



FIRE IN AVESTA

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We find many references in Avesta and Pahlavi literature to show that Fire is venerated, and equated with the Glow of Ahura Mazda. In the Holy hymns of Zarathushtra the reference to fire has been made at least nine times by the Prophet. We also find that there is a close association of Fire and Asha in Zoroastrianism. Asha primarily means Cosmic Order, similar to Sanskrit Rta of the ancient Aryans society. Aryan is the root stock that comprised the tribal groups of Proto-Indo-Iranian. These Aryan tribes migrated to India in the east and to Iranian plateau on the west to compose respectively, the present day community of Hindus and Zoroastrians. They pioneered a way of life in tune with cosmic order, and through it, to commune with Omniscient God- from Nature to Nature's God.

Asha has many meaning and connotations such as Purity of mind and body, Truth, Justice and Righteousness. In the hierarchy of Amesha Spenta "Asha" is third in line after Ahura Mazda and Vohu Manah, and there it is named with an appellation "Vahista" meaning the best. Asha Vahista is presides over Ahura Mazda's most glowing creation, the Fire.

In order to achieve life in consonance with Nature, Zarathustra has provided the path of Asha for mankind, which is stated in Yasna 72.11 as follows:

Aevo panto yo ashahe, vispe anyesham apantam

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

[The above quotation is found only in the colophon of the old Yasna manuscript of Copenhagen (k5; see Geldner, Yasna 72.11; West, Denkard, 484)]

In Bundahisn (Ch 3.7), it is said that "Ohrmazd created fire and attached to it a ray from the endless light. The same text (Ch 3.8) also states that corporeal creation was static. Waters did not flow, plants did not grow and there were no vital signs, until they were permeated with this divine Universal energy to bring them to life. The Aryan text of Rig Veda also pays glowing tributes to fire. No doubt then, 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.

(i) In Yasna 34.4 the devotees yearn for the bright fire of Ahura Mazda through Asha.

At toi Atrem Ahura ajonghvanthem asha usemah

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

(ii) In Yasna 43.4 Ahura Mazda provides justice through the heat (glow) of His Fire and the strength of Asha.

Thwahya garema athro asha-aojangho

hyat moi Vangheush haze jimat Manangho

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

In Yasna 43.9 we notice once again the Prophet yearns to visualize Asha through the Divine fire of Ahura Mazda as follows:



At a thwamai athre ratanm nemangho
Ashahya ma yavat isai manya

"Thenceforth unto Thy Fire the offering of (my) homage (I will pay)
(and) I will esteem Asha above all as long as I am able."

Let us now turn to post Gathic literature.

Yasna 36 which is a part of Haptanhaiti (Haptan Yasht) In Ys 36:1 we come across a very interesting simile. Here Fire is compared with Ahura Mazda's beneficent mind, and extols fire as purifier:

Ahya thwa athro verezena paouruye pairi-jasamaide,
Mazda Ahura thwa thwa mainnyu spenishta,
Ye a akhtish ahmai yem akhtoyo daonghe

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

Further in HaptanYasht (Yasna 36:3):

Atarsh voi Mazdao Ahurahya ahi,
Mainyeush voi ahya spenishto ahi
"O Fire you are the symbol of Ahura Mazda, you are certainly the beneficent mind."

In Hormazd Yasht (1.7) we come across an oblique statement, that the whole creation (universe) is created through Divine Cosmic Energy (Asha/fire):

pukhdha vispa vohu Mazdadhata asha-chithra
"(my) fifth name is the whole good creation of Mazda, (which is) the seed of Asha"

"Seed of Asha" is the cosmic Divine energy which is the origin and sustenance of life, a reiteration of the statement quoted above from Bundahisn.

In Rigveda 10-121-001, we find a close analogy to the above, where the 'seed of Asha' is compared with 'the Golden egg' as a reference to creating Energy of Fire. .

Hiranayagabhra samavatratagra
Bhutayasya zaat: patir aek: aaseet
"In the beginning the golden egg (fire),
He was the Lord of all the worlds, as soon as He came to be."

In Ardibahest Yasht-1, Ahura Mazda instructing Zarathustra that for the worship and invocation of Him and the Amesha Spenta, Zarathustra must appoint Ardibahest (the Fire) as the praiser, invoker, extoller, glorifier of all good shining lights and brilliant works

Adoration, respect and veneration of fire was in vogue before Zarathustra. The very first line of Rigveda (I-001-01) states:

Agnim irlle purohitam yagnasya devam rutviajam

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

In Bhagvad Gita that forms the very essence of Mahabharata, we notice another close analogy. In Ch. 10.36. Krishna tells Arjuna that he is tejas tejasvinam aham meaning "I am the glory of the glorious".



This compares very favorably with the appellation Ahura Mazda rayomand khorehmand – “Ahura Mazda the brilliant, the glorious” that we come across in Hormazd Yasht and in many other liturgies. 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 Exodus 19.18 we read, “ and Mt. Sinai smoked....Jehovah came down upon it in Fire...” The importance of reverence for the fire in Pentateuch is starkly demonstrated in chapter 6 of Leviticus where it states:

“Jehovah continued to speak to Moses, saying....The burnt offering will be on the hearth upon the alter all night long...and the fire of the alter will be kindled in it. The Priest must clothe himself with his official dress....must take the fatty ashes out to a clean place outside the camp 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..... The Fire shall ever be burning upon the alter; it shall never go out.”
(Lev. 6.8-13)

This brings out a striking similarity with our rites of ever burning Fire and praying with an offering of sandalwood in Fire temples, and the bui ceremony.

It is clear from the above that Fire is recognized as the symbol of Divine light, knowledge, and enlightenment in almost all major Faiths. Scholars have associated it with, the innate fire within living, with truth and Purity of Asha, or with Flaming fire of thought. In the final analysis we get clear notion through mysterious, allegorical, poetical and lucid language of Avestan, Rigvedic, Koranic and Biblical scriptures that:

Fire represents cosmic order and energy
Fire represents righteousness, truth and divine law
Fire represents individual spark (aatma) in every human being

Fire is the embodiment of that universal spark -Ahura Mazda- paramatma unto which all other sparks (fires) finally merge; Man ano awayad shudan "I have to reach Him".

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