

**THE RELIGION
OF
ZARATHUSHTRA**

I. J. S. TARAPOREWALA

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BY

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TO
THE TWIN AUTHOR~~S~~
OF
MY BEING
PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL

FOREWORD

JUST because I have been ~~born and~~ brought up in the Religion of Zoroaster, I feel there is hardly any need of an apology for writing this little book for the information of non-Zoroastrians. But I need only say a few words as to its scope. Necessarily, the size of the book has forced me to confine myself strictly to the most essential elements of my Faith. These form the essential features of all great Religions of the world, the only difference being introduced by the personality of the Teacher and by the character of the people He came to teach. So I have strictly confined myself to the vital doctrines of the Faith without any reference to the numerous ceremonies and customs that have grown up round it in the course of centuries of development.

The quotations from the ancient texts have been translated by myself from the

original, except where expressly stated as another's work. In some of these the student of Avesta will find considerable divergences from the translations of various authorities, but I have never consciously strained the grammar of any passage to suit my own purposes.

I have tried to see in my Religion a consistent solution of the "Riddle of Life" and I have formed in my own mind a sort of general idea of the scope and method of the Message of Zarathushtra. Deeper study would lead (and indeed, has led) me to alter my views considerably, but so far I have never felt constrained to alter any of the fundamental notions about the religion of my fathers.

I have one ineradicable belief, *viz.*, that all Founders of Great Religions speak with a fullness of Divine Wisdom, of which we ordinary mortals have but the very faintest conception. To understand the Words of such Mighty Beings we have to follow Their Teachings with a humble and meek spirit. I hope I strive to do this in my life, and what light has been vouchsafed to me from the "Higher

planes" I have tried to put down here. I regard the Master's Message as the noblest thing that we possess in our Faith, and I have tried to understand it by the noblest of which my soul is capable. Later ignorance and human limitations have clouded most of the sublime Teachings; and I believe the one sure way to understand them once again is by appeal to one's Higher Self. To each will then come what he is most in need of. None can claim the final word in these matters, not until he is "as perfect as his Father Who is in Heaven is perfect".

So, if the reader finds the pages that follow uninspiring let the blame attach not to the Divine World-Redeemer, Zarathushtra, but to the weak and very human devotee of His, who tries with all his limitations to measure the Infinity of His Wisdom.

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CHAPTER I

THE ARYANS OF OLD IRAN

Adam Dārayavaush khshāyathiya vazarka, khshāyathiya khshāyathiyānām, . . . Vish-tāspahyā puthra, Hakhāmanishiya, Pārsa Pārsahyā puthra, Ariya Ariya-cithra.

“I AM Darius, the Great King, the King of Kings, . . . the son of Vishtāspa, the Achæmenid, a Parsi, the son of a Parsi, an Ārya of Āryan lineage.”

(Inscription of Darius the Great at Naksh-i-Rustam.)

In order to understand properly the religion of Zoroaster, it is necessary to know something of the state of religion in Irān before the Great Teacher appeared. New faiths have to be grafted upon old ones. All great Teachers have built upon the past traditions of the race They have come to lead. They alter and adapt the Eternal Ancient Wisdom to the peculiar needs of that race, to the particular

Message which that race is destined to leave for humanity. So also the Lord Zoroaster found a certain mass of tradition in Irān, and the Message He gave to this branch of the human race was based upon what they had inherited from a dim and distant past.

The *Āryans* (using the word in its narrower sense, as comprising the two peoples, the Indians and the Irānians, who called themselves by that proud name) had lived together for long ages in one land, had spoken one tongue and had followed one religion. Where that ancient Motherland of the *Āryans* was, we have now no means of determining, but it seems to have been a region far to the North, which, according to the Irānian tradition, was overwhelmed and destroyed by ice and snow. At a later period the two main stocks of these people migrated southwards, still keeping together, and after many generations of wandering, ultimately arrived in the neighbourhood of the high mountainous region which we know as the Pamir table-land to-day. They spread around from that region into

the lower fertile and salubrious valleys of the south, west and east. The lands called by us Afghanistan and Bactria were the regions where the Āryans had long carried on their activities.

The language which these people spoke was the ancient tongue of which the language of the Vedic Hymns and that of the Gāthic Chants of Zarathushtra were both branches. The exceeding close resemblance between the two has been noted by every student of Āryan philology. So close are these two languages that a mere phonetic change (or, to put it popularly, a slight mispronunciation) often suffices to *translate* a passage from the one into the other, keeping at the same time the sense absolutely intact. The differences are not greater than what are found between two "dialects" of one original tongue.

The religious traditions inherited by these two great peoples, the Hindus and the Persians were, therefore, the common Āryan traditions. In the Avesta the great Teachers of the *paoiryō-tkaēsha* (the Ancient Faith) have been invoked,

and a good many of them have been mentioned by name. This Ancient Faith has been named the *Māzdayasna* Faith—the Faith that worships *Mazdā*, the Great Lord of All. The Religion of Zarathushtra bears the same name, but with the epithet *Zarathushtrish* (i.e., taught by Zarathushtra) added to it. This confirms the statement made above that the Prophet built up His system upon the ancient traditions of the race.

We have to piece carefully together the legends and the myths of the Avesta and the Veda to get some idea of this Ancient Faith. Many names are common between the two Scriptures, and what is really remarkable, several of these names are used in diametrically opposite senses. This latter fact may point to religious troubles between the two sections of the Āryan race; though as to whether these arose directly out of the advent of Zoroaster, and whether these differences were the reason for the final splitting up of the Āryans into the two branches, it would be out of place to discuss here. The very remarkable fact remains that

the opposition is there at some of the most important points. But a still more remarkable fact is that the agreements are far greater in number than the oppositions, a fact which the student often tends to ignore.

The Āryas ("the noble ones") are said in the Avesta to have had their original home in the fair land of *Airyana-Vaēja* (the Cradle-land of the Āryas), which had been "the first among the lands" created by Mazdā. It was at the centre of the Earth and in its very centre stood the mountain *Hara-bareza*. This description closely corresponds with the Hindu description of "the Land of the Gods" with Mount Meru at its centre. It was far to the North, and a most remarkable point about this ancient home was that there "the year seemed as a day". The Hindus also say that a day of the Gods equals a year of us mortals. Both these branches of the Aryans divided the Universe into "seven Regions" (called *Kishvars*), but we need not pause to inquire whether they represented climatic zones (as some scholars contend), or were

geographical divisions, or had any other signification.

The Āryans were a fairly advanced people as regards material civilisation; they were certainly an agricultural race. Their language was a very complex and well developed instrument capable of expressing with great nicety all subtle variations of human thought, and it shows them to have been much given to introspection. They had a well developed religious system, which had been successively taught to them by great Teachers and by Royal-Sages (the *Rājārshis* of Hinduism) from time to time. Many of these Teachers have been mentioned by name, and a few of them, whose names are also mentioned in the Vedic Religion, have fairly detailed accounts attached to them.

One of the earliest of these Royal-Sages belonging to the common tradition is *Yima* (*Yama*; later King *Famshīd* of the Persian Hero-cycle), "the King," the son of *Vīvanghana* (*Vivasvān*). In the Avesta He is the great Ruler and Teacher of the Golden Age. - He was warned by *Mazdā* about the impending

destruction of the wicked world by snow and ice, and He was commanded to build a *vara*, or underground enclosure, and to take there a set of specially chosen people, together, with the seeds of the finest trees, the best fruits and the most fragrant flowers, and also a pair each of the best and the most useful animals. All these details do not exactly correspond with those given in the Vedas about Yama, though there also He is "the King"; but the other details given above are associated in the later *Purānas* (traditional lore) of India with Manu, who, too, is the son of Vivasvān.

Another Sage belonging to this common tradition may also be mentioned. He is *Kava-Ushan* (*Kāvya-Ushanas*), who is one of the Royal-Sages of the Avesta. He was a holy King who overcame the forces of evil by His prayers, and He was specially famed for the glorious halo that surrounded Him, whence He is also known by the epithet *ash-varecāo* (of full radiance). He is also said to have acquired miraculous powers of flying through the air, with the help of a heavenly bird.

The Veda mentions Him mostly as *Kāvya*, and He is mostly associated with Indra and in one place He is said to have established the Sacred Fire. But in the Epics of India He is mentioned as the Teacher of the *Asuras* (the followers of *Ahura*), and He is also known by His other name of *Shukrāchārya* (the radiant Teacher), probably on account of His remarkable halo.

A third Royal-Sage may also be mentioned. He is *Thraētaona* (later *Faridūn*, in the Hero-cycle of Persia). He seems to be specially associated with the curing of diseases with the help of "spells" (*mantras*), and is the great physician and healer. These points are also associated with Him in the *Atharva-Veda*, where He is called *Trita*. In both traditions He bears the patronymic name of *Āthwya* (*Āptya*) and is closely associated in both with *Haoma* (*Soma*) and the preparation of the Drink of Immortality. In the *Yajur-Veda* He is mentioned as granting immortality. The Vedic tradition also mentions *Traitāna* (which is nearer the Avestan name *Thraētaona*) who had slain

a mighty three-headed monster who had for ages oppressed the world. The same tradition, in almost the same words, is found in the Avesta; and in the later Persian "Epic of the Kings" (the *Shāhnāmeḥ*) this three-headed demon becomes the Semitic tyrant *Zohāk* (Av. *Azhi-dahāka*) from whose oppression Irān was freed by the Royal Faridūn.

Coming now to the Deities worshipped by the Āryas we get a really formidable list of names, which are the common property of both the branches. Only a few of these may be considered here. These may be divided into two classes: the first containing those names which came to signify diametrically opposed powers among the two communities, and the second (which contains the majority of these names) which contains names of Deities who are regarded as beneficent by both. The older scholars seemed to think that Zoroaster came as a reformer, and that out of a host of Gods He put forward only *Ahura* (*Asura*) as the One Supreme God. This, they said, caused a schism and a religious conflict which led to the

inversion of some of the ancient Deities into Demons among the Irānians, and that the Hindus also repaid the compliment. Apparently there *was* a religious conflict, but the origin of it could by no means be ascribed to Zoroaster with any degree of certainty. And moreover this view fails to explain how the older Deities (at any rate many of them) came to regain their sway in Irān during the later ages. Whatever the cause of this partial inversion of the Pantheon, the facts are quite interesting.

The very first name that occurs to the student in this connection is that of the Supreme Lord Himself—*Ahura*—which in the Sanskrit form *Asura* signifies “a demon”. The name originally signifies “the Lord of Life” (from Av. *ahu*, Skt. *asu*, life), or the One Life from Whom all proceed. The Sanskrit *Asura* also signified originally the One Eternal Life, and in the *Rig-Veda* (in its oldest portions) it is not used in its later degraded signification. In classical Sanskrit the name *Pūrva-devāh* (earlier Gods) is also used for the Asuras; and the legend has grown

up in India that it was these Asuras who had once ruled the Earth, till in later ages they were ousted from their positions by the comparatively more modern *Devas* (Gods). In the earlier Vedas the epithet *Asura* is used especially for *Varuṇa*, the Ruler of the endless Heavenly Sphere, refulgent by day and shining with innumerable stars at night. *Varuṇa* is also the All-pervading Life which ensouls the Creation. He is the Ruler of the Universe, the Lord of Righteousness, the One Being Who has laid down the Law and Order of Nature, and is the Father of All. The one important point to note in this conception of the Vedic *Varuṇa* is the great emphasis laid therein on the *moral and ethical* aspect of this God. *Varuṇa* is pre-eminently the *Lord of Righteousness*. This grand concept of *Asura Varuṇa* agrees closely with that of *Ahurā-Mazdā* of the earlier Avesta; and very probably the legends in the *Brāhmaṇas* and in the Epics of the Hindus about the conflicts between "the Gods and the Demons" (the *Devas* and the *Asuras*) are but echoes of some religious and national strifes

between the two branches of the Āryans in the prehistoric days.

The Avestic *Daēva* is the natural complement of *Ahura*. Originally "the Shining One," this word retains its pristine purity practically throughout the history of Indian languages. But in the Avesta the word is never used in its old signification of "Deity," even in the earliest portions,¹ and in the later Avesta it invariably means "Demon". In the Veda however, we find the word used a couple of times as an epithet of the demons.

Of individual deities there are but few that have suffered this inversion. The most notable of these is *Indra*, one of the greatest Deities in the Vedic Pantheon. In the Avesta he is the chief helpmate of the Evil One. It is very remarkable that of two of the most important Gods of the Vedas—*Varuṇa* and *Indra*—one should have become in Irān the Supreme Being, *Ahura*; while the other became the most important lieutenant of the Evil One.

¹ There are one or two places where the word seems to imply "a God" of the earlier (pre-Zoroastrian) faith.

But what is still more remarkable is that one of Indra's epithets—*Vṛtrahan* (the Slayer of the Demon-foe)—an epithet which is pre-eminently his—should have continued all through the history of Irānian Religion to be the name of one of the greatest of the Deities, *Verethraghna* (later *Behrām*). The *Behrām Yasht* (*Yasht*, xiv) where his deeds are recorded is a fine epic, and some of the achievements therein recorded remind us of the deeds of Indra mentioned in the Veda.

Vāyu (the Wind, a name which is identically the same in both the languages) is another of the ancient Āryan Deities. Haug says that "he is the only Vedic Deity who is mentioned by name in the Gāthās," a rare distinction indeed, if Haug's interpretation be true; but modern scholars like Bartholomae have cast a doubt upon Haug's rendering of that passage.

Nairyōsanga is the Messenger of the Supreme Ahuramazda to mankind. He appears before the Great Saviours when the time has arrived for their manifestation in the world. One of his special tasks is

“the guarding of the seed of Zarathushtra” from which the future Redeemers of mankind are to be born. He is also said to have helped at the creation of the first human pair, the *Mashyo-Mashyoi*. These last two functions of his seem to have come into prominence during the Pahlavi period, but in the Avesta he represents some kind of Divine Fire, and in the Veda, under the name *Narāshamsa* (he who is praised of mankind) he also represents the Sacred Fire.

Aramaiti is the Spirit of the Earth, and also of Divine Wisdom and Grace, both in the Avesta and in the Veda. She has the rank of an *Amesha-Spenta* (a Holy Immortal, corresponding to an Archangel in Christianity) in the Zoroastrian Hierarchy. In the Avesta she also represents the Spirit of Obedience to the Eternal Law of God and also in a few passages in the *Rig-Veda* she represents the same idea. But on the whole her position in the Veda is much humbler than in the Avesta, for in the latter she is represented as the Guardian of the Faith of Zarathushtra.

Baga (corresponding to the Vedic *Bhaga*) is an epithet of the Supreme Being Ahuramazda in the Achæmenian inscriptions at Persepolis and elsewhere. In the Veda he is a special Deity who is later identified with the Sun.

Airyaman is also one of the ancient Āryan Deities, and in the Veda his name is mainly associated with those of the great Twin-Brethren *Mitra* and *Varuṇa*. To both the nations the name implies "friend" or "comrade" and so he is specially the God presiding over marriage. A similar position is accorded to him in the Veda where he is invoked during the marriage ceremony, and among the Parsis to-day a short hymn dedicated to him, and called the *Airyēmā-ishyo*, is still used as an essential part of the wedding service.

But the most important of the ancient Indo-Irānian Deities in many ways is *Mithra* (*Mitra*), who represents the Sun. In the Veda He is very intimately associated with Asura *Varuṇa*. In the Avesta, however, He is associated more with the two Guardian-Judges of departed souls

than with Ahuramazda. He awaits the Souls on the other side of death and sits in judgment over them by the side of *Sraosha* and *Rashnu*. He dwells on the top of the Hara-Bareza Mountain. In the Avesta He is the Great Being who is the Wise Ruler, the Loving Guardian and the Impartial Judge of humanity, a conception which is essentially ethical. In the Veda too His position is similar. In later days the cult of Mithra attained great importance in Irān and grew into an important esoteric school of occultism, which in its turn profoundly influenced the later Roman thought as well as earlier Christianity.

Haoma is another Indo-Irānian Deity, being the Vedic *Soma*. In the Avesta He is not a mere personification of the *Soma*-plant, but a great Teacher who appeared in the very early days to lead forward our infant humanity; and He is represented in the Avesta as being adored by the great Teachers of ancient Irān themselves. In *Yasna*, ix, He is represented as appearing before Zarathushtra and telling Him in broad outline

the history of the Sacred Teaching in Irān in the ages gone by. Some scholars believe that it was He who introduced the *Haoma*-(*Soma*-) Cult among the Āryans and thus gave His own name to the plant and its juice which formed an important item of the Indo-Iranian ritual. The Hindu and Zoroastrian rituals turn entirely upon the offering of the juice of this plant; and two priests called the *Zaotā* (*Hotā*) and the *Rāthwi* (corresponding to the Hindu *Adhvaryu*) officiate at that ceremony.

A great deal of the ceremonial of both the branches of the Aryan race goes back to a very remote antiquity, as also some of the social and other customs. The religious ceremonies depended upon the yearly change of seasons. Hence the yearly *Gāhambārs*, six in number, which the Irānians celebrated in the ancient days and which are even to-day observed by the Parsis. These corresponded pretty closely to the annual sacrificial-cycle observed in the Veda. The chief objects of *popular* worship among these two nations were the Elements—Fire, Water,

Earth and Air—and the Lights of Heaven—the Sun, the Moon and the Stars. These were invoked as Heavenly Beings, but above and beyond them all was the idea of the Supreme God, which is seen in the Vedas and which was far more strongly emphasised by Zarathushtra. This emphasis which He laid upon the supremacy of Ahura has coloured the whole of the subsequent development of Irānian religious thought.

Society in the Avesta shows the division into the three classes: the *Āthravan* or Priest, the *Rathaēshtār* or Warrior, and the *Vāstryosh* or Husbandman, corresponding to the first three “castes” of India, in other words “the Twice-born” (*Dviija*) classes. To these three was added at a much later period (just as was the case in India) a fourth class the *Hutokhsa* or Manual-worker. The King belonged to the Warrior or the Ruler class, and held supreme power in the land; but the Religious Teacher was his equal in every way “verily by reason of his Righteousness”. The name of the Priestly class, *Āthravan*, indicates the

cult of Fire, which the Great Teacher had definitely established in Irān.

