(1) An Ancient Pedigree

The old Aryan Religion
"In ancient India, Iran and elsewhere, Dumezil found that the 'ideology' of a tripartite division of society parallel to a tripartite classification of the gods was prominent.... Among the Aryans, then later the Indians, Mithra and Varuna represented respectively the juridical and magical aspects of the first function, the province of priests. The second function, the martial spirit or force, was the domain of the warriors and the god Indra, while the third function, that of fecundity or growth, was the concern of farmers and husband men."
"From cuneiform sources one could surmise that Aryan bands first came into Mesopotamia with the general movement of peoples after the death of Hammurabi in the seventeenth century BC. This is also the time of the expansion of the Hurrians, a people whose linguistic and ethnic affiliations are puzzling; in any case, they are not Indo-Europeans. They formed an important empire called Mitanni, and it is principally among the Mitanni that Aryan names and words occur....In a famous treaty between the Hittite ruler Suppiluliuma and the Mitanni king, Mattiwaza, about 1370 BC, the Aryan gods Mithra, Varuna, Indra and the twin Nasatyas are mentioned. Thus in the Mitanni kingdom Aryan gods were worshipped as well as Mesopotamian deities, which would indicate an Aryan element, but probably only among the rulers."
"Since the Aryan bands in India fought among themselves as well as against the non-Aryans in Iran, and there must have resulted considerable mixtures of various peoples."

- Richard N. Frye, The Heritage of Persia

Dating Zarathushtra
"A figure of 258 years before the fall of the Persian empire in 330 BC was generally given as the date for the coming of Zoraster, i.e. 588 BC...."

- Andrew Collins, From the Ashes of Angels, p. 348

"Linguistic evidence has suggested a strong case for placing Zarathushtra at the time of the emergence and compilation of the last text relating to the Vedic religion, that is, between 1750 and 1400 BCE (although the Rig Veda did not receive its final redaction until 900 BCE). The dating is approximate and 1200 or the more precise 1080 BCE have also been suggested from linguistic research. The Gathas and the hymns of the Rig Veda exhibit such a similarity of grammatical style
and vocabulary that it is certain that they both derive from a common parent language and thus presume a common cultural and religious heritage. In addition to this cosmic affinity there are also other significant points of convergence, and so the Haoma ceremony, whose abuse Zarathushtra attacks, finds its Vedic counterpart in the Soma ritual, and indeed these two terms are related. In further evidence of this early dating, the imagery that Zarathushtra employs in the Gathas is that more associated with a pastoral economy than an agrarian one. Just as the cow is a dominant feature of the Rig Veda, so she is of the Gathas."

"We should also note that in the roughly contemporary Rig Veda the idea of a cycle of rebirths - samsara - had not been established, and that this idea was not to emerge until the later texts called the Brahmanas; it is surely not by coincidence that neither does Zoroastrianism entertain notions of rebirth or reincarnation. Even though the Aryan split had taken place long before, at probably 2000 BCE, there is sufficient reason to think that there must have been some contact between the two peoples [Avestan and Vedic], even if it was only sporadic."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, pp. 19-20

"Zoroaster [Zarathushtra] (628-551 BC?) was probably a priest of the old Aryan religion, for he calls himself a zaotar (Indian hotar) in the Gathas (Yasna 33.6)....He also retained the old poetic form, for the meter of his Gathas is similar to that of the Vedas. He further exalted the concept of asha, 'truth', the rta of India, and further used words in the same sense as in the Vedas."

"The deity is like a partner in discourse with the prophet, and this is new with Zoroaster."

"...The adherents of the old Aryan religion were more rites centered and the adherents of Zoroaster, perhaps to be designated as Aryan reformers, more belief centered."

- Richard N. Frye, The Heritage of Persia

The available evidence leads to the conclusion that Zarathushtra believed in unremitting punishment for evil actions, and engaged in animal sacrifice.

Revelation of the Gathas

"Zoroaster terms himself manthram - one able to compose mantras, or utterances of power - which is comparable to the logos or 'word' embodied by Jesus in John's gospel. Just as the Holy Spirit descends like a dove into Jesus immediately after his baptism, so Zoroaster's original vision occurs after he emerges from a river ritually purified to be led by a shining being into the presence of his God."


"God is as much the desired Master as the Judge according to Truth, Order, and Justice. He is the source of all good things, of life itself. To God is the kingdom, established as a refuge and protector for the poor."

- Ahunvar (composed in Gathic dialect by Zarathushtra)

"The Gathas were passed on from generation to generation, for a long time orally but later in written form, by the priests who recited them as part of their ritual worship and eventually committed them to writing. It is believed that even when their meaning was forgotten or simply ceased to be understood, the mere sounds of the words, being sacred in themselves, were faithfully
remembered and taught from priest to priest."
"Zarathushtra's Gathas belong to a specific category of ancient poetry, represented in both Iranian and Indian traditions and characterized by defined metrical constraints (which the often untraditional Zarathushtra is not afraid to ignore when the occasion demands it), by an esoteric content and highly allegorical use of language. The technique required for composing this kind of poetry was learnt over many years of study and it presupposes an educated and privileged studentship drawn from the priestly class.

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 2

"Where and which part of land shall I go to succeed? They keep me away from the family and the tribe. The community that I wish to join does not gratify me, nor do the deceitful tyrants of the land. How shall I gratify you, 0 Mazda Ahura?"

- Yasna 46:1

"Like the psalms of the Hebrew scriptures, the Gathas are deeply personal and often anguished utterances, and at other times they abound with joy. Since the hymns of the Gathas are metrical, and grouped according to their meters, it can be supposed that they were conceived within a musical framework and partly intended for use within a ritual context, a notion confirmed by references to ritual practice in the Gathas themselves. Although they are not primarily doctrinal treatises, or instructional compositions, they contain much that forms the basis of the Zoroastrian religion, and therefore they can rightly be said to embody the essential truths of Zoroastrianism as Zarathushtra would have understood and taught them."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 2

Click here for the entire text of the Gathas.

The zaotar is the leading priest who chants the Gathas.

"The term zaotar is interpreted by Jafrey as meaning one who 'pours out his heart to have a divine vision'."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 111

"Zarathushtrian doctrine...has its own simple and sublime ways of communicating with Ahura Mazda."


"As a leading priest straightforward in truth, in accordance with the best spirit I am pleased with the thought with which one thinks pastoral works should be performed. With that (thought) I implore your sight and your counsel, 0 Mazda Ahura."

- Yasna 33:6

Today the priest is no longer considered a "pastor".

"There is no 'pastoral' work as such undertaken by the Zoroastrian clergy, particularly in such matters as regularly visiting the sick, since the threat to priestly purity in such situations would be too great."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 108
(2) Ethical Teachings of the Prophet

A New Revelation

"Zarathushtra [Gk. Zoroaster] was the son of a priest of a pastoral tribe. As a boy he showed much concern for others and was deeply interested in finding the truth of religion. At the age of thirty, or a little older, he had a decisive religious experience in which he encountered the angel Vohu Manah (literally 'Good Thought'), an aspect or emissary from God. The angel transported him in spiritual form to the great spirit 'Ahura Mazda', the 'Wise Lord' - henceforth Zarathushtra's name for God. This prophetic experience was followed by other revelations in the next decade of Zarathushtra's life. As a consequence, he felt called to preach a purified faith against the existing polytheism (which had some similarities to the related religion of the Aryans...)
"

- Ninian Smart, The Religious Experience of Mankind

Zarathushtra reinterpreted the theological structure of the priesthood and injected "into it an ethical element demanding personal responsibility, an element which had been previously all but absent."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 61

"The ethics taught by Zarathushtra were based on the social life of the husbandman. The good man is one who looks after the cattle and tills the soil in peace and neighborliness. He is upright and has a burning regard for the truth. It is his duty to keep away from those who worship the daevas and to resist them with force if necessary. Angra Mainyu, the great evil spirit, threatens the farmer's life."

