

אגני

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أگنی

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अग्नि

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1 Hindi. 1.1 Etymology; 1.2 Proper noun; 1.3 Noun. 1.3.1 Synonyms ... From Sanskrit

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Agni

For other uses, see [Agni \(disambiguation\)](#).

Agni (Sanskrit: अग्नि *Agni*), is a Hindu deity, one of the most important of the Vedic gods. He is the god of fire^[1] and the acceptor of sacrifices for onwards conveyance to other deities. The sacrifices made to Agni go to the deities because Agni is a messenger^[2] from and to the other gods. He is ever-young, because the fire is re-lit every day, and is immortal.

1 Overview

Agni occupies a prominent place in the Vedas and Brahmanas works. The ancient Indians recognized it as the power of heat and light and the will-power united with wisdom, they knew the human will-power to be a feeble projection of this power which they believed could be strengthened by the Rig Vedic chants to Agni.^[3]

The Vedic people developed the worship of Agni, personified and deified Agni as the sacrificial fire, as the priest of the gods and as the god of the priests, who through yajna carries the oblations to the gods, the celestial controllers of the mysterious and potent forces of nature, to ensure the continuance of conditions favourable to mankind. In Vedic deities, Agni occupies, after Indra, the most important position. In the Rig Veda there are over 200 hymns addressed to and in praise of Agni. Agni is the Rishi (hymn-seer) of Sukta X.124 of the Rig Veda, and along with Indra and Surya makes up the Vedic triad of deities.^[4]

Agni, the Vedic god of fire, is depicted as having two heads, one head marks immortality and the other marks an unknown symbol of life. Agni has made the transition into the Hindu pantheon of gods, without losing his importance. With Varuna and Indra he is one of the supreme gods in the Rig Veda. Due to the link between heaven and earth, and between deities and humans, he is associated with Vedic sacrifice, taking offerings to the other world in his fire. In Hinduism, his vehicle is the ram.^[5]

2 Etymology

The word *agni* is Sanskrit for “fire” (noun), cognate with Latin *ignis* (the root of English *ignite*), Russian огонь (*ogon*), Polish “ogień”, Slovenian “oganj”, Serbo-Croatian *oganj*, and Lithuanian *ugnis*—all with the mean-

ing “fire”, with the reconstructed Proto-Indo-European root being *h₁égni-*. Agni has three forms: fire, lightning and the Sun.^[6]

3 Variants of Agni

In Hindu scriptures, Agni is the God of Fire, and is present in many phases of life such as honouring of a birth (diva lamp), prayers (diva lamp), at weddings (the yajna where the bride and groom circle the fire seven times) and at death (cremation).

In Section VII of the Sabha Parva of Mahabharata, Narada speaks about the twenty-seven fires conveying the sacrificial butter,^[7] which fires are:-

- Angira (अङ्गरि) – Angiras, son of Bharata, himself became Agni whom he surpassed when Agni began to practise penance,
- Dakshinagni (दक्षिणाग्नि) - consecrated fire taken from the house-hold fire and placed in the south side,
- Gārhapatya (गार्हपत्य) – the perpetual house-hold fire,
- Āhavanīya (आहवनीय) – consecrated fire taken from the house-hold fire and placed in the east side,
- Nirmanthya (नर्मन्थ्य) – fire produced by friction,
- Vaidyuta (वैद्युत) – lightening,
- Śūra (शूर) – powerful mighty fire,
- Samvarta (संवर्त) – the fire that destroys,
- Laukika (लौकिकि) – the classical fire, belonging to the world of men,
- Jathar (जठर) – the old or ancient fire, the fire pertaining to the stomach,
- Vishaghā (वषिघा) – the entwining fire,
- Havya-vāhan (हव्य-वाहन) – the bearer of oblations,
- Kshemāvān (क्षेमावान्) – the secure, tranquil fire,
- Vaishnava (वैष्णव) – the fire relating to Vishnu,
- Dasyuhan (दस्युहन्) – the fire who is the destroyer of the dasyus,
- Balād (बलाद्) -

- Śānta (शान्त) – the calm, peaceful, serene fire,
- Pushta (पुष्ट) – the ever-equipped, protected fire,
- Vibhāvasu (वभिवसु) – the fire which is one of the eight vasus
- Jotishmata (ज्योतिष्मत) – the luminous, pure, brilliant fire,
- Bharat (भरत) – the fire who is the priest, maintained,
- Bhadra (भद्र) – the great, auspicious fire,
- Swistikrt (सवस्तकृत्) – the fire causing welfare or prosperity,
- Vasumaya (वसुमय) – the fire consisting of wealth or of good things
- Ritu (ऋतु) – the fire of light, splendor,
- Soma (सोम) – the fire which is nectar, ethereal,
- Pitryāna (पितृयाण) – the conveyor of virtuous persons to heaven.

There are five kinds of Agni (fire) – *Kala-agni* ('the fire of time'), *Ksuda-agni* ('the fire of hunger'), *Sita-agni* ('the cold fire'), *Kopa-agni* ('the fire of anger') and *Jnana-agni* ('the fire of knowledge'). Agni is also the name of one of the *Saptarishi* of the *Svarocisa Manvantara*, one of the *Saptarishi* of the *Tamasa Manvantara* and one of the *Saptarishi* of the *Indrasavarni Manvantara* which is yet to come. Agni is the name of the son of *Dharma* and *Vasordhara*, of an *Achārya* and of a disciple of *Indra*.^[8]

4 Vedic conception of Agni

Agni is the first word of the first hymn of the *Rig Veda* (Sukta I.i.1) revealed to Rishi Madhuchchandah Vaishvamtah in Gāyatri metre, which reads:

अग्नमि ईळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देवम्
ऋत्वजिम् ।
होतारं रत्नधातमम् ॥

With this mantra the *Rig Veda* begins with a prayer to Agni, the receiver, holder and distributor of energy, who leads the *devtas* to victory in their battles against the *asuras*, and confers wealth of various kinds to the performers of *yajnas*. The first line of the first mantra of the first *sukta* of the first *mandala* of the *Rig Veda* consists of six words. The first word is *agnimeele*, which is a compound word. This word is made of two words *agni* (energy) and *eeley* (initiate or pray). The Vedic mantras were the direct perceptions of the seers - ऋचः ऋषीणां दृष्टयो भवन्ति ॥. The purport of the afore-cited important mantra (*Rig Veda* I.i.1) is:

"I aspire intensely for Agni, the adorable, the leader who carries out the *yajna*; who does and gets done the *yajna* in due season, who is the summoning priest capable of bringing the gods to the *yajna* performed here, and the one who establishes excellent felicities in the aspirants.
"

Agni is the 'Mystic Fire', adored by the ancient and the present seers, to whom obeisance is carried by thought, and who endowing inner plenitude to the performers of *yajnas*, leads the *yajna* and through seer-will, and as the summoning priest takes them forward on the journey leading to God who is Truth. Agni is the envoy, the carrier of offerings, who born in the human aspirant, awakens the gods, burns the opposing foes - the demons. Agni, the youthful lord of the house who has the flame-tongue for his mouth, is invoked (kindled) by Agni –

अग्निनाग्निः समधियते कवरिगृहपतरियुवा ।
हव्यवाङ्जुहवास्यः ॥

who is the destroyer of afflictions, the purifier possessing the power that fills and fulfils.^[9]

Agni is the supreme director of religious ceremonies and duties, and figures as messenger between mortals and gods. Vedic rituals all involve Agni, for example, the elaborate *Agnicayana*, which is the piling of the fire-altar, and the *Agnihotra*, which is making offerings to Agni. The *Rig Veda* often says that Agni arises from water or dwells in the waters; the Vedic sage says that Agni manifesting in the waters and seated in the lap of the winding waters, flaming upward, increases; and that Agni was born by the prowess of *Tvasht* (*Rig Veda* I.95.5). He may have originally been the same as *Apam Napat*, the supreme god of creation, who is also sometimes described as fire arising from water. Hydrogen burns easily and Oxygen is required to inflame the fire. This is the important physiological phenomenon in any living body, which in a natural explanation may have referred to flames from natural gas or oil seepages surfacing through water, or as the seven rays or bands of light of a rainbow. Other *Rig-vedic* names, epithets or aspects of Agni include *Matarishvan*, *Jatavedas*, or *Bharata*.

