

ZOROASTRIANISM



"Thus Spoke Zarathustra.."



Early Persian Religions



- Not much is known
- Possible animists or nature worshippers
- Most information comes from outside sources, i.e. Torah, the Old Testament & the Vedas.
- Aryan, Akkadian, Assyrian, Sumerian, Arab, Jew, and several other tribal groups brought in and/or adopted various beliefs and passed them down orally.
- Sometime between 4,000 - 2300 B.C., a series of myths began to develop that were common among most of these groups.
- This will establish the foundation for Zoroastrianism.

Mesopotamian gods

- Marduk - god of creation. Started out lowly but will rise to the top of the pantheon.
- Tiamat - goddess of chaos
- Enlil/Ea - god of the water
- Tammuz/Dumuzi - god of fertility, giver of life, god of food & vegetation, called "The Shepherd"
- Inanna/Ishtar (Sky Lady) - goddess of love, sex, war
- Enki - (Earth Lord) - god of the crafts, mischief, water, intelligence & creation. Father of Ishtar & Ereshkigal.
- Ereshkigal - goddess of the underworld & sister of Ishtar.
- Sin - the moon god
- Shamash - the sun god
- Many will evolve into esoteric concepts of energy, force, soul, etc.

Epic of Gilgamesh

- Gilgamesh - King of Uruk fought Enkidu the hairy wildman from the forests. They will become friends & go fight the monster, Huwawa.
- Enkidu will kill Huwawa, only to be killed by the god, Enlil.
- Gilgamesh was so upset, he sets out to find immortality.
- Utnapishtim - the Babylonian "Noah." He was such a good & righteous man, Enlil warned him of the coming flood that was to destroy the world. Utnapishtim builds a great boat (ark), then loads his family & 2 of each animal. They were given everlasting life for their help. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh of the plant (flower) of immortality & he brings Enkidu back from the dead. He will later be identified with/as Tammuz/Dumuzi.
- Many of the stories here will be borrowed by the ancient Hebrews.

Foundations for other religions in the region

- The gods can be confusing since they are known by several different names, as adopted by other groups, but will influence all in the area, Hebrews, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, and Christians.
- Establishment of "eternal life" as a reward, god choosing a person or people to carry out a mission, explanation of seasons, judgment & afterlife really expanded. (The ancient Hebrews never mentioned an afterlife until after their contact with the ancient Persians)
- Ziggurat - giant stepped, man-made temples with a room at the top with god would visit.
- Establishing the concept of good towards all mankind, answering for your actions towards others.

- The ancient Mesopotamian religions will die out & resurface as new ideas, concepts, and people come into the region.
- The Aryans will continue some of these beliefs and add to them, Ahura = Lord & Devas = Shining ones / angels.
- The Aryans will take these and many will move into northern India. Several of the Mesopotamian concepts/beliefs/gods re-emerge in the Vedas & other Indian writings.



Zarathustra Spitama

- Zoroaster is the Latin version
- Born sometime in the 11th or 10th century BC. Some evidence has the date as late as the 600's BC.
- Part of the warrior clan, Spitama. However, some accounts say a priestly caste.
- Pourushaspa - father, Dugdhoa - mother, were both of noble birth & family.
- Believed to have been born & raised near the Ditya River. Lots of shepherds & livestock in region. However, some descriptions match a part of Afghanistan.
- Little is known of his early life, apart from myth or legend. One tale is that of demons trying to kill the baby Zarathustra.

- When he turned 15, he was vested with the "Kusti" or sacred thread or string, wrapped around the waist 3 times. Tied twice in a double knot in the front & back. It is an essential part of the "Naozot" ritual today. (Use is similar to that of the Rosary). He was now recognized as a man.
- Went into the priesthood. (Only founder of a world religion formally trained as a priest.) Married 3 wives & had 6 children. (actually rebelled against his parents & did not marry a woman they had arranged for him.)
- Around 30 years old, he was wandering around seeking answers to religious questions that bothered him. He stopped & rested by a river bank & had a vision.
- The Vohu Mana (Good Thought) appeared to him, 9 times the size of an average man. The angel told him that there is no god but the one true god, Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord). And that Zarathustra was to be his prophet.

