

# USHAO

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## A Stone Throw That Changed the World

The last day of January is celebrated as Jashn-e-Sadeh, an ancient Iranian tradition to commemorate the discovery of fire. In Farsi, Sadeh means "hundred". Some historians believe that the festival is so called because it falls one hundred days after the Fall harvest is over on 21 October, while others believe it refers to fifty days and fifty nights left to the beginning of the new year on March 21. Whatever the reason for the date, Jashn-e-Sadeh celebrates the discovery of fire, symbolizing the defeat the forces of darkness, frost, and cold. It also recalls the importance of the light, which comes from Ahura Mazda and is found in the hearts of all His creations.

We have no knowledge of the way in which early man came into possession of fire. Possibly he kindled his first fire from a glowing lava stream or from some burning tree trunk set aflame by the lightning. However, the epic *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* by Abul Qassim Firdausi (from a translation by Dick Davis) tells the story of the discovery of fire and the establishment of the feast of Sadeh.

“One day the king was riding toward the mountains with a group of companions when something long, and black suddenly appeared. Its two eyes were like bowls of blood affixed to its head, and smoke billowed from its mouth, darkening the world. Hushang considered carefully, then grasped a rock and flung it with all his royal strength at the beast, which flickered aside, so that the rock struck against stony ground and shattered. From the collision of the two stones a spark leaped out, and the rock's heart glowed with fire. The snake was not killed, but the fiery nature of flint was discovered, so that whenever anyone struck it with iron, sparks flashed forth. Hushang gave thanks to God that he had given this gift of fire, and from that time forth men prayed toward fire. When night came Hushang and his companions made a mountain of fire and circumambulated it. They had a feast that night, and drank wine. The feast was named "Sadeh" and is Hushang's legacy to us.

Then he took ore in his fist, and with fire he separated iron from its rocky home. In this way he created the blacksmith's craft, fashioning maces, axes, saws, and hatchets. Then he turned his attention to irrigation, bringing water from lakes to the plains by means of channels and canals, and so using his royal farr to lessen men's labor. In this way he increased the land available for agriculture and the harvest, so that each man could grow grain for his own bread and know the fruits of his own toil.”

The discovery of fire is second only in importance to the discovery of language in the way it changed the quality of life for human beings. \*\*

Thank you, Father for your free gift of fire  
Because it is through fire that you draw near us every day.  
It is with fire that you constantly bless us.  
Our Father, bless this fire today.  
With your power enter into it.  
Make the fire a worthy thing.  
A thing that carries your blessing.  
Let it become a reminder of your love.  
A reminder of life without end.  
A thing that shines for the sake of the people.  
A thing that shines for your sake.  
Father, heed this sweet smelling smoke.  
Make our life also sweet smelling.  
A thing sweet smelling that rises to You.  
A holy thing.  
A thing fitting for you.

*A Masai prayer*



*From a painting of  
Masai women by  
Sunny Smith*

## **A Celebration of Warmth and Light**

During ancient times, Jashn-e Sadeh was celebrated by lighting a fire. For Zarathushtis the chief preparation for Sadeh was 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. For most, this is the first time they are away from their families. The occasion resembles a ritual of passage to adulthood, a notable step for the boys on the way to manhood. The boys would take the camel thorns to the temples in their cities; and if it were their first time doing this, on their return, a celebration was held at home with the presence of friends and families.

During ancient times, the fires were always set near water and the temples. The fire originally meant to assist the revival of sun and bring back the warmth and light of summer. It was also meant to drive off the demons of frost and cold, which turned water to ice, and thus could kill the roots of plants. 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.



Iranian Zarathushtis celebrating Jashan-e Sadeh in Shiraz, Iran. – Farshad Palideh

The festivities went on for three days. The evenings were spent eating and giving out foods as donations, food that was prepared from slaughtered lambs and was distributed among the poor people.

The most elaborate report of the celebration of Sadeh after the dominations of Muslims over Iran comes from the 10th century AD during the reign of Mardavij of Ziyarid dynasty, the ruler of Isfahan. Ziyarid dynasty did their best to keep the Persian traditions alive. Bonfires were set up on both sides of the Zayandeh River to remember the Sadeh

custom. The fires were kept in specially built metal holders. Hundreds of birds were released while the fireworks were lighting the sky. There were fireworks, dancing and music with lavish feasts of roasted lamb, beef, chicken and other delicacies.

Today, the ceremony is celebrated like ancient times in some Iranian cities such as Kerman and Yazd. Jashn e Sadeh is also celebrated every year in the Kushke Varjavand gardens in Karaj (a township of Tehran province) in the presence of Iranian Zarathushtis and others interested in traditional Persian ceremonies.

