

The Enigma of Yoishta Friyan

How IIm-e-Khshnoom deepens our understanding of the life and times of an ancient hero

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One of the best ways to understand any religion and its followers is to look at its folk literature. These tales of yore, handed down from generation to generation have an appeal that is timeless and do not cease to arouse wonder and awe centuries after they may have been first told. In doing so, these tales also impart important lessons for living life in a manner that is faithful to the religion to which those people belong. It is not surprising, therefore, that most of these tales would have a resonance somewhere in the scriptures. The world over, efforts are being made to assimilate these ancient tales and preserve them for posterity.

The Zarathushtrian religion too has its fair share of such stories. We have an immense storehouse of inspiring stories, which have religious and historical resonances from the epic Shah Nameh. Most Parsees are aware of the famous stories of *Rustam* and *Sohrab*, *Bezan* and *Manijeh*, *Faridun* and *Zohak*, which were recited to us by our parents and grandparents. In addition to these, we have other sources too, such as the story of *Arda Viraf* – a most compelling tale of a holy priest’s visit to the different regions of heaven and hell, or the story of *Adurbad Mahrespand*, whose feats of valour revitalised the sagging faith of thousands of Zarathushtrians at a time when the religion was in a period of real crisis. One more remarkable story is that relating to the enigmas of *Yoishta Friyan*, which we shall explore in this essay.

The tale of Yoishta Friyan is found in several Pahlavi manuscripts and is generally appended to the story of Arda Viraf. Manuscripts H6, K20 and K26 follow this style as also the old manuscript of *Mihrpanah Sroshyar* of *Nishapur* dated AD 1249. The story has been divided into four chapters, plus a postscript and a colophon. The original compilation of the manuscripts was done by Dr. Haug and further revisions and translations into English were done by Dr. E W West in 1892. I have followed this text and translation in the greater part but have added comments or changes to translations in the light of further study of the

Pahlavi language since over a hundred years have passed since the original translation was done.

The story of Yoishta Friyan goes thus: An evil sorcerer by the name of *Akht* challenged holy and learned men to answer various riddles set to them. If they were able to answer all these questions, Akht would let them live, else he would kill them. So riddle-some were the questions that Akht put, that none could answer them. This went on for some time and over nine hundred magavs, holy men, and the same number of holy women were killed by this horrible demon. Finally, Akht went to the city of *Frashno-Vazaran* – the city of ‘Enigma Expounders’. There he met with none who could answer his riddles. He was told of a man called Yoishta Friyan, who was holy and wise. Immediately Akht summoned Yoishta Friyan to his residence and challenged the young man to answer his riddles. Then begins the great game of question and answer. Akht puts 33 questions to Yoishta Friyan and the text recounts each of these. In turn, Yoishta Friyan asks Akht three questions too, and the tale draws to a horrifying, though satisfying climax. We shall now explore the tale as recounted in the Pahlavi ‘*Madigan i Yoishta Friyan*’.

The Pahlavi text begins with recounting that Akht the sorcerer went to the city of Frashno-Vazaran and challenged the holy men over there to answer his riddles. His attention was drawn to the presence of Yoishta Friyan whom he immediately summoned to his house. Yoishta Friyan came near the sorcerer’s house but refused to go in as he realised that the sorcerer had hidden dead matter under the carpet of his house. He thus asked Akht to clean the floor and change the carpet. Having done so Akht invited him again and asks him to sit on the cushion on the carpet. However, Yoishta Friyan realises that the cushion too is stuffed with dead matter and refuses to sit down, whereupon the sorcerer has the cushions changed and finally the two get ready for the session.

