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**Purity undefiled**  
**An-āhītām: a primal spiritual tradition in the way of life**  
**among the Indo-Iranian peoples.**

## Introduction

*During the period of early twilight in history when the quality of life and the very existence depended largely on strict prevention of illness rather than on finding a cure, strict emphasis on proper hygiene, good sanitation and public health was best projected to the masses by being conveyed in teachings, incorporated in a spiritual context among the Āryānic Indic and the Airyānic Avestan peoples in their primal homelands of 'Ārya avarta' and 'Airyānā vaēja'. A phenomenally high infant mortality rate and lasting adult disability from illnesses and equally high mortality among adults too from diseases, little understood at the time, had already laid the ground work for 'treatment', both herbal and surgical, when preventive measures had failed. Historical documented records of 'treatments' implemented after migration of the Indo-Iranian peoples further south (and west wards and eastwards) to their New World (namely the 'Classical World' of the time) by physicians and surgeons really occurred millennia later in Mesopotamia, Greece, Turkey.....etc. Then, as it is now, the subtle purpose of maintaining proper rules of sanitation governing a strict hygienic way of life in individual settlements was to keep the immune processes of the body at optimal levels for good physical wellness as well as for the upkeep of mental health. The author does not touch on ceremonial and ritual 'purity' as it is a complex subject matter in its own right.*

The Av. word '**āhita**'<sup>1</sup> means *polluted/soiled* (knowingly or unknowingly); *made foul* (negligently or inadvertently); *adulterated* (deliberately/intentionally by the addition of impurities, as in goods for sale with the sole purpose of making profit) and, therefore, '**impure/defiled**'. The equivalent Vedic Sanskrit word is '**āsita**'<sup>2</sup>.

Grammatically, the Av. word '**an-āhita**' then becomes 'not polluted/not soiled' meaning '**not impure**' and, therefore, '**pure**'. Note the double negative used by the Av. people compared to

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<sup>1</sup> *Āhita* - See Kanga Dictionary, 1900, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Āsita* - See Moniér-Williams Dictionary, 1988, p. 120.

the single positive used by the Vēd. people. The author has been unable to find a double negative in the Ṛg Vēda. A double negative (not infrequently, to my mind) creates a different kind of emphasis, which a single positive (frequently) fails to create. Not making something impure is really not the same as having something, which is inherently pure.

Grammatically, thus, ‘*an-āhītām*’ indicates ‘*purity*’. The emphasis on the alertness at maintaining purity appears, to my mind, much greater in the latter form of speech than in the former. It is of interest to note in comparison that the Av. ‘*an-āhita*’ (the opposite of ‘*āhita*’) is the Vēd. Sans. ‘*sita*’<sup>3</sup> meaning ‘immaculate /chaste, white /not black’. Its opposite ‘*asita*’ is ‘not immaculate/not chaste, not white /black’. The Av. immaculate lady of purity, ‘*an-āhita*’ (not impure) has thus the same meaning as the Vēd. immaculate lady of purity, ‘*sitā*’ (pure / chaste).

## Purity as chastity

Indeed, in the Epic ‘*Mahābhārata*’ incorporating the ‘*Rāmāyana*’ *Sitā*<sup>4</sup>, as a person who remains chaste though her year-long captivity after abduction by Rāvana is the very embodiment of an unblemished, immaculate lady among the peoples of Ved. origin. Initially, even her husband Rāma had lingering doubts about her chastity but the Saint Vālmiki reassures him.

*“I tell you on oath, Rāma that Sitā is truly a chaste wife.” said Vālmiki, “Lav and Kush, your two sons are from her. You sent her away to the forests merely from an unfounded fear that she may have become unchaste during her captivity. Through my meditation I profess that God will render my years of meditation fruitless if my assertion about Sita is shown untrue.”*

