

**Title: Conversations**

**Subtitle: Zoroastrianism**

**Second Subtitle: Zoroastrianism**

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Quote:

"Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed world-religions, and it has probably had more influence 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 importance to humanity is much greater than its current numbers might suggest, because:

Their theology has had a great impact on Judaism, Christianity and other later religions, in the beliefs surrounding God and Satan, the soul, heaven and hell, savior, resurrection, final judgment, 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 India and Persia). Conservative Zoroastrians assign a date of 6000 BCE to the founding of the religion; other followers estimate 600 BCE. Historians and religious scholars generally date his life sometime between 1500 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 that attempts were made by the forces of evil to kill him as a child. He preached a monotheism in a land which followed an aboriginal polytheistic religion. He was attacked for his teaching, but finally won the support of the king. Zoroastrianism became the state religion of various Persian empires, until the 7th Century CE.

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 have survived centuries of persecution, systematic slaughter, forced conversion, heavy taxes, etc. They now number only about 18,000 and reside chiefly in Yazd, Kernan and Tehran in what is now Iran. The 1991 census counted 3,190 Zoroastrians in Canada. The actual number is believed to be much higher.

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### Zoroastrian Sacred Text:

The Zoroastrian holy book is called the Avesta. This includes the original words of their founder Zarathushtra, preserved in a series of five hymns, called the Gathas. The latter represent the core text of the religion. The Gathas are abstract sacred poetry, directed towards the worship of the One God, understanding of righteousness and cosmic order, promotion of social justice and individual choice between good and evil. The Gathas have a general and even universal vision.

At some later date (most scholars say many centuries later), the remaining parts of the Avestas were written. These deal with laws of ritual and practice, with the traditions of the faith. The Zoroastrian community is sharply divided between those who would follow mostly (or exclusively) the teachings of the original Gathas, and those who believe that the later traditions are important and equally divinely inspired.

### Zoroastrian Beliefs:

Beliefs include:

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

One school of thought promotes a cosmic dualism between: An all powerful God Ahura Mazda who 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 humanity who is required to choose which to follow. Evil, and the Spirit of Evil, will be completely destroyed at the end of time. 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 an ethical dualism, set 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 are: After death, the urvan (soul) is allowed three days to meditate on his/her past life. The soul is then judged by a troika Mithra, Sraosha and Rashnu. If the good thoughts, words and deeds outweigh the bad, then 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 seen as gradually 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 released.

A Saoshyant (savior) will be born of a virgin, but of the lineage of the Prophet Zoroaster 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 actually worship fire. This is not true. They regard fire as a symbol of their God.

Zoroastrians do not generally accept converts. One has to be born into the religion. This belief is disputed by some members.

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