

Lessons for modern life from the Gosh Yasht

How Ilm-e-Khshnoom reveals the true meaning hidden in the Yashts

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The *Gosh Yasht* might seem to be an odd place to find some practical lessons of life. But the Avesta abounds in such peculiarities. Some of its most obscure parts contain many of life's greatest teachings – of course they are well hidden in numerous allegories and mystic constructs. What is needed is a master key to unravel this book of mysteries. The objective of this essay is to show how the correct application of '*taavil*' or the inner essence of the Avesta can unlock its magnificent splendour and uncover its spiritual beauty – and give us real lessons for everyday living.

The Yashts form a major part of what is called the 'Younger' or 'later' Avesta, and have remained a somewhat baffling part of the Zarathushtrian scriptures. Some go as far as to term them 'literature' with some interesting tidbits of history, geography, astrology and mythology thrown in. Many aver that the Yashts represent a 'dilution' of the original thoughts as propounded by Zarathushtra in the Gathas: the resurgence of a pantheon of 'angels' – the Yazatas, whom Zarathushtra had 'banished' from the reformed Mazdayasni religion.

But the application of *taavil* reveals to us that the Yashts are a description of the work that a particular Yazata, or Divine Being performs in Nature. The very word 'Yasht' denotes something that is worthy of being worshipped, of attuning to. Thus by praying these Yashts, not only do we remember and venerate the work done by the Yazata in nature, we also in a very small but significant way, help that Yazata in his divine tasks. The Yashts are the perfect vehicle given to us by Zarathushtra to join him and his Yazatas in their never-ending task of taking all of us closer to the Creator Ahura Mazda.

The Gosh Yasht, which is more properly known as the *Dravaaspa Yasht*, is a short Yasht of 7 kartas or chapters. It contains the description of the work of the Yazata *Geush Urva* and her assistant *Dravaaspa*. *Geush Urva* or the Soul of the Earth is the mother of our Earth and its chief caretaker. There are various functions that *Geush Urva* and her twin *Geush Tashan*

perform in their quest to take Earth and its chief resident – man – closer to Ahura Mazda. One of the key functions is the spiritual progress of man's body and soul. The progress of man's body can happen only by the ongoing purification of its prime constituent – the anasers. The anasers are the building blocks of our body – our spiritual DNA which keep on multiplying in various permutations and combinations and give rise to the human body. In order to reach Ahura Mazda, man must purify his anasers – by the practice of the tarikats of the Zarathushtrian religion. Not only that, man must also help purify the anasers which are related to him and which are present in the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, and ultimately collect these and unify them in his own body and move one step closer to Ahura Mazda.

Of course Ahura Mazda does not expect us to do this onerous job without His help. Hence he has deputed a special divine being – a *Yazata* to help us in this task. That Yazata is Dravaaspa. The word Dravaaspa is generally translated as 'giving strength to horses'. But the application of taavil reveals to us a very different meaning. A horse denotes a vehicle that one may use to go from one place to another - quickly. It also implies that one must be strong enough to ride and control that horse – or it may take us where it wants, and not where we want to go. Thus Dravaaspa is that Yazata, who gives strength to a man who is trying to advance his body and soul by following the path of Asha. Dravaaspa guides any man or woman who is taking the first unsteady steps on the path of religion and shows them the true and straight path to Ahura Mazda. She (Dravaaspa is a female Yazata!) helps Geush Urva purify the anasers of such men and women and also ensures that they do not stumble or fall in their walk to God. Hence Dravaaspa is the patron saint of each and every one of us. She keeps a close watch on us and is ever ready to help us – we only need to ask her.

After the normal Pazend introduction, the first two paragraphs of the Yasht, which are repeated at the beginning of each of the 7 chapters give us a brief idea of the kind of work that Dravaaspa does on this Earth and in our own bodies. The first paragraph of the Yasht says that Dravaaspa gives health to cattle and beasts of burden, to old men and to young children. Dravaaspa keeps watch on that well lit path that gives long-standing friendship. What seems to be a jumble of ideas however reveals itself beautifully with the application of taavil.

This first paragraph aptly summarizes the divine functions of Dravaaspa. In her role as the purifier of anasers, Dravaaspa offers protection and health to different categories of beings. Firstly, when we begin to progress on the path of religion, Dravaaspa ensures that the spiritual benefits accruing to us are received not only by us but also by our anasers that are present in the in the bodies of cattle and beasts of burden. Why are some animals seen in very good conditions whereas some suffer the worst indignities? The answer lies in this taavil – that the condition of the animal depends on the spiritual condition of the man whose anasers are present in that creature. Dravaaspa is the divine agency that ensures that the benefits of our spiritual progress filters down to our lowest constituents.

The second category whom Dravaaspa offers health and protection is elders. We are aware of the various religious practices and tarikats that we need to follow as Zarathushtrians. However, what about very old or infirm people who are unable to do even a kusti on their own? Does Ahura Mazda have nothing for them in their time of distress? He does – Dravaaspa offers protection and health to those Zarathushtrians who are in such a state as to be unable to follow the basic precepts of their religion. She looks after such individuals and gives them the succour and strength to bear their pain and suffering, through which they will ultimately meet Ahura Mazda.

The third category that comes under Dravaaspa's protection is children. Dravaaspa protects the anasers of young children so that no spiritual pollution may attack them. This is precisely the reason that children do not face any restriction about going near a woman just out of pregnancy or when she is in her monthly cycle. Dravaaspa ensures that the spiritual pollution that emanates out of a woman in that delicate stage is not transferred to the child unwittingly.

