

## ZOROASTRIANISM: THE MAJOR PERSIAN RELIGION

The religion of Zoroaster was spread in Persia by the Prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster), probably around 600 B.C.E., though perhaps earlier. This seems to have been the first major religion founded by a particular, inspiring individual, though we know little about Zoroaster as a person beyond his influential writings. As an Indo-European people, Persians shared cultural roots with India and also with Greeks and Romans; Zoroastrianism however was a distinctive religious product, an ethical monotheism that can usefully be compared with Judaism, whose roots are somewhat earlier and seemingly quite separate. Zoroastrianism must also be treated in terms of change, away from the kinds of religions that had prevailed previously in Mesopotamia; not only ideas, but also practices (like animal sacrifice, of which Zoroaster firmly disapproved) were significantly challenged.

Zoroastrianism became deeply embedded in Iran, the Hymns or Gathas playing a role quite similar to the Old Testament's service for the Hebrews. Ultimately, the religion was eclipsed by the spread of Islam to Persia, but pockets survived; and it has also been argued that Zoroastrianism had significant influence on other religions that formed in the region, including Christianity.

### HYMNS OF ZARATHUSTRA, VERSE 33

1

Towards the wicked man and the righteous one  
And him in whom right and wrong meet  
Shall the judge act in upright manner,  
According to the laws of the present existence.

2

He who by word or thought or hands  
Works evil to the wicked one,  
Or he who converts his clansman to the good,  
They please the Lord and fulfil his will.

3

He who, belonging to family or village or tribe, O Lord,  
Is most good to the righteous man, or labours for the care of the herd,  
He shall be in the pasture of Righteousness and of Good Mind.

. . .

4

I who by my prayer will keep from thee, O Wise One, disobedience and Bad Mind,  
Discord from the family, from the village the evil that is very near,  
The oppressors from the tribe, and from the herd's pasture the worst steward,

5

I who will invoke thy Discipline as the mightiest of all,  
At the outcome, when I shall attain the long life,  
The Dominion of the Good Mind and the straight paths of Right  
Wherein dwells the Wise Lord,

6

I who, a priest, would learn through Righteousness,  
Would learn from the Best Mind the straight paths,  
Henceforth to practise husbandry in the sense in which it has been  
ordained,  
I strive therefore to see thee and take counsel with thee, O Wise Lord!

1

Now will I speak to those who will hear  
Of the things which the initiate should remember:  
The praises and prayer of the Good Mind to the Lord  
And the joy which he shall see in the light who has remembered them well.

2

Hear with your ears that which is the sovereign good;  
With a clear mind look upon the two sides  
Between which each man must choose for himself,  
Watchful beforehand that the great test may be accomplished in our favour.

3

Now at the beginning the twin spirits have declared their nature,  
The better and the evil,  
In thought and word and deed. And between the two  
The wise ones choose well, not so the foolish.

4

And when these two spirits came together,  
In the beginning they established life and non-life,  
And that at the last the worst existence should be for the wicked,  
But for the righteous one the Best Mind.

5

Of these two spirits, the evil one chose to do the worst things;  
But the Most Holy Spirit, clothed in the most steadfast heavens,  
Joined himself unto Righteousness;  
And thus did all those who delight to please the Wise Lord by honest deeds.

6

Between the two, the false gods also did not choose rightly,  
For while they pondered they were beset by error,  
So that they chose the Worst Mind.  
Then did they hasten to join themselves unto Fury,  
That they might by it deprave the existence of man.

7

And to him came Devotion, together with Dominion, Good Mind and  
Righteousness:  
She gave endurance of body and the breath of life,  
That he may be thine apart from them,  
As the first by the retributions through the metal.

8

And when their punishment shall come to these sinners,  
Then, O Wise One, shall thy Dominion, with the Good Mind,  
Be granted to those who have delivered Evil into the hands of Righteousness, O  
Lord!

9

And may we be those that renew this existence!  
O Wise One, and you other Lords, and Righteousness, bring your alliance,  
That thoughts may gather where wisdom is faint.

10

Then shall Evil cease to flourish,  
While those who have acquired good fame  
Shall reap the promised reward  
In the blessed dwelling of the Good Mind, of the Wise One, and of Righteousness.

## II. HEBREW LAW

### Exodus

In the third month after Israel had left Egypt, they came to the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and, entering the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped there, pitching their tents in front of the mountain. Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I have carried you on eagles' wings and brought you here to me. If only you will now listen to me and keep my covenant, then out of all peoples you will become my special possession; for the whole earth is mine. You will be to me a kingdom of priests, my holy nation. Those are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.' . . .

God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You must have no other god besides me.

You must not make a carved image for yourself, nor the likeness of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth.

You must not bow down to them in worship; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and

fourth generation of those who reject me. But I keep faith with thousands, those who love me and keep my commandments.

You must not make wrong use of the name of the LORD your God; the LORD will not leave unpunished anyone who misuses his name.

Remember to keep the sabbath day holy. You have six days to labour and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; that day you must not do any work, neither you, nor your son or your daughter, your slave or your slave-girl, your cattle, or the alien residing among you; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and on the seventh day he rested. Therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and declared it holy.

