

ZOROASTRIANISM — An Overview

Inception: Zoroaster (628-527 BCE)

Adherents: 2.6 Million [EBI Estimate]

Primary Value Proposition: Free Will Choice Between Good and Evil

The Word of (about and/or attributed to) God:

- All things come from, and belong to, the One God — all-wise, good, righteous, holy, resplendent, and glorious. This, our God, is the source of all luminosity.
- The wise course in life is to act in consonance with the spirit of truth.
- The Lord is an all-powerful benefactor.
- The light of the sun is as wisdom to those who discern God in the universe.
- Worship the God of light by joyfully walking in the paths ordained by his revealed religion. There is but one Supreme God, the Lord of Lights.
- God is farthest from us and at the same time nearest to us in that he dwells within our souls.
- Our God is the divine and holiest Spirit of Paradise, and yet he is more friendly to man than the most friendly of all creatures.

Core Beliefs: Zoroastrians believe that Ahura Mazda is the one true God and the nature gods or daevas (devils) that Zoroaster's people worshipped were false gods. Ahura Mazda is seen as one, universal, and transcendent. He is said to be the one uncreated Creator. That creation — evident as *asha*, truth and order, is the antithesis of chaos, which is evident as *druj*, falsehood and disorder. The conflict involves the entire universe, including humanity, which has an active role to play in our world as the forces of good struggle with the forces of evil. Zoroaster taught that man is born in a pure and sinless state. We have complete freedom of will to co-operate with good or evil and shape our destiny.

In Zoroastrian tradition, the malevolent is represented by Angra Mainyu (also referred to as "Ahriman"), the "Destructive Principle", while the benevolent is represented through Ahura Mazda's Spenta Mainyu, the instrument or "Bounteous Principle" of the act of creation. It is through Spenta Mainyu that transcendental Ahura Mazda is immanent in humankind.

The religion states that active participation in life through good thoughts, good words, and good deeds is necessary to ensure happiness and to keep chaos at bay. This active participation is a central element in Zoroaster's concept of free will, and Zoroastrianism rejects all forms of monasticism. Ahura Mazda will ultimately prevail over the evil Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, at which point the universe will undergo a cosmic renovation and time will end. In the final renovation, all of creation, even the souls of the dead that were initially banished to "darkness," will be reunited in Ahura Mazda, returning to life in the undead form. At the end of time, a savior-figure (a Saoshyant) will bring about a final renovation of the world (*frasho.kereti*), in which the dead will be revived.

While Zoroaster was clearly affected by and carefully considered then prevalent concepts of dual spiritism, the good and the bad, he did not believe that good and evil contended on equal terms. He exalted the idea of one eternal and personally involved Deity and of the ultimate victory of light over darkness. The Zoroastrian conception of the struggle between cosmic good and evil left its imprint on both Judaism and Mithraism and thereby Christianity.

While some Zoroastrians revered and worshipped fire, Zoroaster sought only to utilize the flame as a symbol of the pure and wise Spirit of universal and supreme dominance. The idea of a supreme God was clear in his mind as he embarked on a journey to spread a new religion, not of prayers and rituals, but of action — work. Zoroaster believed and taught that it is through our good thinking the wise Creator will enable us to do his will, thereby attaining the realization of all that is divinely perfect.