Dravaaspa has taken care of animals, elders and children. This brings us to the question: what about us? The answer to that is found in the last line of the first paragraph, where it is said that Dravaaspa keeps watch on the well-lit path that gives long-standing friendship. What is the taavil? Dravaaspa is our spiritual guard-dog. She watches our every step. When she feels that we need her assistance, Dravaaspa steps in to provide it. We all have along way to go before we meet with Ahura Mazda. In this long journey we will have to take several births too. In this long exercise, there is only path for us to take – the path of tarikats or following the essential practices of the Zarathushtrian religion. Dravaaspa keeps this path well lit and always in front of our eyes – so that we may not lose track of our ongoing mission. And since

this path can take several births to complete, it is called a long-standing one, and since Dravaaspa never leaves our side, she is called as one giving long-enduring friendship.

We have seen that how the simple adjectives used to describe Dravaaspa in this first paragraph of the Yasht throw up such deep and beautiful meanings with the application of taavil. We now go to the second paragraph – which is also repeated at the beginning of every karta. Here we find four statements of fact that are mentioned about Dravaaspa. They are:

- Dravaaspa roams in a chariot. The wheels of this chariot are spiritual, and when they turn they emit a pleasant celestial tune.
- The horses of Dravaaspa's chariot are forever yoked. They are never set free.
- The chariot is fast moving, and very easy to manoeuvre on to any side.
- The brave Dravaaspa, who is well armed, sits in this chariot giving health and prosperity to all without fail. She gives various tools to the holy men.

Again we encounter seemingly innocuous and vague statements that have a very bland meaning if taken literally. Now let us apply the taavil and dig out the real meaning of all these four facts.

Firstly, the Avesta says, Dravaaspa roams in a chariot, whose wheels are spiritual and emit a celestial tune when they turn. This actually denotes the fact that the agency of Dravaaspa Yazata is present in our anasars. A chariot signifies a powerful spiritual entity that is in complete command of all its faculties and which helps others reach their destinations. Thus Dravaaspa roams around our anasars and our physical bodies, ever willing to give help to us. The agency that Dravaaspa uses to help us is spiritual – it invokes the blessings of Ahura Mazda – hence the spiritual wheels. Thus Dravaaspa is always in touch with those divine places where the presence of Ahura Mazda is most present and draws those blessings with the power of her innate abilities and gives that to us. Whenever we receive such spiritual blessings, there arises within us a feeling of spiritual bliss, which is denoted by saying that the wheels emit a celestial resonance.

Secondly, it is said that the horses of Dravaaspa's chariot are always yoked. This denotes that Dravaaspa is always working, without any rest to fulfil her duties. It also means that our bodies are always on the attack by the evil forces that threaten to destroy our anasars and cause us spiritual as well as physical illnesses. Dravaaspa maintains a constant and powerful vigil against these attacks and keeps them at bay.

The third statement about Dravaaspa is that her chariot is fast moving, and very easy to manoeuvre. What does this denote? Man, in his daily life causes several new obligations to spin up and fulfil certain of his old obligations. This constant barter of obligations gives rise to what is technically known as ‘Keshash’ or the law of cause and effect. Keshash can be of two types – one that is straight and easy to understand – the cause and effect are clearly demarcated, and the other is tangled – so tied up in different permutations that we are unable to see the cause and effect. This constant muddling of our Keshash causes great traffic jams on our highway to Ahura Mazda.

We become confused in our way. But not so for Dravaaspa. Armed as she is with divine powers, Dravaaspa can see through all these traffic jams with consummate ease. She skilfully dodges these mazes and shows man the true straight path, and she does that very quickly. This is allegorically depicted by her ability to drive the chariot fast and manoeuvre it easily.

Coming to the last fact, Dravaaspa is denoted as being well armed and health and prosperity giving. She also provides various tools for the benefit of the holy man. This shows the divine stature of Dravaaspa. She is so blessed by Ahura Mazda that despite being in the thick and thin of our daily battles, she is untouched by the spiritual pollution around her. She is ‘huraodha’ – well armed, well formed. Nothing can defile her. She drives her chariot in the anasars of sick men, giving them health and the succour to bear their pain. She pays special attention to the status of holy men – men who are going ahead on the path to Ahura Mazda – because they are the most susceptible to the temptations of evil – since Angra Mino will make special efforts to pull such holy men down. She gives them tools – spiritual strength – to withstand the forces of temptation that the evil one lines up at their door.

Thus the first two paragraphs of the Gosh Yasht reveal to us the wonderful ways in which Dravaaspa functions both within us and in the world around us. With the right application of taavil we realise how seemingly unconnected sentences hide such deep mysticism and beauty in them. Truly this can be the only way to understand our scriptures.

We now come to the main content of the Yasht. Like many other Yashts, the Gosh Yasht also follows a common narrative style. After the introductory paragraph describing the Yazata’s many attributes, a particular hero of ancient Iran or any other divine personage is described as having worshipped the Yazata at a specific place, offering ‘animal’ sacrifices and asking for

precise boons. The Yazata, after giving due consideration to the ‘gifts’ offered and the hero’s standing, either grants the wish or refuses it.

This peculiar composition has given rise to a lot of heartburn amongst genuine scholars and ample ammunition to the half-baked ones to ridicule and run down the religion. Many have described the contents as evidence of animal sacrifices, bartering with God and other retrograde practices that were rejected by Zarathushtra being reintroduced by the latter day priests. The question is: is this really so? Or is there a meaning behind these seemingly arcane passages? Once again, we apply the taavil to the passage and come up with a totally refreshing view.

To understand the Yashts we need to understand the history of this Earth and how the progress of man is inextricably linked to the progress of the Earth. To do so we have to study the concept of time. The Avesta mentions three distinct concepts of time: Zravane Akarne – Endless time that encompasses the entire creation; Zravane Daregho Khadata – one cycle of 81,000 years through which the earth passes from creation to destruction and Zravane Thwashe Khadata – an individual’s one cycle of birth to death. The entire creation thus moves within the endless time – Zravane Akarne, within which are the cycles of the Earth – Zravane Daregho Khadata and man’s individual time cycle – Zravane Thwashe Khadata.

