

Title

**THE TEACHINGS
OF
ZOROASTER**

AND

**THE PHILOSOPHY
OF
THE PARSI RELIGION**

By

S. A. Kapadia

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"The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains -
Are not these, O soul, the vision of Him who reigns?"

Tennyson

Author`s Preface

Zoroastrianism is a religion much commented upon by a few enthusiastic oriental scholars, and less understood by the general public. Out of the millions of believers of this faith in the bygone ages, there now remains a handful of devout followers, known as the Parsis. I have, therefore, ventured to put before my readers a brief sketch of the teachings of this divine prophet. I hope, that the strangers to the faith may find in it food for philosophic enlightenment, and the Zoroastrians themselves a subject for deeper and wider researches in the untold wealth of sublime theology and philosophy, now looked up in the monumental tomes of the ancient Avesta writings.

For extracts in this volume, I am greatly indebted, amongst others, to the works of the following eminent oriental scholars: Dr. Martin Haug, Dr. E. W. West, Dr. L. H. Mills, Professors Max Muller, Spiegel, Bleeck, Westergaard, Z. A. Ragozin, J. Darmesteter, Mr. K. R. Cama, Ervard Kavasji Edalji Kanga, Mr. N. M. N. Kanga, Mr. J. A. Pope, and Dr. J. Adams.

I have also to thank the India Office authorities for their kindness in placing at my disposal their splendid library of the Persian and Zend literature, and my old friend Sir C. Purdon Clarke, the Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, for his valuable suggestions regarding the ancient print of Zoroaster, which appears on the cover of this book, and my friend Mr. A. Kapadia, of Lincoln's Inn, for his kind assistance.

S. A. Kapadia.

Inner Temple, London,
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Introduction

"I will now tell you who are assembled here the wise sayings of Mazda,¹ the praises of Ahura,² and the hymns of the Good Spirit, the sublime truth which I see rising out of these flames. You shall therefore *Hearten to the Soul of the Nature*. Contemplate the beams of fire with a most pious mind! Every one, both men and women, ought today to choose his Dread. Ye offspring of renowned ancestors, awake to agree with us." So preached Zoroaster, the prophet of the Parsis, in one of his earliest sermons nearly 3,500 years ago.

Imbued from his infancy with deep philosophical and religious thoughts for the welfare and well-being of mankind, this ancient prophet of Bactria derived his holy inspiration after thirty years of divine meditation on a secluded and inaccessible mountain-top of "Ushidarena." Thus fortified in communion with Ahura-Mazda, "Spitama Zarathustra" proceeded to the city of Balkh, at the time the capital of the King of Iran, Kava Vishtacpa.³

Clothed in pure white flowing vestments, bearing with him the sacred fire,⁴ "Adar Burzin Mehr," and a staff or sceptre made of a cypress tree, this sage of antiquity appeared before the court of Kava Vishtacpa. By persuasion and argument he unfolded his religious mission; and proclaimed the mandate of Ahura, in order to elevate the ancient faith of the Aryas to its lofty and intellectual purity of monotheism.

Somewhere in the region washed by the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, on the fertile soil of Atropatene, the primeval Aryas toiled and laboured in peaceful pastoral pursuit. In the early days of Zoroaster homage was paid and prayers were offered to the Supreme Being, usually through the recognized symbols of the Deity. The heavenly firmament, tinted with cerulean hue - one limitless vault of refulgence and indescribable splendour - the resplendent orb of the rising sun, the ethereal gentleness of the beaming moon, with her coruscating companions, the planets and the stars, the verdant earth, the swift-flowing river, murmuring in sweet cadence of eternity and bliss, the roaring sea of life and death, and the glorious fire of Emyrean, - all these, in the days of the primitive Aryan religion, were believed to be so many manifestations of the Almighty God, and were accordingly symbolized. Things, which were originally manifestations of God's good work, became in course of time personified; assumed shapes of deities in the frail imagination of the devotees; and finally came to be adored in lieu of the Great Architect of the world. Thus, a religious system, in itself philosophically sublime, degenerated into a system of polytheism, having for its object adoration of idols and visible forms of good and evil spirits, reflective of human imagination. This was the great evil, the crime of ignoring the Creator for the created, which our prophet Zarathustra laboured to remedy; and to restore the then ancient faith to its pristine purity of Ahura worship was his chief object.

