

# THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

## AMERICAN SECTION.

### Oriental Department.

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#### DO THE PARSIS WORSHIP FIRE?

“Purify me, O Ahura! give me strength through Armaiti [Srasvati]; Holiest Heavenly Mazda! bestower of Goodness, strong power through Asha, eternal happiness through Vohumano [pure mind].”

—*Atash-niyesh.*



THE Parsis, the persecuted descendants of Ancient Magi, now living principally in India, are occasionally called “Fire-worshippers” by those who are not well acquainted with the religious philosophy of the Zoroastrians. Some Parsis consider this appellation to be injurious to their feelings, others do not; while a few have gone so far as to suggest the abolition of the practice of reciting Manthras in the presence of fire—a practice followed from time immemorial—only because some ignorant people call them “Fire-worshippers.”

The formula which is called “Atash-niyayesh,” the Mantra to be recited near fire, contains passages referring to the *praise*, and not worship, of cosmic and occult Fires. A Parsi in this formula is

made to say: "Praise be to thee, Fire, son of Ahuramazda! giver of good, the greatest Yazata!"

Then he goes on praising various minor Fires, among them Neriosang, the Adar-frohba or fra, Adar Burzin-mihir, Adar Gushaspa, and wishes them "offerings, good nourishment, helpful nourishment,"—of course by this meaning personal sacrifices. Again he wishes: "Mayest thou burn in this dwelling [body], O Fire, son of Ahuramazda! mayest thou continually burn in this dwelling, mayest thou be in brightness in this dwelling, mayest thou increase in this dwelling throughout the long time until the Frasho-Kraitim [period] is completed,—the perfect Frasho-Kereit included.

"Give me, O Fire, son of Ahuramazda! pure brightness, pure nourishment, pure life; perfect brightness, perfect nourishment, perfect life; greatness, progression, illumination; [and] for the soul, wisdom and understanding, which afterwards increases itself, and does not diminish,—and then courage, activity!"

Notwithstanding "the whole of the Magian or Mazdean literature—or what remains of it—is magical, occult, hence allegorical and symbolical" (*Secret Doctrine*, vol. II, p. 517), we shall easily arrive at the end in view, namely, the question whether the Parsis are justified or not in reciting passages like the above in the presence of fire. To a student of Theosophy I hope the above passages are manifest; but for others an explanation is necessary; and in view of this a few words may not be thrown out in vain here, though I do not presume myself to be an expositor.

We are told by the Western Oriental scholars that "the key to Avesta is not Pahlavi [the traditional literature of the Parsis], but the *Vedas*," and Theosophy teaches us that if the key of the Avesta is the Vedas, the key to the Vedas is the *Secret Doctrine*.

Let us see, then, what the Vedantic literature says with regard to the various Fires. In this literature the principal Fire is called Agni; and as in the Avesta, so in the Vedas, it is said there are various other Fires through which the principal Fire works. If we take the cosmic evolution in the following order:

PARABRAHM,

Mahat . . . . .	<i>Spiritual</i> akas',	FIRE, air, water, earth,
Akas' . . . . .	Akasic akas',	fire, air, water, earth,
Fire . . . . .	Fiery akas',	fire, air, water, earth,
Air . . . . .	Aerial akas',	fire, air, water, earth,
Water . . . . .	Watery akas',	fire, air, water, earth,
Earth . . . . .	Earthly akas',	fire, air, water, earth,

the fire in the first row, "rightly understood," would become "the object of the religious adoration of the Parsis." We common

