



FRAVAHAR

فرَوَهَر

### THE SYMBOL OF ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION

- Was designed during the reign of Achaemenian Dynasty, 600-500 B.C. Cyrus and Darius the Great were the two well-known kings of that dynasty.
- The head represents wisdom which is emphasized in Zoroastrian religion. Ahura Mazda (The Supreme Creator) means The Wise Lord.
- The raised index finger indicates one God.
- The ring in the other hand means honoring contracts. Mithra which was the god of light with his seat being the sun, also was the supporter of sanctity of treaties.
- Wings with 3 layer of feathers symbolize Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds.
- The large circle represents this world of matter.
- The two supports are the two natures of man (angelic and animal.)
- The skirt is the worldly attachment.

The message of this symbol is that with recognition of one God, with use of wisdom and trustworthiness and wings of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds the angelic side of man could free him from the world of matter and lift him towards God.

**ZOROASTER - BAHU'U'LLAH'S ANCESTOR**

A transcript of audio-cassette from series  
**WINDOWS TO THE PAST**  
by Darius K. Shahrokh, M.D.

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This presentation, which is a window from my heart, is dedicated to the memory of my father, Arbab Kaykhosrow Shahrokh, whose over thirty years of dedicated service as the leader and representative of the Zoroastrian Community of Iran elevated the status of that persecuted and impoverished minority from ignominy of being called infidel fire-worshippers and untouchables to the height of being considered the honorable descendants of original Persians, the noble ones.

Zoroaster and His religion should be of great interest to everyone because of its influence on Christianity and Islam, as well as its offspring, Mithraism, which took the form of a mystery religion and entered the ancient Roman world about 75 B.C., and for 200 years ranked as the principle competitor of Christianity. To the Baha'is, Zoroaster, as the physical forefather of Baha'u'llah, should be of particular interest.

It suffices to say that the moral principles of the Faith of Zoroaster; namely, good thoughts, good words and good deeds, for centuries was the charter of Achaemenian and Sassanian dynasties which spread to the whole of the Middle East. The country of Iran should take pride in being the birthplace of three known Manifestations of God, Zoroaster, the Bab, and Baha'u'llah.

To do justice to the complexity of a 3,000-year-old religion, a blend of writings of a practicing Zoroastrian scholar and the methodical approach of a Western scholar was found fair enough. To use exclusively the writings of an insider might be considered slanted by unquestioning acceptance; and the work of an outsider, too critically objective.

One of the major references is the book, The Religion of Zarathushtra, by the late scholar Dr. Irach Taraporewala, a Parsi from India. Part of that book contains a beautiful English translation of Gathas, or the poetries of Zoroaster, from Avesta language. It is interesting that in the chapter called "The Past and the Future," he writes, "Iran has shaken herself awake now. The first sign of awakening came in 1850 when the Bab proclaimed His new gospel of toleration and human brotherhood. This gave the first direct blow to the fanatical Islamic clergy of Persia..." Further on he states, "In the past, Iran gave the world the great message of Asha and the three commandments of God. The world today needs the Message once again."

An objective reference is by John B. Noss called Man's Religions. This textbook, to the credit of its author, at the very end has given a fairly accurate summary of the Baha'i Faith. The other references include a book by my oldest sister, Farangis Shahrokh, the past president of the Zoroastrian Community of Los Angeles, called In Search of Truth, as well as pamphlets published by the Zoroastrians of New York.

In summary, Zoroaster, or Zarathushtra, means "He of the Golden Light." His Faith taught a polytheistic society to worship only one God called Ahura Mazda, and to abide by the three commandments of good thoughts, good words and good deeds while walking in the path of Asha. The translation of Asha is physical and spiritual purity as well as righteousness.

The following dawn-time hymn of Zoroaster says it all, "Through the best Asha, through the highest Asha, may we catch sight of Thee, may we approach Thee, may we be in perfect union with Thee."

Invariably, like the rest of the Saviours, it was not the miracles ascribed to Zoroaster, but the influence of His divine teachings

which made Him one of the Messengers of God. To appreciate the Faith of Zoroaster and what transpired in the past three milleniums, one should learn briefly about the Aryans who occupied the land before His appearance. Scholars state that the Aryans migrated to Iran from southeastern Europe.

The word "Aryan" means the Noble Ones, and the name "Iran" is a shortened version of Aryan. The name "Zoroaster" in present-day Persian is called "Zartosht" and in the ancient Avesta language it is pronounced "Zarathushtra." "Zaratha" means golden and "Ushtra" is from the root "ush," meaning to shine. "Ushtra" has two meanings, one is light and one is camel. Obviously, Zarathushtra means "He of the Golden Light". The unfortunate and demeaning translation by some non-Zoroastrians as the "Owner of the Yellow Camel" is definitely unbecoming to a prophet of God and absolutely incorrect. His birthplace in northern Iran is where the climate is cold and camel is an animal native to hot and arid lands which further supports the above conclusion that His name is "He of the Golden Light" and does not refer to camel. Possibly, camels were brought to Iran with the invasion of the Arabs 1,300 years later.

