

Musings on the Magi

"... with wisdom we shall learn liberality. The solitary hired man on a farm in the outskirts of Concord, who has had his second birth and peculiar religious experience, and is driven as he believes into the silent gravity and exclusiveness by his faith, may think it is not true; but Zoroaster, thousands of years ago, travelled the same road and had the same experience; but he, being wise, knew it to be universal, and treated his neighbors accordingly, and is even said to have invented and established worship among men. Let him humbly commune with Zoroaster then, ..."

— Henry David Thoreau, "Walden"

Thoreau seems to have implied that Zoroaster was the first transcendentalist. How so?

Zoroastrianism exhibits a simple, natural genius that possesses that rare talent of pointing out the obvious.

"It takes immense genius to represent, simply and sincerely, what we see right in front of us."

— Edmond Duranty (1833–80)

The genius of Zoroaster was, as Thoreau implies, his recognition of an innate human capacity for virtue—the fundamental claim of transcendentalism.

Asha and Choice

Virtue, synonymous with goodness, righteousness, and moral truth, is perhaps the most characteristic principle of Zoroastrianism. It is associated with fire, the most characteristic symbol of Zoroastrianism.

There is a peculiar similarity here with the idea of Heraclitus that reality and truth are best represented by fire. Another theme shared by Zoroaster and Heraclitus is strife. In each case, strife is intrinsic to reality. For Zoroaster, both truth and strife are ethical, whereas for Heraclitus truth *is* strife, in a metaphysical sense. Both visions of truth as strife, whether ethical or metaphysical, bring fire to mind.

When one reads scholars of Zoroastrianism, it's hard to find points of agreement. Even the identifying principle of cosmic dualism is not universally supported, as some students of the Gathas of Zoroaster claim that there is nothing in the Gathas about an evil divinity or force, but rather only bad choices. So we must fall back on ethical dualism to admit reformists into our fold, hoping that this doesn't offend the cosmic dualists. Let us then admit that the dualism of Zoroaster is fundamentally about good and evil, but only good and evil choices (in thought, word, and deed). There is no doctrine here of good and evil in Nature; not, perhaps, because Nature is without good and evil, but rather because that is not our business. Our business is the good and evil that we choose as individuals.

Freedom and Apprehension

Right and wrong choices can only be made if we (1) are free to choose, and (2) can distinguish wrong from right. Furthermore, freedom implies creativity, that is, divinity. Hence we see that the idea of ethical dualism is necessarily equivalent to transcendentalism.

Also, to claim that we can distinguish good from evil, and that we are free to choose between them, must mean that we are capable of choosing the good for its own sake, and not because anybody has promised us a reward or threatened us with a punishment. Therefore, compensation for virtue must not be discussed: such compensation is no more than a distraction that devaluates virtue.

Moral Monotheism and the Kingdom of God on Earth

Zoroastrianism is—in one sense or another—monotheistic. Whether there are one or two Gods, there is only one Good God, and that is all that matters, for we need God to serve as a standard of unity; that my truth is—at its core—the same as your truth. Thus monotheism serves an important purpose, but let us remember that Virtue came first, and that God is more a leap of faith that assures us that one is not alone with ones truth.

In contrast, when we put God before Virtue, we are at risk of being reduced to cowering beasts whose only master is the God who with a food bowl and a warm house. We can certainly imagine a ultimate Creator that created even Virtue, but that is only an image. Whoever the actual creator is, we have no business defining him (or her).

The only God that concerns us is the God of the Oneness of Virtue.

The Ascendancy of Truth

If we are essentially one in truth—as monotheism would have it, we ought to have a potential to be politically one. The moral commonality in our hearts, which we might call—in Zoroastrian terms—the Dominion of God, ought to someday find political fruition, or more likely it finds that fruition by degrees. We cannot take victory for granted, though, so long as men are free to turn away from it.

Allies of God

Now that we have discussed the freedom of humanity and the ascendancy of moral truth (i.e. God), we can introduce the idea of “allies of God” amongst men and women. God, one might say, establishes the truth of Righteousness, and individuals decide whether or not to embrace that truth, thereby determining whether or not righteousness is established in the world. That truth being intrinsic—by definition—to their own nature, one might caution them that to renounce God is to renounce ones own divine virtue.

