

The Glory of USHA, the Divinity of DAWN

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Pronunciation symbols:

I have adopted the following transcription (after Kanga & Taraporewala) as permitted by my software, while avoiding the encoding of the **ITRANS convention** hoping to make the reading for non-academic purposes generally easier: -

a as in **fun**; **ā** as in **far**; **ə** as in **fed**, **ē** as in **fade**; **i** as in **fill**; **ī** as in **feel**; **o** as in **for**; **ō** as in **fore**; **u** as in **full**; **ū** as in **fool**. The nasal sounds are **ān** as in **āvan**; **ən** as in the French 'tres biən', **īn** as in **Ahīnsā** (also pronounced 'īm' as in Sanskrit **Ahīmsā** and also in Avestan and Gathic languages) and **ūn** as in Humāyūn. The pronunciation of some consonants (as permitted by my software) are 'ś' for 'sh', 'š' for 'ss', 'r̥' for 'ri', **n** for 'ni', 'ž' for 'zh'.

The Āryās, in their endeavor to propagate and, thus, allow their spiritual beliefs and culture to be more easily understood by the masses, very successfully and for the first time in recorded history 'personified' the best human qualities and the best attributes of nature. These personifications were then praised/glorified in hymns (revered, as it were) in the form of 'Divine Creations' - the Vēdic Divinities, the Avestan Yazatas.

One such personification of a Creation in nature was **Ushā**, the Divinity / Yazata of Dawn. Both, in the Ṛg Vēdā and in the Avesta Ushā has been given a noteworthy place. In the cold, dark and dismal 9-10 months of Subarctic climatic conditions of their common Primal Homeland it is not surprising that the Vēdic Āryānic and the Gāthic / Avestan Airyānic peoples yearned for the warmth of the Sun and showed deep veneration to brightness by personifying and glorifying Light. This has been repeatedly emphasized both in the Vēdās and in our Avesta:-

- 1) Daylight of Hvarēkhshaēta (Pāh/Guj -terrestrial Khorshēd) the shining Sun;
- 2) Māonghah (Pāh - terrestrial Māh/ Guj. Mōhōr) the shining Moon;
- 3) Anaghra Raōchahē (Pāh/Guj - Celestial Anērān) the boundless, endless, eternal Celestial Light;
- 4) Dyāus (pitār) (Pāh/Guj - terrestrial Asmān) the bright Father Sky [the Greeks later expurgated it as their divinity, Jupiter, the Romans as Zeus];
- 5) Zāmyād (Pāh - terrestrial Zāmyād/Guj - Jamiād the brightly colored Mother Earth);
- 6) Ushābāmi (Pāh/Guj - the terrestrial glowing Dawn. Later corruption-Hoshbām).

In the Ṛg Vēdā Ushā is the only female divinity to whom entire hymns are devoted - in fact, 20 complete hymns covering 176 verses, believed to be among the oldest known compositions in the Rg Vēdā. These verses are unparalleled in lyric beauty, depth of literary description and poetic fervor. No prose or poetry, no painting or photograph, it has been said, has rivaled the beauty of these hymns.

The late **Dastoor Nawrooz D. Minochehr-Homji**, my teacher in school, in this respect, quotes John Ruskin (1819 - 1900) the English social thinker, poet and artist, "*There is no solemnity so*

deep to a rightly thinking creature as that of Dawn". We will come back to the words 'rightly thinking creature' later.

But, for now try and grasp the import of the Ṛg Vēdic words. Ushā is the daughter of Dyāus Pitār (the Skies) and Prithvi Mātar (Mother Earth/ Avestan Zāmyād); the sister of the Aswins (the rays of the Sun); the sister of Bhāgā and Varuna, the 44th of the 101 names, the 544th name in the 1001 names of Ahurā Mazdā and the 554th name of Lord Vishnu in the Vishnu Sahasra Nāma (the Vēdic Assurās and the Gāthic Ahurās); elder sister of Rātri (the Night); Ushā, the glow of Dawn takes the place of her younger sister even before the Sun rises; (These ancient cultural traits are still invoked in our present times on the Subcontinent in rural areas. The younger sister is obliged to respectfully give way to the older sister to her older sister. In return, the older sister is taught to show humility and to refrain from taking undue advantage of her position); bride of Surya (the Sun); mother of other divinities associated with Dawn (her white off-springs are the thin layers of tiny fluffy clouds that transiently appear around sunrise).