Between the 18th and 12th century before Christ a portion of Aryans migrated to India. Originally, both worshipped the same gods of natural forces such as sun, moon, earth, fire, water and wind. These gods were called devas which is the root for words "deity" and "divine." Already we can see where it all began.

In the period before Zoroaster, the common people worshipped the devas. However, the priests also recognized Ahuras or lords who were high in heaven and were concerned with cosmic order. Among these lords, one interesting one was Indra, the god of war who was court-marshalled by Zoroaster, and therefore, became a demon. He became the chief lieutenant of Ahriman, the Zoroastrian word for Satan. One Ahura or lord was Mithra who was a very popular god with highest honor. His rank was high and his responsibility vast as he was the god of light, the giver of sons and cattle and the supporter of the sanctity of treaties. The word "mithra" as a common noun means contract. His seat or throne was the sun.

The many gods were worshipped and animal sacrifices were made to them under the open sky. While kindling the sacrificial fire the

priests drank a psychedelic potion known as haoma extracted from a plant, and then people drank the urine of the priests which contained the active ingredient. You like to know that soma mentioned in Indian scriptures is the same thing as haoma. One source states that haoma is from a plant of the species Ephedra that used to grow in the mountains of Iran. In the 9th Yasna, Zoroaster makes a reference to Soma as a great teacher appearing before Zoroaster and revealing ancient sacred teachings in Iran. Some scholars believe he was the one who introduced the haoma cult and gave his own name to that plant.

With decadence and the burden of such rituals, time was ripe for the appearance of Zoroaster. Zoroaster's birth is estimated anywhere between 1700 and 700 B.C., however, the majority of scholars agree on the 7th century before Christ, around 660 B.C.

He was born in northern Iran. His given name was Spitama, the son of Pourouhaspa. His father and mother were honorable and religious people. Among the miracles accompanying His birth two will be mentioned. While in His mother's womb He glowed with such spiritual light that everything around His mother was illuminated. As the time of birth approached the whole neighborhood glowed with light. As soon as He was born He smiled.

At the age of 15 He was initiated into manhood by the ritual of putting on the sacred cord of koshti around His waist, thus becoming a member of their religion. He was known for His compassionate nature towards the aged and the cattle. At age 20 He left His wife and parents for a life of seclusion in search of answers to His religious questions. When 30 years old He received the first of seven visions which occurred on the banks of the river Daitya near His house. In that startling vision He saw a man nine times larger than average man. He was the Archangel Vohu Mana (meaning good thoughts). Vohu Mana questioned Zoroaster and instructed Him to divest Himself of His body and lie next to it. Then His soul was taken to the presence of Ahura Mazda, or the Wise Lord, who was surrounded by His archangels. The Supreme Being appointed Zoroaster as a prophet and gave Him the doctrines and duties of the true religion.

Within the next eight years He had visions of six principal

archangels

→ to go on next line

and each one confirmed and supplemented the original vision. He immediately began to preach but without success. For ten or twelve years no one accepted His religion, and as happened to all Saviours, He was called a heretic and sorcerer. He was quite discouraged and even was tempted by Satan called Angra-Mainyu who told Him to renounce the religion of Mazda in return for sovereignty over the world. You might know that Christ was also tempted in this same way. His strong refusal made the fiend howl and flee towards the North. In the ancient tradition north was considered to be Satan's territory.

Finally, his cousin accepted His Faith, and together they went to the court of King Vishtaspa. He tried to win the king to His Faith but the karpans interferred. The karpans were the greedy bunch of priests who did numerous sacrifices with magical procedures for everything from good crops, protecting the cattle or keeping the Turanian nomads from the north at a distance. The karpans succeeded to cause Zoroaster's imprisonment, but His long debates with the karpans in the presence of the king, performance of miracles and wondrous cure of the king's favorite black horse converted the king. Another factor was the sympathetic support of the queen. The queen, the king's son, Esfandiyar, the king's brother, and the whole court became converted. Two men who were brothers and had high positions in the court became related to Zoroaster. One gave his daughter to be Zoroaster's wife and the other one married Zoroaster's daughter from His previous marriage.

The next twenty years were spent vigorously spreading His Faith among Iranians. Not much is known about His travels, but according to Abdu'l-Baha's words referred to in God Passes By (p. 183), at one time Zoroaster traveled to Israel where "He held converse with the Prophets of Israel." Two holy wars were fought in defense of Zoroaster's Faith. The first war saw the rise of Prince Esfandiyar who defeated the Turanians. In the second war, which happened when Zoroaster was 77 years old, He was killed at the fire altar where He was officiating, but again the enemy was defeated. His death occurred in the city of Balkh, presently in northern Afghanistan.

Now about the sacred Zoroastrian book. It is called Avesta. After destruction of Persepolis in 4th century B.C., it was preserved

orally and not written down until the 3rd or 4th century A.D. during the Sassanian Dynasty. The attack of Alexander of Macedonia resulted in the defeat of Iran in 4th century B.C. The destruction of the great capital Persepolis and its immense library wiped out whatever had been written.