- Geoffrey Ashe, The Ancient Wisdom

"Zarathushtra had a strong sense of justice and he saw the battle between good and evil as a constant one. There was to be no respite for the Ashavan [follower of the 'truth'] since the malign influence of drug [evil] could be seen all around. The 'deceitful ones' clearly included those priests whose activities he so roundly condemned elsewhere in the Gathas. The daevas, deities of the pre-Zoroastrian Indo-Iranian pantheon who were rejected as false gods by Zarathushtra, are also mentioned in the context of the deceitful ones..."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 32

"The Daevas do not rightly discriminate between these two spirits, for as they take counsel with each other delusion comes over them, so that they choose the worst thought. In that way they all run to meet wrath, by which the mortals sicken existence."

- Yasna 30:6

(Note: the hymns in the collection known as the Yasna include the Gathas as well as other hymns recited during the ceremony.)

Asha

"Freedom to choose right or wrong is a key concept in Gathic and later Zoroastrian ethics, and to implement the decision-making process five tools are provided to humans by Ahura Mazda...They are all to be found within the Gathas, and are: Mind, Desire, Conscience, Perception or Insight and Wisdom, and they lead to recognition of Truth (Asha)."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 127

"May that man attain what is better than good, who could show us the straight paths of this material existence and that of thought, the true (paths) to the possessions where the Ahrua dwells, the one such as you, zestful, bountiful (to us), and holy, O
"Of great importance is the [Vedic] concept of rta, the law regulating the cosmos, which was under the protection of Varuna and Mitra in the Vedic system. The Zoroastrian notion of Asha, often rendered as 'righteousness', also conveys the meanings 'truth' and 'order'. Asha, a concept with which rta may be equated, is an empowering force which emanates directly from Ahura Mazda and which differs in this respect from the Vedic rta, which was essentially distinct from the gods themselves. There is, in Vedic religion, a merely philosophical distinction between order and chaos (nirriti), whereas for Zarathushtra there is an ethical distinction to be made between Asha and drug (deceit). And although Varuna and Mitra seem to have been accessible only through ritual, Zarathushtra establishes a link between humanity and Ahura Mazda that is not solely dependent upon the mediations of the priesthood. In the Hindu world rta was gradually supplanted by dharma, but in the religion of Zarathushtra the significance of Asha has never diminished."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 5-6

"Inspired by good thought and being a witness for Ahura Mazda, I have in mind (one's) soul for (his commendation by my) song, as well as the rewards for (his) actions. For as long as I can and am able I shall look out in (my) search for truth."

- *Yasna* 28:4

Ishraq, the theosophy of Suhrawardi, a an Iranian Sufi master who was martyred in 1191, "was as close to the original teachings of Zoroaster as you could get. At its core was the concept of mundus imaginalis, a kind of parallel world, the Earth of Hurqalya, the Heavenly Jerusalem, a world of light that was itself a mirror of a still higher realm. In this world of light each person had another self, a self of light that was his or her true identity or Perfected Nature - but until this was realized it appeared as a guardian angel or spiritual guide."


### The Cosmic Heptad

(1) **Ahura Mazda**

The *Gathas* present "the exalted Lord of Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, his Holy Spirit Spenta Mainyu, and the antagonistic or hostile spirit, Angra Mainyu."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 7

"With Holy spirit and best thought, with action and word in accordance with truth, they shall offer Him integrity and immortality. The Ahura (Lord) is Mazda (wisdom) through (His) power (and) holy devotion."

- *Yasna* 47:1

"Ahura Mazda was Zarathushtra's name for the greatest deity of an Indo-Iranian divine triad known simply as the ahuras (or, in Vedic terms, the dsuras), the other two being Mitra (Mithra) and Varuna. It is Ahura Mazda who Zarathushtra exalts above all other beings, and who"
Xerxes, Ahura Mazda and Fire Altar
Naqsh-I-Rustam, Iran

is the supreme object of his worship."
"Even Ahura Mazda in his relationship to Asha of which he is both the originator and custodian seems to have

more than slight similarity, in this attribute at least, to the Vedic deity Varuna..."
- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, pp. 4-5

"When shall I know, O Mazda, whether through truth you have control over anything, the fear
of which frightens me. Let the pronouncement of good thoughts be told me truly. May the
benefactor know of what kind his reward will be."
- Yasna 48:9

"In the Gathas he [Ahura Mazda] is the noble but benign all-wise ruler of creation, who dwells in
transcendent intimacy with his holy immortals but who is, at the same by virtue of his simultaneous
immanence, relevant. The later Ahura Mazda, as seen in so many of the Yashts, has lost something of this
vibrancy. He is no longer spoken of in the imploring terms that Zarathushtra uses in his Gathas, but in a
merely academic or regulative terminology evoking function rather than personality, often suggestive of an
abstract distant creator who has no desire to interact with his creation. The sense of respect tinged with
familiarity which Zarathushtra so often displays in his Gathas is missing from these later Avestan hymns."
- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 44

(2) Bountiful Immortals

"Zoroaster know that his people had been honoring familiar gods for centuries, however, so he recast some
of them as 'bounteous immortals', or angels; the rest he condemned as demons."
- Cosmic Duality

"...Since Zarathushtra was preaching to a people accustomed to dealing with a multiplicity of divine beings,
each with his or her demands and attributes, the theological structure was, as it were, merely waiting for the
Iranian prophet to appear so that he might introduce into it an ethical component. Isolating individual
qualities and attributing to them discreet personalities, whilst maintaining their union with the supreme
godhead, was an invaluable way for Zarathushtra to inculcate into his intended followers the qualities that
the good menog [immaterial/spirit] beings express, since by presenting them not merely as abstract qualities
but as real beings they were accorded a means whereby they might be accessed, on both a ritual (public) and a
private level."
- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 80

"We worship the good, strong, beneficent Fravashis [ancestral spirits] of the Amesha
Spentas...who are all seven of one thought, who are all seven of one speech, who are all seven of
one deed..."
- Yasht 19:82-3

"Early Zoroastrianism, much influenced by the astronomical and astrological sciences of ancient Iran,
coordinated the concept of the seven known planetary spheres with its belief in the heptad (grouping of
seven) of celestial beings..."
- Encyclopaedia Britannica

"...The six personified attributes of Ahura Mazda are known as the Amesha Spentas, the Bountiful or Holy
Immortals, and with Ahura Mazda (hypostatically united to his Holy Spirit Spenta Mainyu) they constitute a
divine heptad. These spiritual entities are developments of the Indo-Iranian deities personifying desirable
qualities such as law and piety and so in Zarathushtra’s scheme they also denote these virtuous qualities
which people must strive to imitate if they wish to be included among the followers and worshippers of Ahura
Mazda destined to enjoy the benefits of the world’s refreshment (frashokereti)."
- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 5

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"Theologically however they are usually considered in pairs since they form a logical series of concentric circles, radiating, as it were, from the core which is Ahura Mazda (who dwells there in the most intimate fashion with Spenta Mainyu) to a furthermost rim where the more distant of these mainyus reside."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 28

**Spenta Mainyu - Holy Spirit**

"The best (manifestation) of his most holy spirit: the action of righteousness (performed) with hands and (inspired) by the utterances (spoken) by tongue in pursuit of good thought, (these) one performs with this realization; 'He, Mazda, is the father of truth.'"