The worship of "Ancestors" (the *Pitris*) was another very marked feature of the ancient Aryan Faith, which both the branches inherited in common. The ritual pertaining to this worship consists of the "cake-offering" (the *darūn* among the Parsis and the *puroḍāsha* among the Hindus) and the libation of "a product of the cow," which latter was milk in Irān and *ghī* (clarified butter) in India. But in Irān ancestor-worship developed into the deeper and the more philosophical idea of the *Fravashi*, which is lacking in the Indian branch. The *Fravashi* is the Eternal principle in man which persists through all time and seemingly progresses throughout the ages. As a writer (himself a Zoroastrian) has well put it: "The *Fravashis* of men are archetypal souls clothed in ethereal forms, after whose model each human being is formed on earth . . . The body of each man with its peculiar physical, mental, moral and spiritual capacities, is shaped and formed after the model which each

particular Fravashi presents." Each being, right up to Ahura Himself, possesses a Fravashi which exists through all eternity.

Another interesting Indo-Irânian ceremonial was the sacrament of Initiation—the Zoroastrian *Navjot* (literally, "New-birth") which corresponds to the *Upanayana* ceremony of the Hindus. Like the Hindus of the Vedic period all children among the Zoroastrians, both boys and girls, get this "new-birth". After this ceremony they are regarded as fully responsible members of the Zoroastrian fold. And as outward signs they put on the Sacred Shirt (the *Sudreh*, the Sacred Girdle (the *Kusti*) and they should also have a covering to their heads (at least during prayers), generally a small skull-cap. These three outward symbols correspond very closely to the Hindu *Yajñopavīta* (the Sacred Thread), the *Mekhalā* (the Girdle) and the *Shikhā* (the tuft of hair on the top of the head) respectively. The first of these among the Hindus was originally a full upper garment as can be seen from ancient statues and from the dress of the Buddhist

priests even to-day. The second, the Girdle, was originally the most important part of the dress of "the twice-born". In the Avesta it was Haoma for whom Ahuramazda first brought the "sacred girdle, star-begemmed, woven by the two Spirits". The cap was intended to protect the vital parts of the head,¹ and the tonsure of the Roman Catholic priests seems to have had a similar significance.

Such are some of the ancient Āryan traditions and ceremonials which these two great peoples, the Irānian and the Indian, had inherited. In Irān, however, the dominating influence of their Teacher, Zarathushtra, has completely overshadowed all later development. His philosophy and His solution of the riddle of life has been at the root of all Irānian, and particularly Zoroastrian, thought ever since. He made use of these traditions, but He laid the greatest emphasis upon the moral concept of Ahura and of the grand Indo-Irānian idea of *Asha* (Vedic *Rita*), and made the latter the keystone of His World-Religion.

¹The *Brahmarandhra*.

CHAPTER II

THE PROPHET

Ushta-nō zātō Athrava, vō Spitāmō Zarathushtrō.

Fortunate are we that the Teacher was born,
Spitama Zarathushtra.

(*Yasht* xiii. 94.)

THE modern inquirer would demand first of all to know the date of Zarathushtra and all the other material evidence there is about Him. As His date is even now not quite satisfactorily settled, we may here provisionally accept a date perhaps three or four centuries earlier than what used to be ascribed to Him. So we may agree with Prof. A. V. W. Jackson in putting Him as having lived about the beginning of the first millennium B.C. But we must also here mention an occult tradition which says that He lived at an age so remote it must be now called "prehistoric," and there is another tradition which says that there has not been one

Teacher, but several of that name, and that consequently the Teacher of whom modern scholarship and the Pahlavi traditions speak is the last of that name. Be that as it may, we are here content to examine the life that has come down to us in the Pahlavi traditions and has been amplified by modern scholarship. But whatever the personality of the Prophet may have been, His teaching is the most important gift He made to humanity. His life also, as has been preserved in the Parsi tradition, is a worthy life and full of its own lessons.

Another point may here be touched upon, which has puzzled not a few scholars. It is the significance of the name Zarathushtra. It is well known that His personal name was Spitama, after an ancestor who was the founder of the family. Zarathushtra was very probably the title by which He was known after He had proclaimed His Message. Just in the same way we find that the Prince Siddhārtha, after His Enlightenment, was known as the Buddha (the Enlightened One), and Jesus was known as the Christ (the Anointed). The name

Zarathushtra (usually in its superlative form *Zarathushtrōtema*) had been used in Irān to designate the Head of the Zoroastrian Church. The usual meaning, therefore, attached to this name, connecting it with *ushtra* (camel) does not seem at all appropriate. Far better is the suggestion made by some scholars deriving the name from *zaratha* (golden) and *ushtra* ("light"), from the root *ush*, "to shine".¹ Thus this designation of the Prophet would mean "He of the Golden Light," which is just the appropriate name to be given to one of the Greatest of the Light-Bringers of the world.

It has been well said by a Christian clergyman that "the Cross of the Christ is of greater worth than all His miracles". It is so with all the Great Teachers of humanity. Every one of them has been invested in later ages with a halo of mystic tradition, and has had miracles attached to His life upon earth. All this merely indicates that Their followers have regarded them as far above the average of mortal man, and that they

¹ Found in Vedic *Ushas* (the Dawn).

thought Their lives to be specially precious to humanity; but unfortunately these very legends, many of them inventions of later superstitious ages, have tended in a great measure to obscure the real worth of Their teaching. There is also a certain "family-likeness" between these mystic traditions which have grown up around the lives of these great Saviours. But it is certainly not the miracles They performed which constitute Their chief claim to greatness and to the gratitude of humanity. It is the Message which They proclaimed, the Eternal Truth which They sought to re-establish in the hearts of men and women; it is the Peace which They brought to countless suffering hearts that constitutes Their title to be called Saviours, Masters and Lords of the World. They in the fullness of Their Wisdom and Their Compassion have brought the most valued of Divine Gifts, the Message inspired by God Himself, and hence it is that Their names are remembered and worshipped by millions of men through countless generations. So also with the Saviour of

Irān, it is not the miracles which He wrought that have caused His memory to be the most sacred heritage of His followers, but His great Message of *Asha*, and of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds. Still, as already hinted above, it may be useful and interesting to know something of the life of this Great Sage, to know something about Zarathushtra *the Man*.

In the warrior family of Spitama, connected also with the imperial family of ancient Irān, there was a good and learned man named Pourushaspa. He was deeply attached to the study of religion, and had gained a reputation for piety and wisdom. It is said that the blessing of God rested upon him and that his Son came to him as a visible proof of God's pleasure. When the proper time came he was united in marriage to Dughdhōvā, the daughter of Frāhīmrava, another nobleman of Irān. This lady too was as deeply devoted to religion and to the study of the higher problems of life, and as God-fearing and pious as her husband. They made an ideal pair and they

were the right sort of parents for the future Prophet of Irān. They had five sons born to them, of whom Spitama was the third.

Prophecies about the advent of the Great Teacher had been current in Irān at that period. The whole of the Āryan world seemed at that time to be plunged into chaos; wickedness went unchecked, truth seemed to have left the earth, oppression of the weak and self-seeking seemed to be the only things that existed. Naturally the people were eagerly looking forward to a Saviour to bring order out of all this confusion, and to teach mankind anew the lesson of Righteousness which they had forgotten. The opening verse of the second chapter of the *Ahunavaiti Gāthā* (*Yasna*, xxix) puts this very poetically. The Soul of the Cow (Mother-Earth) appears before the Throne of the Almighty with loud complaints of the oppression and the tyranny she has been groaning under. She asks bitterly the meaning of it all and wonders why she has been created. Verily the cry of the oppressed reached the Throne of the Heavenly

Father and He in His mercy pointed out Zarathushtra as the one Saviour who could set matters right and bring relief to the Soul of Mother-Earth.

Among the miracles accompanying His birth, two may be mentioned here. Even while in the mother's womb, the Child glowed with such Spiritual Light that everything around her was illuminated with the radiance, and the light increased in brilliance as the time for the birth approached, until, we are told, the whole house and the neighbourhood became one blaze of splendour. And the Divine Child *smiled* as soon as born, and all Nature rejoiced in sympathy,—the trees, the waters and all the good creation exclaimed with joy :

Fortunate are we that the Teacher is born,
Spitama Zarathushtra.

The Child was named Spitama from the famous founder of the family. The wicked trembled when they knew that He had been born, and they tried to destroy Him while yet an infant. But time after time He was saved, for He had a mission to fulfil in the world, and till

He had faithfully carried it out there was none who could hurt a hair of His head. Pourushaspa marked with delight and wonder the signs of greatness in his Son, and to avoid all danger he retired with his family into seclusion.

The Child received the training usual in those days from the hands of a devout and very wise father, who early turned His thoughts to things of Heaven. At the age of fifteen (when the youth of ancient Irān used to enter upon their worldly life) young Spitama went into absolute seclusion to commune alone with His Maker and to prepare for His great task. Whither He went and what He did has never been fully revealed. As with other Great Teachers, we have but vague traditions and legends about a life led amidst dreary wastes, of years spent in strenuous meditation upon the Eternal "Riddle of Life". In one part of the Avesta (*Vendīdād*, xix) we have an account of His temptation by *Angrō-Mainyu* (the Evil One). Just in the same way we read of Siddhārtha tempted by *Māra*, the Arch-fiend, and of Jesus

tempted by Satan. The Evil One offered the sovereignty of the world to Spitama for one blessing from His lips upon the "creation of Evil"; but Spitama was firm, He replied:

No, I shall not renounce the Good Religion of the Worshippers of Mazda, not though life and limb and soul should part asunder.¹

This was the final test, and the Fiend fled howling towards the North.² Good had triumphed; the Prophet now stood forth in His full stature, as *Zarathushtra*, "He of the Golden Light". He was then thirty years old.

The new Prophet was not at all well received in the land of His birth, Western Irān, and for a considerable time His only disciple was Maidhyōi-Māongha, the son of Pourushaspa's brother Ārāsti. But He never faltered and He never doubted, even though He met with repeated rebuffs.

At last in the 12th year of His ministry, the Prophet left His native province and travelled eastwards to far off Bactria, where ruled Vīsh-tāspa. The King received

¹ Jackson, *Zoroaster*.

² The North is, among Zoroastrians, the region of the Demons.

Him kindly and showed himself inclined to His Message. Zarathushtra performed several miracles in the presence of the King and his court, and held long discussions with the learned men there. Slowly and surely the Truth He proclaimed gained firm hold over the King and his people. There were several set-backs, and once the enemies of the Prophet contrived to put Him in prison and thus scored a temporary victory. But in the end Vishtāspa became openly a convert to the Zoroastrian Faith.

This was the most important event in the history of the Religion. This was the turning point ; for from this time onwards the temporal power of Irān stood identified with the Faith taught by Zarathushtra, and its success and progress were assured. The immediate effect of the conversion of Vishtāspa was that other members of the Royal family and the Court also accepted Zoroaster as their Teacher. Among the latter there were the two famous brothers Frashaoshtra and Jāmāspa (surnamed "the Wise") of the family of Hvogva. Their names and that of Vishtāspa are

mentioned in the *Gāthās*, and we feel that they are as much living personages there as the Prophet Himself.

The spread of the Religion through Irān and the other lands, once begun, was fairly rapid, but it was not without some wars and fighting. The Pahlavi tradition mentions at least two such wars, and some passages of the *Gāthās* might very well have been uttered by the Prophet on the eve of some of these battles. But through all this fighting the Religion emerged stronger and more firmly established.

After forty-seven years of very strenuous effort for the establishment of the Faith the great Prophet passed away at the age of seventy-seven. Irānian tradition says that He met the death of a warrior fighting in defence of His Fire-Temple which was attacked by the enemy. There is also another tradition, mentioned by Greek writers, that He was killed by "a fire from Heaven". In any case the end was worthy of the Great Teacher and the dauntless Soldier in the cause of Truth and Righteousness.

Great as His life had been in strenuous effort and uncompromising adherence to Truth, the greatest legacy left by Zarathushtra to humanity is the Religion to which He gave His name. Even to-day, many centuries after His time, and many hundreds of miles away from the ancient land of its birth, the Religion He founded is a living Faith. The followers it claims to-day are but few, still it is a living force in the lives of its adherents. For it embodies the Eternal Truth of God and it has carried consolation and blessing to millions of human beings through all the ages. The Parsi community has always prospered in India, because they have clung steadfast to their Faith, and they are sure that as long as they continue to do so the blessings of their Prophet will be theirs.

CHAPTER III

THE PATH OF ASHA

*Azō pantāo yō ashahē, vīspe anyaēshām
apantām.*

There is but one Path, that of *Asha*, all other paths are false paths.

(Colophon to the *Yasna*.)

THE Indo-Irānian peoples had, besides the traditions mentioned in the first chapter, one fundamental doctrine of Faith which they held in common, the grand conception of *Asha* or *Ṛita*. When exactly this doctrine first came into their Religion we have no means of judging, but even in the earliest of the *Gāthās* of the Avesta, as also in the oldest of the Vedic Hymns, we find the idea fully developed. Even phonetically the two words *asha* and *ṛita* are identical as has been shown by Professor Chr. Bartholomæ. But this phonetic identity is the least important part of our question.

The identity of *concept* between these two words is our most important consideration. The original concept of these two words is so sublime and so far above the usual material ideas, that we must admit that this must have come from some Great Teacher who spoke with the full inspiration derivable from God alone. These highest conceptions of spiritual life are first given by one who possesses full Wisdom, it is only the limitations of us mortals that drag down these conceptions from Heaven to the Earth. What the Great Founders of Religions have taught has to be taken in the highest and the most spiritual sense of which it is capable, if we are to get the true Message of the Teacher. So also with the word *asha*.

The word is rather loosely translated by "purity" or "righteousness". Though near enough for all practical purposes, these renderings by no means give us an adequate idea of the original concept. It is true that the words "purity" or "righteousness" might be more or less accurate translations of the word *asha* as used in the *later* Avesta and in the

Pahlavi works. But as we go backwards to earlier and earlier ages we find the concept gradually getting fuller and fuller, until in the *Gāthās*—the chants of the Great Master of Wisdom, Zarathushtra—we get the full breadth and depth of this concept exposed to our view. It would therefore be better if we try to trace this concept in gradually widening circles until we reach the thought of the Teacher Himself. But we have to remember that Zoroaster merely revived and emphasised the idea of the Ancient Wisdom which was the joint heritage of both Irān and India.

We Parsis of to-day have inherited this idea through an immemorial tradition. We name it *ashoi*, which is practically the same word, though to most of us the idea predominating is that of material or earthly purity. This means not merely *bodily* purity—baths, clean clothes, etc.—but also implies mental purity. Still it is essentially confined to our earthly life here below. The implication of the higher degree of “spiritual purity” is at best vague in this word *ashoi*. Exactly

the same has been the history in India of the word *dharma*, which had replaced the ancient Vedic word *rita*. The modern signification of *dharma* is something vastly different from the meaning attached to it in Manu and the older Lawgivers of India. Or again compare the word "Righteousness" as used in the Sermon on the Mount and the very colourless use made of the same word in our ordinary parlance. All these words *have fallen* from their original "high estate"; for necessarily the Teacher uses them in their fullest spiritual import, which we ordinary mortals have neither the sense nor the strength to keep up. The Hindu legend of the descent of the Ganges from Heaven is quite an apt illustration. When the Ganges came down from the feet of the Creator upon the Earth, it was only the great God Shiva who had the strength to receive her on His head. Similarly the River of Divine Inspiration is only to be received by the Great Teachers alone. Ordinary mortals can bathe in the Divine Stream only at much lower levels.

The Parsi conception of *ashoi* is, therefore, principally that of righteous conduct upon Earth—a clean body and fair and just dealing towards our fellowmen. What the Prophet of Irān understood by this was something far deeper and wider. Hence we find necessarily that the nearer we approach His time the clearer becomes the conception of *Asha*, and the higher it rises in spiritual import. Taking the first step backwards towards the Prophet we find that the Zoroastrian Divines who wrote during the earlier centuries of the Christian era have had a clearer conception of this *Asha* than the Parsis to-day. The great Dasturs (High-Priests) of the Sasanian Empire, men like Adarbād Māraspand and Artā Virāf must have undoubtedly had far clearer notions of *Asha* based upon their inner spiritual experiences. Hence we find in the Avesta books compiled at that period the concept of *Asha* is distinctly at a higher level. In fact, to indicate earthly purity, another word (*yaoshdāo*) has been used, as distinct from *Asha* which means spiritual purity. From the later Sasanian

days onwards it seems that the idea of spiritual purity receded slowly into the background, with the masses at any rate. This decay of spiritual ideals in the nation as a whole, combined with the fierce intolerance of the priesthood, who resorted to unceasing persecution of all religious beliefs other than their own, and who had gone to extremes of ferocity in putting down the followers of Māni and Mazdak, led to the sure and rapid downfall of Zoroastrian Faith during the later days of the House of Sasan. And when the fresh and more vigorous Gospel of Islam was arrayed against the Old Faith, the latter withered up practically without any forcing on the part of Islam. The Empire, though large, was essentially devoid of the inner soul-force which religion alone can give. The natural spiritual leaders of the people, the *Āthravans* had apparently lost their grip of the spiritual needs of their flock, and hence they did not receive the whole hearted support of the masses when a younger and therefore more vigorous creed clashed with the Older Faith. The people who needed spiritual food received

none at the hands of their own accredited leaders, and hence they turned naturally to the doctrines of Islam, with its more practical effort at brotherhood and its innate democratic ideals. Islam was, moreover, distinctly adapted to be acceptable to the masses and to inspire them with the ideal of brotherhood and of neighbourly love, while the older Faith of Zoroaster in those days of its degeneration had become so overlaid with outward ceremonial and mere bodily purifications and baths and penances for all occasions, possible and impossible, that people ceased to care for such mere outer forms of purity, which neither inspired them nor satisfied their spiritual thirst.

At a yet earlier period, as is evidenced by the Later Avestan Hymns, the *Yashts* and the *Yasna* (excepting the *Gāthās*) and the *Vispered*, we get more and more of the spiritual import of the word *Asha*. We get closer to the idea that "the Adorable Ones" (the *Yazatas*, who correspond to the *Devas* of the Hindus and to the Angels of Christianity) have attained Their high position in the

spiritual world by reason of Their *Asha*. In this context *Asha* stands for a fundamental truth of the spiritual world, a truth which being understood and obeyed has led these Great Beings to be what They are. As a matter of fact, even Ahura Himself is said to have "reached the highest through *Asha*"—a passage of deep meaning. These hymns have mostly come down to us nearly unchanged through the centuries, because most of them, especially those of the *Yasna*, have had a ritual use and hence they were handed down orally through a long line of teachers much as were the hymns of the Vedas in India.