The secret of understanding the Yashts lies in understanding what happens in one Zravane Daregho Khadata. As mentioned earlier, the Earth goes through a cycle of birth to destruction that lasts for 81,000 years. At the end of this cycle, a global deluge submerges the Earth. Before that happens, the last saviour – Saoshyans or Soshyos appears on the earth, and gathers the best amongst god’s creations and takes them to a place where the waters cannot submerge them. The Earth is then flooded – given a spiritual bath as it were, which lasts for a few thousand years. Then when the waters recede, the descendants of the group of souls that were taken up by Soshyos descend on the Earth to start life afresh. Before that happens, however, the Daevas – the evil ones descend on the Earth too and start their nefarious activities. The aim of the Daevas is to despoil the Earth and make it unsuited for humans to advance spiritually. To counter this, the leader of the first group of humans that descend on the Earth – Gayomard or Kayumars gives a strong challenge to the Daevas – fighting with them with all his strength. This fight is then carried on by his descendents including Hoshang,

Tehmurasp, Jamshid, Faridun, who were all ably assisted by the great paladin family of Sam, Nariman, Rustam and Zaal.

This scenario goes on for the first nearly 4000 years of every Zravane Daregho Khadata. Despite their best efforts, the great heroes can control the evil forces up to only a certain extent. When the efforts of the evil ones seem to be on the verge of success, when the load on Mother earth becomes too much to bear, when it seems that everything is lost and there is no hope for man – at that crucial time in Earth’s history Zarathushtra descends on the Earth. He then severely curtails the activities of the Daevas and renders them powerless to a large extent. He establishes the divine Pav Mahel: the palace of purity that draws Ahura Mazda’s blessings on the Earth and distributes them to Zarathushtrians. He sets up various institutions that will perform great deeds in nature and from which Zarathushtrians will draw sustenance for thousands of years to come.

After Zarathushtra, his tradition is carried on by his worthy successors and the Dasturs. Then, 14000 years after the start of the Zravane Daregho Khadata, the Earth again goes through a period of severe turmoil and unrest. The forces of evil rise up again and threaten to destroy creation. At that point, the first of the three saviours descends on the Earth and rectifies matters. We are living in those troubled times today – a time when the hope of the advent of the Rainidar – the Great Restorer is in the minds and hearts of every true Zarathushtrian. After a period that will witness the resurrection of the Zarathushtrian religion and when its rich culture and heritage will once again shine all through the world, the earth will once again be caught in the vice of evil – the second ‘qayamat’. At this time, the second saviour will descend on the Earth to rein in the evil that has crossed reasonable limits. Finally, at the end of 81,000 years, the evil goes so much out of control that the Earth needs to be given a spiritual bath. At this time, the final saviour – Soshyos descends and performs his function as described before.

This is the way the history of the Earth is linked to the progress of man – as each Zravane Daregho Khadata passes, man evolves and purifies himself, taking him one step closer to Ahura Mazda. At the same time, the earth also purifies herself and takes one more step to Frashokereiti – the Final Union with Ahura Mazda. And it is this long story of man’s battle with the evil both within and outside him that is revealed to us in the Yashts. The valiant efforts that the heroes of ancient Iran made to rein the evil forces, the divine agencies of

Ahura Mazda that helped them in their endeavours, the kind of might that the evil forces had and how they used that might against the heroes, the tragic stories of some good men and women who fell prey to the evil ones, the amazing encounters that our heroes had with various evil forces, all this and more is encompassed in our Yashts. And in giving us this wisdom, the Yashts also leave us with powerful and practical examples of how to conduct ourselves as true Zarathushtrians in this day and age.

Coming back to the Gosh Yasht, the 7 Kartas of the Yasht contain the description of how 7 heroes of Iran worshipped the brave Dravaaspa and asked for particular boons. This gives rise to the following queries: Why, who, how, where, what for? We have explained above why the heroes needed to ask for help from divine sources - since they were facing up to some of the most powerful evil forces of nature. So we have solved one riddle. So who were these seven heroes? Hoshang, Jamshid, Faridun, Haoma-Frashmish, Kai Khushroo, Zarathushtra and Kai Gustasp. Hoshang, of the Peshdadian dynasty was one of the foremost fighters against the Daevas. Jamshid the Great introduced the Golden Age in Iran – the age of immortality, where no one died, where there was no hunger, heat or cold. He ruled for ‘one thousand years’ before he was overthrown by the evil Zohak. Faridun was the great warrior of the Athavyan clan who was brought up by the holy cow Purmae and who defeated and overthrew the evil Zohak. Haoma-Frashmish was a great abed – a spiritually advanced person about whom we shall say more later. Kai Khushroo was a spiritually advanced master and a very pious soul. We do not need to say anything about Zarathushtra, except that he had descended on the earth for a specific reason – to contain the evil that had reached unacceptable proportions and to establish the Zarathushtrian religion from the old Mazdayasni Daena. Finally, Kai Gustasp was that brave Kyanian king in whose reign the Prophet Zarathushtra made his advent.