The Means: Heart and Mind

Balance—or cooperation—between the heart and mind is not a new idea, but rather one might say it is one of the most common doctrines of wisdom. Zoroastrianism teaches something of this sort in its theology of the Wise Lord. Moral Truth, symbolized by fire, is accompanied by two human potentials: (1) good mentality and (2) devotion. To see this as a general doctrine of worldly wisdom, as opposed to religious doctrine, we must understand “devotion” as a general attitude—that is, toward ourselves, our friends and family, society, and nature. We can also think of this as devotion to God if we allow ourselves to direct such devotion to the light of God in everyone and everything.

In this light, there is nothing remarkable about the Zoroastrian triad of Asha, Vohuman, and Armaiti (commonly translated as Righteousness, Good Mind, and Devotion). There are other such principles in the Zoroastrian theology of wisdom, but these three form the causative core.

The Ends: Efficacy

Wisdom, whatever its dynamics, is wise because it is efficacious. To Zoroaster, the three chief effects appear to have been (1) health, (2) longevity, and (3) political progress. Over the ages, these have been seen in different ways.

“Health” can be seen as wellness, wholeness, perfection, or perhaps contentment. These share a characteristic of self-mastery.

“Longevity”, tightly bound to health, is most often seen by Zoroastrians as immortality. The core concept is ascendancy over death. In psychological terms, this can be seen as detachment, or freedom from the ubiquitous mortality of existence.

We have discussed “political progress” as the Dominion of God in the world. This principle is juxtaposed well to health and longevity, as it represents mastery of man en masse, rather than as an individual.

These principles are represented by the terms Haurvatat, Ameretat, and Khshanthra in Zoroastrianism. The first two are nearly inseparable twins, and again, are well juxtaposed against the third, so we may reduce these principles of efficacy to two: Haurvatat-Ameretat and Khshanthra, representing a mastery of the individual and society, respectively.

Putting It All Together

In Zoroastrianism, there are three levels of wisdom: (1) truth, (2) human receptivity to truth, and (3) the efficaciousness of truth. The first is singular, and the second and third are dual. Hence, we have five aspects of wisdom—or in monotheistic terms, divinity.

Playing with Geometry

For the new-ager in all of us ...

These aspects of divinity, given the five-fold, monistic, and dualistic symmetries that we have described, quite conveniently arrange themselves into a pentagram, with truth at the top, good mentality and devotion at the base (forming a triangle), and with personal and group mastery (Haurvatat-Ameretat and Khshanthra) represented by the arms of the pentagram.

Meaning and Actuality

Does this model of monotheistic wisdom reflect the actual teachings of the man Zarathushtra that lived sometime before Cyrus? Perhaps not, but as the saying goes, reality is overrated. Actuality has its place in objective science—to say nothing of everyday life, but meaning is every bit as important. To sum up, “never let the truth get in the way of a good story.” What can be said for the historical validity of the model is that it does appear to represent the essence of Zoroastrianism without wandering too much into the messy details of history, doctrine, and practice.

Signs of Age

Zoroastrianism as a living religion is loaded with superstitions and an excessive emphasis on ritual. It regards too much of nature as intrinsically evil, and encourages the destruction of these evil elements and species. The ancient dread of various beasts ought to be replaced with our modern natural foes (HIV, for instance).

In my opinion, Zoroastrianism does not emphasize strongly enough the intrinsic value of virtue as its own reward, but this is a demerit of every religion that I am aware of. Zoroastrianism does, in the Gathas at least, make some effort to treat virtue as a reward in and of itself. The fact that Zoroastrianism stresses the reformation of existence shows that this is a religion that is more than just a merit accumulation scheme toward personal salvation.

Changes need to be made, but I think Zoroastrianism has a solid enough foundation to make these changes without endangering its soul. It is flexible enough to have been reformed to a radically existentialistic faith by some believers. Perhaps this is too extreme, and it unnecessarily abandons culture, but it is worthy as a demonstration of the breadth and adaptability of Zoroastrianism.