Finally we come to the concept of *Asha* in the *Gāthās*. The five *Gāthās* are reputed to be the words of the Master Himself. In any case they are linguistically and also from other internal evidence the oldest extant portion of the Avesta texts. In point of time they would be very nearly (even if not quite) contemporaneous with the Prophet. Even if we are inclined to dispute their reputed authorship, we have still to acknowledge

that they embody the highest and best of His Teaching, the Message that the World-Teacher brought for humanity through the Irānian race. Here we find in their purest form the Teacher's philosophy of life and His solution of the problems of existence. And here it is that we find *Asha* as the very keystone of this structure. Sometimes vaguely personified (but never sufficiently anthropomorphic) *Asha* is there a Mighty Being, an Aspect of God Himself, standing next in rank to Ahura-Mazda Himself. But most often the meaning is that of a deep Spiritual Truth or a Spiritual Law on which the Government of the Universe depends. All that happens in this world is through *Asha*, we have to obey *Asha*, and it is *Asha* who ultimately leads us into the presence of God. This deep and fundamental importance of *Asha* colours the whole of Zarathushtra's Teaching.

And what then is this *Asha*? Scholars translate it variously as "Purity," or "Righteousness" or "Truth," but it is far more than any of these words in their ordinary sense. It is the Eternal

Truth, the One Reality, which is the mainspring of all Manifestation and of all Evolution. It is very hard to express the concept in mere words; it has to be meditated upon and realised within ourselves. It is The Truth which upholds the Throne of God Himself. It is the GREAT LAW, the PLAN of God, according to which He fashioned the Universe. The best description of *Asha* can be only given in the inspired words of Tennyson as :

That God who always lives and loves,
One God, One Law, One Element,
And one far-off divine Event,
To which the whole Creation moves.

Asha then is, in short, the Divine Plan or the Law, which rules the whole of the manifested creation. By it Spirit descends into matter and re-ascends. One aspect of *Asha's* working is the eternal conflict between good and evil; another aspect is the Law of Action (and Reaction) known to India as the Law of *Karma*. Both these aspects of *Asha* are dealt with pretty clearly in Zarathushtra's Philosophy. A full comprehension of this

Asha must inevitably lead the human soul to help in this Great Plan of God, to go with the "Creation of *Asha*"—with those who are striving to reach onwards and upwards. Hence very often the word *asha* is used in the secondary sense of the *Path to God*. And because, of course, with the idea of treading this path are also necessarily implied the qualities requisite to fit the human being to tread it successfully, there has grown up what may be called a "tertiary sense" of the word *asha, viz.*, "Righteousness" in the sense which the Christ has used it. We have already seen the further implications involved in this last sense attached to this word.

In the Veda the word *Rita* has exactly the same signification as the word *Asha* in the Avesta. The later word *dharma* has also had the same signification originally, but in later times it also lost much of its original spiritual signification, and now in the modern Indian vernaculars it means merely ceremonial observances connected with religion. In the Veda Varuṇa is called "the Lord of

Rita” and the Gods are said to hold their places through *Rita*. The word *Rishi* (Sage) is probably a connected word, originally meaning one who follows the *Rita*, much like the word *Ashavan* in the Avesta. This latter word is used in the Avesta for all Deities as well as for all Holy Sages and Bringers of Light to humanity. So also is the Avestic word *Ratu* (Spiritual Teacher) another connected word, and it practically means the same as the Sanskrit *Rishi*, and is used for a Teacher who has attained the higher level of Wisdom by treading the Path and by realising the Eternal Law of *Asha*.

In the Avesta there are certain short prayers reputed to be the most ancient, even pre-Zoroastrian in date, which speak of the greatness of *Asha*. These we shall consider in a later chapter, but here it may be only pointed out that like all the great Prayers of other Religions (the *Paternoster* of the Christians, or the *Gāyatrī* of the Hindus) their meaning is to be sought much deeper than the mere words indicate, and that this latter gradually unfolds

itself as the life is led and the Path is trodden: *Asha* is better understood as we try to follow the Path of *Asha*.

This Path of *Asha* is very clearly indicated in the last verse of the *Hoshbām* (the Dawn Hymn):

Through the best *Asha*, through the highest *Asha*, may we catch sight of Thee (Ahura), may we approach Thee, may we be in perfect union with Thee!

Here the three stages of the *vision of God*, the *approach to God* and the *final absorption in God* are clearly stated to be accomplished through *Asha*, the best and highest *Asha*. Evidently this means that *Asha* has to be followed in the *deepest spiritual sense* it is capable of bearing, the sense in which the Great Teachers of the past had understood it, the sense in which Zarathushtra had used it.

The Avesta as well as the Veda speak often enough of the *Path of Asha* (*Ashahe pantāo*, the Vedic *Ṛitasya panthā*), implying the Path by which the human being reaches his Father Who is in Heaven. And quite in the fitness of things the last line¹ of the Book of *Yasna*, the most

¹ In fact it is the Colophon.

important of the surviving books of the Avesta, speaks of the Path of *Asha*, summing up the whole teaching of Zarathushtra :

aēvō pantāo yō Ashahe, vīspe anyāēshām apantam,

There is but one Path, the *Path of Asha*, all other paths are false paths.

CHAPTER IV

GOOD AND EVIL

*At-cā hyat tā hēm Mainyā
jasæitēm paourvīm
dazdē gaēm-cā ajoyāitīm-cā.*

And now when these Two Spirits together came, they in the beginning created Life and Not-Life.

(*Gāhtā Ahunavaiti ; Yasna, xxx, 4.*)

THE solution of the problem of Evil has been attempted by every Great Prophet, and though the ways of looking at it have been different in different lands and at different epochs, still there is a fundamental similarity of treatment. Zaratrusthra has tackled the problem in His characteristic manner. He had made *Asha* the very key-stone of His Teaching, and we have seen that to Him *Asha* meant the Eternal Law which impels all creation to progress Godwards. To Him life upon this Earth meant a constant endeavour to tread this Path. Life

therefore was unceasing endeavour, a continuous activity—what the Hindus have named *Karma Yoga*, or the Religion through Action. The Prophet expected all His followers to be *active* partisans on the side of Asha; consequently all that helps the forward progress of humanity is Good, all that tends to hinder it is Evil.

Zoroaster preached about the two Spirits, but His Philosophy is by no means dualistic. This idea of dualism did, indeed, creep into the religion during the later stages of its development; but in the Teacher's own days and in His own words, the idea developed is most emphatically *not* dualistic. It is not dualistic in the sense usually understood, *viz.*, of conceiving two *co-eternal, co-equal* powers, one good and one evil, who are for ever at war with each other. The concept of Zarathushtra is something essentially different. He tells us that there are the Two Spirits—the Good and the Evil—at war with each other. They form the antithesis of each other in every respect. But in two most important

respects His Teaching differs from the popularly conceived idea of "Dualism". In the first place *the conflict is bound to have an end*. The books, even the later books which were responsible for all this later confusion of thought, speak of the ultimate triumph of the Good Spirit (*Spēntō-Mainyu*) and the hiding of the Evil One (*Angrō-Mainyu*) "underground". And the Prophet Himself categorically declares in the *Gāthā* (*Yasna*, xxx, 10), "Then indeed shall the support of Falsehood come down, and broken shall be its Power," that Evil shall ultimately perish. If, therefore, one of the two powers in the so-called "Dualistic" system is ultimately to perish, we cannot in reason say that the system teaches that these two powers are either *co-equal* or *co-eternal*.

And yet in another aspect and perhaps in a more fundamental respect is the system of Zoroaster not dualistic. The Two Spirits are not "self-created" as may be expected in a truly "Dualistic" system. For both these emanate from and are *the creation of Ahura Mazda*.

These Twin Spirits first emanate from Him, the Eternal Lord of all Life and these Twain working together create and maintain the whole of this Universe. As Prof. Jackson has very well expressed it, these Twin Spirits

do not exist independently but each in relation to the other; *they meet in the higher unity of Ahura Mazda.*¹ They exist before the beginning of the world, but their opposition only comes to its expression in the world that we see.

Though it has not been very clearly stated that these Two Spirits are "created by Mazda," still, at least in one place in the *Gāthās* (*Yasna*, xxx, 1), I believe that such a statement is made. It is a disputed passage and the Pahlavi tradition seems to support this translation. This is not the place to enter into a grammatical discussion as to the meaning of this passage, but I would render the opening lines of that verse as,

Now I will speak to those who desire (to hear), about these Two who are created by Mazda, which (teaching) is indeed for the wise. Then again in *Yasna*, xix, 9, Ahura Mazda speaks of the Two Spirits as His

¹ Italics mine.

own, implying that they both emanated from Him. Thus though not explicitly, still by implication, we may conclude that the Two Spirits represent the double emanation from the Eternal, when the Eternal "breathes out into manifestation". They may be compared to the twofold Powers, *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (or Spirit and Matter), which have been postulated in the Yoga Philosophy of India as emanating from the Supreme Lord, *Ishvara*. Of course, I do not here wish to imply that all the subtleties of the Yoga system are to be found in the teaching of Zarathushtra, but I wish merely to draw a rough sort of analogy. Just as *Ishvara* in the very act of manifestation gives forth these Twain—Spirit and Matter—so also for the purposes of manifestation, according to Zoroaster, are needed the Twin Spirits, the Good and the Evil, "created by Mazda". They represent the two poles upon which the whole of manifestation and evolution revolves. Apparently opposed to each other in every respect, they are *both* necessary to create and to sustain the

manifested universe. Their opposition is clearly and forcibly declared in the *Gāthās* (*Yasna*, xxx, 4):

And now when these Two Spirits together came, they in the beginning created Life and Not-Life.

And in another place Zarathushtra declares (*Yasna*, xlv, 2):

I will speak of the Spirits Twain at the first beginning of Life, of whom the holier spake thus to the wicked one:

Never shall our minds harmonise, nor our doctrines; neither our aspirations, nor yet our beliefs; neither our words nor yet our actions; neither our hearts nor yet our souls.

The first quotation given above is very significant—"they created *Life* and *Not-Life*". This constitutes the fundamental opposition of this pair, and it virtually amounts to saying that they correspond in the essence to the idea underlying *Purusha* and *Prakṛiti* or Spirit and Matter. This quotation is in fact the clearest expression of the fundamental difference between the Two Spirits that is to be found in the Zoroastrian Scriptures. If we look upon them as in a sense representing the two phases of the

eternal activity of God, namely creation and dissolution, we may better understand their true importance. It was probably in this sense that, in later times, the Zoroastrian Divines attributed to the Evil Spirit such "evils" as the creation of extreme heat and extreme cold, of plagues, of vermin and noxious creatures.

As time went on and as the true Teaching of the Prophet receded further and further into oblivion, a new and curious idea began to overlay this original idea of the Two Spirits. The later Zoroastrian theologians seem to have forgotten that destruction is also part of God's work; that one side of His activity, as shown in the progress of the universe, consists in renovation and renewal, which is impossible without the destruction of what has ceased to help in the forward march of Creation and has thus become "evil". This forgetting of the fundamental conception of the Evil One as an Aspect of God Himself led, in later times, to a marked divorce between the functions of *Angrō-Mainyu* (the Matter or Not-Life Aspect of God) and those of

Spentō-Mainyu (the Spirit or Life Aspect of God). And in exact proportion as the Evil and the Good Spirits became estranged from one another did the former also get estranged from his Creator. And just at the same rate did the Good Spirit become more and more identified with Ahura Mazda. And at last in Sasanian times (as represented by the Theologians of the *Vendīdād*) we find, instead of the Good and Evil Spirits, *Ahura and Ahriman* (*Angrō-Mainyu*) forming the fundamental Pair. How far this view had been influenced by the doctrines of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism (in its more popular forms with its hosts of demons and evil spirits) would form a very interesting piece of work in Comparative religions. Here it may be sufficient to state that *Angrō-Mainyu* in the *Vendīdād*, 'far from being "a Creation of God," has become the Arch-Opponent of the Almighty, very much as Satan did after "he fell from Heaven". Thus, we read in the very first chapter of that book that when Ahura Mazda created various fine lands for the people to dwell in, this

Arch-Fiend, Ahriman, "counter-created" various plagues therein in order to drive away God's own people from their homes ! This later idea of *Ahriman* is decidedly unphilosophical and inconsistent with the other dogma, simultaneously put forward, of the omnipotence of God. And it is certainly opposed to the original teaching of Zarathushtra, which, as we have already seen, admitted no other at God's level. This later conception was, due to a misunderstanding of the Prophet's teaching, very possibly under the influence of Semitic theology. And assuredly this later conception of Ahriman is responsible both for the philosophic confusions and the superstitions that crept into Sasanian Zoroastrianism, and also for the belief among foreigners that Zarathushtra's religion was "dualistic".

Whatever the subsequent history of the Evil Spirit may have been in Iranian Theology, there cannot be any reasonable doubt that the original concept as it emanated from the mind of the Master Himself and embodied in the *Gāthās* is the purest and the most philosophical

explanation of the existence and the origin of Evil. "Life and Not-Life," this phrase conveys the very essence of the whole teaching. It must, however, be borne in mind that in the *Gāthās* we find only the main points of the teaching jotted down rather than a "connected" system of philosophy. Each verse contains one or two ideas expressed in terse and often highly poetic language. Each verse represents some idea but the connection between the verses themselves is often not expressed at all. Only long and patient thought and meditation, coupled with a life lived according to the teaching, would slowly bring out clearly the connecting links. All one can do at present is to take up the scattered hints from various verses of the *Gāthās* and other Hymns and carry them forward to their logical conclusions.

The first such conclusion we can draw from the very definition of the Two Spirits—as Creators of "Life" and "Not-Life"—is that both are as the two poles of the same Eternal Source of all Life; that both are (to vary our metaphor) the

First Creatures and the First Ministers of His Will. The Absolute willed to manifest, and from Unity He became Duality. *Angrō-Mainyu* is as essential for Creation and Manifestation as *Spentō-Mainyu*. This point is very finely brought out in the *Sraosha Yasht* (*Yasna*, lvii).

In that Hymn, in the very first verse, Sraosha is described as paying His homage to all the Beings who have helped to create the universe :

Among the creatures of the Great Ahura,
He was the first to worship the Eternal;
He first did worship the Immortals Holy,
The Six that stand around the Throne of
Mazda;

He also worshipped first the Twin
Maintainers,—

The Twin Creators,—who create together
The manifold creation all around us.

Sraosha (Obedience to the Divine Will) is here shown as worshipping the Twin Spirits; in other words He is shown as recognising the Two as among the Supreme Manifestations of the Will of the Eternal. Evil is necessary in the world in order that Good may ultimately triumph. Spirit must unite itself with Matter in order to realise completely the

fullness of its stature. That Good shall come out triumphant in the end has been maintained by Zoroastrian theology throughout its long history. And when we characterise Evil as "Not-Life," we only imply that until Spirit returns to the Eternal Source from which it emanated, Matter serves as *the shadow*, that it only *appears* as Evil. In other words Evil in itself does not exist; or to put it paradoxically, Evil has but a negative existence.

A second implication is with regard to human conduct. Evil is found in the world in order that we may strengthen ourselves by learning to overcome it. For life to a true follower of Zarathushtra is a constant and strenuous effort not merely in being good but also in fighting and overpowering evil. Evil has to be regarded, so to say, as a whetstone for a Zoroastrian to sharpen his determination upon. Evil is, like Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*,

Part of that power which still
Produceth good whilst ever scheming ill.

Another, and perhaps a more remote, implication from these ideas is that

complete freedom is left to the individual to choose his own side in the eternal battle. The strenuous Zoroastrian *must stand upon his own legs*. No Prophet, no Saviour intercedes for him or bears his burden. The Lord Zarathushtra points out the Path and stands as a glorious example to all mankind, and is ever ready to guide and help and inspire. But each individual has got complete freedom to choose his own path in life; and once the choice is made every step upon the path chosen must be trodden by his own feet. According to Zoroastrian theology each human being has a principle within himself called *urvān* which is often translated as "soul". The literal meaning of *urvān* is "the chooser"; for it is that within the human being which enables him to choose between the right and the wrong, between the temporary and the eternal. Zarathushtra, even while he first proclaimed His Message, said :

Hear with your ears the Great Truths, consider them with clear thought, deciding between the two and choosing,—man by man, *each one for himself*.

Once the choice is made, the Eternal Law, which declares that a man shall reap exactly as he has sown, steps in and determines the future progress of the individual.

Thus we see that the Lord Zarathushtra has worked out a very satisfactory solution of the problem of the existence and the origin of Evil. He has taught that Evil is but a negative aspect of the Divine Life, only "the Shadow of the Eternal," for it has created "Not-Life". Evil *by itself* does not, cannot exist; but it is relative, depending upon the distance from God at which the individual stands upon the Path of Asha. *Angrō-Mainyu* is terrible indeed as long as He has power to tempt people with material and temporary happiness, or to confound their intellects and souls. He has tempted Sages always, and often quite successfully. He tempted Yima and led him to his fall. He tried to tempt the Master Himself (as Buddha and Christ were also tempted later) but failed. When this last temptation was overcome, the Master stood up in His full glory as Teacher of the World,

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as ZARATHUSHTRA (He of the Golden Light). Then He explained to mankind what Evil was in reality—the Shadow of the Light Eternal, of God Himself. For He had conquered *Angrō-Mainyu* and assuredly He had the best right to explain to humanity the true nature of Evil.

CHAPTER V

THE RELIGION OF ACTION

Ushtë ahmāi yahmāi ushtë kahmāi-cit

Happiness (be) to him through whom happiness (is caused) to another.

(*Gāthā Ushtavaiti ; Yasna, xliii, 1.*)

THE Law of Asha, as we have seen above, implies a regular and ordered progress in all manifestation. All beings tend Godward, and human beings are expected to work out their own salvation by their own efforts. God has endowed them with *urvān*—that faculty within them that enables them *to choose* for themselves. And the choice once made, there is perforce the necessity of abiding by the consequences. The *urvān* may learn the lesson through suffering, and may go back upon the evil choice made without experience, and learn to walk along the right path at last ; but an evil

choice, once made, *must* lead to suffering. This is the Great Law which has been recognised by all Great Teachers. "As ye sow so shall ye surely reap" has been the Teaching of every Great Prophet. The Hindus call it the *Law of Karma*, *i.e.*, the Law of Action (and Reaction).