The first enigma that Akht asked was: ‘is the paradise in this world good, or that which is in heaven?’ Yoishta Friyan thinks hard and realizes that this is a trap: was he to say that paradise in heaven is better than the one on Earth, then the sorcerer would immediately say: ‘why are you still here then, let me dispatch you to the other paradise’ and kill him. So Yoishta Friyan answers that it is indeed the paradise on Earth that is better since even though a man may be lazy and do no good, he would not be punished for it in this life – his

punishment would come after he dies. Hence it is better to stay in this paradise on Earth rather than the one in heaven. A stupefied Akht remarks that Yoishta Friyan is the first person that has correctly answered the riddle thus. He had killed over 900 holy men and an equal number of holy women with this question and Yoishta Friyan has become the first one to beat him.

So Akht asks the second riddle: ‘which creation of Ahura Mazda is such that it is taller when it sits than when it stands?’ And Yoishta Friyan answers: ‘may you be in misery whilst living, felon and wicked tyrant! And fall to hell when dead! For it is the dog that is taller when he sits than when he stands.’

‘Which of the creations of Ahura Mazda is one that walks and yet leaves no footprint?’ went the third enigma. And Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘it is the sparrow that walks and plants no footstep.’

‘And which of the creations of Ahura Mazda is one whose tooth is sharp yet the horn fleshy?’ asked Akht, the fourth riddle. Yoishta Friyan replied: ‘it is the cock, the bird of the Holy Sraosha, and when it crows, it keeps away the misfortunes of life from the creatures of Ahura Mazda.’

And now we come to the first of the humorous, yet pithy riddles. The fifth riddle is asked: ‘Is a small knife good, or little eating?’ Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘may you be in misery whilst living, felon and wicked tyrant! And fall to hell when dead! for a small knife is better than little eating, since it is righteous to cut and collect the Barsom (twigs of the holy pomegranate tree used in the Yasna ceremony) with a small knife, while eating a little is useless since it hardly reaches the belly, and what is more, it creates wind!’ A succinct reply that is scientifically proven today that eating very little and traveling is more likely to produce nausea and bad wind than a reasonably full belly!

The sixth enigma is asked: ‘what is full? And what is that which is half-full? And what is that which is never full?’ Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘to be famous, yet keep the soul pious – that life is always full. To be in misery, yet keep the soul pious is half-full. But to live a life of wretched misery and make the soul wicked, that is always empty, never full.’

A humorous seventh riddle is asked: ‘what is that thing which men wish to conceal but which is not possible to conceal?’ And Yoishta Friyan replies wisely, ‘it is old age that men try to conceal but which is never possible to conceal.’

Akht then asks the eight enigma: ‘which is that living man who sees the demon of death and dies, and yet wishes that he may go back to the living?’ Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘one is the man who has performed no worship, nor drunk no Haoma juice; the second is that man who is of marriageable age and has not yet married; and the third is the man who has not honoured the fravashis, and has not given alms to holy men, these are the men who would like to go back to the living when their time of death approaches.’

The ninth riddle tests Yoishta Friyan’s knowledge of biology. Akht asks: ‘in how many months do the elephant and the horse and the camel and the ass and the cow and the sheep and woman and the dog and the pig and the cat give birth?’ Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘the elephant gives birth in three years, and the horse and camel and ass give birth in twelve months, and the cow and woman give birth in nine months, and the sheep gives birth in five months, and the dog and pig give birth in four months, and the cat gives birth in forty days.’

The tenth mystery is asked: ‘which man lives in more pleasure and more comfort?’ Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘that man lives in more pleasure and comfort, who is more contented, more wealth and un-anxious.’

So Akht asks the eleventh riddle: ‘which is that thing in this world that is like Ahura Mazda and the Amesha Spentas?’ And the wise Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘o wicked one! In this world, a ruler is like Ahura Mazda, his palace is like the Abode of Songs (Garothmaan), and the ministers of the king are like the Amesha Spentas, and the numerous courtiers in the King’s court are like the stars of the various constellations.’

The twelfth riddle is put forth: ‘of food, which is the more agreeable and more savoury?’ Answers the astute Yoishta Friyan: ‘of food, that is more agreeable and more savoury, which is acquired through honest labour and good deeds.’