Legacy & Coherence

Zoroastrianism is thought to have had a great impact on Judaism around the time of the Babylonian Exile. Some scholars contest this dominant doctrine of Zoroastrian influence, and they can manage to do so because there is no hard proof that Zoroastrian doctrines of Heaven, Hell, Armageddon, the Last Judgement, and the like predated respective Jewish doctrines. Still, it is remarkable how well these doctrines fit into Zoroastrian thought, whereas they don't seem to be as well-aligned with the fundamentals of Judaism. They are quite incongruous with the fundamentals of Christianity and Islam, who have adopted these doctrines with even more fervor.

Let us begin with the first principles of Zoroastrian dualism. Beginning with the idea of twin opposing aspects of Good and Evil in the world, Armageddon is implicit: the universe is a battleground between Good and Evil. One could say that Armageddon is an eternal reality, and a basic fact of the human condition. From an evolutionary perspective, one might say it's just a matter of time before the battle comes to a boil. The "Kingdom of God on Earth", likewise, is the faith that Good will ultimately prevail. This ultimate outcome may be seen on the universal scale, or at an individual level.

In contrast, religions that renounce "this world" in favor of some other posited existence ought have little concern for the destiny of this world, yet they succumb to their desire for vindication in the present world.

Likewise, religions that define themselves as fundamentally monotheistic cannot engage Evil in battle in like manner without dualizing their monotheism with some personification of Evil such as Satan. Zoroastrianism has the benefit of being first and foremost a religion about virtue.

Ethical Dualism

The dualism of Zoroaster was ethical rather than theological. His theology was clearly monotheistic, but Zoroastrianism is—unlike other monotheistic religions—more ethical than theological in nature, so it is indeed—or was initially—a dualistic faith; again, without being duotheistic.

It must be conceded that this ethical dualism gave rise, over time, to a theological dualism in Zoroastrianism that profoundly influenced the great monotheistic faiths. The difference for Zoroastrianism was that it retained its ethical focus, whereas the Judaic faiths simply adopted a historical impurity of Zoroastrianism as an attempt to account for evil.

Zoroaster was a monotheist, but his monotheism was not so much a metaphysical monotheism, in the sense that his God was conceived as an attempt to explain good and evil, but rather, the God of Zoroaster was a personal Lord and Savior, loving, merciful, and wise, possessing unrivalled foresight, and ultimately triumphant. The Zoroastrian God is a personification of the good in all of us, coupled with a faith in our capacity to champion virtue and redeem the world.

Sound a bit like Christianity, but without all the baggage? More of that to come.

Reexamining Armageddon

Up until recently, I would disparage the doctrines of Armageddon and the Final Judgement as counter-productive escapist fantasies of the disenfranchised. Having been raised under the weight of these doctrines, I became particularly antagonistic to them.

Now that I see the same doctrines from a Zoroastrian perspective, they seem quite positive, affirmational, and responsible. Hence, it seems reasonable to depict these doctrines as more appropriately Zoroastrian, and their adoption by other faiths relatively incoherent and thus derivative in a more basic sense than the archaeological.

In Zoroastrianism, Armageddon is not a prophecy of doom, but rather a natural process that ever tends toward the triumph of Good over Evil. The Final Judgement is depicted as a purification by fire, wherein the righteous and the wicked are purified by walking upon molten metal. The experience is painful only for the wicked—perhaps less so for the common sinner, but all are purified and emancipated.

What happens to Satan? One might say that Satan is the only loser, or perhaps one might observe that Zoroaster never recognized the existence of such a being.

Zoroastrianism is a religion of hope and affirmation—and true faith in man, rather than renunciation and escape.

Jesus (Yeshua) Hushedar

“Without Zarathushtra there would be no Christ. He was the bridge, and the Romans burnt it...”¹

It is generally accepted that the Zoroastrian concept of messiahs predated the similar Judaic concept of the Messiah. It is safe to assume that it was generally known in the early years of Christianity that the Zoroastrians, commonly known as Magians, were expecting a messiah named Hushedar soon. Hushedar would be born to a virgin, a millenium after Zoroaster.

It is therefore no surprise that a virgin birth appears in two Gospels² and the Magi appear in the Gospel of Matthew. Though I don't believe in such things as virgin births and Persian astrologers following stars, I have a strong faith in St. Matthew's resolve to weave gospel stories out of old prophecies.

