

# Fire and Fire-temples in Zoroastrianism Through the Ages

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Fire or light has always been an object of adoration or even veneration by people all through the ages. Veneration of fire, therefore, is not confined to Zoroastrians only as it could be found in all places of worship in some form or the other, throughout history, at least from the time of Moses. However, the Zoroastrian practice of venerating fire is unique in that no contamination of fire or extinction of fire is allowed by blowing breath or sprinkling water over it.

The sacred fire ritually established in a fire-temple is maintained permanently and is served only by qualified priests in a strictly structured ritual manner. However, Zoroaster himself did not recommend this mode of fire worship or fire-temples, and even the later Avesta does not refer to it. Herodotus (*Histories* I.131) and other Greek writers make it explicitly clear that the early Achaemenians did not have fire-temples and five centuries later Strabo (15.3.13) confirmed this fact. Cicero states that Xerxes “considered it to be very sacrilegious to keep the gods whose home is the whole universe shut up within walls”. If so, it is not possible that Anaxerxes II, as is often suggested, was the first one to build fire-temples (*de Republica*, 3.9.14). Cicero also informs us that the Persians considered as wicked to make sacred statues in human form (*ibid*). No fire-temples have been found either at Pasargadae or Persepolis. The Achaemenians only used altars as is evident from Persepolis and seals containing altars. Yumiko Yamamoto, who wrote his Master’s thesis at the University of London under Mary Boyce, observes: “It seems likely that the practice of having an ever-burning fire in a consecrated place was not yet known to the early Achaemenians, and that they still restricted the fire cult to the simple Indo-Iranian custom of maintaining an ever-burning hearth fire in each house”. He also quotes Xenophon as saying that the Persians in his times did not have temples but had only the hearth fire for praying. (“The Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire in Archaeology & Literature,” *School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London, 1978, p.20*). Since Yamamoto’s views corroborate with most of what I have already written on this subject, and since he relies mostly on Mary Boyce, J.J. Modi, and the Rivayats, they lend authenticity to my views: Therefore, they are quoted here at length by me.

The later Achaemenians in the fourth century B.C., particularly Artaxerxes II built temples to the water-goddess Anahita and so it is often presumed that the temple cult started from thereon, though the concrete evidence for the prevalence of fire-temples during this period is nonexistent, and it is rather based on the false presumption that because the temples were established for

Anahita they must have been established for the fire cult too, but the fire altars, and not the fire-temples, continued to be in vogue as was done previously.

As I have stated elsewhere, Artaxerxes II's objective in promoting Anahita's cult, and even raising statues to Anahita, despite strict injunctions against it, was indeed political – since other nations were vigorously promoting their own water goddesses such as Artemis, Hemithea, Ishtar, Aphrodite, or Nanai, in order to compete for gaining political allegiance from their devotees, he found it politically expedient to compete with them, and win them over to worshipping Anahita (and therefore to the Persian rule) instead of to alien goddesses. (See my article in *K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Journal*, 1995, pp. 59-65). The significance of having fire-temples has resurfaced in our times due to Zoroastrians migrating out to the West as well as to Australia and New Zealand. The Parsi immigrants to Sanjan established Iranshah (not always called by this name) by arranging to have the sacred fire transported by land by priests through Sistan where a formidable number of Zoroastrians had still survived, and even preserved Zoroastrian texts. They could not bring the sacred fire by sea with them as they would violate the purity laws. There is such little awareness amongst us about the origin of fire-temples that I hope that the study I made of this important topic in view of our own situation in Chicago might prove enlightening and helpful to others.

## **Fire in the Avesta & Among the Indo-Europeans**

Zoroastrians venerate all other natural elements and are adjoined to promote their growth and sanctity. Yasna 17.11 describes five types of fire or energy, which the Pahlavi commentary describe as beneficent, diffusing goodness, providing greatest bliss, greatest swiftness (lightning), and most holiness. It describes the first one as burning in the Atash Bahram, and the last one as burning in the highest heaven before Hormazd. However, the Bundahishn mentions the above-mentioned first fire as the fire burning before Hormazd, and the last one as the one burning in the Atash Bahram, which may indicate some differences in the belief or practices over the years. (See H. K. Mirza, *The Zoroastrian Religion*, Bombay, 1977, pp.109-113).

According to the Greater Bundahishn (I.54), fire stands last in the order of creation but it permeates and activates all other creations. Each living being, whether human or non-human, is animated and sustained by “fire” in the form of life-force, which indeed is the very basis for the significance of fire in Zoroastrianism.

Zarathushtra refers to fire eight times in the Gathas, namely, in Yasna 31.3, 31.19, 34.4, 43.4, 43.9, 46.7, quintessentially intertwined in his theology if not merged with each other, especially at the time of the final judgment through molten metal as in Yasna 31.3, 31.19, 34.4, 43.4, 47.6 and 51.9. Yasna 34.4,

47.6, 43.9, 46.7 & 51.9 refer to Ahuramazda's fire and equate it with the principle of Asha by which the fate of the mortals will be decided at the time of the last judgment and resurrection.

Agni, the Fire God among the Indo-Aryans was regarded as the god of the house, the master of the house, and the house guest. The hearth fire was maintained continuously in the house. Similarly, Hestia, Goddess of the Hearth, formed the center of the Greek daily life. The bride's mother would even carry a portion of her own hearth fire to her daughter's new home on her wedding. The Greeks not only had an altar for Hestia in their city hall which served as a city center but they also carried the fire of Hestia of their native city to a new town or colony whenever they migrated. The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus regarded fire as the most basic element in nature from which other elements, and consequently all other things, came forth in the world, which may suggest Zoroastrian influence. He also considered soul as fire.

The Rig-Veda devotes one-fifth of its hymns to Agni who stands second only to Indra in the Rig-Veda.

As the movement of the sun follows the cosmic law of Asha that governs the universe, fire was regarded as a physical phenomenon of the sun as clearly indicated by Yasna 36.6 which is linguistically quite close to the Gathas. It equates the sun with the fire in the sky. Yasna 25.7 and 71.10 address fire as the son of Ahura Mazda and as such its presence is required in all our ceremonies. However, Asha is only one of the seven aspects (Amesha Spentas) of Ahura Mazda and fire is only one of the seven elements revered by the Zoroastrians. Neither the longer declaration of faith – Yasna 12 – nor the shorter one recited at the end of the daily Kusti prayers mentions fire, or a consecrated fire-temple nor even a simple fire-temple nor fire worship as we know today.