- He will continue having visions & visitations by the Devas (angels) who revealed more of the truth to him.
- He will be told of the "Adversary," the spirit of evil, Angra Mainyu.
- These will become the "Gathas" or hymns.
- He will roam the countryside for the next 10 years, preaching the "True" religion with very little success. Only his wives, children & a cousin, Maidhyomah, will convert.
- He will be labeled a heretic, madman, sorcerer, conjurer of evil spirits or "Jin".
- When he was around 40 years old, he & his cousin went to meet King Vishtaspa of Bactria. Where he will be kept in the court & finally put in prison for several years.
- It is believed that Zarathustra is able to heal the prince's favorite horse, that gains his freedom & conversion of the royal family.
- From this point, Zoroastrianism began to spread quickly through proselytizing & through holy war.

- Zarathustra will be tending a sacred flame one of his temples, when he is murdered by a Turanian soldier.
- He will die at the age of 77.
- His death is not mentioned in the Gathas nor is it in the Avestas, only from other sources do we know how he died.

Zoroastrianism

- The Avesta - Book of the Law, contain the "Gathas" - sacred hymns. The oldest of these are called the "Yashts" - hymns of praise. The "Visperad" - honoring & praising the ahuras or lords, the "Vindevat" - hymns & rituals against the demons.
- Ahura Mazda - "Wise Lord" is the one & only true god.
- Amesha Spentas - "Holy Immortals," 6 being who were the embodiments of virtue & the messengers of Ahura Mazda.
 - 3 masculine: Asha - knowledge of the law of god, Vohu Manah - good thought or love, & Kshathra - loving service.
 - 3 feminine: Armaiti - purity, Haurvatat - wholeness or perfection, & Ameretat - immortality.

- Yazatas - "Adorable Ones," are angel like beings that surround the throne of god. Only 40 are mentioned, but thought to be limitless.
- Angra Mainyu - the evil one, adversary, satan.
- Daevas - demons that serve Angra Mainyu, similar to the Amesha Spentas.
- People can choose which path they want to live, and which force they would help, that of Ahura Mazda or that of Angra Mainyu.
- Ethical conduct is greatly encouraged in order to reach perfection in this life. (unlike Hinduism)
- People have free will & choice over one's destiny. Which means one must answer for their actions. One will be judged in the afterlife and then sent to paradise or hell.

- The Soul stays with the body for 3 days, on the 4th it goes to judgment where Mithra - god of light, judges the soul by the deeds done here on earth. The deeds are balanced on a scale & if the deeds tip the scale to good = paradise, bad = hell.

- The evil soul then must cross the "Chinvat Bridge," a bridge of swords. As the blade turns up, the soul falls into a torturous hell.

Rituals

- Naozot - once a child is 7 years old, they are given the "sudreh" - sacred shirt & the "kusti" - sacred thread.
- Tying ritual - the kusti is tied several times a day in prayer as a show of devotion to Ahura Mazda.
- Bareshnum - ritual bathing to purify oneself. Done for those who join the priesthood, work with corpses or who feels defiled in any way.
- Funerals - the body is washed in "Gomez" - unconsecrated bull urine & water. Clothed in clean white clothes & places on a white sheet for viewing. Then the "Sagdid" is performed. A dog is brought in to ensure the body has no life & to keep the demons away. The corpse is then taken to the "Dakhma" or tower of silence, placed in certain areas according to sex & age, then left for the buzzards to feed on. This prevents contamination of the decaying flesh which is caused by a demon - Druj-I-Nasush. The dried bones are then washed into a well inside the dakhma, never to be touched.

Holy Days

- The Jansans - feasts that take place each month during the Zoroastrian calendar year. The most popular is Farvardin jansan. Which is held on the (Farvardin) 19th day of the 1st month. This is in honor of the dead & lasts for 10 days. It allows the living & the dead to visit.
- No Ruz - New Year's Day, celebrated on the 1st day of the 1st month (Farvardin). This day is lucky & commemorates the coming of spring.
- The Birth of Zarathustra - the 6th day of the 1st month (Farvardin).
- Death of Zarathustra - the 11th day of the 10th month.
- Gahambars - 6 seasonal feasts, scattered throughout the year & each lasts 5 days. They are all connected with creation: of heaven, water, earth, trees, animals & humans respectively.

- Muktdad - All Soul's Day. Like Farvardin, it also honors the dead ancestors. The dead family members return home where a special platform is made. Water, fruit, flowers, special lamps & sandalwood sticks are placed on it as an offering. Also, the favorite foods of the dead family member are cooked & placed nearby.
- The basic tenets of Zoroastrianism is to be the best person you can be, show kindness & love your family & friends, care for the animals & never be cruel to them, do all this in the name of Ahura Mazda and you shall earn your reward in heaven.