During the following Sassanian Dynasty, the Avesta was compiled from the memory of high priests. Of course, by that time the language of Avesta had been replaced by Pahlavi language which was very different from the present Persian language. It is interesting to learn that Plato, after the death of his teacher Socrates, wished to go to Iran to study Zoroastrian religion, but because of war between Greece and Iran, he could not go. Both Greeks and Romans were much impressed by Zoroastrian Faith and what it stood for. Numerous references in their literature testify to that.

The powerful Zoroastrian dynasty of Sassanians ruled Iran from 3rd to 7th century after Christ until the middle of the 7th century when Iran was defeated by Moslem Arabs. With the passing of all those centuries after the birth of Zoroastrian Faith, many variations and additions were made.

The successors to Muhammad in 651 A.D., nearly three decades after Islamic calendar began, defeated the last Sassanian king Yazdigird, and he was killed. Zoroastrian Faith suffered a near fatal blow. At first Moslems were tolerant and enjoyed the taxes collected from non-converts. Matter of fact, after a while, for monetary reasons, it became to their disadvantage to have new converts. However, after passage of two centuries severe persecutions began by the hands of no one but the Persian converts to Islam who had intermarried with the Arabs. One wonders what made it so. Was it because constant wars and intrigues between the two major sects of Islam which began right after the death of Muhammad, or the annoyance and envy of the steadfastness of closely knit Zoroastrian community hanging on to their values. They were called Gabr or infidels, fire-worshippers and najes, meaning dirty or untouchable. The taxes for not being Moslem, called jezyeh, continued to be the great source of revenue, and in the middle of the 9th century the new converts were not excused from paying taxes. Finally, before the turn of the 19th century through the influence of the Parsis of India, by the order of the king of Iran, it was stopped.



You can easily see why in the 9th century all the Zoroastrians who could afford it took the road to India where their Aryan brothers and sisters were tolerant. Those pioneer immigrants were the forefathers of the present-day influential and industrious Parsis. Parsis achieved prominence during the reign of the British in India because of their high ethics, particular interest in education, and not having a caste system. The poor Zoroastrians who stayed behind escaped to the southern and arid part of Iran where the climate was and still is undesirable.

One city was Yazd, where my mother is from, the other is Kerman, the birthplace of my father. They were treated as low class citizens with not much civil rights, even not good enough to serve in the army until a blessed man with iron will pulled them out of misery. Conditions and persecutions were so bad that they were forced to wear an ugly dark shade of yellow robe for identification. On rainy days they had to stay indoors so their wet clothing would not defile a Moslem. When shopping they had to point to the fruits or items they wished to buy and the shopkeeper would put it in a bag for them. Touching one fruit would defile the whole mound of fruit. In Yazd I have seen the water cisterns where in summer people climbed 30 or 40 steps to fill their containers. If a Zoroastrian ever touched the faucet, defiling the precious cistern, the penalty was immediate death. How well I remember while very young that a Moslem household servant would eat our food, which by tradition she was not supposed to do, and then in front of us would go into the courtyard and rinse her mouth with the dirty pool water which was used only for the garden. This way she felt cleansed from the defilement. Sorry that some of my personal sentiments were interjected, but it makes the talk more real and less legendary.

Let us go back to the Zoroastrian Holy Book. As was said before, the sacred book of Avesta is not quite authentic except for the portion called Yasna. The four following parts of Avesta; namely, Yasna, Yashts, Visperat and Vendidad, will be briefly discussed.

1. YASNA This part of Avesta contains Gathas, or the hymns of Zoroaster. It gives trustworthy information on the life and thoughts of Zoroaster. Time permitting, a few verses translated by Dr. Taraporewala will be recited at the end.

2. YASHTS These are the songs of praise. In Yashts we find reintroduction of polytheism which Zoroaster condemned. These gods in Yashts are referred to as devas, but Zoroaster used the term deva for demons. Such term still is in use in Persian as deeve for demon.

3. VISPERAT Contains invocations and rituals.

4. VENDIDAD OR VIDEVAT It is full of spells against demons and prescriptions for purification. Defilement from corpse and women's monthly as well as dead tissue, such as cut fingernails and hair became an obsession in later times. Many rituals for purification involved the elaborate and expensive work of the priest. Towards the end, many Zoroastrians, being fed up with this, welcomed Islam as a change.

The next subject worthy of your attention is the teachings and ethics of Zoroastrian Faith. It is very difficult to sort out what is original or what was added by the priests as nothing was written until 1,000 years later, but for practical purposes they will be considered original and grouped as follows.

#### GOD, ANGELS, AND SATAN

Zoroaster taught monotheism and said the moral law came from one God, the supreme God, Ahura Mazda, meaning the Wise Lord. This name was already current among the people as the god of moral and natural order. Opposing the popular polytheistic religion, He proclaimed the following clear-cut doctrines.

