

Great ecological legacy of the Zoroastrian religion



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Zoroastrianism

- Founded ~1700 BC by Zarathushtra (Greek: Zoroaster)
- “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.” (Boyce 1979 p. 1)
- Dominant world religion during the Persian empires (559 BC-651 AC), and was thus the most powerful world religion at the time of Jesus. Now a tiny minority

Best known for...

- Kings Cyrus and Darius released Jews from captivity in Babylon, and secured widespread good will of different cultures throughout the empire by policy of religious tolerance and respect – praised in the Bible
- The priests are called Magi, and 3 magi endorsement would add great credibility to newborn Christian faith
- Also sprach Zarathustra
- Famous Zoroastrians include musicians Zubin Mehta and Freddy Mercury of Queen
- Mazda Motor Co. named for Zoroastrian name of God

Precepts

- One God, called Ahura Mazda: All good
- Heaven (“paradise” is an Avestan word) and Hell, ideas about right and wrong, good and evil
- Hell is not permanent, just a place of purification

Ecological principles

- Origins in Bronze-age agricultural society, struggling to survive on scarce resources; careful management and planning were **essential**
- Best practices (“*asha vahishta*”) brought abundance, comfort, happiness, while disruptions and deviating from them threatened community’s survival
- Deep respect and custodianship of nature is strongly embedded in the religion: earth, water, trees, plants, fire are all honored and meticulously protected from pollution
- The ancient Avesta (scripture) expresses strict rules for preserving forested areas (Vd9.2, 16.2; Hd 22.13)



- In spite of intense persecution, have been able to survive in remote desert regions of Iran, largely due to conservation practices
- Use of sand and “gray water” for most washing; virtually 0 garbage: few scraps, hair and nail clippings brought to a small communal structure on the outskirts of community (where acid periodically poured in); *qanats*: ancient water systems
- Different days of month dedicated to the water (10th); *geush*/sentient life (14th); *gowad*/atmosphere/wind (22nd); *asman*/sky (27th); *zam*/Earth (28th)
- (There are also days dedicated to other concepts such as *asha*/rightness or truth, *rashnu*/justice, *vohumano*/critical thinking, etc.; today is in fact the festival day/month of *asha*)

Prayer & litanies honoring them Y42:1-3

- We honor the fountains, & the fordings of the rivers, the forkings of the highways, & the meetings of the roads.
- We honor the hills that run with torrents, & the lakes that brim with waters! & the grain that fills the fields; & we honor both their protector and their Creator, & Zarathushtra & the Lord.
- We honor both earth & heaven, & the stormy wind that Mazda made, & the peaks of high Mount Haraiti, & the land, & all things good.

Yasna 30.9 – a hymn of Zarathushtra

aṭcā tōi vaēm hyāmā yōi īm fərašēm kərənāun ahūm

May we be among those who make this World
fresh

Prayer & litanies honoring them

Siroza 2.28:

zəmō huδāṅhō yazatahe imā asā imā šōiθrā garōiš uši-darənahe
mazdaδātahe aša-x^vāθrahe vīspaēšamca gairinaṃ aša-x^vāθranaṃ pouru-
x^vāθranaṃ mazdaδātanāṃ

We honor the bounteous Earth, these habitats and fields, Mount Ushidarena, created by Mazda, bringing an easeful life in harmony with Asha, and all the mountains, created by Mazda that bring an easeful life in harmony with Asha, a life full of rewards