Agni is a *deva*, second only to *Indra* in the power and importance attributed to him in *Vedic mythology*, with 218 out of 1,028 hymns of the *Rigveda* dedicated to him. He is *Indra's* twin, and therefore a son of *Dyaus Pita* and *Prthivi*. However, he is also said to have two mothers,^[10] or has two parts of the *firedrill* used to start the fire, and ten servant maids (the fingers of the man who is lighting the fire) or as the twice-born.^[11] He is one of the *Guardians of the directions*, representing the southeast. Rishi Medhatithi Kanva of the *Rig Veda* (I.xiii.3) calls Agni - मधुजविहम meaning the sweet-tongued. In the *Mundaka Upanishad* (I.ii.1-5) it is said that Agni, here meant the *Āhavaniya* Fire, has seven

tongues or flames – *Kālī* ('black'), *Karālī* ('terrible'), *Manojava* ('speedy as the mind'), *Sulohita* ('very red'), *Sudhumravarna* ('coloured like thick smoke'), *Sphulingini* ('emitting sparks') and *Vishwaruchi* ('having the fuel as the Sun' – तस्मादग्नः समधिो यस्य सूर्यः (II.i.5)). Agni, who is addressed as *Atithi* ('guest'), is also called – जातवेदसम् meaning - the one who knows all things that are born, created or produced (Rig Veda I.xliv.4), thus Rishi Praskanva states that Agni represents great learning and enlightening wisdom which ought to be sought, located and humbly approached. Agni excites *Buddhi* (reason and intellect), the perceiving and the determining factor, and by illuminating the mind it makes one understand and comprehend the truth – प्रचेतसोऽग्ने देवाँ इह द्रवत् (Rig Veda I.xliv.7). The Rishis of the Rig Veda knew knowledge to be the quality of the *Atman*, which quality inheres in the *Atman* and is in the nature of manifestations as physical and mental objects that exist in Time and Space. Therefore, by invoking Agni, the self-sustaining child who generates his mothers (two mothers) by his own powers - वत्सो मातृजन्यत स्वाधाम् (Rig Veda I.95.4), and as the guardian of all existence (सतः च गोपाम्) is also invoked the Unseeable One and His invisible power of infinite strength and magnitude which supports, sustains and protects space and all things, including Fire and Time, contained in Space.^[12]

purpose Agni is obtained from the rays of the Sun.

In the *Jātaveda* form, Agni, the god of fire, acts as the divine model for the sacrificial priest. He is the messenger who carries the oblation from humans to the gods, bringing the Gods to sacrifice, and interceding between gods and humans (Rig Veda I.26.3). When Agni is pleased, the gods are generous. Agni represents the cultivated, cooked and cultured aspects of Vedic ritual. Together with *Soma*, Agni is invoked in the Rig Veda more than any other gods.^[16]

The Rishis of the Rig Veda held Agni to be responsible for the manifestation of gods for the mortal being who then comes to know them and worship them by the mind

अग्नरियद् वेरमत्तार्य देवान्त्स चा बोधात्
मनसा यजात (Rig Veda I.77.2),

5 Nature and significance of Agni

Atharvan, the first teacher of divine wisdom (*Brahma-vidya*), was the eldest son of *Brahma*; as a priest he first instituted worship of 'fire' (*Agni*) and 'nectar' (*Soma*).^[13]

According to *Agni Purana*, which is the eighth in the list of eighteen *Puranas*, no god is approachable without the medium of Agni, and no divinity is without the presence of Agni; his element is earth. At the command of *Bhrigu*, Agni was brought down from the heavens for man's use by *Matarishvan*, in the later writings Agni is described as a son of *Angiras* who happened to discover fire and its uses. Agni as the immortal guest is the witness of all actions, supremely powerful, all consuming and irresistible but who commands all earthly and heavenly riches i.e. all temporal good. His most destructive aspect is when he acts as *Kravyād*.^[14] Agni first appeared in the heavens in the form of lightening; this was his first birth, his second birth was among the human beings as *Jātaveda* (learned by birth); his third birth was in water (Rig Veda I.45.1).^[15]

Agni has two forms: *Jātaveda* and *Kravyāda*.

Jātaveda is invoked to burn and carry the offerings (except flesh) to the respective Gods, in which case Agni is light identified with knowledge and with Brahman.

Kravyād is invoked to burn the flesh (corpses and animal parts) in the *Pitri-yajna* for which

therefore, they pray to Agni to increase its own strength or power that is within all human beings for them to cultivate strong conviction and firm belief (*shraddha*) without which there cannot develop a meaningful faith and deep devotion to support a dedicated mind. Agni is the essence of the knowledge of Existence, with its increase is wholly destroyed ignorance and all delusions, there is no nescience to be taken for granted and the human form assumed by *Brahman* is erased from the mind. *Shraddha* is that which supports and upholds Truth; it indicates a state of harmony.^[17]

Shatapatha Brahmana (SB 6.1.1.1) tells us that *Prajapati* was generated through the *tapas* of the *rishis* (equated with the non-existent of the Beginning), thereafter, through his own *tapas* *Prajapati* generated all the gods and all the creatures. He also generated Agni as the sacrificial fire and as the second self having wearied himself his glow and essence of him heated up and developed Agni (SB 10.6.5.2). Ritually Agni, as the altar built by the sacrifice, reconstitutes *Prajapati*.

Kravyād (क्रव्याद) is the form of Agni which eats corpses, the fire of the funeral pyre; the fire that eats corpses can eat everything. This is the impure form which is much feared. ^[18] In this form, after one's death and at the time of cremation, Agni heats up and burns the body only, the body which is the impure human condition (SB 2.2.4.8).^[19]



A Hindu Marriage Ceremony in progress



Yajna being performed at Vishnu Yangna Kunda on the occasion of Kumbhabhishekam of renovated Gunjanar-simhaswamy Temple at Tirumakudal Narsipur

6 Depictions of Agni



Agni with his consort Svaha.

In Hindu scriptures, Agni is depicted with two or seven hands, two heads and three legs. He has seven fiery tongues with which he licks the sacrificial butter. He rides a ram or a chariot harnessed by fiery horses. Agni is represented as red and two-faced, suggesting both his destructive and beneficent qualities, and with black eyes and hair, three legs and seven arms. He rides a ram, or a chariot pulled by goats or, more rarely, parrots. **Seven** rays of light emanate from his body. One of his names is *Sapta-jihva*, “the one having seven tongues”.^[20] Another one of his epithets is *Abhimani* (from Sanskrit: *abhi* (towards) + *man* (the verbal root man to think, reflect upon) meaning dignified, proud; longing for, thinking. Agni is worshipped as the symbol of piety and purity; as expression of two kinds of energy i.e. light and heat, he is the symbol of life and activity. When Agni is worshipped all gods (gods are symbols of life) lend their powers to this deity. The ancient seers had divided Agni into three parts – *gārhapatya* (for general domestic usage), *āhavaniya* (for inviting and welcoming a personage or deity) and *dakshinagni* (for fighting against all evil).^[21]

Agni is the chief terrestrial deity personified by the sacrificial fire which is the centre of the ritual poetry of the Rig Veda. The earth enveloped in darkness and the sky, become visible when Agni is born; the acquisition of fire by man is regarded as a gift of the gods. Agni is only compared and not identified with the Sun. *Yāska* states that his predecessor *Sākapuni* regarded the threefold existence of Agni as being in earth, air and heaven as stated by the Rig Veda but a *Brāhmana* considered the third manifestation to be the Sun. Agni, who is more closely connected with human life than any other god, is often identified with other gods, especially with *Varuna* and *Mitra*, in the evening he becomes *Varuna*, when he rises in the morning he becomes *Mitra*. And, his priesthood is the most salient feature of his character. A sage of the Rig Veda (Sukta IV.iii.11) states that the Sun became visible when Agni was born.^[22]

In the collection at Bharat Kalā Kendra (Benares Hindu University), there is a First century CE, red sandstone sculpture identifiable as Agni shown in the garb of a Brahmin, very much like sage *Kashyapa*, on the *Govindanagar Rsyasrngā door-jamb*. In the *Panchala* coins of *Agnimitra* there is deity with a halo of flames and on *Kushana* coins there is engraved an Iranian deity under the name of *Athos* (Agni?); in *Gupta* sculptures, Agni is shown as a Brahmanical deity with a halo of flames round the body and also with a beard, pot-bellied and holding *amrtaḡhata* (nectar-pot) in his right hand.^[23]

7 Agnihotra yajna

Agnihotra means - 'sacrificial fire'; the *Agnihotris* once maintained a perpetual fire in their homes. This ritual ceremony was conducted on important and auspicious occasions; in many homes prayers are still offered to Agni

(fire). The sage of the *Atharvaveda* (Sukta 19.55.3) prays to the fire for happiness and peace, for a happy temperament, resolve and good health, for strength and mental contentment, and as the ladder to spirituality. The sage also states – अग्नेर्होत्रेण प्रणुदे सप्तनान् - that *Agnihotra* destroys enemies (*Atharvaveda* 9.2.6). Even *Gautama Buddha* had explained the importance of the *yajna* of *Agnihotra* as “the ocean amongst rivers, a king amongst people and Savitri amongst the verses” (*Sutta Nipata* 568/21).^[24]

Indian people consider it as the duty of the man who has established his fires, as of the man who has no fires, to daily, morning and evening, to perform *Agnihotra*. If the fires are kept perpetually alight, then they are required only to be brightened up for each occasion, if otherwise then it has to be taken from the *garahpatya*. The main offering is milk, and at the end, the sacrificer offers four water oblations i.e. to the gods, to father and the fathers, to the seven seers and to Agni on earth.^[25] Shatapatha Brahmana (SB 3.1.3.18) tells us that *Agnihotra* should be performed by the performer knowing that he will gain the strength and victories gained by Agni who conquered the earth, Vayu, the air and Surya, the sky, with whom he shares the world; and the same text further tells us that the *Agnihotra*, doubtless, is the Sun.^[26]

Shankara in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* states that the rightful observance of the *Agnihotra* and other rites are meant for those desirous of attaining Heaven and other enjoyments, and the understanding of the rightful doctrine of the Soul is meant for those desirous of emancipation.^[27]