It's peculiar that the Magi have commonly become known as “wise men”, wisdom having been the guiding principle in Zoroastrianism.

The Crucifixion and Resurrection also have precedents in Zoroastrian scripture:

“The typical passage is found in the Hatokht Nask (Yt. 22. 1-36; and compares Vistasp Yasht, Yt. 24. 53-64). For the first three nights after the breath has left the body the soul hovers about the lifeless frame and experiences joy or sorrow according to the deeds done in this life. On the dawn of the fourth day the soul takes flight from earth...”³

¹ Paul William Roberts , “In Search of the Birth of Jesus—The Real Journey of the Magi”

² Matthew and Luke

³ A.V. Williams Jackson , “Zoroastrian Studies”

Regardless of the fabricated appearance of these Gospel stories, I think the Jesus of the Gospels would have made a fine Zoroastrian Messiah—if one focuses on first principles rather than Zoroastrian tradition and later developments in Christian belief.

One might say that Jesus was a Zoroastrian messiah in a Judaic context.

To my knowledge, Jesus was the only man proclaimed to be a Zoroastrian messiah outside of the Zoroastrian world. The next messiah, Aushedar-Mah, was due to appear around 1300 C.E.. By that time, Zoroastrianism was virtually vanquished. The Arab conquest had occurred over six centuries before, and the only Zoroastrians free to practice their faith had resettled centuries before in the Gujarat province of India and were probably no longer speaking the language of Iran.

Nature: Science and the Environment

The objective of Zoroastrianism is the reform of existence. This means more than just the reform of human society, but of Nature as well, for Nature too is regarded as a battleground. She must be purified, and in so doing, she must also be governed. This is a progressive ethic that seeks to both preserve and master Nature, so that the good in her can be preserved while her destructive, merciless temper can be bridled.

In traditional terms, this has meant taking great care in guarding the purity of the environment, and opposing the more dangerous creatures. To kill a snake or a scorpion was a good deed, yet dogs were believed to possess unique spiritual powers. These are understandable doctrines, but they ought to be seen as derivative, rather than fundamental and unchangeable.

“No other religion expresses as clearly as Zoroastrianism the affirmation of life, the upholding of “the good principle,” and the appeal to be active in shaping the world.”

— S.A. Nigosian,
“The Zoroastrian Faith—Tradition & Modern Research”

To close, we will present an interpretive translation of a chapter from the Gospel according to Zarathushtra. We call it a Gospel because—quite appropriately—it proclaims the “good news” of the transcendental virtue of Man. It’s an Evangel that’s not only welcome news, but even more, it’s news of the good within us.

Daniel J. Jensen
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The Gospel According to Zarathushtra

Genesis—and The Choice⁴

The Pronouncement

1. To you who are mindful to understand,
I bear a new message,
troubling to them that destroy the good in the world,
yet most welcome to those who cherish
the Wise One.
2. As you wander off the good path,
I come as a guide
—as the Wise Lord is my witness—
in your choice between right and wrong.

The Invocation

3. O Wise One, What blessing will You bestow
by the Fire of the Mind⁵,
and impart with Virtue⁶,
to those acting with discernment?
Enlighten me, speaking to me directly,
that I may guide the living to choose aright.
4. We invoke the Fire of Righteousness⁷,
O Wise One, and Your Divine Powers⁸,
to assist us.
Grant us the blessings of Benevolence, and
aided by Discernment⁹, may we establish Your Dominion
and overcome evil.

⁴ Yasna 31.

⁵ Mainyu — typically translated as “Spirit”, but Jafarey makes a good argument that it means something closer to “Mentality”. “The Fire of the Mind” is a variation on Jafarey’s “mental fire”. The phrase has also been translated as “Spirit and Fire”.

⁶ Ashá.

⁷ The “Fire of Righteousness” is an expansion of “Ashá”, which is symbolized by fire.

⁸ Ahuras — literally “Lords”.

⁹ Vohu Mana.

