



## AHUNWAR

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**AHUNWAR**, Middle Persian form of Avestan Ahuna Vairya, name of the most sacred of the Gathic prayers (*Y.* 27.13, etc.). It is so named after the opening phrase, *yaθa ahū vairyō*. Its text contains important points of Zarathuštra's teaching (cf., especially, *Y.* 29 and 53.9), but its precise total sense remains debated. One possible rendering is: "As a temporal lord (is) chosen, so (is) a spiritual lord, according to Truth, (as) an establisher of the works of Good Mind in the world—and the sovereignty is Ahura Mazdā's—whom they have bestowed on the humble as a shepherd."

Like the [Airyaman](#) prayer, the Ahunwar implored security for Zarathuštra's followers. The Younger Avestan tradition interpreted it as referring to Zarathuštra (see the exegesis in *Y.* 19); but originally the prophet's successors, as reliable guides for the faithful, were probably also intended. Later tradition saw no special reference to Zarathuštra (*Zand ī Xwurdag Abestāg*, ed. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1927, pp. 1-2; *Dēnkard [Dk.]*, ed. Sanjana, 9.24.1; *Zātspram* 1.13-19). Zarathuštra was the first man to chant the prayer (*Y.* 9.14), but its potency derives from its character as a primordial utterance of Ahura Mazdā (*Y.* 19.3, 4.8). It was created after the spiritual beings, but before all material things, and so has great power to aid souls and distress the demons. It is cited along with other formulae (*Y.* 57.22, 59.33, 61.1-3, *Vispered* 24.1) and singled out as "most victorious" (*Yt.* 11.3), "most healing" (*Vd.* 11.3), etc. (*Y.* 8.1, 27.7). *Vd.* 11.3, prescribing five recitations, says "the Ahuna Vairya protects the body."

Four *nasks* in the Sasanian Avesta contained chapters expounding the



Ahunwar (*Dk.* 8.44.1; 9.1.1, 24.1, 46), and its supremacy among formulae is evident in later Zoroastrian literature. (1) It is potent for smiting demons and protecting life and property (*Dk.* 4.38-45, 8.43.81, 9.1.4). Its power stems from (2) its primordial character. Ohrmazd fashioned, from boundless light, the “fire form” which was the source for all creatures. The first manifestation from the “fire form” was Ahunwar, the spirit of the *yaθā ahū vairyō*, “out of whom (is) the manifestation of creation and the ultimate end of creatures” (*Bd.*, ed. Anklesaria, p. 12.13-14). By reciting the prayer, Ohrmazd revealed his own ultimate triumph to Ahriman; the demon then fell back, confounded, for 3,000 years (1.29-30). Since it is primordial, the Ahunwar (3) is the summation and the epitome of the religion, “the seed of seeds of the reckoning of the religion” (*Dk.* 8.45.1). In the *Bd.*, the spirit Ahunwar is identified with Dēn “Religion.” Each of the prayer’s twenty-one words was used to name one *nask* of the Avesta, whose total contents the formula thus symbolized (*Dk.* 8, intro., 6, 17-18; 9.1.4; *Zātspram* 28.1-3). *Pursišn* 26 cites the Avesta verse “what manifestation of that Ahuna Vairya do you have?” as meaning: “How is it when it becomes clear that the Religion (is) resident in one’s body?” (K. M. Jamaspa and H. Humbach, *Pursišnīhā*, Wiesbaden, 1971, I, pp. 42-43). (4) In accord with its importance, the Ahunwar has numerous ritual uses. Besides its use as a part of the scripture, in the *yasna* and *baršnūm* ceremonies and its repetition in the *āfrīnagān* rite, it is recited with such actions as tying the *kusti*, urinating, having intercourse, entering a house (*Dk.* 9.18.5-7), paring nails (*Šaddar Našr*, ed. B. N. Dhabhar, Bombay, 1909, par. 14), pouring a drink, sneezing or coughing (*Šāyast nē šāyast* 10.7, 12.32). It is particularly offensive to mumble this prayer (*ibid.*, 10.25b).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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