## **Achaemenid Period**

The type of fire altars depicted so often on royal Achaemenian seals or architecture always shows two men wearing typically Persian clothes with wide sleeves and long skirts and a crown and having bows and an arrow case. Since the Magi then wore Median attire only, the figures depicted as facing each other at these altars apparently represent the king and his heir. Yamamoto identifies them as the dynastic altars and assumes that "it came to symbolize the life of the dynasty and then that of the nation represented by the king. So the dynastic fire may be taken as the symbolic center of the nation, and as the representative of the homeland". (Ibid, p.23). He adds: "the size of the altars shows that they could not have been moved; but must have been fixed in a certain place". (Ibid, p.23). Just as the hearth fire was always allowed to expire when the master of the house passed away, the dynastic fire was also allowed

to expire whenever the king passed away, which is not surprising since both these practices were governed by the Magian beliefs. Historians often quote Diodorus Siculus (17.114.4) as noting that on the death of his dearest gay friend, Hephaestion, Alexander “proclaimed to all the peoples of Asia that they should sedulously quench what the Persians call the sacred fire, until such time as the funeral should be ended. This was the custom of the Persians when their kings died.” Yamamoto also quotes Diodorus and comments: “Since this proclamation was made to ‘all of the peoples of Asia’, the fire in question was probably the hearth fire in each house” and “the royal fire was the symbol of the Achaemenian dynasty and the empire ----- The royal fire being thus not only a private center for the royal family, but also a public and symbolic one for their subjects, it resembled in this respect the ever-burning fire consecrated in a temple, WHICH DEVELOPED LATER”. (Ibid, p.25). The pillar-shaped altar, depicted on royal tomb reliefs and Persepolis comes somewhat close to representing the fire-altars used in contemporary fire- altars, the prototype of which can be detected on an eighth century B.C. Assyrian cylinder seal discovered near Hamadan in Iran. Relying on Stronach who excavated it, Yamamoto doubts that its shallow bowl was designed to hold a permanent fire and concludes: “the early fires of Media were not permanent but were rekindled for each ceremony. —Consequently all that we can tentatively accept is that in ancient Media there were temples in which some use was made of fire, *but that the fire was not ever-burning*”. (Ibid, pp25-26), not unlike the practice in North American Darbe Mehrs. Yamamoto finds it “still quite uncertain” that metal altars were in use during the Achaemenian period. It is well known, however, ^that according to the historian of Alexander, Curtius Rufus (3.3.9) Darius III’s army carried a fire upon ‘a silver altar’ upfront when facing Alexander in battle. Xerxes is described to have done the same by Herodotus.

However, Yamamoto posits that “such an altar could not have been used to hold ever-burning fire, as the bowl was too small to contain enough ashes to keep the fire burning safely for a long time” and it “may in fact have been some sort of brazier or portable vessel,” (Ibid, p 26), or, if I may venture, a magnified version of the portable vessel (Afargaan) used for daily Loban or a Jashan ceremony by Zoroastrians to this day. “The establishing of the temple-cult of fire”, he comments, “was an act which caused people to call Zoroastrians fire-worshippers. In other words, it was not reasonable to characterize Zoroastrians as fire-worshippers before they adopted the cult of worshipping perpetually burning fires publicly in temples.”(Ibid, p.29). This becomes quite evident for instance in the comments made by Sir E. Denison Ross’ “The Zoroastrians have been called fire worshippers and sun-worshippers, but, though they do not actually worship either, the former name may be more fittingly applied to them on account of their tradition of a fire lit in a remote age which has never been extinguished. Muslim historians alleged

that among the phenomena witnessed at the birth of the Prophet Mohammed was the sudden extinction of the Sacred Fire of the Zoroastrians.” (*The Persians*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1931, pp.31-32). Zoroastrians have been subjected to such comments, often maliciously, ever since they established the temple-cult, the first available evidence for it comes from Strabo (15.3.15) who calls Zoroastrians Pyraethi – fire-kindlers.

Since Strabo and Pausanias report the existence of many fire-temples in Asia Minor during the Parthian period that followed the Seleucid (Greek) rule over Persia, Yamamoto assumes that the temple-cult were introduced during the later Achaemenian period because otherwise “it could not have been disseminated far into Asia Minor, where the Greeks ruled”. (Ibid, p. 30). However, on the basis of the evidence provided by recent findings of Mary Boyce and others, I have elsewhere established that these fire-temples belonged to the Persians who settled in Anatolia (modern Turkey) or Asia Minor during the Achaemenian times, and who may have adopted the Philhellenic Parthian model for fire-temples. In response to my question, Mary Boyce had told me that there was hitherto no architectural evidence for the existence of fire-temples during the Achaemenian period. While Herodotus mentions the open-air cult of fire, the tomb reliefs of Naqsh-e Rostam reinforce his views as it represents the sun or the moon or both over the fire-altars, suggesting the possibility of holding rituals in the open, as well as fire as representing the rays of the sun per Yasna 36.6, as already noted.

## **The Parthian Period**

As the Greeks were ardent temple builders, the Greek rule that followed the Achaemenian dynasty may have led the Persians to devise their own temple-cults in order to dissuade the Zoroastrians from visiting Greek temples or indulging in the Greek cultural life which was gaining popularity not only among the Iranians but also among all other nations conquered by the Greeks. Indeed, from then on there is no paucity of the evidence for the prevalence of fire-temples. Thus, Isidor of Charax refers to a fire maintained permanently in the town of Assak in Khorasan where the Parthian dynasty that succeeded the Greeks was founded by the Arsaces. (*Parthian Stations*, translated by W.H. Schroff, Philadelphia, 1914, p. 11). As the Persian chieftains who were tributary to the Parthian kings also maintained their own dynastic fires, (Strabo 15.1.36), their numbers rapidly swelled. Yamamoto provides many details about them, and comments that even the virulent propaganda about the Parthians not being Zoroastrian by the early Sasanians, who overthrew them did not affect the popularity of these fire-temples during the Sasanian period. However, the fire temple on the Kuhe Khwaja near the Hamun Lake in Sistan is the only fire-temple identified with any fair degree of certainty as being Parthian. Its fire-altar may be the oldest one surviving to this day, and is

considered by its excavator, E. Herzfeld, as belonging to the first century B.C. The reverse side of coins issued by the Parthian kings and their vassal kings show fire-altars as a rule. The fact that the phrase *Daitva-gatu* ('proper place'), was first applied solely to a fire sanctuary in the *Vandidad* (8.81) which is generally believed to have been compiled during the late Parthian or early Sasanian period lends credence to the fact that the practice of erecting fire-temples was already in vogue during this period.

