

The Amesha Spentas

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Sources :

- The Gathas – main source – the collective term Amesha Spenta not used.
- Avestan Texts – Zam Yasht, Haphtan Yasht and Siroze Yasht.
- Pahlavi Texts – Shayest-le-Shayest, (Part III, ch. 25, v. 2-6).
- Other Sources – History of Zoroastrianism by Prof. Mary Boyce.

Definition :

- Seven chief attributes of God – Spenta = holy or possessing conscious supernatural, positive powers and hence beneficent.
- Amesha = undying or immortal – Hence Amesha Spentas = Bounteous (Holy) Immortals.

Description :

- The Amesha Spentas are the chief of the *yazatas* (Adorable Beings worthy of worship).
- First created in the *menog* (spiritual) state by Ahura Mazda – His first creation.
- The word Amesha Spentas as a collective term occurs first in the Haptainghaiti Gatha (Y. 37).
- They have a dual function to perform :
 - a) They form the kernel of the ethical infrastructure for man to base his life on.
 - b) They form a task force for Ahura Mazda's creations – they are the fashioners, preservers, protectors and guardians of the seven physical creations.

All seven are in total accord – to carry out God's Will.

They operate within the soul of man - help man to produce Good thoughts, words and deeds.

All seven work together to produce moderation (the golden mean in any action).

Man should recognize and respect the Amesha Spentas and by listening to them integrate them in his daily life, carrying out his actions in accordance with their commands (Y. 50, v. 4; Y. 30, v. 9).

Application of the Amesha Spentas in one's daily actions:-

Vohu Manah (the Good Mind) receives the true motivation from Spenta Mainyu (the Holy Spirit) and places God's Will into operation in accordance with Asha Vahishta (the Best Order and Truth) – By exercising Khshathra Vairya (authority and moral conviction) and balancing it with Spenta Armaity (receptivity – devotion to the task), the action is carried out with Haurvetat (Perfection) – Such a deed then belongs to Ameretat (Immortality) as a small *frasho.kereti* (bringing about perfection through righteousness) and – when man bases his action on the dictates of the Amesha Spentas and then reflects it to his conscience (guide to God's Will) to find out the motivation (God's Will), he performs a real good deed.

- Spiritual Reality becomes real through :-
 - a) Path of conscious knowledge – awareness and intellect (head)
 - b) And path of devotion (heart) which manifests through:
 - i) Rituals which existentialize doctrine, giving experiential qualities to concepts like Vohu Manah and Asha Vahishta.
 - ii) By integrating the Amesha Spentas in daily life.
 - iii) Consciously balancing the ethical infrastructure with conscience to get the true motivation (God's Will).
- The Amesha Spentas are the strongest weapons within man to fight evil (Y. 34, v. 11; History of Zoroastrianism by M. Boyce, Vol. 1, p. 220).
- The man who recognizes the unity which lies in the ethical abstract world and the physical tangible world of creations, and bases his life on it by heeding the Amesha Spenta ethical infrastructure and taking

care of the creations, will never go to hell (Sh-n-Sh. Part III, Ch. 25, para 2-6).

- The Amesha Spentas will restore the world at frasho.kereti (Zam Yasht, S.B.E. Series, vol. 23, p. 290, para 15-20).
- The Amesha Senta structure is the heart of the doctrine on which Zoroastrians base their lives.
- **The Creation Infrastructure** of the Amesha Spentas is different in order from the ethical infrastructure :-

<u>No.</u>	<u>Creation Infrastructure</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Ethical Infrastructure</u>
1 st	Sky	4 th	Khshathra Vairya (Sovereign Kingdom)
2 nd	Water	6 th	Haurvetat (Perfection)
3 rd	Earth	5 th	Spenta Armaity (Piety / Devotion)
4 th	Plant	7 th	Ameretat (Immortality)
5 th	Animal	2 nd	Vohu Manah (Good Mind)
6 th	Man	1 st	Spenta Mainyu (Holy Spirit)
7 th	Fire	3 rd	Asha Vahishta (Order / Truth / Righteousness)

- The ethical infrastructure given by Zarathushtra – Creation infrastructure worked out late by learned priests who linked the appropriate cration to its ethical couterpart.
- The Amesha Spentas usually linked in terms of concept :

- Triadic principles of Spenta Mainyu, Vohu Manah and Asha Vahishta (Y. 43, v. 2).
- Combination of Vohu Manah and Asha Vahishta (Y. 43, v. 2 & 121; Y. 50, v. 4; Y.28 v.11).
- Coupling of Haurvetat and Ameretat (Y. 31, v. 6; Y 34, v. 11; Y. 45, v. 5)
- The first four Amesha Spentas are active as balanced to the last three which are passive attributes.
- The balance between the active and passive principles is stressed for moderation :-
 - o Balance between Vohu Manah (active) and Spenta Mainyu (passive) (Y. 34, v. 10; Y48, v. 5).
 - o Balance between Khshathra Vairya and Spenta Armaity (Y. 31, v. 4; Y. 44, v. 7; Y. 51, v. 21).
 - o Balance between Asha Vahishta and Spenta Armaity (Y. 33, v. 13; Y. 49, v. 5; Y. 44, v. 6; Y. 43, v. 9).
 - o Combined balance between Asha vahishta, Khshathra vairya and Spenta Armaity (Y. 44, v. 6).