How did these heroes ask for help from Dravaaspa? Here we come to the thorny issue of animal sacrifices. Most of the heroes offered ‘a hundred of horses, a thousand of oxen and ten thousand of small animals’(Avesta: ‘*satem aspanam, hazangrem gavam, baezare anumayanam.*’). We need to read this very carefully. The passage does not say the hero offered ‘one hundred horses.’ Instead it says ‘a hundred of horses’. In that one insignificant ‘of’, is hidden the true meaning of this phrase. We are now aware of the backdrop against which these heroes had to ask for help from the Yazatas. They were putting up a tremendous resistance against the forces of evil. In this fight they were divinely inspired to approach the

Yazatas for help. But although they were spiritually advanced souls themselves, they were of course still not of the stature of Yazatas. Their bodies were not spiritually pure enough to approach the Yazatas. In other words these heroes needed to increase their own spirituality quotient before they could ask for favours from the Yazatas. This they did by the practice of strict spiritual disciplines. They raised the profile of their bodies in a manner where they would be able to rightfully ask of boons from the Yazatas. This immense spiritual exercise is depicted in the Avesta through the phrase: ‘a hundred of horses, a thousand of oxen and ten thousand of small animals’. That is, the hero raised the profile of his body to an extent where he possessed the power of a hundred horses: the ability to take others with him on the path to Ahura Mazda; the power of a thousand oxen: the gift to happily and ungrudgingly bear the spiritual load of others; the power of a thousand small animals: to help others gather their spiritual fragments from the lower kingdoms and ameliorate them in their own bodies. Once the hero had assumed this high stature, only then could he rightfully ask of a favour from the Yazata. It is interesting to note that throughout the Yashts when these passages occur, the hero never says: ‘please give me this boon’. The tense used is always the imperative mood- ‘Thou shalt give, dost thou give’. Why is that so? Because the hero has achieved the spiritual stature in Nature where the Yazata is bound to give him his due. Such is the beauty of Tavit where even an innocuous use of a different tense can be explained completely.

After answering why, who and how, we now come to where. Each of these heroes offered their ‘gifts’ to Dravaaspa at different places. For example, Hoshang worshipped Dravaaspa at the foot of the Elburz Mountain, whereas Jamshid did so on Mount Hukairya. Faridun asked for his boon in Gilan – a city with ‘four gates’, whereas Kaikhushroo worshipped her on ‘the other side of Lake Chaechst’. Many scholars have tried to find these places in the atlas, and some corresponding places have even been identified. But is it only something physical? By now we should realise that the Avesta cannot be read as a geography primer. We need to apply Tavit. And a new and completely different meaning comes to light.

The human body is composed of nine parts, divided into three groups of three bodies each: physical, semi-physical and divine. One of the semi-physical bodies is the ‘Keherp’. This body houses the 16 Chakhras or divine energy centres. These Chakhras, which are in various parts of our body, are centres that attract, process and distribute the divine energy of Ahura Mazda that flows throughout the cosmos. Further, each Chakhra has a specific spiritual function. The development of each of these Chakhras is an integral part of the process of

going closer to Ahura Mazda, and calls for intense spiritual exercises. Just as yoga and pranayam help develop the chakras of the Hindus, so also our religious Tarikats help in developing the 16 Chakhras of our bodies. As we develop each of these 16 Chakhras, we get closer to God and our ultimate aim of unifying with him.

We are aware that the progress of man and Earth are interlinked. Neither can do without the other. In many respects, the composition of the human body and the Earth are similar. For example, nearly 70% of the bodies of both Earth and man are composed of water. Thus it should come as no surprise that even the Earth has 16 Chakhras of her own. These are spiritual centres located at different parts of the planet that act as receiving, processing and distribution centres of divine energy. In those ancient times, each of these Chakhras was identified with an actual physical city. For example, the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Chakhra of the Earth is located at the foot of Mount Elburz, whereas the 1st Chakhra is located on the summit of Mount Elburz.

We are aware that the heroes of Iran were also masters of spiritual development. Each of them was at various stages of development – each had developed certain of their own Chakhras. Thus when they asked for boons from the Yazatas, they would go to that particular city whose Chakhra correlated with that Chakhra of their own body that was the most highly developed. Hence they would unite their own divine energy centre with the energy centre of the Earth and be in a position to gain tremendous spiritual strength. Once they were in that formidable position, they could counter the attack of the evil forces who also had their own power centres. This is the real explanation for the description of the various places where the heroes worshipped Dravaaspa as given in the Gosh Yasht and also other Yashts. This is the beauty of Tavail.

Finally we need to answer: what for? What were the boons that these heroes asked for? Was it for riches, land, and cattle? Was it something else? In some instances, the boons asked for seem to be too trifling, like personal vendetta. Is there something more? As usual, there is. We need to understand that each of the heroes had a preset function in nature. They were aware of what was required of them. Furthermore, each hero was aware of a serial progression of his task in Nature: that is, he knew that first he would need to develop a particular faculty for which he would require a specific Yazata's help. Then he would go on

to another Yazata and develop another faculty. Thus there is a natural progression in each hero's demands. This we will understand when we take each hero in particular.

What have we understood so far then? We have seen Dravaaspa's role in Nature as the protector and sustainer of those men and women who try to walk the spiritual path. She leads us onto the path of religious practices, keeps a watchful eye on our progress and steps in when we falter. She roams in our bodies and outside, purifying our anasers and helping us collect those anasers that are in the lower kingdoms. She gives health and well being to infants, elders and to the animals in whose bodies our own anasers are trapped. Her spiritual chariot roams through all our murky actions and shows us the clear way to fulfil our obligations. We then understood the concept of time and how the progress of man and the Earth are interlinked. We took a brief snapshot of a Zravane Daregho Khadata and understood the events that occur in the first 4000 years of every Zravane Daregho khadata. We have examined the great role played by the heroes in keeping the evil within reasonable limits. We saw that when, despite their best efforts, they could not do so and the Earth seemed to be in danger of getting destroyed, the Prophet Zarathushtra descends on the Earth and sets things right. We have studied how innocuous passages in the Yashts can be seen in a totally new light when the correct taavil is applied. We have proved that there is no concept of animal sacrifice in the religion, nor is there any retrograde practice of bribing Yazatas and then asking them for favours. We have seen how the heroes of Iran developed their own spiritual prowess, joined that with the divine energy centres of the Earth and arose strong to take on the might of evil. We have realised that the Avesta is not a geography primer and it is futile to hunt for places where none are intended. Finally, we have learnt the truth that every man has a preset role in nature for him, that the divine forces will guide him to that role, sooner or later. All this has revealed to us the glory of the Avesta, when seen in its true light. We can now begin to truly understand the deep meaning contained in the Yashts and realise the folly of those who dare to treat this scripture as literature. Truly it is not in their destiny to see the truth. May Ahura Mazda give them the humility to accept the truth. We now examine the role of each of the 7 heroes mentioned in the Gosh Yasht and draw practical lessons of life from their exploits.