- *Yasna* 47:2

**Note:** the *Gathas* don't mention Spenta Mainyu by name.

"Humanity, Ahura Mazda's special creation, came to be represented by the officiating priest and protected by the Holy Spirit, Spenta Mainyu, who is unique in the Ahuric college since he is co-eternal with Ahura Mazda with whom he enjoys a degree of union not accorded to the other members of the heptad, despite their being also intimately united to Ahura Mazda's essence. Ahura Mazda and Spenta Mainyu in fact gradually merge so that the two become completely one and it is therefore probably not coincidental that Spenta Mainyu's name is all but absent from the later Pahlavi texts relating to eschatology."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 12

**Asha Vahishta - Best Truth; Righteousness**

"Asha Vahishta is the spirit of the universal law Asha which should be the choice of all those who wish to be numbered among the company of Ashavans. This Amesha Spenta is most closely associated with truth and righteousness and, in the *Yasna ceremony*, is represented (or, more accurately, epiphanized) by fire. Fire...played a major part in Indo-Iranian religion, and thus this is an example of Zarathushtra's enthusiasm for retaining elements of his pre-revelation religious upbringing and training. Asha is the quality of the divine heptad which most effectively opposes the demonic (or Ahrimanic, a term derived from the later Pahlavi name for Angra Mainyu, Ahriman) drug or 'Lie', the instrument of deceit by which the evil spirit attempts to seduce humanity away from the Ahuric path."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 31

**Khshathra Vairya - Power; Dominion or Kingdom of God**

"The god Indra,...who features extensively in Vedic literature and who is reportedly abjured by the prophet, resembles the Amesha Spenta of the good dominion, Khshathra Vairya, though this resemblance is only partial (and substantially etymological)."

"...Indra, a warrior god, was seemingly rejected by Zarathushtra, since he may well have been associated in
the prophet's mind with some of the less constructive aspects of the Vedic Soma sacrifice. Indra was invoked before battle, and the Soma juice, used in this ritual, was an intoxicant which no doubt encouraged truculent behavior. Probably because of this association a later Avestan text called the Vendidad puts Indra at the head of a demonic group which Zarathushtra denounces.

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, pp. 28, 5

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**Cosmic Dualism and Eschatology**

(1) **The War Against Druj**

"Before the Creation, as in Vedic philosophy, there is only Eternity, an utter stillness and silence and absence of time - thus also of movement - in which only God is. "With Creation, though, time suddenly begins, along with movement and, inevitably, the choice inherent in every action. According to the vision which Zoroaster claims revealed this to him, God knows that the moment his creation moves from the spiritual to the material the evil spirit will attack it, because it is good, and it will thus become a battleground for their two forces. But in the end, God also knows he will win the cosmic struggle there and be able to destroy evil, achieving a universe which will be wholly good forever."


"The god whom he addressed as Ahura Mazda had attributes, both ethical and celestial, of the sky god Varuna, a focal figure of Vedic religion...But the indigenous religion of early Iran entertained belief in a host of other gods and spirits - Mithra, Vayu, Yima, the fravashi, and so on. Zarathustra....equated the gods with evil spirits, who seduced men from the true worship of the one Spirit....He often mentioned Druj, the 'Lie', which was an evil force waging a struggle against Ahura Mazda....The chief evil spirit in the service of Druj was Angra Mainyu."

- Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*

For the Zoroastrian, the words "lie" and "sin" are practically synonymous. (Note: the antagonistic or hostile spirit, Angra Mainyu, is not mentioned by name in the *Gathas.*)

"No longer shall the evil teacher - Druj that he is! - destroy the second life,
In the speech of his tongue misleading to the evil life.
- *The Gathas*

"For then destruction will come down upon deceit through its elimination. The swiftest steeds will be yoked, and they will win good fame (in the race) to the good dwelling of good thoughts, Mazda, and truth."

- *Yasna* 30:10

"This would suggest very strongly that the prophet himself advocated a form of dualism, but one weighted towards the eventual triumph of good since he has an unshakable belief in the power of the Wise Lord over that of the hostile spirit."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 9

"These are the two spirits (existing) in the beginning, twins who have been heard of as the two dreams, the two thoughts, the two words, and the two actions, the better and the evil. Between these two the munificent discriminate rightly, but not those who give bad gifts... Of these two spirits the deceitful one chooses to do the worst things, but the most holy spirit, clothed in the hardest stones (chooses) truth (as do those) who, with true actions, devotedly gratify Mazda Ahura."

- *Yasna* 30:3, 5

"Allied with Angra Mainyu against Ahura Mazda were Akoman (Evil Mind), Indra-vayu (Death), Saurva (a daeva of death and disease), Nanhaithya (a daeva related to the Vedic god Nasatya), Tauru (difficult to identify), and Zairi (the personification of Haoma, the sacred drink related to the sacrifices of both ahuras and daevas). Among other demonic figures is Aeshma (violence, fury, or the aggressive impulse that consumes man)--who may well be the demon Asmodeus of the book of Tobit, Az (Concupiscence or Lust),"
Mithrandruj (He Who Lies to Mithra or False Speech), Jeh (the demon Whore, created later by Ahriman to defile the human race), and many others...

- Encyclopaedia Britannica

"The getig [material] plane...was brought into being to provide the battleground where the fight between good and evil would occur, the idea being that Ahriman would be 'tempted' out of the menog realm and into the getig where the physical army of Ahura Mazda - headed by the Ashavans - could defeat him. This has the temporary drawback that the Wise Lord would be limited in his ability to operate in the cosmos. The limitation is self-imposed in that the Wise Lord permits the Evil Spirit to wield his influence in the getig sphere."

"The good dominion is to be established on the physical plane, though one free of Ahriman disfiguration...The only way Ahriman can work his evil is on the superior getig [material] plane....Another text recounts how Ahriman, aware now of this, attempts to destroy all the immortality-conferring haoma in the world, since immortality itself can only be conferred in the physical realm:"

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 78, 74

"It is manifest that Ahraman (sic) speaks to the 'Divs' (Daevas) every night: go into the world; and first go to the sea and dry up the sea; and go to the white Hom and dry it up entirely, for they will revive the dead bodies of men thereby..."

- Pahlavi fragment?

"A compact or pact is binding, just as the universal family in intended to be bound together in the fight against Angra Mainyu. Zoroastrianism, as a life-enhancing religion, does therefore not encourage such practices as monastic-style isolation or celibacy; indeed asceticism of any kind is discouraged, since such customs are deemed to have a deleterious or weakening effect."