1. Firm stand on the revelation He had received. In Gathas He over and over states that He was called to prophethood by Ahura Mazda Himself, and the religion that He taught was the final and true religion.

2. He gave all His devotion only to one God, and that by the will of Ahura Mazda all things have come to being, and Ahura Mazda would forever crush all evil. He states in Gathas that Ahura Mazda caused the light as well as the darkness to be created.

3. Ahura Mazda expresses His will through the Holy Spirit called Sepanta Mainyu and the agency of six Holy Immortals called Amesha

Sepantas. Some Western scholars equate these six with the archangels of Christianity. They actually are the attributes and perfections of God. Before introducing them, one thought for your reflection.

In religion, something more is needed than the mere acceptance by intellect which often leaves the heart of average person untouched. What satisfies a sage or philosopher may fail to satisfy the ordinary man at lower levels. Therefore, something tangible has been needed to illustrate the ethical concepts. Now the Holy Immortals or Amesha Sepantas are standing in line to be introduced.

It is interesting how 3,000 years ago Zoroaster brought honor to women by pronouncing three of these Immortals to be the feminine aspects of God. They are Armaiti, meaning Holy Devotion; Haurvatat or Khordad, meaning Spiritual Health; and Ameretat or Amordad, meaning Immortality. The Persians who might hear these names may be surprised because they are the names of the months in the present Persian solar calendar.

Of the three masculine attributes, one stands as most important and number one of all Holy Immortals, and that one is Asha which also means Good Mind. He is second only to Ahura Mazda Himself. Being so important he naturally came to be associated with fire, the symbol of religion chosen by Zoroaster. This symbol will be explained in a short while.

Vohu Mana, or Good Thought, originally was the second in rank, but in later times occupied the first place. Vohu Mana and Asha, according to the Gathas, stand on either side of Ahura Mazda. For Persian listeners, Vohu Mana is the same as Bahman, the name of the 11th Persian month. The third masculine Holy Immortal is Kashatra, Vairya, or Shahriyar, who is the Lord of the Mineral Kingdom. Zoroaster declared the six Holy Immortals to be worthy of adoration.

With this personification of perfections, the faithful followers pray that these Immortals may come to their homes and bless them. How beautiful.

Now that the six Holy Immortals were mentioned, you like to learn

about the angels. These angels are called Yazatas or Adorable Ones in Avesta. The numerous Aryan gods receded into the background except one; Atar or Azar, meaning a spark of the divine flame, the symbol of Zoroaster's Faith. Azar was given a place in the Gathas. The other two are Soroush and his feminine partner, Ashi.

Soroush is the guardian angel of humanity for obedience and protection. His weapons are the Holy Chants, particularly at night when the evil powers are at work. The rooster who ushers in the day is a sacred bird to Soroush, therefore no orthodox Parsi would ever eat a rooster. His feminine counterpart is Ashi Vanguhi, meaning Holy Blessings. She brings blessings from heaven to those who are obedient to the Eternal Law. Ashi is the special guardian of matrimony. The married state is regarded as highly sacred by Zoroastrian men and women.

Throughout ages, 33 Yazatas entered the Zoroastrian books and many Aryan gods were revived and worshipped such as Mithra. Later in this talk under the title of "Later Zoroastrians" such modifications will be discussed, but you should realize that only the three above-mentioned Yazatas are authentic, having been mentioned in the Gathas.

Before explaining the symbol of fire chosen by Zoroaster, a slight digression is timely. Doesn't it surprise you to hear that in a Moslem country, the Zoroastrian names of Holy Immortals and angels became the names of their months? How did it happen? Well, explaining it is simple, but implementing it was nearly impossible, and it took diplomacy and influence.

Earlier in this century in 1925 the parliament of Iran introduced a modern solar calendar through the efforts of Arbab Kaykhosrow Shahrokh, and influential member of the parliament and very close to the king. Such names were extracted from Zoroastrian Avesta and adopted for the months of the new calendar. It is noteworthy that the geneology of Arbab Kaykhosrow Shahrokh extends far back to Bahram the fifth, a Sassanian king also known as Bahram-i-Goor. The lunar Islamic calendar has not been totally discarded, particularly with the reign of present Islamic regime, but for all practical transactions the solar calendar with its Zoroastrian names including Naw-Ruz for the new year's day is in use.

Now about fire as the symbol chosen by Zoroaster. During the Sassanian Dynasty, fire in Pahlavi language was called ordibehesht; however, the Avesta name of Atar or Azar, meaning fire or divine spark, is considered to be the holiest of all elements. It is considered to be the chief cleanser from all sins. Being the purest thing in God's creation it has a number of spiritual characteristics.

1. To transmute everything it touches into likeness of itself.
2. The flame of fire always rises upward and thus symbolizes yearning to attain higher spiritual life.
3. Lastly, it produces light, the chaser of darkness.

