

Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture Extract # 143 – Zarathushtra explains the role of Aathra - Atash - Spenta Mainyu Gatha - Yasna 47 Verses 5 - 6

Hello all Tele Class friends:

Last Saturday on 30 January, thousands of our Zoroastrian Humdins in Iran, North America and other countries celebrated the religious feast of Jashn-e Sadeh by burning firewood in an open space to signify the coming of spring and as a symbolic token of the eternal fight of light against darkness.

In India where I grew up, we knew about the legend of Sadeh in our Iranian History class in our wonderful Boarding School of M. F. Cama Athornan Institute but we Parsis have forgotten most of our old Iranian customs like Navroze and Sadeh but thanks to our Iranian Humdins, these ancient festivals are being celebrated among all Parsi/Irani diaspora.

Sadeh in Persian means “hundred” and refers to one hundred days and nights before Navroze on 21st March. Sadeh is a mid-winter festival that was celebrated with grandeur and magnificence in ancient Persia. It was a festivity to honor fire and to defeat the forces of darkness, frost, and cold.

Our very good friends and teachers, [Pearl and Poras Balsara of Dallas ZANT have created a very good PowerPoint Presentation on Sadeh and I have attached it to this weekly.](#)

Legends have it that King Hushang, the 2nd king of the mythological Pishdadian dynasty (Pishdad means to give the Law), established the Sadeh tradition. It is said that once Hushang was climbing a mountain when all of a sudden he saw a snake and wanted to hit it with a stone. When he threw the stone, it fell on another stone and since they were both flint stones, fire broke out and the snake escaped. This way he discovered how to light a fire. Hushang cheered up and praised God who revealed to him the secret of lighting a fire. Then he announced: “This is a light from God. So we must admire it.”

According to religious beliefs, Jashan-e Sadeh recalls the importance of light, fire and energy; light which comes from God is found in the hearts of all HIS creatures.

During ancient times, Jashan-e Sadeh was celebrated by lighting fire. For Zoroastrians the chief preparation for Sadeh was and still in some parts is the gathering of wood the day before the festival. Teenage boys accompanied by a few adult males would go to local mountains in order to gather camel thorns, a

common desert shrub in Iran. The boys would take the camel thorns to the temples in their cities.

In Sassanian times huge bon fires were set up. Priests led the prayers specific to fire 'Atash Nyaayesh' and performed the correct rituals before it was lit at sunset. People would dance around the fires. Wine an expensive luxury would be served communally and like all other Zoroastrian religious ceremonies the occasion would end with fun, merriment and feasts.

The fire was kept burning all night. The day after, women would go to the fire in the morning, each taking a small portion of the fire back to their homes to make new glowing fire from the "blessed fire" of the temple. This is to spread the blessing of the Sadeh fire to every household in the neighborhood. Whatever is left from the fire would be taken back to the shrine to be placed in one container and kept at the temple until the next year. This way the fire is kept burning all year round. The "eternal fire" also symbolizes the love of homeland which is always alive like a fervent fire in the people's hearts.
(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadeh>)

So, let us ask: What does our Prophet Zarathushtra has to say in his Gathas about Fire – Aatash – Aathra?

Our very good friend Dina G. McIntyre with her scholarly friends created "An Introduction to the Gathas" in a twelve-lesson course on the Gathas at a basic level. It was published in twelve booklets, once a month, from October 1989 through September 1990, and was distributed world-wide to interested persons.
(<http://www.zarathushtra.com/z/article/dgm/index.htm>)

In this course, our very good friend, Dr. Lovji Cama, ZAGNY, with whom I came to this country in a boat as a JN Tata Scholar in September 1960, wrote the essay on: Aathra, Fire in the Gathas of Zarathushtra at:

<http://www.zarathushtra.com/z/article/dgm/vol7.htm#volume7>

He points out that Aathra and its cognates are mentioned 8 times in Zarathushtra's Gathas. He further states:

"For Zoroastrians, fire is the symbol of their religion. Almost all religious ceremonies are performed in the presence of fire, which may be a permanently consecrated fire of an Atash Behram or Atash Aderan or that which is consecrated for the occasion. Fire holds the central place in a Zoroastrian temple and the worship of God is performed in front of it. The permanently consecrated fires are objects of great reverence and the physical fire is treated as a living being and is referred to as Atash Padshah (king) by the priests in present practice."

“When a physical object becomes such a powerful and respected symbol, it becomes necessary to know exactly the meaning of the symbol. For example, does the consecrated fire represent God? Does it represent a particular aspect of God? Does it represent a connection between the spiritual and physical world?”

In order to answer these questions, Lovji analyzed the entire Gathas of Zarathushtra and arrived at a conclusion that Zarathushtra refers to Aathra – Aatah 8 times in his Gathas. He analyzed all these 8 instances to find out what Aathra symbolizes in Zarathushtra’s mind.