"Furthermore, since asceticism is invariably connected with atonement or expiation, there is no need for it in a religious tradition whose theology has no room for notions of original sin or universally shared inherited guilt, as it would imply an imperfection on the part of the creator. Zoroastrian liturgies do not apologize for wrongdoing or ask for forgiveness for sin, but concentrate on praising Ahura Mazda and his menog beings and on purifying, or renovating, the good creation where it has been invaded by Ahriman."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, pp. 131, 132

(2) The Bridge of the Separator

"One of Zarathushtra's most striking eschatological images concerns the individual's judgment and his or her arrival at the Bridge of the Separator, or the Account-keeper's Bridge (Avestan cinvaotperetu - the 'Chinvat Bridge')."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 63

"According to Zoroastrian belief, the soul of the departed hovers near the body for three days. On the fourth day he faces a judgement on the 'Bridge of the Requiter' (Cinvat Bridge), where Rashn 'the righteous' impartially weighs his good and evil deeds."

- "The Iranian Afterlife - The Crossing of the Cinvat Bridge and the Roads to Heaven and Hell"

"The dead one would approach the Chinvat Bridge, which crosses to Ahura Mazda's paradise. Below it hell would yawn. If a man's good deeds outweighed his bad ones, he would be beckoned onward and could cross the bridge with ease. But the wicked would find it impossible and topple over into the regions of punishment."

- Geoffrey Ashe, The Ancient Wisdom

"O Mazda Ahura, whosoever, man or woman, gives me those things which you know are the best of existence: reward for truth and power through good thought, and whom I stimulate to glorify those such as you, with all those I will cross over the Account-keeper's Bridge."

- Yasna 46.10

"In the Gathas we have the idea that at death the person's soul is presented at this bridge or 'crossing'; the crossing can either lead to the House of Song (heaven) or the House of Lies (hell). The 'separator' itself may have been the enormous chasm that may be supposed to exist between the House of Song and the House of
Lies, for some versions of the myth state that the soul destined for damnation will find that the bridge contracts to such a degree that it is impossible to remain on it; and so the soul will fall off and plunge down to hell."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 63

"But for the Zoroastrians, Hell is not eternal. At the Last Judgement, at the end of time, the bodies are resurrected and reunited with their souls. Then there is a final and universal purgation, from which all men without exception emerge spotless, and enter into Paradise."
- "The Iranian Afterlife - The Crossing of the Cinvat Bridge and the Roads to Heaven and Hell"

(3) The Frashokereti

Zarathushtra taught that eventually all creation, including mankind would be renewed and perfected. Later this event was referred to as the frashokereti, the renovation or refreshment of the universe (from Avestan "to make" and "wonderful"). This term does not appear in the Zoroastrian literature.

For Zarathushtra, "it seems that the fruits of the cosmic renewal would only be tasted by the saoshyant:-Ashavans - those who had brought about the frashokereti. Life after death meant either complete happiness or complete misery."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 64

"Brilliant things instead of weeping will be (the rewards) for the person who comes to the truthful one. But a long period of darkness, foul food, and the word 'woe' - to such an existence your religious view will lead you, 0 deceitful ones, because of your own actions."
- *Yasna* 31:20

"Eschatology is not merely a once-and-for-all event in the undefined future, but a present reality with which individuals must reckon."
"There is an urgency in his vision which impels him to gather as many people as he can into his family of co-workers in order that the hostile spirit might be defeated and the frashokereti then brought about speedily."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 64

A means to help achieve the cosmic renewal is the ancient *Yasna* ritual.

(4) The Saoshyant

Saoshyant: one who will "make existence brilliant".
"Since He is (the One) to be chosen by the world therefore the judgment emanating from truth itself (to be passed) on the deeds of good thought of the world, as well as the power, is committed to Mazda Ahura whom (people) assign as a shepherd to the poor."
- *Yasna* 27:13 - the Ahuna Vairya prayer

One of Zarathushtra's 'most revolutionary concepts [is] that of the savior, the 'bringer of benefit' or the benefactor known in the *Gathas* as the Saoshyant. It is this savior figure - also referred to in the plural - who will bring about the renovation of the world."
"The seeds of later Zoroastrian eschatology are contained within Zarathushtra's introduction of the saoshyant. It is evident, though, that Zarathushtra was either anticipating the apocalyptic event in the near future or at least that he was hoping for it. Moreover, this concept of savior (which was later to have such a dramatic effect on the development of the post-exilic Jewish theological thought) is one of the chief means by which Zarathushtra attempts to break from the rigidity of the proto-Indo-Iranian tradition. In a sense he establishes, alongside an 'official' sacerdotal class, a preaching vocation of all believers (Ashavans), who would work with him towards the final event."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 15

"Thus may we be those who make existence brilliant, 0 Mazda...
- *Yasna* 30:9
"...The saoshyants are not considered to be divine beings, and nor are they of the menog [immaterial/spirit] realm. Despite the fact that they are born miraculously, they are still creatures of the material creation. The co-operation of humanity has always been a fundamental tenet of the Zoroastrian teaching concerning the frashokereti."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 74

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**The Centuries Following Zarathushtra**

(1) Zarathushtra as World Savior

In the period following the Gathas (believed to have been written by Zarathushtra), Zarathushtra began to be identified as a semi-divine saoshyant.

"Zarathushtra's new position as a saoshyant as understood in the post-Gathic Avesta as opposed to the Gathic sense, is amplified by a number of other titles given to him which serve to underline further his status."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 66

"Ahura Mazda replied to him [i.e. Zarathushtra]: My name is the one of whom questions are asked, 0 holy Zarathushtra!
My second name is the Herd-giver. My third name is the Strong One.
My fourth name is perfect holiness.
My fifth name is All good things created by Mazda, the offspring of the holy principle.
My sixth name is Understanding.
My seventh name is the One with understanding. My eighth name is knowledge.
My ninth name is the one with knowledge."

- Yasna 1:7

"The Farvardin Yasht greets the prophet's birth with an air of expectant jubilation unsurpassed in any other text, and it also connects him, by the use of this title, to a class of priests from pre-Zoroastrian times, confirming the Iranian religious tradition's continuity whilst simultaneously setting the prophet above that priestly class. The texts recounts that 'all the creatures of the good creation' welcome the prophet with these words:"

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 66

"Hail to us! For he is born the Athravan [Priest] Spitama Zarathushtra. Zarathushtra will offer us sacrifices with libations and bundles of baresma..."

- Farvadin Yasht 13:94

"The passage effectively creates a super-Athravan in Zarathushtra, and hints at his saoshyant role since because of him 'the good Law of the worshippers of Mazda' will spread over the earth (see Yasna 13:94), suggesting the implementation of the kingdom of God and confirming Zarathushtra as the first eschatological sign."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 68

(2) The Achaemenian Period (550 to 331 BCE)

Similarities and Differences

"Little is known of the details of the religion of the Achaemenian kings Cyrus, who conquered Babylon in 539 BCE, Darius the Great (522-486 BCE), and their successors other than that gathered from the inscriptions dated to their reigns which have been found in and around Persepolis; we can be confident, however, in stating that this was an essentially Zoroastrian faith that was maintained. These inscriptions, written in the cuneiform script associated with south-western Iran, devote much space to the god Ahuramazda (sic) but say nothing about the divine heptad as a homogenous group. From this we can deduce that the religion, though rooted in Iranian tradition, had in some features departed from or even developed separately to the priestly religion of the north-east Iranian Avesta. There are no references to Zarathushtra himself in these
inscriptions, but there are important references to the deceit-promoting drujo, a number of abjurations of the daevas, and frequent allusions to Ahuramazda in such terms as 'greatest of the gods', which of course indicates an acceptance of other divine beings, and 'creator', which denotes Ahuramazda's supremacy. Certain texts suggest a more recognizably Avestan religion being observed. In these texts the divine heptad is not enumerated in its entirety but there is evidence for the worship of individual members such as Asha Vahishta and Khshathra Vairya, the latter possibly being venerated due to his connection with kingship. There are also references to Mithra and to the goddess Anahita."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 56

"According to Lahiji [an Iranian antiquarian] Darius wanted to institute a system like that of the Egyptians or Israelites, where the king was both secular and spiritual head. To this end he was gradually importing into Persia the trappings of Egyptian religion-like the winged image of Ahura Mazda."