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<sup>3</sup> *Sita* - See Moniér-Williams Dictionary, 1988, p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> *Sitā* as a person – See Vyasa’s The Epic ‘*Mahā bhā rata*’ incorporating ‘The *Rā mā yana*’. This quotation is from ‘*Srimad Vā lmiki Rā mā yana*’ - Sanskrit *slokas* with English translation. The Yuddha Kanda (Book VI, 116.31) of Valmiki’s Ramayana). ‘*Sita, with the shining of fresh refined gold and decked with ornaments of refined gold, plunged into the blazing fire, in the presence of all people*’. See Tulsi Dā sa’s epic poem ‘*Rā maçaritmā nasa*’ 1988, p. 670, which also differs from the Mahabharata Ramayana regarding Sita’s demise. Like Vā lmiki, Tulsi Dā sa, philosopher, composer prefers in his epic poem ‘*Rā maçaritmā nasa*’. He creates a twist in the way Sita ends her life to save her husband the stigma of public shame by proving and maintaining her stance about her chastity to have Sita give the ultimate sacrifice by self-immolation in a pile of Fire prepared by Lakshmana. *With her thoughts fixed on the Lord, Janaki entered the flames as though they were cool like-paste.....! Both, her shadow form as well as the stigma of public shame were consumed in the blazing fire.....*’

In response to Vālmiki's plea Rāma replied, "Your words, O Sage, have left no doubt in my mind about Sita's immaculate chastity. They have reinforced my conviction as a result of the terrible ordeal she was forced to undergo earlier. It was the ill rumour that had compelled me to leave her in the forests." It was, then, left to Lakshmana and companions to persuade her to return to Ayōdhyā with Rāma. Little did they envisage the intuitive and resolute determination of a woman who had once been snubbed. Still, when compelled by all who approached her, she agreed to come but only to the edge of the forest by the banks of the river Saryu where she vehemently implored upon Mother Earth 'to give her shelter by accepting her in her lap'.

Legend has it that instantly, amidst the roar of stormy clouds and flashes of lightning a wide opening in the earth occurred where Sitā stood, as during an earthquake. Sitā, being chaste, was instantly consumed in the wide chasm. In the *R̥g Vēda iv, 56.6*<sup>5</sup> Sitā is simply a divinity of the field-furrow, which bears crops for men and, after all, her life's fulfilments thus returns to her abode, the Earth. To the millions of men and women in India, however, Sitā is not an allegory; she lives in their hearts and minds as a role model of womanly love, devotion and her unstinting conjugal fidelity. The later Epics, Srimad Vālmiki's *Rāmāyana*<sup>6</sup> and Tulsi Dāsa's *Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa*<sup>7</sup> (the Holy Lake of the acts of Rāma) describe Sitā's demise differently.

### **Purity (hygiene) as a way of life**

It is a truth widely acknowledged that Zoroastrians are proud of their heritage of implementing a strict sense of cleanliness (Guj: *Chōkhkhai*) in their daily life. Zoroastrians have a holy duty to keep all the natural elements undefiled, whether earth, air, vegetation, water, or fire. A deeply imbibed Av. reverence to the created 'pure' elements of nature will not allow Avestans to contaminate these Ahua Mazda bestowed natural elements indiscriminately. The inferences and advice in the Gāth./Av. Scriptures and the Pāh. texts are

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<sup>5</sup> Sitā as earthly field furrow personified. See Griffiths, 1986, p. 235.

<sup>6</sup> Sitā - See Srimad Valmiki's Epic, The Ramayana. Refer <http://valmikiramayan.net/> Yuddha Kanda, VI, 116.31.

<sup>7</sup> Sitā - See Tulsi Dāsa's *Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa* (the Holy Lake of the acts of Rāma), 1991, p. 670.

simple: ‘those who do not heed them do not practice them in daily life; those who do not practice them are not holy. Thus, those who promote *filthiness/defilement* are not holy, since it would be akin to promoting evil -*Āhitam*, which considered as having been devised by Angra Mainyu’s forces of evil.’

Should impurity/defilement (*āhitam*) occur due to any reason - from stagnant waters, corpse on ground or in water, corpse eating bird or dog, from disease (and some named infectious illnesses), the Vāndidād in several verses prescribes a strict code of hygiene to the extent that penitence for transgression of the prescribed rules of hygiene was made obligatory and even mandatory under pain of castigation and punishment: -

**Āhitim**<sup>8</sup> - Vān. 11.9 & 12: *alludes to direct and indirect defilement*

*and suggests chanting of four Ahunāvars in a low tone*

- Vān. 16.11<sup>9</sup>: *alludes to the contamination from blood and bodily secretions*

*and suggests disinfection using ‘Gomez’.*

**Āhitya**<sup>10</sup> - Vān. 16.16: *alludes to the contamination of excretory body fluids,*

*and suggests atonements 90 times, involving the person in some form of meritorious acts.*

**Āhiticha**<sup>11</sup> - Vān. 5.27: *Suggests that if there is a defilement of persons from a corpse ‘carry the holy house fire far away and wait for 9 nights in Winter and a month in summer before returning the fire to the house’.*

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<sup>8</sup> *Alludes to direct and indirect defilement Āhitim* - See Sethna, 1977, Vān.11.9 & 12, p. 98-99.