## Sasanian Period

Fire-temples were quite prevalent from the very start of the Sasanian dynasty, which had earlier served as the main caretaker for the temple of *Ardivisur* (*Anahita*) at *Istakhar* in *Pars*. But its founder, *Ardashir*, did not allow the existence of any dynastic fire, but his own, in order to assert his own supreme authority over the entire kingdom he conquered. *Tansar Name* written by his chief ecclesiastical advisor, *Dastur Tansar*, even declares that the king "has taken away local (dynastic) fires from the fire-temples and extinguished them and blotted them out". (*Mary Boyce, The Letter of Tansar, Roma, 1968, p. 37*).

However, according to *Tabari*, King *Ardashir* established numerous *Atash-i-Wahram* (fires to celebrate victory) in numerous cities and awarded some of his war booties to them. Even though *Tabari* wrote about it four centuries or so later, and therefore his account cannot be totally reliable, it leaves no doubt about *Ardashir's* interest in establishing fire-temples. His descendants faithfully continued the tradition of establishing fire-temples as well as of depicting the dynastic fire-altar on the reverse of their coins, and even clearly noting that the fire pertained to the reigning king or queen.

The year was stipulated as proceeding from the time the fire of the ruling monarch was installed. Even the high priest *Kirdir* claims in his still extant *Kaba-ye Zartosht* inscription that he converted many people of other faiths such as Christians, Brahmins, and Manicheans, and built fire-temples for them and others to attend.

*Yamamoto* further reveals: "each fire-temple was usually, it seems, named after its founder. ----- Actually it is known that there were many fires founded at an individual's expense and named after him in Sasanian's times," a practice which the Parsis have followed when they came into wealth in the nineteenth century. What he observes further is of great relevance for our situation: "Therefore to build a named fire must have been a widespread custom in Sasanian times. Some fifty ruins have been identified as fire-temples of this period, almost all of which are located in the area of *Pars* and the neighboring provinces. *This evidence may indicate that the founding of named fires was not as popular in other regions of the empire. In fact the Parsis, who emigrated to*

*Gujarat in India from Khorasan at the beginning of the tenth century, were satisfied with only one Atash Bahram for nearly eight hundred years*". (Ibid, pp. 63-64). Many of these fire-temples were endowed with so much wealth and treasures by various kings and princes that they often became an easy target for looting by Romans & Arabs. Thus, the temple of Adur Gushnasp was looted by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius in 624 A.D. and had to be refortified with stronger walls. See Yamamoto (pp. 54-68) for the name and location of various fire-temples of the Sasanian period. Their main architectural feature (which was also employed for some other structures) was what is commonly called Chahaar Taaq (four arches) where four corner-pillars supported a dome over a square shaped room apparently serving as an inner sanctum where fire was visible to outsiders from these arches, often located on high places. Since a *synonymous term for the Atash-i Wahram is not attested in the entire Avesta, and the Atar & Verethragna have no common bond or ties between them as Yazatas*, Yamamoto is unable to ascertain why the Sasanians called the greatest fire-temple Atash-i Wahram, but I think its very name may reveal the answer: It represented the fire of victory, which the Sasanians fervently aspired for throughout their dynasty, unvariably establishing Atash-i Wahrams for marking each major victory, or donating war-booty to them including slaves. Sasanians hailed from Pars where these temples were founded significantly more than anywhere else in Iran, as already noted. Moreover, it is likely that Atash-i Wahrams were often established at the Sasanian victory sites. Yamamoto wonders if the word victory here implies victory over 'heretics', rather than by force of arms, as claimed by Kirder in his inscriptions, but the victory by all the Sasanian kings clearly involved force of arms, and Kirder himself participated in Shapur I's battles in Asia Minor, where he was so very surprised to find, among his captives, many Zoroastrians who were the descendants of the settlers there during the Achaemenian times. He generously returned the goods captured from them, and established fire-temples for their use. The tradition of building fire-temples to celebrate the victory in battles was kept up till the end of the Sasanian empire. For example, Khushrau II built an Atash-Vahram in Jerusalem to celebrate his victory over the Romans there as the temple of Mars in Jerusalem, mentioned in the Acta Sanctorum is regarded by most historians as almost certainly a Varharan fire. Many Sasanian kings bore the name Varharan. The pair of wings symbolizing the winged incarnation of Verethragna figures on some crowns, notably on Varhran IV's. Shapur II wore another symbol of Varhran, a ram's head, instead of his royal crown, in battle. Most likely it is Varhran which is frequently represented on intaglios in one form or the other. The intaglio now in the University of Philadelphia shows a falcon on the altar, the falcon being the bird of Varhran. The name of the fire appears on Kushan coins as also in many Kushan proper names. Khwar or Farr also appears on Kushan coins and in the Farnbag, one of

the great fires of the Sasanians. Farnbag was often adopted by the Kushans as a personal name also.

## **Fire in the Post-Gathic Times**

Even though fire was venerated in some form or the other from the Indo-Iranian times, the Avesta mentions fire only as one of the seven creations of Ahura Mazda. In the younger Avesta it is regarded as the “Fire of Ahura Mazda” (Yasna 13.2), (which compares well with Yasna 43.9 cited earlier), or as “son of Ahura Mazda” (Yasna 62.1).

## **Post-Sasanian Period**

Even during the Post-Sasanian times, the uniqueness of fire among the creations of God was not amissed, though expressed in a medieval manner. Thus, Bundahishn I.44 declares: “Ohrmazd created the body of his Creation in the form of fire, bright, white, round and seen from afar, from his own selfhood, from the substance of light.” (Bundahishn adds that “the brightness of fire was derived from the Infinite Light”.) The close relationship between fire and the Creation, as seen in the theology of Zoroaster, was quite obvious even in the Sasanian theology. Another Pahlavi book, the *Wizidagiha-i Zadspram* (I.25) (“Selections of Zadspram”) written about fifty years before the Bundahishn was composed, states: “it is said that ‘Fire was diffused in all, entirely in the six elements’,” which may explain why the ancient Zoroastrians preferred to worship out in the open by exposing themselves to all the elements of nature, as Herodotus noted, rather than in a walled-in Atashkadeh. As Yamamoto often reiterates: “Far from there being clear references to a temple cult of fire, there is not even plain evidence to be found in the Avesta for the existence of temples; and only a few passages may be taken to reflect the cult of fire in ancient days”. (Ibid, p.89).

