

Zarathushtra

**INTRODUCTION
&
FIRST SIX CHAPTERS**

by
ARDESHIR MEHTA

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CAVEAT

There are some typographical mistakes in this draft, and it has been formatted for single-sided printing (the final book will be printed on both sides of the paper, with the margin notes along the outside edge of each page). Some page numbers may also be off in the draft.

Each chapter begins with an odd-numbered page, regardless of the page on which the previous chapter ended—in order to preserve the same page numbering between double-sided and single-sided printing.

In addition, some quotations will have to be checked against the originals, to make sure they are correct in content, reference and/or translation. (*Hey—it's only a draft, right?*)

Ardeshir Mehta

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Ardeshir D. Mehta
414 Kintyre Private
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K2C 3M7

Tel: (613) 225 6208
Fax: (613) 225 0244

Zarathushtra

INTRODUCTION

The most ancient records we have of humanity having evolved a culture, a religion, and even a language, are to be found in the *Vedas*¹. The earliest of these Hymns go so far back in time as to seem to be almost contemporaneous with the beginnings of language itself: the first tentative attempts made by humans to say something, to express themselves in words. We can observe this process taking place before our very eyes and inside our very ears when we read and, more importantly, *listen to* the Vedas, for in many cases, the very sound of Vedic words convey their intended meaning: for this was, of course, the only way they could gain acceptance in those early days when, in all probability, no other language existed—when speech itself began to evolve from undifferentiated sound. We also see in the Vedas the process of a simple language acquiring greater and greater complexity, as we observe words becoming linked to each other through what linguists call their “roots” or “elements”—simple basic sounds which give rise to many different meanings, related in concept and yet distinct from each other.

The sound of the Vedas is one of the most fascinating features of this most ancient of ancient literatures, and of the language that gave rise to it. It is a language and a literature whose very resonances, whose very sounds, have rich and vibrant meaning. Indeed, this is one reason the Vedas are called श्रुति *shruti*, “that which is heard”. Not merely heard: the Vedas are *chanted*; in fact, the English word “chant” is very probably derived, in the ultimate analysis, from the Sanskrit term छन्द *chhanda*, which denotes the “metre” according to which Vedic Hymns are to be recited aloud. In fact, the word छन्दस् *chhandas* was another name for the Hymns of the Vedas themselves; for it is with this meaning that the word is at times used in the *Upanishads*²: they are referred to as “The Chants”.

If this word छन्द *chhanda* has found its way even into English (via Latin) as “chant”, it would be strange indeed if it were not found in languages which were spoken in lands far closer to India. And, as a matter of fact, so it is: it is the word **Zend**, found in the language of ancient Iran.

The *Zend Avesta*—the sacred scripture of the followers of Zarathushtra³—is the most ancient book of Iran. In fact the San-

¹ “*Vedas*: Ancient scriptures of India held to be ... the very revealed word of divinity. They go back to the early centuries of Aryan migration into India, some of the hymns doubtless having been in use before their arrival in India. There are four Vedas, the basic Rig-veda upon which the remaining three depend to a considerable degree; the Sama-veda or Chant-veda; the Yajur-veda and the late Atharva-veda. Theoretically the later Hindu sacred writings serve but to elucidate further the teachings of the Vedas.” (Note by Charles S. Braden in *An Encyclopedia of Religion* edited by Vergilius Ferm). What the learned scholar does *not* say is perhaps more fascinating than what he does. He does not mention, for instance, that the Veda—considered as a whole—is the oldest book humanity possesses; or that its language is the first known form of the vast majority of languages of both Europe and India, not excluding English, and far antedating Greek and Latin; or that it contains among the most marvelous poetry ever uttered by man—or woman. It would be impossible to do justice to this, arguably the world’s most magnificent literary work, in a short space; and indeed we shall not even attempt it: for of this entire book the Vedas will be one of the principal *leitmotifs*; and the more you read here, the more, we hope, you will be fascinated.