<sup>9</sup> *Alludes to the contamination from menstrual secretions Āhitim* - See Sethna, 1977, Vān.16.11, p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> *Alludes to the contamination of menstrual secretions Āhitya* - See Sethna, 1977, Vān.16.16, p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> *Combating defilement of persons from a corpse -Āhiticha* - See Sethna, 1977, Vān.5.27; Vān.6.30, 33, 36 & 39, p. 37-39.

- Vən. 6.30<sup>12</sup>: *Defilement of stagnant water / - Vən. 6.33: Defilement of well water/*

- Vən. 6.36: *Defiled dripping snow or sheet of ice/ - Vən. 6.39: Defilement in flowing waters*

– *For these 4 defilements the prescription was removal of the impurity at least 6 steps away from the water on to dry and high ground before the water became fit for personal use.*

**Āhitayāo**<sup>13</sup> - Vən. 20.3 & 6.30: *Thrita possessed the skillful art of extracting juices from herbal*

*plants and Divine powers of repelling the causes of illnesses and of clearing defilements promoted by the evil forces.*

**Āhitish**<sup>14</sup> -Y. 10.7: ‘.....the Hoama worshipper beseeches all evil defilement to perish from his house’ –

*Mēhr Yt.*<sup>15</sup> X.50: ‘...the creator Ahura Mazda has bestowed a dwelling high above exalted mountains where there is neither night nor darkness, nor.....any form of evil defilement or...’

*Rashnā Yt.*<sup>16</sup> XII.23 ‘.....Yazata Rashnā resides in a radiant exalted shelter where there is neither night nor darkness nor.....or any defilement....’

The rules of hygiene include more or less the same precautionary measures in general as they are now followed by modern hospitals but in Av. times more so when a person was suspected to be inflicted by the many infectious diseases named in the Avesta. The use of (‘purifiers’) - herbal decoctions, emulsions and solutions and powders for disinfection and as

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<sup>12</sup> *Combating defilement of stagnant water, well water, dripping water from snow or sheet of ice and from flowing waters - Āhiticha - See Sethna, 1977, Vən.5.27, p. 46-48.*

<sup>13</sup> *Thrita’s Divine powers of repelling the causes of illnesses and of clearing defilements -Āhitayāo - See Sethna, 1977, Vən 20.3 & 6.30, p. 149-150.*

<sup>14</sup> *Recitations from the Gathas, promoting ‘purity undefiled’ -Āhitish - See Sethna 1977, Yasna 10.7, p. 42.*

<sup>15</sup> *Yazata Mithra’s abode is free of defilement -Āhitish - See Sethna 1976, Mehr Yasht<sup>15</sup> X.50, p. 143.*

<sup>16</sup> *Yazata Rashna’s abode is free of defilement -Āhitish - See Sethna 1976, Rashna Yasht<sup>16</sup> XII.23, p. 191.*

deodorants was recommended as also *'the recitation of the Ahunāvar four times in a low intonation'*.

While some of the advice in the code of those times may, in the present context of life, appear not to be of much relevance in modern times, it was of immense importance and certainly relevant to the saving of lives from dangerous contamination and infectious diseases during those ancient times. It is amazing how whatever was taught to me in Hygiene and Public Health during my medical studies in the early 1950s now appears rather inadequate in the modern context of life within only 60 years.

