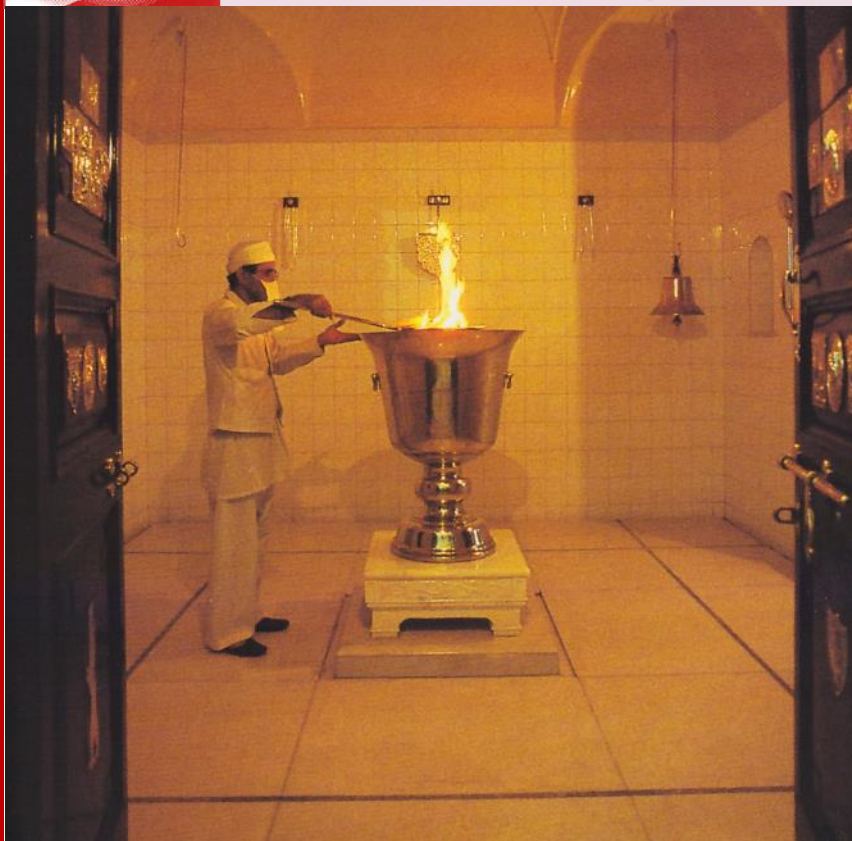


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Atash: Our Link with Light Divine

By

Dastur K.N.

Dastoor

MeherjiRana &
Silloo Mehta

Oppressed by their Muslim neighbors and ridiculed for their worship of fire, Zarathushtis of Iran vehemently oppose the label of “fire-worshippers” as their Islamic compatriots associate it with idol-worship. Nevertheless, for centuries, the veneration of fire (Pers. Atash) has formed an integral part of the religion of Zarathushtra.

Fire has been revered in the Gatha and the Yasna. A brightly burning fire is a pre-requisite *ālāt* for almost all our Kriyas (rituals). The consecrated fires burning without being extinguished for centuries in our fire-temples, the offerings of fuel (wood) and manthra to the Padshah-saheb during the *Bui* ceremony and the recitation of zillions of Atash Niyashts by the faithful in front of a fire, all testify to the fact that fire is revered by the followers of the faith. Asho Zarathushtra himself has been called an Athravan.

Are Zarathushtis then fire-worshippers? And is fire-worship a form of idol worship? This article throws light on the concept of fire (Ātār, Atash) in the religion of Zarathushtra.

The term Atash (Av. Ātār) in the Religion of Zarathushtra is not merely confined to the fire of our earthly experience or to the fire in a Fire-temple. It has a far more expansive meaning. In his *Khordeh Avesta Bā Khshnoom*, Dr. Faramroze Chiniwalla writes:

“Atash is called the son of Ahura Mazda - who carries out and accomplishes His work. Atash is stated to be the expanse of the whole Creation. Human beings as well as every particle of Creation have in them the root of Atash; because nothing whatsoever can happen without energy, and energy is the phase in between the earthly fire and the subtle (non-physical or divine) Fire.”

Here, Dr. Chiniwalla refers to 'energy' and the phases of Fire as the roots of energy.