² “*Upanishads*: the basic philosophic texts of Hinduism, upon which all the orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy are supposed to rest. They are writings which record the speculations of the Hindu sages upon the nature of the world and of ultimate reality, and how man may find salvation.” (Charles S. Braden again, in the same *Encyclopedia of Religion* quoted above.) The word उपनिषद् *Upanishad* itself is derived, it is thought, from the terms उप-नि *upa-ni* “near to” and षद् *shad* “[to] sit”; for these were treatises—or so it is conjectured—expounded to disciples who *sat near* their teachers, most probably in forest glades, in order to learn the wisdom contained in them. (The word वेद *Veda*, on the other hand, comes from an ancient root *vid* meaning “knowledge”, and from which the English term “wit”—as in “wit and wisdom”—is also derived). It would be as unnecessary to explain these terms to Hindus as to explain what the Old and the

skrit word **पुस्तक** **pustaka** or “book” is itself thought by some to be derived from the term **Avesta**, which word, by application of the phonetic rules of transposition from Iranian into Indian pronunciation, becomes at first **उपसथा** **upasthâ** and thence **अपिस्तक** **apistaka** in Sanskrit. The word—or rather, a derivative of it—was so important to Pânîni⁴, the foremost grammarian of ancient India, that he singled it out for special emphasis: he says **उपान्मन्त्रकरणे** **upan mantrakarane**, *i.e.*, “**Upân** means ‘to compose **mantras** (or hymns)’” (*Pânîni 1.3.25*). The term **Zend Avesta**, then, can be translated as “A Book of Vedic Hymns”; and indeed the core of the **Avesta** are Zarathushtra’s own Hymns, his **Gathas** or Songs.

It is hardly appreciated, whether by the Hindus or the Zoroastrians of today, how close to one another the Gathas and the Vedas are. Their relationship is so intimate that entire passages from the Gathas can be rendered into the purest Vedic Sanskrit by the mere application of phonetic rules—that is, by merely exchanging some sounds for others; for instance, the Sanskrit word **अहम्** **aham** “I” is pronounced **ajem** in the Gatha, while the Sanskrit **जीव्हा** **jîvhâ** “tongue” becomes the Iranian **hijva**. Not only are the words of both languages derived from the same roots, but it is very likely that both versions of this common tongue were understood by people on either side of the Indus; for not only the words, but the grammar and syntax of the two idioms are virtually the same: in fact, some of the rules enunciated by Pânîni for Sanskrit⁵ grammar apply far more often to the language of the Gatha than they do to Vedic and even post-Vedic Sanskrit. Many names, on either side of the River, were in those times similar, and moreover, meant the same thing; for in ancient days personal names were epithets, describing some distinguishing characteristic of the person named—as for instance **शुक्र** **Shukra** meaning “bright” or “white”, and **कृष्ण** **Krishna** meaning “dark” or “black”. Traditions observed by people on either side of the Indus Valley were similar, and so were their myths and legends; many of their religious rites had virtually the same form and content, and were at times even called by the same or similar names. These people felt themselves free to intermarry among each other, and have offspring to inherit their property; for some of them settled down in Iran while other did the same in India, and yet others had relations and homes in both these territories. For in those days what we now call the frontier between the two lands—the imaginary line dividing people of imaginary differences—did not exist; the Vedic people populated both Iran and India equally freely. They established kingdoms, formed alliances, and created common systems of worship and living and trade and even measurement and mathematics; developed ongoing cultural and trade contacts with peoples

New Testaments are to Christians; but since generally speaking the votaries of each religion believe theirs to be superior (and others’, moreover, to be inferior), few Christians know even the names of the texts of Hinduism, much less bother to study them. That, of course, is their own loss; but in a way it is everyone’s, for the world of wisdom is the more impoverished thereby.

³ **Zarathushtra**, founder of the religion known as Zoroastrianism or Mazdaism (from *Mazda* or *Ahura Mazda*, the name of the god prophesied by Zarathushtra). The etymology and history of *Zarathushtra*, the Avestan and oldest form of the name, is uncertain ... The form *Zoroaster*, derived from the Greek *Zoroastres*, was used traditionally in European culture until the eighteenth century, when *Zarathustra*, closer to the original (and as found in Nietzsche) came into common use after the rediscovery [in the West] of the Avesta, the collection of sacred books of Zoroastrianism, and the resulting studies in Iranian philology.” (Note by Gherardo Gnoli, writing in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*—not the same *Encyclopedia* as the one quoted earlier though: a far more comprehensive one in fact, edited by the redoubtable Prof. Mircea Eliade). At one time one of the most widely-spread of all religions—mainly during the epochs of the great Persian Empires, the first of which was the first great empire of human history—it has now dwindled to very few formal adherents indeed; and yet, as we shall show, its impact on your own religion, dear reader, was so phenomenal as to leave almost no facet of it untouched.