The Greeks, whose cultural development and consolidation occurred at a much later period in time, adopted this idea of personification and wove this concept into their own mythology, as in Jupiter - Dyāus (pitār), Zeus - Dyāus, Diana - Daēnā ...etc. Still later, they borrowed the stories from the Panchatantra of Vishnu Sharmā (animals were personified to relate stories of ethical and moral behavior to the 3 children of a king). Aesop, a Phrygian (620-560 BCE) added a bit of the Greek flavor converting the Panchatantra stories into 'Aesop's fables'.

The Vēdās mention Ushā awakens first and rises earlier than anyone (a virtue emphasized, both in the Vēdic and in the Avestan scriptures). ***'Let the slothful slumber on'***, say the Vēdās. Those who rise with her are promised abundant rewards and the glow of an optimistic outlook. Clothed in shining garments Ushā arrives bubbling with zest and new hope to display her colorful garments and wondrous splendor. Sitting on the laps of her parents Ushā brings joy to the Earth and graces and blessings to all the finer qualities of life. Ushā heeds the voice of every worshipper in our scriptures. In our beliefs prayers in praise of Dawn are given the pride of place even during the various ceremonies appeasing the soul of the deceased.

Ushā, after a spell of the stillness of the night, evokes sweet sounds of life bringing them down to enliven the race of men into activity, granting spirit and strength and making them do marvels. With the eagerly awaited glow of the twilight of early morn Ushā brings welcome auspicious moments during the ensuing day (Guj: cycles of Muhurats and Chōgariāns) fulfilling all aspirations and bestowing many auspicious moments, thus kindling more hope.

Ushā urges every living soul (all creatures, both, great and small) to motion and to advance towards the goal by herself driving away all darkness and distress, thus bestowing new life each day. Though herself ageless, she inadvertently diminishes the duration (daily) of mortal life by one day. It is for this reason that in our beliefs prayers solemnizing Ushā are recited during Ushāhin Gāh (Guj: Ushēhn Gēh) offered to the soul of the deceased.

Verse after verse, right through to the last one there is a consistent message of optimistic hope, ensuing excitement and a spirit of new adventure as each new day commences. The poetic Rishis who composed these hymns manage to maintain a consistent excitement of positivism.

Western scholars have often translated the Vēdic Sanskrit word ‘Ushās’ in the plural as mentioned in some hymns considering the dawn of each day of the 30 days in the month as an individual dawn ‘following each day the earlier dawns’. The extra ‘s’ in Ushās could well be justifying the metric beat of the particular verse.

Thus, in the Vēdās Ushā becomes a **Divinity of hope and optimism**. Even so, the Avesta repeatedly emphasizes that there is no place at all for pessimism, inactivity, void, looking back or negative attitudes. The entire text of our scriptures bubbles and vibrates with thrills of constant optimism, positive desires and hope and strong will to do better and better.

Ushābāmi, the glow of Dawn in the Vēdās ultimately yields to the brightness of Surya (the Sun) just as her younger sister, Rātri (the night) gave way to her when she arrived (these ancient cultural traditions in family life are still held among the orthodox Vēdic families, particularly in small towns and the rural areas of India and also among some Parsi families). Dastoor Navrooz D. Minochehr-Homji translates ‘*Nēmasētē Hushbāmi*’ as ‘*hail unto thee, glorious Dawn*’. In Ṛg Vēdā 3.61,5 the translation reads, “*I salute thee, O Ushā (of shining brilliance) and, with obeisance, I present a song of praise to thee.*” Note, here, also Dastoor Navrooz D. Minochehr-Homji’s words, ‘*rightly thinking creature*’ when he (previously) quotes John Ruskin addresses, with solemnity, reverence to Usha. He, thus, excludes the Ahrimānic creatures of darkness like the cat, the owl, the bat.....etc, which Zarathuhstis are known to disfavor.

Ushā is revered & given the pride of place in several of our religious ceremonies:-

Ushābāmi (Guj: Hōshbām) in our scriptures: Hoshbam prayers are recited at the time of Dawn between the end of Ushāhin Gāh and the twilight just preceding sunrise. Bām refers to the lingering glitter/glow before the Sun actually rises

The Avestan word, Ushābāmi becomes ‘corrupted’ (linguistically speaking, that is) during the Pāhlavi, Pāzand, Modern Persian and later Gujarati changes in our scriptures to **Hushabāmi / Hushbāmi / Hūshbām** and finally **Hōshbām**. There are many auspicious blessings connected to its recitation to the extent that the investiture (Sudrēh-pūshi initiation ceremony) was originally conducted at dawn and the Hōshbām was recited. Later, for some reason (probably for the sake of convenience) it was conducted after sunrise during the Hāvan Gāh. Even during the mid-1990s I have attended an Initiation Ceremony held during the Hāvan Gāh in Yazd. Now, it seems to have become a norm, at least on the Subcontinent, to conduct the Initiation Ceremony during the Uzērin Gāh during the convenience of the evening.