mortals, with all our boast of modern science, know only four elements; and from above it would appear that before we become conscious of realizing the first fire here mentioned, we have to realize many other finer elements and forces in nature. Fire is called the "son of Ahuramazda" in the Avesta, because "it is an emanation from the Supreme One," as Mr. P. S'rinivasa Row says, and hence in the Vishnu-Purana is called "Agni, as being the *mouth-born son of Brahmâ.*" Agni is the source of all that gives light and heat. "Whatever other fires may be, they are but the ramifications of Agni, the immortal" (*Rig Veda*, 1, 59, 1). "Agni has three sons, Suchi, Pavamâna, and Pavaka" (*Vishnu-Purana*, 1, x). The primary division of Agni is threefold. We are therefore told, Suchi means *Soura* or solar fire; Pavamâna means *Nirmathana*, fire produced by friction; and Pavaka means the *Vaidyuta* or fire of firmament, the electric fire. This Vaidyuta or Pavaka can be easily compared to the Adar Gushaspa of the Avesta, the "fire of lightning." For Suchi, the solar, and Pavaman, the frictional, we have in the Avesta also fires—Adar Frah and Adar Mihir,—but to compare them each with the other at present would be premature. This much can be said, however, that the Adar Frah is believed by the Parsis as *mvakull* (presiding) over yogis, Mōbeds, and pure and perfected men, and Adar Mihir over cultivators.

Now let us see what part these three Fires play in nature. "Man is the product," says the *Secret Doctrine*, "of three fires. The electric fire—Spirit. The solar fire—Soul. The fire produced by friction—body. Metaphysically the last means the union between Buddhi and Manas; in the physical it relates to the creative spark of the germ, which fructifies and generates the human being" (vol. II, p. 318).

Then we come to the fire Neriosang, which, according to some Parsis, is "bestowed in the navel of kings." Each man is a *king* of himself provided he governs his own nature well. This fire, then, is the same as the Vaisvanara of the Vedas, the seat of which is the mystic circle called Mullâdhâra, about the navel of the human body, the sacral plexus.

"It is to be remarked here," says Mr. P. S'rinivasa Row, the learned Judge of Madras, "that the same Vaidyuta (or firmamental) fire, which, in the form of Vaisvanara, sustains human life, also supports the whole Universe; for the Veda declares it to be equally the prop and navel of the Universe—(*Rig Veda*, 1, 59, 2.) That which is abroad in the universe is analogous to electric-

ity, magnetism, light, heat, etc., as those terms are understood by physical science; and that which is in living beings is what may be called the animal magnetism; it belongs to the vital and spiritual portions of man, the microcosm, and is not only endowed with all the qualities of electricity, etc., which the macrocosm possesses, but is also replete with intelligence such as may be communicated to it by the will of the individual who evolves it from time to time."

In addition to the Atash-niyayesh there is another chapter in the Avesta, called *Ardibes'ta yes'ta*, an occult chapter on the art of magnetic healing. It is unnecessary to comment upon this here, because, though of mantramic quality in the hand of an occultist, it is not serviceable for our present purpose. I may suggest, however, to the earnest inquirers to read in this regard the most interesting and elaborate commentary on the *Light on the Path*, in the *Theosophist*, vol. 7, especially pages 192, *et seq.* Let research in the line of occult physiology progress (it is beginning to be felt in modern scientific circles as a recognized science), and the value of the Avestaic and Vedic Fires may be made manifest to the world.

#### ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOLY FIRE.

The Parsi does not kneel before a common object of worship, such as a wooden altar, a statue, a photograph, an organ, or an idol. He recites his Manthras near the holy Fire, which was not established by any common man as are any common fires.

A Parsi stands reverentially before the sacred Fire "to please, to invoke, to praise, to please, to praise," all beneficial fires—fires that are within, and out of, himself. He invokes and asks from the son of Ahuramazda—which is within himself, the Higher Self—illumination, to become himself one of the illuminati. In spite of of this recitation daily uttered by a Parsi before the Fire why does he not become one of such illuminati? Here we are again confronted by that unfathomable Law of Karma—Daen or Din. It is not merely utterance, but right comprehension, and action in accord with comprehension, that is necessary.

The average Parsi believes in the working of the Law of Karma to a limited extent, like his Christian brother, that is, as the law applied to the manifested world, to one life only, and not beyond. Although he believes that whatever he suffers or enjoys is the result of his own Karma,—he cannot deny that, perhaps, because in the physical world the law of cause and effect stands good—he seldom believes in reincarnation, and in explanation of the suffering of a child, he would say, "Ah! it is providential!" while a

more "educated" Parsi would reply, "Heredity!" But we have a word in the Avesta which suggests itself the advisability—indirectly though it may be—of reincarnation. The word is "Asnokh-ratu," acquired wisdom,—wisdom, the effect or influence remaining from lessons learnt in former earth-lives. It is equivalent to "Sanskâr" of the Sanskrita.