**Ardibēhēst Yasht 3.6**<sup>17</sup> - *'Of the 5 types of healers, the one using purifying rites, the one who cures by the mental powers of reassurance of order and justice, the one who heals with the knife, the one who uses herbal plants, by far the most efficacious healer-of-all healers is the healer who heals by reciting the Holy Mānthra.'*

While avoiding reference to ceremonial rites of purity and those during consecration I will limit my discussion and comments to aspects of purity which show reverence to Fire, the Waters and to the Cosmic heavenly bodies. Why the cosmic heavenly bodies in our Solar system and Galaxy? Because the gravitational attraction between them has governed the Eternal Law of Āshā/Ṛta and influenced the positive psyche of the Indo-Iranians without which life on Earth, as we now know, cannot exist.

**Fire** as it is understood in modern science is the purest form of visible physical element on earth.

It is not only pure in itself but it also helps to burn away/ consume (purify, so to say) external pollutants and extraneous impurities. Ṛg Vēda ii, 8.5<sup>18</sup> mentions Ā'tri (Ātra) & Agni together. The former, in the Ved. Sense, means devourer/consumer (of impure material). In the Avesta, Ātar is a *Yazata*<sup>19</sup> and Master/Lord of the house (*nmānō-paiti*)<sup>20</sup> -

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<sup>17</sup> *Holy Mānthra* as an efficacious healer - See Kanga English Khordeh Avesta, 1993, Ardibēhēst Yasht 3.6, p. 195.

<sup>18</sup> *Ā'tri (Ātra) as devourer/consumer (of impure material)* - See Griffith, 1983, Ṛg V. ii, 8.5, p. 134.

<sup>19</sup> *Yajata - Agni in the Vedas* is a Yajata. See Griffith, 1983, Ṛg V., v, 44.11, p. 260. The Av. Equivalent is Yazata - Divinity/angel. Master/Lord of the house is mentioned in several verses.

Mēhr Yasht 10.17) while in the Ṛg Vēda Agni is a *Yajata* and Master/Lord of the house (*grihapati*<sup>21</sup> - ‘*agmim grihapatim abhismavāsna*’).

**Ātash Niyāyēsh, 5.8**<sup>22</sup> refers allegorically to ‘the Inner Fire’

(one’s Inner Self) as the friend of the ‘Outer (physical) Fire’.

The Av./Vēd. people consider Fire (*Ātar* of the Avesta and *Agni* of the Vēdās) as the most sublime earthly representation of the Creator on earth. In the Gāthās, *Ātar* always implies the ‘*Inner Divine spark in the heart of every human being*’. It has never meant the physical Fire. It has always represented symbolically ‘*the inner spiritual Fire as belonging to the Supreme or as being part of the Divine Being, a spark (as it were) emanating from Him*’. The same sentiment is also reflected in the *Mundaka Upanishād 2.1.1.* – ‘*The inner Divine spark...*’ See The 13 Principal Upanishads, Trans by Robert E. Hume. (‘As from the blazing Fire, sparks by the thousand issue forth .....’). It is, only later, in the Younger Avesta that the ‘*Spark*’ metaphorically denotes the ‘*Son*’ of Ahura Mazda.

*Through their veneration of Fire, thus, the Avestans are able to generate intimate contact with Ahura Mazda symbolically deemed to be father of Ātash*

**Ātash Niyāyēsh** in the initial introductory passage<sup>23</sup> reiterates

‘.....*tava ātarsh puthra Ahurahē Mazdāō*’

(.....*unto thee, O Fire, son of Ahura Mazda*).

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<sup>20</sup> *Ātar* in the Avesta is *Nmānō-paiti*, the Master/Lord of the house. See Sethna, 1976, Mehr Yasht X.18, p 131. It is mentioned in several passages in the Avesta. Also see Mirza, 1974, p. 389.

<sup>21</sup> *Agni* in the Rg.V. is *Grihapati*, the Master/Lord of the house. See Griffith’s 1986, Ṛg V., VIII, 49.19, p. 437.

<sup>22</sup> *One’s Inner Self - Daēna as the Inner Fire (found in the heart of every human being)* - See Kanga English Khordēh Avesta, 1993, *Ātash Nyāyēsh* 5.8, p. 82.

<sup>23</sup> *Fire* described as ‘.....*tava Ātarsh puthra Ahurahe Mazdāō*’ in the *Ātash Nyāyēsh* in its initial introductory passage and repeatedly in the Avesta. Fire has always represented, symbolically, the ‘inner spiritual Fire’ as belonging to or as being part of the Divine Supreme, a spark (as it were).