Among the Parsis as well as Irani Zoroastrians, the tradition of maintaining fire temples and hearth fire remained essentially the same initially but as the Zoroastrians in Iran were since perennially persecuted for their beliefs by their conquerors for over thirteen centuries, they often tended to conceal the fire inside the temple in order to escape any hostile attempts at extinguishing the fire. As I have noted in my paper, Arab conquest of Iraq and Iran, the very first action the Arabs undertook after winning any battle, was turning the fire-temples (and even churches) into mosques and trying to convert the defeated soldiers and citizens to Islam, designating them as Mawalis, as at Kufa, and recruiting them in their army. The priestly author of the last Rivayat regrets his inability to respond to further ecclesiastical inquiries from the Parsis as the fire-temples were regularly turned into mosques and the Zoroastrian community was too disintegrated and demoralized to continue in any

meaningful manner and therefore to respond appropriately to inquiries by the Parsis. Boyce has reported a recent incident when a Zoroastrian who had turned Muslim wantonly extinguished the fire in his ancestral fire-temple in order to show his allegiance to his new-found faith. So the need to hide inner sanctums by Irani Zoroastrians is quite understandable, though it sounds so unfamiliar to the Parsis who were so fortunate to live among the kind and tolerant Hindus. The persecution of Irani Zoroastrians progressed to such a scale that, as Unwala's Rivayat (I. p.76) and Dhabhar's Rivayat (pp. 72-73) reveal, only fully-qualified Yozdathregar mobeds could see and attend to the fire in an Atash Behram, despite the fact that such a practice has no basis or support from any religious texts, but unfortunately, persecutions obviously left them with no choice.

### **Three Categories of Fire-Temples**

As already noted, the Avesta is conspicuous by its silence about fire-temples, but later on the Pahlavi Vendidad (8.81-96) lists sixteen kinds of fires which are to be purified and brought to the Atash Bahram. It has not however explained the basis or rationale for it nor does it cite any older conventions or references for it. These sixteen fires include: the fire which cooked Nasa, 'dead matter', fire of a burning corpse, per Modi; that which cooked liquid impurities, dyer per Modi. That which cooked dung, which is a very surprisingly fire of kings per Modi; that from potters' ovens; that from glass-makers' ovens; that from *onay arzuritan*, (untranslatable as the meaning is quite obscure, but Modi defines it as ascetic); that from goldsmiths or a mint; that from iron-mongers or iron-smith; that from iron-manufacturers or armorer, per Modi; that from bakers' ovens; that from a cooking cauldron or brewer distiller or idol-worshiper, per Modi; that from *onay takian* (meaning unknown) but soldier or traveler, per Modi; that from the way of shepherds; that from the (army) camp but atmospheric electricity per Modi; from the nearest fire apparently the hearth fire per Modi, fire of a Zoroastrian and of friction by flint and pieces of wood, (see Modi, Op. cit. p.210). These sixteen different sorts of fires which were required to undergo purification presumably led to the idea that sixteen different fires had to be collected and purified separately and ultimately integrated into one fire and installed as Atash Baharam through laborious rituals. However, there is no complete unanimity about their meaning, though it is safe to assume that Modi derives their meaning from the Parsi usage, which indeed is relatively recent, at least not before the adoption of the Kadmi sect by the Parsis.

Thus installed, says Pahlavi Vendidad (8.80) it becomes so powerful that it can kill a thousand demons, which apparently does not seem to resonate with the Gathas. Atash-i Adaran, the second grade fire, is not referred to in Pahlavi by this term, but only as an unspecified Ataxsh (fire). It is to be made from

fires of the four social classes, priests, warriors, farmers, and artisans. Adaran usually serves a town or local area. Even though later on the Rivayats (M. Unwala, I. p.72 & B. Dhabhar, p. 60) require ten lay Zoroastrian families populating one area for building an Adaran, there were no Adarans in India until Lavji Wadia built one in his native village, Sigapore, which stands till today, sharing a common wall with my grandfather's house, and where Avesta lessons were taught to the young up to my time, and including myself, which was a usual tradition until then among the Parsis. For starting an Adaran, only the embers from a well-kept Dadgah ("hearth fire") are required, and the site has to be consecrated, but it does not call for building a temple.

In Iran a Dadgah was often kept within the precincts of an Atash Bahram, and it could receive the embers of an Adaran fire, to be carried to an Atash Behram once a year. The Rivayats (M.Unwala, I, p. 67 & B.N. Dhabhar, p.56) suggest that in Iran an Adaran itself received the embers of hearth fires once a month. A Dadgah fire, could be attended even by a layperson, if need be, but only qualified priests could serve the inner sanctums of Adaran and Atash-i-Bahram. These three distinct classes of fire are never united or combined with each other.

### **Establishing an Atash-Bahram**

Fire for an Atash-Bahram can be collected by a Behdin, a lay person, from a designated place and is indeed regarded as a very virtuous deed. For obtaining fire of a dead body either the help of a non-Zoroastrian can be sought or two Zoroastrians can obtain it from a burning corpse by placing a highly perforated ladle laid with easily ignitable fuel or wood over it to secure the fire of cremation without touching it or the corpse. The fire thus obtained is placed on the ground after being replenished with more fuel or wood. A substantial amount of wood is heaped into a trench one span downwind in order to catch its flame, a process that was repeated nine times by the Iranis, but the Parsis repeat this process for the same number of times as the number of fires collected for a particular class of fire, for instance, 91 times for a cremation fire.

Thereafter, the purification of various fires is performed by qualified priests. Each of the fires thus collected is placed either in a pit or vessel, and a perforated ladle heaped with ignitable fuel is held over it in order to get it ignited without touching the former and is then kept near the original fire. This new fire is placed beside the original fire. This process is carried out seven or nine times or, once again, by the Parsis for the same number of times as each fire is collected.

Such a procedure for the purification of fire seems to have its roots in antiquity, since purifying a contaminated fire is emphasized by the Vendidad

(8.81-96). The Rivayats (B. N. Dhabhar p. 56 & M. Unwala, I. p. 67) describe the Iranian custom (obviously forgotten by Parsis or not even perhaps known to them because of their Khorasani background) which required a few embers from each hearth fire to be carried to the Atash Adaran after the fire was used for more than three times, or every three or seven days, obviously for purification, may reflect the same principle. These Rivayats also state that the embers from the Atash Adaran too must be taken to the Atash Behram after four months, or one year, or three years. An indication of how much fire suffers in this world from being contaminated or polluted is expressed also in the lost Sudgar Nask, as summarized in the *Denkard* (9.12, 1-3).

It should also be noted that the custom of *atash buzorg kardan* (“upgrading the purity of the fire”), was practiced until lately in the area around Yazd in Iran, as a repentance and expiation for wittingly or unwittingly polluting fire.