What do we understand by energy? When you kick a football, it runs; that is mechanical energy. When you heat a piece of metal, it acquires more heat energy than it had before. When you speak, the air particles move and transmit your words to the listener's ears; that is sound energy. The electric wires carry moving particles of electric energy. An atom has within it energy that can wipe out thousands in an instant. When you pray, you generate spiritual energy within you. When a Yasna (Guj. *Ijashne*) ceremony is performed, the circuits of divine energies are generated. When the bell in a Fire Temple is tolled during the Bui ceremony, sound waves of physical and divine energy are proliferated.

Science defines energy simply as the "ability to do work." "Work" is defined as a measure of motion. Wherever there is motion or movement, i.e. whenever any thing moves, it is said to do work as a result of energy; some form or flow of energy makes it move and thus do work.

Motion in every particle of Creation

We know that all things which we see or experience in this world have motion. The earth moves. It rotates around its axis and revolves round the sun. The sun is the chief of the solar system and the solar system itself moves in its galaxy. The galaxy also moves in the seemingly infinite sky. Thus our earth, along with the humans on it, has as many motions as there are motions in the sky. It is said that if all the known motions are

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taken into account, we are traveling at the speed of 410 kms. per second, and we do not even feel it! By the time you read this paragraph, you may have traveled over 2000 kms!

On the earth, everything is in motion. Any thing you touch has molecules which move and dance with frenzy. That dance causes it to have a certain temperature. At room temperature, the thing does not feel hot, but if it is heated, the molecular dance will be so energetic that you will burn your fingers by touching it. There must be some power, some energy which causes the molecules to dance. That energy is Atash. (Heat is a form of fire.)



So, the axiom is that wherever there is motion there is Atash; and there are motions within motions like the many motions of the earth. The molecules have in them atoms which are in motion. The tree grows because there are water currents and various other motions going on within its branches and leaves. The sea roars with motion, the river sings with motion, the wind hisses with motion. Insects crawl, birds fly, fish swim and humans rush - all motions. Nothing is without motion. The causal energy behind these motions is Atash.

From the beginning of creation, fire energies are the chief sources of life energies. They have helped the Universe in its formation and will help in its redemption. That is why Dr. Faramroze Chiniwalla says, Atash is in every thing. Atash is the root force of all motions and therefore is the motive force of the whole world, the whole universe, the whole creation. Nothing can happen without Atash.

In Avesta, Atash has been called the son of Ahura Mazda - *athro ahurahe mazdao puthra* - who carries out His command, who executes His decree, who 'works' for Him, like a son does for his father.

This Gathic stanza, which is also prayed in the Atash Niyaaesh, sums up the function of Atash:

Verily oh Ahura! Thy Atash has Thy own Divine Energy (*aojonghvantem*). He is swift and faultless in his task (*asishtem*). He is full of courage and imparts courage (*emavantem*). He helps in attaining divine ecstasy (*stoi rapentem*). He extends his help in all kinds of mysterious ways (*chithra avanghem*).

Such is your Atash with whom I crave attunement and unison through Asha (which is Thy divine light, law, order, beauty, truth, righteousness and purity.)

Verily Mazda draws out (*dereshta*) with His strong hands (*zastaishtaish*), the dirt, evil, fraud, hatred, carnal passions (*aenanghem*) from the mind of a sinner (*daibishyante*). [Gatha Ha 34.4]

Zarathushtis and Fire Worship

Thus, Zarathushtis revere Ahura Mazda through the brightest, the most beneficent and the grandest of his manifestations, the Radiant fire! When a Zarathushti bows reverently or recites an Atash Niyaaesh before a fire in an Atash Behram, Adaran or Dadgah, he/she is worshipping the divine energy of Ahura Mazda in the consecrated fire. Thus, fire-worship is not idol-worship; it is the veneration of Ahura Mazda through His creation, Atash.

When praying before a fire, let the eyes concentrate on the physical fire, but let the heart experience love and the mind think and meditate upon Ahura Mazda's energy deep within this fire.



Attunement with the consecrated fire brings flashes of inner enlightenment, clarity of thought, deeper and clearer understanding, purity of character with deepening of devotion, and flashes of foretelling and forewarning of coming events of importance. It can also be said that the Holy Fire has its own language or way of expression which it makes known to the sincere and devoted worshipper. ■