8 Upanishadic conception

For the Vedic people Agni was the multifaceted psychological power connected with will, action and related powers, *Isha Upanishad* focuses on this tradition of Agni as the Divine Will which motivates and executes.^[28] The sage of this *Upanishad*, offering total submission and self-surrender of all the faculties of the lower egoistic human nature, prays to Agni, the Cosmic energy on account of which is the universe, and therefore, is the knower of all things that are manifested, to guide and lead him to its own place of origin, to That (*Brahman*) in which all this is established, to That from which all this has sprung, to That in which all this finally find refuge (*Isha Upanishad*.18).^[29] In the *Kena Upanishad*, Agni reveals his identity as the heat energy and the ever-burning flame of the conscious force in matter that makes up the entire world.^[30] The gods sent first Agni to find out the nature of *Brahman*, which means it is Agni that releases the energy which is latent in all beings. Moreover, the sage of the *Kena Upanishad* refers to the functional differentiation and specialization of body parts on which account the life-stream progresses when he speaks of Agni becoming the speech and entering the mouth and Vayu becoming

breath and entering the nostrils.^[31]

Pravahana Jaivali, who was well-versed in *udgitha*, held that the Universe exhibits at every stage the principle of sacrifice in as much as the heaven by itself is a great altar in which the sun is burning as fuel from the oblation that is offered in this sacrifice, namely *shraddha*, rises the Moon; looking at the sky again it is seen that *parjanya* is the great altar in which the year is burning as fuel from the oblation offered in this sacrifice, namely the Moon, rises Rain; then again the whole world is a great altar in which the earth burns as fuel from the oblation offered in this sacrifice, namely Rain, rises Food; man himself is a great altar in which the opened mouth is the fuel from the oblation offered in his sacrifice, namely Food, rises Seed; and finally woman herself is a great altar in which Seed being offered as an oblation, rises Man. This is his celebrated “Doctrine of the Five Fires” - the *Panchagni vidya*. Before *Satyakama Jabala*, in bodily form arose the Three Sacrificial Fires to instruct him, the three fires were – i) the *Garhapatya* who told him that the ultimate reality was to be found in the sun, ii) the *Anvaharyapachana* who told him that it was to be found in the moon, and iii) the *Ahavaniya* who told him that it was to be found in the lightening, but to whom *Upakosala* explained that the ultimate reality was to be found not in these three but in the image of the person reflected in the human eye. And from *Katha Upanishad* becomes known about *Yama* taught *Nachiketa* the secrets of the fire that leads to heaven and what bricks were required to build the altar.^[32]

The *Chandogya Upanishad* conceives the whole universal activity of creation as a kind of *yajna* (sacrifice) where everything is connected; this sacrifice/knowledge is known as the *Panchagni vidya*. The activity of creation (or of manifestation of any object) begins with the birth of the child (or with the production of an atom or molecule) whom the cosmos produces and not parents alone, then the child’s presence is felt everywhere mainly because the universe is intimately inter-connected. The *Shatras* teach that the macrocosm is in the microcosm; each manifestation is the quintessence of every particle of *Prakriti*, and that *Prakriti* on its own accord takes care of each manifestation or birth and withdraws those manifestations as a part of the operation of the universal laws. This is the philosophical background of this *vidya* which deals all events of manifestation not merely as the birth of a human child alone, and which *vidya* is the contemplation of the mind in perceiving the reality that is transcendent to the visible parts of the inner sacrifice. The subtle effects (all effects are only phenomenal) produced by all our actions are invisible to the eye, they are called *apurva*; we, as the causer of *apurva*, reap the fruits of all our actions; because higher realms are activated by our actions, with every stage of development being a sacrifice i.e. a meditation, the consequence of those actions become the cause of our descent.^[33] The *Chandogya Upanishad* epitomizes ‘Mind’ and ‘Ākāśa’ into ‘Speech’, ‘Prana’, ‘Sight’

and 'Hearing' into 'Agni', 'Vayu', 'Aditya' and the 'Directions', and declares that Speech is a foot of Brahman; it shines with Agni as light. Dhira Satparaneya had told Mahasala Jabala that Agni is Speech (Shatapatha Brahmana X.ii.3).^[34]

9 Legends

Agni is the eldest son of Brahma. In Visnu Purana, Agni (Abhimani) the fire god is said to have sprung from the mouth of the Virat purusha, the Cosmic Man. His wife is Svaha. Abhimani had three sons of surpassing brilliancy: Pavaka, Pavamana, and Suchi, the personifications of the three fires that produced our earth and humanity (VP 1:10).^[35] All these three names indicate purity. Abhimani, his three sons, and their 45 sons constitute the 49 mystic fires of the Puranas and theosophy. (cf Agni Purana.) Agneya is the Hindu Goddess of Fire and the daughter of Agni.

Agni's three sons, according to the Vayu Purana, stand for three different aspects of Agni (fire): Pavaka is the electric fire, Pavamana is the fire produced by friction, and Suchi is the solar fire. Interpreted on the cosmic and human planes, these three fires are "Spirit, Soul, and Body, the three great Root groups, with their four additional divisions" (SD 2:247). They are said to have been cursed by the sage Vasishtha to be born again and again (cf BP 4:24,4; SD 2:247-8). "Every fire has a distinct function and meaning in the worlds of the physical and the spiritual. He has, moreover, in its essential nature a corresponding relation to one of the human psychic faculties, besides its well determined chemical and physical potencies when coming in contact with the terrestrially differentiated matter" (SD 1:521).

In some Hindu symbolism, Agni's parents are said to be the two components of the firedrill used to start the fire, and when young he was said to be cared for by ten servants who are represented by the ten fingers of the man who starts the fire.

Agniparikshā or 'the Fire ordeal' has Agni as the witness. Sita was forced to undergo this ordeal to prove her virtue. Agni redeemed the original Sita from the wrath and condemnation of her husband and her community.^[36]

10 Ayurvedic conception

Agni is an important entity in Ayurveda. Agni is the fiery metabolic energy of digestion, allows assimilation of food while ridding the body of waste and toxins and transforms dense physical matter into subtle forms of energy the body needs. Jathar-agni determines the production of hydrochloric acid in the stomach, Bhuta-agni determines the production of bile in the liver, Kloma-agni determines the production of sugar-digesting pancreatic enzymes and

so forth. The nature and quality of these agnis depend on one's dosha which can be – vata, pitta or kapha.^[37]

Agni is also known as Vaisvanara. In Shrimad Bhagavad Gita (Sloka 15.14) it is said:

अहं वैश्वानरो भूत्वा प्राणानि देहमाश्रतिः ।

प्राणापानसमायुक्तः पचाम्यन्नं चतुर्वधिम् ॥

"Taking the form of fire lodged in the body of all creatures and united with the Prāṇa (exhalation) and Apāna (inhalation) breaths, it is I who consume the four kinds of food."

Here, the digestion of the food is referred to as Vaisvanara. The four kinds of food are – a) Bhaksya, solid food that requires mastication before swallowing, b) Bhojya, food that can be directly swallowed without mastication, c) Lehya, food that can be licked and d) Cosya, that which is sucked. Just as the illuminating power in the fire is a part of Lord's own effulgence even so the heating power in it i.e. its digestive and appetizing power is also a part of His energy or potency.^[38]

Water is needed in all physiological reaction; water is either produced or consumed in form of Hydrogen combining with Oxygen. Pandurang Shastri Athavale of Swadhyaya Parivar has narrated this beautifully in his discourses of Ishopanishad. The Vedic people attributed special healing power to 'water' or to 'fire'; the Kauśika Sūtra, which constitutes the oldest system of Indian Medical Science, relies on the so-called Vedic magical chants which chants or songs actually give with great clarity the symptoms of the various diseases.^[39]

11 Agni and the Arya Samaj

Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati on 10 April 1875, at Bombay.

The Arya Samajists, who call heaven and hell as the conditions of the soul, do not worship the fire, but perform yajnas to recite Vedic mantras and that too mostly on special occasions^[40] even though Agni is of central importance in their religious practices.^[41] At the performance of those yajnas, and as part of Samidadhana ('fuel-adding'), fire is placed in the vedi with a prayer for the yajmana (the performer of the yajna) to accomplish the desired performances, then that fire placed in the vedi lights up the woodfuel (samidha) which is the power of endurance to fire which is present in all created things, which fire is kept enkindled by ghee and to which to begin with oblations are offered meant for jatavedas agni and the angiras agni alone.^[42]



Sculpture of Agni from Musée Guimet

12 Fire-rites in other religions

In Newar, Tibetan and Japanese Buddhism, he is a *lokapāla* guarding the Southeast. In the Tibetan text *Jigten lugs kyi bstan bcos* it says “Make your hearth in the southeast corner of the house, which is the quarter of Agni”. He also plays a central role in most Buddhist *homa* fire-puja rites. A typical praise to Agni starts “Son of Brahma, Lord of the World, King of fire gods empowered by Takki, Whose supreme wisdom burns all delusion [...]”^[43] In Mikkyō tradition Agni is known as *Katen* (迦騰). In the Philippine Mythology, Agni is also the god of fire as their local beliefs in pre-Spanish times have some Hindu influences.^[44]

All faiths have fire rites. The eternal flame was a component of the Jewish religious rituals performed in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple in Jerusalem, where a commandment required a fire to burn continuously upon the Outer Altar.^[45] The Hebrews offered their children to Agni as Maloch. The serpent is also an emblem of Agni. Mazdeans in Persia worshipped fire as god, that Ahirman commanded fire. Parsees still see him in their *Atash-ga*. Fire is one of man’s earliest divine ideas; Ag is a Turanian root; it impregnated earth, for Orphean mystics said – “without heat nothing germinates”; and the Japanese kosmogonies teach that from fire and water sprang mountains and rivers. The Akkadian fire symbol represents the fire stick. The Celts and the Greeks walked

round the fire holding grass (*kusha*) in their hands, and the Romans spoke of fire as the focus of the hearth and of family life.^[46]