#### FIRE AS REGARDED BY OTHER NATIONS.

The Parsis are not the only race who regard fire with reverence. From prehistoric times the Hindûs, the Rishis have regarded fire in such a manner. In the preface to the English translation of the Rig Veda, Professor Max Müller says: "We see at one glance all that has been said of a certain god, and we gain a more complete insight into his nature and character. Something of the same kind had been attempted by the original collectors of the ten books, for it can hardly be by accident that *each of them begins with hymns addressed to Agni*, and these are followed by hymns addressed to Indra." Again, the Chhandogya Upanishad can easily be recommended to those who wanted to know something about the praise of fire. Coming nearer our time we see the Rosicrucians doing the same thing, and the work of Hargrave Jennings shows how the author himself eulogized fire. Says Hippocrates: "All living creatures . . . animals and men originate from the two Principles, differing in potency, but agreeing in purpose—I mean Fire and Water. . . . Father fire gives life to all things, but Mother water nourishes them."

Writing on the life of Simon Magus of Samaria, the first Teacher of the Gnosis, M. Jules Dionel says: "Simon Magus makes Fire the foundation of all. And fire was the first cause of the Cosmos. God said to the Initiate Moses: 'God is a consuming Fire.' This Fire, *totally different from the elementary fire, which is only its symbol*, has a visible nature and a mysterious nature. This occult, secret nature hides itself under a visible appearance, under a material manifestation. The visible appearance in its turn hides itself under occult nature. In other words the Invisible is visible to Seers; the Visible is invisible to the profane. That is to say, the profane do not know how to distinguish Spirit under form. The Vedas had taught this root idea, in speaking of Agni, the Supreme Fire. This Fire of Simon is the Fire of Empedocles; *it is that of Ancient Irân*. It is the burning bush of Genesis. It is also the Intelligible and Sensible of the divine Plato, the Power and the Act of the profound Aristotle. Finally it is the blazing star of the Masonic Lodges.

"In the external manifestation of the primordial Fire are in-

cluded all the germs of matter. In its interior manifestation evolves the world of Spirit. Then this fire contains the Absolute and the Relative, Matter and Spirit, and is at once the One and the Multiple God and that which emanates from God. This Fire, the Eternal Cause, develops itself by emanation. It eternally becomes. But developing itself, it remains, is stable, is permanent. It is that which IS, which HAS BEEN, and which WILL BE: the Im-mutable, the Infinite, the Substance."

Can anything more be said than the above plain exposition? Reverence for fire was, and is still, universal among the wise. "There never was a religion but paid reverence to the Sun and Fire as the fittest emblem of *Life*, hence—of the life-giving principle; nay, there is not, even at present, one single creed on our globe (including Christianity) but has preserved this reverence in its ritualism, though the emblems with time have been changed and disfigured."—(*Theosophist*, vol. iv.) If such is the state of being at present, why should we lose our precious time in fighting for words? Let us work harmoniously to reach that goal—the *Fire* of all the Fires, the *Light* of all the lights.

Giving away thousands of coins in charity on occasion only does not show the value of a generous heart. As the Persian poet would say:

"Buzorgi ba akalast naba sal  
Tavangari ba dilkas naba mal."

The wise man is known by his wisdom and not by his age; the generous man is known by the nature of his heart and not by his wealth. Before we learn the lesson of the Law we have to become selfless. It is the self-sacrificing work with an idea of doing good to all (without the slightest motive of reward, though effect always follows cause), accompanied by a humble nature, that awakens the fire of philanthropy, that can be practised even by a beggar. We have not to fan and feed the fire of lower self—the Ahriman—the fire of matter—we have to nourish and make manifest the fire of unselfishness—Ahuramazda—the immaterial.