Fires used by non-Zoroastrians for purposes of their trade or otherwise, were construed to be polluted and in the need for redemption by purification. This rite was often undertaken in memory of a deceased person by the members surviving him or her. This rite required collecting embers from nine fires sustaining most contamination or impurity among Muslims engaged in nine trades, namely, a coppersmith, a blacksmith, a locksmith, a baker, a confectioner, a man who makes sugar-loaves, a dyer, a turner, and a bath-attendant. All these embers are placed in an Afrinagan (a metal or clay vessel for holding fire) and are consecrated by prayers for three days and nights consecutively. Then the Afrinagan is carried to the fire-temple for a public ceremony, and this fire is purified by the process of generating fires from this consecrated one, by the same method reviewed above and the ninth fire is united to the sacred fire itself. (See Mary Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrian*, pp. 186-189).

## **Consecration Ceremonies for Establishing an Atash Behram:**

Several ceremonies are required for consecrating an Atash Behram. A Yasna ceremony is performed in the morning (Havan Gah) in the Khshnuman of the Yazad of the day, and a Vendidad from midnight (Ushahin Gah) over EACH purified fire. One such act of consecration is conducted each day by two priests, and the fire consecrated thereby is then merged with those already consecrated. However, the consecration of all 1001 (or 1128) fires collected and purified would take more than two years if performed by only two priests. Consequently, in order to expedite this process, usually, several pairs of priests are engaged simultaneously. When this consecration procedure is finalized, only 16 different fires would emerge, and these are kept and tended separately in a different vase, making a total of 16 vases.

The final unification of these 16 individual fires is performed on the first day of the Gathas which are the last five days of the year. Two fully qualified (Yozdathregar) priests will begin by placing the 16 fires in a large Afrinagan which is to be ultimately installed in the consecrated Atash Behram, and carrying it to the Yazishn-gah for consecration by the performance of the Yasna ceremony each morning, and the Vendidad ceremony each night consecutively for 33 days. The inner sanctum where the consecrated fire will be permanently established is also consecrated by performing the Yasna and Vendidad ceremonies for three days in a row. The fire is then taken by priests who are to stay within the lines that form a *Pavi* (indentations in the floor surrounding a consecrated place), in order to keep them pure from external influences that may vitiate their purity, and is permanently installed on a stone platform which too has to have a *Pavi* around it. This fire is sprinkled with frankincense and sandalwood and *Kaathi* (thick wood strips) and the first Atash Nyaish (prayer to the fire) is recited over it. After that no other rituals are performed there except those specifically required to maintain it. Apparently these ceremonies, as detailed by J.J. Modi in his famous book, *Religious Customs & Ceremonies of the Parsis*, pertain to the Parsi customs, as unfortunately no Atash Bahram could possibly be consecrated in Iran after the Arab conquest, but the Rivayats, cited above, verify that the Iranis were at least aware of this tradition.

### **Establishing an Adaran**

For starting an Atash Adaran, the procedure was relatively simple, and requires collecting fires from members of the four classes of Iranian society, namely, priests, soldiers, farmers, and artisans. The process for purifying each fire is repeated three times only to be followed by the performance of consecration ceremonies for three days, and the installation of the Atash Adaran in the inner sanctum over the stone platform, surrounded on all sides by a *Pavi*.

### **Starting a Dadgah**

The requirements for starting a Dadgah fire are very few and simple. The building and the place where the Dadgah fire is to be installed needs to be cleansed with Gomez (consecrated bull's urine), or water and embers from a hearth fire from a Zoroastrian household, for the Yasna ceremony as well as for the Vendidad ceremony, both of which are performed for three days, Yasna in the morning, and Vendidad in the night, and the place is then regarded as consecrated. After a Yasna ceremony is performed on the fourth day, the fire thus consecrated is installed as the Dadgah fire.

The word Dadgah is derived from the Avestan term *Daityo Gatu* (“rightfully/proper place”), which is mentioned in the Vendidad, and is of rather late origin as noted earlier. According to Modi (Op. cit., pp. 229-30), a Yasna ceremony with the Kshnuman of Sraosha is performed in the morning for three days, and a Vendidad ceremony is performed with the same Kshnuman after midnight as usual. But on the fourth morning a Yasna with the Kshnuman of Arda Frawash is recited, followed in the end with a Jashan ceremony invoking five Afringans with the Khshnumans of Ardwhisht, Ohrmazd, Spandarmad, Ardafrwash, Dahman, and Sraosh. Six Bajis with the same Khshnumans also have to be performed. Space does not allow presenting all the details about the consecration of sacred fires, but an interested reader can find them in Modi (Op. cit., pp. 199-230).

### **Attending the Fire**

These three consecrated fires, once installed, have to be kept on their Atash-gah, and are never to be extinguished, divided, or merged. Only wood and incense are offered to these consecrated fires. Fat from a Gospend, usually from a goat or lamb was offered to the consecrated fire, which was called Atash Zohr on certain occasions, for example, on Chahrum, the fourth day after death, to aid the soul of the deceased to pass the Chinvat bridge, or on Mihragan, when the animals were often sacrificed (See M. Boyce, “Atash-Zohr & Ab-Zohr”, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 1966, p. 101). Atash Zohr, however, is no more practiced since the nineteenth century. Boi ceremony that includes Atash Nyaesh is regularly performed five times a day, at the start of each Geh, inside the inner sanctum of Atash Behram and Atash Adaran, by priests who feed the fire with sandalwood or any clean wood, in order to ensure that the fire would continue to keep burning forever. Only highly qualified (Yodathregar) priests who have undergone Barashnom of nine nights can perform the Boi ceremony for Atash Behram and they should pray all *Farazyat* (“prescribed/obligatory”) prayers performing Boi. Moreover, Atash Nyaesh is then recited by the priest eleven times for Hawan Gah, nine times for Rapithwin Gah, seven times for Uzerin and Aiwisruthrem Gahs, and six times for Ushahin Gah, during the Boi ceremony.