Thus, in Gāthā Uštavaiti (*Yasna 43.4*)<sup>24</sup> Zarathushtra talks about Fire, one of the implications being ‘inner illumination’, the fire of enlightenment (the ‘*spark*’ in the heart of all humans) through which the Creator bestows knowledge, courage, strength and the power to think rationally (as it were, a form of mental purity - possessing a clear, rational thinking mind without the lewdness of ignorance and impure thoughts.

*‘O Mazda, I shall certainly adore thee as the all-powerful giver of blessings,*

*- both, upon the followers of untruth as also upon the righteous -*

*through the power of thy Spark, the preserver of Purity.....’*

In Gāthā Spənta Mainyu (*Yasna 48.5*)<sup>25</sup> and in Gāthā Uštavaiti (*Yasna 44.9*)<sup>26</sup> Zarathushtra uses the words *yāoš dā* and *yāoš dānē* respectively to mean just that - the maintenance of strict hygiene and ‘*cleanliness being the best to preserve health throughout life (that is, from birth)*’. The Vēd. equivalent is ‘*yōh dhā*’, which occurs several times in the Ṛg .V. (i, 93.7; viii, 39.4<sup>27</sup> ....etc). The derivation is from the Sanskrit root word ‘*yu*’ meaning ‘to incorporate, to join, to bind.....’.

To the Zoroastrian Fire stands for purity as well as holiness. It is kept burning continuously both in the Zoroastrian Temples as well as in their homes (the Hearth Fires). Orthodox Zoroastrians (on the subcontinent) still have their house Fire-places for cooking constructed in such a way that the ash from the burnt coals can be collected in a receptacle (*Guj.- Choolā Vāti*) underneath and in front of the cooking range. At the end of the day the burning embers of coal are carefully placed underneath the collected heap of ashes to be re-ignited the next morning. The emphasis is on continuity of the burning Fire, which has a deep and profound significance. It is as if when one looks at a glow in the fire one is looking

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<sup>24</sup> ‘*Inner illumination, spark of enlightenment*’ - See Taraporewala English Edition, 1993, Gāthā Uštavaiti (*Yasna 43.4*), p. 415.

<sup>25</sup> *yāoš dā* - See Taraporewala English Edition, 1993, Gāthā Spənta Mainyu (*Yasna 48.5*), p. 669.

<sup>26</sup> *yāoš dānē* - See Taraporewala English Edition, 1993, Gāthā Uštavaiti (*Yasna 44.9*), p. 489.

<sup>27</sup> *yoh dha* - See Griffith, 1986, Ṛg Vēdā (*i,93.7; viii, 39.4....etc*), p. 59 and 426.

at the diligent efforts and reverence of generations of ancestors who had piously laboured to keep it glowing and active. It further reinforces the practice of ‘*ancestor worship*’ among the Indo-Iranian peoples.

The descendants of the Vēd. people, too, deeply revere Agni but there is no emphasis on maintaining continuity. Rather, they organize elective *Agni Pujā* to celebrate or commemorate an occasion or a family event. Still, their reverence to Fire remains so intense that a burning Fire is kept in the midst of the wedding ceremony as a ‘witness’, around which the couple with a knot tied between their wedding apparel walk seven times as symbolic of reverence. In fact, it was their ‘*Agniyāghars (Literal translation: Fire Houses)*’ that the first Zoroastrian migrant refugees, who came to India after the fall of the Sassānian Empire witnessed (to their pleasant amazement) that made them name their own Fire Temples ‘*Agniyāries*’ (except, with their Pāhlavi tongue they were unable to pronounce the ‘*aña*’ and ‘*gña*’ characters of the Guj. alphabet). To this day, the Zoroastrian Fire temples in India are pronounced ‘*Agiyāries*’.

**The Sun** as the cosmic Fire Supreme (Av. Hvarakhshaēta; Pah. Khorshēd).

Its Fire emits both heat and light and is considered ‘pure’ by both the Vēd. as well as the Av. peoples. Sun worship was not just limited to the Āryas in their cold dark abode in the Steppes of Central Asia. In fact, there is no civilisation that has not revered the Sun from times immemorial. As migration progressed in search of greener pastures and more amicable climates the knowledge and appreciation went with it. In the Ṛg Vēda I, 136.2 the Sun (*Vēd. Surya / Av. Hvara*) is called the ‘eye of the universe’<sup>28</sup> since it watches over to negate the natural impurities of the darkness of Space.