Individual Amesha Spentas :

Spenta Mainyu : (Holy Spirit of God) (Y. 28, v. 11; Y. 43, v. 2; Y. 47, v.2).

- Purely Zoroastrian concept introduced by Zarathushtra.
- Responsible for creation of man – the 6th creation.
- First in the heptad of the Amesha Spentas.
- The motivating force to carry out God's Will.
- Ahura Mazda, through His conscious thought first created Spenta Mainyu which then served as a torch to light the other 6 Amesha Spentas (Ayadgur-i-Jamaspi).
- Spenta Mainyu is just a step below Ahura Mazda – some scholars equate the two.
- Guides man in his free will to choose the good from the evil – Man is the only creation endowed with consciousness to exercise freedom of

- choice – animals choose and react through instinct alone whereas man can choose consciously through his mind.
- Man is Ahura Mazda's finest creation – he alone can carry out God's purpose for perfecting this world by ridding it of all evil through conscious practice of good thoughts, words and deeds.
 - Because of this God's own Holy Spirit was assigned to man as his fashioner, preserver and protector – Man is made in the image of God and has His other attributes (Amesha Spentas) also within him.
 - Man has a maximum responsibility towards looking after himself as well as taking care of the other creations. (Y. 28, v. 11; Y. 43, v. 2; Y. 47, v.2).

Vohu Manah : (Good Mind) (Y. 32, v. 6; Y. 45, v. 9; Y. 50, v.6)

- Purely a Zoroastrian concept introduced by Zarathushtra for the first time in the history of religion.
- No other religion lays the premium on the good mind the way Zoroastrianism does.
- Crucial to man to differentiate between good and evil.
- Helps man to consciously discern God's Plan for the universe and to implement it.
- Most crucial to carry out good thoughts, words and deeds.
- Vohu Manah is in charge of the 5th creation – animal.
- Domestic animals like the cow symbolize mildness, benevolence and beneficial qualities on which man depends – the cow chooses the herdsman as its master and serves him with good intention.
- At the level of animal consciousness, the cow recognized Ahura Mazda and asked for deliverance (Y. 29, v. 1) – Therefore at animal level, the cow and other domestic animals stand for good, intentions to serve mankind – hence the link with Vohu Manah. (In pre-Zoroastrian times, the divinity for the animals was Verethragna (Bahram) anthropomorphized as a wild boar.
- Vohu Manah is purely Zoroastrian in concept.
- Vohu Manah gives good intelligence, good discernment and the best vision to recognize and implement God's Plan for the universe and helps man to morally and ethically make the correct choice.
- As Vohu Manah is present in man, man has the responsibility to look after and protect the animal world.
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Asha Vahishta : (Best Order/Truth/Righteousness) (Y. 49, v. 3; Y. 50, v. 6).

- Asha on the physical level is order – essential for life and health
- On the psychological level, this order becomes Truth
- On the spiritual level it is the quintessence of order and truth which is righteousness.
- By observing order and realizing the truth in it, one leads a life
- Asha regulates the functioning of the universe – responsible for the harmony prevalent in the creations.
- When man realizes this, this principle and exercises truth for its own sake, he finds happiness and is in harmony within himself as well as in harmony with his surroundings.
- God’s Plan is based on the path of Asha – the path to realization of God as it is pure and undefiled.
- As Asha is uncontaminated and stands for Truth which is the nature of Ahura Mazda, it is associated with fire which symbolizes truth.
- Hence truth and fire are inter-linked (Y. 43, v. 4 & 9).
- Fire reveals the truth of existence and is the repository of wisdom.
- Intrinsically pure and the nearest to total purity in this relative world
- Pure like truth.
- God is Truth (He Exists) and His essence in existential form is the fire which is therefore synonymous with Truth.
- Hence Asha Vahishta is the fashioner and protector of the fire, the seventh creation.
- In pre-Zoroastrian times the concept of Asha was not well developed
- Was seen as Rta
- Zarathushtra developed this concept into a crucial principle to base one’s life on.