



## ATASH NIYAYESH

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While most other Niyayeshes invoke the veneration of a specific creation of Nature, and are recited at a specific time, the unique feature of Atash Niyayesh is that it is the only liturgy that can be offered at any time of the day or night. This in itself defines the nature of Fire as the Universal Omnipresent Divine Energy in the entire creation. The other unique feature of this Niyayesh is that it is the only liturgy of the group, that has Gathic passages ( Ys 33.12-14; Ys 34.4) incorporated within, and like Ardvi Sura Niyayesh the main body of the text consists of older avestan yasna (Ys 62.1-10).

In translating Atash Niyayesh one notices a spectrum of spiritual to physical sentiments incorporated in the explanations by various authors. While Dastur Minocheher-homji resorts to a highly esoteric philosophical elaboration, Ervad K.E. Kanga tends to explain the prayer more in corporeal context. In contrast the work of T.R.Sethna is an amalgam of spiritual and physical traits highlighted in various places.

An important case in point is the explanation of phrase Atarsh Puthra Ahurahe Mazdao which clearly elaborates the intimacy of Sacred Fire with Ahura Mazda. Both Kanga and Sethna interprets the term Puthra through Sanskrit root 'pu' meaning to purify, or to cleanse. Their translation explains fire as the Purifier agency of Ahura Mazda, in contrast Minocheher-homji simply interprets it as 'Light Divine'. Majority Zarathushti and western scholars simply use the word 'son' as the translation of Puthra and interpret it as 'Fire, son of Ahura Mazda'.

The main body of the liturgy can be arbitrarily divided into four sections.  
Admiration adoration and veneration of the sacred element ( Verse 1-3).  
Request by devotee for guidance and blessings (Verse 4-6)  
Expected veneration and devotion to Fire from a devotee (Verse 7-9)  
Benediction and blessings from the Divine Light (Verse 10)

In the discussion that follows Ervad K.E. Kanga, T.R.Sethna and Dastur Minocheher-homji are denoted as KEK, TRS and MH respectively.

#### **Verse 1:**

The devotee praises the fire by saying " The purifying fire of Ahura Mazda, you are worthy of praise (worship) and homage (invocation) in the abodes of mankind and may there be happiness (greatness) and good fortune unto that man who shall always worship thee with: fuel (aesmo), Baresman (baresmo), milk (gao), and mortar (havano) in hand". (KEK).

TRS essentially states the same thing in the first part of paragraph, however he replaces the objects with which an adherent can offer homage, in more profound terms. Saying, "With shining hands, with exalted hands, with praying hands, and with strong hands." While MH goes even a step further in his expression of the mode of worship by stating, "With illumination, with inner exaltation, soul sustenance, and soul purification.



### **Verse 2:**

While the above verse establishes Fire as praiseworthy and laudable this verse speaks of adoration by providing the proper environment. Here again KEK translates as "May You (Fire) have adequate wood, incense, fuel and nourishment". In contrast TRS describes the qualities that a Fire would bestow when provided with ideal conditions. May you become bestower of light, (aesme) of intellect (baoidhi), of nourishment (pithvi), of high praises (upasayenti), of life of abundance (harethre). May you become protector of pious life". This is again put in profound terms by MH who concludes it by stating, " Mayest thou be tended and tenderly cared for by devotees of maturity and wisdom."

In physical sense the above verse implies that this Divine Energy (Fire) should not be allowed to extinguish for lack of nourishment (fuel). Also the sacred Fire is personified as a living entity, that needs proper nutrients to remain healthy, and continue to stay alive (ablaze), and it is the wish of the worshipper that the fire receives what sustenance it so richly deserves. This also explains why the Fire enthroned in Atash-e-Behram is often anthropomorphized as Atash Padshah.

### **Verse 3:**

This is perhaps the most appealing part of the prayer. Where it states, "May you burn in this house for ever, for a very long time till the Renovation. May you bring brilliance and prosperity in this house" (KEK). It is interesting to note that TRS extends the veneration not only to the physical Sacred Fire but also reminds us of the Fire of the divine spirit within all living. He speaks of the " blazing fire not just in the house but also in the human body that houses of the Divine spirit of soul".

In his thoughtful and reflective way MH states, "May the mighty flame be in hearth and heart: ever growing, deep, ever constant and steady, ever bright and clear, ever unquenchable – ever waxing never waning till the renovation be achieved along the milestones of eternity and soul's consummation.

The above can be interpreted as either the veneration of fire in a home, and/or reverence to fire as a visible symbol, of the inner light, the inner spark that dwells in every human being, and the spiritual flame that burns within each of us. We need to keep that ignited and blazing. In physical sense – it implies to be active, industrious, and progressive.

### **Verse 4:**

We now come to the section where an adherent prays for fulfillment of his desires and wishes. KEK says, "O fire the purifier, of Ahura Mazda! grant me, comfort (Khvathrem) and sustenance (Thraitim), long life (Jitim) and happiness (Khvathrem), greatness (Mastim), wisdom (Spano), fluent tongue, (Khshviwrem hizvam), intelligence (Ushi) for my soul (Urune), intellect (Khratum) which may increase in proportion and may not diminish, and strength (Hamvaretim) of manliness (Nairyam)"

This verse is translated by TRS in a similar manner with few synonymous differences such as, 'joyous welfare' for comfort, 'good memory' for wisdom and so on. However MH is globally reflective in his interpretation when he says, "Grant unto me O Light Divine dignity (of humanity), wisdom, clear convincing, speech to expound the Gospels, consciousness of my soul to comprehend the deeper meaning Intelligence -reason all comprehending



Humanity all encompassing”.

