

Title: Conversations

Subtitle: Zoroastrianism

Second Subtitle: Zoroastrianism

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Quote:

"Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed world-religions, and it has on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith." Mary Boyce

Introduction:

Zoroastrianism is a small religion with about 140,000 members. Yet its impact is much greater than its current numbers might suggest, because:

Their theology has had a great impact on Judaism, Christianity and other beliefs surrounding God and Satan, the soul, heaven and hell, savior, resurrection, etc.

It is one of the oldest religions still in existence,
It may have been the first monotheistic religion.

The religion was founded by Zarathushtra (Zoroaster in Greek; Zarthosht in Persian). Conservative Zoroastrians assign a date of 6000 BCE to the founding of the religion, while others estimate 600 BCE. Historians and religious scholars generally date his life to around 600 and 1000 BCE on the basis of his style of writing.

He lived in Persia, modern day Iran. Legends say that his birth was predicted and made by the forces of evil to kill him as a child. He preached a monotheistic religion, an aboriginal polytheistic religion. He was attacked for his teaching, but survived. Zoroastrianism became the state religion of various Persian empires.

When Arabs, followers of Islam, invaded Persia in 650 CE, a small number of Zoroastrians fled to India where most are concentrated today. Those who remained behind had to endure persecution, systematic slaughter, forced conversion, heavy taxes, etc. Today there are about 18,000 and reside chiefly in Yazd, Kerman and Tehran in what is now Iran. There are also 3,190 Zoroastrians in Canada. The actual number is believed to be much larger.

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Zoroastrian Sacred Text:

The Zoroastrian holy book is called the Avesta. This includes the original Zarathushtra, preserved in a series of five hymns, called the Gathas. This is the text of the religion. The Gathas are abstract sacred poetry, directed towards God, understanding of righteousness and cosmic order, promotion of social choice between good and evil. The Gathas have a general and even univocal

At some later date (most scholars say many centuries later), the remainder was written. These deal with laws of ritual and practice, with the traditions of the community is sharply divided between those who would follow mostly (or only) the original Gathas, and those who believe that the later traditions are divinely inspired.

Zoroastrian Beliefs:

Beliefs include:

A single god Ahura Mazda who is supreme. Communication between Him and a number of Attributes, called Amesha Spentas or Bounteous Immortals. Within the original Zoroastrian sacred text, these Immortals are sometimes described as sometimes personified.

One school of thought promotes a cosmic dualism between: An all powerful God is the only deity worthy of being worshipped, and

An evil spirit of violence and death, Angra Mainyu, who opposes Ahura Mazda.

The resulting cosmic conflict involves the entire universe, including humans who choose which to follow. Evil, and the Spirit of Evil, will be completely defeated. Dualism will come to an end and Goodness will be all in all.

Another school of thought perceives the battle between Good and Evil as taking place within the human consciousness.

Asha is a form of righteous, all encompassing, natural law.

Legends, which are probably not those of Zarathushtra's original teachings, say that the urvan (soul) is allowed three days to meditate on his/her past life. The soul is judged by Mithra, Sraosha and Rashnu. If the good thoughts, words and deeds outweigh the bad, the soul is taken into heaven. Otherwise, the soul is led to hell.

The universe will go through three eras: creation;

the present world where good and evil are mixed. People's good works are rewarded, transforming the world towards its heavenly ideal;

and a final state after this renovation when good and evil will be separated.

Eventually, everything will be purified. Even the occupants of hell will be purified.

A Saoshyant (savior) will be born of a virgin, but of the lineage of the Pious, who will raise the dead and judge everyone in a final judgment.

Zoroastrian Practices:

Their worship includes prayers and symbolic ceremonies.

The rituals are conducted before a sacred fire. Some believe that they are not true. They regard fire as a symbol of their God.

Zoroastrians do not generally accept converts. One has to be born into the faith, a practice that is disputed by some members.

Members are dedicated to a three-fold path, as shown in their motto: "Good thoughts, good words, good deeds"