Zoroaster

The Prophet of Ancient Iran and His Book, Zoroaster

-To present the subject of this ancient faith in a brief form is most difficult. There are too many controversial opinions concerning the time when this Prophet appeared in Iran. European scholars place him all the way from six thousand three hundred and fifty (6350 B.C.) to two thousand (2000 B.C.) and as late as 1300-1000 B.C. (see Bunson, Spiegel, Max Muller, Repp (1865) and others). Aristotle and Eudoxus, according to Pliny place him 6000 years prior to the death of Plato. Other ancient and later writers speak on his place of origin which as Bactria, at that time an independent monarchy. They speak of him as a contemporary of King Vistapa. Plato says that he belonged to the Country of the Medes in West Iran, while Duncker gives proof that the Prophet and his Book have originated in Bactria. The period of King Vistapa, supposed to be the Persian King Guhshtasp, however, contradicts the other dates mentioned above. Those who place him several thousand years B.C. assert that he belonged to the Aryon race supposed to have had its origin in Central Asia, and which due to diversity of opinions migrated to lands further West (Iran) and to the South (India). The Aryans remaining in India became the Ancient Brahman the founders of the Vedic Age. Their Prophets revealed the Rig-Veda followed by commentaries by the priest-hood who introducted the worship of many Gods and beliefs in the Reincarnation and the Works containing such interpretations are the three Vedas which followed the original teachings of true Brahman Prophets as revealed in the Rig-Veda.

The other branch of the Aryans who are supposed to have migrated to Iran in the West were the ancestors of Zoroaster.

Other writers on the subject place the origin of the Aryans in Iran and assert that they were nature worshipers and believers in many Gods, with the exception of a large section who believed in one God as taught by Zoroaster. They add that the adishen they created caused the migration of the former to India while the latter who followed the pure religion of Zoroaster remained in Iran. These went under the name Manavahangara (monothelists).

The origin and birth of Zoroaster is related by one writer as follows; about 3,500 y ears ago at Reyv (near the present capital, Tehran) there lived a holy man by name Pourushahpa whose wife was Dogho. The ninth chapter of the Yavna (part of Zoroastrian sacred writings) related that he prepared a religious ceremony as a thanks offering to God and prayed for the gift of a child. His prayer was answered and the male child named Zarathustra was born with the mission to destroy evil and establish the good in the land. Then the Father prayed, "O Maker of the material world, to what greatness can this evil destroying teaching of Zoroaster be compared?" The answer came, "As high as Heaven is above the Earth, so high above all other utterance the law of Meadeism."

Zoroaster preached the Eternal or absolute Being which he called Zarana-Akerova, the Invisible Essence whose manifestation was Ahura-Mazda, King of Lights. The energy of Ahura was Ahriman or Angra Mainius, King of Darkness. Ormazd, the Manifestation, was to destroy Ahriman by creating the visible world.

He first created the Fravashi, the divine intelligences or souls. These were the basis and reason for existence. On the earth he created the lofty Alborij (Alborij, the mountain chain in the north of Iran). From its summit (the dampand over 15,000 feet high), the chinvent bridge extends to heaven and beneath in Buzshk (the monstrous gulf, the home of ahriman), beneath the earth. To defeat Ahriman, he created the sun, moon and stars and the Galaxies. The space between heaven and earth, he divided into three giving each to one of the three. The sun, the moon, and the stars led the hosts of the Army Heaven against Ahriman.

Ahriman prepared for battle against them, and Ormazd, knowing of the final defeat of the hosts of darkness, offered Ahriman peace for the time being.

Ormazd and the Fravashis (holy men and divine souls) terrified Ahriman. The letter was at last defeated by Ormazd's "strong word"—and laid him in chains.

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The record continues the story which leads to completing the creation by Ormazd. The waters were the cause of mists which formed the clouds, which caused the rain to water the seas, and each element and plane was placed in charge of the Divine Souls. These highly revered were Mitra (the sun), who was the god of fruitification and reproduction, and led the Holy Souls to their stations. The letter lowered the leader was Ormazd wore, with him, seven beings. Each was a King or Queen of the various parts and planes of creation, as the metals, vegetables, waters, etc., etc.

Meanwhile, Ahriman was busy preparing his Hosts to oppose the above Souls. He reached Heaven, but his followers remained behind. Thus he fell down upon the earth in the form of a serpent and entered everything he found, but men of good deeds who served Ormazd defeated him after ninety days and ninety nights, and drove him back into the abyss of Duzeshk (Hell). But he returned and entered the Bull to test men and misled them, but the Bull died and Kiamarth (the First man) according to Zoroastran story of Genesis, came from his right shoulder, and Sozehirin, the guardian spirit of the animal race,
came from his left shoulder. Kayumarth was both man and woman, who produced children after they came from the fallen Bull; and these were to remain in Hell until the Day of Resurrection. However, men stand between the two worlds of light and darkness, left to their own free will. As creatures of Ormand, men are protected but are tempted night and day by Abriman. Ormand took pity on men and sent a revelation of his Will to men in the Law of Zoroaster. If men obey, he is saved. That Law is - "think purely, speak purely, act purely. And bodily purity has a like worth with moral purity.

