna Vairya also reveal certain inconsistencies. For example, that the Ahuna Vairya existed before the creation of the material world, (Y19.1, 8, Bundahishn 1.23-26) yet the prayer itself mentions actions, the needy poor and other things that are all part of the material world. They also state that the Ahuna Vairya existed before Ahura Mazda made His good creation, including good thinking, truth and good rule (Bundahishn 1.21-26). Yet the Ahuna Vairya mentions good thinking, truth and good rule.

To the extent that what these later texts say about the Ahuna Vairya is corroborated in the Gathas, they probably accurately represent teachings that were handed down from earlier times. The inconsistencies probably represent later additions by persons to whom the Gathic language, and therefore the meaning of the Ahuna Vairya were no longer clearly understood, which is not surprising when you consider the two cataclysmic destructions of texts and teachers that the community experienced around 330 BCE and 650 CE. Yet these faithful scribes of these later texts, for all their limitations, cared enough to transmit such knowledge as they had. For this I feel towards them both affection and gratitude.

In a reprint of his article Approaches to Zoroaster’s Gathas, at page 6, Professor Gershevitch expresses the opinion that mainyu is “thought”, whereas manah is “act of thinking”. Other scholars translate mainyu as spirit (Inslar) or force (Dastur N. D. Minochehr-Homji). Based on the way Zarathushtra uses the word mainyu in the Gathas, I am inclined to think it means “way of being”. Thus spenta mainyu is the way of being that is ashavan.

See also:

.....Through its actions, [aramaiti] gives substance to the truth.....” Y44.6.

There are wide differences of opinion among scholars of the Gathic language regarding the correct translation of the word aramaiti. For example:

Bode & Nanavutty translate aramaiti as devotion.

Haug, as the personification of prayers, Essays on the Language, Writing & Religion of the Parsis, page 150, note 2 (Philo Press reprint, 1971).

Humbach and Ichaporia, as right-mindedness (as do the Pahlavi writers),

Mills as piety,

Inslar as piety, or (more recently) respect,

Dinshaw Irani as love,

Jafarey as serenity,

Moulton, as piety or devotion, Early Zoroastrianism, p. 344,

Windfuhr, as humility, in his article Vohu Manah, page 272 (Michigan Oriental Studies in honor of George Cameron, 1976),

Professor Inslar has expressed the opinion, inter alia, that the word aramaiti is also related to the Vedic aram kr which means “to serve”. See An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra, No. 4, page 5, footnote 7. Based on the way in which Zarathushtra uses the term in the Gathas, I think aramaiti means bringing to life the rule of truth and good thinking with our thoughts, our words and our actions. For example, he says:

“But to this world He came with the rule of good thinking and of truth, and (our) enduring [aramaiti] gave body and breath (to it).....” Y30.7.

“[spento] is the man of [aramaiti]. He is so by reason of his understanding, his words, his action, his [daena].....”
Y51.21.

In Yasna 45 verse 2, the two mainyu are again described as primordial, and manifest themselves in thought, word and action. The concept of choice does not appear specifically in Yasna 45 verse 2, but is indirectly alluded to in the verses that follow, culminating in:

“.....Those of you who shall give obedience and regard to this (Lord) of mine, they shall reach completeness and immortality.....” (Y45.5).

As nearly as I can determine, according to the Gathas, evil is defeated in the following ways: Through reason or persuasion by changing it into good, also through the educational effects of the law of consequences (what Taraporewala calls the law of action and reaction), and above all, by the choices we make – by following the path of the amesha spenta, by thoughts, words and actions stemming from good spirit, good thinking, and truth.

Gershevitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mitra*, Addenda page 329. The Avestan Hymn to Mithra is not a reference to the Ahuna Vairya, but the book contains in the Addenda a translation of the Ahuna Vairya by Professor Gershevitch, and some commentary on that prayer. Although both Professor Gershevitch and Professor Insler see three choices in the Ahuna Vairya, their translations differ somewhat.

Insler, *The Ahuna Vairya Prayer*, Acta Iranica, Monumentum H.S. Nyberg, (Brill, 1975), pp 419 – 420.