This led to a schism amongst the Indo-Eranians. One branch of the ancient Aryas, powerfully supported by the State, became Mazdayasnians (Monotheists), and the other of the same stock remained staunch to the worship of material gods, and were known as Daevayasnians (Polytheists). Inevitable war of creed and faith resulted in the migration of the weaker and polytheistic branch to the fertile plains of India, where it took root and blossomed into the

¹ All-Knowing.

² The Lord.

³ King Gushtasp.

⁴ Symbol of Life.

absolute Brahminism of the modern Hindoos. The other remained on the native soil, flourished for centuries, built up an empire, and finally in its turn gave place to the Moslem hordes of Arabia. It migrated, and by the irony of Fate, sought and obtained shelter with religious toleration among the banished sister branch of the primeval stock.

The appearance of Zoroaster, to teach his excellent religion before King Gushtasp and his wise and learned courtiers, may be well compared to that of St. Augustine before King Ethelbert in the sixth century of the Christian era. It is a curious historical coincidence that in both oases extreme piety, religious convictions, eloquent and persuasive arguments, prevailed. England received the blessings of Christianity through the Saxon King Ethelbert, and rose in its might to be a great Christian nation, whose empire in the twentieth century of the Christian era extends over land beyond the seas; and under whose sceptre are folded together vast millions of most loyal subjects of His Britannic Majesty King Edward VII. So, 3,500 years ago, did the mighty Gushtasp of Iran espouse the cause of Zoroaster and spread the Mazdayasnian religion to all the corners of his vast empire. He was the first founder of the doctrine of the State religion. Under the renowned and mighty warriors Cyrus and Darius of Persia, the national flag of State and Zoroastrianism, welded together in unity, proudly floated over untold millions, who claimed protection and paid homage to the Persian Court. Thus, through generations and generations, flourished Zoroastrianism, to be ultimately shattered and almost annihilated by the Arabs of the Khaliph Omar at the battle of Nehavand, A.D. 642. Subsequent events may well be described in the words of Thomas Moore:

*"Is Iran's pride then gone forever,
Quenched with the flame in Mithra's caves?
No-she has sons, that never – never
Will stoop to be the Moslem's slaves,
While heaven has light or earth has graves."*

Inspired with zealous fervour, conquered but never vanquished, a few Magian fathers of the East boldly sallied forth in a frail bark to seek their fortunes in other climes. After undergoing terrible hardships, they floated, at the mercy of the tempestuous ocean, to the hospitable shores of Western India. Since then, centuries have passed, and the Parsis have made themselves known in the West for their charity and benevolence; for their staunch loyalty to the Crown; for their commercial, educational, and political achievements.

I have often wondered what powerful influence, what intrinsic philosophy, what imperceptible charm of thought and theology have been at work to endear Zoroastrianism to the heart of the modern Parsis - devoid as it is of the powerful support of the State; uprooted from its native soil and transplanted for centuries amongst the Hindoos. In the following pages I shall endeavour to show why Zoroastrianism has maintained its divine power and prestige amongst them.

Nearly 3,500 years ago, at Rae, in Media, there lived a man of the name of Pourushaspa, who led a holy and righteous life with his wife Dogdho.

It is related of this holy man, on the authority of the ninth chapter of the Yacna, that, being desirous of perpetuating his posterity, he prepared a religious ceremony as a thanksgiving to the Almighty, and solemnly prayed for the favour of a child. This worthy man's prayers were duly answered, and a son was born to him, who laboured amongst our primitive forefathers for the amelioration of mankind and their deliverance from the everlasting ruin. His mission

was prior to the advent of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.

He left behind him, written in letters of golden fire, in the History of the World, his illustrious name, Zarathustra, as a permanent landmark and everlasting beacon for the welfare of the body and the guidance of the soul in its passage from the known to the unknown.

"O Maker of the material world! to what greatness, goodness, and fairness, can this daeva-destroying teaching (Monotheism) of Zoroaster be compared?"

The answer came:

"As high as Heaven is above the earth, which it encompasses, so high above all other utterances the law of Mazdeism stands."⁵

*"YOU SHALL THEREFORE HEARKEN TO
THE SOUL OF NATURE"*

I shall now explain the theology and moral philosophy of the religion of Zoroaster. It is purely a monotheistic religion, based on the worship and adoration of Ahura-Mazda, the "All-knowing Lord." It teaches:

- (1) Of the life on the earth.
- (2) Of the life hereafter.
- (3) Of Immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body.