Note the superlative description in

*Mēhr Yasht X.88*<sup>29</sup>: ‘*anāhitam anāhitō*’ referring to the radiance of the

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<sup>28</sup> *Surya*, the ‘eye of the Universe’ - See Griffith, 1986, Ṛg V., I, 136.2, p. 94.

<sup>29</sup> *Fire, the purest of the pure* - See Sethna, 1976, *Mēhr Yasht X.88*, p. 156.

*Fire as the 'purest of the pure' - purity undefiled.*

*Further, in Mēhr Yasht X.50<sup>30</sup>: 'The sun continues to remain pure,*

*Because Ahura Mazda has bestowed it a dwelling high above all*

*.....where there is no illness or sorrow, defilement of evil*

*or darkness of clouds ever able to reach such heights.'*

**The Moon** (*Av: Māonghāh; Pāh: Māh /Guj: Mōhōr*).

Its reverant admiration is because of its projection of its brilliance as a soothing glow through the reflected light of the Sun, its precisely timed waxing and waning and for the fact that it has a positive influence on the moisture of vegetation and waters, the tides of the oceans. It also has a positive exhilarating influence on animal and human psyche and therefore their behaviour.

*Māh Yasht VII.5<sup>31</sup> - 'Reverence be to the Moon, part of the Universe. It bestows bliss, brilliance and glory, promotes the tides of the seas,*

*gives a warm soothing light, bestows mental comfort and peace,*

*gives happiness, strength, prosperity, health and power.'*

The star, **Tishtriya** (*Av: Tēshtar/Tir; Vēd: Pushya; Sirius/Dog Star*) - Earth's 'second Sun'.

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<sup>30</sup> *Purity of Fire* - See Sethna, 1976, Mēhr Yasht X.50, p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> *The Full Moon has a positive and purifying influence on moisture, vegetation and waters - the tides and also on human and animal psyche.* See Sethna, 1976, Māh Yasht VII.4, p. 78.

It is the brightest star as seen with the naked eye from earth. It is about 70 times brighter, hotter and larger than our Sun. Being 8.7 light years away, compared to our Sun, its rays take 8.7 years to reach earth while the rays of our Sun take only 8 minutes to reach the earth. It is interesting to note that modern science now knows that it is another Sun, a massive cauldron of flaming material and gases which emits direct white light of its own and not the reflected light from the Sun.

In *Tir Yasht VIII.2*<sup>32</sup> it is described as *‘radiant, full of red hue, red, shining, beautiful, helpful, far-spreading with exalted lustre from a great distance emitting brilliant and pure health-bestowing rays.’*

**The Waters** [Av. *Yazata Āvā(n)* - the ‘n’ being nasal, soft or silent / Pah. *Ābān* the ‘n’ is pronounced].

The Av. tradition promoted reverence to flowing waters by name. The revered title of the River was: -

***Arēdvi Sura Anāhita Bānū***

*(Gleaming, overflowing with water, not impure lady).*

In *Arēdvi Sura Niyāyēsh (2.4 and 6)*<sup>33</sup> *Arēdvi Sura Anāhita* is the embodiment of righteousness, the divine personification of flowing waters which pour down from Mount Hukairiya into the Sea, Vourukhasha and ultimately through thousands of channels distributes her waters to the seven Kēshvars - regions of the, then, known world.

*‘May the Fravashis of the righteous.....they have drawn up the waters in the form of vapour for the supply of rain water to allow the rivers to flow onwards and distribute the life-giving waters to distant places.’*

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<sup>32</sup> *Sirius, Earth’s second Sun emitting pure actinic rays of white light* - See Kanga, English Khordēh Avesta, 1993, *Tir Yasht VIII.2*; p. 218.

<sup>33</sup> *Divine immaculate personification of purifying flowing waters* - See Kanga English Khordēh Avesta, 1993, *Arēdvi Sura Niyāyēsh (2.4 and 6)*, p. 64 & 65.