The sacred fire in Zoroastrian temples, or Atash-Bahrams, is never allowed to extinguish under any circumstances. In the oldest of these temples situated about one hundred miles north of Bombay, still is burning the sacred flame of Iran-Shah which the pilgrim forefathers of the Parsis had carried along with them through all the years of struggle and suffering sustained at the hands of the Moslem Arab conquerors of their motherland.

Now is a good time to talk about the majestic picture of Fravahar shown on the insert. This symbol is seen on Zoroastrian temples, palaces, books and greeting cards. Variations of it could also be depicted in non-Zoroastrian enterprises. Matter of fact, the name Mazda was used for electrical lamps and is now adopted by a Far Eastern manufacturer.

The symbol Fravahar was designed during the reign of Achaemenian Dynasty around the 6th century B.C. The ruins of Persepolis, the palace of Darius the Great of that dynasty, stands a witness to the glorious days of ancient Iran. In the symbol, the head represents wisdom which is so emphasized in the Faith of Zoroaster. As you recall, Ahura Mazda, or the Supreme Creator, means the Wise Lord. The raised index finger indicates one God. The ring in the left hand means honoring verbal or written agreements. The wings with three layers of feathers symbolizes the three major commandments of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. The larger circle represents this world of matter. The two side supports are the two natures of man, namely angelic and animal, and finally, the skirt is worldly attachment.

The message of Asha expressed by this symbol is that through belief in one God, by application of wisdom and trustworthiness and wings of the three commandments, the angelic aspect of man could free him from the lowly world of matter and lift him towards God.

Let us discuss other concepts and principles. Ahura Mazda, though supreme in power, is not unopposed. The two opposing forces created by Him are the Holy Spirit called Sepanta Mainyu opposed by Angra Mainya, the bad spirit, also known as Ahriman or Shaitin. In the hierarchy of attributes of God, Asha is opposed by Druj or lying. Today's Persian word for lying is doroug. Such contrast of forces began when Ahura Mazda created the world and gave freedom of choice to man.

Some writers mistakenly call Zoroaster's religion dualistic, but Ahriman, being a creation of God similar to the fallen angel, Lucifer, in Christianity, does not make the two powers equal, particularly when in the Gathas, Zoroaster states that in the fullness of time Ahura Mazda would overthrow Ahriman. Therefore, Ahura Mazda and Ahriman are not considered co-equal or co-eternal.

Zoroaster declared that each man's soul is the seat of war between good and evil and that the soul was not created incorruptible. He eliminated the animal sacrifices so common before His appearance and condemned the ritual of intoxication with haoma juice.

He stressed that man's role in this world is to co-operate and be harmonious with nature, such as the four elements of water, fire, air, and earth, and to lead a virtuous life of Humata, Hukhta, Huvareshhta (good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.)

On the subject of life after death and the day of judgement, the following might give you an impression.

After death each soul must face judgement at the Chinvat Bridge, or the Bridge of Separation. That bridge spans the abyss of hell, and at its farthest end, opens to paradise. Before the bridge, the two judges, Mithra and Rashnu, assisted by the guardian angel, Soroush, read and weigh the deeds of the departed. Depending on the predominance of good or evil, the pointing hand of Ahura Mazda will direct towards paradise or hell. The righteous have no

difficulty crossing the bridge, but the sinful would not pass beyond its midpoint. Individual judgement follows shortly after death, and the state of the soul remains fixed until the general resurrection at the end of time when even the sinful become cleansed by the molten metal and fire and everyone will enter paradise.

In the Gathas, paradise is presented in ascending levels. The highest level is termed as the House of Songs, and also the Best Existence. Hell is referred to as the House of Lies and also the Worst Existence. In case the good and evil deeds are precisely equal, the soul is carried off to a place called the Place of the Mixed, which is not exactly like the Christian purgatory because it is a place of mild correction where the only pain suffered is that of heat and cold. A closer parallel to Christian purgatory is the Zoroastrian hell which is not eternal and only a prelude to the soul's entrance to heaven. As you notice in Zoroastrian religion there is no eternal damnation as God judges with justice and mercy. The wrath of God mentioned in Judaic and Islamic doctrine is not found in Zoroastrian teaching which considers wrathfulness to be a characteristic of Satan. To think that God has wrath is considered to be a sin.

According to Zoroaster, children are born pure and without sin, but with free choice which will lead the individual to its eventual destiny. It is markedly different from some Christian belief in original sin and Islam's arbitrary predetermination of by Allah. Path of Asha is sufficient for salvation and therefore multiple returns, or reincarnation, does not enter this Faith.

With the passage of centuries, the following description of the final judgement day is recorded. Zoroaster will be succeeded by three Saviour Beings who will appear at intervals of 1,000 years with the following names; Oshidar, Oshidar-Mah, and the greatest one, Syoshance or Shah-Bahram. They are all from the seed of Zoroaster. At the appearance of Syoshance, Ahriman will be hurled into hell and all people will live together forever. The aged will be restored to age 40 and children to age 15. Since they are immortal there will be no need for food or procreation.