5. Declare to me,
what You have, through Virtue, appointed for me
as the better portion.
Teach me, with the aid of Discernment,
to know and realize my place,
and apprise me, O Wise Lord, of what shall and shall not be.
6. The noblest occupation is to disseminate the message of divine wisdom,
imparting Integrity and Vitality¹⁰.
Thus the Ascendancy of the Wise One will
—through the Power of Discernment—
increase in him.¹¹

Genesis and Choice

7. In the Beginning, the Creator conceived Light,
and lo! The glorious heavens were clothed in light.
Thus He willed the creation of Righteousness,
whereby He upholds Good Thinking.
O Wise One,
this Creative Mind¹² and You are one and the same, O Lord!
8. I have realized, O Wise One, that You are the very First and Last¹³—
the Father of Reason¹⁴ ,
as I perceive You¹⁵ to be the true creator of Righteousness
and the Lord of action!¹⁶
9. By Your Benevolence¹⁷ , the Earth was made bountiful.¹⁸
Yours was the Wisdom which created Life,

¹⁰ Haurvatat and Ameretat. Typically translated as Perfection and Immortality.

¹¹ "Those who pronounce these mantras get the best rewards." — Nigosian, pg. 80

¹² mainyú

¹³ "He is also changeless, first and foremost, the most perfect being, the greatest, the most powerful, the one who was, is, and will be forever. Ahura Mazda is the creator of the universe, the suthor of the celestial and terrestrial worlds." — Nigosian, pg. 72

¹⁴ mananghó, indicating Vohu Mana.

¹⁵ "This vision, in which Zoroaster saw, heard, or felt conscious of Ahura Mazda, was later repeated a number of times." — Nigosian, pg. 12

¹⁶ "Asha Vahishta is the embodiment of divine law and moral order—the equivalent of righteousness." — Nigosian, pg. 77

¹⁷ Ármaitísh

¹⁸ Spenta Armaiti "is Ahura Mazda's own beloved." — Nigosian, pg. 79

- and Yours was the Thinking¹⁹, O Wise Lord,
 which presented the Earth's Bounty with a choice,
 whether to take a diligent guide as her protector,
 or instead to put her trust in a neglectful guide.
10. Of these two, did she choose the diligent guide,
 a virtuous²⁰ and clear-headed²¹ man.
 O Wise One,
 he who squanders her Bounty has no part in this Gospel!²²
11. O Wise One, when You first created
 —of your perfect Mentality—
 the soul and its powers of understanding,
 You clothed this life with a body,
 thus granting it the power of speech and action,
 whereby one may freely act upon one's conscience.²³
12. Thus the liar and the honest may speak,
 as well as the enlightened and the ignorant,
 each according to his heart and mind.
 Your Benevolence extends her hand
 to the spirits wavering in doubt.
13. Thoughts and deeds, whether clearly manifest or concealed;
 those which impose great penance for a trifling offense;
 these all, through Truth²⁴, do not escape your perceptive vision.²⁵

¹⁹ manyéush

²⁰ ashavanem: followers of virtue (Ashá).

²¹ mananghó, indicating Vohu Mana.

²² "the diligent farmer who tends cattle is considered a promoter of Vohu Manah." — Nigosian, pg. 76

²³ "He created the human body and endowed it with life, mind, and conscience." — Nigosian, pg. 72

²⁴ Asha, perhaps treated here as a fire of judgement. The fire of Moral Truth tests the purity of the metal, and may purify it in the process.

²⁵ "He is self-created, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, invisible, and beyond human conceptualization. ... He is, as his name implies, the Wise Lord, the Most Knowing One, and the Most Far-Seeing One. ... he is conceived of as observing with his eyes everything that is done in secret or in the open, and as distributing to human beings their just dues by his own hands." — Nigosian, pg. 71-2

These Things I Ask

14. These things do I ask of You, O Lord.
What is happening?
What does the future hold?
Regarding the vows of the righteous and the wicked,
how shall they be reckoned, O Wise One, in the end?
15. I ask You this, O Lord:
what consequence awaits the one
 who strives to bring dominion to the Liar,
and what for the one who does nothing
 but harm the flock of the good shepherd?
16. When, O Wise Lord, will that man of insight appear,
striving by Virtue²⁶ to establish Your Dominion
 over home, province, and country?
By what actions will he achieve it?
17. Which is better?
The doctrine of Virtue or the doctrine of the Lie?
Let the enlightened inform the wise.
Let not the ignorant deceive any more!
O Wise Lord, bestow Discernment²⁷ upon us!