Akht now lets loose a salvo of ten riddles all at once. He asks: ‘which is the one? And which the two? And which the three? And which the four? And which the five? And which the six?’

And which the seven? And which the eight? And which the nine? And which are the ten? The shrewd Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘the One is the good sun, which keeps the whole world illumined; and the Two are the inhaling and exhaling of the breath; and the Three are the good thoughts and good words and good deeds; and the Four are water and Earth and trees and beasts; and the Five are the five good Kayanians; and the Six are the six times of the Gahambars; and the Seven are the seven Amesha Spentas; and the Eight are the eight good celebrities; and the Nine are the nine openings in the bodies of men; and the Ten are the ten fingers on the hands of men.’

Thus we come to the 23rd enigma: ‘what is the colder?’ And a philosophical Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘o wicked one, it not what you think – for you think that the snow which remains on the high mountains, which the sun is not able to melt is colder. But it is the heart of an evil and wicked man that is colder. Call your own brother who is wicked, and see if you can melt his heart using any means at your disposal.’ The wicked Akht immediately called his brother and slew him on the spot. Then he removed his brother’s heart and tried to melt it using various means, but could not do so. The holy Yoishta Friyan held the heart in his pious hands, and lo, the heart melted!

And Akht asked the 24th riddle: ‘what is the hotter?’ And Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘the palm of the hand of a pious man is the hotter, for what the sun and the fire could not do with your wicked brother’s heart, I have done so with my own hands.’

The 25th mystery is asked: ‘what is good when it goes down? And what is good when it is chilled? And what is good when it shall die?’ Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘water is good when it goes down; and fire is good when it is chilled; and a murderer and wicked tyrant like you is good when he dies, for if the water does not go down (i.e. the levels of the waters in rivers and oceans) the world would be full of water, and if the fire is not chilled, the whole world would be afire, and if a wicked murderer like you were not to die, this Earth would be plain impossible to live on.’

A shameless Akht asks the 26th riddle: ‘what is heavier than a mountain? And what is sharper than a steel knife? And what is sweeter than honey? And what is fatter than the tail of a sheep? And what is more righteous than the righteous? And what is more just than the just? The wise Yoishta Friyan replies: ‘falsehood and irreverence are heavier than a mountain; and the tongues of men are sharper than a steel knife; and a child of fortune is sweeter than

honey, for its father and mother; and the Earth and rain of Spenta Armaiti are fatter than the tail of a sheep; and Tishtar, the Yazata, is more righteous than the righteous; and more just than the just is Vayo (the Yazata Mino Govad) the good, who is no favorer of any person, and takes no bribe, and has the same justice for the lord and the slave, one with the other.'

A nervous Akht now decides to bring his own wife, Hu-parsh, who is also the sister of Yoishta Friyan into the picture. He asks the 27th riddle. 'Which foot is the better and handsomer? Because of the many feet that I have seen, her foot is the handsomest and best which I have seen, who is Hu-parsh, thy sister and my wife.' Yet Yoishta Friyan refuses to be tricked. He replies: 'the foot of Water (Ava Yazata, i.e. Ardivisur Anahita) is handsomer and better, because there where Water places a foot, vegetation will grow; and there where Hu-parsh places a foot, will be dry.'

And so we come to the 28th enigma. Akht asks: 'in which act is the greater pleasure of women?' And Yoishta Friyan replies: 'It is not as you think, that the greater pleasure of women is in dressing up and doing housework, for the reality is that they are happier when they are in bed with their husbands.' A victorious Akht exclaims: 'I have caught you with the wrong answer and for that you will die. Let us go to Hu-parsh and ask her the true answer to this question. For Hu-parsh has never told a lie in her life and she will not tell one now. Quick, let us hasten to Hu-parsh.' And so they go to meet Hu-parsh, and Yoishta Friyan asks her the riddle. Now, Hu-parsh falls into a dilemma. She realizes that Yoishta Friyan has given the true answer. If she agrees with him the evil Akht will surely kill her. If she agrees with Akht, then her brother will be slain and she will lie – something that she has never done. And so the brave and pious lady covers her face with a veil and replies: 'there is great pleasure for women in dressing up and doing housework. But when they are without cohabitation, they are in pain and uneasiness. Hence the greater pleasure for women is when they are in bed with their husbands.' The wicked Akht, on hearing these words became so infuriated that without more ado he slew the holy Hu-parsh. And the soul of the pious lady immediately went to the Abode of Songs (Garothmaan) crying: 'good I am. Until now I had been pious, but now I have become more pious. Evil you are, O sorcerer Akht. Until now you had been wicked, but now you have become more wicked.'