The Building of Temples

"The building of temples to various deities, and to house the ritual fire, a custom hitherto unknown to the Persians, began in earnest during this time [c. 400 BCE]. The construction of such buildings was almost certainly a result of the Achaemenians having observed the Babylonian tradition in this matter, and the significance and value of buildings set aside for the purposes of divine worship was clearly not lost on Artaxerxes II, as his concern for the recently re-established temple at Jerusalem indicates. The prophet Zarathushtra would not have considered the construction of buildings to house representations of deities, or even the sacred fire itself, not because he would necessarily have been ideologically opposed to such a practice, but simply because it would never have occurred to anyone reared in the religious tradition of northeastern Iran."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 57

The "World Year"

"Contact with the Babylonians during the Achaemenian period resulted in the formulation of a 'world year'. This concept of a 'world-year', with the movement of history reflecting the change of the seasons and the lunar cycle, and thus suggestive of a cyclical nature of time, can be identified in a variety of religious traditions. A residue of the concept survives in the retention of a liturgical cycle or calendar, common to many religions. The Zoroastrian understanding of the world-year consists of a division of history into four equal 3,000 year segments, perhaps influenced by the seasons. It thus spans a period of 12,000 years, or one thousand years for each lunar month."

"Although these Zoroastrian scholars were unable to accept the cyclical notion of time (Zarathushtra of course having established for them that the movement of time is linear), the idea that history could be divided into pre-determined stages was an attractive one."

"Since the Zoroastrian calendar is solar rather than lunar, it contains 360 days, and so five Gatha Days are also celebrated, bringing the total to 365. Each 30-day period or month thus enables the tradition to acknowledge, on a regularly recurring basis, one of thirty divine beings per day, twelve of which are also celebrated with their own 'month'."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, pp. 50, 51, 119

(3) The Magi

"Magi, like India's Brahmans, were the priestly caste and officiated at all religious functions, Zoroastrian or otherwise."


"The ancient Chaldeans devoted great attention to magic. In the British Museum are over 200 magical tables containing formulas for the Chaldean magical processes that were originally prepared by King Ashurbanipal and written in two languages, Assyrian and Accadian. They are a mixture of both high and low magic; much of the teaching is concerned with demonology, magical charms, amulets, and divinations."

- Geoffrey Ashe, *The Ancient Wisdom*

"One should not be led astray by the wide use of 'Magi' in Hellenistic and Roman times for priests of Mithraism and many other religions or sects. One may tentatively suggest that the Magi were a 'tribe' of the
Medes who exercised sacerdotal functions. During the supremacy of the Medes they expanded over the Median empire as a priesthood since the priestly trade was kept, so to speak, 'in the family'. The theogonies they sung were the ancient hymns of the Aryan Urzeit, not well understood by Medes or Persians but impressive because of their antiquity."
- Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*

"The Magi were known for their worship of fire, and had reputation of being able to control and direct fire and lightening. Eliphas Levi says that the Magi have discovered the secret of electricity and "were able to generate and direct it in ways that are now unknown" (History, 55). In favor of this may speak the artifacts that were found around today's Baghdad, 4000 years old, and which looked like modern batteries. When scientist filled them with alkaline solution the 'Baghdad Batteries' were perfectly able to produce electricity."  
- Borce T. Gjorgjievski, *History of Western Magic*

"According to one tradition, Zarathustra converted a king called Vishtaspa, or Hystaspes in the Greek transliteration, who was a ruler of parts of eastern Iran. His conversion was crucial in the spread of Zoroastrianism because Hystaspes was the father of Darius the Great who, in turn, became a strong exponent of the religion."
"During the Achaemenid dynasty there developed a tendency to restore the cult of lesser deities within the framework of Zoroastrian belief in Ahura Mazda's supremacy. The Amesha Spentas, for instance, were more and more personalized. The fravashis, or ancestral spirits, though they were identified with the highest part of the human personality, and so entered into the later doctrines of immortality, were restored in the form of guardian angels....The Magi had opposed the Zoroastrian movement when it first spread through Persia. They were drawn into the new religion because of their excellence as priests and magicians. The magi imported into Zoroastrianism certain practices that gave the faith a character more ritual and magical than ethical. The latter portions of the Avesta have much to say about spells and incantations....There was a considerable proliferation of the mythology of evil: a whole hierarchy of spirits were ranged under the leadership of Angra Mainyu."
- Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*

Click here to learn about the Magi and the nativity story of Jesus.

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**Later Developments**

(1) The Sacred Texts

The Vendidad
"The Vendidad, which according to M. Boyce reached its final form during the Parthian period of Zoroastrian history (141 BCE-224 CE), is principally a book of laws regulating certain practices of the Zoroastrian religion and particularly those concerning purity. This forms the bulk of the material and is the central section of the book. This 'legal' section of this text is flanked by material of a more mythological nature, and additional passages on medicine."
"According to the Vendidad for each of the good lands - getig creations - fashioned by Ahura Mazda there is a work of evil created by the adversarial spirit. These works of evil may be a noxious creature (e.g. the 'stained mosquito'), or a sinful attribute (e.g. 'pride'), or what was understood by the compilers as a physical aberration (e.g. 'abnormal issue in women', a reference to the menstrual cycle)....Since the later Bundahishen makes it clear that Ahriman is incapable of material creation, but not that he is incapable of influencing the lives of men and women, such characteristics as 'pride' can be understood as a rejection of the Ahuric path."
"A. V. Williams has suggested that it might...be permissible to think of evil as an 'anti-body', since 'it has itself no physical, only a parasitic, destructive presence in the world'. Thus those creatures which are viewed as Ahrimanic in Zoroastrianism - frogs, scorpions, snakes and so on - are the 'shells' in which evil walks upon the earth. [The Body and the Boundaries of Zoroastrian Spirituality', Religion, 19 (1989); 227-39]."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, pp. 83, 9
**Bundahishen**
The Bundahishen ("Creation")

9th c. Pahlavi text which exists as the Greater (longer) Bundahishen recension and the Iranian Bundahishen recension.

"The Bundahishen seems to represent a convergence of at least three traditional sources: the Zarathushtrian celestial court and apocalyptic vision, the modified Babylonian world year and also a pre-Zoroastrian creation mythology. These three strands have then been woven together in the one text. "Furthermore, it is from the Bundahishen that we receive a clear and coherent picture of the concept of Ahura Mazda as creator of the Amesha Spentas and the purpose of their creation."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 51

(2) An Evolving Theology

Developments in Zoroastrianism have "been obscured by the changes that followed the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great, especially the establishment of many smaller Greek dynasties in plane of the Great Empire. The period, which started effectively under Mithridates I, in the second century B.C., and which lasted down to the Parthian era, brought about a further syncretism within Zoroastrianism. One effect of this was the rise of Mithraism...The Sassanian dynasty, which destroyed the Parthian supremacy, lasted from the early part of the third century A.D. until 651, when it was vanquished by the Muslims."

- Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*

The Heavenly Court

"Zoroaster's rarefied cosmology - as such things tend to do - became increasingly embellished with the passing of time. Eventually, this embellishment would cause serious problems. First, the two spirits came to be regarded as Ahura Mazda's two sons, though, which merely created the minor problem of God being Satan's dad. Thus Spenta Mainyu, the good spirit, gradually became completely fused with Ahura Mazda. On one hand, this made the supreme God suddenly disappear from the scene, and on the other it made Spenta his own father - with Satan for a brother. Ultimately, though, it left them both without a father, giving the appearance of two gods, a good one in a constant state of war with an evil opposite number. Feuding brothers - such as Cain and Abel - are a common theme found in numerous faiths originating in the Near and Middle East, linked to the idea of the heavenly twin: a kind of double each individual creates in the next world through his or her actions in this one, the result being either beautiful or like Dorian Gray's portrait."


"Whereas Zarathushtra in his Gathas offers a vision of a simultaneously immanent and transcendent Ahura Mazda surrounded by the bountiful immortals, with the occasional glimpse of other celestial figures (such as Sroash, the divinity who impels us to hear the word of God and urges us to be obedient to it), the literature from post-Zarathushtrian times suggests that the heavenly court might be somewhat more populated than we had first imagined. We also see in the Yashts a definite blurring with regard to the order of importance of the heavenly beings, since other menog beings are named side by side with the Amesha Spentas, often with no clear distinction between the two categories."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 49

A Boundless Time

According to the Bundahishen:

"In an eternity without beginning, in a boundless time that exists outside our own, Ohrmazd [Pahlavi for Ahura Mazda] dwells in isolation in a realm of pure light and the evil spirit in a realm of utter darkness. In this fashion the Bundahishen sets the pattern for a subsequent series of mirror images designed to accentuate the contrast between the domains of Ohrmazd and Ahriman. The symmetry is not perfect, however, for the text states that whereas Ohrmazd is omniscient and knows of Ahriman's existence, the reverse is not the case. Moreover the evil spirit only has "backward knowledge that is, he can only know what has happened, not what will happen."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, pp. 51, 52

Gayomart, the First Man
"As recounted in the Bundahishen, the final saoshyant's first act will be to raise Gayomart, the first man, who was slaughtered by Ahriman and from whose body plant and human life sprang. For the next fifty-seven years the souls all of humanity will be recalled from their places, and they will be reunited with their bodies. Whether they have been languishing in the agony of the House of Lies, or rejoicing in bliss of the House of Song, or merely existing in the Place of the Mixed Ones, they will be presented for a final judgment. At the judgment, which seems to be the concern of the saoshyant, since there is no mention yet of Ohrmazd's role in the apocalypse..."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 71

"The Magian priesthood, developing this teaching further, produced the generally held belief that the Saoshyant would be born of the prophet's own seed, miraculously preserved at the bottom of a lake. Near to the dreaded End of Time, it is said, a virgin will bathe in this lake and be impregnated by the prophet's seed; in due course she'll give birth to a son, named Astvat-ereta, meaning 'He who embodies righteousness,' and reflecting Zoroaster's own words: 'May righteousness be embodied.' Despite his miraculous conception, therefore, the coming Savior of the World will still be a man, born of human parents. In this development of the Saoshyant belief the Magi thus did not betray Zoroaster's own teachings about the vital role to be played by humankind in the great cosmic struggle. Like kings and heroes, the Saoshyant is thought of as being blessed with divine grace, which, according to later literature, 'will accompany the victorious Saoshyant ... so that he may restore existence ... When [he] emerges from the lake ... this messenger of God ... will drive the Lie out from the world of Righteousness.'"


A Purgative Fire

"Fire and the yazad Airyaman will melt the metal in the hills and mountains, and it will be upon the earth like a river."

- Greater Bundahishen 34:17

"When people are made to pass through this metal as part of the universal judgment, the just will be unaffected by it, but to those who have lived wicked lives, those who have been in hell as well as those still alive during these last times, it will be purgative, and after this ordeal all people will 'come together with the greatest affection'. There is a marked shift towards leniency, then, in this doctrine from the Pahlavi books. There is here none of the Greek final destruction of the evil-doer. The House of Lies, it seems, is now to relinquish its captives so that they might pay for their wrong doing in a most tortuous way, but only in order that they might be able to join their fellow humans in the perfection of the good dominion when Ohrmazd's creation will be restored. Perhaps here is a hint of the nature of that Ahuric perfection which must be total - that is, not one human must be lost when the restoration takes place, for if that happens the completeness of creation will also be lost."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 71

"The Soshyant (Saoshyant) with his helpers will perform the Yasna for restoring the dead. For that Yasna they will slay the Hayadans bull; from the fat of that bull and the white haoma they will prepare ambrosia and give it to all mankind; and all men will become immortal for ever and ever... Ohrmazd will himself come into the world as celebrating priest, and the just Sroash as serving priest; and he will hold the sacred girdle in his hands. And at that Gathic liturgy the Evil Spirit, helpless and with his power destroyed, will rush back to shadowy darkness through the way which he had entered. And the molten metal will flow into hell; and the stench and filth in the earth, where hell was, will be burnt by that metal... and there will be Frashegird (frashokereti) in the world."

- Greater Bundahishen 34

"The perfect state of the getig creation was only to last until the Ahrimanic assault began. One by one the material creations of Ohrmazd are attacked and destroyed by Ahriman's forces. Finally Ahriman comes to 'the Bull' (the Gathic Geus Urvan seems to be Zarathushtra's own extension of this myth) and the Just Man (Gayomart), intent on destroying them....In a scenario reminiscent of Vedic creation mythology, from the killing of the just man, there sprang not only the entire human race but all manner of minerals. In a curious variation on the Vedic scenario (which states that the 'cosmic man' provided the materials for the structure of the universe and the pattern of society from his dismembered body during the prototypical sacrifice), as Gayomart died, his seed entered the ground where it was guarded for forty years; from this seed came plant..."
life which eventually produced the first pair of the new human race. Therefore in destroying creation and slaying the Primal Bull and the First Man, Ahriman was unknowingly laying the foundations for his eventual destruction."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 54

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(3) Saviors and the Final Judgment

A Succession of Saoshyants

The Zoroastrian theory of history was elaborated during the Sassanian dynasty (3rd to 7th c. C.E.).

"The first stage [of the World Year] consisted solely of spiritual existence during which time a chief god designed the physical universe. During the second stage, the material universe was created, followed by the entrance of the chief god's opponent into the new universe for the purpose of creating problems. The third phase consisted of a battle between the chief god and his rivals over the fate of the many souls who came to occupy the universe. In the fourth and final stage, the chief god was to send in a succession of saviors who would finally defeat the opponent and bring salvation to all spiritual beings in the universe. According to Zoroaster's model, the world is in the fourth stage."