#### ABOLITION OF THE "FIRE WORSHIP."

But, unfortunately, guided as he is by the peculiar education of the day, the modern Parsi has become a hypocrite to himself. Comfort of life, propitiating his lower self, is the "object of life" of a modern Parsi, taught by his guide, the gross and gluttonous John Bull. And when the reverses of life approach, he hangs the blame on the neck of a peculiar god invented by himself, forgetting that they are the effects of his own actions, speech and thought. Foreign and ignorant ridicule, like the word "Fire-

worshippers" have made the Parsi scoff at his own ancestral religion, at ancestors who—"credulous" though they are now called by the modern "educated" Parsi—never believed in a god to whom the Chief priest of the "educated" Parsis applies attributes the ancestors never dreamt of. After recommending the abolition of praising Fire, the Parsi "Reformers," the indirect followers of Church-Christianity, have begun to worship pianos and photographs—the latter have been consecrated in some families—and to compose verses in the shape of "prayers" in honour of that unknown god, who is said to have a desire of "prayers" from mankind in return for the bounties he bestows on them.—(Vide *Fam-i-Jamshed*, July 4, 1889.) Such a god—something like a shop-keeper or money-changer—was unknown to the composers of even the *Khordeh Avesta*, who would have surely added the "direct prayer," had it been needed at all, to the minor Avesta. But they understood the nature of the universe better than the modern "educated Parsi Reformer," and never allowed such god to enter their head, that god being the creation of the Christian clergy in the dark ages of Kaliyuga.

#### EFFICACY OF THE MANTHRAS.

They say the "mumbledom" of the Manthras is inexplicable, hence useless. We cannot discard the science of Chemistry because we do not understand its peculiar signs and technicalities; but efforts must be made to understand them. To grasp the nature of the thing the brain must be receptive or prepared for the idea. All cannot understand the nature of each thing equally. It is not *entirely* necessary, therefore, that the words which have occult and mysterious meanings in them, should be understood at one and the same time by all alike. The purer we become the more the manthramic words impart broader and broader meaning *to our hitherto gross brain*. The justification of constantly reciting Manthras stands good, therefore, for an idiot as well as for an intellectual being. Those of my friends who have read anything about "Sound" and "Vibration" in modern science—provided they have a keen foresight in them—will agree with me that even sound is capable of effecting change in the *akâsa*, the Mithraic light. Professor Tyndall's work on "Sound," and Mrs. Watts Hughes' sound-pictures are sufficient to establish a belief in the *manthramic* power of sound.

"A mantram is a collection of words which, when sounded in speech, induce certain vibrations not only in the air, but also in finer ether, thereby producing certain effects." (*Path*, Aug., 1888.)

"A mantra," says Colonel Olcott, "is a verse which, when

chanted in a certain prescribed rhythm, for a certain number of times, by a person of what we should call a certain mesmeric temperament, and under prescribed condition of time, place, and surroundings, effects certain vibratory changes in the akâsa (ether.) These vibrations develop a mesmeric force that flows into the body of the reciter, modifies his psychic aura, and, as the Hindûs put it, enwraps and envelops him round about."

It is to be remembered that the Parsis have Manthras only to effect spiritual benefit; I have not yet come across any such manthra in the Avesta literature as to charm or subdue a snake, a woman or an elemental for selfish purposes. On the contrary, almost the whole Avestaic Manthras are considered to protect us from the otherwise constant attacks of elementals, which the Parsis call *drûgas*.

This is "fire-worship" such as I for one understand it to be. The Sun and element worship is also based on the same root-idea. There may be other better ways of explaining it. My other brothers may do that.

NASARVANJI FRAMJI BILIMORIA.

*Bombay, 10th April, 1891.*

## THE GINEE, OR THE HINDU FAMILY QUEEN OF BENGAL.\*

**T**HE Ginee is generally the mother or wife of the eldest male member of the family. She rises from her bed about an hour and a half before sunrise and looks to the sweeping and cleaning of the house, particularly the door lintels, the yards, and the cowshed. She then collects flowers from the shrubs and goes to bathe in the river Bhagirathee, if the river be not more than a mile or so from the house. The sun has not yet appeared in the horizon, but most of the females have left their beds and many join to go to bathe in the river, talking on their way.