⁴ **Pânîni**, the greatest grammarian of all time. He was the first to carry out (probably some time in the first millennium BCE, though to fix a definite date or even century is difficult if not impossible) a thorough study of the Sanskrit language and its even-then vast literature, and to codify its rules of grammar in a remarkably comprehensive work which, for conciseness of expression, has no rivals: indeed this trait became the badge of all subsequent Indian grammarians, who were reputed to rejoice more over half a syllable saved than over the birth of a son. Pânîni’s epoch-making treatise exerted such a potent effect on the language that Sanskrit was never the same after him.

⁵ **Sanskrit**. This most beautiful and fascinating of languages—whose expressions run the gamut from the most starkly simple to the most intricately complex ever enunciated—is (if the Vedic idiom be included in this definition) the longest-lived of all human tongues: neither Chinese nor Hebrew can match its immense antiquity; and while it is no longer spoken widely, it never quite died out even as a spoken language, for even today All-India Radio broadcasts the daily news in

of rival cultures as far away as Mesopotamia, Phoenicia and even Egypt; and carried their language so far west that the westernmost Isles of the Eurasian land mass are to this day called “Eire” after the term **आर्य** **Ārya**⁶, used by these people to describe themselves since even before some of them migrated south into Iran and India, others west into Europe and still others as far east as Japan, from their ancient arctic home.

In this book we shall make an attempt to trace the various links between the different cultures that grew up within the numerous branches of the Aryan peoples; explore their common linguistic, cultural and religious heritage; and try to determine their links with another major group of people who gave the world a large part of its culture, civilisation and religions: *viz.*, the **Semitic**⁷ peoples.

Two great religions have emerged out of the Land of Israel, which also used to be called Palestine: these two are Judaism and Christianity. They may be termed “World Religions”⁸, for their adherents are spread over major parts of the globe; these faiths have given rise to Spiritual Masters of the highest calibre and attainments, and have endured thousands of years. A third World Religion, Islam, emerged out of Arabia; although more recent than the others, it has nevertheless lasted more than a millennium; its founder was one of the most dynamic and multi-talented individuals who has ever lived; and it too has spread over enormous tracts of the earth’s territory and been embraced by hundreds of millions. These three World Religions are of Semitic origin: their founders and earliest adherents were all Semitic, and they exhibit a distinctly Semitic temper in their teachings and doctrine.

Two other Great Religions, namely Hinduism and Buddhism, are the product of the Aryan genius; they also have given rise to Seers of the highest spiritual level, have also lasted thousands of years, and can also boast hundreds of millions of adherents in many parts of the world.

These two groups—the Semitic creeds on the one hand, and the Aryan faiths on the other—exhibit pronounced differences between one another, at least outwardly: differences far more significant than those exhibited by the Semitic religions among themselves, or the Aryan religions between each other. Indeed, for years it was considered that, whether it be from the linguistic, cultural or religious point of view, the two peoples—Aryan and Semitic—developed independently of each other. This, however, is not quite correct; for as we shall show in the following pages, there exists a tremendously profound and immensely important historical link between these two great branches of the spiritual and cultural development of humanity. That link happens to be Iran and its ancient system of belief,

Sanskrit, and some Indian families employ it exclusively in the home. It is, of course, only ignorance that isolates most non-Indians—and many Indians too—from this wonder of the world of the mind: one whose magnificence prompted Pandit Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, to say (rightly or wrongly—depends on your viewpoint) that the Sanskrit language and its literature are India’s greatest gift to humanity.