The philosophies of India, both in the Hindu and the Buddhistic systems, have elaborated this Law in great detail, and have carried it to its full logical conclusion. They have clearly recognised that occasionally the consequences of our acts are not experienced within the limits of one life, and that consequently more lives than one are needed to have the full experiences and to learn the lesson which this Law is meant to teach. In no case could there be an eternal Heaven or an eternal Hell for acts done with all our limitations during our short lives upon earth. Thus as a necessary corollary to the Law of Karma they have laid down the doctrine of Reincarnation; and in this respect the systems of India stand out in sharp contrast with the "orthodox" Christian and Islamic dogma.

In Zoroastrian theology the Law of Action and Reaction has been clearly enunciated, in many places both in the *Gāthās* and in the later books. Thus in *Yasna*, xxx, 11, we are told about "the Law which Mazda hath ordained of happiness and misery—long suffering to the followers of the Druj (Falsehood) and happiness to the Righteous". Be it noted that this passage from the *Gāthās* does not speak of condemnation or reward through all eternity. Even in later times eternal Heaven or Hell is not what has been meant, and wherever such a statement occurs it is very probably due to Semitic influences.

But again we must admit that nowhere in the *Gāthās* do we get an explicit statement that the human being has to return again and again to this worldly existence in order to atone for his faults and to learn his lessons. There are some passages which may imply such a conclusion, but these are at the best doubtful. In the whole range of the religious literature of Zoroastrianism there is but one book where there is an explicit mention of

this idea of reincarnation; and that book is the *Desātīr*, whose very authenticity has been doubted by many competent scholars. So all we feel warranted in saying is that the idea of reincarnation may be deduced by some sort of implication, but it is nowhere clearly put forward. And we must also admit that in the earlier texts, at any rate, there is nothing which is opposed to such an idea. On the whole the evidence for the doctrine of reincarnation in Zoroastrian Faith is negative, although the Law of Karma is exceedingly clearly put forward and has been duly emphasised.

The clearly expressed idea of progress along the Path of Asha seems to imply stages in the spiritual life and growth of an individual. This, too, might be taken by some as further corroborative evidence for the idea of reincarnation. But all such implications would rather imply a will to believe, and could not be admitted as positive evidence. Let us, therefore, be content to say that there is no evidence that this was a belief

of Zoroastrian theology, neither is there anything directly controverting such a belief.

At any rate the goal of our human life has been unequivocally set forth by the Prophet—and that is to tread the Path of Asha, and along it to reach our God. This can be achieved by several methods,—through Knowledge, through Devotion or through Action. There are hints about all these three ways scattered through the Avesta; but the method emphasised is that of Action. Zoroastrianism is above all a *Religion of Action—Karma Yoga*, to use the Hindu phrase. The Message of the Teacher is mainly concerned with action—right action which will help the Good Spirit and defeat the Evil One. The whole Teaching has been compressed into three commandments—*Humata, Hūkhta, Huaarshta* (Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds). And though, as necessarily, thoughts come first, as the roots of all action, still *Good Deeds* constitute the chief qualification in treading the Path of Asha. God has given us powers and abilities in order that we may *act*, that

we may become *fighters* in the ranks of "the followers of Asha".

Like every other religion Zoroastrianism has chants which are regarded as specially sacred. One such is the short prayer known as the *Ahuna-Vairya*. It has been said at one place in the Avesta, that if this prayer is repeated properly even once in the correct rhythm and intonation, and with a clear understanding of its meaning, it is equal in efficacy to the repetition of a hundred other hymns put together. Zarathushtra Himself is said to have chanted this prayer in order to defeat the Evil Spirit when he came to tempt Him. And again and again the Avesta states that "the *Ahuna-Vairya* protects the self".¹

Why should this particular prayer have such special efficacy attached to it above all others? The reason seems to me to be not far to seek. This particular verse has been regarded as embodying within itself the essentials of Zoroaster's Teaching. And therefore the chanting of it

¹ The word used is *tanu*, which literally means 'the body'; but the word is often used to mean 'the ego,' 'the self' just as in Sanskrit.

with a proper understanding of its meaning is said to possess such wonderful efficacy. A true grasping of the meaning of the *Ahuna-Vairya* means a correct understanding of the Teacher's Message. And I believe that it is only this way of regarding this verse that can give a clue to its true meaning. It is really remarkable that every scholar that has attempted to translate this important verse has done it in his own way, there are as many renderings of it as men who have attempted them. To all these I would here add my own version.

This verse is admittedly among the most ancient in the Avesta, according to many it is pre-Zoroastrian in date. Originally it must have stood at the head of the first *Gāthā* to which it has given its name, *Ahunavaiti*. The verse is arranged in three lines and consists of twenty one words, each word standing for one of the original twenty-one books of the Zoroastrian Scriptures. The verse runs as follows :

*Yatha Aha vairyo, atha Ratush,—Ashat cit
haca;*

*Vangheush dazdā Mananghō shyaothananām
 angheush Mazdāi ;
 Khshathremcā Ahurāi ā yim drigubyō dadat
 vāstārem.*

I propose the following rendering :

Just as a Ruler (is) all-powerful (among men), so (too, is) the Spiritual-Teacher, even by reason of His Asha ; the gifts of Good Mind (are) for (those) working for the Lord of Life ; and the Strength of Ahura (is granted) unto (him) who to (his) poor (brothers) giveth help.

Each of the three lines contains an Eternal Truth.

The first line asserts the existence of Spiritual Teachers as a class of Supermen. They are termed *Ratus*, and Their position in the spiritual world is like that of the Ruler (*Ahu*) in this lower world of ours. This is a very important assertion. The *Ratus* have been mentioned very frequently all over the Avesta, and nearly always They are called *Ashahe Rathwo* (Lords of Asha). This first line of the Ahuna-Vairya says clearly that "by reason of His Asha" the *Ratu* is great : His position is owing to the fact that He has been treading the Path of Asha, and that He is much further advanced upon

it than are the ordinary mortals in the world.

The following two lines of this verse show in what this Asha consists, and they also set forth the reward that awaits the person following the Path.¹ In these we find the Religion of Action enunciated in the clearest terms. Other ways also lead to salvation but the Prophet of Irān has laid special emphasis upon the Action side. This idea has dominated the Faith throughout its history, for never has seclusion from the world and from worldly duties formed part of the Zoroastrian belief. God has sent us into the world that we may perform the task allotted to us. We are to *work* all our lives and work in the right manner.

So the second line tells us that "the gifts of Good Mind are for those *working* for the Lord of Life". *Working* here is the most important word. The Parsis wear the sacred girdle round the waist, and at the time of prayers this is untied and tied on again. It is tied round

¹ I feel that the simplest rendering possible of these lines is the nearest to the original.

with four knots, two in the front and two behind. And the two front knots are tied each with a repetition of this verse, the actual tying being at the word *shyaothananām* (working). This is to remind us that we are girding up to be workers for the Lord, to be soldiers on His side. Our life is meant not for mere contemplation and dreaming about Good, but in active pursuit of Good and also in active fighting against Evil. We have to *become* Good through doing good deeds, and by fighting against all Evil and iniquity. A true follower of Zarathushtra is he who is always ready to help in the hour of another's need, who is always ranged on the side of justice and truth. For such a person is said to be "working for the Lord of Life". And to him as reward come "the gifts of Good Mind". *Vohu-Manō* (Good Mind) is one of the six Holy Immortals, the great Powers that stand next to Ahura, the Lord of Life Himself.¹ These Holy Immortals are in fact "Attributes of God Himself," in most places but vaguely personified in

¹ See next chapter.

the *Gāthās*. Good Mind is the Mind of the Lord Himself; and the gifts from Him are the insight and the inspiration that come to the human being who is striving upwards to realise the highest. As we advance we begin to see clearer and clearer, our vision of God's Plan gets ever wider and wider. If we fulfil one duty to the best of our abilities, the one next following would be done better, for the first task well done clears our understanding, and we see better how to proceed. Good Mind has helped us, He has given us His gift of understanding, for these have been reserved only for those who work for the Lord. True understanding of the work of the Lord—the only work that matters—is not for the mere dreamer, for the mere student sitting down in quiet meditation all for himself. This is why in a former chapter I have asserted that we come to understand the *Gāthās* (the words of the Master Himself) better, *as we try to live the life enjoined therein*. No Scripture in the world can be understood merely by analysing its words and its grammar:

it has to be lived and practised. And when we live the life according to the rules laid down in a Scripture we are following some Divine Messenger and we are trying to work for the Lord; and it is then that Good-Mind sends us His gifts, that clear our understanding and show us the next step on our upward march along the Path of Asha.

The last line points out the best way in which we may work for the Lord. This is *the Way of Service*, "giving help to the poor," says the verse. And we have to understand "poor" not in the usual restricted sense of those lacking material goods of the world, but in the far wider sense of those who are lacking in anything whatsoever, whether material, mental or spiritual. If we possess anything which our brother lacks, we are the richer and he the poorer by comparison. Our riches may consist in bodily strength, or in wealth and worldly power; they may consist in mental and intellectual equipment or in artistic perception; they may consist in spiritual insight, or in Divine Wisdom;—whatever they be,

God hath bestowed them upon us not for our benefit, but that we may share them with our brothers and that the world be made richer through our possessing these gifts. The gifts of God are not to be hoarded, but they are to be spent freely in the service of our brothers. "Freely have ye received, freely give"—such has been the teaching of all religions. No man can be saved alone and for himself. Such a thought would be the very height of selfishness, and this thought of the self first has always been the strongest weapon of the Evil One. No selfish person, who has used the gifts of God for himself alone, who, in other words, has misused them, can ever find grace in His sight. His blessings are not for the selfish but for the selfless. To those who share the gifts of God with their poor brothers cometh "the Strength of the Lord". This is another of the Holy Immortals.¹ The holy man, the servant of humanity, gets first of all "the gifts of Good Mind" in order that he may see the Path clearly before him, and next there cometh unto

¹ See next chapter.

him "the Strength of the Lord" to help him to tread it. Strength flows in upon him in ever increasing measure, in exact proportion as he shares the blessings of Heaven with his poorer brothers. The higher the gifts a man possesses, the larger is the number of people he can help; and as these gifts are used in the service of his brother-men, God grants him Strength for greater service. Thus the best reward for the Service of Humanity is Strength to do greater Service. Thus does the individual grow ever greater and wiser and stronger, constantly unfolding higher and diviner powers. And as the individual grows in spiritual stature he enfolds a larger and still larger number of his "poor" brothers in his loving compassion, until at last we see a Great Soul, who has attained the rank of the World-Teacher, like Zarathushtra, Whose love and strength encompass the whole of humanity, Who stands forth as the World-Saviour, the "Lord of Lords, the Teacher of Teachers".

CHAPTER VI

THE "HOLY IMMORTALS"

*Yoi hapta hamō-managhō, yōi hapta hamō-
vacanghō, yōi hapta hamō-shyaothnāonghō:
yaēshām asti hamem mand, hamem vacō
hamem shyathanem; hamō pata-ca fra-
sasta-ca, yō Dadhvāo Ahurō Mazdāo.*

Who are seven of one thought, who are seven of one word, who are seven of one deed: whose thought is the same, whose word is the same, whose deed is the same; and whose Father and Lord is the same—the Creator, Ahura Mazda.

(*Yasht*, xiii, 23.)

THE ancient Āryan Religion has been known in Irān as the *Māzdayasna* faith, *i.e.*, the faith which enjoins the worship of Mazda, the Great Lord of all. The various "Powers of Nature," too, were taken as aspects of the One Great Being and were worshipped as such. The Great Lord was, above all the Lord of Righteousness—*Ritasya Patih* or *Ashahe Ratush*—and in His worship the ethical

aspect of His Power and Greatness was duly emphasised. In both the branches of the Āryan peoples we find the *Asha* (*Rita*)-aspect of God brought into great prominence even in the earliest hymns. Both Ahura and Asura Varuṇa embody the highest ideal of Truth and Righteousness. The other Beings worshipped were regarded as so many varied aspects of the activities of the Godhead. But in course of time we find these subordinate Āryan Deities becoming more and more of importance and even usurping the position once occupied by the Highest alone. Of course this applies only to what may be styled "popular religion," for the Sages always recognised the fundamental unity, as the Vedic Sage has sung :

The TRUTH is one, the Wise in many ways do call It.

The reason for the subordinate Deities coming to the fore is not very difficult to understand. The pure ethical concept of the Supreme Being as the Lord of *Asha* (*Rita*), as we find in the case of Ahura or of Asura Varuṇa, though very grand, can be grasped by most men only intellectually.

In religion something more is needed than the mere acceptance by the brain ; and such a purely ethical concept leaves the *hearts* of the majority of poor mortals untouched. It does not satisfy the yearning of the average human heart, which needs something more tangible to which to attach itself. Hence what is satisfying to the Sage and the Philosopher, fails to satisfy the ordinary man at lower levels, even though intellectually he may accept the position taken up by the former. Humanity at ordinary levels needs a Deity, whom they can understand with less effort, whose workings they can perceive easier, and consequently upon whom they can with far better satisfaction to themselves pour out the deep love and yearnings of their hearts. Hence we find that among the Āryans the subordinate Powers like Indra (the Thunderer, who brings the fertilising rains), Mitra (the Sun), Agni (the Fire), and others come gradually to the front. The more these come into prominence the further does the pure ethical conception of the Godhead recede into the

background; hence we find in the Veda that Asura Varuṇa, in all but the very earliest hymns occupies a position not much superior to that of Indra or Agni or Mitra. In fact we get the impression that the deity invoked for one particular hymn is for the time being regarded as supreme. Thus from the worship of the One, the masses of the Āryans passed to "polytheism," and the essence of the Law of Asha, the Law of the Asura Varuṇa also came to be more or less forgotten. Often we find the Vedas re-emphasising the Ancient Truth, "the One Truth, which the Wise in many ways call"; but in general the people as a whole went on with their worship of the Shining Ones, "the Gods," who were better perceptible to their hearts and to their intellects.

Such seems to have been the state of the Āryan religion when the Prophet came with His Message. He took up once again the eternal Law of Asha, and making that the keystone of His religion, He taught once again that the One Lord of Life—Ahura Mazda—was alone to be worshipped and none other besides. He

restored once again to the Mazdayasna faith its original purity and its worship of the One. He admitted no other Deity to an equal position with Ahura and in this sense He was a strict monotheist. This monotheism has remained stamped upon His religion so deeply that all through the millennia of its history it never was anything but monotheistic in the strictest sense of the term. Even though in later ages the popular worship of the older Deities was in a great measure restored, still the position of Ahura Mazda remained that of the First Creator and the Father of All. They are henceforth not His equals, but His creatures and ministers. Even the highest among these Adorable Ones (*Yazatas*) worship Ahura and obey His Law of Asha.

Among these Adorable Ones the first in rank are the Eternal Six known as the Holy Immortals, the *Amesha-Spentas*. These six and three others—Sraosha, Ashi and Ātar—are the only "Deities" whose names occur in the *Gāthās*. Zaratrusthra in the course of expounding His view of life had no need to talk about any

of the rest and he seems, therefore, to have neglected them. Of these nine, who have been admitted in the sermons of the Prophet Himself, eight are palpable personifications. They are attributes of the Lord of Life, at times but thinly veiled; and the ninth—Atar—is the Symbol of the Zarathushtrian Faith.

The six Holy Immortals, as described by the Master represent the six principal aspects of the Divine Lord. Sometimes Ahura Himself is mentioned together with them and then They are spoken of together as the *seven* Holy Immortals, Ahura being then almost a *primus inter pares*. They all work together in the Government of the universe, and the Six are among the earliest of the Creation of Ahura. In the *Gāthās*, as may be expected, we get Them in the purest and most ethical aspect. There They are doubtless the Powers or Attributes of the Supreme.

It is rather remarkable that three out of the Six Holy Immortals should represent the masculine¹ aspects of God and the

¹ These three names are really neuter in gender.

other three the feminine aspect. This is but one of the many hints we get in Zoroaster's religion of the absolute equality of the sexes.

The first among these, in the Gāthās, is Asha-Vahishta (the highest or the best Asha). The Prophet basing all His teaching on Asha, quite naturally gave the first place to Asha. In the Gāthās the word Asha is used in the highest sense it is capable of bearing. Often we have a clear personification, and then Asha is a veritable Archangel, the highest of the Angel hosts standing next to God Himself. Thus throughout the Gāthās the word Asha can be taken either in the highest abstract sense of the term, or as a mighty Angel, who directs the universe into the Path of Righteousness.

The high concept of Asha, although it forms the core of Zoroaster's teaching, could not long continue at its high spiritual and intellectual level. The average human being needs something more tangible than this abstract idea of Asha, and so we find that gradually Asha gets a lower place in the Angel Hierarchy, and

the more easily understood Good Mind takes the position next to Ahura, which originally belonged to Asha. And because Asha was the most important part of the Prophet's message, He came naturally to be associated with the outward symbol of His religion—Fire. So, very early we find Asha-Vahishta representing Fire, the symbol of Zoroastrian Religion. The Prophet chose the Fire as His symbol, for it is the purest among God's creations. It has besides two special peculiarities, which can also be used to symbolise two important spiritual qualities. In the first place Fire has got the power of immediately transmuting everything it touches into a likeness of itself. And secondly, the flames of fire always tend *upwards*, and thus aptly symbolise our yearning for the Higher Life. So this association of Asha, the Eternal Law, by which all progress upwards is guided, and the Fire was a very natural step. And in Sasanian times the name of this Holy Immortal—in the Pahlavi language, Ardibesht—is used for Fire, and He is regarded as the Lord of Fire.

As already hinted above, the first position in the Angel Hierarchy has been taken on later by Vohu-Manō, originally the second Holy Immortal. His name signifies Good Mind, and is the most obvious among the six abstractions. In this case the personification is also very slight, at any rate in the Gāthās. Among the three commandments of Zoroaster's religion *humata* (good thought) stands first. Hence, when in later times the much more complex Asha was closer identified with Fire, a material symbol, in the same proportion does the concept of Vohu-Manō become more important as symbolising a beautiful ethical thought. So, in later Zoroastrian theology Bahman (Vohu-Manō) occupies the first place among the Holy Immortals, while Ardi-besht takes the second.