Incensed with his wife's death, and exasperated with Yoishta Friyan's intelligence, Akht asks his 29th and most difficult question: 'what is that which has ten feet, and three heads, and six

eyes, and six ears, and two tails, and three pair of testicles, and two hands, and three noses, and four horns, and three backs, and the life and preservation of the whole world comes from it?' This amazing riddle had Yoishta Friyan stumped. Immediately he came up with a ruse. He tells Akht that he wishes to answer a call of nature – he wants to go to the toilet. And so the sorcerer asks him to go out of the house, finish his business and come back soon and answer the riddle or lose his life.

And so the pious Yoishta Friyan goes out and sits on a rock and thinks about how to answer this remarkable riddle. He appeals to Ahura Mazda for help, and the Wise Lord sends his messenger, the Yazata *Nairyosangh* with the right answer. Nairyosangh goes near Yoishta Friyan and whispers the answer. Since Yoishta Friyan cannot see anyone, he thinks it is the evil one playing tricks with him. And so Nairyosangh appears in front of him and gives him the true answer. The joyous Yoishta Friyan goes inside and reveals the answer to Akht: 'the answer is a pair of oxen along with a man ploughing the Earth, for from cultivation is the preservation of the world'. And the wicked Akht, when he heard this answer became confounded, and remained unconscious for three days and three nights. And when he arose from his stupor, the evil one said: 'you are truly the master of the riddles, for you have put your trust in Ahura Mazda, who has surely helped you with this last riddle.'

And so they go on to the 30th riddle. Akht asks: 'which horse is better?' Yoishta Friyan replies: 'it is the male, of a good pedigree.'

Akht asks the 31st enigma: 'what is that which is dry and will not burn? And what is that which damp and will burn? The intelligent Yoishta Friyan replies: 'It is dust that is dry and yet does not burn, and it is grease which is damp and yet will burn.'

And so Akht asks the 32nd riddle. 'Which king is good?' Yoishta Friyan replies: 'that king is better who is more merciful, possesses excellent wisdom and knowledge, and who is fond of the creations of Ahura Mazda.'

Akht then asks the final riddle: 'how many riches are there for you, O Yoishta Friyan?' Yoishta Friyan replies: 'there are three riches for me: that which I eat, that which I wear and that which I give to the poor and needy.'

Having finished his quota of 33 questions, and not having succeeded in trapping the wily Yoishta Friyan, the wicked Akht is now at the receiving end. Yoishta Friyan says: ‘The thirty and three enigmas, asked me by you, are all truly explained; now I ask you three enigmas; if you can give no answer, I will slay you immediately.’ And so Yoishta Friyan asks his three riddles: ‘how much is the value of the seed of one cubit of land? How much is the value of the ploughing of one ox? How much is the value of the duty and good work of one *Khaetwodath* (the ultimate spiritual merger of a male and female soul)?’

The evil Akht has no answer to any of the three riddles. He therefore tries to use the same ploy that Yoishta Friyan had used for the 29th riddle. He says he needs to answer a call of nature. Yoishta Friyan asks him to go out, finish his business quickly and come back and answer the riddles or die. The nervous Akht goes out and appeals to his master Ahriman – the evil one for help. And the evil one shows his true colours – he refuses to help Akht. He says: ‘if I was to answer you, all my creations and devices will become inefficient, and nothing will remain that can oppose the good of Ahura Mazda. The final resurrection – Frashokereiti will occur immediately. I am in no mood to allow that. So go forth, O evil Akht and give your neck to Yoishta Friyan for your time is up and your place is here in hell and your punishment is more severe than that of all the wicked.’