Now a few words about the ritual of the sacred cord. There are rituals for each point of life such as birth, adulthood, marriage

and death. The initiation ceremony called navjot, or new birth, is done for both sexes in Iran and for only boys in India, usually between ages 7 and 10, but it must take place before age 15. In this ceremony the child wears the sacred shirt called sedreh and the sacred cord called koshti. Sedreh is made of cotton and is an undershirt with a small pouch, called gerehban, sewn at the notch of the v-neck. This pouch is the repository of the three commandments. The koshti is a cord made of white lamb's wool. It is made of 72 strands representing 72 chapters of Yasna, the most important portion of Avesta. It goes around the waist three times, again signifying the three commandments of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, and is tied in a sailor's knot in front and back. A faithful Zoroastrian unties and ties the cord five times a day while chanting specific prayer. Thus a child is initiated with outward symbols of the Faith.

The two final subjects are the religion of later Zoroastrians and the present-day Zoroastrians. Your question on the towers of silence will be addressed, also.

Cyrus the Great in 538 B.C. conquered Babylon. He was presumably a Zoroastrian but not a strict one. Because of political reasons he sought the support of the Babylonians by appearing to be a worshipper of the god of Babylon, Marduk, but his son, Darius, was less compromising and honored Ahura Mazda. During the 36 years of the reign of Darius the Great, which was from 521 to 485 B.C., the Faith of Zoroaster became the official state religion. Under his instruction all sacred Zoroastrian scriptures were collected and inscribed on parchment in letters of gold. The whole collection was divided according to subject matter into 21 books. This collection was deposited in the imperial library of Persepolis in southwestern Iran, and presently a short way from Shiraz.

This was during the 36 years reign of Darius the Great, a king of Achaemenian dynasty when the Persian Empire extended to Egypt, Europe and Greece. For nearly two centuries they held the Middle East, but the 5th century B.C. witnessed the gradual decline of that empire. In later 4th century B.C. it was defeated by the one known as Alexander the Great. By the order of the conquering Macedonian, while intoxicated, the library and all the palace was set on fire and destroyed. Stone pillars, steps and some walls



still standing are the silent witnesses to the destructive madness of Alexander.

After one century the cultural force of Greece gradually receded, and finally the powerful Dynasty of Sassanians came to power. It ruled from 3rd to 7th century after Christ when in 651 A.D. was defeated by Moslem Arabs. Valuable records disappeared in the tumults between 300 B.C. and 300 A.D., a period of six centuries.

With the passage of centuries, changes took place. Ahura Mazda lost his prominence and the god, Mithra, and Anahita, the goddess of waters and fertility resurged. The following are among the major changes.

People became worshippers of Zoroaster instead of Ahura Mazda, with passionate devotion to Zoroaster through stories of miracles. The following is a good example. Tradition states that Zoroaster's conception occurred by the glory of Ahura Mazda uniting itself with Zoroaster's mother at her birth, making her fit to bear the prophet. At birth, Zoroaster laughed aloud and all creation rejoiced. The baby was almost killed in the cradle, survived a huge fire, and was almost trampled to death by a herd of cattle when an ox stood over Him and saved Him, as also later did a horse in a stampede of horses. He was placed in a cave with wolves whose young had been killed. The wolves allowed a female sheep to enter the cave and give milk to the baby Zoroaster. These near disasters were brought on by hostile demons. The first time He attended the court of King Vishtaspa He appeared through the roof of the palace as he held a cube of fire in the palm of His bare hand.

Another major change was Ahura Mazda having partners. By then the name was shortened to Hormozd. The old Aryan gods crept in. A number of Yazatas and angels were named, greatest of which was Mithra. For you to recognize the station of Mithra in that period, it is stated that Ahura Mazda himself offered sacrifices to Mithra. Haoma, the sacred psychodelic plant, was reintroduced. Haoma was considered to be a god. By crushing it to extract the juice, they believed they were actually sacrificing the god and by drinking the juice they would achieve immortality.

At this period, Fravashis were introduced. They were considered

to be the ancestral spirits guarding the living, and in return they expected to be worshipped. Later on this concept became broadened to include being guardians of the gods as well. The Fravashis were described as the spiritual counterpart of living people, animals and plants, and had existed from the beginning of time and would last to eternity. Interestingly enough, even Ahura Mazda was assigned a Fravashi.

As if these changes were not radical enough, it continued. Listen to this. Ahura Mazda and Ahriman were made equal and the world was regarded as their joint creation. No wonder inadequate research makes one think that Zoroastrian theology is dualistic.

