

Zoroastrianism

The Beginning

Thousands of years ago, there was no organized religion. People worshipped various pagan gods and goddesses. This lack of religion in the people's daily lives meant that there was no sense of ethics. People stole, killed, looted, and lied. In short, there was chaos.



According to myth, Zarathustra had a conversion experience. An angel called **Good Thought** appeared to him and took him before **Ahura Mazda** (Wise Lord). Zarathustra recognized Ahura Mazda as the one true God. That was when Ahura Mazda, the supreme creator of the universe, sent the prophet Zarathustra down to earth to teach the people a new religion. Zarathustra (known to the Greeks as Zoroaster) came down and taught the people that there was one God, Ahura Mazda, and that he was all



powerful. He taught them that God was the supreme creator of all things, and that he would reward their good deeds and punish their wrongdoing justly. The time and place Zarathustra came is still debated, but most experts agree it was in the area known as Persia (now Iran) around 1500 B.C.

What was life like on earth before Zarathustra's experience? What element of religion does this fit into?

What is a conversion experience? What element of religion (there are seven) does this fit into?

Against overwhelming odds, the Zoroastrian religion has survived until the present, although there are less than 200,000 still practicing the religion today. Most of these are in India, Iran, North America, and Australia. A few are scattered through other corners of the globe.

Scripture:

The sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism is called the **Avesta**. It includes the *Gathas* (hymns) written by Zarathustra himself.

Ahunavaiti Gatha – from the Avesta

1. With outspread hands in petition for that help, O Mazda, I will pray for the works of the holy spirit, O thou the Right, whereby I may please the will of Good Thought and the Ox-Soul.

3. I who would praise ye as never before, Right and Good Thought and Mazda Ahura, and those for whom Piety makes an imperishable Dominion to grow; come ye to me help at my call.

The Zoroastrians pray five times a day, each prayer coming from one of the parts of the Avesta

Doctrine:

Monotheism: Zoroastrians believe in one God. This was a radical idea at the time as all other religions were polytheistic. For Zarathustra, the one true God was Ahura



Ahura Mazda fighting Ahriman

Mazda who is eternal and universal goodness. He controls the universe and the destiny of all human beings.

Ethical Dualism: is the belief in universal forces of good and evil. In Zoroastrianism, *the universal goodness*, Ahura Mazda is opposed by *the Lie*, known as **Ahriman**. Thus, for Zoroastrianism, evil really existed and it could be seen in the world as Ahriman was helped by demons known as *daevas* and *drujs*. One specific hostile spirit was known as *Shaitan*, which is related to the Hebrew name for evil, Satan.

Zarathustra believed that the universe was a battleground for the forces of good and evil. He believed the battle would eventually be won by good and predicted a future savior who would help restore this goodness to the world. This is the concept of **apocalypticism**.

What other religions do you know of, that teach the concept of apocalypticism and that a savior will come to save the world?

Zoroastrianists believed that humans must also be involved in this battle between good and evil: **we must choose between the Truth and the Lie**. Each person's choice has eternal consequences. At the day of judgment, the wicked will suffer the pains of the **Worse Existence** (hell) and the just will enjoy **The House of Best Purpose** (Heaven). Humans determine their own destiny by choosing truth, goodness and life or falsehood, evil and death. This is the concept of **Ethical dualism**.

Truly, there are two primal Spirits, twins renowned to be in conflict. In thought and word, in act they are two: the better and the bad. And those who act well have chosen rightly between these two, not so the evildoers. And when these two Spirits first came together they created life and not-life, and how at the end Worst Existence shall be for the wicked, but the House of Best Purpose shall for the just man. Of these two Spirits the Wicked One chose achieving the worst things. The Most Holy Spirit, who is clad in the hardest stone, chose right, and so do those who shall satisfy Ahuramazda continually with rightful acts.

The daevas indeed did not choose rightly between these two, for the Deceiver approached them as they conferred. Because they chose worst purpose, they then rushed to Fury, with whom they have afflicted the world and mankind.

Yasna 30.1-6

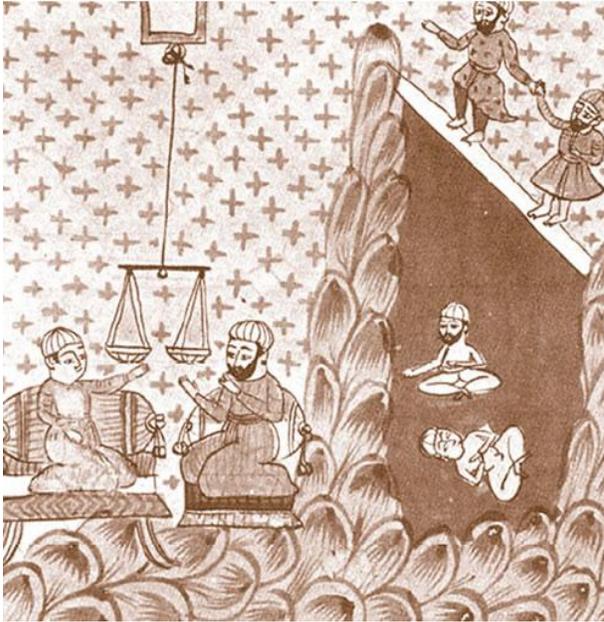
In your own words, describe ethical dualism.

Do you believe in it? Why?



Human Destiny

After death, Zarathustra teaches, each soul undergoes a judgment. The soul crosses the **Bridge of the Separator**, which goes over an abyss of horrible torment but leads to



paradise. The ethical record of the soul is judged; the good are allowed to pass into paradise, but the wicked are cast into the abyss. For Zoroastrianism, heaven is a place of joy and sunshine. Hell is a foul-smelling, dark place where the tormented are cursed to remain alone for eternity.

There is a promise also, of a series of saviors, **the Saoshyants**, who will appear in the world and complete the triumph of good over evil. Evil will be rendered ineffective and Ahura Mazda, the Infinite One, will finally become truly Omnipotent in Endless Light. There will then take place, a general Last Judgment of all the souls awaiting redemption, followed by the Resurrection of the

physical body, which will once again meet its spiritual counterpart, the soul. Time, as we know it, will cease to exist and the creation of Ahura Mazda will be gathered together in eternal blessedness in the Kingdom of Mazda, where everything, it is believed, will remain forever in a perfect state of joy.

In your own words, briefly explain what Zoroastrians believe happens after death. What does this remind you of?

Who are the Saoshyants? What is their importance?