### **Priestly Precautions & Requirements**

The Barashnom provides the purity needed by the higher grade priests to conduct inner ceremonies but only as long as he maintains highest standards of purity. This means he should not partake food cooked by non-Zoroastrians, or coming from the animals designated as “unclean”. Yamamoto observes what I witnessed priests in a village Adaran practicing when I was growing up: drinking water was “brought from a distant stream every morning at dawn, or drawn from a clean well. He must abstain from speaking with unclean people,

particularly non-Zoroastrians, or women in their menses. He must always wash his hands and say proper Avestan prayers before eating. While he eats he keeps silence, covers his head and uses his own clean utensils, separate from others". However, there are many more rules than he cites, and one needs to be deeply ingrained in priestly upbringing and culture to be aware of them all. If a priest breaks one of these rules, he has to undertake another barashnom (of nine nights) in order to become ritually qualified again". (Ibid, p.96). As Yamamoto's observations are actually based on Boyce's *Persian Stronghold*, p. 136 and Modi's *Customs and Ceremonies of the Parsis*, p. 141 and The Rivayats, they are quite authoritative. As I have observed earlier in this context, "inner ceremonies" fall under the category of *Pav Mahel* ("Palace of Purity") and require many prior requirements (such as Barashnom, Khoob, and its daily even minute-to-minute observations) which can perhaps be comparable to batteries or antennae to get the desired power from the recital of prayers. Reciting inner ceremony prayers without it even constitutes a sin, which does not lead to holiness, but "hole-ness", and Vendidad XVIII, 1 to 4 condemns the priest who performs (inner) rituals "but has not girded his loins with (purity) laws". Moreover, as the Vendidad castigates all those who cremate or bury dead bodies as committing a *Margazan* sin (sin punishable by death), how valid its performance could be by those who cremate or bury their dead?

What Yamamoto – under the tutelage of Boyce – observes about the maintenance of Khub by a priest, shows that it is hard for any priest to keep his khub in the West. The Khub ceremony on the other hand, retains its effectiveness only for four days; and even during these days, if the priest has a bath, or a wet dream, or partakes of food without the regular observance of taking the Baj, or comes into contact with a non-Zoroastrian, he must undergo it again. The Khub ceremony consists of the performance of the whole Yasna together with a priest who is already "with khub". (Ibid, p. 97). Yamamoto also describes how the Boi and Machi are usually performed (pp. 97-98).

## **Yamamoto's Conclusion**

Yamamoto, apparently under the mentorship of Mary Boyce, concludes: "Zoroastrians are generally called 'fire-worshippers' because of the temple cult of fire. Amongst all the customs of fire-worship, or the veneration of fire, which have been practiced widely throughout the world, it was the temple cult of fire which singled out Zoroastrians as fire-worshippers. However, *no reference to this cult can be traced in the original words of Zoroaster, nor in the older parts of the later Avesta, nor in the early historical period of Zoroastrianism.* The older cult of the ever-burning hearth fire is not particularly Zoroastrian nor new. For the Indo-Iranian people, a house fire was to be kept burning continually while the house-head lived; and indeed the cult

of the hearth fire had probably been known already to the Indo-Europeans, since it is attested among the Greeks and Indians as well as the ancient Iranians” a fact which is indeed well known.

“When Zoroaster reformed the religion of the Iranians, he preached a highly moral doctrine, which embodied its own specific cosmology and eschatology. Fire was conceived of as a vital force which pervades all the Creations of Ahura Mazda, and animates them. Without fire there would be no movement or life, which is one reason why fire is closely linked with Asha.” When I asked the saintly Dasturji Dabu in the religion class at the Cama Institute if he had ever experienced miracles, he responded that the only thing close to it he ever witnessed was seeing light all around him as if the whole world consisted of light, just before giving a lecture on the Atash Nyaesh. Indeed, it is the cosmic energy that sustains the universe and keeps it going. While promoting fire-temples, this fact needs to be emphasized, to avoid any impression of indulging in fire-worship, as in fire we only see God and His divine radiance and energy that sustain the universe.

At the Last Judgment, fire will represent righteousness and its victory over evil, when the mortals will be judged by the ordeal of molten metal. The righteous will not feel its heat, but the unrighteous will. In referring to cosmic and symbolic fire, Zoroaster used very vivid images, taken from earthly fire, and consequently his cosmology and eschatology are suffused with allegorical or symbolical references to fire.

However significant fire may be in the prophet's scheme of thought, it was all the same not the only element that was to be venerated by mortals, since the circle is complete only when all the seven creations of Ahura Mazda are cared for and respected. “Among them”, Yamamoto adds, “*water appears to have been treated in a manner very similar to fire*, both by pagan Iranians and Zoroastrians. To maintain the purity of water, and to pray before it with offerings, was very important throughout the known history of Zoroastrianism”. (Ibid, pp. 106-107). Indeed the first ever temples dedicated and built were for Anahita, the angel presiding over water, by Artaxerxes II. There is no real evidence for attributing the tradition of erecting fire-temples to Artaxerxes II. Even when Yamamoto attributes it to Artaxerxes II, he qualifies it by the word “probably” which does not mean much historically. (Ibid, p. 108). If Artaxerxes had also erected fire-temples, he would have added Bahram or Adar Yazad in his rock inscriptions in addition to adding Mithra and Anahita as worthy of veneration besides Ahuramazda. However, he seemed to be politically too preoccupied in erecting statues and temples to Anahita to get involved with erecting fire-temples, probably as it had less appeal, at least politically, for non-Zoroastrians as Anahita had. Moreover, Mary Boyce had once told me that no fire-temples belonging to the Achaemenian era was ever found. For all I know, fire-temples have all through the ages fallen into only

three categories described above: Atash Behram, Atash Adaran, and Atash Dadgah, and Yamamoto too confirms it, on the basis of Boyce and Modi. This should utterly rule out any possibility whatsoever for any other category of fire-temple or for any intermediate category.

## **Concluding Observations**

In conclusion, the following observations may be noted in this regard:

1. Renowned scholars, such as Mary Boyce and Yamamoto among others, clearly indicate that “no reference to fire-cult can be traced in the original words of Zoroaster, nor in the older parts of the later Avesta, nor in the early historical period of Zoroastrianism”.
2. Fire is only one of the seven venerable elements of nature.
3. Fire represents inner fire (or energy) residing in all living beings, and is the driving force in the whole universe. The physical fire or fire-temple in itself is not accorded spiritual significance, but it serves as a symbol for our inner fire, and symbolically keeping it burning forever, by the performance of good deeds that smell sweet like sandalwood or incense. Wanton or incessant use of wood, however, is contraindicated, as man is entrusted with the responsibility for safeguarding vegetation, which is also one of the seven elements of nature, coming under the purview of Khordad Ameshaspand.
4. Water and the angel presiding over water, Anahita, were also equal in importance to fire. Indeed, Sasanians were as well-known for their dynastic temple dedicated to Anahita at Istakhar as for their dynastic fires, if not more.
5. There were no fire-temples as we know today until the Parthians built them, apparently under the Greek influence resulting from the Greek rule over Persia that preceded the Parthians. Even so, mostly dynastic fires were established by the ruling king, requiring it to be extinguished on the king’s death. King Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, extinguished all the dynastic fires in existence at his time, expressly in order to firmly establish his own dynastic rule, thereby assigning it a more political significance than a spiritual one. It is interesting to note that no Atash-Kadehs were built either in India (or Iran) until the advent of British rule in India, and that too when wealthy donors were readily available.
6. Fire-temples in Sasanian times quite apparently thrived on royal endowments which made them vulnerable to looting by foreign invaders, both Roman and Arab. The Sasanian “high priest” Kirter

boasts of converting Christians, Hindus, etc., and building fire-temples for spreading Zoroastrianism.