And so Akht returns dejected to the house and admits defeat to Yoishta Friyan, saying: ‘The enigmas are yours, O Yoishta Friyan, for you put your trust in Ahura Mazda and the Amesha Spentas and they helped you, but I, who put my trust in Ahriman, have been betrayed.’ The pious Yoishta Friyan then kills the evil Akht with that same small knife which is used to collect the Barsom (riddle 5), and thus destroys the pestilence caused by his evil, and rids the Earth of one of its greatest tormentors.

Thus ends the Pahlavi account of the tale of Yoishta Friyan.

This simple story used to be recounted at public meetings, handed down to children over the generations, and was used to make youngsters imbibe the basic facts of life and religion. The riddles themselves were so ingenious, that they helped the children become sharp and street smart. God’s help to Yoishta Friyan was used as an instrument to build the faith of children – to let them know that God was always willing to help those who were truthful and God-fearing. Similarly, Ahriman’s great betrayal of Akht was used as a lesson to explain the folly

of going over to the evil side for temporary material benefits. That this tale must have had a profound impact on the minds of youngsters is evident from its continuing popularity over the ages. It was even translated into Gujarati and recounted at religious meetings as recently as 50 years ago.

However, tales such as these have a religious resonance. We need to explore the Avesta scriptures and see if there is any reference to Yoishta Friyan. Not surprisingly, there are two references to Yoishta Friyan in the extant Avesta. He is remembered in the roll call of honour in the 27th Karta of the Fravardin Yasht (Yt. 13, 120), and in the 20th Karta of the Ava Yasht (Yt. 5, 81). This gives a totally new dimension to the story. In earlier essays (cf. Gosh Yasht essay) we have seen that the Avesta lends itself to numerous translations and when we apply the right 'taavil' or the inner essence of the Avesta we arrive at a refreshing insight into a seemingly innocuous phrase. We shall, therefore, first go to the Avesta references to Yoishta Friyan and explore them, and then apply the taavil and see what we come up with.

The first reference to Yoishta Friyan is in the Fravardin Yasht, Karta 27 (Yt. 13, 120), where his righteous soul is remembered as one of the great worthies in the roll call of honour of the religion. It simply says:

'We remember and worship the Fravashi of the holy Yoishta, of the house of Friyan.'

This reference implies that Yoishta Friyan must have been a man of some distinction to be included in this roll call of honour along with other worthies of the religion. But what did he do to deserve this honour? No answers.

We then go to the second reference – Ava Yasht, Karta 20. (Yt.5, 81)

"To her did Yoishta, one of the Fryanas, offer up a sacrifice with a hundred horses, a thousand oxen, ten thousand lambs on the banks of the Ranghu river. He begged of her a boon, saying: "Grant me this, O good, most beneficent Ardivisur Anahita! That I may overcome the evil-doing Akhti, the offspring of darkness, and that I may answer the ninety-nine hard riddles that he asks me maliciously, the evil-doing Akhti, the offspring of darkness."

Ardivisur Anahita granted him that boon, as he was offering up libations, giving gifts, sacrificing, and entreating that she would grant him that boon.'

Now here is an Avesta construct that we are familiar with. Our earlier essay on the Gosh Yasht has explained the methodologies involved in this so-called ‘sacrifice’. To recap shortly, this was a spiritual exercise which involved raising the divinity quotient of the hero before he could go up to the Yazata and ask him/her for a specific favour. Thus, Yoishta Friyan raised his divinity quotient and then went before Ardivisur Anahita and asked her for a favour: that he may overcome the 99 malicious riddles of the evil Akhti. And Ardivisur grants him the boon.

