

# SHAUL SHAKED'S UNDERSTANDING OF ZOROASTRIAN DUALISM

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 20, 2020

In the *Cambridge History of Judaism I* "Iranian Influence on Judaism",<sup>1</sup> Shaked expresses the same views on dualism in both faiths: "A common misconception has bred an argument against a comparison of Jewish dualism with the Iranian type of faith." Whereas it is generally held that in Judaism there is never a departure from the underlying monotheism, but "in Iran we have a 'pure' dualism, with a pair of deities on an equal footing poised against each other, representing the two opposite principles. This is not an entirely accurate description of the Iranian dualism." He traces strong expression of dualism in Judaism especially in the *Testament of Twelve Patriarchs* (particularly Levi, Dan, Naphtali, Asher, and Benjamin), the *Manual of Discipline* of Qumran, and the Judeo-Christian *Didache*, and *Enoch (Slavonic Enoch)*. He maintains that the contrast between the two "is not as deep as may be imagined from a cursory comparison. The type of dualism present in these Jewish books is also akin to Iranian dualism in that in both the division cuts across the material and the spiritual universe, unlike gnostic dualism, where the spiritual was identified with the divine." However, as he rightly opines, such a similarity in structure by itself does not indicate influence unless it is shown that such a similarity cannot possibly exist in both these faiths independently (which Shaked seems to explore in his various research) and until this is done, the argument for Iranian influence on dualism "would rest on shaky grounds."

But in his conclusion he notes that "it seems quite significant in this context that the specific Iranian religious themes encountered in the Jewish books discussed above tend to be concentrated in the compositions cited above, whereas it seems other Jewish books discuss Iranian ideas in a rather secondary manner". He concludes: "It does not seem at all likely that so many similarities could have been formed in parallel independently, and, despite the chronological difficulties of the documentation, in most of the parallel points one may feel quite confident that the ideas were indigenous to Iran. "However, he finds "it is much more difficult to establish how contacts between Jews and Iranians took place in such a way as to bring about the awareness of common religious concerns evidenced by compositions which were perhaps for the most part written in Palestine and its environment, and

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<sup>1</sup> Davies WD Finkelstein L. *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Vol. 1 Introduction ; the Persian Period.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1984, pp. 315-318.

not in Iran.” And even if we accept it that the Iranian influence ultimately came about as a result of adaptation and absorption into the exiting framework of contemporary Jewish beliefs by shaping or sharpening ideas which were lying vague in their books (or I may add, psyche), they had to be “modified in a Jewish way and it is unlikely that any deductions could be made from them about their supposed originals,” a very ardent, if not impossible task, I may add, as they are all long lost to history.

In view of Ezra's important role in the Persian court, Shaked sees the possibility of Zoroastrian influences on the Pentateuch, (which is reviewed at length earlier here) and assigns it to P. One such section he believes, is Genesis I: 1 to 2: 4a, which differs so much from Genesis 2:4b ff, as it resembles the Zoroastrian cosmogony in two significant details – the Ruah here embodying the Spirit of God with creation, as in Yasna 44.7 and 57.7, this being the only such mention in the Old Testament. It is so very reminiscent of the Holy Spirit in the Gathas. Secondly, both systems divide the acts of creation in seven stages, though they are not identical and have a less conspicuous place for fire in Genesis. “Yet”, affirms Shaked, “there is a broad and noble likeness between the two cosmogonies; and since cosmogony was of such importance in Zoroastrianism being linked with the doctrines of the seven Amesha Spentas, and God's purpose in creating the world, knowledge of the Zoroastrian account can be expected to have become known to theologians of other faiths throughout the empire.”