The Perviishis (Holy Grear Souls) are kept in Heaven in Ormand's realm of light, but these spirits must descend to be united with human bodies and be led to the "way of two destinies". One, by obeying, they cross the chivald bridge, and by disobeying, they fell in the abyss. But some are redeemed by prayer and intercession, and some remain there until the Day of Resurrection.

In the end, God will send his Prophet, Socioosh who saves all, and his advent will be followed by the General Resurrection.

Abriman's comet will then fall, and communication will change the earth into a river of melted iron which will pour into the realm of Abriman. To the righteous, it will feel like warm milk and they will pass through it to the dwelling of the just. But all sinners are borne away to Hell. There, they will burn three days and three nights, and then being purified, Ormand will receive into Heaven. All others, too, will be purified by this fire, all evil will be consumed and all darkness will be banished. There will at last emerge from that fire a more beautiful earth, pure and perfect, and destined to be eternal.

In comparing Zoroaster and his Faith with Brahmanism and the Vedas, there are many points in contrast. For example, all the gods of Brahmanism are the demons and evil spirits of Zoroastrianism. This reform movement in Iran replaced the ancient Mongol worship of stars and phenomena of nature, in the same way that Buddhism in India reformed the worship of many gods amongst the followers of the Brahman.

In the Zoroastrian records, the Zend-Avesta is the oldest part. Then in later times came the sacred records called the Vendidad, the Sandishis and other traditional works. The Zend-Avesta means the Avesta and its footnotes, or commentaries, written in the Zend language, which was a later development of the Arvian language.

When in the second century A.D. Ardishah conquered Perthis (one of the petty kingdoms to which Alexander had reduced the Persian Empire 500 years before) he founded the Sassanian Empire, and his successors organized a body of Priests and Scholars to search and study all the religious writings which were found in the hand of the nation. For Alexander who conquered Persia in the fourth century B.C., had set fire to all the libraries and consumed the sacred writings of the Persians, while preserving and sending into Greece all the scientific and philosophical works of the Persians.

After many years of research, the Persian Saviours found only one and one-half of the original twenty-one chapters of the Avesta, the Book of Zoroaster. All other records consisted of prayers to stars, rivers, fire, the sun, etc., composed by the priesthood during the previous five hundred years. Thus, the new religious culture was based upon the one and one-half chapters remaining of the Avesta mentioned above.

That fragment, however, contains essential rules for human conduct, besides a record of Creation and Genesis, not unlike such records in other Religions. Most important of all, was the prophecies by Zoroaster regarding future Prophets, especially the final Universal Resurrection. One prophecy speaks of the coming of Ismar or the Arab Faith, whose prophet would speak with eloquence in words as involved so that they would lead to the appearance of many sects and divisions in his Faith. Then Zoroaster adds, that about 1260 years (1844 A.D.) after the 5th Prophet, Ushider-Meh (the great Door of Knowledge, etc.) will appear, followed by Shah Behrann (an Ancient Persian King) or Sanchin, who is to come at the end of all things to bring about the Resurrection and establish the Kingdom and untroubled happiness. (See Spiegel, Vendidad, Cott. 117, etc.)

Many people have misjudged the faith of Zoroaster, as teaching two gods, one, the good, and one, the evil. This is untrue, as it would be if applied
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end of all things to bring about the Resurrection and establish the Kingdom
and untroubled happiness (See Spiegel, Vondrid, Ch. "1", note.)

Many people have misunderstood the faith of Zoroaster, as teaching two gods,
one, the good, and one, the evil. This is as untrue as it would be if applied
to Christianity, Islam or any other faith, which has taught the oneness of
God, but else spoken of the Tempter, be it the devil, Lucifer or Satan. The
eternal battle between truth and falsehood and Light and Darkness is a record
of Man's search after truth and goodness and of the tests and temptations which
have at times retarded his progress towards the knowledge of the True God.

Similarly, many have made the mistake of calling the Faith of Zoroaster
as one which taught the worship of fire, the sun, moon, the elements and the
phenomena of nature. Reverence for these is common to all the ancient pagan
cults which we believe to be branches of the most ancient religion
called Sabeanism. For these branches, be they the Druids, the worship by the
Norsemen of Thor, the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, Romans, Indians, Chinese, and
the early Magi of Iran all belong to a once Universal Faith called Sabeanism.