7. Fire-temples were much more in vogue in Pars than in Khorasan provinces, from which hailed the Parsis, who for long had only one Atash Behram, Iranshah. More were built only when the Parsis came into wealth, as they entail significant expenses for establishing and maintaining them.
8. Not a single Adaran (Agiary) was built by the Parsis until eighteenth century (or so) when Lavji Wadia, the famous ship-builder, built one in his Singapore village and his descendants built more. However, several Atashkadehs, including one belonging to my own group of priestly families have ceased to function, as such in India, due to various reasons, and inner ceremonies are performed in only a few of them, because of the difficulty in following ritual purity, shortage of priests, etc. Even in Tehran I saw the place for the inner ceremonies not used for long, and its high priest is on record saying (in the *Fezana Journal*, etc.) they cannot be performed there anymore. Atash Dadgahs generally did not have a Gumbad, nor did any Atashkadeh until at least the Parthian times.
9. Our purity laws make it very hard for priests to maintain their Barashnom and Khub, even in the old country (that is, if laity is even aware of them at all today), and they make it almost impossible for us to maintain them in the West. The purity laws are so intricate that even the priests are not always aware of them all, and the laypersons nowadays are hardly cognizant of them, thus making it impossible to observe all the rules for maintaining an Atash-kadeh, in the West (which also requires a date-palm tree, a pomegranate tree, a spring well, and a female goat for Jivam. See J.J. Modi's *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Bombay, 1986, p.278). High priests in Bombay have often voiced the same opinion, but as often noted by Parsiana, they are apt to change their opinion under pressure.
10. Priests cannot maintain their own ritual purity or that of Atashkadeh if laypersons do not know and/or observe them at least while interacting with them in as well as out of the Atashkadeh. For instance, the priest attending to an Atash Behram has to maintain Khub, which, according to Modi, "consists of the performance of the Yasna ceremony", which after the fourth day, must be performed again. A bath during the interval, or a wet dream, "or not reciting the Baj before eating," or the coming into contact with a non-Zoroastrian, breaks the influence of the Khub, which in such case, must be performed again". (Op.cit. p.

- 219). Similarly, according to Modi, a baj “must be recited by a priest, holding the Bareshnum and qualified with a Khub”. (Op.cit., p. 337).
11. Mary Boyce has noted that many Zoroastrians converted to Islam because of harsh purity laws, which also made it hard to convert aliens into the fold (See my book *The Argument for Acceptance in Zoroastrianism*, 2012 for references.) What I have stated here is quite in consonance with what Boyce relays on this subject in *A History of Zoroastrianism* Volume I (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996, pp. 28-9, 140-2, 154-5, 167, 242, 297, etc.). The transfer of the consecrated fire from the Adenwala Agiary in Aden (on November 14, 1976) to Bombay, and then to Lonavala by air, required utmost precautions for maintaining its purity and sanctity, as well as personal effort by Indias’ then-Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and Defense Minister Yashwantrao Chavan, a Bombayite sympathetic to the Parsis, which allowed, among other things, allowing the entire air crew to consist of Parsis only, carry fire aboard a plane, permission to make Pavs, not letting and non-Parsis witness the fire, receive police support all along the way in both the countries, cleanse the airplane with *Taro*, (whether that met all requirements for purity is another matter), etc. It will be difficult to replicate such an effort today. Moreover, the consecrated fire in the Adenwala Agiary in Zanzibar became extinct in absence of any possible means to retrieve it and transfer it out of Zanzibar. Dasturji Irachji Meherjirana, who even in nineteenth century strongly advocated conversion, insisted on maintaining strict ritual observances. (Ibid). The priests who sailed to Aden to establish an Agiary there, as well as Sir J. J. Modi, who sailed to Europe, were initially prohibited from performing any higher ceremonies, because they could not observe all the purity laws while sailing by ship. I am presenting the facts as best as I know, but that should not be construed as criticism or rejection of the system, since it worked well when it was quite workable, prior to the advent of modernity. However, we need to consider its applicability in terms of the *Zeitgeist* so that our progeny will not lose faith in our religion. Even before the close of the nineteenth century, many priests begged an author of Rivayats not to translate and publish them in Gujarati, lest lay persons will get to know ritual practices that they were no more observing. As long as we attend our inner fire as exhorted by our prophet in Yasna 43.9, we will be able to continue our faith.
  12. It is hard to explain the meaning and reasoning underlying many of our ritual practices. It is lamented in a very well-researched paper in the *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* (No. 94, 1994, pp. 79-92) that “the ingenuity of the Barsom tradition and its full significance remain to be revealed” and its “practical benefits are

hardly commented upon”. Our children deserve a proper explanation from us for it. Our purity and other rules, however, do not make it possible to practice inner rituals in the west.

13. If the Achaemenians survived well without a fire-temple, and ended up establishing the greatest empire in the world known up to their times, we too can survive well by keeping it simple like they did – a permanent, stationary fire altar without a Gumbaj, etc., like in our Darbe Mehrs. If any structure is raised around the fire-altars in our Darbe Mehrs, it will not only have no precedence for it (my family Darbe Mehr in Surat and many others did not have one) but it would lead to wrangling over what design is best, what direction it should face, what Ilm-e-khshnum, Pundole, and other orthodox people would prefer, etc. Our children may wonder as J. R. D. Tata did: “Why do we keep the fire in a cage?” when shown the design of the Jamshedpur Agiary by the illustrious Miss Behroze J. M. Cursetjee, who often related it to me, and arranged to transfer her family Adaran fire to the newly-built fire-temple in Jamshedpur, circa 1958. A priest may likewise feel at least distanced from others, especially as a Dadgah fire does not require a separate room as in an Agiary.
14. Our purity laws have much in common with those of the Ancient Jews, and while writing about these similarities, and what makes a place sacred, I found that it is “*the Place*” where ceremonies are performed regularly. (See my forthcoming booklet on this subject). The Darbe Mehr is indeed that place, and any attempt at changing it will give a wrong message to the young, and affect the sanctity and permanence of our practices, making them wonder whether all that the priests did over thirty years was not kosher!
15. How many short-cuts to our system of inner ceremonies and purity laws can be permissible before the entire system is rendered invalid or useless, even though it books or permits no changes at all. Such a scenario could be averted as outer ceremonies could be performed even by laypersons without compromising purity laws.
16. How exactly does an Atashkadeh help us to tend to our inner fire better than the one that we are devoutly attending for so long and maintaining (without seeking donations for it), when it is not possible to safeguard its ritual sanctity? How long can one depend on them? How is it proper to do so?
17. Hardly anyone has cared to request inner ceremonies, though it is possible to get them performed in Bombay, which could be easily arranged.