²⁶ Asha

²⁷ Vohu Mana, translated as "Good Thought" and "Good Mind".

Virtue and Trustworthiness

18. Let none listen to the words of the unfaithful²⁸,
who bring woe and destruction
to home and family, province and country.
Resist them, then, with force!
19. One who heeds and apprehends Virtue²⁹, O Lord,
becomes wise—a healer of Life.
He masters his tongue, selecting the right words
with which to express the truth.
O Wise One, he distinguishes
the virtuous from the wicked
with Your radiant Fire.
20. He who turns his eye to righteousness
shall attain an enduring abode of light,
but the deceitful³⁰ shall long dwell in darkness,
woe, and despair.
Verily people,
your deeds determine your destination!
21. O Wise Lord, You truly grant Integrity and Life,
Ascendancy, Virtue,
and Discernment to Your friend in spirit and deed.³¹
22. This is clear to the man of wisdom,
who has perceived it with his thought,
and he cleaves to Virtue³²,
upholding Your Dominion by his word and deed.
He, indeed, is Your most valued ally,
O Wise Lord!

²⁸ follower of the Druj; variously translated as “wrongful”, “false and wicked ones”, and “evil liar”.

²⁹ Asha

³⁰ variously translated as “liars and evil persons”, “followers of the Lie”, “wrongful”, and “he who deceived”.

³¹ Ahura Mazda “is a friend and helper of human beings, deeply interested in their welfare. ... bestows the blessings of Vohu Manah on the faithful and the righteous.”
— Nigosian, pg. 72, 76

³² Asha

Citations

Zarathushtra taught the Persians to sacrifice to Ahura Mazda 'vows and thanksgivings.'

— Plutarch,
cited in the forward to the Divine Songs of Zarathushtra, D.J. Irani

First, the figure of Satan, originally a servant of God, appointed by Him as His prosecutor, came more and more to resemble Ahriman, the enemy of God. Secondly, the figure of the Messiah, originally a future King of Israel who would save his people from oppression, evolved, in Deutero-Isaiah for instance, into a universal Savior very similar to the Iranian Saoshyant. Other points of comparison between Iran and Israel include the doctrine of the millennia; the Last Judgment; the heavenly book in which human actions are inscribed; the Resurrection; the final transformation of the earth; paradise on earth or in heaven; and hell .

— J. Duchesne-Guillemin

Should we in a future world be permitted to hold high converse with the great departed, it may chance that in the Bactrian sage, who lived and taught almost before the dawn of history, we may find the spiritual patriarch, to whose lessons we have owed such a portion of our intellectual inheritance that we might hardly conceive what human belief would be now had Zarathushtra never existed .

— Frances Power Cobbe ,
"Studies, New and Old, of Ethical and Social Subjects"

The similarity between it (the Zoroastrian doctrine of the future life and the end of the world) and the Christian doctrine is striking and deserve more attention on the side of Christian theology, even though much has been written on this subject.

— A.V. Williams Jackson , “Zoroastrian Studies”

"Persian belief was reorganized by the prophet Zarathushtra according to a strict dualism of good and evil principles, light and dark, angels and devils. This crisis profoundly affected not only the Persians, but also the subject Hebrew beliefs, and thereby (centuries later) Christianity."

— Joseph Campbell , “The Hero with a Thousand Faces”

There is plenty of evidence that the post-exilic religious development of the Hebrews was affected by the teachings of Zarathushtra, and that among the international influences to which the development of Hebrew morals was exposed, we must include also the teachings of the great Medo-Persian Prophet.

— James Henry Breasted , “The Dawn of Consciousness”, page 345

It was not until the rise of the Chaldean power (Neo-Babylonian) in the 6th century B.C. and the subsequent supremacy of the Persians after Cyrus, that the Babylonians disclosed outstanding intellectual interests and their noble astronomers laid the foundations upon which the astronomical sciences of the Greeks was later built up.