As regards the fate after death, not like other authors, Shaked finds little evidence for it until the end of the Old Testament period, the earliest reference being the post-exilic verse, Isaiah 26:19, quoted earlier – which is “expressly linked with the doctrine alluded to in Yasna 30.7 and a Zoroastrian article of faith, (for the latter, See Boyce, *History* I, p. 293), which must be well-known then at least to the Greek thinkers as Theopompus, both in 380 B.C. ascribed it to Zoroaster. “With it and other elements of Zoroastrian apocalyptic finding their counterparts eventually in Pharisaic beliefs, it seems once more difficult wholly to set aside the possibility of influence by the Iranian religion on the development of Jewish salvation-faith in the post-exilic period.” Shaked finds earliest attestation of reaction to Zoroastrian notions in Deutero-Isaiah which speaks disapprovingly of certain Jews as “fire-lighters, girders of fire-brand” (Isaiah 50.11) but it is not possible to ascertain what actual practices it refers to. Although other references in Deutero-Isaiah are even more ambivalent or vague, chapters 40-48 clearly allude to Zoroastrian terminology as in 45.7, which is narrated by Morton Smith, as already reviewed. The theory of Four Monarchies and Four Ages as symbolized by four metals also seems to have a Zoroastrian origin.

From the limited area assigned to Free Will in the Middle Persian texts, as regards acceptance of faith, Shaked disagrees with some scholars who deny Zoroastrian influence on the Qumran sectarians and declares that their views “on the problem of individual freedom differed from those of official Zoroastrianism in emphasis rather than in substance. He sees “a fairly substantial area of agreement (about) the destiny of the world and the concomitant idea of a definite succession of periods – 12,000 or 9,000 years, divided into the units of 3,000 years each, the present area being the final one consisting of 3,000 years. While Shaked does not view the corresponding Jewish beliefs as coherent and well-defined as their Zoroastrian counterparts, he finds a division of universal history into twelve parts (2 Baruch 56:3; 4 Ezra 14:11)”, along with the notion of the four periods of the world.

Shaked also traces the unique notion of double time – *Zarwane Akarne* and *Zarwane Daregho-Khadhatahe* (limited Time and unlimited Time, which is spoken of literally as ‘Time of the Long Domain’) in the *Slavonic Book of Enoch*. He regards it as “one of the dearest cases of borrowing”, which provides him a unique “opportunity of dating this idea in Iran to an earlier period than its attention in Iran itself,” where it is mentioned much later in the Pahlavi texts, thus proving that the Pahlavi texts contains notions that are much older than their times of composition. Thus he finds in the Slavonic Book of Enoch “a number of other motifs borrowed from Iran, such as the creation of the world by stages from invisible (*Menog*) to visible (*Getig*) and making men a composite of the two elements; the idea of the soul of the beast (2 Enoch 58:3 ff).

Shaked encounters “some of the most striking points of similarity between Iran and the Jewish writings, despite the problem that eschatology is detailed only in the late Pahlavi texts, Avesta providing only a few hints. And yet, he posits it is so improbably that “such a complex and interwoven set of ideas would come to exist in two religious cultures independently of each other.” In both eschatological narratives there are apparent contradictions, complexity and incoherence. Many of the events associated with individual judgment are also found in the universal judgment. Nevertheless, Shaked finds it “striking that there are similarities not only in the employment of the themes but also in their apparent incoherence. Whereas he sees an organic development of eschatological notions in Zoroastrianism, he finds their development in Judaism in a haphazard manner as they “were borrowed and adapted to the requirement of Judaism.”

However, Shaked views that at least some of the eschatological notions were already a part of the bible, which were “adapted to express a new mood “rather than arbitrarily grafting a Zoroastrian concept. For instance, the Zoroastrian belief that the soul of the departed lingers

around the body of the deceased for three days and nights is echoed in the *Testament of Abraham* (Recension A, 20) as also elsewhere in Jewish books. We also find typical Zoroastrian ideas about retrieval of the separate parts of the body from specific elements of the universe, as in 2 Enoch. Both literature describe the excitement and joy felt by those risen from the dead. While 1 Enoch may contain certain features from Greek ideas of Orphic origin which however is known to have been influenced earlier by Zoroastrian notions, such as the above of the dead, where the justice is meted out to the good and the wicked respectively and the intermediate state between death and final resurrection.