- William Bramley, *The Gods of Eden*

"There arose...a doctrine which taught that there was to be a succession of saoshyants (of which Zarathushtra was the first), who would, over succeeding millennia, be born of virgins from the seed of the prophet, which will be miraculously preserved in the lake Kayansih, as told in the Bundahishen. Since the Gathas do not define a number, it is difficult to say when the figure of three was determined; three, though, is an auspicious number in Zoroastrianism (as it seems to be in many other traditions). These saoshyants, now three in number following Zarathushtra, were to appear at intervals in the history of the world when it was in danger of such a moral degeneration that it might seem that it had fallen finally to the forces of evil. But from the moment of the first of these saviors' appearances there will be a reversal of the trend towards evil and all the qualities associated with the Ahuric way - justice, peace, piety and so on - will prevail. The next period of decline will precede the next of these saviors. The last of the world saviors will be the one to begin the final work that brings about the frashokereti."

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 66

"The fourth era begins with the sending by God of his prophet, Zarathustra, to help mankind. Zarathustra's fravashi [everlasting prototype] had already been created in the second period, so that his soul dwelt in the realm of the transcendent before it was clothed in human flesh at the time of his earthly life. After Zarathustra, every thousand years during the remainder of the era spiritual successors came into existence. These saviors will culminate in Soshyans, who will prepare the way for the resurrection of the dead. In a final combat, the forces of evil will be put to flight and destroyed. The universe will be restored in a purified state: men and other creatures will be made immortal, and join in the praises of Ahura Mazda."

- Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*

Trial by Molten Metal

"...Later Zoroastrian apocalyptic mythology, rooted in Zarathushtra's Gathic teachings, speaks of a universal trial by molten metal, whereby all men and women will be subjected to a general judgment; men and women who have lived good virtuous lives will be made to pass through the metal and to those people it will seem like 'warm milk'. Those who have lived evil lives, however, will not be so fortunate, for to them the metal will be agonizing and will destroy them:""

- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 38

  "Make clear (to them) in their minds, 0 Mazda, which (is) the gratification you apportion with your red fire and the molten metal according to the balance. In order to damage the deceitful one you benefit the truthful one."

  - Yasna 51:9

"It is believed the molten metal ordeal, whereby molten metal was poured onto the chest of an offender, was a tribal juridical practice with which Zarathushtra will have been familiar (although the Gathas do not make clear his approval of the practice, merely suggesting his recognition of its value as an image with which his
audience will also, presumably, have been familiar). There is no Gathic evidence to suggest that Zarathushtra envisaged a general resurrection far in the future; his poems strongly suggest that as far as he was concerned the refreshment of the world or frashokereti was to be within his lifetime. The modifications which occurred within Zoroastrian eschatological mythology were a result of Zarathushtra's vision being unrealized...

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 38

The Magi and the Infant Jesus

"He [the infant Jesus] presented to them [the Magi] a closed box, desiring them not to open it till their return home. After having traveled a number of days, however, they were curious to see what was in the box, and opened it, when they found only a stone, which was meant to express that they should remain firm in the faith which they had received. They did not understand this meaning, and, despising the gift, threw it into a well, when immediately a great fire came down from heaven, and began to burn brightly. When they saw this wonder, they were quite astonished, and repented that they had thrown away the stone. They, however, took a portion of the fire, carried it to their country, and placed it in their church, where they kept it continually burning. They revere it as a god, and use it for burning all their sacrifices; and when at any time it goes out, they repair to that well, where the fire is never extinguished, and from it bring a fresh supply. This is what all the people of that country tell, and Messer Marco was assured of it by those of the castle, and therefore it is truth."

- Marco Polo, Travels

"The heart is a light in the depths of the well of nature, like Joseph's light in the well into which he was thrown. Of water in inner visions he says if it 'is clear and if suns or lights or flames are drowned in it, know that it is the sea of mystic gnosis ... the color of ardent pure fire is the sign of the vitality of spiritual energy.'"

- Najmoddin Kobra, 13th c.

"Kobra is referring to meditation techniques or dhikr, one stage of which he likens to a bucket being lowered into the well of the heart."

"Initially when the well is revealed it has a depth to which no depth perceived physically can be compared, but as the seeker ascends toward the light shining above, the whole well below is transformed into a well of light or of a green-colored light."


"Dark at the beginning, because it was the dwelling-place of devils, it is now luminous with green light, because it has become the place to which descend the Angels and the divine Compassion."

- Najmoddin Kobra, 13th c.

"[Jesus] said to them, 'Whoever has ears should hear. There is light within a person of light, and it shines on the whole world. If it does not shine, it is dark.'"

- Thomas 24

According to Iranian tradition the tombs of the Magi who visited the infant Jesus are located in the ruins of Saveh, Iran.

"There were only two Persian Magi here: just as there were evidently only two buried at Saveh, only two portrayed on the enigmatic tiles, only two in the Mandaean account, and only two depicted in one of the oldest catacombs under Rome."


"The 'square house carefully preserved' above the tombs of Polo's Magi, and their own perfectly preserved bodies, was a symbol of mystical transcendence: they had merged with their Perfect Natures and were in Hurqalya, of which the square building, like Solomon's square holy of holies, was a microcosm. The tower or castle on its mountain in Saveh, near the dried-up salt lake, was the 'Mountain of the Lord,' where the Fravartis, angelic beings, watch over the Zoroastrian seed of the Savior, the Saoshyant to come. It was the Mons victorialis, the point from which the Magi began their journey."

"The reason each of the Magi visiting the child separately, see him as themselves is that he is their Perfected Nature, their heavenly twin [their true self]."

Note that Thomas means "twin" and according to some traditions was Jesus' twin brother.

**The Legacy of Zoroastrianism**

"...Despite the virtual demise of the religion in its homeland, it contributed to the stream of western religious history. In eastern thought the Zoroastrian idea about later Saviors who would help mankind played some part in the rise of the Bodhisattva cult in Greater Vehicle Buddhism. Traders and travelers must have exchanged ideas about religion as they followed along the silk routes of Central Asia to China. It is probable too the Mazdaean magical ideas entered into later Taoism, through Chang Tao-ling. Oriental ideas transversely contributed to Manichaeism..."
- Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*

Zoroastrianism also had a significant effect on Judaism during the Achaemenian period. See "Zoroastrian Precedents" for details.

### Rituals

#### (1) Fire Ceremony

"Ritual for the Zoroastrian is something to be witnessed or experienced, but there is no sense of the priest and laity engaging in communal prayer or 'offering' a ritual together."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 120

"The chief ritual of Zoroastrianism, the fire ceremony, seems to have derived from the earliest times in the Zoroastrian tradition - perhaps from Zarathustra himself, who, according to later tradition, was killed while performing the fire sacrifice. There is little doubt that Zarathustra was adapting and attempting to purify the old Aryan fire sacrifice, which had centered on the figure of Agni in the Vedic hymns."

In the fire temples of the Parsees in modern India, "the sacred fire is maintained continuously in an inner chamber of the temple by priests who wear special protective cloths over their mouths to prevent contamination of the pure fire. Worshipers come to the threshold with their offerings, and receive in return ashes from the sacred fire."
- Geoffrey Ashe, *The Ancient Wisdom*

"We desire your fire."
- *Yasna* 34:4

In "consecrated form, that is within the sacred confines of the Atash Bahram [Fire Temple] and after the requisite ceremonies have been performed to sanctify it, the fire makes present the divine light of Ahura Mazda not only through symbolic or signifying process but by virtue of its physical identity as fire, and so it is entitled to be addressed as the 'son of Ahrua Mazda'."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 95

#### (2) Yasna

Yasna: "an ancient ritual which knits together heaven and earth and which urges creation on to its renewal, an event which later came to be referred to as the frashokereti, when humanity and all that is created will be perfected."