⁶ The word **Āryan** has, after the Nazis’ misuse of it, acquired in the West highly opprobrious overtones; and modern writers therefore avoid using it whenever possible, preferring alternatives like “Indo-European” whenever they have to talk even of the ancient Aryans. However Hitler has been, historically speaking, a very recent phenomenon, and a very transitory one at that; and we can hardly allow that *creep* to dictate to us our choice of words, now can we?—especially with regard to this noble term (**आर्य** **ārya** itself, in Classical Sanskrit, means “noble”). The word is employed in Indian texts so often that in any study connected with them it is unavoidable; and etymologically it survives in Europe too, for scholars think it originally derived from an ancient word for land, **âré** (whence also our English “acre” and “area”, as well as the basic metric measure of land, “are” or 100 square metres)—since the originators of this term obviously thought of **agri**-culture (another word derived in part from the same linguistic root) as an **aristocratic** (yet another word!) or **noble** occupation. For our study anyway it is indispensable; and we shall therefore use it freely and without additional apology, simply stating that by doing so no offense (nor pretense) is contemplated.

⁷ **Semitic**. Another term supercharged with emotion. As a word however it is much more recent than **Aryan**, having been coined by scholars (from **שֵׁם** **Shem**, the name of one of Noah’s sons) in order to designate Middle Eastern peoples—past or present—speaking a group of languages very distinct from the Indo-European; and of whom the Jews and the Arabs are the main modern survivors. As we shall have cause to show, they can in no way be looked upon as *racially* different from Aryans; however, *linguistically* there can be no question as to their separateness; and since in this study linguistic analysis is brought to bear with what some might consider a heavy hand, I’m afraid we shall have to retain in our book the word **Semitic** as well: again with the clarification, of course, that in using it no disrespect—or for that matter respect either—is intended.

⁸ For the sake of definition, we shall refer by the term “World Religion” only to those faiths which fulfil the following criteria: (i) The creed in question must have spread, at one time or another in history, over a major portion of the globe; (ii) It must have given rise to spir-

namely Zoroastrianism: the sixth of the Great World Religions of history, founded by Zarathushtra, the composer of the Gathas of the Vedic Age, the Prophet of the Mazda Yasni faith of the ancient Aryans of Iran, and the most important personality in the religious history of humankind.

For as we shall demonstrate quite conclusively in this book—and stupendous though the thesis may sound—Zarathushtra has, directly and indirectly, and over the millennia, exerted more influence on the world than any other person who has ever lived. The Parsis, as those who formally follow his faith are called today, number less than a hundred-thousand; but the impact of Zarathushtra can be powerfully felt in contemporary Christianity and Judaism, Islam and Hinduism, Sikhism and Baha'ism. His voice, though disguised as another's, has been heard on the slopes of Mount Fuji and on Hadrian's Wall; the hills of Judea and the shores of the Sea of Galilee have echoed his teaching, albeit unacknowledged, and so have the banks of the Ganges and the plains of the Punjab. The Bible, which does not mention his name, was nonetheless so strongly influenced by his teaching that without him Judaism would have been a very different faith from what it is, and Christianity as we know it might not, arguably, even have come into existence⁹, and certainly not spread in the direction it did. The transformation of *Vedism*—the ancient religion of the Aryans before they entered India from the north—into *Hinduism*, a pronouncedly Indian form of the original Aryan faith—is a result that has come about largely due to his work, unrecognised though his contribution has been. Islam has been so strongly influenced by the ideas of Zarathushtra—without even its founder, Rasul Muhammad, suspecting it to be so—that this most recent of World Religions has been adopted wholeheartedly by the people of Zarathushtra's very homeland: for the post-Sassanian Persians of the time did not realise that by embracing the strict monotheism, aniconism and simplicity emphasised by Islam, they were doing exactly what Zarathushtra had taught their ancestors to do when he first sang his Songs in praise of the Mighty Formless Spirit. And since the doctrines of exoteric Islam as enunciated by the Arabian genius could not completely satisfy the philosophical longings of the Persian mind, the Iranians appended an esoteric superstructure to Islam which goes by the name of *Sufism*, whose roots lie deep in Zarathushtra's own Songs, the Gathas. Not even Buddhism has escaped Zoroastrian influence, for the region around Afghanistan and Bactria, where Zarathushtra lived many years, and which to this day harbours esoteric communities and hermitages deriving their teachings from ancient Zoroastrian lore, was at a crucial time in history one of the main centres of the development of **Mahâyâna** Buddhist philosophy. Zarathushtra's thoughts, words, deeds

itual Masters of the highest calibre; and (iii) It must have endured a thousand years or more. (For this definition I am indebted to my father, Dr. Dinshah K. Mehta, the founder of the Society of Servants of God—and to whom, as may readily be imagined, I am indebted in many more ways too: indeed far too many and far too important to even begin to enumerate here). These criteria are to some extent subjective, especially the first two, and open to conflicting interpretations; but they *are* convenient at times to work with.