In the Gāthās, too, Vohu-Manō occupies a very high place. He and Asha stand on either side of Ahura Mazda. It is Vohu-Manō who leads mankind up to Asha. A man who chooses not to tread the Path of Asha gets no help from Good Mind. "The gifts of Good Mind are for

those who work for the Lord." In all this we see the pure ethical conception of this Holy Immortal. He, in short, represents the highest mental purity that a human being is capable of achieving.

Good Mind naturally implies loving kindness and goodwill towards all beings. This goodwill and love embraces not merely mankind but also our younger brethren of the animal creation. Kindness to animals, especially to those who are of use to men and help him forward in his progress and civilisation, is a cardinal virtue enjoined in Zoroastrianism. All animal creation is under the special protection of Good Mind, and cruelty to animals is a sin against Him. Quite logically therefore many Parsis have held that early Zoroastrians must have abstained from meat-eating. It is certain that "blood-sacrifices" and the offering of any animal products to the Deities, except perhaps milk, is inconsistent with calling this Archangel "the Guardian of the animal creation". Offerings of animal flesh were, indeed, made in later times, and are even now made, in many

ceremonies, but the present day Parsis, who have devoted any serious thought to this matter, have begun to see the inconsistency of such procedure, and slowly but surely flesh offerings are disappearing from modern Zoroastrian ceremonies.

The third Holy Immortal is Kshathra-Vairya (Supreme Power, literally Power at Will).¹ He represents the Perfect Strength, the Omnipotence and the Universal Sovereignty of the Lord. He too is nearly a pure abstraction in the Gāthās. The man who obeys the Law of God obtains the Divine Power. We pray for this Divine Strength to help us further along the Path. We have already seen, how in the Ahuna-Vairya verse, Asha, Vohu-Manō and Kshathra-Vairya are spoken of in turn.

In later times Shahrivar (Kshathra-Vairya) becomes the Lord of the Mineral Kingdom, the Guardian Angel of the metals and the precious things of the great earth. This seems to have been partly the later dogma about "the ordeal

¹ I do not quite see eye to eye with western Christian scholars who would translate this name as "the Wished for Kingdom". It is too reminiscent of the Paternoster.

of Molten Lead," through which the soul had to pass at "the last judgment," and where necessarily the Strength of the Lord would be needed to come through safely. Probably another reason for investing Shahrivar with the guardianship of the metals lies in the fact that the possession of metals forms the outer sign of earthly sovereignty. The earthly lord should possess besides gold and silver also iron and steel and copper and bronze. The last four which supplied the weapons and the armour of the soldiers represent strength much more effectively than do the first two.

Spenta-Ārmaiti (Holy Devotion) is the fourth of the Holy Immortals and the first on the feminine side. There seems to have been some sort of correspondence between these two groups, masculine and feminine, of the Holy Immortals, though this correspondence is not quite clearly brought out. Still Asha and Ārmaiti, who stand at the head of each group are clearly connected and have a certain number of features in common. She is as essential to the faithful as Asha is.

Devotion is the first requisite for the human being, for it is devotion that sanctifies the heart. The devoted in heart alone can travel the path in safety, and so Spenta-Ārmaiti is to be the constant guide and friend of the Zoroastrian throughout his life. In the very beginning of the Zoroastrian *credo*, the worshipper says, "I choose for myself the excellent Holy Devotion, may she be with me."¹ And the faithful believer longs for the approach of Ārmaiti accompanied by Asha. When the Zoroastrian dies, he is left in the tender care of Ārmaiti. After the dead body has been placed inside the Tower of Silence, and its destruction by the birds has begun, all assembled there repeat "Salutations unto Ārmaiti".

Ārmaiti has also been identified with Mother Earth who sustains and nourishes us all upon her bosom. We have our birth from her, we are nourished in life by her and after death we rest in her bosom again.

The twin Amesha-Spentas, Haurvatāt and Ameretatāt, stand for "Wholeness"

¹ *Yasna*, xii, 2.

and "Immortality". They are always spoken of together in the Gāthās. Haurvatāt represents Spiritual Wholesomeness and Spiritual Health, in other words the Perfection of our Father in Heaven. Ameretatāt is the Immortality, the Freedom from Death which invariably accompanies Perfection. In the Gāthās these two names occur but in few places.

On the physical plane Haurvatāt and Ameretatāt are the Guardians of the waters and of the vegetable kingdom respectively. They figuratively represent the ambrosial food of heaven and the resulting immortality. Their blessings to the worshipper take the shape of perfect physical health and endurance of the body, and hence their connection with the healing and health-giving waters and plants, which should in an ideal age form the only food of mankind.¹

¹ As already hinted above there are a number of Parsi scholars who held that meat-eating was not the rule in the days of the Gāthās. However that may have been, there are clear indications in the Gāthās about the sin of killing animals. A most remarkable passage is Yasna, xxxii, 8, in which the fall of Yima is said to have been due to the reason that he "desiring to satisfy men gave our people flesh of the ox to eat". And tradition also states quite clearly that in the golden age, before the fall of Yima, mankind did not use flesh for food.

CHAPTER VII

THE ADORABLE ONES

*Mainyava-ca yazata yazamaide, yoi vanghazdao
ashavanō.*

We worship the spiritual Yazatas who are the givers of the better (rewards) and are full of Asha.

(*Gāh ii, 6.*)

ZARATHUSHTRA recognised the worship of only one Supreme Being, the Great Lord alone, the One without a second. He also declared the Six Attributes of the Lord to be worthy of our adoration, and in places spoke of Them as Divinities, the Holy Immortals. All the numerous host of Āryan Deities receded into the background, except only Ātar (Fire), who being the living symbol of Zarathushtra's Faith, was also given a place in the Gāthās. Besides the six Holy Immortals and Ātar, there are two other Beings mentioned in the Gāthās—Sraosha and Ashi—who are also to be taken in much

the same way as the Amesha-Spentas. These two also form a pair, masculine and feminine.

In later Zoroastrianism all these nine have continued, but the Holy Immortals form a class by themselves, and may be called the Archangels. The other three become the most important members of a class of Divine Beings called the Yazatas (the Adorable Ones) and these we may call Angels. Sraosha the oldest among them all and the most ethical of them all naturally is the greatest among them. The Yazatas, however, are not merely three in number.¹ Among them we find a large number of the ancient Āryan Deities who have regained some of their old importance as Deities. And we also find among these later Yazatas some fresh names which can be only regarded as Divine Attributes which have been "personified". We may, however, lay down as a general rule that the earlier Gāthic conceptions of the Divine Attributes are much loftier and on a higher spiritual

¹ The number of Yazatas usually given, including the Holy Immortals is thirty-three. The same is the fundamental number of the Hindu *Devas*.

level altogether than these later ones. Another important point which has always to be remembered is that whatever the original idea of the Yazatas may have been, they are one and all regarded as Powers subordinate to Ahura Mazda, and as the Servants of His Will. And with these Adorable Ones also we find their spiritual level much lower in the later ages than in the days when they first began to be worshipped. This degradation had gone in some cases to the extent of their images being made and worshipped in the later ages.¹

From what has been said above we may be enabled to classify these Yazatas in a rough sort of way. There are (i) Yazatas who are "personified Divine Attributes," (ii) Yazatas who represent original Indo-Irānian Deities, and (iii) Yazatas who represent the Elements and the Powers of Nature. The last two necessarily overlap more or less. The first group is peculiarly Zoroastrian and in the case of these Yazatas, it was doubtless

¹ e.g., the image of Anāhita mentioned by Greek writers, and also the images of Irānian Deities found on coins in Kashmir and elsewhere.

the Holy Immortals that supplied the idea. These were probably the earliest of the post-Zoroastrian additions to the pantheon. Among the Yazatas the three mentioned in the Gāthās are of course predominant.

Of these three, even in the Gāthās, *Sraosha* is the most important. There He is often mentioned in close association with the Holy Immortals and so in the later theology He naturally is the first among the Adorable Ones. He is distinctly Gāthic in conception and, like the other Holy Immortals, He typifies a cardinal virtue. The name is derived from the root *srū* (Sanskrit *srū*), "to hear," and means literally, "hearing". It means "listening to the commandments of God" or "obedience to the commands of God". *Sraosha* therefore typifies the highest virtue of a human being, Obedience to and submission to the Divine Law. In one oft repeated passage of the Gāthās, the Prophet desires that "*Sraosha* may approach with Good Mind" the man whom Mazda loves.¹ In other words He

¹ The *Kem-nā Mazdā* hymn (*Yasna*, xliv, 16).

desires that all human beings who tread the Path may have clear understanding (Good Mind) plus the desire to obey (Sraosha), in other words that not mere blind faith should inspire all His followers.

This being the original idea of Sraosha it was but natural that He should become in later ages the chief among the Yazatas. As with all Gâthic ideals Sraosha, also becomes more and more anthropomorphic with the passing of time. Some of the attributes of the earlier Āryan Divinities came to be attached to Sraosha; such, for instance, is His double weapon, holding which uplifted, He guards night and day all the creatures of Mazda. Sraosha is the Guardian Angel of Humanity, for Obedience to the Law of Mazda is the highest protection humanity could have. And we also read that the most efficacious of His weapons are the Holy Chants,¹ with which He smites and routs from off the face of the earth the Evil One and all his crew. He is the special Guardian of the Zoroastrian flock. His aid is especially

¹ One very significant epithet of Sraosha is *Tanu-mānthra*, "He whose body is the Holy Chants".

invoked at night when the powers of evil stalk abroad, and the cock, who ushers in the day, is the bird sacred to Sraosha.¹ He is invoked for protection during hours of darkness and peril, both material and spiritual. Wherever He is invoked and made welcome, there people become more righteous in thought, word and deed.

As Guardian of Humanity Sraosha is necessarily very closely associated with the human soul after the death of the body. All death ceremonies are closely associated with Him. The funeral service begins and ends by invoking Him, and the ceremonies during the first three days are also closely associated with Him. On the morning of the fourth day after death the soul crosses over "the Bridge" into the next world, and there, on the other side, it is judged for all its actions done upon this earth; and at this time of trial Sraosha is his chief helper before the great judges of the dead.²

A very curious idea grew up in later times that King Vīshṭāspa, the first Royal

¹ No orthodox Parsi would eat the cock.

² Mithra and Rashnu, see below.

disciple of Zarathushtra, was an incarnation of Sraosha. This is borne out by the fact that all the epithets showered upon the King are identical with those which are usually found with Sraosha.¹

Ashi Vanguhi (Holy Blessing) has been constantly associated with Sraosha. The name is the same as the Sanskrit word *āśis* (blessing). In the Gāthās she is a sort of feminine counterpart of Sraosha, and indicates the blessings of heaven that follow upon Obedience to the Eternal Law, for the Teaching of the Prophet of Irān has also been: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you". In later ages the blessings were understood more in the material sense of riches and physical well-being, and Ashi becomes a sort of Goddess of Fortune; indeed, in the Sanskrit version of the Avesta texts by Nairyosang (*cirsa*, A.D. 1200) the name is always rendered by Lakshmī, the Hindu Goddess of Fortune. All the great prophets and

¹ Cf. for example, *Yasht*, xiii, 99.

Heroes of Irān have been represented as having invoked her aid, in other words, they have prayed for the Spiritual Blessings which Ashi essentially represents.

One of the greatest sources of happiness for man here below is the union of man and woman, knit strong in bonds of holy love for each other and for their progeny. The married state has been upheld by all Āryans as the most desirable in life. The continuance of the race, and consequently also of the Āryan ideals, has always been regarded as the most sacred duty of every man and of every woman both in India as well as in Irān. And Ashi Vanguhi is the special guardian of Holy Matrimony. She guards the chastity of women and the sanctity of the home. This is, therefore, an additional reason why she is associated with Sraosha.

Ātar is the third of the Yazatas who has been expressly mentioned in the Gāthās. Zarathushtra mentions *Ātar* more in the sense of the Divine Spark which glows in the heart of every man, a Spark of the Divine Flame. The

Prophet chose Fire as the outward symbol of His Faith, because to Him Fire, as the holiest of the Elements, had a special signification. And in fact Fire most aptly symbolises the spiritual nature of the Eternal Truth. He is the one Yazata in the Avesta who has throughout remained on the spiritual level, even though He has been identified with the physical element Fire. This is because even physical Fire typifies something higher, and one feels instinctively that "it is not of the earth, earthly". For this same reason *Ātar* has never been anthropomorphised in Zoroastrian scriptures. Even the later hymns speak of Him always as *Authro Ahurahe Mazdāo*, the Son of Ahura Mazda. He is the chief cleanser from all sins. He also represents the sacred Fire of the domestic hearth, the Fire which is still maintained as sacred in many Parsi homes. We have already seen above that in later times Asha-Vahishta became the Archangel of Fire, and *Ātar* is necessarily closely associated with this Holy Immortal. Coupled with the epithet *Verethraghna* (victorious)

the name of *Ātar*¹ represents the most sacred of the Fires in Parsi Temples. This sacred Fire is never allowed to be extinguished under any circumstances. And the Temples known as *Ātash-Behrāms* are among the most sacred of Zoroastrian shrines to-day. There are not more than ten such shrines in the whole world. In the oldest of these, now situated at *Udwāda*, about a hundred miles north of Bombay, there is still burning the Sacred Flame of the *Irān-Shāh* (the Lord of Irān), Whom the Pilgrim Fathers of the Parsis had carried along with them through all the years of struggle and suffering against the Arab conquerors of their motherland.

Daēnā (the Faith) is another "personified abstraction"; and her name is not found in the *Gāthās* but in the later Avesta. We find her name coupled with another "personified abstraction"—*Chishti* (Wisdom). The worshipper demands from Her "clear vision". It is also remarkable that the name given to

¹ *Ātar-Verethraghna* becomes in later language *Ātash Behrām*.

one of the "daughters" of Zoroaster is Pouru-chishti (Perfect Wisdom).¹

Two important Divinities are in the later Avesta closely associated with Sraosha in the task of judging the souls of the departed. They are Rashnu and Mithra. On the morning of the fourth day after the soul has "departed"² from the body, it crosses over the *Chinvat*-bridge. This is the bridge leading into the other world, where the good and the bad are separated. On the other side sit the Judges, who judge the departed soul and allot the proper reward in exact proportion to its conduct upon earth.

Of these two Judges, *Rashnu* always bears the epithet *Razishta* (the most just). As the Judge after death, He is the foe of all unrighteous people. *Rashnu* is sometimes also associated with Sraosha as Judge of the departed. Here again the original idea seems to have been Divine Justice meting out rewards and punishments for actions done here below, in

¹ I believe that "the children" of the Prophet are allegorical.

² The word used in the Avesta, *irista*, means "departed".

strict accord with the Law of Action and Reaction, which is a Law of Ahura, and with the strictest impartiality. The departed soul stands before the Judges in all its nakedness, stripped of all the glamour which invested it during its life upon this earth. And at this hour of its trial the soul has none to accompany it except its own deeds upon earth. The soul of man has got perfect freedom to choose its own path in life,¹ but once the choice has been made, it must bear whatever results follow. In one place (*Yasht*, xxii) there is a very poetical description of a womanly shape—the embodiment of the deeds done in life—(beautiful or ugly as the departed has made her) meeting the soul halfway, across the bridge and accompanying it before the Judges.

Mithra is closely associated with Rashnu as Judge and He is one of the ancient Āryan Divinities of Light. He is the ancient Vedic Mitra and closely associated with Asura Varuṇa. In Irānian mythology He is also invoked

¹ Hence it is called *urvān* "the chooser".

together with the other Solar Deity, Hvare-Kshaēta and the daily morning prayer of the Zoroastrians is addressed to both these Divinities. One of the longest of the *Yashts* (Hymns of Praise) is dedicated to Mithra.¹ This hymn is a fine piece of ancient Irānian poetry rising at times to epic grandeur. The Giver of Light, the Lord and Inspirer of Life, Mithra, very naturally is the foe of all the Powers of Darkness and of what they represent in the moral world, falsehood. Mithra also represents equity and justice, hence too he is the presiding Lord of the courts of Justice upon earth. The word of the ancient Irānian was always held sacred; and Mithra who presides over all Law and Justice gives His name to legal contracts.² In later Achæmenian days the cult of Mithra developed into a definite school of religious thought, and with this cult were also early associated certain mystic and esoteric ceremonies and symbols. Doubtless the contemporary Greek mysteries

¹ *Yasht x.*

² The word *mithra* as a common noun means "contract".

had also some influence in giving final shape to the Mithra cult, and its spread throughout the Greek, and later the Roman world was truly remarkable. All over Europe, even in far-off England, shrines of Mithra have been found, and in the early days of Christianity the worship of this ancient Āryan Sun-God was a very dominant cult and had its influence upon the new religion as well.

Another Āryan Deity whose worship was revived in the later Avesta days was *Verethraghnā* (Vedic, *Vṛitrahan*)—the slayer of the Arch-Fiend, *Vṛitra*. Among the Hindus the Slayer of *Vṛitra* becomes later on the Lord of all the Gods, Indra. Among the Irānians, however, Indra is a Demon, second only to Ahriman, but *Verethraghna* is one of the greatest of the Divinities. The long hymn (*Yasht* xiv) reminds one of the Indra hymns of the Vedas. It is very vigorous and full of epic grandeur, and one almost hears the clash of battle. He is the Angel of Victory and He is invoked by both the opposing armies arrayed for battle. One very remarkable point with regard to

Him is that He appears in various shapes. The hymn enumerates ten such, including several of animals.

Among the older Indo-Irānian Deities, whose worship was revived in post-Zoroastrian ages, may be mentioned also a group of Heavenly Lights—*Hvare-Khshaēta* (Sūrya, the Sun), *Māongha* (Māsā), the Moon, and *Ushah* (Ushas, the Dawn). Of these the first, *Hvare-Khshaēta* (later *Khurshīd*) is always closely associated with the Sun as Mithra. He shows a close resemblance to the Vedic Sūrya. He is “immortal, radiant and swift-horsed”; He is the eye of Lord Ahura. The hymns dedicated to Him (*Niyāyish* i, and *Yasht* vi) give us some of the finest poetry in the Avesta. Through the physical Sun the worshipper approaches the real Lord and Life-Giver of our system of worlds.

