



YEŅHĒ HĀTAṂ

YEŅHĒ HĀTAṂ, *Yasna* 27.15 of the *Avesta*, one of the four major Zoroastrian ritual prayers or mantras (Av. *mąθra*). In the extant *Avesta*, the commentary on *Yeñhē hātām* (hereafter: *YH*) survives in *Yasna* 21, which immediately precedes the *Gāthās*. *Y.* 21 follows the lengthier exposition of the *Yaθā ahū vairiō* (*YAV*) mantra in *Y.* 19 and that of *Aṣəm vohū* (*AV*) in *Y.* 20. These three prayers are listed (with two other *Yasna* formulae) as an anti-*daevic* remedy in *Videvdat* 18.43; the three are worshipped in *Visperad* 1.4 and 2.6, and *AV* and *YH* are recited in 21.0. Of the commentaries on these three that existed in the Sasanian *Avesta* (see [Table 1](#)), those belonging to the *Bag Nask* survive in *Y.* 19-21.

Function. In the *Yasna* ritual, recitation of *YH* is closely linked to that of *YAV* and *AV*, which it follows as a doxology, marking the transition from one unit of scripture to the next (see Kotwal and Boyd, p. 155). The *Yasna* rubrics invoke *YH* (one recitation) after *AV* (three recitations) at the conclusion of each chapter (*hāiti*, Pahl. *hā*) of the five *Gāthās* and the *Yasna Haptañhāiti* (*Y.* 28 through 51, 53) and after the concluding prayers, *Y.* 54 (*Ā airiāmā išiiō*) and 55. The *Srōš Yašt* (*Y.* 57) invokes *YH*, but preceding *AV* (57.34; Geldner, I, pp. 204-5). *YH* also is indicated at the conclusion of various other *Yasna* chapters (ed. Geldner, *Y.* 4.26, 7.27, 13.8, 17.19, 18.9, 19.21, 20.5, 21.5, 60.13, 68.24, 70.7; for an outline of the liturgical structure of the *Yasna*, see Kotwal and Boyd, pp. 155-57; for an example of use, in the context of *Y.* 4-8, see *ibid.*, pp. 95-96). M. Molé, pointing out that *YH* is the only mantra that speaks of the *yasna* sacrifice/worship, attributes to it a key role in enabling ritual to be



accomplished correctly and validly (pp. 274, 516). For J. Darmesteter, *YH* encapsulated the [entire] Yasna ritual; it was “the liturgical formula *par excellence*” (I, p. 176).

Given its role as a doxology following *YAV* and *AV*, *YH* can similarly accompany these mantras when they are recited apart from the sacrifice, and it similarly follows the devotional prayers of the *Khordeh Avesta*; it is also embedded within the *Mihr Yašt*, *Y.* 10.6, following declaration of sacrificial offerings to *Miθra*, and in that god’s *Nyāyišn*, 1.16. *YH* is not recited alone (Stausberg, III, p. 12; Stewart, p. 68). Perhaps due to this ancillary role, as well as to its ambiguity, the prayer is easily overlooked or treated in cursory fashion. For instance, E. W. West, in his edition of *Martin Haug* (1878 and 1890, p. 141, n., expanding on 1862, p. 134), suggested translations of *YAV* and *AV*, but not of *YH*. J. J. Modi did translate it (see below), and he noted that “there is hardly a prayer that does not contain [that is, conclude with] this formula” (Modi, p. 349). But, as in the case of the often-mentioned *AV*, his discussion is brief, compared with the lengthy consideration given *YAV*. Nevertheless, *YH* has been revered by Parsis as having great power similar to that of *YAV* and *AV* (e.g., see the interview in Kreyenbroek, p. 76).