Thus, Shaked finds following new trends developed in Judaism during the Persian period; dualistic traits, a comprehensive listing of angels and demons, division of three or four predetermined periods of the universe, as an essential ingredient for developing an intricate eschatology, both individual and universal, eschatological explanations for judgments, ordeals, resurrection, and salvation, follow which will follow certain signs heralding the end of the world, all of which is at times associated with speculations about time.

Martin Haug's views on this subject, so averse to Mary Boyce's views, however, seems to support Shaked's views cited above: Spitama Zarathushtra's conception of Ahuramazda as the Supreme Being is perfectly identical with the notion of Elohim (God) Jehovah. --- A separate evil spirit of equal power with Ahuramazda, and always opposed to him, is entirely foreign to Zarathushtra's theology (by which Haug apparently means Gathas); though the existence of such an opinion among the ancient Zoroastrians can be gathered from some of the later writings, such as the *Vendidad*. (*The Parsis: Essays on Their Sacred Language, Writings and Religion*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, India, 1978, p. 302-3). Haug goes on expressing his views which are more or less in harmony with Shaked's, though being much older he did not enjoy access to the research available now.

The opinion, so generally entertained now, that Zarathushtra was preaching a Dualism, that is to say, the idea of two original independent spirits, one good and the other bad, utterly distinct from each other, and one counter-acting the creation of the other, is owing to a confusion of his philosophy with his theology. Having arrived at the grand idea of the unity and the indivisibility of the Supreme Being, he undertook to solve the great problem which has engaged the attention of so many wise men of antiquity, and even of modern times, viz., how are the imperfections discoverable in the world, the various kinds of evils, wickedness, and baseness, compatible with the goodness, holiness, and justice of God? This great thinker of remote antiquity solved this difficult question *philosophically* by the supposition of two primeval causes, which, though different, were united, and produced the world of material

things, as well as that of the spirit; which doctrine may best be learned from Yas. xxx. (see pp. 149-151).

The one, who produced the "reality" (*gaya*), is called *vohu-mano*, "The good mind," the other, through whom the "non-reality" (*ajyaiti*) originated, bears the name *akem mano*, "the evil mind." All good, true and perfect things, which fall under the category of "reality," are the productions of the "good mind;" while all that is bad and delusive, belongs to the sphere of "non-reality," and is traced to the evil mind." They are the two moving causes in the universe united from the beginning, and therefore, called "twins" (*yema*, Sans. *yamau*). They are present everywhere; in Ahuramazda as well as in men.

These two primeval principles, if supposed to be united in Ahuramazda himself, are not called *vohu-mano* and *akem mano*, but *spento mainyush*, "the beneficent spirit," and *angro mainyush*, "the hurtful spirit." That Ango-mainyush is no separate being, opposed to Ahuramazda, is to be gathered unmistakably from Yas. xix. 9 (see p.187), where Ahuramazda is mentioning his "two spirits," who are inherent in his own nature, and are in other passages (Yas, lvii. 2, see p. 189) distinctly called the "two creators" and "the two masters" (*paju*). And, indeed, we never find Ango-mainyush mentioned as a constant opponent of Ahuramazda in the Gathas, as is the case in later writings. The evil against which Ahuramazda and all good men are fighting is called *drukshsh*, "destruction, or lie," which is nothing but a personification of the Devas. The same expression for the "evil spread in the world, we find in the Persian cuneiform inscriptions, where, moreover, no opponent of Ahuramazda, like Ango-mainyush is ever mentioned. God (*Auramazda*), in the rock records of King Darius, is only one, as Jehovah is in the Old Testament, having no adversary whatsoever.

Haug adds: "The Zoroastrian idea of the Devil and the infernal kingdom coincides entirely with the Christian doctrine. The Devil is a murderer and father of lies according to both the Bible and The Zend-Avesta," an opinion fully supported by D.S. Russell, as reviewed earlier.