They all bathe and perform their devotional actions called *Puja* on the bank of the river and return home at about 8 A. M. The Ginee then prepares herself for cooking, in which act she is assisted by the younger females of the family who must have bathed

\* I only describe the things that are to be found in most of the villages of Bengal. Families within Calcutta and the surrounding villages, and those also of large towns, have now changed much for the worse owing to the stupid zeal for reform of those whom a Bengal civilian once aptly described as "the heterogeneous product of our college education."

themselves by this time. Out of inexpensive vegetables, some of which are planted and taken care of by the females themselves in a little bit of ground near by, the Ginee prepares excellent dishes, and the cooking is all complete between 11 and 12 A. M. The children take their meals first, then the adult males, then the younger females, then the servants, and last of all the Ginee herself. As a rule she never enjoys anything that is liked by either the children or the male members, and she has to distribute and superintend the partaking of food by every member of the family, the servants included. It is very seldom that she condescends to take food cooked by any other woman, even of her own family.

Taking meals is generally over a little before 2 P. M. The female members then congregate in a long room where some lie down for rest, some knit and sew, and some are engaged in talking about the incidents mentioned in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahābhārata*.

At about 4 P. M. the Ginee goes to her neighbors, for a chat or any trifling business that she might think of, and for the purpose of washing herself. She must return before dusk to see watering and sweeping done to the rooms, the shed and the door lintels, and that the cows are properly looked after. Just at sunset every room is lighted and then cooking again begins a little later. In the afternoon some of the male members partake of a little refreshment, consisting generally of fresh fruits and sweetmeats, but this is managed by others.

At about 8 P. M. the children, having partaken of their meals, go with the Ginee to lie down in their beds. Here the Ginee begins to tell them stories till they are asleep. These stories are almost all of them common to all the families of the village. A king had two queens; one much beloved by him, the other neglected; kind providence favored the latter, and the former was humbled. A prince; a minister's son, a commander-in-chief's son, and a merchant's son were great friends; they started to see the corners of the world; saw many wonderful things; had many hair-breadth escapes, and at last all returned home safe and sound. A princess of great beauty lay enchanted in a castle by the Cyclops; a prince goes there by chance; kills the monster in some remarkable manner through the advice of the disenchanted princess, falls in love with her, and marries her. Such, in substance, are the stories told by the Ginee to her delighted little audience who are all very fond of hearing from her. She then makes them over to their mothers, and comes to the cook-room again. The younger females take food, then the males, the servants, and last of all, the Ginee herself. She goes to bed at about 11 P. M.

The Ginee is a little talkative, rather hard on the weaknesses of her neighbors, partial to the members of her family, and is not much loved by young daughters-in-law of the family, who have often to invent excuses for rising late and going early to bed. The Ginee has a fair knowledge of domestic medicines for small complaints, and often irritates the family priest by presuming to correct him when he happens to omit anything in a family religious ceremony. The Ginee is no respecter of persons and often tells disagreeable truths to one's face. She is kind to the servants and beggars, and loves to feed Brahmans on particular auspicious days of the year. She generally spoils the young children by always taking their sides, and often makes them ill by overfeeding them.

Thus pass the lives of many middle-class ladies of lower Bengal; in industry, peace, self-denial, and devotion, loved by all, teaching others to do their household duties, herself a pattern of good women, mistress, and Hindû family queen.

But perhaps twenty-five years hence this will be a thing of the past. Selfishness and irreligiousness are making sad inroads in our families, and disunion, want of peace and patience are driving members of the Hindû family to find happiness and comfort in that will-o'-the-wisp, Western civilization. I have closely observed other families than those I have tried to give some idea of in my article, other families in which the "reformers" have tried to introduce foreign rules of life. I will not describe their miserable condition; it makes my heart ache to think with what bitter experience, what sad failures, how large a quantity of wretchedness and misery will my countrymen have to learn the inestimable truth that a life based on spirituality and self-sacrifice is better, even far happier, than a life of selfish enjoyments, be that life that of an individual or family or that of a nation. Oh, for a Vyasa to inculcate these truths in the withering hearts of my fallen, degraded, and miserable countrymen!

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