Source:

From information on Zoroastrian News ([www.zoroastriannews.com](http://www.zoroastriannews.com))

## Fire - A Universal Symbol

The most magnetic of all religious symbols is light that radiates everywhere, within and without all of Ahura Mazda's creations. Dastur Dhalla wrote in *Homage Unto Ahura Mazda*: "Fire is the purest, grandest, and noblest emblem of thy divinity, Ahura Mazda. It is the sublimest symbol of the faith or Zarathushtra. Fire is the image made by divine hands, incomparably more sublime than any image graven by human hands. It is unsurpassed and unequalled by any in the language of symbology.

Fire is the visible sign of thee that art invisible, the flaming form of thee that art formless. It is the physical manifestation of thy spirituality, the emblem that clothes thy divinity, the representation of thy divine substance, the symbolic presentation of thyself to us. Fire best explains thee to our mind, it shows thy semblance to our eyes. It is thy nearest substitute and most suitable object through which we can comprehend thee, that art incomprehensible. Fire expresses thy likeness, it reflects thy reality to us, and recalls thee to us when we pray.

In fire as the sublime symbol of my faith, I glory, O glorious Lord. Thou art the reality and fire is thy replica. When I bow before the fire, I worship not the fire but thee alone, Ahura Mazda. Fire is but a sacred symbol that stands for thee and reminds me of thee."



Although fire is associated most often with Zarathushti faith, other religions also use fire and light in their symbolism and rituals. The Upanishad seers called Divine Light *Jothi Aham*. In Judaic tradition, Moses received the word of God from a burning bush and the story of the Hannukah miracle revolves around lighting lamps in the synagogue. In Buddha's teachings, light is the symbol of truth that dispels the darkness of ignorance. As a flame can pass from one candle to another, so too can truth be passed. In Roman Catholicism, candles and incense are burnt. On Palm Sunday, palm fronds are burned and turned into ashes to be used on Ash Wednesday. These guards and their fire symbolize understanding barring the way to the ignorant or the unenlightened. Muslims refer to *Noor-e-Ilahi* or the light of Allah.

The Olympic flame is one of the most famous secular symbols in the world. The tradition of lighting an Olympic Flame comes from the ancient Greeks. During the Ancient Olympic Games, a sacred flame was lit from the sun's rays at Olympia, and stayed lit until the Games were completed. It was first introduced into our Modern Olympics at the 1928 Amsterdam Games. Originally the flame symbolized the "endeavor for protection and struggle for victory." It has since come to represent "the light of spirit, knowledge, and life."

In *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Gaston Bachelard (Beacon Press (January 30, 1987) notes that "fire is precisely the first object, the first phenomenon, on which the human mind reflected." Even today, many meditators focus on the flame of a candle to go deep within. Bachelard also writes about the dichotomies of fire. "Among all phenomena," he notes, "it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in Paradise. It burns in hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse."

Fire and heat have been used to symbolize human emotions and particularly emotions associated with sexual power. This association can be seen in popular cliches such as "they warmed up to each other" or "she gave him a cold shoulder" or in "the heat of passion." It is linked to aspiring towards the best when we say someone is all "fired up" about an idea. In *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, J.C. Cooper (Thames & Hudson 1987) discusses the origin of the expression "baptism by fire." The term is associated with an experience which restores primordial purity by burning away the dross of life by passing through fire to regain Paradise. \*\*

Sources:

- [www.athensinfo.com](http://www.athensinfo.com)
- *Homage Unto Ahura Mazda*, Dastur Dr. M.N. Dhalla (New York, 1941)
- [www.symbolism.org](http://www.symbolism.org)

## Connection with Fire in the Jashan Ceremony



The Jashan ceremony is initiated with the recital of *Atash Niyesh*. Fire is the physical perception of the Wise Lord – Mazda Ahura. Zarathushtra saw in this element absolute Truth, absolute Righteousness, absolute Justice, and the Immutable Order of Nature. The prophet realized in the divine Fire that paramount concept of Asha, a concept that personifies the will of God. Therefore, Fire in this ceremony represents the embodiment of the Spirit of Mazda. There are three occasions in this Niyesh when the *Atravakshi* (connection with the fire) is performed:

(a) **The 1<sup>st</sup> Atravakshi** is performed at the very beginning with the recital of *Khshnaothro Ahurahe Mazdao ... Atash Dadgah Adarfra* and ending with words *pa patet hom*. Reverence is paid to one of the three types of fires in this section. i) Atash Behram, ii) Atash Adaran, and iii) Atash Dadgah.