“Even the Kavis [princes] have continually fixed their intentions on capturing and plundering the riches of this world, since they have begun to aid the deceitful one.....” Y32.14.

“Those deceitful ones who appear in grandeur as lords and ladies, even they have ruined this life by stealing the property of the (true) inheritor.....” Y32.11.

[Referring to Ahura Mazda and His divine attributes] “.....ye are above all others, be they fierce gods or mortals.”
Y34.5.

“But ye gods – as well as the one who worships you – all of you are offspring stemming from evil thinking, deceit and disrespect. Hateful, too are your actions, by reason of which ye have become renowned in this seventh part of the earth.” Y32.3.

See also Y30.5 where Zarathushtra says:

“.....the very virtuous spirit, chose the truth,”

See also: “..... ‘Such is the rule for the Wise One that one shall increase it for Him through good thinking.’ ”(Y31.6). Or stated another way: “.....Through good thinking the Creator of existence shall promote the true realization of what is most healing according to our wish.” (Y50.11).

See *Some Thoughts on Yasna 29 in An Introduction to the Gathas of Zarathushtra*, No. 12, p 7 et seq., for the evidence from the Gathas on which this conclusion is based.

SBE Vol. 47, pp 156 to 157, translation by West.

The three cardinal amesha spenta or divine attributes, in the order in which they appear in the Gathas, are a benevolent spirit (spenta mainyu), what fits, truth, right, beneficence (asha), and good thinking or a good mind (vohu mano). The term amesha spenta itself does not appear in the Gathas, but each amesha spenta itself is mentioned numerous times in the Gathas.

The next two amesha spenta are variants of the first three – good rule (vohu xshathra) which in the Gathas is called the rule of truth and good thinking), and benevolent devotion or service (spenta aramaiti). I believe spenta aramaiti means thoughts, words and actions which bring to life God’s divine values, thereby establishing His good rule.

And the last two amesha spenta are the end results of achieving the first five – completeness (haurvatat) and immortality (ameretat).

In the Ormazd Yasht verses 1 through 4, (SBE Vol. 23, pp 23 – 24), Ahura Mazda is described as stating that “Our Name, O Spitama Zarathushtra ! who are the Amesha-Spentas” i.e. God’s divine values or attributes, is the strongest Holy Word, the “most fiend-smiting” the best healing, which destroys best the malice of false gods and men, and makes the material world best come to the fulfillment of its wishes. Interestingly enough, these are also precisely the ways in which the Ahuna Vairya is described in the later literature, even to the use of the term “best fiend-smiting” which occurs in the Srosh Yasht Hadokht Ch. 1, verse 3 (SBE Vol. 23. p 160). This similarity between the way the amesha spenta are described in the Ormazd Yasht, and the way the Ahuna Vairya is described in the later literature, while not conclusive, is suggestive that perhaps the interpretations of the Ahuna Vairya in this paper are on the right track.

See also:

“This I ask Thee..... Have they truly seen that vision which is best for those who exist, and which, in companionship with truth, would prosper my creatures.....through words and acts stemming from [aramaiti]? In consequence of my insight they have wished for Thy powers, Wise One.” Y44.10.

“Let those of good rule rule over us – not those of evil rule – with actions stemming from good understanding and with [aramaiti].....” Y48.5.

“What is the power of Thy good rule, Wise One?.....What (reward) of Thine is to be sent by truth to those who are certainly sincere as an incentive for actions stemming from good spirit?” Y48.8.

“...To which man shall come the understanding stemming from good thinking?” Y48.11.

“...Thou art the Lord by reason of Thy words stemming from good thinking,” Y51.3.

“...those who have accepted and taught the words and actions stemming from His good conception [daena-].” Y53.1.

See Dhalla, History of Zoroastrianism, (1985 reprint) pp 289, 423 – 428 (with references to Avesta and Pahlavi source materials footnoted).

Dastur Dhalla is in agreement with this reading of the Gathas, Dhalla, *ibid.* p 288.