⁹ "...For had Cyrus, the Mazda-worshipper, not brought the [Jewish] people back [from Babylonian Exile], the later prophets might not have spoken at Jerusalem, nor might Jesus have been born at Bethlehem, nor taught in the region."—Words, not of a Zarathushtrian (who might conceivably have an axe to grind), but of a Christian clergyman, the Rev. L.H. Mills who lived and taught at Oxford. My own arguments bolstering this thesis—in some ears perhaps too strong, but which as I shall be able to show (especially in Chapter 18) is no exaggeration—are even more compelling. And over and above all that, we ought to remember that Christianity is an emanation out of Judaism, whose tenets were accepted *in toto* by Christ himself (see **Matthew 5.17-19**); and so any doctrine that influenced Judaism *ipso facto* influenced Christianity as well. As for Zoroastrianism's impact on Judaism, it has been so extensively researched by scholars, both Western and Eastern that there is hardly any need to elaborate on it here. Nevertheless, we shall be saying something about all these matters in the course of this study. Read on!

¹⁰ Of all of these we shall have a great deal more to say in this book. One distinguishing feature of an inquiry like ours is the proliferation in it of innumerable terms belonging to cultures and creeds foreign to one's own—familiar enough to those with whom they are native, but often very strange and exotic to others. And to the ordinary reader their mention in passing (as being "understood", so to speak) is at times irksome, and makes for heavy going; to lighten which load I have decided to adopt this system of margin notes wherein, whenever a term of such nature occurs for the first time in the main body of the text, I have attempted to give some elucidation. However, for some terms (like those in bold print here opposite) this is not quite an appropriate process; and these have, instead, been explained in the text itself, over a number of pages. So also with a few—like **Vedas** and **Upanishads**—regarding which some introduction has already been supplied in the margins: for they are far too complex and involved to be defined briefly.—The margin notes also serve to express lines of thought which now and again branch off in more than one direction—some-

and personality have captured the hearts and fired the imaginations of such important thinkers of our own times as H.P. Blavatsky and G.I. Gurdjieff, Rudolf Steiner and Friedrich Nietzsche¹⁰.

He was the *First Prophet* of Humanity, for we know of no person before him who singlehandedly founded an entire religion: a monotheistic religion at that, and one which has survived down to our own days. He was also the *Foremost Prophet* of Humanity, for not only did he found his own faith, but had a profound impact on almost all subsequent ones.

No other individual in the entire history of the world from the time Time began has ever had greater importance, influence, or impact on humanity; and yet he has been so neglected, even by the majority of historians (who surely ought to know better) that many—perhaps most—people in the world have not so much as heard of him.

It is about this unknown but mighty figure of human history, then, that this book is written; and it is to him that it is dedicated.

thing which occurs in the human mind all the time, but which mental process, owing to the exceedingly *linear* nature of written text, is hard if not impossible to represent in a book with but a single body of text: that is to say, *without* margin notes. (The idea for this method of book design I have pinched—as my Jewish readers will immediately discern—from the *Talmud*, which carries the concept much farther, and provides margin notes to margin notes: a superb way to render in writing the natural processes of the mind, and of which I am astonished to see so few other authors take advantage. Indeed had I the time, skill and patience—which of course I don't—to make this book as intricate as the *Talmud* even in the matter of its typesetting, I would willingly have done so: for although somewhat convoluted, such a layout much more faithfully mirrors the multi-dimensional complexity of human thought than does the common or garden variety of book. (Those familiar with computers and the World Wide Web will immediately realise that the *Talmud* anticipated, more than two millennia ago, the idea of hypertext—a magnificent feat indeed!)