Origin. Authorship of *YH* sometimes has been attributed to *Zoroaster* himself, based on interpretation of the Avesta commentary (*Y.* 21.1-2; e.g., Gershevitch, p. 9)—that is, as the prophet’s own restatement of the Gathic strophe from which it derives, *Y.* 51.22 (for both regarded as “consistent with common authorship,” see Gershevitch, p. 64, n.). As such, it would have the same authenticity, as pristine doctrine, as the *Gāθās*. However, the phrase “worshipful utterance of Zoroaster” (*yēsniṃ vacō*, *Y.* 21.1) may refer, not to authorship, but only to performance of the liturgy of the sacrifice (Molé, p. 173), in which Zoroaster is priest; he recites the sacred text just as the *zōd* officiant still does today. The Pahlavi *Dēnkard* summary of the *YH* chapter of the *Wārštmanšr Nask* seems to clarify this sense of *Y.* 21.1 when it describes the context of the prayer and has Zarduxšt respond to *Ohrmazd*’s command for “words of worship and praise of us, who are the *Amahraspands*,” saying “I will speak the words of *Ohrmazd* [*gowišn ī ohrmazd*] ...” (*Dk.* 9.27; *DkM*, II, p. 82). The *YH* prayer’s origin is seen, at present, as a rephrasing of the Gathic strophe done by a later generation of the Zoroastrian faithful (see Boyce, pp. 262-63). The text is analyzed as “archaized Younger Avestan” (see Humbach, 2000; idem et al., II, p. 14), rather than as Gathic with Younger Avestan substitutions.



The prayer and its source. The brevity of YH, its phrasing with pronouns, and different analyses of grammatical forms and phrase structure, as well as of Gathic doctrine, have occasioned different interpretations. The same can be said for the predecessor text, the greater part of the Gathic strophe Y. 51.22:

yehiā mōi ašāt hacā vaēdā mazdā ahurō yoi
vahištām yesnē paitī āṇharēcā həṇticā
tq yazāi ...

“In the worship toward which one [for “which ones”] the best for me according to Truth [Aša] the Wise Lord [Ahura Mazdā] knows, [the ones] who both have existed and do exist, them I shall worship ...”

(cf. W. B. Henning, apud Boyce, 1969, pp. 18-19; Humbach and Faiss, p. 158). The text recurs, as *yeṛhē mē ašāt hacā ...*, in Y. 15.2 and is repeated twice as a formula in Y. 69.2 (for the liturgical context of the latter, see Kotwal and Kreyenbroek, p. 229; Kotwal and Boyd, p. 125). The ambiguity of this strophe can well be regarded as deliberate (Humbach et al., II, p. 234), and the same point can apply to the mantras (cf. Humbach and Taraporewala, p. 21, n. 1). The reciters of the prayers may have felt several, equally valid, interpretations in the wording of verses 1-2. (For possibilities, see Schmidt, p. 325; Humbach et al., II, p. 235; I, p. 191; for the translation “best (accomplishment) ... (will have fallen) to me” [ibid., I, p. 191], in the context of the mystery of the sacrifice, see ibid., I, pp. 92-94; cf. Kellens and Pirart, I, p. 185). For instance, the concept “recompense/reward” is already present in Y. 51 (*mīzdām*, 51.15, *vaṇuhīm ... ašīm*, 51.21) and can be viewed as strongly implied also in 51.22 (*vahištām* “the best”) and YH (*vaṇhō*, lit. “the better”; thus Darmesteter, I, pp. 175-76; Nyberg, p. 270; cf. Humbach et al., II, p. 14; Kellens and Pirart, I, p. 185).

The prayer YH, with wording derived from Y. 51.22 but with transposition of the references to “existent beings” and “Truth,” presumably was intended to express the manner in which the Gathic strophe was interpreted at the time of YH composition. Exact correspondence between the two is uncertain, since scholarship lacks the exegetical oral tradition and ritual context that would have existed at the time of the prayers’ earliest use, when Zoroastrian liturgical practice was being developed and codified (cf. Boyce, 1975, p. 263).

yeṛhē hātām āat yesnē paitī vaṇhō
mazdā ahurō vaēθā ašāt hacā



yāṅhqm̄cā tqscā tāsca yazamaidē

Then in the worship toward which male one of the existent beings,
the Wise Lord knows, according to Truth, the better,
and toward which female ones,
those male ones and those female ones we worship.

(The latter verses also are cited as: *mazdā ahurō vaēθā ašāt hacā yāṅhqm̄cā / tqscā tāsca yazamaidē*. Similar translations are Schmidt, p. 329; Gershevitch, p. 77; Boyce, 1975, p. 262; cf. “the better [accomplishment of them to be displayed] at worship,” Humbach et al., I, p. 116; II, p. 235.)