Traditionally fires of three grades of purity have evolved over time. The highest grade is that of the Fire of Victory, Atash Behram, which is generated through highly elaborate rituals of purification. The next grade is called Atash Adran, which is for communal worship in *Agiaries*. The last grade is called Atash Dadgah, the hearth fire of the Zarathushti household. The fire revered in most of the Jashan performances is the Atash Dadgah.

(b) **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Atravakshi** is performed starting with the recital of three *Ashem vohu* followed by *At toi atrem...* prayer and ends with *...Ashem vohu*. This prayer is taken from the Gathas<sup>6</sup>. The Prophet pays homage to the Fire of Mazda and explains its potential strength through the purity of its Righteousness. He further elaborates, “Thy fire is swift and powerful help to the supporters but brings visible harm to the deceitful”.

(c) **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Atravakshi** is performed at the end while reciting “*Khshnaothra Ahurahe Mazdao Nemasete...* and ends with *...Ashem Vohu*”.

It is important to note that both the Gathic concept (2<sup>nd</sup> Atravakshi) and the later evolved Younger Avestan concept (1<sup>st</sup> Atravakshi) of fire is revered in this liturgy. This is the only Niyesh (with the exception of *Ardevi Sur Niyesh*) of the five liturgies of this group, where a significant part of its text is composed of the Gathas and Yasna prayers. The initial *khshnuman* of the liturgy includes three verses taken from *Gatha Ahunavaiti*. These are the crucial prayers where Asho Zarthusht realizes the attunement with his Master. In the first verse, the sage pleads with Ahura Mazda to “Rise within him and grant him Devotion”. In the next verse he prays for the realization of the power of Divine Sovereignty, through Good Mind. Finally he dedicates his self both physical and spiritual, as well as his benevolent thoughts and actions with obedience to the Divine ruler. The main body of the text consists of the verses of *Yasna* dedicated to Fire. The liturgy terminates with the ending of *khshnuman* which, includes the Gathic verse that prays homage to the Enlightenment (Fire) of Ahura Mazda. \*\*

Source:

*Significance And Explanation of Jashan Ceremony* by Ervad Jehan Bagli and Ervad Adi Unwalla (2002)

## Sacred Flames of Baku

*The Atashgah* is located within Greater Baku in the village of Surakhany (15 km from Baku, Azerbaijan). It was once reknowned for its ever-burning fire caused by flaming torches of gas escaping from under the ground. These miraculous bursts of fire were believed to have divine power and may have given Azerbaijan its name, which is thought by some researchers to mean "a land of fires".



In post-Islamic times, Azerbaijan carried on trade with many countries. One of them was India. Indian trades-people brought to their home-land, where fire is regarded as sacred, the news about the ever-burning Apsheron fires. From then on the merchant caravans were followed by pilgrims flocking to the "sacred flames". They paid money to the local ruler for the right to build cells, prayer rooms, stables, and a guestroom (balakhane) at the temple. Thus it happened that these structures were built one after another for a century and a half, from the late 17th to the mid-19th century. This is why the Atashgah's



pentagonal complex looks like a regular town caravanserai, a kind of inn with a large central court, where caravans stopped for the night. As distinct from other caravanserais, however, the temple has the altar in its center with tiny cells for the temple's attendants and for pilgrims lining the walls.

Although long believed to be a Zarathushti atashgah, Sanskrit and Hindi inscriptions on stones set in the walls may reveal an Indian origin. In his book, *My Travels Outside Bombay: Iran, Azerbaijan, Baku* Ervad Shams-ul-Ulama Dr. Sir Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, (translated by Soli Dastur, 1926) writes "...maybe, before Moslem epoch it was Zoroastrian Fire Temple, which was destroyed by Arabs and later was restored by Hindu people for their purposes. Not just me but any Parsee who is a little familiar with our Hindu brethren's religion, their temples and their customs, after examining this building with its inscriptions, architecture, etc., would conclude that this is not a Parsee Atash Kadeh but is a Hindu Temple ... I asked for a tall ladder and with trepidation I climbed to the top of the building and examined the foundation stone which was inscribed in the Nagrik [or Nagari] script ... the installation date is mentioned as the Hindu Vikramaajeet calendar year 1866 (equivalent to 1810 A. D.)."