In Greek Mythology, Prometheus, the ancient Greek god of Fire, who had aided Zeus in his fight against his father Cronos, was the son of the Titan, Iapetus. He is believed to have brought fire to earth after stealing it from Zeus for use by mankind as an essential of civilized life; he is credited to have given man weapons of war, and also all miseries.^[47]

13 See also

- Apris
- Atar (Zoroastrian yazata of fire)
- Hindu deities
- Eternal flame

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16.1 Text

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Agni Yoga

Agni Yoga is a spiritual teaching transmitted by the artist **Nicholas Roerich** and his wife **Helena Roerich** from 1920. The followers of Agni Yoga believe that the teaching was given to the Roerich family and their associates by Master **Morya**, the guru of **Helena Blavatsky**, a founder of the **Theosophical Society**. In the seventeen volumes of Agni Yoga that have been translated into English from the original Russian, as well as in the letters of Helena Roerich, the Agni Yoga teaching is also referred to as the Teaching of **Living Ethics**, the Teaching of Life, the Teaching of Light, or simply as “the Teaching.”

1 Teachings

1.1 Fire and the New Era

Agni means “fire” in **Sanskrit** — the Creative Fire of the Universe. The fire god **Agni** is a major deity in the **Vedic pantheon**, especially in the **Rigveda**. **Agni** and fire have a broad spectrum of meanings in the Agni Yoga books. They often refer to: the primordial light and life at the root of the universe; cosmic energy, or the “Fire of Space”; and “psychic energy,” the powers of the human mind and heart, particularly those manifesting in love, thought, and creativity. In general, fire is a powerful transformative energy, a swift, subtle, connective force of high vibration.

Agni Yoga states that humanity is entering the New Era of Satya Yuga (Light), having just left the previous era of Kali Yuga (darkness) in which the flow of cosmic fire pouring onto the Earth will intensify. There is danger that the lack of spiritual synthesis (i.e. the inability of humanity to recognize the existence of Higher Fiery Energy Forces) will block these Energies from being transmuted by humanity into the crust of the earth where they would stabilize the molten magma under the surface. Without such transmutation by humanity, these energies will turn negative and destructive and bring on earthquakes and other upheavals.^{[1]:307, 341[2]:1} The situation is exacerbated by humanity’s misuse of “fire”: not only such gross fires as combustion and electricity, but also the subtler fires of thought and feeling.^{[3]:19} If humanity and our planet are to survive, we need to be able to consciously accept this powerful energy from space and transform it into a constructive force.^{[4]:378} In accomplishing this, we first must purify and refine our **psychic energy**, the subtle force at the root of our emotions, perceptions, and thoughts. This gradual process involves expansion of **consciousness**, as well as the kindling of the subtle energy

centers in the human organism and the transmutation of their fires.^{[5]:227–229}

Unlike most traditional approaches to the mastery of the highest subtle energies, Agni Yoga insists that mastery must take place within the context of contemporary secular life. Monasticism is replaced by action for the Common Good, creative work that helps build a new era based on knowledge that is both scientific and spiritual. Although “The coming epoch will be under the Rays of three Lords—**Maitreya**, **Buddha**, and **Christ**,”^{[6]:353} the New Age is known as the Age of Maitreya, the future World Teacher, because the characteristics associated with Maitreya will come to the fore. Moreover, because the manifestation of Maitreya is linked with the affirmation of the Mother of the World, in the past, present and future,^{[7]:13} the coming era is also known as the Epoch of Woman, or the Epoch of the Mother of the World. It is also the Epoch of Shambhala, since humanity will be directly ruled by the Brotherhood of Mahatmas that dwell in **Shambhala**, a mysterious abode in Central Asia. “What are the signs of the time of Shambhala? The signs of the age of truth and cooperation.”^{[8]:242} “One should understand the most proximate gifts of evolution: first—psychic energy; second—the woman’s movement; third—cooperation. Each of these gifts must be accepted in full measure, not abstractly.”^{[9]:414}

1.2 Building the Temple

In addressing “builders and warriors”, the very first lines of the Agni Yoga teaching^{[10]:preface} indicate two aspects of the external work of those who follow Agni Yoga: construction of a New Era, and the battle to create conditions under which construction is possible.^{[11]:116[9]:11}

The constructive work outlined in the Agni Yoga books embraces every domain of human life. In the first paragraphs of the Teaching, the work is likened to the building of a New Temple for all humanity, the temple being a symbol of spiritual knowledge.^{[10]:1 [12]} Art and beauty are also emphasized from the very beginning.^{[10]:2} “Remember, Art is the one vital medium of the coming culture. Through Beauty will you approach.”^{[10]:333} Working with children is another early theme that continues through the entire series.^{[10]:375, 378}

In the field of medicine, Agni Yoga anticipates developments in later decades. “Agni Yoga approaches just in time. Without it, who would say that epidemics of influenza should be cured by psychic energy? Who would

pay attention to new kinds of mental illness, brain disease, and sleep disorders? ...[O]ne should think seriously about the new enemies that are created by the conditions of contemporary life. One cannot apply the old methods to them; a new approach will be developed through the expansion of consciousness.”^{[1]:492}

The new approach will focus on “psychic energy, because its crystal brings about the best healing. It is possible to extract deposits of this energy, which is a panacea for all illnesses.”^{[1]:495} in English; 476 in Russian Just as an emotion like irritation gives rise to chemical substances that deposit in the body, so does the sacred energy, “because each energy has a physical crystal.”^{[1]:220} Along with study of the “nerve centers” (chakras), research on the chemical deposits of subtle energies “will form the future direction of medicine. Through these domains humanity will come closer to detecting the subtlest energy, which for the sake of simplicity we call ‘spirit.’ The next step in the development of culture will arise from discovery of the emanations of this energy.”^{[1]:42}

Agni Yoga favors empirical research on the interaction of psychic energy (“mind” or “spirit”) with the human organism and its environment, and it often discusses how scientists might best approach this new field.^{[1]:396}^{[13]:480, 584} ^{[14]:453} ^{[9]:342} At the same time, Agni Yoga endorses aromatherapy,^{[9]:221, 224, 384} Ayurveda,^{[15]:538} herbalism, suggestion,^{[13]:74} ^{[14]:293–295} and other practices about which mainstream Western medicine remains skeptical. “We [of the Brotherhood] do not ignore the methods of Western science, but We lay psychic energy in the foundation. Having come to the conclusion that psychic energy is necessary both for ourselves and for experimental procedures, We are primarily concerned with creating conditions favorable to its accumulation.”^{[8]:198}

The accumulation of psychic energy requires attention to the macrocosm as well as the microcosm. The “course of the luminaries”—the motion of celestial bodies, particularly the planets that represent the seven lines of cosmic life—and the chemical composition of their rays have a powerful impact on human events. The ancient science of astrology should be revived, especially for medical and governmental purposes,^{[14]:218, 293} ^{[16]:205–206, 3.5.7 (328 in Russian)} but it needs to be combined with practical knowledge on the ground^{[15]:23} and the inner knowledge of a fiery heart.^{[3]:115} The expansion of consciousness will naturally carry humanity to the “far-off worlds,” including planets on a higher plane of existence.^{[16]:133–134, 2.8.15; 224 in Russian}

Agni Yoga’s insight into the Earth’s critical situation is ahead of its time. “People will ask, ‘Right now, how can we serve on Earth in the most beneficial way?’ They should restore the Earth’s health. There is a whole list of ways to carry out this worldwide task of restoration. One should keep in mind that people have destroyed the resources of Earth without mercy. They are ready

to poison the earth and the air. They have laid waste forests—the receptacles of prana. They have diminished animal life, forgetting that animal energy nourishes the earth. They believe that untested chemical substances (medicine and drugs) can take the place of prana and earthly emanations. They plunder mineral resources, unmindful that a balance must be maintained. They do not think about what caused the catastrophe of Atlantis. They neglect the fact that chemical substances should be tested over the course of a century, for a single generation is too short to determine whether a substance will bring evolution or its opposite... They think that by some act of mercy the weather will clear and people will become prosperous! But the problem of restoring health does not cross their minds. So let us love all of creation!”^{[14]:630} There is also discussion of such issues as climate change,^{[3]:19} desertification,^{[14]:317} excessive urbanization,^{[14]:323} air pollution, and narcotics.^{[3]:351}

1.3 Warriors of Light

“What to call the illness of the planet? The best name would be ‘fever from poisoning.’ Stifling gases from the detritus of the Subtle World’s lower strata are cutting the planet off from the worlds that could be bringing it assistance. The Earth’s destiny may end with a gigantic explosion if this thick veil is not penetrated.”^{[8]:49} To avoid this fate and bring about the renewal of the Earth, people must learn to consciously participate in the tremendous battle that rages not only in our visible world but primarily in the invisible Subtle World.^{[13]:184} This will help to save the Earth and usher in the Epoch of Maitreya, an age of worldwide peace and culture.^{[7]:109} ^{[17]:135} ^{[10]:105} ^{[13]:154} This being a battle between the earthly world and the invisible, subtle worlds, in a certain sense, the struggle will help link these worlds, ending the unnatural state of isolation in which earthly humanity now exists.^{[18]:376–377, 388} ^{[13]:180} By bringing all forces into play and raising tension and danger to an unprecedented level, the Battle makes it possible for the “Warrior of Light” to temper herself or himself, attain joy, and kindle the chakras, especially the heart.^{[4]:350} ^{[7]:320} ^{[11]:61} ^{[2]:48} ^{[1]:111, 650} ^{[17]:324} ^{[3]:82}