This simple explanation from the Avesta, however, leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Who exactly was Akht? Why did he roam around asking everyone his riddles? Was there no authority that could stop him from killing a large number of holy men and women? And when Yoishta Friyan was his own brother-in-law, why did he not go to him in the first place? And why did Yoishta Friyan not approach the sorcerer himself when he realised the terrible carnage that Akht was causing? Why was the saintly Hu-parsh married to a demon like Akht? These are some of the questions that come to mind when we do a cursory study of the text and its Avesta references. We therefore, need to apply the ‘taavil’ – the inner essence of the Avesta, to come up with an explanation that can satisfy us.

Taavil reveals to us that the Fravardin Yasht contains the names of illustrious personages who appear on the Earth at various points of time and help creation go closer to Ahura Mazda. The work of these eminent men and women creates tremendous force fields in Nature, called kuniyats from which ordinary men and women can draw sustenance by attuning to the kuniyats in a particular manner. For example, the tradition of war-cries is an ancient exercise that results in the warrior getting courage and the strength to wage battle against his foes through the process of attuning his own body and soul to the kuniyats of his chosen ancestor via the rendition of the war cry in a particular tone and tenor. The war cry is a sort of device which he uses to merge with the force-field of his chosen Ustad, and then draw on its vast reserves to fight the battle. Hence there were different war cries used by each warrior as is evident from the Shah Nameh. Similarly, in Indian classical music, the phrases (called ‘cheez’) sung for each raga are hundreds of years old. Musicians recount that while singing these ancient lyrics, they feel a surge of strength in their bodies and are able to explore greater depths of the raga than they would were they to sing a self composed cheez. This is nothing but them being able to draw strength from the mini-kuniyats created by the ancient

masters of music who created and sang these compositions hundreds of years ago and which were handed down from guru to disciple in an unending tradition.

Yoishta was a descendant of the Friyan kuniyat which was created by Friyan, an ancient person of eminence. The word Friyan contains the root *fra* ‘to take forth’. Hence Friyan was one of the pre-Zarathushtrian worthies who took the creation forward and made it possible for Zarathushtra to descend on Earth. The word Yoishta is derived from *yeshiti* which is derived from the root *yaz* ‘to worship, to attune’. It signifies that Yoishta was the performer of great Yasnas, one who practiced severe and difficult spiritual kinetics, and thereby took the entire creation further to Ahura Mazda. According to the *Datestan-i-Dini*, a Pahlavi book dealing with religious issues, Yoishta Friyan was one of the 7 immortal disciples of Zarathushtra, and the spiritual head of the region of ‘*Khvaniras*’ (Datestan-i-Dini, Chapter 90.1).

The allegory of the 99 questions requires us to delve a little into numerology. The Supreme Godhead is Ahu, who is denoted by the number 1. Those who are in the process of trying to reach Ahu, and are very close to doing so are denoted by the number 01. Those who have reached Ahu and perfection, such as the Yazatas and the Amesha Spentas are denoted by the numeral 10. In order for the other souls to reach Ahu, he has created the Immortal Cosmos – known as Hasti, and the Mortal Cosmos – known as Nisti. Those who are in Hasti, and working towards Ahu are denoted by the numbers 1 to 10, whereas those still in Nisti and working towards reaching Hasti are denoted by the numbers 11 to 1001. We may illustrate this as under:

<i>Allegory</i>	<i>Number</i>
Ahu	1
Those close to Ahu	01
Those with Ahu and achieved perfection	10
Those in Hasti and reaching out to Ahu	1 to 10
Those in Nisti and reaching out to Hasti	11 to 1001

Man is full of wants and desires. He desires material wealth and happiness, a good life, a happy family, a congenial working atmosphere. As soon as he fulfils one desire, another one creeps into his psyche, which is of greater grossness than the earlier one. Hence, the more he achieves, the more deficient he feels. This incompleteness, this insecurity is denoted by the numbers 8, or 88 or 888.