These features which these peoples worshipped as gods, were symbols of the
numerous names and attributes of the One God and it was in that sense that
they were revered by Zoroaster.
As for the different ancient and modern writers' disagreement as to the time that Zoroaster lived and taught, this is explained by the fact that the title Zoroaster, or Light Bringer, was borne by every Prophet who appeared in Iran in various ages.

But the author of the Avesta, the Zoroaster with whom we are dealing, appeared 3000 years ago, or 5000 years before the rise of the Bab. We Bahai's base this conclusion on a prophecy by Zoroaster concerning four equal sections of 12,000 years. He takes the last two sections, namely the last 6000 years, and states that the pure God (Ormazd) sent him as the middle of the road Prophet, that is, he rose 5000 years before the coming of the Universal Manifestation whose forerunner, the Bab, appeared in 1844. Dr. Adolf Repp (1865) in his book, figures the date of Zoroaster to have been about 1200 B.C. But the late Dr. James Breasted, head of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, who for many years conducted excavations in the Near East and especially Persepolis, in southern Persia, confirms the date of Zoroaster to have been 1000 B.C.

Another point which needs explaining is the assumption by ancient and modern writers, that Zoroaster and Abraham were the same person. This is because the name of our Zoroaster was Apa M, which is similar to Abraham. But Apa M is an Arvyn name, while Abraham is Semitic or Chaldean-Semitic. As for their additional proof that the story of fire is recorded in one of them both, this is quite far-fetched. For Nimrod's fire which Abraham turned into a garden, was the fire of opposition to his mission and belief in one God. He overcame this fire, and the flowers of the garden were his many followers. The fire of Zoroaster, however, was the symbol of the love of God, which consumes all infidelity, and united men in fellowship and brotherhood.

Furthermore, the Koran speaking of Heavenly Books refers to Abraham's "Epistles" we conclude that the Abrahsm in the Koran was the Archimedean form of Apa M, the author of the Avesta.

Another point—Ancient and later historians, place Zoroaster in Balkh, in the province of Khurasan of ancient Bactria. He may have traveled to those parts, but the Persian records place him in Ararat, the ancient name of the present northwestern province of Iran, i.e., Azerbaijan (Asor, i.e., Fire Bayjan, i.e., the place of). There existed one of the great fire temples of which there many, including the one in Beku in the Caucasus, where the fire, as a symbol of the love of God, was kept perpetually. It now appears that the seepage of petroleum which was then unknown was feeding those flames.

The Moslem do not consider Zoroaster a Prophet; and they assert that no mention of his name is found in the Koran. We Bahai's, however, believe the contrary. In addition to reference, in the Koran, to "Epistles" of Zoroaster, there is mention of the "people or followers of Raia." This refers to river area in Persian Azerbaijan which forms the present frontier between Iran and Armenia and the Caucasus, wrested from Iran by Russia over one hundred years ago.

When in the seventh century, Islam conquered Iran the followers of Zoroaster, or Parsis (as they are now called) who did not accept Islam sailed for India, and formed the present flourishing community of Parsis, both in India and Iran, who although small in numbers are renowned for uprightness and purity as citizens, and men. Many amongst them have accepted the Bahai faith which to them, as to all seekers in other religions, is the fulfillment of the prophecy of their ancient Prophet.

We conclude this sketch by quoting a few teachings of Zoroaster:—

1. of the life on the earth
2. of the life hereafter
3. of immortality of the Soul and the Resurrection

"I am the Keeper; I am the Creator, and the Sustainer: I am the most beneficent spirit."

"The Creator, Ahura-Mazde, the brilliant, the majestic, the greatest, the best, the most beautiful."

"Who created us, who formed us, who keeps us, the holiest among the heavenly."

The true spirit of Zoroaster's ideal of God is well depicted by the English poet, Milton, who says:—
The Mohammedans do not consider Zoroaster a Prophet; and they assert that no mention of his name is found in the Koran. We Baha'is, however, believe the contrary. In addition to reference, in the Koran, to "Annas" of Zoroaster, there is mentioned of the "people of followers of Ras". This refers to river Aras in Persian Azerbaijan which forms the present frontier between Iran and Armenia and the Caucasus, wrested from Iran by Russia over one hundred years ago.

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Ahura-Mazda, the all-knowing Lord teaches:

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"Unspeakable, who sittest above those heavens,
To us invisible or dimly seen
In those Thy lowest works, yet those declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine."

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Beverly, Mass.

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Written by request of a beloved Baha'i Friend and delivered at the Baha'i Center in Hamilton, Mass., on the evening of Aug. 30/45. Set aside for the study of different religions.