The Battle can be looked at from many perspectives. It is a conflict between the elements earth and fire,^{[1]:121} ^{[4]:329} between the higher and lower fires,^{[4]:574} ^{[10]:276} and between the separative aspect of Saturn and Uranus the synthesizer.^{[2]:338, 356} Perhaps most fundamentally it is a battle between the creative, affirmative power of the human free will and the destructive power of negation or nihilism.^{[17]:320, 138} Agni Yoga says Yes to every aspect of life, including conflict. For the Brotherhood, battle is fundamentally defensive, but it is able to use the unavoidable battle to affirm the highest creative values.^{[15]:490} ^{[11]:116}

A human being is inevitably involved in three battles: the battle between free will and karma, that is, between the higher self and the lower personality; the battle between the Brotherhood (or Hierarchy) of Light and the disem-

bodied forces of evil; and the cosmic battle “between the subtle energies and the waves of chaos,” a battle that continues forever.^{[11]:161 [19]:825, 831 [7]:168 [2]:51, 293} The Battle may also refer to *Armageddon*, the international conflict that started in 1942.^[20] In any case, Agni Yoga differs from most “spiritual” teachings in that it is “not a peaceful teaching” but a “call to battle.”^{[10]:194, 319} It is full of martial imagery—swords, shields, arrows, spears, and armor—as its followers are “warriors of spirit” and such martial virtues as courage and vigilance are needed on earth.

1.4 Four Stones

The second book of the Agni Yoga teaching, *Leaves of Morya's Garden II (Illumination)*, indicates four basic principles for action. “Friends! Place four stones in the foundation of your actions: First—Reverence for the Hierarchy. Second—Consciousness of unity. Third—Consciousness of co-measurement. Fourth—Application of the principle, ‘By thy God.’”^{[16]:144, 2.9.10 in English; section 235 in Russian.}

Along with many schools of Asian thought, Agni Yoga teaches that spiritual liberation depends on cultivating an awareness of unity with the Higher Forces so we can be guided and protected by the compassionate enlightened beings who belong to the Brotherhood, the Hierarchy of Light. Co-measurement is the ability to understand the relative importance of one’s relationship with these Higher Beings and act accordingly. It is related to “goal-fitness,” the ability to evaluate and adjust one’s thoughts and actions in light of conscious goals.^{[1]:259 [11]:127}

“By thy God” means the ability to understand the highest ideals of other people—their gods, so to speak—and affirm them. In the past, a person would assert the sanctity and value of his own god, but now it is essential to “find the God of each one and exalt Him. One can understand this with reason, but it is more important to embrace it in the smile of the spirit.” This principle of Great Tolerance “is the basis of the New World.”^{[16]:124-5, 2.8.2 in English; section 211 in Russian [21]}

1.5 The Fiery Transmutation

The initial steps of Agni Yoga resemble those of Raja Yoga: purification, striving, study, and mastery of prana, the life force.^[22] “A young person may ask, ‘How should Agni Yoga be understood?’ Say, ‘As discernment of the all-connecting element of fire, which nourishes the seed of the spirit, and its application to life.’ The young person may ask, ‘How can I approach that knowledge?’ ‘Purify your thinking, and after determining your three worst traits, consign them to the flames of a fiery striving. Then choose a Teacher on Earth and, while getting to know the Teaching, strengthen your body with the medicines and pranayama indicated. You will behold the stars of the

spirit; you will see the fires that purify your centers; you will hear the voice of the Invisible Teacher; and you will enter into other aspects of the subtlest understanding that transforms life.”^[23]

As in *Raja Yoga*, successful practice under a qualified guru results in development of *clairvoyance*, *clairaudience*, and other subtle faculties, as well as the kindling of the psychic centers—the *chakras*.^[24] Besides the seven chakras often mentioned in esoteric literature, Agni Yoga touches on the kindling of the centers in the lungs, shoulders, and other parts of the body.^[24] Special emphasis is placed on the fires in the heart center and the Chalice, or the *Anahata* chakra, which is behind the heart.^[25] In the latter are stored spiritual accumulations from past lives, including “straight-knowledge,” a very high degree of intuition.^[26] “People often confuse great straight-knowledge, which is the result of many experiences and wonderful accumulations over many incarnations, with a certain psychism. The latter manifests in more or less correct presentiments, dreams, and perceptions of the *astral plane* that correspond to the perceiver’s consciousness. Straight-knowledge, on the other hand, knows with certainty, knows the essence of everything happening, knows the direction of evolution as well as the future. Straight-knowledge is the synthesis of spirituality; naturally, it only belongs to a great spirit who has accumulated its Chalice, regardless of how modest his or her social position may be.”^[27]

Although in general Agni Yoga avoids negation, including prohibition and renunciation,^[28] it expresses strong opposition to magic, mediumistic practices, and psychism—the pursuit of lower psychic powers and attachment to psychic phenomena^[29]—because they hinder the practice of Agni Yoga. For the same reason, Agni Yoga opposes “mechanical” exercises that seek to awaken the inner power by manipulation or strengthening of the outer. Even exercises to develop concentration have subordinate value. Inspiration from the Hierarchy, an essential condition on the path, “descends through a single basic condition. Neither concentration nor command of the will, but love for the Hierarchy gives rise to direct Communion. We do not know how better or more precisely to express the guiding law than as a surge of love. That is why it is timely to cast aside magic with all its compulsion and be imbued with love to one’s very core. Then one can easily approach the source of Being through a truly wondrous feeling. Precisely, amidst the disintegration of the planet, one needs to turn to the principle that will most effectively restore health. And what can more strongly unify than the mantram, ‘I love you, O Lord!’ Such a call makes it easy to receive a ray of knowledge.”^[30]

Love, then, is what makes it possible to receive inner knowledge, especially when accompanied by gratitude and joy.^[31] Courage and patience are also needed,^[32] for Agni Yoga is not merely a matter of kindling the centers with a “*Kundalini* experience,” but involves years of “fiery transmutation” by which the feelings, thoughts,

and sensations are refined, eventually allowing the Yogi to function in his or her **subtle body**, and later the still more sublime and powerful fire body.^[33] The development of these bodies makes it possible for a Yogi to attain **immortality**—the ability to act consciously at will in the earthly, subtle, and fiery worlds^[34]—and work for the good of others on a vast scale. Because the world is currently in such chaos, during the process of transmutation feelings of anguish are inevitable; they need to be acknowledged and overcome.^[35]

In outlining “four gates,” *Agni Yoga* 163 gives an overview of the entire process. “He who would swim must dive fearlessly into the water. And he who has determined to master Agni Yoga must transform his entire life with it. Why do people think they can spare **Yoga** a portion of some idle hour and remain in impure thought the rest of the time? Truly, all actions ought to be imbued with the purifying power of fiery striving... This most synthesizing Yoga exacts an obligation to construct your entire life in accordance with a discipline that is externally imperceptible. If this imperceptible discipline no longer feels like chains but instead turns into the joy of responsibility, we can consider the first Gates open. When one awakens to the cooperation with the far-off worlds, then the second Gates will open. And when the foundations of evolution are understood, the bolts will fall from the third Gates. And finally, when the advantage of using a densified **astral body** has been understood, then the bolts of the fourth Gates will fall away. As this process goes forward, the fires of the centers of knowledge kindle, and amidst the lightning bolts of the subtlest energies, straight-knowledge emerges. Cherish, then, the fire of knowledge and guard the growing power.”^[36]

2 The Maitreya Sangha

Beginning with *New Era Community*, the third work in the Agni Yoga series, the covers of all of the books display a square in which are written the Sanskrit words “Maitreya Sangha.” This implies that Agni Yoga is a teaching for the **Sangha**—the spiritual community—that will follow the future Buddha, **Maitreya**.

The name Maitreya derives from the Sanskrit *maitri* (*mettā* in Pali), “friendliness” or “loving-kindness”. Maitreya is also called “Ajita”, which means “the invincible one”. Both **Mahayana** and **Theravada** Buddhism recognize Maitreya as the next Buddha, the fifth Buddha who is to succeed the fourth Buddha, **Gotama**. Maitreya will be the last of the five Buddhas who attain enlightenment in this **kalpa**, or great cycle. **Asanga**, the founder of the **Yogacara** or ‘Consciousness-only’ school of Mahayana Buddhism, is said to have gone to Maitreya’s abode in **Tushita** heaven and obtained five teachings from him. In 5.67 billion years, Maitreya will be reborn in the physical world and become a Buddha. Until then, he will be a caretaker who watches over the Earth’s destiny.