**Verse 5:**

Once again the devotee prays for boons that can increase good and righteous life. Here again KEK and TRS are in close agreement in their expressions. The worshippers desire “ strength for being firm footed and wakeful, sleeping only a third of the day and steadiness in one’s duty. The desire for a progeny that is nourishing (tuthrusham), of innate wisdom (asnam), ruling over regions (karsho-razam), sitting in the assembly (vyakhanam), thoroughly developed (ham-raodham), possessed of good respect (hvapam), delivering from distress (anzo-buzim), and as powerful as a hero (hviram). An offspring who may render my home (nmanemcha), my family (visemcha), my town - province (zantumcha), my country (dakhyumcha) and the religion of my country (danghu-sastimcha) prosperous.”

In this verse we find that MH displays some similarity stating, “May I be ever active never drowsy and dull (resting only one third of the day) watchful even when seated and at rest”. He also uses different adjectives to qualify the progeny by saying, “May they be intelligent, self sustaining, guiding the Anjuman, with all round development, accomplishment, self-redeeming, superior intelligence” and concluding with the sentence “Such a progeny that would advance life at various levels and stages of self realization”.

**Verse 6:**

This is the last verse of prayer for human aspirations where devotee wishes for guidance to righteousness, that can lead to a peaceful salvation for the soul. This is expressed by KEK in the words, “O fire, do thou grant me such knowledge, and point out such a course, so that I may perform virtuous deeds, pay homage to Ahura Mazda and lead my soul to goodness, so that after my passing away, I may obtain for my good deeds the exalted place of Heaven in return”. The interpretation of TRS is once again quite similar with little differences in the words to conclude, “good rewards as a return for prayers and long time of happiness for the soul”.

The esoteric explanation of MH for this boon is reflected in the following words. Devotee requesting “That which will remain for ever shining admonition for my betterment, a pointer to the best life of the saintly soul,... May I deserve that result of my life dedicated to virtue, devotion and duty. Such is the blissful life of the soul ever-enduring”.

**Verse 7:**

This verse is particularly interesting as it is the first of the three that speaks of the yearning of the Sacred Fire for the dedication of the devotee. The ending line according to KEK says, “...and from all he (Fire) solicits a good (huberetimcha), healthful (ushtaberetimcha) and friendly (vantaberetimcha) offering”. TRS explains the expected dedication to Fire in words, “ ...to seek and follow with good, shining, and loving dedication”. While MH states, “ ...the Light Divine yearns the triple dedication of Virtue, Light, and Love”. In return the fire provides religious instructions (TRS), good understanding (KEK) or a lesson (MH).

**Verse 8 and 9:**

This passage asks, “...what does a walking friend bring to the sitting friend” (KEK). Generally the ‘walking friend’ is interpreted as a devotee while the ‘sitting friend’ can imply either the Holy Fire



enthroned in a sacred space, or the spirit of the Divine Fire within all life forms. This verse is reminiscent of Zarathushtra asking Ahura Mazda as a friend to help a friend (Ys 46.2). "The Holy Fire is revered as a strong brilliant warrior" (TRS) to fight evil and pollution.

As we proceed to Verse 9, we again evoke personification of the sacred element to determine what will satiate and please the Holy Fire, so it may grant the blessings to the worshippers. As KEK explains, "But if any person brings unto that Fire Fuel with sincere heart or Baresman spread, or the fragrant plant Hadhanaepeta unto him sanctimoniously, the Fire of Ahura Mazda being pleased, revered and satisfied gives a blessing". It is interesting to note that both TRS and MH concur, but for small differences in their phraseology.

### **Verse 10:**

We now come to the benedictions that Holy Fire will bestow on those who follows the moral code implied in the above verses. As KEK states, "Unto thee (i.e. in thy family) may the flock of cattle increase, may there be an increase of heroic men, may thou have an active mind, may thy life be active, and mayest thou live a joyous life". MH sums up the blessing in terms such as, "possession of ample means, blessed with many worthy sons, endowed with active and alert mind, enjoying life of larger interests". In conclusion KEK states, "These are the blessings that fire endows on one who offers clean, dry fuel examined in the light and purified through righteousness".

The last line unambiguously directs us to the awareness and care for the environment, by maintaining purity and cleanliness. The nourishment (dry fuel) that is offered to the Sacred Fire must be cleansed and free of polluting microbial matter. Thus a conscientious devotee faithful in these respects, through one's truthful dedication to the fire, - both the outer physical one and the innate Divine Fire, - is the recipient of these profound benedictions.

### **Conclusion:**

Atash Niyayesh thus emphasises important tenets of our faith, to guide a devotee to fulfill his/her commitment to life and live by the message of Zarathushtra.

It stresses the reverence to fire (Verse 1), to be alert and active (Verse 3), commitment to physical and spiritual evolution of self (Verse 4), to be industrious (Verse 5), equality of genders (Verse 5), not to be selfish and to think of others (Verse 5), to be ecologically conscious (Verse 10).

I would like to end with a quote by Dr. Iruch J S Taraporewalla

"No scripture in the world can be understood merely by analyzing its words and its grammar: it has to be practiced. And when we live the life according to the rules laid down in a scripture we are following some Divine Messenger and we are trying to work for the Lord."