18. Our Iranian Humdins have helped us so significantly in realizing our dream of establishing Darbe Mehrs in North America. Have we cared to find their views about starting an Atashkadeh on the Parsi model, especially as they are so sensitive, even so vulnerable to the charge of being fire-worshippers? If the Parsis' religious dedication survived for hundreds of years in India without establishing a single Agiary – not even in Surat where they numbered about 100,000 before Bombay was developed by the British. Zoroastrians can likewise survive in North America too. Most major cities in USA at least have well-maintained Darbe Mehrs. Indeed, spirituality resides in the human heart, mind, and soul, and of course in our behavior towards others more than in anything else. Fire-temples can serve us as symbolical reminders for the path towards spirituality but the Gathas tell us again and again that it is we who have to take that path. Any notion that erecting a fire-temple and keeping the fire burning twenty-four / seven, or visiting it, will by itself confer 'spirituality' (the Mantra that is often used to justify the need for consecrated fire-temple) is un-Gathic as the ultimate salvation and spirituality depend on us. As it is acclaimed in the Avesta, "there is only one path (for attaining 'spirituality') which is following Asha (Ashoi); all others are no path at all". An Atashkadeh that, is built without conforming to the basic rules for its consecration, which in the west are almost impossible to observe, may provide only an illusory satisfaction of having one to the older generation, but it will be an unjustified burden imposed on the younger generation facing a lack of religious guidance and a dwindling population and economy. Even so, if our traditional sacerdotal and ritual rules had really allowed us to start and maintain any Atash Behram or even an Agiary in the West, it would be welcome, but alas they do not allow this.
19. Having been trained under Dasturji Dabu, I learned the importance of simplicity, frugality, self-sacrifice, and devotion. Our religion emphasizes them strongly, and even enjoins upon us to conserve what is in use, e.g., to use only old clothes on the body even for funeral. Therefore, it behooves us to accept the situation we find ourselves in, and resolve it with simplicity and devotion. Yajashnegah, for example, could be demonstrated better by the aid of videos and photographs. Even then, it is difficult to explain a Yajashnegah: Yajashnegah is also called Urvishgah, but Modi States: "The meaning of the word is not certain". He cites the opinion of different scholars, and prefers West's opinion: "Urvish is the circle or the limits within which the celebrants have to remain", but "the stone slab on which the ceremonial utensils are arranged is also called Aurves (Dadistan-i-Dini, XLVIII, 14)". "The word Hindora", he adds, "is another name of

the Yazashna-gah” but he is ambivalent about its etiology. (Op. cit., pp. 248-9). Modi further observes: “it seems that the use of stone-slabs as the Alat-gah, or the place for religious utensils, is comparatively recent, because it does not seem to have been referred to in the Avesta”. I would like to point out that the word itself is Arabic. However, as the Visperad XI,2 refers to it as Stareta, which means a mat or carpet, and which is supported by the observation of Herodotus (Book I, 132), Modi regards it as a “carpet”. (Op. cit., p. 257). Modi sees no sanctity attached to “the Hindora on which the Zaota or the officiating priest sits while reciting the whole Yasna” (Op. cit., p. 258). Thus expensively replicating a Yajashnegah as a museum piece will have little spiritual significance.

We hardly migrated anywhere without securing the services of full-fledged priests, and providing accommodation for them, but, regrettably this has not at all been the case in North America, where probably 20,000 of us, one-fifth of our population resides. Talking about building a fully-functioning, self-standing Akashkadeh, without providing the priests a decent accommodation and/or pay, contravenes our age-old tradition, and is also analogous to putting the cart before the horse. A learned priest can inspire us to keep our inner fire alive. It has always been our tradition to provide accommodation and maintenance to priests. Cyrus, the first Zoroastrian ruler known to history, provided accommodation and substantial subsistence for the priests attending his resting place – a tradition that was honored by all his successors, as chronicled by Alexander’s historians who witnessed it personally.

Since Zoroastrian ritual practices have many parallels in Judaism, as detailed by me at great length elsewhere, the follow observations may help us to understand the evolution of our own ritual practices over millennia: “Sociological and anthropological study demonstrates that ritual adapts to fit the needs and the world of its practitioners. This is especially to be expected when it is recognized that ritual is a means of forming relationships, and as conditions evolve, so does ritual. Even though a ritual performance may be studied synchronically, a clearer view of its rationale and logic may be gained by studying the diachronic dimension, much as when studying the historical development of a language. Models of ritual change from sociology and anthropology can help to constructively complicate a more straightforward historical analysis of the practices and institutions described in these Jewish texts. They can advantageously draw attention to how events, such as domination by foreign powers, the loss of temple and kingship, (in our case subjugation by Arabs) and battles between local groups seeking power, (say, between Dasturs Manushcheher and Zadspram, both being brothers) led to modifications in ritual practice”. (See *Social Theory and The Study of Israelite*

*Religion*” edited by Saul Olyan, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012, p. 208).

From the very moment the Persians came upon the discovery of fire, they recognized and appreciated its unique nature. Later on, Zarathushtra perceived in it the working of a cosmic principal called Asha, that governs the entire universe, and fire – being a manifestation of God Himself – Yasna 43.9, which does not behoove anyone calling his followers fire-worshippers, especially as he had vehemently renounced idol worship and the like, long before anyone else. This belief system is so unique in the annals of the world, as it goes back to the dawn of history when idol worship and the like were so prevalent and common among all nations. Fire or light thus have eternal relevance and significance, for inviting and signaling the divine within us. Let us conclude by praying that the fire pervading in the universe, and moving it towards Frashokereti, may activate and stimulate the fire within us, and inspire us to develop the divinity residing within us, no matter what category of Atashkadeh our circumstances allow us to pray at.

Aedun Baad! May it be so!