CHAPTER 1

THE EARLIEST TIMES OF WHICH WE HAVE THE GLIMMERINGS OF RECORD

Let us try to take our minds back to the days— and this, of course, cannot be other than conjecture—when humanity first evolved for itself a language; when, out of the various sounds proceeding from the mouth, people started to create a system of communication, some way they could make other people understand their thoughts. Let us think of those days, and try to imagine what the process must have been like.¹

No doubt the evolution of language took place, not all at once, but over centuries and millennia; and no doubt, too, that it took place independently in several different locations on the globe. The people living in the territory known today as China must have evolved their language independently of the Aryans, and they independently of the Semites; the African peoples must have their own language evolution, and so must the native people of the Americas. However, one conclusion seems inescapable, no matter where language evolved: the first words of humanity must have conveyed their meanings *by their very sounds*.

It seems also most likely that the first words of any language were very simple, and therefore short; most of them were probably monosyllabic, and a few bisyllabic; not too many could have started out as polysyllabic tongue-twisters. The commonest “word” in this regard is, of course, one of the first we all learn as infants to speak and to recognise: **ma**, arising most probably from the action of sucking at the breast.² The word for “mother” is similar in so many languages and even groups of languages that there seems to be little doubt that it evolved in such a fashion; for we find it with a **-m-** sound in a great many different parts of the world: in Hebrew it is **אִמָּה** *ima*, in Arabic it is **umm**, in Chinese it is **mu**, while in almost all Indo-European languages it is derived from the Vedic **मात्र** *mâtr*, which in Hindi and Gujarati becomes **माँ** *mā*, in Italian and Spanish **madre**, in German **mutter**, in Russian **мать** *mâty*, in French **mère**, and in the mouths of children—in most European countries at least—**mama**, **mummy**, **maman**, **mom**, **mum**, **ma** and so on.

This word is somewhat unusual, in that it is common not only to different languages but even to different groups of languages. However, a similar phenomenon is exhibited by most basic words within any one language group.³

The earliest words of human beings, then, would have had to

¹ The work I have attempted in this book is perhaps best described as what the ancient Greeks called a **history**, which term in their minds meant simply an *inquiry* (into anything). I have, however, tried to keep to a chronological scheme as well, working forwards in time. This does not mean, of course, that I have neglected to conduct an inquiry into other, non-chronological aspects of life; and indeed I have ranged over a very wide spectrum of subjects, for I am by temperament a dilettante or amateur (in the original senses of these words), and delight in delving into this and that as whimsy may dictate, without much regard for the neat classification schemes of professional scholars (whose works I find boring, mostly). The reader may not find here, perhaps, the kind of fare for which a university professor would give good grades; but if you love life and are interested in virtually every aspect of it, you will probably find this treatise quite enjoyable—and perhaps provoking as well.

² When I originally drafted these words I had not yet become a father; and so it came as something of a surprise to me to observe that my first son, when he started to speak, said “daddy” before he said “mummy”. However, one baby does not a linguistic generalisation make, and it would be interesting to find out what other infants first say (our son’s first sounds—not meaningful words but simple noises—contained a lot of hard **-g-** sounds in them; and he also did not breast-feed for long after his birth, which might have had some effect on his vocalisations). In any case the existence of the **-m-** sound in so many words for “mother” surely indicates something. —Note, too, that we do not say that the word for “mother” is the *first* one babies utter: all we are saying is that it very often contains the **-m-** sound, and that this might be because of breast-feeding.

³ It may interest people to know—if they do not already—that by far the largest such group is the Aryan (or Indo-European, as most western linguists prefer to term it): it includes most of the languages of Europe and India, as well as the languages of Persia with all their variations through the ages. It is a fascinating thing to see Norwegian words reflected, for instance, in Bengali, or the great similarities between modern

convey their meaning by their very sound: at a time when not only dictionaries, but even education as we know it, did not exist, only such a process could enable newly-coined words to gain wide acceptance. And this is where “mere” conjecture ends and fascinating evidence begins: for some of the clearest examples we have of this process actually taking place is to be found in the Indo-Iranian Hymns: the *Vedas* and the *Gathas*.