Thus salvation, as per numerology, lies in man going across the state of 8, 88 or 888 and achieving 10, 100 or 1000. To do so, however, he must cross the barrier of 9, or 99, or 999 – the spiritual difficulties that tie him down to the level of 8, or 88, or 888. These spiritual roadblocks or barriers are raised by the evil personages who are forever lurking around, trying to derail a man's onward progress.

Thus, the 99 questions posed by Akht to all the great men and women he killed, were the traps of filth and lucre he set for those souls who were on their way to Ahura Mazda, their last test before they could vault into the next higher level. The word Akht means filth, pestilence, evil. Thus Akht was an evil sorcerer who tried to stop the progress of persons trying to get ahead spiritually by trapping them in such filth or pestilence. So what were those questions? As per the Ava Yasht, these questions were no ordinary riddles. They are described as being '*tbaesho-parshstanam*' – causing illness, and '*khruzdranam*' – ones that grind hard. Taavil explains that these questions were composed by the evil Akht using the knowledge of '*Staota*' – the law of vibrations. They can be likened to a tightly wound spring which was given to the unsuspecting victims. As they tried to open the spring, (i.e. answer the questions) the force with which the spring would burst open would actually kill the victim, if he were not spiritually strong enough to take the force of the vibrations. Of these 99 questions, only 33 have survived, which are recounted in the later Pahlavi manuscript.

We now come to those 900 holy men and women that Akht boasts of killing when Yoishta Friyan answered the first riddle. Is there a deeper meaning in that phrase? To answer that we need to delve a little into the origin of man and his descent from Ahura Mazda and subsequent return. Taavil reveals that within each of us lies a part of Ahura Mazda – what we call the Ruvan (Avesta 'urvan'). This part of Ahura Mazda came to us through a process of fragmentation using the laws of decimalisation, called '*Daseme stutam*' in the Avesta. (Gatha Ahunavaiti, Yasna 28.9) While the actual process of this decimalisation contains various steps, we present here a very short and condensed version that will serve our purpose.

Essentially, the process starts with the division of the one part into two – called the male and the female. Each of these parts is then divided into ten parts. As Ahura Mazda showers his blessings on these ten parts, nine of the ten merge back into him. The remaining one tenth is further divided into ten parts and the blessings showered. Again 9 of the ten merge back into Ahura Mazda. The remaining part (one hundredth of the original) is further broken into ten

parts and the whole process repeated. This process continues for a certain number of times, till the soul is our own body is one such miniscule part of the original. Thus both the male and the female parts of the original whole are thus subdivided. A further one tenth of the part in us is present in the animal kingdom, a one hundredth part in the vegetable kingdom and a one thousandth part in the mineral kingdom.

Our entire job on this Earth is to gather our fragments from the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms – not by eating them, but by following the spiritual exercises of the religion which will result in these parts automatically becoming attracted to us and arriving into our bodies through various means. Thus we go ahead, collecting our parts and then pass on to the higher realms where we further advance, and merge into our higher selves. This process continues till all the parts of the male portion of the original whole are collected and made ready and similarly all the fragments of the female side also advance and reach the state of wholeness. The final union of the male and female parts of the original is a glorious and stupendous event in nature, and is known in the Avesta as ‘Khaetwodath’, wrongly translated as ‘next of kin marriage’.

Thus the explanation of the 900 holy men killed by Akht is simply this: There were 900 great souls at that time on the Earth, whose female counterparts had collected all their fragments and were awaiting their final union with the male. However, the male counterpart was still on the Earth, busy collecting its fragments. A last test awaited them and then they could meet the female counterpart and engage in khaetwodath. This final test was given to them by Ahura Mazda through the agency of the 99 questions of Akht. The last remains of filth and pestilence in their bodies was removed by the reaction of their trying to answer the questions of Akht. The reverse action of the Staota-filled questions liberated their souls from their physical bodies (i.e. they died) and the thus freed soul flew away to meet with its female counterpart that was eagerly awaiting its arrival.

