

Who are the Zoroastrians and what is Zoroastrianism? Considered the oldest monotheistic religion in the world, Zoroastrianism is believed to be influential to the ideas of Judaism, and therefore Christianity. To explain and define what Zoroastrianism is, first, I need to tell the story of who is responsible for this ancient religion's existence, mankind's role in the doctrine of Zoroastrianism, and how it relates to more popular and dominant religions of today.

Iran is the setting and the origin of the Zoroastrian faith. Ancestors of the Zoroastrians of Iran (pre-Islamic) were members of the Indo-European family known as the Aryans. These people called themselves Zoroastrians because they believed in the teachings of the first Aryan prophet, Zarathushtra. Zarathushtra's religion was the prominent one in Iran until the conquest by the Arabs, around 1300 years ago, who converted Iran to Islam. In response to the Arab invasion, a band of Zarathushtrians sailed to India in order to preserve the Zoroastrian faith. Upon their settlement in India they became known as the Parsees.

Zarathushtra was the first prophet to teach a monotheistic religion. He was born in Iran about 8000 years BC. He revealed through his sublime hymns, the Gathas, that there was only one God, Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom, Wise, Good, and Just. Ahura Mazda, taught by Zarathushtra, was a friend to all and never to be feared by man, who in turn should worship Him. He proclaimed that there were two primordial, or original, spirits were: Spenta Mainyu, the Holy Spirit of Ahura Mazda and His adversary, Anghra Mainyu, the Hostile Spirit.

According to the Zoroastrian texts, Ahura Mazda knew of His own Infinite Self, as well as the Hostile Spirit's limited strength and finite existence. In order to destroy His

adversary, Ahura Mazda created an immaculate material world of the seven creations (sky, waters, earth, plants, cattle, man and fire) to trap the Hostile Spirit. Ahura Mazda knew that Anghra Mainyu, because of his destructive nature and ignorance, would attack the material world bringing with it disorder (falsehood, wickedness, sorrow, cruelty, disease, suffering, and death). Man, Ahura Mazda's finest creation, is believed to be the central figure in this cosmic struggle. Zarathushtra, the prophet, declared that through free will man should choose to fight and vanquish the Hostile Spirit using seven qualities called the Amesha Spentas (Goodness, the Good Mind, Truth, Power, Devotion, Perfection and Immortality). Zarathushtra recognized that the use of these principles of righteous living, would enable man to bring about the eventual annihilation of evil in this world.

There are some scholars who consider Zoroastrianism to be the mother religion of the present day world's faiths. Concepts such as heaven and hell, God and the evil adversary, the coming of the Savior born of a virgin, the purge of the world by fire followed by the resurrection of the dead, and the final battle between good and evil leading to the final defeat of evil are said to have been filtered down to Judaism during the reign of King Khushru or (Cyrus) of Iran.

There are only a little over 100,000 Zoroastrians in the world today. Why so few? A person is not considered a "true" Zoroastrian unless he/she is born to two parents of the faith. Nor can members born into other faiths become Zoroastrian by choice; Zoroastrians believe everyone was born into a specific faith according to God's will. To help try and keep their religion alive, many Zoroastrians encourage young people to marry other Zoroastrians and preserve their heritage. Ultimately, the fate of the religion

may come down to two simple changes: allowing non-Zoroastrians to willingly embrace and be accepted into the religion, and permitting the children of inter-faith relationships to call themselves Zoroastrians as well.