The obsession with the dead is worth mentioning since parts of it have hygienic values. Contact with a corpse was considered to cause great defilement because a dead body, cut fingernails and hair became property of Satan. Anyone touching a corpse must immediately be cleansed by ablutions with water or the urine of cattle. Anything other than metal or stone coming in contact with corpse must be destroyed. The special outfits of the corpse-bearers were destroyed after each funeral. Only two bearers would enter the tower of silence, or dakhmeh. The towers of silence were a large, circular area on a hilltop enclosed by thick, high wall, open to the sky, and with one locked entrance. Clothing would be removed from the corpse and it would be laid on a bed of stone under the open sky for the birds of prey to consume. The vultures usually cleaned the body to skeleton within half an hour. Later when the bone was bleached and dried by the sun, it was thrown into a central pit which was underlaid with layers of sand and charcoal. No monuments were permitted so the rich could not be distinguished from the poor. Instead of monuments, it was desired that the anniversary of one's death would be remembered by the family with prayer and charity. The greatest monument to a Zoroastrian would be remembering the departed for all of the love and services given.

The reason for not burying the dead nor cremating by fire was to not defile either the earth or fire, the sacred natural elements. In towns where there were not enough Zoroastrian deaths to keep sufficient vultures, the dead were buried in lead coffins within concrete vaults. At the present time, sometimes cremation in

electric oven is done, thus not defiling the fire. It is significant that Arbab Kaykhosrow Shahrokh in his early years of leadership changed this system by acquiring a cemetery, although not without outcry of the conservative Zoroastrians, but it freed the community from the ridicule of Moslems.

The step-by-step drama for the soul after death became more elaborate as follows. In the first three days the soul sits or hovers around the head of the deceased and reflects on its past good or evil thoughts, words and deeds. On the fourth day, it makes its way to the Chinvat Bridge to stand before judges, Mithra, Rashnu, and Soroush. Rashnu holds the scale with which the good and evil deeds of the departed are weighed. Then the soul walks on the bridge which spans over hell. For the righteous soul the bridge is like the broad side of a sword, and is guided to enter heaven by the hand of a beautiful maiden which is that person's own goodness. For the sinful and evil, the bridge is as the sharp edge of a sword, and the soul is confronted by an ugly hag, the embodiment of his own shortcomings, who embraces him and pulls him into the abyss of hell.

In heaven there is light, songs, sweet fragrance and the company of the righteous; while in hell, there is loneliness, stench, and monsters, the smallest of which is the size of a mountain.

Now let us learn about the Zoroastrians of today. There are about 100,000 Parsis in India, 20,000 to 30,000 in Iran, and 2,000 in the United States. Their high priest is called dastoor, the plural is dastooran, and then there are specially trained priests called mobed who perform ceremonies at the fire altar and attend the sacred flame. Should you ever see a photo of a Zoroastrian priest attending the sacred fire, you will notice the white cap and white mask, like surgical mask, because exhaled breath and fallen hair is considered unclean. Defilement of the sacred fire must be avoided. The priests are the descendants of the tribe of Magi. The three wise men, the Magi, who went to the Holy Land to bring gifts to the baby Jesus were Zoroastrian priests. Astronomy was an advanced science for them, so naturally they were guided by the stars.

The priests memorize most of the Avesta which is in an ancient

and dead language. The priests are expected to be married. The only sacrifice done today is feeding a special wood to the sacred fire. Mithraism has left the religion. Men and women have equal rights and monogamy without divorce is the ideal. Active converting efforts are not practiced.

To a faithful Zoroastrian, service is giving help to the poor. Wealth or poverty is not a concept connected to money. One's riches may consist of talents, bodily strength, spiritual insight, affluence or many other gifts of God. One has to share such riches with those lacking them. The best reward is the gift of happiness and strength to do greater service. What a noble philosophy. Each one of us could become a happy being by sharing our God-given gifts.

Finally, a few words about the influence of Zoroastrian teaching on two succeeding religions. Cyrus conquered Babylon in 538 B.C. and freed the Jews that had been held there in slavery and oppression for fifty years. A minority of those Jews returned to Judea, now known as Israel. The rest enjoyed the tolerance of the Persians and some even moved to Persia.

Biblical books before 538 B.C. have no Satan figure, but after that date, Satan is mentioned. Also biblical books before 538 B.C. have no mention of resurrection, hell, heaven and the day of judgement. It is interesting to see the similarity of the name for the evil spirit in three successive religions, namely Shaitin in Zoroastrian, Satan in Christianity, and Shaitan in Islam. The sacrifice practiced by the Zoroastrians of today which is offering of fruit and a flat, unleavened, round bread has a resemblance to the Christian eucharist.

As we contemplate on the ups and downs with its resultant changes and modification of this religion, let us look at the picture of Fravahar once again and reflect on a religion in which the majority of its followers still manifest their inherited nobility by combining the path of Asha with Vohu Mana. While translating that combination into Kashatra, they hold fast to Armaiti to attain Khordad and Amordad. To translate that into terms we are accustomed to will summarize the teachings of the ancient prophet of Iran.

One must strive to comprehend the Eternal Law of Asha, meaning

truth, purity and righteousness, and must apply it to daily life. In order to do this, one must cultivate a capacity for deep love. This combination of love and truth must be translated into acts of service while holding fast to the unshakeable faith in the essential holiness and goodness of all creation. Thereby one shall attain perfection and immortality, which our Creator has intended for each one of us.