Honour your father and your mother, so that you may enjoy long life in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

Do not commit murder.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not give false evidence against your neighbour.

Do not covet your neighbour's household: you must not covet your neighbour's wife, his slave, his slave-girl, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to him. . . .

These are the laws you are to set before them:

When you purchase a Hebrew as a slave, he will be your slave for six years; in the seventh year he is to go free without paying anything.

If he comes to you alone, he is to go away alone; but if he is already a married man, his wife is to go away with him.

If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman with her children belongs to her master, and the man must go away alone. But if the slave should say, 'I am devoted to my master and my wife and children; I do not wish to go free,' then his master must bring him to God: he is to be brought to the door or the doorpost, and his master will pierce his ear with an awl; the man will then be his slave for life.

When a man sells his daughter into slavery, she is not to go free as male slaves may.

If she proves displeasing to her master who had designed her for himself, he must let her be redeemed; he has treated her unfairly, and therefore he has no right to sell her to foreigners. If he assigns her to his son, he must allow her the rights of a daughter. If he takes another woman, he must not deprive the first of meat, clothes, and conjugal rights; if he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free without payment. . . .

When a man removes the cover of a cistern or digs a cistern and leaves it uncovered, then if an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the cistern must make good the loss; he must pay the owner the price of the animal, and the dead beast will be his.

When one man's ox butts another's and kills it, they must sell the live ox, share the price, and also share the dead beast. But if it is known that the ox has for some time past been vicious and the owner has not kept it under control, he must make good the loss, ox for ox, but the dead beast is his.

When a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters or sells it, he must repay five beasts for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. He must pay in full; if he has no means, he is to be sold to pay for the theft. But if the animal is found alive in his possession, be it ox, donkey, or sheep, he must repay two for each one stolen.

If a burglar is caught in the act and receives a fatal injury, it is not murder; but if he breaks in after sunrise and receives a fatal injury, then it is murder.

When a man burns off a field or a vineyard and lets the fire spread so that it burns another man's field, he must make restitution from his own field according to the yield expected; and if the whole field is laid waste, he must make restitution from the best part of his own field or vineyard. . . .

When a man seduces a virgin who is not yet betrothed, he must pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father refuses to give her to him, the seducer must pay in silver a sum equal to the bride-price for virgins. . . .

You must not wrong or oppress an alien; you were yourselves aliens in Egypt. You must not wrong a widow or a fatherless child. If you do, and they appeal to me, be sure that I shall listen; my anger will be roused and I shall kill you with the sword; your own wives will become widows and your children fatherless.

If you advance money to any poor man amongst my people, you are not to act like a moneylender; you must not exact interest from him.

If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, return it to him by sunset, because it is his only covering. It is the cloak in which he wraps his body; in what else can he sleep? If he appeals to me, I shall listen, for I am full of compassion. . . .

You must not be led into wrongdoing by the majority, nor, when you give evidence in a lawsuit, should you side with the majority to pervert justice; nor should you show favouritism to a poor person in his lawsuit.

Should you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey straying, you must take it back to him. Should you see the donkey of someone who hates you lying helpless under its load, however unwilling you may be to help, you must lend a hand with it.

You must not deprive the poor man of justice in his lawsuit. Avoid all lies, and do not cause the death of the innocent and guiltless; for I the LORD will never acquit the guilty. Do not accept a bribe, for bribery makes the discerning person blind and the just person give a crooked answer. . . .

Be attentive to every word of mine. You must not invoke other gods: their names are not to cross your lips.

Three times a year you are to keep a pilgrim-feast to me. You are to celebrate the pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread: for seven days, as I have commanded you, you are to eat unleavened bread at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt; and no one is to come into my presence without an offering. You are to celebrate the pilgrim-feast of Harvest, with the firstfruits of your work in sowing the land, and the pilgrim-feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather the fruits of your work in from the land. Those three times a year all your males are to come into the presence of the LORD GOD.

Do not offer the blood of my sacrifice at the same time as anything leavened.

The fat of my festal offering is not to remain overnight till morning.

You must bring the choicest firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God.

Do not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

And now I am sending an angel before you to guard you on your way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Heed him and listen to his voice. Do not defy him; he will not pardon your rebelliousness, for my authority rests in him. If you will only listen to his voice and do all I tell you, then I shall be an enemy to your enemies, and I shall harass those who harass you. My angel will go before you and bring you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I will make an end of them. You are not to bow down to their gods; you are not to worship them or observe their rites. Rather, you must tear down all their images and smash their sacred pillars. You are to worship the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water. I shall take away all sickness out of your midst. No woman will miscarry or be barren in your land. I shall grant you a full span of life.

I shall send terror of me ahead of you and throw into panic every people you find in your path. I shall make all your enemies turn their backs towards you. I shall spread panic before you to drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites in front of you.

I shall not drive them out all in one year, or the land would become waste and the wild beasts too many for you, but I shall drive them out little by little until you have grown numerous enough to take possession of the country. I shall establish your frontiers from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the river Euphrates. I shall give the inhabitants of the land into your power, and you will drive them out before you. You are not to make any alliance with them and their gods. They must not stay in your land, for fear they make you sin against me by ensnaring you into the worship of their gods. . . .