Māongha (the Moon) is closely associated with the animal creation. He is called the “possessor of the seed of cattle,” and is thus closely associated with *Vohu-Manō*, the Guardian Angel of the animal world, and also with *Dravāspa* (the

feminine Deity) who gives health and strength to cattle and to all animals.¹

Ushah in the Vesta is not invoked so very frequently as in the Vedas; She has but one short hymn addressed to Her, and though it is made up from various sources still it is a very beautiful piece full of very high ethical thought. The whole of the *Gāh* v² is addressed to Ushahina, who is the same Deity in the masculine gender.

There are several other astronomical Deities, the most notable among whom is *Tishtrya*, the Dog-star. As with other Indo-European nations He is closely associated with rain. The *Yasht* dedicated to Him (vii) is a fine and forcible epic fragment. The account of His fight with Apaosha, the Demon of Drought, and of His ultimate victory has in it echoes of the ancient Āryan description of the fight of Indra with the Demon Vṛitra, who also held the waters prisoner.

¹ On the days of the month consecrated to Vohumanō, Māongha, Dravāsra (Gosh) and to Rāma (Vāyu) orthodox Persia abstain from meat.

² Originally this was *Gāh* i, as the day began from midnight.

Other "Powers of Nature" invoked in the Avesta are the Waters, the Wind and the Earth. The first name attained a considerable importance in the later Achæmenian period when *Aradvisūra Anāhita* (the Deity of the Waters) is mentioned as the Patron of the King of Kings side by side with Ahuramazda and Mithra. She was regarded at that time as one of the important Guardians of the Imperial power of Irān. The worship of Anāhita spread very far and in many ways she represents the female counterpart of Mithra. One very long *Yasht* (v) is dedicated to her. She is there described as a beautiful and glorious maiden, Who is worshipped by all the great heroes of ancient Irān in turn and Who gives to them help in times of difficulty. Her image was worshipped in Persia as Greek writers have recorded, and some scholars are of opinion that the description given in *Yasht* v, follows closely her actual image as set up by Artaxerxes Mnemon.¹

¹ Dhalla, *Zoroastrian Theology*, p. 138. I have to acknowledge my great debt to this work for much of what is contained in this chapter.

Rāman (the ancient *Vāyu*) represents the Wind. The epithets that are showered upon Him are almost an echo of those which are used of Ahura Mazda Himself. In the *Yasht* dedicated to Him (xv) the list of His suppliants is headed by Ahura Himself! He also has been invoked by the successive rulers of Irān and He has helped all the good among them, but refused His help to the wicked ones.

Zām (Mother Earth) is also invoked. But the *Yasht* known as the *Zām Yasht* (xix) is devoted to the history of the Imperial Glory (*Kavaēm Khvarenō*) of Irān, the possession of which also meant the possession of the Earth. This Glory is said to have descended upon each of the Royal Sages of Irān one after the other, and to have departed from him when he died or proved unworthy. The whole of this *Yasht* is, therefore, the history of the Irānians. And it is note-worthy that in the later Persian Epic the *Shāh-Nāmeḥ*, the history of "the First Law-Givers" of Irān¹ agrees very closely with the Avestan account.

¹ This is the meaning of the name given to the first dynasty of the ancient Irān, *Peshdādī*.

CHAPTER VIII.
SOME ZOROASTRIAN CEREMONIES
AND CUSTOMS

“There comes a day, Spitama Zarathushtra, or a night when the cattle leave the master, or the master leaves the cattle, and the soul leaves the body full of desires. Righteousness alone, which is the greatest, best and finest of all that is in existence, never parts from man . . . For the ox turns to dust, silver and gold turn to dust, the valiant hero turns to dust, all mortals turn to dust; what one thing does not turn to dust is the righteousness which a man practises upon the earth.”

Aogemadaēca.

SINCE coming out to India the Parsis have adopted three things belonging to the people of this land—the language, the dress and part of the marriage ceremony. There are, of course, a large number of minor ceremonials and superstitions that have crept into Parsi life in the course of the many centuries that they have lived in this country. Some of these have

been due to the inevitable deterioration in the older ritual, when the purpose of the ancient ceremony was forgotten and only the outer husk remained. And some have been directly borrowed from the surrounding Hindu population of Gujarāt.

Still, on the whole, the Parsi community has kept up its ancient traditions and has maintained an individual existence, even though in actual numbers they seem seldom to have exceeded some hundred thousand in India. Having lived in India now for over eleven centuries, and having adopted the language and the dress of the land, the Parsis have outwardly merged into the Indian people forming but one of the many communities of the country. But on the most important occasions of human life—initiation, marriage and death—the Parsis clearly show their individual existence as a separate people, distinctly different from the other races of India.

The initiation ceremony, or the *Navjot*, is the occasion when the child is admitted into the Zoroastrian fold, and is then invested with the outward symbols of the

Faith—the shirt (*sudreh*) and the girdle (*kusti*). This investiture is a very ancient Āryan custom and is pre-Zoroastrian. It has been practised among all the Āryans since immemorial ages. Both the Hindus and the Zoroastrians have kept it up to this day. But there are some remarkable differences to be observed between the two peoples to-day. In the first place, among the Parsis *both boys and girls* are invested with the shirt and the girdle, whereas among the Hindus the investiture is for boys alone and not for girls.¹ The Zoroastrians have kept up the ancient form of the dress almost unchanged, *viz.*, both the shirt and the girdle. But among the Hindus the shirt had dwindled down to a mere thread—the sacred thread worn across the chest and over the right shoulder, while the girdle, though worn at the time of the investiture, has dropped out almost completely. There is a third thing also necessary with the shirt and the girdle, a covering for the head. Fifty years ago

¹ The Hindu girls did have the investiture in the old days; and even to-day when a man marries he puts on two sacred threads for the occasion.

no Parsi would have remained bareheaded either by day or by night; and even to-day, though the men have adopted the European costume and they go about bareheaded most of the time, still at the times of prayers, inside the temples and during all religious ceremonies the wearing of a small velvet or silken skull-cap is compulsory. Orthodox and old fashioned women tie up their hair with a white cotton kerchief, so as to have the head always covered, and even though to-day the kerchief has been discarded, still at prayer time their head must be covered either with the kerchief or with their silk *sāri*.¹ Among the Hindus the tuft of hair worn on the top of the head by the men—the *shikhā*—corresponds in its original object with the cap of the Parsi.

The Navjot (literally, “the New Birth”) ceremony marks the second birth of the child, *i.e.*, into the Zoroastrian fold. The ceremony, it is enjoined, should take place between the ages of seven and fifteen; but it is rarely postponed beyond the age

¹ Cf. the similar injunction for women during prayers among the Christians and the Jews.

of puberty and usually the age is between seven and nine. After this investiture the Zoroastrian has to wear the shirt and the girdle day and night (except while bathing), and these constitute the dress of the body of a Zoroastrian when it is carried to the last resting place.

The shirt is a loose garment of white cotton,¹ the colour implying Asha, the fundamental doctrine of Zoroaster's Faith. It is called *sudreh*, which word, according to some scholars, means "the Good Path". It is usually short-sleeved and reaches down nearly to the knees. It has no collar and is cut low down over the chest; and in the centre there is a small pouch or bag-shaped attachment sewn on. This is called the *gireh-bān*. This is the most important part of the garment, for it is the symbolical repository of the good thoughts, the good words and the good deeds of the wearer.

The *kusti* or the sacred girdle implies that the wearer is girded and ready to follow the commands of his Master, Zoroaster. The *kusti* is woven out of

¹ In colder Irān it might have been made of white wool.

white lamb's wool, and the process of weaving it is a complex one. It is prepared, as a rule, only by women of the priestly class, though nowadays sometimes non-priestly women also may weave it.¹ First of all the wool is spun into a fine thread, and two threads of the requisite length are twisted together, symbolising the union of the Two Spirits for manifestation. Then seventy-two such double strands are taken and woven together into a long thin hollow tape. The number seventy-two represents the seventy-two chapters of the *Yasna*, the most important book of the Scriptures. The hollow tape is then turned carefully inside out, after which there is a ceremonial washing and finally it is rolled up tightly. Every detail in the preparation of the *kusti* is symbolic, the seventy-two strands are divided into six groups of twelve each, these numbers also having definite significance.

As worn over the *sudreh*, the *kusti* goes round the waist thrice, to signify the three commandments of Zoroaster—*humata*,

¹ In any case it must be woven by a Zoroastrian. Some years ago some Hindus started making *kusti*, but the Parsi women broke up their apparatus completely.

hūkhta, huvarshta. It is secured by a "sailor's knot" before and behind. Each twist of these knots is meant to bring one important truth to the mind of the wearer : (1) that God is the One Eternal Being, (2) that the Mazdayasni Faith is the true Faith, (3) that Zoroaster is the true inspired Prophet of God, and (4) that the wearer shall try to obey the three commandments.

The state of matrimony has always been regarded as the most important part of life by all Āryans. In the *Vendīdād* it is clearly stated that Ahura Mazda is better pleased with a married man than with an unmarried one, and that He is better pleased with a man having progeny than with one who has none.¹ It has always been regarded as the bounden duty of the Zoroastrian to marry and to bring up a family, and thus to ensure the continuance of the race and the religion.

When the Parsis landed at Sanjān in Gujarāt, and asked leave from the Yādava

¹ *Vendīdād*, iv, 47. Cf. also *Ibid.*, iii, 2: "That place is happy over which a pious man builds a house with fire, cattle, wife, children and good followers".

Prince of that land¹ to settle down in his territory, one of the conditions exacted from them is said to have been an alteration in the marriage ceremony. The time for the celebration is said to have been changed from that date from daylight to immediately after sunset.² The essential part of the ceremony consists of the recital three times of the marriage contract by the officiating priest. The original formula is in the Pahlavi language, which was the language of Irān at the time of the Arab conquest. The same ceremony is often repeated in Sanskrit as well, out of deference to a promise given to the Yādava Prince that the marriage ceremony should also be conducted in a language intelligible to the rulers of the land where they had been permitted to settle down.

The essential part of the marriage ceremony is as follows :

The Priest: " In the presence of this assembly, that has met together in . . . city, on the . . . day of month of . . . in the year

¹ This prince is usually called *Jādi Rānā* by the Parsis.

² Among the Zoroastrians of Persia the marriage still takes place during the daylight hours.

... of the Emperor Yazdezard Shahriyār of the Sāsānian dynasty¹ of auspicious Irān say whether you have agreed to take this maiden named . . . in marriage for this bridegroom in accordance with the rites and customs of the Mazda worshippers, promising to pay her 2,000 *dirhems* of pure white silver and two *dinārs* of standard gold of Nishāhpūr coinage?"

*The Witness for the Bridegroom:*² "I have".

¹ The Parsis at present use the *Yazdezardi* era, dating from the accession of Yazdezar Shahriyār (Yazdezard III.), the last Zoroastrian Emperor of Irān (A.D. 632-651). The present year (1926) is A.Y. 1295-96. The beginning of the New Year in Persia is reckoned from the Vernal Equinox (March 21st) since times immemorial. In India, however, one section of the Parsis begin their New Year sometime in August, while another section do so exactly thirty days later in September. The reason for this discrepancy is to be sought in the fact that in ancient Irān the secular year of 365 days was corrected so as to equal the true solar year by intercalation of one month every 120 years. Since the Arab conquest one section of the people observed this intercalation but *once*, while the others did not do so even once. And so there is this difference of exactly one month between the two methods of reckoning, while there is the difference of nearly *ten months* between the true calendar of ancient Irān and the modern Parsi one. In Persia itself the present Shah, H. M. Reza Shah Pahlavi, has ordered the ancient Iranian (*i.e.*, Zoroastrian) months to be introduced from the 21st March, 1926. The year is to have twelve months of 30 days each, with five extra days at the end. Every fourth year (corresponding to the European Leap Year) a sixth extra day has to be reckoned at the end of the year. Some of the Parsis in India have joyfully accepted this new Persian calendar, and signs are not wanting that the community in India will soon follow Persia's lead in this matter.

² He corresponds to "the best man" in European weddings. He is generally a near relation or a very intimate friend. Both he as well as the Witness for the Bride have to sign the marriage register in Bombay.

The Priest: "And have you and your family with pure mind and truthful thoughts, words and deeds, and for the increase of righteousness, agreed to give for ever and aye, this bride in marriage to . . . ?"

The Witness for the Bride: "I have agreed".

The Priest: "Have you desired to enter into this contract with pure mind and until Death do ye part?"

The Bridegroom and the Bride: "I have so desired".

The rest of the ceremony is the invocation of the blessings of God and of the Amesha-Spentas and of the Yazatas upon the newly joined couple and an address from the Priest to them as to their conduct in life.

The solemn hour of death and the ceremonies that follow naturally form the most important and the most impressive part of the ritual in every religion. Among the Zoroastrians it is the foremost bounden duty of the nearest relations at such a moment to repeat into the dying ears the sacred verses *Ashem Vohu* and

the *Ahuna Vairya*. The person dying if conscious is also required to join in these prayers.

As soon as the breath has left it, the body is regarded as impure, for it begins then to decay and to fall to pieces. It has therefore to be destroyed as soon as possible and in a manner as may be the least harmful to the living. Dead matter very soon becomes a centre of corruption, and hence in the disposal of a dead body care has to be taken that none of the pure Elements of Ahura Mazda are contaminated. The Mazda worshipper is enjoined "to expose the dead body to the Sun".¹ Hence the body is not to be burnt, neither is it to be buried, nor thrown into water. Therefore the structures known as "the Towers of Silence" are erected, wherever Parsis are congregated in any numbers, in which the dead are exposed without violating either the sense of decency and propriety, or any of the well thought out rules of the Zoroastrian religion.

These Towers of Silence are usually of a squat cylindrical shape, about 20 to 30

¹ *Vendīdād*, v, 13.

feet high, enclosed all round by a thick wall and open to the sky. The only entrance left is an iron gate situated on the eastern side of the wall, which is kept securely locked. Inside the Tower is a platform of solid masonry divided into three concentric rings, and right in the middle is a deep circular pit going down into the earth right up to the foundations. This pit also is constructed of solid masonry. The inner platform is made to slope uniformly and gently towards the central pit. In each of the three concentric rings shallow depressions of three different sizes are arranged radially. The outermost ring contains the largest of these and they are meant to receive the bodies of men, the middle ring has somewhat smaller depressions, which are meant for women, and the innermost ring contains the smallest sized depressions and these are meant for the bodies of children. Between these three rings there are narrow raised ledges running all round, separating them one from the other; and these serve as paths along which any part of the

interior may be approached without stepping over the bodies already exposed there. There are also narrow channels connecting each of the depressions with the central pit, along which all fluids may ultimately drain into it. The bottom of the central pit is covered over with layers of sand and charcoal so as to make it a perfect filter; and from here also radiate four underground channels, which also contain filter beds. These channels ultimately lead deep down into the soil, and thus all the fluids that ultimately enter the soil have been thoroughly filtered and rendered harmless.

Soon after the spirit has departed, the body is bathed and dressed in old worn out garments of white cotton. After the *sudreh* is put on, the nearest male relation (usually the eldest son) puts on the *kusti* reciting the appropriate prayers. The entire body is then swathed in a long white robe only the face and the ears showing. In the meanwhile a room in the house has been washed and in a corner sand is sprinkled on the floor or slabs of stone are laid thereon, and on

this the body is reverently deposited, until the hour of its removal has come. The body cannot be carried to the Tower except in the daylight hours and the usual time for the funeral is either in the morning or in the afternoon. As long as the body remains in the house a priest sits near reciting prayers, and keeping alight a fire in which incense and sandalwood is constantly burnt. None but the two Naseh-sālārs (corpse-bearers) can henceforth touch the body, and none may approach within three paces of the dead.

At the time appointed the two Naseh-sālārs come in with an iron bier,¹ on which the corpse has to be carried; and two priests stand at the door of the room and, facing the departed, recite aloud the *Ahunavaiti Gāthā* (*Yasna*, xxviii-xxxiv). When the recital is over the assembled friends and relations take the last leave of the departed, bowing low before the dead. Then the bier is covered over

¹ Any objects, except those made of metal or stone, which have come in contact with the dead body must be destroyed. The dresses of all who assist in carrying the dead body are completely destroyed after each funeral.

with a white sheet and carried out. There are other men to help the two "corpse-bearers," but these may not touch anything except the long handles of the bier. It may also be noted that the carriers of the body, the priests who say the prayers and the friends who follow up to the Tower of Silence, must be dressed in white, and they must always go *in pairs*, holding a white handkerchief between them. The colour of the dress indicates Purity and the going in pairs implies mutual help in the hour of sorrow. Arriving at the Tower the procession halts a certain distance from it, the bier is laid down, and the face is exposed for the last time. All assembled bow low in the last salutation; and then the two "corpse-bearers"¹ carry the bier into the Tower. None but these two may go inside. There the body is placed within its proper ring and denuded of all its clothing. For naked were we born into

¹ These are a special class of men maintained expressly by the community for this purpose. They are paid regularly and they cannot take up any other service. They may, however, follow any independent profession, but they have to be ready to serve any hour of the day or night that they are called out.

the world and naked must we go out of it.¹

The Tower of Silence, being open at the top, gives free access to birds of prey—the creatures meant by God to devour dead bodies. Incidentally it also emphasises the Zoroastrian virtue of charity even in death by feeding the birds with our cast-off bodies. In towns where there is a considerable Zoroastrian population such birds are encouraged to build their nests in the vicinity of the Towers. In places like Bombay the birds finish off the flesh within half an hour, and the bones are completely bleached by the sun and the air within a few days. These are then collected together and deposited within the central pit, where they crumble to dust. Thus rich and poor, saint and sinner, man, woman and child all find the same level at the long last and mingle their dust together. No monument is erected so that the rich may be marked out from the poor even in death.

¹ It is noteworthy that the dead body enters the Tower head first, because most human beings come into the world head first.

The rain washes out the Tower and the water running into the pit is filtered through the bone dust there and through the filter beds, and through the four channels and ultimately reaches the soil pure and clear.