Lovji uses mainly Dr. Irach J. S. Taraporewala’s translation for the Gathas.

Today, we will cover one of these 8 references of Aathra in Gathas pointed out by Lovji from the 2 verses of Spenta Mainyu Gatha, Yasna 47 Verses 5 – 6, as given below:

Zarathushtra explains the role of Aathra – Aatah - Spentaa Mainyu Gatha - Yasna 47 Verses 5 - 6

(Please hear the attached .mp3 file for its recitation)

- (5) Taachaa Spentaa Mainyu Mazdaa Ahuraa,
Ashaaneh choish yaa-zi chichaa vahishtaa;
Hanareh thwahaat zaoshaat dregvaao bakshaiti,
Ahyaa shyaathnaaish akaat aashyaas manangho.
- (6) Taa daao Spentaa Mainyu Mazdaa Ahuraa,
Aathraa vanghaau vidaaiteh raanoibyaa,
Aarmatoish debaazanghaa ashakhvyaachaa;
Haa zi pourush ishento vaauraaiteh.

**Zarathushtra explains the role of Aathra – Aatah -
Spentaa Mainyu Gatha - Yasna 47 Verses 5 – 6
Translation:**

(5) And those things through Thy Holy Spirit, O Mazda Ahura,

**hast Thou promised to the Righteous,
even all those things that are the Best;
the follower of Untruth shall partake of his reward
removed from Thy Love,
absorbed by his own actions inspired by the Evil Mind.**

**(6) These things, O Mazda Ahura,
dost Thou grant through Thy Holy Spirit,
through Thy Fire shall be determined the destiny of the two parties;
through the advancement of Aramaiti and Asha,
She Herself shall draw into her fold many Seekers.**

**(Translation from Taraporewala's *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra* –
Page 645).**

SPD Comments

Lovji Cama states further:

“The above verse (Verse 6) indicates that Ahura Mazda has promised through His Holy Spirit the proper rewards for the two parties. What has been promised must be granted at the proper time and in Yasna 47.6 we see that the agency that does the granting is *Ahura Mazda* 's fire, *Athra*. Thus *Athra* is Ahura Mazda (*Asha*, *Vohu Mano*, and/or *Spenta Mainyu*) in action in the world of man, helping him to fulfill the true destiny of creation and meeting out the proper rewards for those who help fulfill and those who hinder fulfillment.”

Lovji summarizes his conclusion based on the analysis of all 8 instances of *Athra* in Zarathushtra's Gathas.

“First, *Athra* is an agency or faculty or aspect of Ahura Mazda, moreover it is an active agency, unlike the *Ameshaa Spentaas* which are ideas or desirable qualities. The most obvious action of *Athra* is to bestow the just rewards to the deceitful and the truthful, at the time of the judgment of the soul. In this activity *Athra* is undeceivable by those who are evil, in other words the evil cannot escape the consequences of their action. *Athra* derives power from *Asha* (right and truth) and works with *Vohu Mano* towards the fulfillment of *Asha* (order) and therefore the final victory of good over evil. *Athra* gives constant and clear help to the faithful, this help is always there and it is a clear guidance, easily perceived by the truthful, in that sense *Athra* illuminates or reveals the path of *Asha*. Not only does *Athra* give

guidance and help to the truthful, it also protects them from physical harm that is intended or caused by the deceitful.”

“What then is the concept of Athra, God's Fire? To me it is God in action in the world of man, guiding, illuminating, protecting those who use their good thinking to understand *Asha* then work towards its fulfillment and also meeting out the true rewards to those who promote *Asha* and those who frustrate *Asha*. *Athra* is God meeting out justice, that is, ensuring the just consequences of man's action in this world. *Athra* is also God bringing about the final purification at the time of final judgment, at *Frashokereti*. *Athra* is God, actively helping man to fulfill his good destiny.”

“If in Zoroastrianism *Athra* is God in action in the world of man, then the physical consecrated fire, which is the object of reverence, must be regarded as a symbol of the presence of God in our world. It would then make sense to keep the fire ever-burning because extinguishing it would be a symbolic denial of God's presence in our world. Worship in front of it would be acknowledging that one is worshipping God. Reverence and respect to fire in a temple would be the logical consequence of realizing what it stands for.”

Thank you Lovji Bhai for your wonderful exposition of how Athra – Aatash represents Dadar Ahura Mazda in our day to day lives!

May the Flame of Fellowship, Love, Charity and Respect for all burn ever eternal in our hearts so we can do HIS work with humility, diligence and eternal enthusiasm!

Atha Jamyat, Yatha Aafrinaamahi! (May it be so as we wish!)

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli