



BAHMAN I. IN THE AVESTA

i. In the Avesta

Vohu Manah (Good Thought) is one of the divine beings to whom the name Aməša Spenta is given in the post-Gathic parts of the Avesta. As with all these beings, an originally abstract idea has been personified and deified. (On ideas and their personifications in Zoroaster's thinking, see Thieme, *Die vedischen Āditya*, pp. 404f.) In many contexts it is unclear whether *vohu manah* (good thought) or *vahišta manah* (best thought) means the abstract idea or the divine being, but as in the case of the other personifications, a synergy of the idea and the being is apparent. (Such is the view of Boyce, *Zoroastrianism I*, pp. 212f., and Humbach, *Die Gathas*, p. 55. On the other hand, Nyberg, *Religionen*, p. 121, and Duchesne-Guillemin, *Zoroastre*, pp. 205ff., and *The Western Response*, pp. 227ff., consider *vohu manah* to be in all respects a being, while Insler, *The Gathas*, pp. 25ff., reckons him to be wholly an idea.)

Vohu manah means literally the good moral state of a person's mind which alone enables him to perform his duties, whether these be worship of Ahura Mazda or care of cows, which in the *Gāθās* is deemed particularly important. For example, it is said of Ahura Mazda's dominion that mankind "will augment it by good thought" (Y. 31.6), while righteous believers are described as persons "who through their practice of good thought are in the community of the milch cow" (Y. 34.14).

As a being, Vohu Manah appears in the *Gāθās* mainly in association with Ahura Mazda and other beings, e.g., "I too shall praise you, O Truth, as never



before, (you) and Good Thought and the Wise Lords” (Y. 28.3; cf. Y. 28.9, and Y. 33.11). In the abode where Ahura Mazdā dwells, Vohu Manah is present together with the souls of the truthful (Y. 49.10). One of the designations of the next world is “Abode of Good Thought” (Y. 32.15). Vohu Manah is presented as one of the basic facts of the creation (Y. 44.4). Ahura Mazdā is named as his father (Y. 31.8; 45.4), but this relationship, which other divine beings also enjoy, is not pictured in clearly anthropomorphic terms. Just as Ahura Mazdā is related to Vohu Manah (Y. 32.2), so too does man strive for partnership with him (Y. 49.3, 5). One characteristic function of Vohu Manah is that of an adviser (Y. 44.8, 13; 47.3). Man ought to follow the “Ways of Good Thought” (Y. 34.12, 13; 51.16). Anyone who does good to a truthful person—among other things by tending cows—will have a place “on the meadow of Truth and Good Thought” (Y. 33.3).

Vohu Manah, the being, also acts as a protector of man and his animals, but is not the only performer of this function. “Who could be found to be the protector of my cattle, of myself, (who) other than Truth, than you, O Wise Lord, and Best Thought?” (Y. 50.1). Conversely the herdsman, charged with the care of cows, is described as “Good Thought’s supporter” (Y. 31.10). There is probably also an allusion to Vohu Manah’s role in the sentence “Whom do you appoint, O Wise One, to be a keeper for one like me . . . , (whom) other than your Fire and your Thought?” (Y. 46.7).

It has often been assumed (e.g., by Lommel, *Die Religion*, pp. 123ff., and Boyce, *Zoroastrianism I*, pp. 209ff.) that a special relationship between Vohu Manah, the being, and animals, particularly the cow as representative of the animals, is already manifest in the *Gāθās*; but there is no clear evidence of such a relationship in the texts (cf. Narten, *Die Aməša Spəntas*, pp. 107ff.).

In line with the dualistic world view, *vohu manah* is opposed by *aka manah* (bad thought) or *acišta manah* (worst thought). Here again tendencies to personification appear in some contexts: the *daēvas* are “seeds from Worst Thought” (Y. 32.3), hell is called the “abode of Worst Thought” (Y. 32.13), the deceiver dwells “with Worst Thought” (Y. 47.5). (On the conflict between Good Thought and Bad Thought, visualized as beings, see Lommel, *Die Religion*, pp. 37f.)

The importance given in the *Gāθās* to the idea and personification of *vohu manah* is probably a specifically Zoroastrian feature. In the Vedas there is no instance of a compound of the abstract noun *ma’nas* and the adjective *vāsu*



with an ethical connotation. The word *sumati*, cited by Geiger (*Die Aməša Spəntas*, p. 241) can hardly, in view of its different etymology, prove anything relevant to the Indo-Iranian period. (See Lommel, *Die Elemente*, pp. 380f., who thinks it improbable that Vohu Manah is from the Indo-Iranian period. For a different explanation of Vohu Manah, see Duchesne-Guillemin, *La religion*, pp. 200ff.)

In the Younger Avesta there are few references to *vohu manah* the abstract idea, but many invocations and mentions of Vohu Manah the divine being. In general, however, these give no indications of the being's special attributes and functions (see Lommel, *Die Religion*, p. 38). Even so, it is significant that wherever the Aməša Spəntas are mentioned by name, and despite differences in the order of mention, the first rank after Ahura Mazdā is always held by Vohu Manah, whereas in the *Gāθās* Aša appears more important and closest to Ahura Mazdā. Also important is Vohu Manah's role as the victorious opponent of Aka Manah: "Bad Thought will be vanquished, Good Thought will be the victor" (*Yt.* 19.96). In another context Vohu Manah reappears in the role of protector: "When the Evil Spirit assailed the creation of Good Truth, Good Thought and Fire intervened" (*Yt.* 13.77). In the race and combat for the light of good fortune, Vohu Manah takes part, together with Aša Vahišta (Best truth) and Fire, as a champion of Spənta Mainyu (most Beneficent Spirit), but only Fire is mentioned as an actual combatant. Finally Vohu Manah appears as the being who will welcome the truthful man's soul in the afterworld (*Y.* 32.15 and *Y.* 49.10 quoted above, *Vd.* 19). This, by the way, is the only setting where the portrayal is at all graphic: "Good Thought rises from his throne made of gold, Good Thought proclaims . . ." (*Vd.* 19.31), but on the whole Vohu Manah as presented in the Younger Avesta is rather colorless—a being of some importance, but without distinctive attributes.

The second day of the month is dedicated to Vohu Manah, which is consistent with the order of precedence which places Vohu Manah second after Ahura Mazdā. The eleventh month is also sacred to Vohu Manah.

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