The hygienic value of this system has been proved amply through centuries of usage. The Towers, as has been enjoined, are built upon an eminence near the town, but far from human habitation. This is to ensure that any possible stench may not offend the living. But even in places like Bombay and Calcutta, where the Towers are now surrounded by dwelling houses, there has never been any complaint of any smell or of any other sort of nuisance.¹

This much for the disposal of the *body*; but Zoroastrianism regards the *Soul* as infinitely the more important. On the morning of the fourth day after "the departure" the Soul crosses over the Chinvat-bridge where the good are separated from the bad, and on the other side

¹ A very careful investigation of this matter was made a few years ago in Bombay during a great epidemic, the results of which agree with what has been stated above.

it is judged by the Great Judges, Mithra and Rashnu, while Sraosha watches over them all. The Judges give the departed the exact reward for all acts done during the earthly life.

Prayers for the departed form an important part of the Zoroastrian ritual. Death anniversaries are carefully observed. One important item in many ceremonies is the invocation of the *Fravashis* of the departed. The idea of the *Fravashis* is somewhat akin to that of the *Pitris* among the Hindus or of the *Manes* among the Romans. But there are very important differences. The full philosophical development of this idea is found only in the later ages. The *Fravashi* is the highest and the eternal "principle" in a human being. Not only human beings but all creatures possess *Fravashis*, even plants. They persist through all eternity, they have existed since the beginning of creation and will go on till the end. They also seem to progress continually from one state to another higher and holier. The *Yazatas* and the *Amesha-Spentas* also have their *Fravashis*. Even Ahura

Mazda has His Fravashi. The Zoroastrian, however, only invokes the Fravashis of the good, for they are regarded as the guardians of creation, and they help the pious in all their good work and bless every effort at progress and righteousness. The long invocation to them (*Yasht* xiii) is a veritable "Calendar of the Great Men and Women" of old Irān.

In every important ceremony—such as the seasonal festivals, thanksgiving ceremonies, death anniversaries, etc.—the great departed are invoked and remembered by name. All the heroes of ancient Irān as well as all those who have served the community since the migration into India are remembered with gratitude. To have one's name included in this list is the highest honour a Parsi may attain. There is a general list which is used by Parsis all over India on such occasions, and each town has besides its own local list. Though the Parsi dead have no monuments erected to their memory, they have something far more glorious than any stone structure could be—the loving remembrance of their fellow men

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whom they had served. Verily to live in hearts we loved and served, to be mentioned constantly as examples of service, is the greatest monument the human heart could desire.

CHAPTER IX

THE PAST AND THE FUTURE OF
THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION

I dream of a day when the breath of the great Prophet Zarathushtra shall sweep again through His temples, fanning the ashes on the altars of these ancient fanes, and every altar shall flash into flame, and again from heaven the answering flames shall fall making the Iranian religion once more what it ought to be, a beacon-light for the souls of men, one of the greatest religions of the world.

ANNIE BESANT: *Four Great Religions.*

THE devotion and the championship of Vīshṭāspa, the Lord of Bactria, led to the acceptance of the Religion of Zarathushtra by the whole of Irān within a very short time. If we are to believe ancient tradition, after some fighting, the Prophet had the satisfaction of seeing the Faith firmly established in Irān, when He passed away at the age of seventy-seven. The followers of the Faith increased generation by generation and we have reason to believe that in the days of

Darius the Great (521-485 B.C.), perhaps even earlier, the Faith of Zoroaster had become the state-religion of Persia. Tradition has it that Darius caused all the sacred scriptures of Zoroastrianism to be collected after he was firmly established on the throne.¹ He had them inscribed on parchment in letters of gold. The whole collection was divided according to the subject matter into 21 Books, called the *Nasks*. This collection was deposited in the Imperial Library at Persepolis.

Kurush (Cyrus) the Great (558-529 B.C.) and Darius were both stalwart champions of their religion and their inscriptions prove their humble faith in and devotion to Ahura Mazda. Though they are both to be reckoned among the greatest of the Rulers of the ancient world, still in their inscriptions they ascribe all their greatness to the grace of

¹ Would not this be a reason why the religion of Zarathushtra is not mentioned by name in the Inscriptions of Darius? The great Behistun Inscription describes his achievements during the first fifteen years or so of his reign, which were all occupied in fighting against his enemies, against various rebels and usurpers and in consolidating his power. Naturally he had no time then to think about collecting the sacred writings of Zoroastrianism.

Ahuramazda. In his great Inscription at Behistun Darius says :

“What I have done, that did I all by the grace of Ahuramazda : Ahuramazda vouchsafed me help till I completed the work. May Ahuramazda protect me, . . . and likewise my House and these lands ! For this do I pray Ahuramazda : may Ahuramazda vouchsafe me this !

“O man ! this is Ahuramazda’s command to thee : Think no evil ; abandon not the right path ; sin not ! ”

The later Achæmenian inscriptions show a markedly different spirit. The pure ethical worship of Ahuramazda recedes somewhat into the background and though His name is mentioned, others like Mithra and Anāhita are also invoked side by side with Him. This was doubtless a sign of the weakening of the ancient faith.¹ And side by side with

¹ Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, I, pp. 93f., says about the inscriptions of Darius, “there is in them a directness, a dignity, a straightforwardness of diction, which entitle us to regard them as having real literary style”. Of the later inscriptions of Artaxerxes Ochus (361-336 B.C.) he says that the language itself has degenerated “and consequently with this decay of language appear signs of a degeneration in creed ; Ahuramazda no longer stands alone, but is associated with other gods, Mithra (the Sun) and Anāhita (Venus) ”.

this we also find the titles of the King of Kings growing more and more grandiloquent and arrogant. These inscriptions are the only relics we possess of Ancient Persian, but they eloquently indicate the pride that goeth before destruction. The true spirit of the Zoroastrian Faith had departed and the Imperial family was torn to pieces by mutual jealousies and internal factions and was becoming enfeebled by excessive luxury. So when the vigorous young Macedonian, Alexander the Great, led the armies of Greece against Persia, the whole Achæmenian power collapsed (330 B.C.).

Alexander's name has been execrated by all Irānians during all the succeeding centuries not only because he destroyed the Achæmenian power, but because he destroyed what was far more precious—the Holy Scriptures of Zarathushtra. In a drunken fit he set fire to the palace at Persepolis and the whole of the library perished in the conflagration.

For nearly two centuries after Alexander's death we have no record whatever of the Zoroastrian religion. Doubtless the

learned and devoted priests, who, had survived the invasion, had kept the faith alive in the hearts of the people and very likely they had also preserved in their memory the greater part of the Scriptures which had been destroyed.¹ The religion was by no means dead ; because the new rulers of Irān, the successors of Alexander, were quite tolerant in religious matters. But the religion had ceased to be the state religion for the time being and perhaps it was this very obscurity into which it had receded that caused it to be revived with renewed vigour when the hour came.

In the days immediately following Alexander's conquest there were many and various streams of religious thought flowing through Irān after the main stream of Zoroastrianism had been driven underground. There was in the first place the Greek religion, itself influenced on the one hand by Mithraism (which had been rising as a mystic school in Persia during the last days of the

¹ The Scriptures have always been thus remembered and preserved in the East.

Achæmenians), and on the other hand by the hoary religion of Egypt. Then again there were Buddhist missionaries who had spread far and wide all over Western Asia during the two centuries succeeding Alexander.¹ We must not also forget Judaism which was a considerable power in the world of thought. And by the time the revival of Zoroastrianism took place in Irān, Christianity had also arrived.

The rise of the Parthians (249 B.C.) marks a fresh era in the history of Persia. The Parthians were not Zoroastrians in the beginning and were probably not even Aryans.² The founder of the dynasty is said to have been helped by the rulers of Bactria, which land was the first to have accepted the religion of Zarathushtra. It seems that the Parthians got the religion of Zoroaster through the Bactrian Zoroastrians who had helped them, and when the

¹ After the impetus given to the religion by Asoka (272-232 B.C.).

² It is remarkable that the *Shāhnāme* does not mention the Parthians as rulers at all, but as knights at the court of the Kings of Irān. In fact the name used for these heroic knights is *Pahlawān*, which is identical phonetically with *Pārthava* (Parthian).

Parthian power had reached its zenith we find that Zoroastrianism also began to regain its lost dominion in Irān. At one epoch we find three great Irānian (Zoroastrian) powers dominating the whole of Western Asia. These were Pontus, Armenia and Parthia. Out of their rivalries the power of Parthia ultimately emerged victorious. The later Parthian rulers were definitely Zoroastrian, and they did much to bring together the scattered remnants of the older Scriptures. The work of recompiling the Avesta Texts was definitely begun by the Parthian Valkhash (Vologeses) I. (A.D. 51-77) but the work was finally completed only under the Sasanian Shāpūr II. (A.D. 309-379), surnamed the Great.

A new power was now arising in Persia. In the province of Pars, which earlier had given birth to the Achæmenians, there arose the family of Sāsān,¹ which rose to greatness with Artakhshathra (Ardashīr), who overthrew the last Parthian Ruler (A.D. 226) and established

¹ This family is traditionally believed to have been descended from a prince of the Achæmenian line, who had taken refuge in India after Alexander's conquest.

himself upon the throne of Kurush. The new dynasty was Aryan and Parsi and Zoroastrian. Ardashīr once again united the whole of Irān under his own sway, and restored the lost glories of the Achæmenian days. He was an ardent devotee of the Lord Zarathushtra, and he carried forward with great zeal the work, already begun by the later Parthian monarchs, of recompiling the Avesta Scriptures and of having them translated into the language of the people, the Pahlavi. The work was not finished during his reign and was carried on by his son and successor Shāpūr I. (A.D. 240-271).¹ Both the father and son were helped by great and learned men, among whom the most famous were the two Dastūrs (High Priests) Ādarbād Māraspand and Ardā Virāf. Both these holy priests had a great share in the restoration of the ancient Faith of Irān, and in the translation of the Scriptures into the language of the people. Besides this both of them were the authors of important theological works themselves.

¹ The conqueror of Valerian.

Zealous as were the early Sāsānians about the ancient Religion of Zarathushtra, they were tolerant to members of other Faiths. All religions lived in peace side by side. Of course Zoroastrianism, being the Religion of the King of Kings, was the dominant power in the land. But there was no favouritism shown by the Rulers themselves, nor were the other Faiths persecuted.¹ Unfortunately this policy of toleration could not last very long. In the reign of Shāpūr I. a remarkable man, Mani, appeared upon the religious horizon of Irān. Christianity had already been established in Irān and the Assyrian Church was a considerable power in the land, second only to the Zoroastrian Church. Mani was a very remarkable person: one of the acutest intellects of his time, his views were far in advance of his age. He held very advanced views upon toleration and the brotherhood of man. His views about the organisation of the state and society were democratic in the extreme

¹ The Zoroastrian Religion fully recognises and honours holy men and women of other lands and of other faiths. Cf. *Yasht* xiii, 143-145.

and as such were not particularly acceptable to the aristocratic Aryan polity of his age. His uncompromising asceticism as well as his view regarding life as an unmixed evil also revolted the Zoroastrian priesthood. His own life, was of the most rigorous asceticism and his character was quite pure and so he was allowed to carry on his propaganda for a time. But at last his democratic teaching was represented as undermining the Aryan-Irānian polity and so he was beheaded by Behram I. (A.D. 272-275).

Soon after this the Roman Empire under Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion. Consequently the Persian Christians began to regard the Emperor of Rūm (Byzantium) as their spiritual head. Rome had, ever since the days of Pompey, been a formidable rival of Persia, and each of these two powers had always been ready to stir up trouble for the other. Naturally, therefore, the Persian Christians, owing spiritual allegiance to Byzantium became political suspects, and the suspicion was certainly justified by actual events. Shāpūr II.

definitely took up the view that the Christians were disloyal to Persia and to the House of Sāsān. So from that time onward the Christians were subject to many disabilities and they had to suffer heavily from time to time.

Another sect arose about A.D. 487 and spread with wonderful rapidity all over Persia and Armenia. This was the sect founded by Mazdak. On the spiritual side Mazdak taught devotion and the sacredness of animal life, but on the social side his views would be advanced even for a modern Bolshevnik. He maintained the perfect equality of all men, not merely at birth but throughout life, and so he taught that property as well as wives should be held in common. The extreme rapidity with which these revolutionary doctrines spread indicate clearly that something was fundamentally wrong at the very heart of Sāsānian polity. Revolutionary doctrines do not, indeed *cannot*, spread where the aristocracy, the natural leaders of the people remember their motto—*noblesse oblige*—and fulfil their duty by those from whom

they expect obedience and submission. Ultimately the Mazdakites were put down with relentless cruelty and there were wholesale massacres of these people which began in A.D. 523.

Khusrav I., better known as Noshīravān the Just, ruled from A.D. 531-578, and in his time the Sāsānian empire attained the zenith of its outward power and glory. It was in his time that the great Prophet of Arabia was born (A.D. 570). Indeed, the Prophet is reported to have referred with pride to the fact that He was born in the days of that great monarch. Nothing seemed more improbable than that this mighty Sāsānian Empire would crumble away within less than three quarters of a century after the passing away of the greatest of the Sāsānians, and that too at the first onset of the desert power whom all Irānians had heretofore despised. This was emphatically *not* a miracle, as many are apt to imagine; it was not the "misfortune" of Irān, for such things do not happen in a world ruled by the just Ahura Mazda. All that happened was the inevitable result of what had been

going on for many generations in Irān,
for

The mills of God grind slowly, but they
grind exceeding small,
Though with patience He stand waiting,
with exactness grinds He all.

¹The great founders of the House of Sāsān and the great Dastūrs who helped them were true men of God and deeply in earnest as devotees of the Prophet of Irān. Among the last of this line we also find such a glorious figure as Noshiravān.² But we must frankly admit that from among the masses the true spirit of the ancient message was disappearing, for the simple reason that there was none to guide them along the right path after the first two centuries of Sāsānian rule had

¹ I know that a good deal of what follows will not be acceptable to my Parsi brothers. I must, however, set down what appears to me to be the true explanation of the sudden and complete collapse of the Sāsānian and Zoroastrian power at the hands of a power that was admittedly regarded with ill-concealed contempt. In fact, none were more surprised at this conquest than the Arabs themselves, and they ascribed it rightly to the fervour of their new Faith. To us, Parsis, this truth is bound to be distasteful, but it has to be faced. So I would crave the indulgence of my Parsi brothers and request them, "gently to hear, kindly to judge" my views.

² This great monarch was given this name, Noshiravān (*Anushak-rubān*, "he whose soul has been blessed") on account of his justice and his truth and his deep piety.

passed. Noshiravān represents the last flicker of a dying cause, and when he passed away there was none else to take his place. The unfortunate thing is that there are no direct records left of the change that was slowly but surely creeping over the spiritual life of the masses of Irān during the last one hundred and fifty years of Zoroastrian rule. The eminent success of Mazdak, and of Mani even earlier, seems to indicate that things were not as well as might have been with Zoroastrianism for some considerable time. Besides, in the religious literature of the period we find a certain amount of internal evidence. The Vendīdād (a very important work on social customs and on ritual) though in the Avesta language, belongs to this period. In its language even it bears the stamp of having been a much later composition than the hymns of the *Yasna* or the *Yashts*.¹ And though it does contain a core of very ancient tradition

¹ As regards the language of the *Vendīdād*, it seems to me to indicate that the writer did not *think* in the Avesta, but thought in the Pahlavi, (which was the language of that period), and then *translated* it into the Avesta, often retaining the Pahlavi idiom. Of course this does not apply to the whole of the Book, but certainly to a greater part of it.

still the spirit of the whole Book is as different from that of the *Yasna* as it is possible to be. We cannot be sure that everything that is contained in *the present recension of the Vendīdād* dates from an earlier period. There are some traditions of great and undoubted antiquity and there are also some very ancient customs described, but still the greater part of the book deals with the impurity surrounding the dead body, and the woman during her natural physiological periods of sickness and childbearing. The impurities arising from these sources and the endless baths and penances to cleanse these constitute the greater bulk of the book and make it extremely uninteresting and uninspiring reading. Added to these are the innumerable punishments and mortifications to be undergone for such "sins" as injuring a dog or an otter in its various limbs and for a variety of miscellaneous offences against human beings and others. Contrasted with the lofty idealism of Zarathushtra's Message or even with the later hymns of the *Yasna* and the *Yashts*, the *Vendīdād* clearly indicates a lowering

of ideals. And the amount of detail given seems to indicate that all these penances and purifications were actually practised.

No nation can maintain its spiritual life upon such washings and mortifications and upon such an obsession of "the Demon of the Corpse," and of the other demons, such as we read of in the *Vendīdād*. The human heart needs the bread of Divine Love and Grace, and the *Vendīdād* offers merely a stone instead. It is not denied that the older *Yashts* and the *Yasna* and the *Gāthās* with their far more satisfying ideas did also exist at that period, but even with these their Pahlavi interpretations seem to have been largely tinged by the spirit of the *Vendīdād*.¹ The compilers of the *Vendīdād* no doubt aimed at having the greatest possible degree of physical purity, but they erred in their very zeal and carried the matter to the point of obsession.

¹ Dr. John Wilson of Bombay published about a century ago a fierce denunciation of the Parsi religion. But the whole of it was based upon the practices as described in the *Vendīdād*. The curious reader may also refer to the remarks made by Sir William Jones in his review of Anquetil du Perron's translation of the Zoroastrian Scriptures, the first translation made into a European tongue.

Added to this spiritual dissatisfaction there was the political self-seeking among the aristocracy, especially visible after the strong hand of rulers like Noshiravān had been withdrawn. The history of the last Sāsānians is a continuous struggle for aggrandisement now by the monarch, now by the nobles. The people were not satisfied with their lot either spiritual or political. And consequently we see that at the very first shock with fresh and vigorous Islam the power of old Irān simply melted away. There were practically only two hard fought battles, Qadisiyya (A.D. 636) and Nahāvand (A.D. 642).

As soon as the Arabs had established their power over the country, the masses flocked to their side and embraced the new religion of Islam.¹ There were several good points about the new religion as contrasted with the old religion *as it had been practised during the latter days*

¹ The usual story current among the Parsis is that the Arabs converted the masses at the point of the sword. Such conversions did take place, but several centuries later. The Arabs were a very tolerant race on the whole; their democratic spirit and upbringing made them give as much religious liberty to others as they themselves enjoyed. In

of the Sāsānian rule. In the first place the rites and ceremonies were much simpler to observe and hence seemed much more satisfactory to their yearning hearts. And above all, the greatest thing which Islam taught and which Islam practised in those days was the real living brotherhood, which was also in marked contrast with the proud aristocratic aloofness both of the nobility and of the priesthood of the Sāsānian days.¹

Thus the vast empire founded by Ardashīr, nourished by the two Shāpūrs and carried to its zenith by Khusrav Noshiravān, perished almost without a struggle before the onslaught of the nomad Arabs from the desert. Thus was the hoary religion of Zarathushtra replaced in the land of its birth by the new Gospel from Arabia. In the early days

the early days of the conquest the non-Muslims were obliged to pay a poll-tax. The spirit of the conquerors may be seen from the following quotation from a treaty made by an Arab conqueror with the people of a town in Armenia, guaranteeing the safety of the older religions: "Ye are secure and it is incumbent upon us to observe this treaty as long as ye observe it and pay the poll-tax and the land-tax." See Browne, *op. cit.*, pp. 200ff.

¹ Of course there were brilliant individual exceptions. The remarks made above are meant to apply to the generality of the nobility and the priesthood.

of Islamic rule in Persia the Zoroastrians were not persecuted on account of their faith nor were they forcibly converted. Though zealous and eager to spread their own faith the Arab leaders did possess a great deal of toleration and their inborn spirit of democracy undoubtedly helped them to accord to others the same religious liberty they themselves wished to enjoy. There was besides a very sound economic reason for this toleration. According to the earlier Islamic law only non-Islamic subjects paid the taxes; and as the Empire of Islam extended its boundaries, it became a question of vital importance to the state to possess a large number of non-Islamic subjects who could contribute to its upkeep. This certainly curbed for a long time their zeal for proselytising.¹

The real persecution of the Zoroastrians of Persia began after the removal

¹ The *Dīnkart* (Acts of Religion) is regarded as the most important of the Pahlavi works, and it was composed by a Zoroastrian Dastūr—Ātur-farbag son of Ferrukh-zād—at the request of the Caliph Al-ma'mūn (A.D. 813-833), the son of Hārūn Al-rashid. It is "a large collection of information regarding the doctrines, customs, traditions, history and literature of the Mazda-worshipping religion". The details given there are such as must lead us to infer

of the Arab domination. It began about the end of the ninth century of the Christian era, and for quite nine hundred years they remained a downtrodden and a heavily tried community. Still they clung to the Faith of their Fathers, even though they were a mere handful—a few thousand all told.¹ When there seemed to be danger threatening the Sacred Texts at the hands of Moslem fanatics, they sent away to India those precious manuscripts that could be saved. And it was in India that the remains of the ancient literature of Irān were preserved during the past eight or nine centuries. But the greater part of the ancient texts have perished utterly, beyond all hope of recovery. The things that have remained are those parts of the Avesta which are used either for daily worship or for the frequent ceremonies, and hence were that the Avesta Texts must have been available to the writer in almost the complete form of the Sāsānian recension. Besides this he had at his command the complete Pahlavi religious literature. Most of this has now been completely lost owing to the fanaticism of the Islamic clergy of *Persian* origin.

¹ The present Zoroastrian population of Persia is estimated to be about 10,000; and very likely it has never been appreciably much greater during the past few centuries.

remembered by the priests. Of the remainder only some very brief fragments have survived. In Persia itself the community was fiercely persecuted and they were so deliberately crushed down that they could find no chance whatever to revive their old religion. They soon fell into a state of ignorance and poverty, because they had been habitually down-trodden and persecuted. So the modern Zoroastrian of Persia is as a rule ignorant and superstitious. They have, however, preserved some of the ancient traditions and customs better than have the Parsis of India.

Only about half a century or so ago the Persian Government began to remove the disabilities under which the Zoroastrians had been suffering, and many of the laws from which they had been suffering were either repealed or were relaxed. And quite recently the present Ruler of Persia, H.I.M. Shah Reza Khan Pahlavi, has thrown open all military appointments also to the Zoroastrians, thus putting them on terms of almost complete equality with the Muslims.

At the time of the Arab conquest, though the greater part of the people and the country were willing enough to accept the change, still there was very stubborn resistance offered by certain bands and in certain localities. Though the masses were ready to embrace Islam, still there did exist a small but staunch body of Zoroastrians who were inspired with the ancient Message of Zarathushtra, and in whom the flame of religious fervour was burning bright and clear. These were strong in their adherence to the ancient Faith of Irân, and they were also staunch upholders of the Zoroastrian dynasty. They took refuge among the hills of Kohistân in the province of Khorâsân, carrying with them the Holy Fire of Irân. From there, for nearly a century they defied the Arab conquerors and lost no opportunity of harassing them. They were sturdy patriots and lovers of freedom, fervent worshippers of Ahura Mazda, and devotees of their Master, Zarathushtra. They were at last hunted out of their mountain retreats and took refuge in the island of Ormuz at the mouth of

the Persian Gulf. Hard pressed even here they ultimately set sail eastwards, to India. They were well aware that India was the land of brother Aryans, who had religious customs and beliefs very similar to their own.¹ So on account of the love they bore to their religion, and because they wished to be allowed to worship their own God in their own way in complete freedom, these sturdy "Pilgrim Fathers" deliberately accepted exile in the friendly land of Ind. At first they stayed for a few years in the island of Div, off the coast of Kāthiāwār. But they found the place inconvenient and therefore they left it and arrived at the port to which they gave the name of Sanjān,² in South

¹ The intercourse between Persia and India had been very intimate from the earliest days. Its history is being slowly unravelled. The *Bhavishyat-Purāna* of the Hindus describes a class of *Maga Brāhmanas*, who were undoubtedly Irānians. The researches of the late Dr. Spooner, though not accepted in their entirety, have thrown a great deal of light on this subject of Indo-Irānian relations in the long past days. The absence of historical records, and the absence of any extensive excavations in Eastern Irān have been mainly responsible for the almost complete ignorance regarding the relations between Irān and India during the Zoroastrian period. The most recent work done at Pāikuli promises to throw considerable amount of light on these relations in the days of the first Sāsānians.

² The name Sanjān is said to be the Indianised form of the Irānian word *hanjamana* (meeting-place).

Gujerāt on the western coast of India. Here they were welcomed by the Yādava Prince of that land,¹ who gave them some land to settle down and to build their Fire-temple for the Irān-Shāh.² This was about one hundred and fifty years after the Arab conquest. In return for this kindness of the Hindu Prince the Zoroastrians promised to live at peace with the people of the land, to help the Prince and his successors in time of war, to adopt the dress and the language of the people, and to introduce certain changes in the marriage ceremony. These conditions the Parsis have observed faithfully to this day. When Gujerāt was invaded in the

¹ The "Jādi Rānā" of popular tradition. His proper name is not known.

² Such is the traditional account given in the *Kisseh-i Sanjān*, a Persian poem composed several centuries later. This account has been disputed by some Parsi scholars. They maintain that the main body of the Parsis arrived in India overland through the Panjab. It is quite possible that there were more bands than one who took refuge in India after the Arab conquest. The band arriving in Sanjān seems to have been the most important one, and certainly from these most of the Parsis of Western India have descended. The account given in the *Kisseh-i Sanjān* is too circumstantial, as regards the details of how the tradition was handed down from generation to generation, to be seriously disputed. The author says that he has merely written down the ancient tradition.

beginning of the fourteenth century by the King of Delhi, and Sanjān was attacked, Parsis fought and died for their adopted motherland by the side of their Hindu brothers.

These "Pilgrim Fathers" had left their country for the sake of their conscience, and for the freedom of worship, and unto them the promise of God—made to all people and at all times, that He would never forsake the true worshipper—has been amply fulfilled. The Parsis have prospered all through their stay in India and have made their mark in Western India, even though their numbers are but a minute portion of the immense population of the land. They have faithfully carried out the promise made by their Fathers to the Yādava Prince of Sanjān nearly twelve centuries ago,¹ and they have by the blessings of Ahura Mazda gained a place, an honoured place, in the life of this great country. They have shared the life of the people, have stood by them in their joys and in their woes,

¹ The chief promise was that they would live at peace with all Indians.

they have spoken their language, and have lived side by side with them as brothers. They have learnt to love India as their very own, as their second mother.

When Western learning first came to India, the Parsis were among the first of her peoples to acquire it. They soon found themselves, by reason of this western culture, in the position of leaders of the new movement and of the new modern life of India. During the last century every great movement for the social, intellectual and political uplift of India, especially in the Bombay Presidency,¹ has been led by Parsis. The first founder and inspirer of the Indian National movement was Dadabhai Naoroji, who won for himself the affectionate title of the "Dādā (grandsire) of Hind". He was also the pioneer of women's education on western lines in India. And he was one of the truest of Zoroastrians. The leader of industrial revival in India, the establisher of iron and steel industry

¹ Naturally, because the Parsis are mainly confined to Western India.

in this land was another Parsi Zoroastrian, Jamshedji N. Tata. He also founded the Indian Research Institute for Science at Bangalore to help the scientific investigation of India's resources. Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy, another Zoroastrian won for himself and his community universal respect all over India by his princely and catholic charities, and by his truly dignified yet modest bearing.

With Western learning came also a wave of materialism and a rush for mere worldly pleasure and enjoyment. But there is reason to believe that the tide is now turning. Too much of the Western spirit in the outlook upon life, too great a zeal for dropping all "superstition" was responsible for a most appalling state of affairs during the latter end of the nineteenth century. With "superstition" a great deal of true religion was also dropped, and at any rate for a considerable while to be religious was regarded as "superstitious". But there are sure signs now that things are changing and that the community is coming back into its precious age-long

heritage. And this time it is with understanding, and not with mere blind belief, that the ancient religion is being loved and followed. Thus both the head and the heart have now combined in the service of the Religion of Zarathushtra. The heart of the race had always been true to its Master, but in the early (and somewhat ill-directed) enthusiasm for Western Science the head had felt strangely puzzled, and the community at one time seemed in real danger of drifting helplessly to destruction. Now that danger seems to be past. And even though little outward change is visible in the community, there has occurred an inner change of outlook, of the heart, among the rising generation, which is the most hopeful sign. Instead of utter indifference to religion, or at best a sort of neutrality which just tolerated the outer tokens of the ancient Faith, which characterised the communal outlook at the end of the last century, there is to-day a distinct and growing feeling for Religion. And religion to-day means more the essentials than mere ceremonial observances. It is

a subtle change, hardly yet visible on the surface, but yet most hopeful. The rising generation is beginning to realise, as all the world over, the need of an ideal to guide one's life. And this ideal is the message of SERVICE OF HUMANITY preached by Lord Zarathushtra in Irān. This message is stirring Zoroastrian hearts once again and their heads are once again beginning to respond to this ancient message; and with the blessings of their Prophet they hope that their Religion shall once again get its proper place among the great religions of the world, as a Power for the uplift and the progress of humanity.

The renaissance in Persia is another hopeful sign. Into Islam the genius of Irān had infused a fresh vigour and vitality, and Islamic culture is very largely Irānian in spirit. In the course of ages, however, the vigour of Islam too waned in Persia, and it seemed to have fallen into the hands of a more or less ignorant priesthood, who held sway over the hearts of a superstitious and even more ignorant multitude. Like the other

nations of Asia, Irān too had been steeped in a deep slumber till the end of the last century. But she has shaken herself awake now. The first sign of the awakening came in 1850, when the Bāb proclaimed His new Gospel of toleration and Human Brotherhood. This gave the first direct blow to the fanatical Islamic clergy of Persia. The Bāb Himself and thousands of His followers sealed their faith in God with their blood. And out of the blood of these martyrs has sprung up to-day the rich harvest of toleration and of religious freedom, without which Irān could have had no future at all. Irān is rapidly waking up from her age-long sleep, and Moslem and Jew and Babi and Christian and Zoroastrian, all are thrilling with the dreams of a future for their beloved Irān more glorious than any in her past. For this all Irānians are looking back to their past—the pre-Islamic past—to the great Rulers of the ages gone by, to Noshiravān and Shāpūr and Ardashīr, to Darius and to Kurush as living ideals to inspire them with zeal and fervour. Above all they see in

Zarathushtra one of the greatest of mankind and the greatest Irānian; and they are beginning to realise that His Message, reinterpreted in modern tongue, is to be Irān's gift to Humanity. The Message of Zarathushtra, the Prophet of God, has to-day a new meaning to the Irānian. In it he sees the hope of his land, in it he sees the future of Irān. And the Persian Nation has begun to look to the Parsis of India to help them in this coming achievement of Irān's great destiny. They are inviting the Parsis back to the land of their great Fathers to help them to put her once again in her rightful place as one of the leaders of humanity.

In Asia there have been three mighty centres of human achievement and culture—China, India and Irān. All these three are just waking up after their long sleep of close upon one thousand years and are trying to get back into their own glorious heritage. Ishqī, one of the finest of modern Persian poets has seen a glorious vision of the future :

New dawn
Reddens again the sky in Eastern lands.

O East arise, and teach anew the West,
 What mean Humanity and Righteousness.
 Let's hope and pray, when East is wide
 awake,
 And strong again, her new-found strength
 she'll use
 To bring our sore-tried Earth the gift of
 Peace,
 Of Goodwill and of Brotherhood of Man.
 Henceforth no people should in bondage be ;
 All Nations are from God : His workers
 must be free !

In the past Irān gave to the world the great message of ASHA, and the three commandments of God to all mankind—*Humata* (Good Thought), *Hūkhta* (Good Word) and *Huvarshta* (Good Deed). The world to-day needs the Message once again ; and it is the hope of every follower of Zarathushtra, and of every son of the land of the Prophet, that a New Irān and a revived Zoroastrianism be privileged to give this Message of God's Love, of the Brotherhood of Man and of the Path of Asha once again to the world. Such is our hope,

“Let the Lord interpret as He will.”

APPENDIX

SOME SELECTIONS FROM
THE AVESTA

1. *Ashem Vohu.*

(This short verse is one of the most frequently repeated of the Zoroastrian "prayers". In point of sanctity it ranks second only to the *Ahuna Vairya*.)

Asha is the highest good, (it alone) is
(true) happiness;

Happiness is for him (alone) who (is)
righteous for (the sake of) the highest
Asha.

2. *Yenghe Hâtâm.*

(This is the third of the three most sacred "prayers" of Zoroastrianism.)

(That man) among those that are about
whom, because of his Righteousness,

Mazda Ahura knoweth (that he is) verily
better as regards acts of worship (than
others)—

(All such), both men and women, do we
revere.

3. *Kem-nâ Mazdâ.*

(This is also a very common prayer, which has to be recited many times a day. It is made

up of two parts: the first part is taken direct from the *Gāthā*, while the second was composed in the days of the *Vendīdād*, and the contrast in spirit between the two is quite apparent.)

- (i) What man, O Mazdā, shall grant protection to such as me (a weak mortal),
When the infidel makes himself ready
against me to overpower me?¹
Who (can it be) other than thy (Divine)
Fire and (Thy) Mind,
Through whose activities the Law of
Righteousness is fulfilled, O Ahurā?
This knowledge declare clearly unto me,
for (helping me to spread) the Faith.
Who (shall become) a smiter of foes
with the help of Thy Words which are
a shield?
Clearly unto me a wise soul-healing
Leader do Thou reveal:
Then unto him, whomsoever Thou
choosest, O Mazdā,
Let Obedience (to Thy commandments)
approach with Good Mind.
- (ii) Protect us all round from our foes, Ye
both, Mazdā and Holy Armaiti. Perish
thou devilish Demon,² perish thou
devil's spawn, perish thou devil-
fashioned, perish thou follower of
devil's laws, utterly perish O Demon,
utterly disappear, O Demon, utterly

¹ These words were spoken by the Prophet when He was surrounded by His enemies.

² This is the Corpse-Demon.

and entirely perish, O Demon, in the North¹ do thou vanish utterly, mayest thou not destroy the corporeal creation of the Divine Law.

4. *The Zoroastrian Creed (Yasna 12).*

Come unto my help, O Mazda!

I am a Mazda-worshipper: I profess myself to be a Mazda-worshipping follower of Zarathushtra, both a devoted follower and an ardent believer (in this Faith). I solemnly dedicate myself to the true-conceived thought, I solemnly dedicate myself to the true-spoken word, I solemnly dedicate myself to the true-performed act.

I solemnly dedicate myself to the excellent religion of Mazda-worship, (which is) quarrel-removing, weapon-lowering, independence-giving and holy; which, of all those that are and of all those that shall be, is the greatest, the best and the loftiest religion, the Religion of Ahura, revealed by Zarathushtra.

Unto Ahura Mazda do I attribute all good.

Such is the vow of the Religion of Mazda-worship.

5. *The Righteous Soul on the Bridge (Yasht xxii).* (Darmesteter's Translation).

(This is a fragment from one of the lost books of the Avesta.)

At the end of the third night when the dawn appears, it seems to the soul of the faithful one as if it were brought amidst plants and scents: it seems as if a wind were blowing

¹ The North is the dwelling of the Demon host.

from the region of the south, from the regions of the south a sweet scented wind, sweeter scented than any other wind in the world.

And it seems to the soul of the faithful one as if he were inhaling the wind with his nostrils, and he thinks: "Whence does that wind blow, the sweetest scented wind I ever inhaled with my nostrils?"

And it seems to him as if his own conscience were advancing to him in that wind, in the shape of a maiden, fair, bright, white-armed, strong, tall-limbed, high-statured, full-breasted, beautiful of body, noble, of a glorious origin, of the size of a maid in her fifteenth year, as fair as the fairest things in the world.

And the soul of the faithful one addresses her asking: "What maid art thou, who art the fairest maid I have ever seen?"

And she being his own conscience, answers him: "O thou of good thoughts, good words and good deeds, of good religion, I am thy own conscience.

"Everybody did love thee for that greatness, goodness, fairness, sweet-scentedness, victorious strength and freedom from sorrow in which thou didst appear to me . . .

"When thou didst see a man scoffing and doing deeds of idolatry or denying the poor and shutting his door upon them, then thou didst sit singing the Gāthas and worshipping the good waters and Ātar, the Son of Ahura Mazda, and rejoicing the faithful that would come from near and from far.

“I was lovely and thou madest me still lovelier; I was fair and thou madest me still fairer; I was desirable and thou madest me still more desirable; I was sitting in a forward place and thou madest me sit in the foremost place, through this good thought, through this good speech, through this good deed of thine.”

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