Ushāhin Gāh: Again here the Avestan word has been corrupted to Ushēhn Gāh in Gujarati. **It is of interest to note that it is the only one of the five Gāhs named after a Yazata.** Our Avestan day does not commence at 12 midnight but at Sunrise in whichever part of the world we may be living. Before the advent of the precise time as shown by a clock whenever sunrise was not clearly evident due to a cloudy/foggy sky, it is believed, the ancient Avestans deemed it was time for the Hāvan Gāh to commence, when the dermal hair of the front of the forearm first became visible against the open sky. In India the Indian Standard time and the Bombay time are taken as landmarks.

Here I would like to include the explanation of Irach J. S. Taraporewala regarding the fact that Ushāhin Gāh was originally the **first (not the last) Gāh** of each day. He states: “Usually the Hāvani is enumerated as the first Gāh, the day being thought of as beginning with sunrise. But with each Gāh one of the **five ‘Lords’ (Ratus)** of social organization is named in order. Of these the **first is ‘Nmānaya’** the Home (the Head of the family), and he is associated with the Ushāhin Gāh, which begins at midnight and which is now enumerated as the **fifth (or the last)**. The Family or Home being the first unit of social organization must necessarily be associated with the first Gāh of the day. **So it would seem that the Ushāhin (lasting from midnight up to sunrise) was originally the first (not the last) Gāh of the day.** This, incidentally, proves that in ancient Iran the day began at midnight; and that would seem reasonable, for it was much easier to observe stars at night passing the zenith than the sun at midday.”

Dastoor Jehan Bagli’s learned interpretations, recently posted on the internet in relation to discussions on Ushāhin Gāh, are also very informative. In a personal communication he kindly offered to have his views added to this paper. He states “These five periods of the day can be compared with physical and spiritual unfolding of a human being from birth, childhood, adolescent, adulthood, and maturity or perfection, to reach the ultimate blessedness of Divine. In the process a person learns the quest to the path of Ashā and experiences the aspects of Mazdā, we recognize as Amēshā Spēntās. Mankind thus learns to acknowledge the Divine within, and harmonize with it to spiritually attain Perfection and tend to be one with God, as defined by Haurvatāt /Amērētāt.

In Yasna 44.5 we see the first mention of reverence for morning, noon and night suggesting that the day may have been divided into three sections during the time of Zarathushtra. It is at some later time in our history, that daytime watch of Hāvan was divided into Hāvan and Rapithwan - Spirit of Noon. Similarly, the night-time watch was split into Aiwisruthrōm and midnight watch of Ushāhin - the Dawn. Although some scholars attribute this changes to Zarathushtra we have no clear evidence of exactly when these changes took place.

The book of ‘Daily Prayers’ by Framroze Rustomjee starts the description of the Gāh with Ushāhin rather than with Hāvan. Ushāhin is the time, when spiritual unfolding of the soul starts. Philologically the word, Ushāhin means ‘Pertaining to Dawn’. Theoretically this is the period of the day that marks the emergence of Dawn. In an esoteric sense it is also the period that marks the ‘dawn of life’.

There is some discrepancy in the Zarathushtrian tradition, as to - when does the religious day begin? Theoretically, a day starts from 12 am and ends at 11:59 pm. Ushāhin is the day-watch that starts at mid-night and ends at sunrise. However, from religious viewpoint, of Zarathushtrian tradition the day is believed to begin at sunrise - emergence of light. This may have to do with the historical changes that have taken place in the ancient Iranian empires. In that vast empire the Northern-most regions may have had much longer days due to early sunrise.

(Ushāhinēm ashavanēm.....Ārmaitim yazmaidē) - Here we pay reverence to Dawn (*Ushāhin*). It describes dawn as beautiful, brilliant and brilliantly spread, full of luster in the house, pleasing to men, nimbly spread upon the seven regions of the earth. We worship Ahurā Mazdā and the Amēshā Spēntās - Vōhu Manō, Ashāvahishtā, Kshathravairya and Spēntā Armaity. It is

interesting to note that this paragraph of the main body of the Gāh Ushāhin **stops at the reverence of Spānta Armaity**, and the corresponding para of Gāh Hāvan - ‘*Hāvanim ashavanēm.....*’ starts with **reverence to Haurvatāt and Amēretāt**. This strongly suggests the precedence of Ushāhin over Hāvan in the sequence of the Gāhs. Regardless of the meaning, however, tradition seems to have moved down the order of sequence to start the sequence with **Gāh Hāvan**.”