The first karta of the Yasht contains the description of the request of King Hoshang, the founder of the Peshdadian dynasty, and the grandson of Gayomard, the leader of the souls

who descend at the beginning of the new Zravane Daregho khadata. As explained earlier, the Daevas began to cause havoc in the new world, and the Peshdadian kings and their warriors had a hard time protecting the earth from the attacks of the Daevas, which led them to ask for the help of the various Yazatas. Hoshang took the help of Ava Ardivisur, Mino Ram, and Ashishvang, besides Dravaaspa. Firstly, Hoshang had to raise his own level of divinity, for which he undertook strict spiritual disciplines, which are allegorically mentioned as the sacrifice of ‘a hundred of horses...’ as we have discussed earlier. Having done that, Hoshang comes to the foot of Mount Harbarez – today known as the Alburz Mountain, which corresponded to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th chakhra of the Earth. This is because the 2nd, 3rd and 4th chakhras of Hoshang himself were the most developed. Here, Hoshang invokes his spiritual right to ask for help from Dravaaspa and asks for his boon – that he may overpower the Daevas of Mazandaran – and more particularly the Daeva Mazainya. Among the various Daevas who were around at that time, Mazainya was the leader of a particular group of Daevas who specialized in creating an atmosphere of laziness and sloth in the world. This atmosphere would result in making men and women lazy in their spiritual and normal endeavours and thereby delay the progress of the earth and themselves. Hoshang asks for Dravaaspa’s help in his battle against Mazainya, which is given to him due to his spiritual stature. Having so armed himself, Hoshang goes forth and destroys him.

The second karta of the Yasht describes the request of the Peshdadian King Jamshid - the grandson of Hoshang and the son of Tehmurasp. The reign of Jamshid is considered to be the Golden Age of all civilization. It was marked by the reformation of evil to a considerable extent. Jamshid structured the Earth in such a way that regardless of the quantum of evil put on it, the Earth would not disintegrate. He established mechanisms that allowed the 1001 channels of Ava Ardivisur to descend their blessings on the Earth. This is allegorically depicted by the common story that during his reign, Jamshid eradicated hunger and thirst throughout the world. He ensured that the summers were not too hot and the winters were not too cold. There was no disease, death or pestilence. To do all this required tremendous spiritual prowess. Although Jamshid was a highly advanced soul, he needed the assistance of several Yazatas in his task. He thus asked for boons from Ava Ardivisur, Mino Ram, Ashishvang and of course, Dravaaspa. First, he raised his own divinity quotient by practicing strict spiritual disciplines described by the allegory of ‘a hundred of horses...’ Jamshid asked for Dravaaspa’s help at Mount Hukairya – a place where the Earth’s chakhras and his own advanced chakhras were in total consonance and he united with the divine forces of the

Earth's chakhra and performed the various feats that resulted in this Earth and its residents becoming immortal for a long period of time.

The only thing permanent in Nature is change. Following this dictum, a time came when even Jamshid fell to the onslaught of evil. His reign was followed by that of the evil Zohak. As glorious was Jamshid's rule, so inglorious was that of Zohak. The evil forces were in total control of the situation on the Earth. There was large-scale slaughter of pious men and women; untold suffering was caused to the residents of the Earth. Zohak is described as having 3 heads, 3 mouths, 6 eyes and unlimited reserves of wickedness. This is not fanciful exaggeration but holds deep truths. The number 3 describes the process of the unfolding of creation from Mazda, man's work and the subsequent return to Ahura. (This three-stage process is also known by the names of Ahuradat and Mazdadat.) Thus Zohak being described as having 3 heads is actually an indicator that he had the power to stop the three-part process of our evolution and return to Ahura Mazda. His three mouths indicate that his evil tongue had the power to falsely lead men astray from the process of Frashokereiti. The process of Frashokereiti is also depicted through the passing of the 6 Gahambars. The 6 eyes of Zohak indicate that he had the power to halt and even reverse the work of the 6 Gahambars. With this terrible power, Zohak wreaked havoc in the world, destroying several of Jamshid's fine creations. Among these were two of Jamshid's most powerful creations – two divine female forces who helped Jamshid maintain paradise like conditions on earth. These are allegorically depicted as Jamshid's two wives – Shehernaaz and Arnavaz. After Jamshid's downfall, Zohak destroyed the power of these two forces – which is depicted in the allegory that he captured these two ladies and imprisoned them in his black fortress. And so Zohak oppressed the world with his tyranny. Every creation of god cried out in torment. Just as a parched earth eagerly awaits the first rain showers, the good creations waited in anguish for a saviour. They waited long and desperately till finally the saviour arrived – in the form of the brave Thraetaona – more popularly known as Faridun – the vanquisher of Zohak.