The emergence of **millenarian** movements expecting the advent of Maitreya indicates that Buddhists have not always taken the 5.67-billion year figure literally. Moreover, Maitreya is sometimes depicted in the **bhadrāsana** posture with his legs extended, indicating that he is preparing to descend to a lower plane.^[37] Theosophists might explain the 567 figure as indicating that Maitreya will appear at the end of the present “Fifth Race” and in the Sixth and Seventh Races.^[38] Agni Yoga follows the racial theories outlined by Blavatsky and claims to be a teaching for the Sixth Race, which is beginning to manifest as the Epoch of Maitreya draws near. “Now We are gathering the spirits of the sixth race, and Agni Yoga is the Call!”^[39]

In **Vajrayana** or Tantric Buddhism each of the Buddhas who appear in this world is aligned with one of the **Five Dhyani Buddhas** who exist in higher worlds. As the fifth earthly Buddha, Maitreya is linked with the fifth Dhyani-Buddha, **Amoghasiddhi**, the Buddha of “infallible achievement”, “the invincible conqueror” who unflinchingly attains his goal. Amoghasiddhi represents the perfected state of the *samskara-skandha* (*saṅkhāra* in Pali), mental phenomena and motivational factors, including thought and will. He is associated with the All-Accomplishing Wisdom, which leads to unerring action free of envy and jealousy. This wisdom is the synthesis of the other four. Amoghasiddhi is the center of the “karma” group of deities, “karma” indicating “action” and “energy”, and not simply “fate”. He is typically shown with his right hand lifted in the **mudra** of fearlessness, which brings peace and protection to all. He is associated with the direction north, the element air, and green, a color that calms anxiety. His symbol is the double-**vajra**, two thunderbolts that form an equilateral cross, and his seed syllable (*bīja*) is “Ah”. His throne is supported by **garudas**, creatures that are half man and half bird. His consort is **Tara**, the mother goddess in Mongolia and Tibet.^[40]

Agni Yoga emphasizes action and achievement on the earthly plane: “By human hands must the Temple be built... Actions will be achieved by human hands as a result of the highest creativity.”^[41] The strong affirmation of creativity that runs throughout the Agni Yoga teaching signals a break with older concepts of spirituality. “Do not judge much; rather, act. Do not sit in contemplation; rather, create and discover.”^[42] “I shall shorten my psalms, and I shall limit the length of my hymns. And achievement will be my prayer, and I shall start it with silence.”^[43]

The Russian word for “achievement”, *podvig*, shares some meanings of *siddhi*, as it indicates a heroic deed that involves intense striving, self-abnegation, and heroism.^[44] In Agni Yoga *podvig* implies synthesis, the ability to embrace contrasts. The Agni Yogi “acts for spirit, but does not detach himself from Earth.”^[45] Agni Yoga affirms both of the Origins (Начал): Matter and Spirit, Yin and Yang, the vertical and horizontal axes of the equilateral cross. The achievements of Agni Yoga

are manifested in the active lives of Nicholas and Helena Roerich, known in the books as the Guru and the Tara (or Urusvati).

As in the Five Books of Maitreya and Consciousness-Only thought, the concept of “manifestation” (явление) is an essential one in Agni Yoga, variants of the word appearing well over 1,000 times in *Infinity* I alone. The fundamental idea is that a Yogi should not only be aware of Truth but also work with cosmic forces to manifest or express it in creative thought and action. The concept of manifestation is also symbolized in the smiling mouth of Budai Luohan (布袋和尚, Hotei in Japanese), a form of Maitreya in East Asia; the open mouth expresses manifestation, as well as the seed syllable “Ah,” which is associated with the throat center.^[46] The large bag Budai has slung over his shoulder may refer to meritorious “accumulations” such as those that Agni Yoga says are stored in the Chalice, the Anahata chakra behind the heart.

Fugong-chengjiu (フクフジョウ, Fuku-joju in Japanese), one Chinese name for Amoghasiddhi, means “accomplishing everything everywhere without exception.” In Agni Yoga this appears as the practice of “cementing” or saturating space by imbuing it with thought and pure energy.^[47]

The themes of love, tolerance, fearlessness, victory, invincibility, energy, flight, and the future are also shared by Agni Yoga and the Maitreya-Amoghasiddhi constellation.

The above does not validate Agni Yoga’s claim to be a teaching for the Maitreya Sangha, but suggests that whoever was the source of the Agni Yoga books had knowledge of the symbols and ideas traditionally associated with Maitreya and Amoghasiddhi. The Roerichs’ son, George (or Yuri), was an outstanding Tibetologist **George de Roerich**, and the Roerichs consistently expressed a sympathetic attitude toward Buddhism. Their writings, including *Foundations of Buddhism* by Helena Roerich, show familiarity with the Buddhist literature available in Western languages at the time.

3 The Agni Yoga Series

The Agni Yoga teaching was given out in the following books:

Leaves of Morya’s Garden I (*The Call*) (dated 1924, but transmitted from 1920 to 1923, with the Russian original first published in Paris in 1923)

Leaves of Morya’s Garden II (*Illumination*) (1925, but transmitted from May 1923 to June 1925)

New Era Community (1926)

Agni Yoga (1929) (first English edition in two volumes)

Infinity I (1930)

Infinity II (1930)

Hierarchy (1931)

Heart (1932)

Fiery World I (1933)

Fiery World II (1934)

Fiery World III (1935)

Aum (1936)

Brotherhood (1937)

Supermundane: The Inner Life I (1938)

Supermundane: The Inner Life II (1939)

Supermundane: The Inner Life III (1940)

Supermundane: The Inner Life IV (1941) (Due to its length, the single-volume Russian *Supermundane: The Inner Life* has been divided into four volumes in the English translation.)

The letters of Helena Roerich, the “Mother of Agni Yoga” may also be considered an integral part of the teaching. Two volumes of her letters have been translated into English and published in book form by the Agni Yoga Society with translations of the Agni Yoga series. Additionally, the original Russian text of the “Farewell speech to the leader” has been translated into English by Gleb Drobychev and Burt Wilson and published in the United States as “The Leader.” It is a set of governing suggestions from the Hierarchy to Nicholas Roerich who was to become the head of state of a “new country” carved out of regions of China, Japan, Mongolia and Russia. This was plan attempted, but never completed.

The first line of the Agni Yoga teaching reads, “Into the New Russia My first message,”^[10] underscoring the future role of Russia. This passage was rendered “into the New Country” in the 1953 English translation, and “into the New World” in the 1999 translation. While in no way denying the significance of Russia—the teaching was given in Russian to Russians, and even today is most widely read in Russia—these translations are in keeping with the statement in the same book that “The Teaching is intended for the entire world, for all beings.”^[48] “The books of Agni Yoga are a gift to humanity.”^[49] “First of all forget all nationalities, and understand that consciousness is developed by perfecting the invisible centers. Some await a Messiah for a single nation, but this is ignorant, for the evolution of the planet can only take place on a planetary scale. Precisely, the emergence of universality must be thoroughly grasped.”^[50]

The Agni Yoga Teaching is most easily approached by people who have a karmic link with the Masters^[51] and by those who belong in spirit to the Sixth Race—and they are all over the world.^[52] Readers who are expecting a spiritual exposition in the form of a treatise will be frustrated. The messages in the teaching were transmitted by clairaudience according to the recipients’ circumstances.^[53] The books are compiled from Helena Roerich’s notebooks, and the messages are often short and not directly linked to each other. Ideas on any given theme are scattered throughout the entire series. But Agni Yoga claims that, “The Teaching grows spirally, as does everything that exists,”^[54] and that there is an inner rhythm in the growth of this spiral.^[55] “Someone will ask why the Teaching is scattered like seeds. Answer that only from a variety of threads can a complex pattern be created. Someone will

ask why the Teaching has no completed tenets. Answer that in completion lies death. Someone will ask why the parts of the Teaching cannot be logically connected. Answer that it would be ugly to grow only a head or only a hand.”^[56] Because of this unorthodox arrangement, students are told to reread the teachings often and under varied circumstances.^[57]

From the fourth work in the series, *Agni Yoga*, the books are prefaced by the words “Signs of Agni Yoga.” This is not to say that the first three books are any less an integral part of the series. On the contrary, Helena Roerich states that *New Era Community* is her favorite book^[58] and writes about the first two books, *Leaves of Morya’s Garden* I and II, “In a way, they are an introduction to the Agni Yoga series, but actually they touch on the majority of questions and aspects of life that are worked out and elucidated from different angles in subsequent volumes of the Teaching.”^[59] That the series has a definite order is made clear in the explanation why the two volumes of Infinity were given before later books whose contents seem easier to understand.^[60] This might be taken to mean that the series should be read in order, but “It is right to assign to co-workers the collecting of parts from the Books of the Teaching pertaining to separate subjects” for publication.^[61]

Many of the early books in the series were translated into English soon after they were completed. The translations have often been revised: e.g., the sixth edition of *Agni Yoga* was published in 1999. New translations sometimes incorporate material not included in previous ones. The entire series has also been translated into several European languages and partially into other languages, including Japanese. Generally, neither “authors” nor translators are named, in keeping with the instructions in *Agni Yoga* 580. Section 669 of the same book enjoins that the Teaching be “placed at the crossroad”—made available to interested people without any effort to persuade or force them. The Agni Yoga Society in New York has carried out this instruction by giving access to the Russian originals and translations into various languages on its website.