Briefly, it teaches and develops the noblest instinct of mankind - viz., as Zoroaster himself has termed it, "*The Soul of the Nature.*" In the word-picture of the solemn chants of the Gathas of the Zoroastrian religion, a notion of God of all the Universe is convincingly interwoven. He, to whom no form, shape, or colour is attributed, stands alone, Omni Unique, the Nature of Infinite of Infinite Perfection. It is not given to mortals of finite mind to define Him, the most just, the most benevolent, the most merciful. He is One, who dwells in boundless space, clothed in the most resplendent and illumined glory of inscrutable Nature. In Khordah-Avesta, the prayer-book of the Parsis, God describes all His attributes, in the following words:

*"I am the Keeper;
I am the Creator and the Maintainer;
I am the Discerner;
I am the Most Beneficent Spirit. "*

"My name is the Bestower of Health; the Priest; Ahura (the Lord); Mazda (the All-knowing); the Holy; the Glorious; the Farseeing; the Protector; the Well-wisher; the Creator; the Producer of Prosperity; the King who rules at His Will; One who does not deceive; He who is not deceived; He who destroys malice; He who conquers everything; He who has shaped everything; All Weal; Full Weal; Master of Weal; He who can benefit at His wish; the Beneficent One; the Energetic One; Holiness; the Great One; the Best of Sovereigns; the Wise One."⁶

"He is the Light and Source of Light; He is the Wisdom and Intellect. He is in possession of

⁵ Free translation of Fargard V. of the Vendidad.

⁶ Ormuzd Yast. Tr. by Darmesteter.

all good things, spiritual and worldly, such as good mind (vohumano), immortality (ameretad), health (haurvatad), the best truth (asha vahista), devotion and piety (armaiti), and abundance of every earthly good (Khshathra vairya). All these gifts He grants to the righteous man who is upright in thoughts, words, and deeds. As the ruler of the whole universe, He not only rewards the good, but He is a punisher of the wicked at the same time."⁷

In the Zoroastrian Liturgy (Yacna I.), Zarathustra describes God as

(1) "The Creator Ahura-Mazda, the Brilliant, Majestic, Greatest, Best, Most Beautiful.

...

(4) "who created us, who formed us, who keeps us, the Holiest among the heavenly."⁸

The scope of this work does not permit me to discuss comparative theology; but this I will say, that ancient as the Zoroastrian religion is, no more comprehensive, lucid, and intelligible definition of the Great Creative Cause can be found in any religious books of the modern religions. It is worthy of note that Milton, who wrote nearly 2,500 years after Zoroaster, had grasped the true spirit of the Zoroastrian ideal of God.

*"Unspeakable who sit'st above these heavens,
To us invisible or dimly seen
In these Thy lowest works, yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine."*

...

Having established the belief in the Great Creative Power, Zoroaster proceeded to strengthen and fortify his followers by carefully warning them against the influence of the Evil Spirit. One of the greatest evils in the time of the prophet was the tendency of the populace to adore and worship God's manifestations or created elements. Slowly, superstitious belief, for want of good guidance, created imaginary and fanciful gods, who were materialized in idols, and worshipped at the whim of the believer. In the language of the period, amongst the ancient Aryas, the word Daeva signified God, from the Aryan root div, to shine, and consequently all those personified manifestations of Nature were called Daevas. Zoroaster quickly perceived that the ancient monotheistic religion of the Aryas was degenerating into a state of image and idol worship. He had already taught the people *"The Soul of the Nature."* It became necessary that he should stamp out the so-called idol-daevas.

Thenceforth Zoroaster, in the Avesta language, used the word Daeva in the sense of an evil or wicked spirit. The old root div, to shine, has given us such words as Deus in Latin, Daeva in Sanskrit, Zeus in Greek, and Tius in German, for God. The Avesta language of Zoroaster is the only ancient language in which quite a contrary and evil meaning is attached to this word, and, so far as this religion is concerned, the word daeva still has an evil meaning. Had the great Xerxes been successful in his wars with the Greeks, the Mazdayasnian faith would have been established in the West, and all the modern languages would probably have been now using the word Daeva for the Devil, or the Evil One.

Let me but for a moment lift the veil, and show you the most hallowed and impressive picture of Zoroastrian speculative philosophy. In the plenitude of the creation there, one perceives the

⁷ Dr. Haug.

⁸ For further information on this subject see extracts Yaçna XLIV.