In the course of time, gas reserves were discovered in the area and the "eternal fires" of Apsheron ceased to be viewed as divine. It was abandoned after 1883 when oil and gas plants were established in the vicinity. The complex was turned into a museum in 1975 and now receives 15,000 visitors a year. It was nominated for World Heritage Site status in 1998 and was declared a state historical-architectural reserve on 19 December 2007 by decree of the Azeri President. \*\*

Sources:

- [www.avesta.org/modi/baku](http://www.avesta.org/modi/baku)
- [www.bakupages.com](http://www.bakupages.com)

## Cultivating Your Inner Light

The khvarnah or radiance of Ahura Mazda is as much within us as a Divine spark of light as it is manifested in flames in an afargan. The aim of life is to fan the spark till the light within us expands throughout our body, soul and mind so that we attain wholeness (*Haurvatat*) and immortality (*Ameretat*) and one with Ahura Mazda. Dastur M.N. Dhalla uses the symbolism of the fire as the path to link to Ahura Mazda: “With the purity of my mind and the cleanliness of my heart, will I burn incense of the good thoughts of Vohu Manah and the righteousness of Asha, with the full-hearted devotion of Armaiti, on the sacred fire flickering on the altar of my heart and kindle it into a blazing flame. May my soul rise upward unto thee, Ahura Mazda, as the flame on the altar leaps heavenward.” The following tips suggest ways to cultivate the inner light.



### **Tip #1 Choose Optimal Fuel**

The way we fuel our bodies deeply and radically affects the way we think, feel and behave. By improving our food choices we improve our overall health, stamina and happiness while shaping a new destiny for ourselves. The physical body thrives when fueled by the highest quality fresh fruits, vegetables and other foods provided to us by Mother Nature. Adding more live, organic plant foods full of sun energy, vitamins, enzymes and minerals reconnects us with our own vibrant natural state.

### **Tip #2 Cleanse & Purify the Physical Body**

Periodic cleansing and fasting revitalizes the body enabling it to heal and recharge itself. Through the cleansing process, toxins from processed, cooked foods, chemicals and environmental impurities are released initiating the body’s own healing abilities. Our bodies were originally designed to handle periods of feast and famine and are very capable of thriving while fasting and cleansing. We may choose to fast from a certain substance such as dairy, meat, sugar, coffee, alcohol or solid foods. You may choose to fast from a substance for a weekend, fast one day a month on juices or do an intestinal cleanse once a year. Listen to your body.

### **Tip #3 Mind the Mental Diet**

We have the power to shape our reality and it starts with our internal view of the world. Our thoughts, speech and actions determine our reality and define our future. By shifting the quality of our thoughts from fear to faith, from criticism to compassion, from lack to abundance, from separateness to unity, from hate to love shifts our experience of the world. Listening to our internal dialogue and taking time to pause and reflect before acting gives us the opportunity to choose more wisely. Use powerfully worded daily affirmations to confirm your intentions for a vibrant, thriving life full of bliss, prosperity and love for yourself and others.



#### Tip #4 Clear the Emotional Body

Just as the physical body holds toxins and debris so does the emotional body. Pains from childhood, being socialized, relationship experiences, family dynamics, economic influences and sexual interactions are just a few of the sources for latent emotional holdings. These memories shape our views of life affecting the choices we make with regards to relationships, health, success and happiness. Emotions serve as a window into ourselves. Exploring these feelings and searching out their source, enables us to release any emotional debris that is inhibiting us from realizing our true potential and experiencing a peaceful, thriving life. Addressing emotional issues is a vital and necessary process of spiritual growth and personal transformation.



#### Tip #5 Connect to Higher Consciousness

It is when the mind is quiet and the body still that the real truth may be revealed. In this space we are primed to receive messages with regards to our purpose and how to proceed in manifesting our full potential. Our minds are like a turbulent body of water, only in the stillness can one's reflection be seen. In this peaceful space one connects to a source of power and wisdom greater than the individual. Trusting the insights gleaned during meditation provides essential guidance and support along our journey. \*\*

Source:

- 5-Tips-for-Cultivating-Your-Inner-Light by Rebecca Astara ([www.spiritualnow.com](http://www.spiritualnow.com))
- *Homage Unto Ahura Mazda*, Dastur Dr. M.N. Dhalla (New York, 1941)

### Go Laughing into the New Decade

Laughter is far more sacred than prayer, because prayer can be done by any stupid person; it does not require much intelligence. Laughter requires intelligence, it requires presence of mind, a quickness of seeing into things.

Laughter to me is prayer. Serious faces are ill faces. Never go towards God seriously; go laughing and dancing, and your prayer will be heard...and your thankyou will reach to the address.

Remember it always: the deeper your laughter, the deeper will become your prayer. If you can dance, you have entered the shrine, you have come close to God.”

*Osho's Prayer*



“Dancing” by Pavelka