4 Agni Yoga and other teachings

Historically speaking, Agni Yoga is one of several teachings that developed within the theosophical movement that H. P. Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, William Quan Judge, and their associates launched in 1875. The Roerichs joined the Theosophical Society (Adyar) in the 1920s, and Nicholas Roerich carried on a friendly correspondence with Dr. Gottfried de Purucker, head of the Point Loma Theosophical Society. Helena Roerich made a Russian translation of Blavatsky’s magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, and translated several of the Mahatma Letters in *The Chalice of the East*. She spoke highly of Annie Besant,^[62] but in general had little use for 20th-century theosophical works, particularly those of

C. W. Leadbeater, whom she considered to be an opponent of the Agni Yoga teaching.^[63] The paintings of Nicholas Roerich are popular among theosophists—a painting dedicated to Blavatsky hangs in the Theosophical Headquarters in Chennai, India—and some books issued by the Theosophical Publishing House have Roerich paintings on their covers. However, the books and periodicals of theosophical societies almost never touch on the teachings of Agni Yoga *per se*.

“Someone may ask about the relationship of Our Teaching to the one already given by Us through Blavatsky. Answer that each century the appearance of a detailed exposition is followed by a culmination, a teaching that concludes what has been given and, in a practical way, moves the world forward along the lines of humaneness. Thus, Our Teaching includes the “Secret Doctrine” of Blavatsky. Likewise, Christianity was the culmination of the collective wisdom of the classical world, and the Commandments of Moses were the culmination of the wisdom of ancient Egypt and Babylon.”^[64] While there may be few discrepancies between the teaching of Agni Yoga and the Theosophy given by Blavatsky and those close to her, the styles of the teachings are very different, with Agni Yoga making little attempt to shore up its assertions by reference to other sources. Agni Yoga also tends to put theosophical terms into the vernacular: “monad” becomes “the seed of the spirit,” and “Fohat” becomes “the Cosmic Magnet.”

Agni Yoga is squarely within the age-old theosophical tradition that sees all ancient religions and philosophies as expressions of the same essential truths. Just as Nicholas Roerich painted the “Banners of the East” series depicting great saints of Eurasia and Egypt, Agni Yoga makes mention of the founders of major religions, as well as Akbar, Milarepa, Ramakrishna, St. Sergius of Radonezh, St. Catherine of Sienna, Paracelsus, and Hermes Trismegistus. Christ, Buddha, and Maitreya are the most frequently cited personages, along with Plato, who is called “the Thinker” in *Supermundane*. The majority of the references to Christ and God are in the first two books, *Leaves of Morya’s Garden*, most likely with the idea of starting from ideas already familiar to those being taught, who were raised in Christian or, quite often, Judaic traditions. The mention of Origen, a great theologian of early Christianity, as well as numerous biblical references show familiarity with Abrahamic religions. Thus Agni Yoga does not reject the idea of “God” and even considers “godlessness” in the guise of religious fanaticism to be a grave problem,^[65] but ultimately it regards “God” to be the “Origin of Origins” and not a personal deity.^[66] Helena Roerich translated and defended a controversial Mahatma Letter that refutes the orthodox concept of God.^[67]

In its attitude toward the sacred, as well as in its acceptance of karma, reincarnation, and a community of saviors, Agni Yoga adheres to the same principles as Asian thought outside the Abrahamic traditions, particularly Mahayana Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta. The Roerichs

began their study of Asian thought by reading the words of the Indian saint **Ramakrishna** and his chief disciple, **Vivekananda**.^[68] Madam Roerich also mentions reading **Lao-tze**, the Confucian **Analects**, and the **Lamrim** of **Tsongkhapa**, among other works,^[69] and consistently shows a friendly attitude toward the religions of India, where the Roerich family lived from the late 1920s. On the other hand, like Blavatsky she often is critical of Christian intolerance and fanaticism, making a sharp distinction between dogmatic theology and the teachings of Christ and Origen, which she considers to be in harmony with those of Eastern thought.^[70]

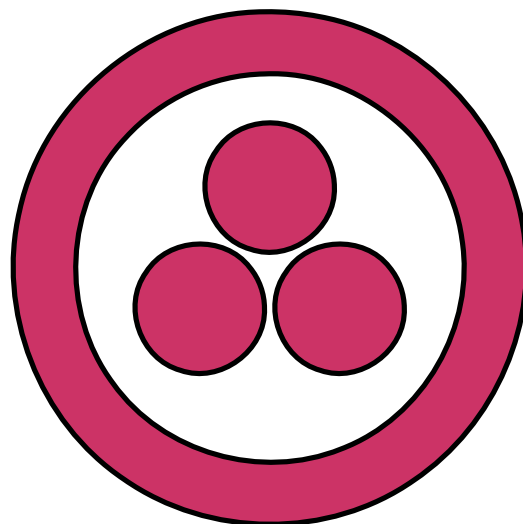
Regarding the various teachings that grew out of modern theosophy, Helena Roerich particularly values *The Teachings of the Temple*, said to be transmitted to Francia LaDue by **Master Hilarion** from 1898 to 1922.^[71] On the other hand, she consistently dismisses the works of **Alice Bailey** as false, although acknowledging that Bailey's **Arcane School** has given classes about Agni Yoga, since Bailey recognizes Agni Yoga to be a true teaching for the future.^[72] Helena Roerich's criticism of the Bailey teachings was not included in the English translations of her letters, and some writers in the Bailey tradition have accorded her a very high occult status.

Mark and Elizabeth Prophet, founders of **The Summit Lighthouse** and the **Church Universal and Triumphant** (CUT), claimed that "Ascended Master El Morya" commissioned them to carry on the work of the Roerichs, and that their daughter was an incarnation of Helena Roerich.^[73]

Regarding other kinds of yoga, *Agni Yoga* 193 writes, "Even in this age of firearms, a skilled archer is still considered a fine marksman. The same holds true of the various Yogas. Except for **Hatha Yoga**, all of the Yogas are beautiful in their attainment. It would be unwise to belittle any of them. One should only speak in terms of better applicability to the present process of evolution." "Let us see wherein lie the similarities and differences between Agni Yoga and previous Yogas. **Karma Yoga** has many similarities with Agni Yoga when it works with the elements of this world; but when Agni Yoga acquires paths to realization of the far-off worlds, the difference becomes apparent. **Raja Yoga**, **Jnana Yoga**, and **Bhakti Yoga** are all sheltered from reality, and therefore they cannot enter into the evolution of the future. Of course, an Agni Yogi should also be a Jnani and a Bhakta, and the development of the forces of his spirit makes him a Raja Yogi as well. How beautiful is the possibility of responding to the challenges of the future evolution without rejecting the past conquests of the spirit! One should not boast of innovating, because it is only the combination of the elements involved that brings about a renewal of possibilities."^[74] "There are a few informed persons who are aware that all the Yogas are fundamentally based on fire. Agni Yoga is a synthesis of all Yogas. In all the ancient Hindu scriptures the approaching Fiery Epoch has been predicted. It is said that Agni – the Fire that is found

in varying degree at the foundation of all Yogas – will saturate the atmosphere of our planet to a tremendous degree, and all the branches of Yoga will be fused into a fiery synthesis. Truly, Agni Yoga is a fiery baptism."^[75]

5 History



Sign of peace; Pax Cultura, (of the Roerich Pact)

The Agni Yoga teaching and the letters of Helena Roerich make frequent reference to the cultural activities undertaken by the Roerichs and their followers. The Roerichs were instrumental in the creation of several institutions, including: **Cor Ardens** ("Flaming Heart") International Art Society (1921); the **Master School of United Arts**, later the **Master Institute** (1921); the first **Roerich Museum** (1929), on Riverside Drive and 103rd in Manhattan; **Corona Mundi** (1921), a sister body supporting East-West artistic dialogue and exhibitions; **Alatas** (1930?), a publishing imprint; and the **Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute** in Kulu Valley, India (1929).

Knowledge about Vedanta and Buddhism was spreading throughout Europe in the first decade of the 20th century, and a Russian branch of the Theosophical Society was founded in 1908.^[76] It is unclear exactly when the Roerichs became members of the TS, but undoubtedly they were able to acquaint themselves with Theosophy and Asian thought in the 1910s if not earlier. During that decade, Nicholas's art took a decidedly visionary turn, and Helena had several powerful spiritual dreams and visions.^[77] Again, there is no definite date given for their initial contact with Master Morya, but by 1920 they were receiving the messages that appear at the beginning of *Leaves of Morya's Garden (Call)*. During that same year Frances Grant, and Sina and Maurice Lichtmann joined their circle, which included the Roerichs' two sons, George and Svetoslav. Nettie and Louis Horch joined the

following year. Excepting the Roerichs, all of the members of this inner circle were Jewish. In each case, the new participants were carefully sounded out about their spiritual views, then given personal messages from Master Morya. While this “inner work” was open to very few people and carefully separated from the public, cultural projects, the latter were led by members of the inner group. Louis Horch, the major financial backer for the cultural work, became titular head of the Master Institute and later the Roerich Museum. Both Sina Lichtmann and Frances Grant worked on the English translations of the Agni Yoga teachings, and among other duties Sina headed the Agni Yoga Committee.^[78]

Ruth Abrams Drayer describes the revelatory process in America before the Roerichs left in 1923: “They would sit together and first Nicholas and then later Helena would transmit questions that the students were allowed to ask of Master Morya.... The answers from the Master were written out by Nicholas Roerich on big scrolls of sketching paper.”^[79] The mode of communication between Master Morya and Helena Roerich was clairaudience, not telepathy,^[80] and indications from the Master were recorded in notebooks. Some guidance was intended for the Roerichs alone; this was compiled into separate notebooks by Helena Roerich. Author’s copies of the notebooks kept by Madam Roerich from 1920 to February 1935 are housed in the Roerich Archive of the Amherst Center for Russian Culture at Amherst College in Massachusetts.