Thus the third karta of the Yasht describes the request of Faridun to Dravaaspa. This is the beauty of taavil – each karta can be related to the next and the preceding. Faridun is described in the Avesta as 'visosur' – a product of 'boonak pasbani' – a true descendant of Gayomard. Faridun had the responsibility to reverse much of the evil done by Zohak and keep him in check. This was no mean task and he naturally asked the assistance of various Yazatas in his endeavours – among them were Ava Ardivisur, Mino Ram, Ashishvang, and of course

Dravaaspa. Once, again the hero first raises his spirituality quotient by practicing strict disciplines which are depicted in the allegory of ‘a hundred of horses...’ Then, so qualified, Faridun asks Dravaaspa for the boon that he may be able to overcome and destroy Zohak, and free the divine forces of Shehernaaz and Arnavaz. The main work of Faridun was to remove the tremendous materialism that had pervaded the entire Earth and its various chakhras. He needed to revitalise the 4 anasers of man. That is why he worshipped Dravaaspa in the ‘four-door city of Gilan’. Gilan represents the dominance of the spiritual element of a chakhra over the material. This was in consonance with the revitalised and energised 8th, 9th, 11th, 13th and 16th chakhras of Faridun. Dravaaspa granted the boon to Faridun, and so armed, he marched against Zohak, defeated him and freed Shehernaaz and Arnavaz, that is, freed the Earth from Zohak’s oppression.

An interesting point needs to be made here and that is this: even Zohak’s reign had a benefit to the ultimate progress of man. How so? The Avesta describes the Earth’s movement as ‘*skerenyao*’ – ‘screw-like’. When we drive a screw into wood, it appears to be moving out whereas actually it is driving into the wood. So also the movement of the Earth. We may feel that Zohak’s reign caused a delay in Frashokereiti. In fact, it is the other way around! Zohak’s reign saw such excesses being committed on the earth, that it in fact hastened the arrival of Faridun, and ultimately Zarathushtra! Such are the mysterious ways of God. Such is the beauty of taavil. The evil reign of Zohak thus came to an end and was replaced by the peaceful and long reign of Faridun.

Time passes and things change. The Peshdadian dynasty came to an end and then arose the mighty Kayanian dynasty. Things were getting ready for the advent of the Prophet. The fight between the Kings and the evil forces went on. Many Iranian nobles fell prey to the forces of evil. Some were clever. They gave an appearance of being in tandem with the evil ones, but actually were on the good side. One such great soul was Afrasiab. Afrasiab was a descendant of Jamshid, who decided it was better to wage the war against evil by being within the system. He attracted and became an associate of an evil power known as ‘Tur-e-Frangras’. He is thus known in the Avesta as Frangasyan. Afrasiab would work with the evil forces. He would encourage them with stories of the weaknesses of the Iranian heroes, and convince them to wage war against such heroes. In reality, he was sending the evil ones to their death. This continued for some time. But it was inevitable that Afrasiab would himself fall prey to the forces of evil. One cannot swim in muddy waters and remain pure. The perverted mind of

Afrasiab thus began working against the forces of good. He schemed and caused the deaths of two of Iran's greatest heroes – Agreras and Syavaksh. These two heroes were of the stature of 'nar-asho'. Only twelve such persons are born in an entire Zravane Daregho khadata. This devious working of Afrasiab caused a great distortion in the equilibrium between the good and evil forces. He therefore needed to be suitably punished and reformed. This onerous and extremely difficult task was given not to a warrior but an abed – a highly evolved spiritual soul, by the name of Haoma Frashmish. This pious abed was an associate of the Yazata Haoma and possessed the power of 'Frashmi' – the power to take one closer to Frashokereiti, hence his name.

Despite being a very advanced soul, Haoma Frashmish required the help of the Yazatas in his task of capturing Afrasiab. He thus asks for assistance from Mino Ram, Ashishvangh and Dravaaspa. But being of a very exalted nature, Haoma does not need to perform the spiritual disciplines that the other heroes had to perform before they asked for their boons. Hence the fourth Karta of the Gosh Yasht which describes the request of Haoma Frashmish does not contain the sentence 'a hundred of horses...'. Haoma worships Dravaaspa at the highest point of Mount Alburz. The stature of Haoma was so high that his 1st chakhra was most developed. The highest point of Mount Alburz is the corresponding chakhra of the Earth. Thence went Haoma Frashmish and asked the boon of Dravaaspa, that he may capture Afrasiab and deliver him to King Kaikhushroo. In reality, what the great soul was asking for was protection for his own anasers – so that he may not get defiled himself when he went close to Afrasiab who was in his prime with the power of Tur-e-Frangras. Dravaaspa grants him the boon, and so armed, the saintly soul went forth and captured Afrasiab and delivered him in the hands of King Kaikhushroo. An important lesson here is that even though Haoma Frashmish was such an advanced soul he was given the responsibility of only capturing Afrasiab and delivering him to Kaikhushroo. The punishment and reformation of Afrasiab was solely the prerogative of Kaikhushroo.

So who was Kaikhushroo? One of the greatest of Kayanian kings, and one of the most important forerunners of Zarathushtra, Kaikhushroo was given the responsibility of preparing the Earth for the advent of the Prophet. As such he had to keep the evil in reasonable check, for which he deployed the various heroes of Iran. In this work, Kaikhushroo's greatest opponent was his own maternal grandfather – Afrasiab. The perverted mind of Afrasiab was responsible for the death of two of Iran's greatest heroes – Agreras and Kai Syavaksh – who

was Kaikhushroo's father. The resultant effect of the loss of these two great warriors was such that it put severe strain on Kaikhushroo's work and gave tremendous strength to the evil forces. The only way to tackle this grave imbalance was to capture Afrasiab, make him realise his mistake and give him his just rewards. The re-conversion of Afrasiab would rectify the imbalance caused and prepare the ground for the advent of the Prophet.