— James Henry Breasted , “The Dawn of Consciousness”, page 337

The Persians had their own mythology, or rather their own conception of the natural and supernatural order, formulated by the religion of Zarathushtra. this cosmic philosophy, influenced by Babylonian astronomy, had an effect on late Jewish thought and Messianic expectations.

— John Gray , “Near Eastern Mythology”, page 16

The development of the concept of Satan as the personal power of evil, who had his counterpart in the archangel Michael, the champion of cause of man in God's purpose of creation, was probably developed under the influence of Persian Zoroastrian belief in the two conflicting spirits of good and evil...

— John Gray , “Near Eastern Mythology”, page 127

The (Zoroastrian) dualism between good and evil was to have an impact upon ancient Israel, Judaism, Christianity and Islam .

— Ninian Smart & Richard D. Hecht ,
“Sacred Texts of the World—A Universal Anthology”

Meanwhile in her encounters with the Medes and Persians, Israel had found a kindred monotheistic creed in the religion of Prophet Zarathushtra, and one of her own Prophets, Isaiah, did not hesitate to salute Cyrus, her liberator, as the Lord's anointed. From this religion too she learnt teachings concerning the afterlife altogether more congenial to her soul than had been the gloomy prospect offered her by her own tradition, teachings to which she had been a stranger before ."

— R.C. Zaehner , “The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism”, page 20

An almost exact parallel to this solution of evil is to be found in the Manual of Discipline, perhaps the most interesting document of the Dead Sea sect of Qumran. That Judaism was deeply influenced by Zoroastrianism during and after the Babylonian captivity can scarcely be questioned, and the extraordinary likeness between the Dead Sea text and the Gathic conception of the nature and origin of evil, as we understand it, would seem to point to direct borrowing on the Jewish side."

— R.C. Zaehner , “The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism”, p. 51–52

Zarathushtra's doctrine of rewards and punishment, of an eternity of bliss and an eternity of woe allotted to good and evil men in another life beyond the grave is so strikingly similar to Christian teaching that we cannot fail to ask whether here at least there is not a direct influence at work. The answer is surely `Yes', for the similarities are so great and the historical context is so neatly apposite that it would be carrying skepticism altogether too far to refuse to draw the obvious conclusion.

— R.C. Zaehner , “The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism”, page 57

Thus from the moment the Jews first made contact with the Iranians they took over the typical Zoroastrian doctrine of an individual afterlife in which rewards are to be enjoyed and punishments endured. This Zoroastrian hope gained ever surer ground during the inter-testamentary period, and by the time of Christ it was upheld by the Pharisees, whose very name some scholars have interpreted as meaning `Persian', that is, the sect most open to Persian influence.

— R.C. Zaehner , “The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism”, page 58

One is tempted to say that all that was vital in Zarathushtra's message passed into Christianity through the Jewish exiles.

— R.C. Zaehner , “The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism”, page 171

How did the idea of two opposing forces (Satan & God) originate? It too is the result of conditions during the Hellenistic age, a period when ideas were exchanged widely among various religions and nations. The principle of dualism came from Zoroastrianism, This idea spread through the wide open Hellenistic world; the controversy between God and Satan is its reflection in Judaism.

— Leo Trepp , “A History of the Jewish Experience”, page 54

...The people have a heavenly representative, a guardian angel. This is a new concept of Zoroastrian origin. Previously the term `Malakh', angel, simply meant messenger of God.

— Leo Trepp , "A History of the Jewish Experience", page 55

It is thought by many that this doctrine `Zoroastrianism' was a source of influence for both Eastern and Western beliefs - Hinduism and Buddhism in the East, and Judaism and Christianity in the West.

— John R. Hinnells, "Persian Mythology"

Dio Chrysostom, Plutarch's contemporary, declares that neither Homer nor Hesiod sang of the chariot and horses of Zeus so worthily as Zoroaster, of whom the Persians tell that, out of love to wisdom and righteousness, he withdrew himself from men, and lived in solitude upon a mountain. The mountain was consumed by fire, but Zoroaster escaped uninjured and spoke to the multitude (vol. ii. p. 60).

— [Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911 ed.](#)