## Impurity (Defilement): *Āhitam*

A short discussion on pervasive modern defilements would perhaps act as a corollary to the present subject matter.

### Defilement of Fire:

**Smoking** is considered by Zoroastrians an unwelcome and unhealthy activity since it carries fire to the mouth. Contamination with unclean fluids and the breath of exhalation from the oral passages and lungs further makes the indulgence unhygienic. Dedicated advocates of smoking have claimed that nowhere is it mentioned in the Zoroastrian scriptures that smoking is prohibited. The fact is that smoking was not known in the Classical world when the Gāth./ Av. scriptures and the Pāh. Texts were composed. A Walter Raleigh was yet to be born several centuries later (c. 1552 - 1618 CE), sail to the New World and return with the Tobacco leaf from a place called Tobago in the West Indies. Such is the intensity with which Zoroastrians take precautions that Fire, being a primal unifying force between the Creator and humanity, is not defiled even by the bodily secretions of the normal breath of the Priests as they attend to the Fire. They are obliged to wear a '*Paddan*', a cloth mask covering the face extending from below the eyes to a level below the jaw.

*Vādidād 11.12*<sup>34</sup> '.....to destroy filthiness before it comes to Fire.... is,

*therefore, the*

*noblest of all deeds O Mazda - by which I may, in truth, fulfill*

*my earnest desires and prayers, achieving it through*

*the good mind and through righteousness.'*

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<sup>34</sup> *Preventing pollution of Fire* - See Sethna, 1977, *Vādidād 11.12*, p. 98.

## **Defilement of waters:**

**Swimming and washing in flowing waters** were considered willful attempts at fouling the water. History records that King Tiridātes of Armenia (66 CE) when invited by Emperor Nero (a Mithrā worshipper who had appointed himself Sol Invictus - that is, Mithrā himself) to Rome so that he could re-crown Tiridātes, King of Armenia. Armenia was at that time a loosely autonomous State under the Hellenized (and reluctantly Zoroastrian) Pārthians with the Suzerain King of Kings, Vologāses I (51-78 CE) of Pārthia in Ēcbātānā, who had already crowned Tiridāte King (Satrāp) of Armenia during his appointment as Governor. The provinces of Pārs and Ēlām had been allowed to continue the practice of the religion of Zarathushtra. Tiridātes embarked on a long and devious land route to Rome by land rather than sail to Rome and pollute the waters during his journey. His protracted land route crossed only the small stretch of water at Constantinople to enter Europe and then took a devious route to Rome taking three and a half months each way.

The Vēd. reverence for the River Ganges in India is as much dedicated as that of the River Arēdvi Sura Anāhita in the Avesta. To dip the entire body into the waters of the Ganges that has been flowing for millennia on the banks of holy city of Banares (ancient names *Varānasi / Kāshi*) and other holy cities during a pilgrimage is considered a most pious act one can undertake in life. One can draw a simile as maintaining continuity between the way the Vēd. people revered the flowing waters of the Ganges by indulging in the pious activities of their ancestors (same river; renewed waters). Likewise, when the Av. people see the glow in the Fire that has been burning for millennia they reflect on the diligent work of their ancestors to maintain the continuity of the fire and the offering of fuel to the Fire (same fire, renewed flames).

## **Vēdic philosophy**

‘Even the purest creation can have impediments, which can mask its purity’, declare the philosophical Vēdas. Lord Krishna (in *Bhāg. G. 18.48*<sup>35</sup> during his dialogue with the reluctant Arjuna says,

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<sup>35</sup> *Some impediment infiltrates all creation* - See Swami Prabhupada, Bhag. G. 1972, 18.48, p. 817.

“Duty, O son of Kunti, though to you may appear mundane and full of flaws must never be forsaken. All things, indeed, are clouded with defects, just as Fire is by smoke.”

## Abbreviations

**Gā th.** Gā thic; **Vē d.** Vē dic; **Sans.** Sanskrit; **Av.** Avestan; **Pā h.** Pā hlavi; **Guj.** Gujarā ti;

**Pers.** Modern Persian; **Gk.** Greek; **Vən.** Vəndidā d; **Y.** Yasna; **Yt.** Yasht;

**Ṛg V.** Ṛg Vē da; **Bhag. G.** Bhā gavadgī tā .

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