During the Ushāhin Gāh: -

1. It is described that it augers well to recite Sraōša Bāj, Hōrmuzd Yasht, Ardibēhēst Yasht, Sraōša Yasht Hādokht, and, of course, the Ushāhin and Hōshbām recitations.
2. The Hōshbām prayers are recited at the time of Dawn on the third night after death when the Soul of the deceased approaches Mēhr Yazata in the direction of the rising Sun towards Chinvat Bridge for judgement.
3. On the third night four ‘daran (bāj)’ ceremonies are consecrated and also consecrated clothes (Syāv) are placed.
4. Uthamnā prayers are held for three days. Some orthodox families, however, have the Uthamnā ceremony only during the Uzērin Gāh. Some even have the Uthamnā ceremony both during the Uzērin as well as the Ushāhin Gāhs.
5. Similar ceremonies for the propitiation of the Soul of the deceased are held on the fourth day (Chēhārom), tenth day (Dasmu), thirteenth day (Sirōzā), thirty-first day (Māsisō), end of sixth month (Chhamsi) and the annual anniversary day (Varsi).
6. Nirangdin Ceremonies for the propitiation of the soul of the deceased / Vəndidād ceremony in honor of Sraōša Yazata are also conducted in this Gāh.
7. It was a norm in ancient times that on the last Gāthā (Vahishtō-Isht) day the holy Fravashis, after the Fravardēgan Days were deemed to return to the other world and recitation of Patēt was obligatory on this day. The year then came to an end and preparations for the festivities of a ‘New Day’ - Nou Rouz was eagerly embarked upon commencing with the Hōshbām and Mōnājāt songs before the rising of the sun...

The following are references in praise of Ushā in the Avesta: -

- a. Ushāhin Gāh, verse 5: ‘Ushā smites all evil thoughts from the arrival of Dawn unto sunrise’.
- b. The part of the firmament in the East where the morning twilight of the glitter of Dawn first becomes evident is called Upaōshangva. Zāmyād (Guj: Jamiād) Yasht, verse 1: ‘The first mountain that formed O Spitamā Zarathushtra, on this earth arose from the waters near the place where the morning twilight first appears’.
- c. Hādōkht Nask, verse 41 describes the domestic rooster as knowledgeable – ‘then towards the time of Dawn this bird, Pārōdars having acquired knowledge leaves listening to the prayers (referring to the Ushāhin and Hōshbām recitations). The domestic rooster holds such deep respect in our beliefs that Zarathushtris would make sure it is not sacrificed for food. Its early morning crowing certainly heralds the coming of Dawn and therefore of hope and optimism. I remember in our Surat Wādi Homestead our family elders could tell the exact time (give or take a few minutes) by the peculiarities in the sound of the crowing of each rooster. Before the advent of the clock the domestic rooster would have been of tremendous help in a land-based way of living.

This praiseworthiness of the domestic rooster has been quoted several times in our scriptures: -

Vəndidād 21, 3: ‘In times of darkness I long for the break of Dawn and ask for the boon of good health and copious rain for the parched new lands to help yield new plants for new remedies and new restorative medications.’

Vəndidād 19, 28: Reverence be to the righteous Ushā, the teacher of righteousness, the beautiful Dawn, the early morning light, which is akin to a magnificent stallion (beloved by both men and warriors), which is gentle and trustworthy. Reverence be to the Dawn, the early morning glow which spreads over the seven ‘kēshvars’ of the earth swiftly with the speed of such a stallion. Reverence be to the Dawn and to righteous Ahurā Mazdā.

Now, let us see what Zarathushtra has to say about Ushā in: -

Gāthā Ushtavaiti; Yasna 44, verse 5: “This do I ask thee, tell me truly O Ahurā. Which architect did fashion both light and darkness? Who was the wise one who planned both sleep and awakening? Who did create Dawn, Day and Night - as if to inculcate wisdom and purpose in life? Note how Zarathushtra places Dawn first, which heralds the day, which in turn is followed by night. He also correlates early awakening with wisdom, with the emergence of dawn.

Gāthā Spəntā Mainyu; Yasna 50, verse 10: While talking of the present and past deeds he says: “They are as worthy as thy shining glory just like the Sun’s rays and the blushing Dawn (*Ushā aēurush*)”. Note how Zarathushtra hints on the pink aura of Dawn to describe Ushā bashful, shy, and blushing as she is pursued by her consort, the Sun and as both emerge from the darkness. Here, note also that although the Dawn emerges first the Sun (as the groom) is mentioned first and then the bride - perhaps, in the proper norms of the time.

References:

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