Probably a mind-altering drug used by the priests (Karpans) in their rituals.

“.....the beneficent have correctly chosen.....” (Y30.3). The dictionary defines “beneficence” as “...active goodness, kindness, charity; bounty springing from purity and goodness.” Webster’s New International Dictionary, Second Edition (1956).

An echo of the Ashem Vohu prayer.

The benevolent spirit (spenta mainyu) is not mentioned by name in the Yasna. Rather, it is referred to as the “fashioner of the cow [metaphor for the good vision]” but other verses in the Gathas identify the fashioner of the cow [good vision] as the benevolent spirit (spenta mainyu), for example:

“Thou, Wise One, who has fashioned the cow [good vision]..... by reason of Thy most virtuous spirit,.....” (Y51.7).

“...Thy most virtuous spirit, Wise One, by reason of which Thou didst create the wondrous powers of good thinking allied with truth [i.e. the good vision, referred to without metaphor].” (Y43.2).

“...The very Wise Master [ahurai] of good thinking...”Y30.1; “...Lord [ahurem] of the word and deed stemming from good spirit...”Y45.8, accord Y51.3; “...The Wise One in rule is Lord through [aramaiti]...”Y47.1; “...the truthful Lord...”Y53.9.

Metaphorically referred to as pastor of the cow [good vision]. The good vision is the vision of a world governed by truth and good thinking – divine aspects. Therefore a master of the good vision (Y31.9 – 10) would be one who has attained the power of (or mastery over) truth [asha] and good thinking [vohu mano].

Zarathushtra uses “best” vahishta, as a code word (i) for Ahura Mazda and his divine aspects, truth, good thinking and good spirit (Y28.8, 28.9, 33.7, 33.6), (ii) for His teachings which are truth, good thinking and good spirit (Y30.2, 45.5, 48.3), (iii) for thoughts, words and actions of truth and good thinking (Y34.15, 47.2) which come from good

spirit (Y45.8), and (iv) for the reward for truth and good thinking (Y49.9, 47.5, 30.4) which comes from good spirit (Y47.5), and which is truth and good thinking (Y51.21, 28.10), paradise (behesht – a later linguistic form of vahishta) (Y32.15-16), the state of being which is the attainment of truth and good thinking (Y51.20), the personification of good spirit.

The last line of the Ahuna Vairya prayer exquisitely complements the last line of the Ashem Vohu prayer. In the Ashem Vohu we desire the divine (asha) for the sake of the divine as concept – the best asha (vahishtai ashem). In the Ahuna Vairya we choose to realize the divine (actions stemming from an existence of good thinking, vohu mano) for the sake of the divine as being – mazda and ahura.

This idea (that truth, good thinking, and good spirit are what make for divinity) may have been one reason why Zarathushtra frequently refers to truth, good thinking, and good spirit as entities, sometimes alone, sometimes in conjunction with Ahura Mazda. This idea may also have been why he frequently addresses Ahura Mazda in the plural, and why he refers to these divine values as objects of worship or reverence, sometimes alone, sometimes in conjunction with Ahura Mazda. See for example:

“With hands outstretched in reverence of him, the spirit virtuous through truth...” Y28.1.

“Come hither to me, ye best ones.....Thou, Wise One, together with truth and good thinking.....Let bright gifts and reverence (for all of you) be manifest amid us.” Y33.7.

“Therefore, let us reverently give an offering to Thee, Lord, and to truth,.....”Y34.3.

“.....As long as I shall be able, I shall respect that truth is to have a gift of reverence.” Y43.9.

“Yes, I shall swear to be your praiser, Wise One, and I shall be it, as long as I have strength and be able, o truth.....” Y50.11.

“...Thou, Wise One, along with truth and good thinking I shall very happily approach all of you, as I worship and praise.” Y34.5-6

“I who shall serve all of you, Wise Lord.....” Y28.2.

“I who shall eulogize all of you as never before – thee, o truth, and good thinking and the Wise Lord and (those others) [i.e. other amesha spenta].....” Y28.3.

“.....worship of all of you, Wise Lord,” Y33.8.