

From persia to present

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The world's first monotheistic religion, Zoroastrianism has its own unique people, rich history, and ever growing culture. It is a fairly homogenous group, which cannot be simply related to just one country. Through a series of political events, the religion and its people spread from its ancient homeland of Persia, to the state of Gujarat in India, to its newest home in most of the Western world. What started as the official religion to a spectacular empire is now a dwindling with but a small population.

Despite its size, Zoroastrianism can arguably be considered the most influential religion on the world of all time due to its great effect on other major and universal religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and even Hinduism. Zoroastrianism was founded approximately 3, 500 years ago, although the exact time is unknown. It began in Persia, where it was the official religion of the empire for over 1, 000 years and served as the religion of rulers. Cyrus the Great founded the Persian Empire by overthrowing the Median court of western Iran. Cyrus the Great was one member of the Archaemenian family; they were devout Zoroastrians and incorporated their religion into their ruling.

Though the Zoroastrian rulers were very religious, they were also very tolerant and allowed other faiths, such as Judaism, to continue and grow. While Zoroastrian rulers were accepting to other religions, they themselves faced attacks fueled by conquest and conversion. Around 637 AD, Islamic invasions led to the persecution of Zoroastrians. The Muslim Arabs burned and destroyed all of the religious writing and libraries and killed or converted many followers. As part of Zoroastrian myth, it is believed that a small group was able to escape to India via a small boat.

But no matter how it was done, survivors of the invasions sought religious freedom in India, where most Zoroastrians reside today. Those who stayed in Persia endured centuries of systematic slaughter, forced conversion and discrimination. These two separated groups follow the same religion, Zoroastrianism, but are known today by two names. Those whose ancestors migrated to India are known as Parsis or Parsees, and those who remained in Persia, which is now Iran, are known as Zoroastrian Iranis. Parsis, who nearly all live in Gujarat on the coast of India, are ethnically unique from most Indians due to Zoroastrianism's Persian origins.

Though they have assimilated flawlessly and are one and the same in Indian society, the Parsis have also maintained a very pure lineage of followers. (BBC- At A Glance; BBC- Under Persian Rule; BBC- The Parsis) As the world's first monotheistic religion, Zoroastrianism originated or included concepts that are now found in many major religions. It is also known as Mazdaism, named after Ahura Mazda, whose name translates to Wise Lord. One of the main focuses is recognizing the difference from good and evil, referred to as sin and consciousness. According to Zoroastrian beliefs, the divine scheme of life is organized in a few levels. At the top is Hasti, the divine world.

It is the ultimate level of Heaven. Next is Ahura Mazda, the Lord, who is also known as The One Above. In Zoroastrianism Ahura Mazda is an all knowing, all powerful, and ever-present god. He is credited as the source of all happiness and goodness as well as being the creator of life. Underneath Him are Ameshaspends, which translates to Holy Immortals. They represent the divine attributes of Ahura Mazda.

There are six Ameshaspends, Vohu Manah, Asha Vahishta, Spenta Ameraiti, Khashathra Vairya, Hauravatat and Ameretat. They represent a good mind and a good purpose, truth and righteousness, holy devotion and serenity, power and fair rule, health and wholeness, and immortality and long life respectively. Next are Asho-Zarathustra, Yazatas and His Saoshyants. The physical world, Earth, is known as Geyti, and is home to the human kingdom, the animal kingdom, the plant kingdom and the mineral kingdom. When one dies, they go to Nisti, the non-physical world, where there are seven dakhyus, or levels, to reaching Hasti. Zarathustra, the prophet of Zoroastrianism, taught six spiritual institutions and a moral code that all Zoroastrians should follow.

The six main spiritual institutions are the Sudreh-Kusti, the Manthra Prayers, the Atash Paresti, the Yasna (Kriyakaam), Dokhm-e-Nashini, and Boonak Paasbani. The latter means the preservation of the racial gene, which is the cause of much debate in India and the western world because of Zoroastrianism's small population. The moral code, the Meher Patet, also has six main focuses. First is love, the attraction to all, which means showing love to all people. Second is kindness, and its opposite, heartburn, which reminds one to show kindness to others' miseries. Third is aramaiti, the abject of humility and absence of ego.

A huge focus in Zoroastrianism is the constant striving to lose ego and instead have selflessness. Fourth is hutokhshi, which is service, compassion, and willingness to help. Fifth is forgiveness, to forget faults and remember the good in all things. Sixth, is sin and consciousness, recognizing evil and good as defined by the religion. In addition to the moral code is the pang of

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conscience, when one does wrong. It involves the firm resolve not to repeat the wrong and willingness to bear karmic retribution.

Due to repeated invasion and destruction by the Muslims and later by the Mongols, most of the Zoroastrian texts were lost. What exists now is from oral tradition and the knowledge of the priests who had to rewrite everything that had been lost to the demolition. The main religious text of Zoroastrianism is the Avesta. It has two main parts, the first containing the Gathas, seventeen hymns that are believed to be written by Zarathustra, and the second part, known as the Younger Avesta, consisting of commentaries on the Older Avesta, myths, stories and details about rituals and worship. In addition to the Avesta are many other religious writings including the Denkard, from which this myth is based, the Jamasp Nameh, the Menog-i Khrad, the Book of Arda Viraf, and the Bundahishn.

(Zoroastrianism) Zoroastrianism is an ancient religion that is still very much alive today.

Its people share a common ethnicity and cultural traits as well. Originating in Persia, which is now Iran, Zoroastrianism spread to India, then in modern day, to the Western world. Fleeing from religious persecution, most Zoroastrians now reside in Gujarat, a state in India. Zoroastrianism may not be well known, but its affects on world religions are great. It helped to influence many monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

It created and utilized concepts that are now common in most religions. Zoroastrianism was the religion of leaders in ancient times, and a leader itself throughout history.