While Nicholas, Helena, and George Roerich were traveling on a lengthy expedition to India, Central Asia, and Russia (1924–1928), fissures began developing among their close coworkers in New York. The Horches, influenced by Esther Lichtmann (Maurice’s sister), came to believe that the Roerichs’ spiritual claims were overblown. A legal battle began in 1935, and in 1937 the Horches won legal control of the Roerich Museum. Along with the collection of Roerich paintings housed there, the notebooks of Helena Roerich passed into their hands.^[81] The students loyal to the Roerichs managed to regroup, and under the guidance of Helena Roerich they incorporated the Agni Yoga Society as a nonprofit educational institution in 1946, giving legal status to a group that had existed de facto since the teaching was first transmitted in 1920.^[82] The Nicholas Roerich Museum was established at its present site in 1949.^[83] Until her death in 1983, Sina Lichtmann (later Fosdick) headed the operations of the Society and the Museum, although the work of these two institutions continued to be kept separate. Presently, Edgar Lansbury is the President of both institutions, and Daniel Entin is the Executive Director of the Museum.

The political thaw in Russia during the 1980s allowed the Roerich movement, which had long existed underground, to surface. With support from Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev, a Roerich Centre was created and provided with a palatial headquarters in Moscow.^[84] Just as George

Roerich had donated paintings to museums in Novosibirsk and St. Petersburg, Svetoslav Roerich and his wife, Devika Rani, did the same for the Roerich Centre in Moscow. The Centre is a major force in the movement to spread Agni Yoga and the Roerich’s work, but in the former Soviet Union as elsewhere, that movement has tended to be loosely organized. Past and present leaders of independent groups in the USA include, Ralph Harris Houston (“Guru RHH”), Burt Wilson’s Academy of Ancient Wisdom in California and Joleen Du Bois, founder of Arizona’s White Mountain Education Association.

6 See also

- Helena Roerich
- Nicholas Roerich
- Svetoslav Roerich
- George de Roerich
- Theosophy
- Morya
- Madame Blavatsky

7 References

- [1] *Agni Yoga* (1929)
- [2] *Infinity I* (1930)
- [3] *Fiery World II* (1934)
- [4] *Fiery World III* (1935)
- [5] *Letters of Helena Roerich I*, 7 June 1934.
- [6] *Letters of Helena Roerich II*, 31 July 1937.
- [7] *Hierarchy* (1931)
- [8] *New Era Community* (1926)
- [9] *Aum* (1936)
- [10] *Leaves of Morya’s Garden I (The Call)*
- [11] *Supermundane: The Inner Life I* (1938)
- [12] *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, XI, p. 89.
- [13] *Heart* (1932)
- [14] *Fiery World I* (1933)
- [15] *Brotherhood* (1937)
- [16] *Leaves of Morya’s Garden II (Illumination)*
- [17] *Infinity II* (1930)
- [18] *Supermundane: The Inner Life II* (1939)

- [19] *Supermundane: The Inner Life* IV (1941)
- [20] *Heart* 184 (1932). In 1931 the Manchurian Incident ushered in the Second World War.
- [21] See *Letters of Helena Roerich* II p. 525, 26 January 1939.
- [22] See Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras*; *Letters of Helena Roerich* I pp. 411–412, 12 March 1935.
- [23] *Agni Yoga* 185; see also 103, 217, 527.
- [24] *Letters of Helena Roerich* I pp. 426–427, 12 April 1935.
- [25] *Ibid.*, II p. 371, 2 September 1937. See *Agni Yoga* 549 on the relation between the Chalice and Kundalini.
- [26] *Letters of Helena Roerich* I p. 448, 8 May 1935.
- [27] *Ibid.*, p. 167, 19 June 1933.
- [28] *Leaves of Morya's Garden* II p. 176, 3.3.2 (293 in Russian); *New Era Community* 221.
- [29] H. P. Blavatsky also follows Asian tradition in this regard by distinguishing between spiritual and psychic powers. See “Psychic and Noetic Action” in *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings* XII pp. 350–374.
- [30] *Fiery World* II 296. See *Leaves of Morya's Garden* I 342 and *Letters of Helena Roerich* I 247–248, 21 July 1934.
- [31] *Heart* 278, *Hierarchy* 273, *New Era Community* 156.
- [32] *Leaves of Morya's Garden* II p. 28–29, 1.11.3 (72 in Russian); *Heart* 478–479.
- [33] *Agni Yoga* 224, 225, 439; *Hierarchy* 106; *Fiery World* I 526; *Fiery World* III 297, 355, 359; *Supermundane* I 48.
- [34] *Letters of Helena Roerich* I p. 473, 11 June 1935; vol. II pp. 248–249, 31 August 1936.
- [35] *New Era Community* 184, *Agni Yoga* 568, *Infinity* I 356.
- [36] Regarding the twelve steps of acquiring knowledge, see *Agni Yoga* 107.
- [37] Blau, Tatjana and Mirabai, *Buddhist Symbols*, 117.
- [38] *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings* XIV 451, VI 116, 266–268; *The Secret Doctrine* I 470.
- [39] *Infinity* I 188.
- [40] Govinda, Lama Anagarika, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, pp. 121–122, 110, 261 ff.
- [41] *Leaves of Morya's Garden* II 2.5.4 and 2.6.1; Russian 152, 169.
- [42] *Leaves of Morya's Garden* I 315.
- [43] *Ibid.*, 360.
- [44] See *Letters of Helena Roerich* I pp. 285–286, 29 August 1934; p. 266, 8 August 1934.
- [45] *Agni Yoga* 261.
- [46] Govinda, op. cit., 181, 184.
- [47] *Infinity* II 395, 398; *Hierarchy* 105; *Fiery World* III 163, 225; *Aum* 339.
- [48] *Ibid.*, 417.
- [49] *Infinity* I 72.
- [50] *New Era Community* 71.
- [51] *Letters of Helena Roerich* II p. 484, 12 July 1938.
- [52] *Ibid.*, II p. 219, 18 June 1936.
- [53] *Ibid.*, p. 86, 7 December 1935.
- [54] *Agni Yoga* 413.
- [55] *Supermundane* II 333.
- [56] *Leaves of Morya's Garden* II p. 94–95, 2.6.5; 173 in Russian.
- [57] *Leaves of Morya's Garden* I preface; *Agni Yoga* 382, 468; *Fiery World* II 204, 285.
- [58] *Letters of Helena Roerich* I 502, 6 July 1935.
- [59] *Ibid.*, II p. 17, 30 August 1935.
- [60] *Brotherhood* 296.
- [61] *Fiery World* III 530.
- [62] *Letters of Helena Roerich* II pp. 253, 422.
- [63] *Letters of Helena Roerich* II pp. 486–487, 12 July 1938.
- [64] *Fiery World* I 79.
- [65] *Fiery World* II 85, 92; *Fiery World* III 330.
- [66] *Fiery World* I 628–629.
- [67] *Letters of Helena Roerich* II pp. 321–330, 11 June 1937; p. 196, 24 May 1936.
- [68] *Letters of Helena Roerich* I pp. 217–218, 2 June 1934.
- [69] *Letters of Helena Roerich* II p. 277, 7 January 1937.
- [70] *Ibid.*, I 175–176, 17 February 1934.
- [71] *Ibid.*, 173–174, 17 February 1934.
- [72] *Ibid.*
- [73] El Morya, *The Chela and the Path*, p. 122, as cited in a review by Joseph P. Szimhart, http://home.dejazzd.com/jszimhart/CUT_melton_lewis.htm.
- [74] *Agni Yoga* 161.
- [75] *Letters of Helena Roerich* I p. 411, 12 March 1935.
- [76] Decter, Jacqueline, *Nicholas Roerich: The Life and Art of a Russian Master*, 108, Park Street Press, 1989.
- [77] Roerich, Helena, *At the Threshold of the New World*, p. 51 ff., White Mountain Education Association, Prescott, Arizona, 1998.

- [78] Drayer, Ruth Abrams, *Nicholas & Helena Roerich: The Spiritual Journey of Two Great Artists & Peacemakers*, p. 309, Quest Books, 2005
- [79] Ibid., p. 71.
- [80] *Letters of Helena Roerich II*, p. 86, 7 December 1935
- [81] About the controversy over possession of the notebooks see Drayer, op. cit., pp. 316–317, 341.
- [82] *About Agni Yoga*
- [83] Decter, op. cit., 136–137.
- [84] Drayer, op. cit., 339–340.

8 External links

- International Centre of the Roerichs (Moscow)
- Agni Yoga Society (USA)
- Roerich-movement in Internet (Russian language)
- Nicholas Roerich Museum (New York)
- International Roerich Memory Trust (India)
- The Academy of Ancient Wisdom (California)
- Agni Yoga Web TV: See www.youtube.com under "Agni Yoga Web TV (English Channel)"

8.1 Conference

- International Scientific and Public Conference «The Living Ethics and Science», Moscow, 2007
- International Scientific and Public Conference «Cosmic World Outlook – New Mentality of the XXI Century», Moscow, 2003

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9.1 Text

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