

FIRE IN AVESTA

Presented by Ervad Gustad Panthaki

At The North American Mobed Council AGM

Montreal, Canada April 14-15 2006

We find many references in Avesta and Pahlavi literature to show that Fire is venerated, and equated with the glow of Ahura Mazda.

We also find that there is a close association of Fire and Asha in Zoroastrianism.

Asha primarily means Cosmic Order, similar to what ancient Aryans call it "Rta" in Sanskrit.

Aryans was a stock comprised of modern days Hindus and Zoroastrians, and they put forward an ideal to be in tune with cosmic order, and through it, with Omniscient God: From Nature to Nature's God.

In order to achieve this, Zarathustra has provided the path of Asha for mankind. It is well said Yasna 72:

Aevo panto yo ashahe, vispe anyeshām apantām

"There is only one path, the path of Asha, all the rest are no paths."

Asha has many meanings and connotations such as; Purity of mind and body, Truth, Justice and righteousness.

In the mechanics of Ameshā Spentā "Asha" is third in line after Ahura Mazda and Vohumana, and there it is named with an appellation "Vahista" meaning the best.

Asha Vahista is presided over Fire, Ahura Mazda's most glowing creation. In Bundahishn, it is said that "Ohrmazd created fire and

attached to it a ray from the endless light.” Aryans too paid glowing tributes to fire in Rig Veda. No doubt that a devotee yearns to have the glimpse of the Supreme Being through the medium of fire.

Let us now turn to the relationship between Fire and Asha in Zoroastrian literature.

From the Gathas:

(i) In Yasna 34-4 the devotees yearn for the bright fire of Ahura Mazda through Asha.

At toi Ātrem Ahurā aojonghvantem ashā usemahi

"O Ahura Mazda we ardently desire Thy mighty Fire, through Asha."

(ii) In Yasna 43-4 Ahura Mazda provides justice through the heat (glow) of His Fire and the strength of Asha.

Thwahyā garemā āthro ashā-aojangho

hyat moi Vangheush haze jimat Manangho

"And (Thou) shall come to me through the heat (splendour) of Thy Fire, possessing the strength of righteousness and good mind."

Let us now turn to post Gathic literature.

In Haptan Yasht (Yasna 36:1) we come across a very interesting simile.

Here Fire is compared with Ahura Mazda's beneficent mind:

Ahyā thwā āthro verezenā paouruye pairi-jasāmaide,

Mazdā Ahurā thwā thwā mainnyu spenishtā,

Ye ā akhtish ahmāi yem akhtoyo dāonghe

"(We) first approach you through your agency, this Fire,
O Ahura Mazda which is your beneficent mind,

Whoever is near filthiness you you remove filthiness."

Further in Haptan Yasht (Yasna 36:3):

***Ātarsh voi Mazdāo Ahurahyā ahi,
Mainyeush voi ahyā spenishto ahi***

"O Fire you are the symbol of Ahura Mazda, you are the symbol of the beneficent mind."

In Hormazd Yasht-7 we come across an oblique statement, that the whole creation (universe) is created through Divine Cosmic Energy (Asha/fire):

pukhdha vispa vohu Mazdadhāta asha-chithra

"(My) fifth name is the whole good creation of Mazda, the seed of Asha"

"Seed of Asha" is the cosmic energy which is the origin and sustenance of life.

In Rig-Veda 10-121-001, we find a similar statement:

***Hiranayagarbha samavartatāgre
Bhutasya jāta: patirekāseet***

"In the beginning the golden egg (fire),

He was the Lord of all the worlds, as soon as He came to be."

Compare "golden egg" and "seed of asha" for similarity of the two quotes.

In Ardibehesht Yasht-1, Ahura Mazda instructing Zarathustra that for the worship and invocation of Him and the Ameshāspand, Zarathustra

must appoint Ardibehesht (the Fire) as the praiser, the invoker, the extoller, the glorifier of all good shining lights and brilliant works

Adoration, respect and symbolization of fire were in vogue before Zarathustra. The very first line of Rig-Veda (I-001-01) states:

Agnimile purohitam yajhasya devam rutvijam

"Let us honour the fire, the chosen priest, god, minister of yagna"

In Gita 10-36 Krishna tells Arjuna that he is ***tejas tejasvinam aham*** "the glory of the glorious". In Hormazd Yasht we come across similar appellation for Ahura Mazda ***rayomand khorehmand***.

The Koran 27-8 and 28-30 states that Moses sees Jehovah as a fire in the bush; not the physical fire, but the glory of the Angels, a reflection of the glory of God.

In the Bible,
Leviticus 6-12 states:

And the Fire upon the alter shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning.

Leviticus 6-13 states:

The Fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out.

Compare our rites of ever burning Fire and praying with an offering of sandalwood in Fire temples, and the boi ceremony.

In the final analysis we get clear notion through mysterious, allegorical, poetical and lucid language of Avesta and Rig-Veda; and also from The Koran and Bible that:

- Fire represents cosmic order and energy
- Fire represents righteousness, truth and divine law
- Fire represents individual spark (ātmā) in every human being
- Fire represents universal spark (Ahura Mazda-paramātma) unto which all other sparks (fires) finally merge; *Man āno āwāyad shudan* "I have to reach Him".

This short essay provides a glance through Zoroastrian and other religious literature the veneration, respect and symbolization of fire to realize the Supreme.