This great event has been captured in the fifth karta of the Gosh Yasht, which describes the request for assistance of Kaikhushroo from Dravaaspa. Even though Kaikhushroo was a great king and highly evolved soul, he practices the strict spiritual disciplines of 'a hundred of horses...' and raises his spirituality quotient. He then approaches Dravaaspa on the banks of Lake Chaechasta and asks for the boon of being able to kill the perverted Afrasiab. Dravaaspa grants the boon, and so armed, Kaikhushroo approaches Afrasiab, who has been earlier captured by Haoma Frashmi as described in the fourth karta and kills him. The killing of Afrasiab is not to be construed as an act of revenge or vendetta, but is in fact a great lesson for all of us. Despite Afrasiab being his own maternal grandfather, Kaikhushroo kills the old man, to set right the imbalance that had been caused in Nature by his perversity. And before killing him, Kaikhushroo imparts Afrasiab's last lesson to him. The brave but misguided noble realises his mistake, and offers wholehearted Patet for it. This act destroys the tremendous evil forces that been caused by the death of Agreras and Syavaksh. Thus, even in dying, the brave Afrasiab performs his duty in Nature, and even in killing his own grandfather the Wise Kaikhushroo prepares the ground for the arrival of the Prophet. Such are the mysteries lying in our scriptures that are revealed to us by the application of taavil.

We can scarcely imagine those times, when the evil forces had a free hand and all the might of the Iranian nobles could only just about control them. As the reign of Kaikhushroo came to an end, the saintly Kai Lohrasp ascended the throne. And there was peace and tranquillity in the kingdom. After 120 years, his son Kai Gushtasp ascended the throne and thus began the final preparations for the birth of the Prophet. Kai Lohrasp retreated to the mountains and immersed himself in prayers and strict spiritual disciplines that helped hasten the birth of the Prophet. And it was indeed a fortuitous day when Zarathushtra descended on to the Earth, throwing the entire creation into ecstasy, hailing his birth. And the final countdown for the curtailment of the evil forces began. Zarathushtra started his divine missions, drastically curtailing the power of the evil forces, creating enormous reserves of good forces that would last the entire Zravane Daregho khadata, reforming those that had gone astray, and laying the

foundations of the Mazdayasni Zarathushtri faith. Among his many great disciples were highly evolved souls like the Wise Jamasp, Kai Gushtasp, his son Aspandiar, and his noble wife Ketayun, also called Hutaosa in the Avesta. The Prophet's missions were of such magnitude that even he required the assistance of the Yazatas. Among those that helped Zarathushtra was Dravaaspa. Hence the sixth karta of the Yasht contains the description of the request of Zarathushtra to Dravaaspa.

Given Zarathushtra's exalted stature, he does not need to go through the strict spiritual disciplines allegorised as 'A hundred of horses...' Rather, he performs a Yazashne of Haoma on the banks of the Vehdaiti river and asks his boon – 'that I may bring the good and noble Hutaosa to think according to the law, to speak according to the law, to do according to the law, that she may spread my Mazdean law and make it known, and that she may bestow beautiful praises upon my deeds.' A strange request to ask for from a Yazata. Did not Zarathushtra have enough convincing power to 'convert' Hutaosa to the Good Religion? Why was Hutaosa so important to Zarathushtra? What is Hutaosa's stature in the religion? It may come as a surprise to many but Hutaosa is in fact the Grand Dame of the religion. She is considered to be the greatest female power of the Zravane Daregho khadata; a highly spiritually evolved soul whose anasers were raised to a very high degree of sublimity by Zarathushtra's performance of the Yasna as mentioned in the sixth karta of this Yasht. This heightened state of her anasers gave rise to two powers in Hutaosa: utayuiti – a student-master relationship that leads one directly to Ahura Mazda; and zarzadaiti – an intense sense of devotion that makes one offer one's life to a cause. Through her utayuiti relationship with the Prophet, Hutaosa reached such an exalted stature that she conferred with him on matters of religion. Her zarzadaiti powers created a powerful Talesam – a spiritual force field that exists even today and moulds the character of young Zarathushtrian women. This Talesam also distributes the blessings from all Pav Mahel ceremonies to female Zarathushtrians. Indeed, just as Dravaaspa is our protector, Hutaosa is the grand Mother of our religion and the special protector of all Zarathushtrian women. Her spiritual reign – her Dasturi extends over all Zarathushtrian women and will remain so till the end of the Zravane Daregho khadata. Yet how many of us are even aware of her existence? This grand lady is thus remembered in the Gosh Yasht, because it was through the help of Dravaaspa that Zarathushtra raised the level of Hutaosa's anasers.

Let us for a moment go back to that age, the age of Zarathushtra's advent on this Earth, an age of immense spiritual battles between good and evil, on a scale never before seen and never to be repeated. Imagine the spiritual stature of our Iranian heroes, the brave paladins Rostam, Zaal, Saam, Agreras, Bezan, and Aspandiar who lead the fight against the evil forces. Can we even begin to understand the divine stature of the Kings of those times? The remarkable sacrifices and terribly heart-breaking events that happened in their lives as they offered their services to our Religion, so that the Prophet's mission could be accomplished are not even documented today. Yet enough evidence has been left in our scriptures for us to just wonder at their bravery and valour. All we need is the right key – the taavil to understand our scriptures. Among all these Kings, the greatest services were offered by Kai Gushtasp, in whose reign the Prophet came down on Earth. His stature in the religion is unparalleled, and he is remembered several times in our scriptures. The main mission of Kai Gushtasp was to spread the Mazdayasni Zarathushtri religion. This is not to be construed as conversion. Rather, the valiant king was given the job to remove the dark cobwebs of Daevayasni that had crept into all the corners of the world in the years preceding the advent of the Prophet. Despite Kai Gushtasp's best efforts, there remained 8 chieftains of evil who refused to see the right path and convert to good. He needed to show them the light, to reform them and set free the normal populace from their tyranny. This was no small mission and Kai Gushtasp needed all the support he could muster. He thus appealed for help from various Yazatas, including Dravaaspa for this task.

