

ZOROASTRIANISM



Zoroastrianism is considered one of the oldest monotheistic religions. It was founded by the Persian prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra)—“He of the golden light”—who lived from 628 BCE to 551 BCE in Persia (northeast Iran), whose teachings featured a single god, Ahura Mazda, as well as concepts of heaven and hell, good and evil, and the Apocalypse. Zoroastrians practise “good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.” Followers are born into the faith, converts are not encouraged, and there are between 145,000 and 200,000 adherents, most living in India, Central Iran and Southern Pakistan. The remaining followers are scattered throughout Great Britain, Canada and Australia. In India, followers are known as Parsis.

Zoroastrianism is a belief in the struggle between good and evil. Zoroaster’s teachings were based upon the conflict between one Eternal God—Ahura Mazda—who is wholly wise, just and good, and Angra Mainyu—the spirit of evil. Ahura Mazda called upon a number of lesser good spirits to destroy this evil, while Angra Mainyu was aided by a host of demons. Within this system of opposing good and evil forces, humans must choose one side or the other, and followers of Zoroastrianism believe that good will eventually triumph. The Avesta is the traditional and holy canon of scriptures; it includes the Gathas, which are the most sacred texts believed to be written by Zoroaster himself.

Zoroastrians celebrate six seasonal festivals—each five days long—called **GAHAMBARS**, which reflect the six primordial creations of Ahura Mazda. They also mark the name days of the eleven divinities of the Zoroastrian pantheon, each of which has a day of the month and a month of the year dedicated to them. Other holy days include:

NO RUZ or **NAVROZ**, the Parsi New Year observed at the Spring Equinox.

PATETI, New Year’s Day, traditionally a day of introspection.

SADEH, a mid-winter festival celebrated 100 days after the first day of winter.

(K)HORDAD SAL, the birthday of Zoroaster on 26 March.

ZARTOSHT NO-DISO, commemorating the death of Zoroaster on 26 December.

ESSENTIAL NON-FICTION

HARTZ, Paula R. (2004). *Zoroastrianism*. Revised ed. (World Religions). Facts on File. ISBN 0-8160-5723-0. Grades 7 and up.

There are few books for young adults on the subject of Zoroastrianism. This title, positively reviewed by *School Library Journal*, is part of a well-organized and readable series covering the history, scripture, philosophy and current practices of world religions. Colour illustrations, maps and sidebars, as well as a glossary, help to highlight the important figures and ideas of Zoroastrianism.

KRIWACZEK, Paul. (2003). *In Search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas That Changed the World*. ISBN 0-3754-1528-9. Grades 11 and up.

This comprehensive historical travelogue examines the significance of the prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster) throughout the centuries, and in particular its influences on Western religious history. Kriwaczek seeks and finds evidence of Zarathustra's teachings in Christianity, Judaism and Islam.



Water (APO) and fire (ATAR) are considered to be the fundamental life-sustaining agents of ritual purity. Zoroaster instructed his followers to pray in the presence of fire, which is a symbol of order and justice.