"The purpose of the Yasna is to purify the world (the chief celebrant is also known by the Avestan term yazdathragar, or the 'one who purifies creation'), to strengthen the bond between the getig and menog realms by creating an environment within which they might form a unity, and to give praise and glory to Ahura
Mazda and his good menog beings. As a consequence of this, the Ahrimanic forces are weakened and the Good Dominion (khshathra) can gradually increase. Thus the Yasna is a ceremony replete with eschatological meaning and potential."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, pp. 2, 100

"(Tell us about) the gratification which you grant with (your) spirit and (your) fire and which you assign through truth..."
- *Yasna* 31:3

"The pawi [furrows which demarcate rectangular sanctuary] is set out in a prescribed manner, with the consecrated fire in its silver vase (the afargan) elevated on a marble table (afarganyu) at the south end of the sanctuary, where it is constantly attended by the raspi. At the north is a stool from where the zot, at specified intervals, presides over the ceremony, and immediately to the zot's south is a table (alat-khwan) upon which are laid many of the ritual instruments and requisite substances, including a cup containing a presanctified libation known as parahom (prepared by the raspi in a prior ceremony called the paragna or 'pre-worship'), a cup of libation water, a cup containing bull's hair, a saucer of goat's milk and a saucer with hom (haoma) and pomegranate twigs in it. There is also a portion of consecrated bread (dron) with clarified butter (ghee), which will be consumed by the zot as part of the ceremony. Also on this table are a bundle of twenty-one metal barsom wires which will be tied together with a date-palm cord. To his right, as he faces south, is a round metal basin containing a pestle, a sieve-like saucer and some additional cups.

"Water also plays an important role in the Yasna ceremony. Every fire temple is provided with a well from which the water is drawn, and this is used in purifying the ritual objects and the priests themselves. Respect is also paid to water in much the same way as the ritual fire, with offerings being made to it and appropriate prayers directed towards it. One of the benefits of the Yasna is good physical health, signified here by the water which in creation is presided over by the Bountiful Immortal Haurvatat (the Amesha Spenta denoting wholeness and health)."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 100

"The healer of existence, the knowing one who conceives truth, has listened (to your teachings). At will he is in control of his tongue for the sake of the correct uttering of the words, at the distribution of the balances in the good (way), with your red fire, 0 Mazda Ahura."
- *Yasna* 31:19

"...The Zoroastrian priesthood is adamant that without the Yasna, 'the world would collapse' [W. Darrow, 'Keeping the Waters Dry', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56/3 (1987) p. 420]. That this means in effect is that the link between the menog and getig realms will be severed, the world will degenerate into irretrievable chaos and the Ahrimanic forces will gain complete control, preventing the frashokereti from ever happening."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, p. 102

(3) The Navjote

The affirmation ceremony known as the Navjote "may be performed on initiates up to the age of fifteen, and in extreme cases on adults."

"The main purpose of the Navjote is affirmation of the candidate's belief in the Zoroastrian religion accompanied by the investiture with the sacred garment and sacred cord, and it is these two items which give the ceremony its name. The Sudre is a thin white garment worn under the outer clothing, and for orthodox Zoroastrians once donned it is kept on constantly other than in circumstances such as bathing. Its color represents purity and innocence. The Kushti, or sacred cord, which should be made of wool, consists of 72 threads, in imitation of the 72 chapters of the Yasna. Once again this is worn at all times except during such circumstances as already mentioned in relation to the Sudre. It wraps around the body three times as a reminder of the Zoroastrian ethical injunction of good thoughts, good words and good deeds."

"The Kushti...seems to be reminiscent of the sacred chord worn by the 'twice-born man' in Brahminical religion..."
- Peter Clark, *Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*, pp. 108, 175

"Adapting the old Vedic Brahman tradition of men wearing a sacred thread over one shoulder which was knotted for them by a priest during their initiation and is never untied, Zoroaster decreed that the sign of..."
membership in his religious community, but for both men and women, would be a thin cord worn as a girdle, passed three times round the waist and knotted at back and front. After initiation - which took place at the age of fifteen - and every day for the rest of their lives, believers must untie and retie the girdle repeatedly when praying, its three coils likely intended to signify the thoughts, words and deeds by whose sum they would be judged after death."


(3) The Towers of Silence

"It is believed that a Zoroastrian corpse is much more open to Ahrimanic threat than that of a non-Zoroastrian, and that the quality of life of the deceased determines how much pollution will be attracted - the holier the person, the greater the pollution.

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 115

"A...spectacular custom is the Parsee method of disposing of the dead: corpses are not buried or cremated, but are placed upon the famous 'Towers of Silence' where vultures pick the flesh and the sun bleaches the bones, which are later thrown into a central well. In this way the sacred elements are not defiled by the corpse."

- Geoffrey Ashe, The Ancient Wisdom

"Upon death, and after any formal medical procedures have been completed, the corpse is taken to a building called a bungli, part of the area set aside for the disposal of corpses. It is washed in unconsecrated bull's urine (gomez), since this is a powerful antiseptic agent and plays a major role in Zoroastrian purity rituals, and dressed in clean, though not new, clothes (including a Sudre), and the sacred cord (Kushti) is tied three times around the body. The body is then removed to a specially prepared area of the room where it has three circles drawn around it, to prevent pollution from entering the rest of the area. The soul is said to hover around the body for three days, and so three days and nights of prayers are performed in the presence of the corpse. A dog is brought out to 'gaze' upon the body. This rite, known as sagdid, in a sense confirms that the body is dead. A dog was thought in earlier times to have the power of discerning between life and death; a dog is also said to be a favored Ahuric creature, capable of slaying three thousand demons in a night.

"After the three-day period, the pall-bearers will take the corpse to the place where it will eventually lie to be devoured by vultures; this place is known as the dakhma or 'tower of silence'. While this happens, the priests will begin to recite suitable prayers, and to reinforce their purity, they, and others in the procession, will hold a piece of white cloth called a paiwand between them as they walk in pairs to a place near the steps of the tower. Dakhmas are large round structures, open to the elements, with three sets of concentric chambers, also unenclosed, in which men, women and children will be laid, men on the outer circle, women in the middle circle and children in the innermost. Only the nasarsarlas [specially appointed individuals] are permitted to enter the dakhma with the corpse. Once inside, the nasarsarlas lay the body in its chamber and leave. It is thought that the vultures which inhabit the complex can strip the corpse of flesh within twenty minutes."

- Peter Clark, Zoroastrianism, An Introduction to an Ancient Faith, p. 116
Hyperlinks

- Ancient Traditions of the Messiah
- An Age of Persecution
- The Book of Revelation
- The Brethren of Sincerity
- The Cult of Mithra
- The Enigmatic Fate of the Ark
- The Gospel According to Matthew
- The Gospel of John
- Going Forth to Rule the World
- A Hierarchy of Demons
- Jesus - The Early Days
- A Land of Strange Gods
- Magic and Magicians in the Roman Empire
- The Manichaeans
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- The Necronomicon
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- The Pseudepigraphical Book of Enoch
- Satan and the Forces of Chaos
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