The seventh and last karta of the Gosh Yasht deals with the request of Kai Gushtasp to Dravaaspa to help him overpower these eight chieftains. Despite his stature, the King first performed spiritual exercises allegorised as 'A hundred of horses...' and raised his divinity quotient. So charged, the valiant King approached Dravaaspa on the other side of the banks of the river Vehdaiti and asked for his boon – that he may overpower these eight chieftains and show them the true path. Dravaaspa granted him the boon, and the King marched into battle against the evil forces and routed them – at a cost – he lost 37 of his 38 children.

Thus we come to the end of the Gosh Yashts and its seven kartas. The application of taavil has showed this Yasht is a totally different light from a literal translation. In doing so, this Yasht leaves us with important and practical lessons for everyday life. We are now in a position to imbibe the true spirit of the Avesta and relate it to our modern day lives.

The first practical lesson this Yasht leaves us with is to remember Dravaaspa whenever we are tempted by any evil. Since Dravaaspa is the protector of our thoughts and our guide to the true path, she will immediately come to our aid. This is an important spiritual discipline – yoga for those who claim there are no exercises in our religion. Whenever we are tempted, let us try to close our eyes and remember Dravaaspa. Let us imagine her in our mind's eye as a beautiful and valiant lady, riding a chariot drawn by strapping white horses, with weapons in her hands, breaking our evil thoughts to smithereens. Appeal to her for help and she will help us.

The second lesson for us to imbibe is to remember Dravaaspa whenever we are sick. Dravaaspa, in her role as the protector of our anasers gives help and succour to the weak and infirm. Physical illness is a manifestation of a spiritual disorder, and if we appeal to Dravaaspa to help us, it would be of great help, rather than go to assorted godmen of dubious reputations.

The third lesson is to remember the exploits of the heroes of ancient Iran and recount the great sacrifices they gave so that we could follow the religion today. Let us try to lead our own lives as shallow reflections of the lives of these great souls. Let us give back to our religion what it has given us – the right to be called a Zarathushtrian. Let us live up to their great reputation.

Let us remember the sad case of Afrasiab and learn the lesson that he who plays with fire will get burnt. He who swims in muddy waters cannot remain white and pure. Let us stick to the path of good. Let us renounce the path of evil. Let us not, for temporary material benefits, give up the path of good and become associates of evil, hoping that some day we will turn back – it will be too late. This is the fourth lesson from the Gosh Yasht.

Let us have the humility to learn from even our children and grandchildren. Remember the case of Kai Khushroo and Afrasiab, where Kai Khushroo, despite being the grandson of Afrasiab is given the authority to punish and reform him. And Afrasiab, even in dying realises his errors and offers true Patet for his sins and hence undoes most of the damage he had caused. That is the fifth lesson from the Gosh Yasht.

The sixth lesson from the Yasht is to remember the noble Hutaosa or Ketayun, the wife of Kai Gushtasp when we bring up our children. Let us pray to her divine presence and ask her to mould the character of our children, so that they may grow up as true Zarathushtrians. Let us tell them stories of our rich and ancient heritage, so that they may grow up as knowledgeable Zarathushtrians, who can look up to their culture with pride.

Let us try and raise our own faith and devotion to the religion to the levels of utayuiti and zarzadaiti that were present in Hutaosa. Let us ask her help for us to build and keep the faith in our Religion. Let us be willing to sacrifice all we have for the sake of our religion – that is the seventh lesson from the Yasht.

Let us always think of and try to follow the Path of Tarikats – the spiritual disciplines laid down in our religion. That is the only true path. Let us not waver from our own traditions and pick up alien influences. All we need is there in our religion – we just need the correct key to understand the religion. That is the eighth lesson that this Yasht imparts.

We know how difficult it is to follow the Path of Tarikats. We often derail ourselves; take wide detours from this straight path. Whenever that happens, let us remember Dravaaspa and ask her help – that she may guide us back to the true path. That is the ninth lesson from the Yasht.

The tenth lesson is for us to remember to pray to Dravaaspa to purify our anasers – to take us ahead in our journey to meet Ahura Mazda. If not everyday, let us try to pray the Yasht every Gosh roj. Let us make it a special point to remember her on that day and to re-dedicate ourselves to Zarathushtrian ideals.

Let us remember the great master, Ustad Behramshah Shroff, in whose destiny alone it was to stay with the Abed Sahibs of Demavand, who brought back this lost knowledge and gave it to us. Let us remember Dr. Framroze Chiniwala, that great writer, who wrote over 60,000 pages of what Behramshah taught, and from whose writings this author has tried to present the explanation of this Yasht.

Finally, let us remember and bow our heads to those great Abed Sahibs of Demavand, who even today keep alive the flame of Zarathushtrianism, whose silent protection has ensured our survival for all these years, who even today are preparing for the advent of the great saviour

Shah Behram Varzavand. It is only through their vigil that there are still Zarathushtrians in the world. Let us pray to them to ensure the quick arrival of the great saviour, so that we may redeem our pledge to India and resurrect the true Mazdayasni Zarathushtri religion once again in our Motherland Iran.

These are the lessons we need to imbibe from the Gosh Yasht. My efforts in this essay have been to prove that philology and Khshnoom are not mutually exclusive – that each needs the other. Only then can we have a better understanding of our religion and its scriptures. After all that is what we all want. Let us therefore, work together in the spirit of brotherhood, mutual respect and understanding and reveal to the world the true beauty of the Avesta, for rightly is it said: ‘That which is not there in the Avesta, is nowhere.’