The “existent beings” in YH. The Younger Avesta commentary on *YH*, in *Y. 21.2* identifies the “existent beings” of this prayer as the *Aməša Spəntas*, of whom the canonical concept was by then clearly defined; in the *Yasna Haptaṅhāiti* (contemporary with *YH?*), *Y. 39.3*, they are “the good male ones, the good female ones.” (On the emergence of the *Aməša Spəntas* from among the undifferentiated *Ahuras*, see Humbach et al., II, pp. 13-16. The latter can be equated with “[those] who both have existed and do exist”: cf. *Y. 45.7* and, for the Old Persian parallels, Boyce, 1969, p. 18.) This identification is later repeated in the Pahlavi *Yasna* glosses, for *Y. 51.22* and *21.2* (Dhabhar, pp. 228, 107), as well as in the *Dēnkard* summaries of the nasks of the Avesta.

The words of *YH* are borrowed in the litanies of the *Visperad* (*Vr. 16.3*), directly following worship of the *fravašis* “of the male Truthful ones ... of the female Truthful ones” and preceding worship of the waters, earth, and plants: “Whose better the Truthful Wise Lord knows at worship for/by us, of these, *Zaraθuštra* is both lord (see *AHU*) and judge (*ratu*)” (*yaēšqm̄ nō ahurō mazdā ašawa yesnē paiti vaṅhō vaēda / aēšqm̄ zaraθuštrō aṅhuca ratušca*, with *nō* as an indirect dative, ethical or of interest; or of possession: Malandra; cf. Humbach et al., II, p. 235: “we ... our lord and judge (is) *Zaraθuštra*”). In the Warštmanr Nask commentary on *YH*, Ohrmazd similarly urges Zarduxšt to the worship of—besides the Amahraspands—water, plants, *fravašis*, and immaterial [*mēnōg*] gods (*Dk. 9.27.1*; *DkM*, II, p. 823; Molé, p. 517). In a similar vein, *Yt. 13.148* rephrases the first two verses of *YH*: “We also worship the *fravašis* of all those truthful men and women / whose better the truthful Wise Lord knows at worship for/by us” (*yaēšqm̄ nō ahurō mazdā ašauua yesne paiti vaṅhō vaēda*; cf. Humbach et al., II, p. 236).

Some scholars (e.g., Nyberg, p. 270; Tavadia, p. 122) have viewed *hātqm̄* in *YH*



as specifically meaning living men and women, even at the time of its origin, and present-day renderings are all the more likely to state or imply reference to the living faithful: “The male one among the existing whose very good (recompense) for the sacrifice / the Wise Lord knows in accordance with truth, / and the female ones as well, those male ones and those female ones we celebrate” (Humbach and Faiss, pp. 73-74; see also Humbach and Ichaporria, p. 21, n. 2). This interpretation of *YH* is in harmony with the increased emphasis in Parsi practice, in the twentieth century, on human morality relative to ritual observances. Thus J. J. Modi (p. 349) rendered *YH*: “Ahura Mazdā knows who among the living [*hātqm*] is the best [*vanhō*] in prayer [*yesnē paitī*] through righteousness [*aṣāt hacā*]. We praise them whether male or female.” Here, and in other translations, *aṣāt hacā* is felt to be bound up with *hātqm* and so is applied to the first verse, whether modifying “the male one,” “the better,” or *yesnē* (e.g., similar to Modi, “on account of his [i.e., the male one’s] righteousness,” Kotwal and Boyd, p. 15).

Perhaps the person most emphatic in giving the prayer a moral focus was Framroz Rustomjee [1896-1978] (on whom, see Choksy, pp. 202-3), when he translated the mantras freely in his book of devotional prayers to be taught to children. In his view (Part 1, p. 41), *Aṣa* (here: Righteousness), was the primary motif and bound *Yenḥē hātqm* thematically with *Yaθā ahū vairiio* and *Aṣam vohū*: “from among the living human beings, in every act of devotion or sacrifice, / (whom) All-wise Lord (God) knows or recognizes (as being) more excellent, / by reason of their knowledge of (the) Divine Law of Righteousness and practice of virtues, / we revere all such men and women” (Part 1, p. 3).

In the end, whether *YH* was, and is, uttered as a cultic formula helping to guarantee the success of ritual sacrifice (cf. Molé, pp. 516-17; Darmesteter, I, p. 176) or is recited devotionally and felt as an individual moral affirmation, either way, the prayer can be said to orient the speaker toward the same Zoroastrian objective—the governance in the material [*gētīg*] world, as in the immaterial, of the Wise Lord’s right order, *Aṣa*.



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