We now come to the saintly Hu-parsh. Taavil reveals that Hu-parsh was indeed the highly advanced female counterpart of the evil Akht. Although the female counterpart had completely collected its fragments and was ready for khaetwodath, the male part lagged far far behind – as is evident from the nature of Akht. The female part had, therefore, consciously stopped her progress in the higher realms and descended on the Earth to hurry up the process of Akht collecting his fragments. This is related in the story by the fact that the

saintly Hu-parsh was a lady who had never spoken a single lie in her entire life – a technical and physical near impossibility. When she tries through various means to mend the evil ways of Akht but fails, she realises that the only option is to use her own brother. Hence it is only after killing lots of other people, that Akht is guided to the city where Yoishta Friyan resides. And then the contest between Akht and Yoishta Friyan begins. As the contest ensues and Akht finds himself getting out-witted by Yoishta Friyan he ropes in his own wife to help him, little knowing that it is indeed his wife that will help him – but in a way he least realises.

An important point to remember here is that Nature works on the principle of action and reaction. The actions of Akht so far had not yet been reacted on by Nature. But they were due for a reaction. Akht brought his wife into the contest with the thought that she would reply as per his wishes. Instead her reply is in her brother's favour. This enrages Akht so much that he immediately kills his wife. This is the final act that Nature is waiting for to begin its reaction on Akht. And Nature works through the agency of Yoishta Friyan. As the soul of Hu-parsh leaves her body it exclaims: 'Good I am. Until now I had been pious, but now I have become more pious. Evil you are O sorcerer Akht. Until now you had been wicked, but now you have become more wicked.' That is, your cup of evil has over flown, o wicked man! My work is over here, since the reaction that Nature will wreak on you through my brother Yoishta Friyan will remove all the vestiges of evil from your soul and make it ready for union with mine.

Thus Yoishta Friyan out wits the sorcerer at his own game. That is, the Staota loaded questions that Akht fires on Yoishta Friyan are ably handled by him, since he has the protection of the Yazata Ava Ardivisur – he had taken that precaution before venturing to the contest as is evident from the Ava Yasht. Not only does Yoishta Friyan take the tremendous load of the Staota loaded questions on his divinely insured body, he intensifies the power of the questions manifold through his spiritual prowess and throws them back on Akht – whose body is unable to take the load of the exponentially charged Staota. Hence the reaction that Nature is awaiting to give the evil man is given through the agency of Yoishta Friyan. The effect of the super-charged Staota is such that it disperses every atom of Akht's body. The evil woven into every atom of his body is dissolved, and the soul emerges out pure – and flies off to meet the soul of the waiting Hu-parsh. That is why the story recounts that Yoishta Friyan killed Akht with the small knife that priests use to cut the twigs of the pomegranate

tree in the Yasna ceremony – that is, Yoishta Friyan kills Akht through the power of his Yasna – thus proving true to his name – the performer of the highest spiritual kinetics.

Such are the mysterious ways in which Nature works, giving benefit to the good and bad to the evil – as is borne out by the Gathic stanza '*akem akai vanghuhim ashim vanghaove*', i.e. 'Evil unto the evil (man) and good blessings unto the good (man).' (Gatha Ushtavaiti, Yasna 43.5). These ancient truths were preserved for posterity through the agency of stories such as the one we have seen. The outer story contains its own pearls of wisdom, while keeping the inner essence safely tucked away to be revealed only to the true aspirant of the religion. We once again realise that the Avesta is open to several levels of translation, each with its own beauty. However, the true grandeur of the scriptures can only be revealed through the application of the right taavil – the inner essence of the Avesta, which is mentioned in the Gathas as the knowledge ('Khshnoom') which the saviours will teach the world (Gatha Spenta Mainyu, Yasna 48.12). May we become worthy enough to be able to understand this divine knowledge, and more importantly, put its precepts into practice.