At this juncture, the words of the honorable Dr. Taraporewala need to be repeated. "In the past, Iran gave the world the great message of Asha and the three commandments of God. The world today needs the Message once again." This was an inspired sentiment by that great author, not realizing that the great Message of Asha and the three commandments all are well-encompassed in the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, the true descendant of Zoroaster. (God Passes By, p. 94) Baha'u'llah's genealogy as researched by the great scholar, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, extends far back to Yazdigird III, the last Zoroastrian king of the Sassanian dynasty, and to Zoroaster Himself. Thus the prophecy fulfilled, and from the seed of Zoroaster, Shah-Bahram as Baha'u'llah manifested Himself.

Let the heedless world wake up from its deep slumber with this call: He of the Golden Light, after 3,000 years, has reappeared in the Glory of God, Baha'u'llah, the most precious Gift to humanity from the land of Aryans.

The final note, as promised, will be recitation of some poetry of Zoroaster, known as the Gathas, translated into English.

## A FEW VERSES FROM THE GATHAS

I would reach up to you, Ahura Mazda, through Vohu Mana, devoted love. Let me be granted, Lord, in both the worlds-this world of body and that of the soul-the blessings that do flow through Asha's Truth, whereby Ye lead the faithful into Light.

And if there be some, who in their righteousness and by their loving hearts appear to Thee as truly insightful and upright, O Lord, grant them in full all that their souls desire, for I believe no prayer devout and true can ever remain unanswered from Your side.

And when the two Spirits did gather together at Creation's early dawn, one made Life, the other made Not-Life, and thus Creation's purpose is achieved. Dark is the mind of those that cling to falsehood, but brightly shines the mind that holds to truth.

If ye will only know and learn these laws which Mazda hath ordained for ye, O men- the laws of happiness, the laws of pain-that falsehood brings on age-long punishment; that truth leads on to fuller, higher Life. Upon all such the Light Divine shall dawn.

That I might choose the better way reveal what Thou hast ordained in accord with Truth. Reveal to me through love, through Vohuman, that I might be uplifted and be sure whatever comes at Thy command is best for me - whether reward or otherwise.

Who hears the truth and lives it in his life, soul-healing lord of wisdom he becomes. To spread true teachings, Ahura, his words are eloquent and able to convince. O Mazda, through Thy fire blazing clear unto each man his place do Ye assign.

When a man doth strive through spoken word, through firm resolve, or through the act direct to frustrate those treading falsehood's path, or teaches them to tread the Path of Truth, he surely doth fulfil the Lord's own will out of his love for Ahura Mazda.

All holy lives are put into Thy hands, all that have been, and all that are today, and all, O Mazda, that shall ever be. Out of Thy grace permit us these to share, through love of man, through service and through truth, raise Thou our souls into Thy Realms of Light.

The Path, O Ahura, that one path of Vohuman Thou pointed out to me, that ancient teaching of all Saviours - that good deeds done for their own sake lead far. This teaching leads mankind to wisdom true, that single prize of life-Thyself, the Goal.

This prize most precious shall, O Mazda, surely be gained by souls in mortal bodies clothed, by deeds of love as taught by Vohuman. For they best serve our fruitful mother-earth, and help, Ahura, in Thy holy plan; they fulfil Asha's task, they do Thy wish.

Therefore, O Mazda, unto me the noblest words and deeds do Thou teach. These indeed through Vohuman and through Asha shall express the yearning of my prayers. O Ahura, regenerated and true make my life, as Thou wishest.

Who brings to others light, himself gets light bestowed by Ahura Mazda, the Lord. For progress, for upholding Asha's law, I pray for life renewed and strength of soul. Armaiti, bless us with the light divine, and mould our life as Vohuman directs.

Thou art Divine, I know, O Lord Supreme, Thou was the First, I know, when Life began. All thoughts and words and deeds of men shall bear fruit as laid down in Thine eternal law. Evil to evil, blessings good to good-Thy wisdom thus ordains until end of time.

Thou art Divine, I know, O Lord Supreme, since good found entrance to my heart through love. I asked, What is Thy holy will? To whom shall I pay my daily utmost homage? Since then, unto Thine inner flame I pay my homage and to Thine eternal law.

Thou art Divine, I know, O Lord Supreme, since good found entrance to my heart through love, and through this teaching I grow true and wise. When difficulties come, my faith in man leads me to be and do what Thou has taught - to be my own true self and do my best.

Thou art Divine, I know, O Lord Supreme, since good found entrance to my heart through love, that we may know where our desires lead. Grant us the bounty that few would dare to ask for. Grant us the gift of long-enduring life, long life of service.

Him shall I strive to turn to with hymns of adoration, for I have seen Him with my soul's eye. Good thoughts, good words and good deeds realized through Asha. Ahura Mazda is Lord Supreme, let us bring our devotions before Him in the Abode on High.

But if the strong one helps not to change the wicked, he himself shall get ensnared. Whoever lets untruth exist without protest, himself becomes supporter of untruth. Righteous is he who loves the truthful man, this is the law since souls were first sent down.