So we find, for instance, the Vedic word for “arrow”: इषु **ishu**—one might almost hear the arrow whizzing past: “ishoo!” Or the word तत् **tat** “that”: one might almost visualise the speaker pointing something out to another person and saying “tat!”—“That’s what I’m talking about!” Or the word हन् **han** “to smite”, “to kill”—the very sound made by the killer, no doubt, as he brought his club down with a forceful exhalation of breath on the head of his enemy.⁴ The Sanskrit word जलम् **jalam** “water” is a veritable one-word-sonata, mimicking, of course, the soft tinkle of water as it flows over stones in a brook. The Vedic भ्रक् **bhrk**, as its sound echoes, signifies “the blazing of the fire”; while the Avestan **druj** or **drug**, which means “liar”, “villain”, “evil one”, finds itself reflected in our own English “dark” as well as the slang term “dreck”.

These, then, are some of the origins of our words—even our English words. The term धातु **dhātu** “element” was, by later Indian linguists, given to the (mostly) monosyllabic “roots” of Indo-European words; and the Vedic and Avestan tongue is based upon a common system of such elements or roots,⁵ which are used in various ways to build up the words of the language as it evolved, attaining greater and greater complexity.

So we find the element धृ **dhr** “to hold”, “to sustain”, “to support”—giving rise to the words धरति **dharati** “earth” (for she *supports* us all); धर्म **dharma** “the moral and spiritual code or law (which *sustains* society)”; and धारणम् **dhâranam** “holding”, “wearing”. In like manner we find the root शृ **shr** “to hear”, which gives rise to the words श्रुति **shruti** “that which is heard” (*viz.*, the *Vedas*, which were *chanted* or *sung*, and therefore *heard*), and the Iranian **sraoshem** which means, more or less, “devotion”, “obedience”, “willingness to *listen*⁶ (to the Voice of the Deity)”—a word which, in later Iranian theology, became indeed the name of one of the highest angels. We find the element पू **pr** “to fill”, which gives rise to the Sanskrit पुर्ण **pūrṇa** “perfect” or “complete”, and to the Iranian **pouru** which also means the same thing; we find इष् **ish** “to wish” (in which English word the sound of the original root still resonates, even after all these millennia), giving rise to the Sanskrit इच्छा **ichchâ** “desire” and the Iranian **aeshem** “passion”. We find the root या **yâ** “to pray” giving rise to the Vedic यान्य **yânya** and the Avestan cognate **yanim**, both signifying “worshipful”, “adorable”,

Lithuanian and ancient Sanskrit—the more astonishing when one remembers the enormous territorial and chronological spread of Aryan geography and history. Such wide distribution is not found, for instance, in Africa; the various peoples of South Africa alone speak at least fifteen different languages, most of them mutually unintelligible. (Of course, research on African languages has not been carried out with anything like the intensity it has been on Aryan or Semitic tongues; and with further study, who knows but links hitherto undiscovered may well be found.)

⁴ And from which sound, perhaps, the **Huns** derive their well-deserved name! The **Hungarians** are their descendants; and they had close contact with the Vedic people also, who more often called them by their alternative name, **Tur**—whence the term **Turks**. The Romans called their chief, Attila, “the scourge of heaven”; and they had a reputation no less fearsome among the Vedic folk, who must have thought their name well suited them.

⁵ The word “root” is somewhat of a misnomer here, for it is derived from the peculiar fashion in which Semitic (*not* Indo-European) languages construct their words: from different vowels tacked on to tri-consonantal combinations. This system—we shall have cause to study it further later on—is obviously a much more sophisticated development than the ancient Aryan monosyllabic *elements*. However, when western linguists began to study Indian languages—which was relatively recently, as compared to their study of Semitic tongues—they carried over the terminology already familiar to them from their study of Hebrew and Arabic; and this included the term “root”. Since their work was the pioneering such effort, the term has stuck; so we too will be using it from time to time, even though the alternative term “element” (as Indian linguists used to call it) is perhaps more appropriate.

⁶ The imagery is very apt, even for speakers of Semitic tongues: for in Hebrew the word for “discipline” is מִשְׁמָעַת **mishma’at**, deriving from the triconsonantal Semitic root ש-מ-ע **sh-m-’a** “[to] listen”. In English too a frustrated parent will often chide a disobedient child with “Why don’t you *listen*?”; and the similarity between the Italian words **udire** “to listen” and **ubedire** “to obey” may also be telling us something.

“sublime”. The element वस् *vas* “to cover”, “to protect” has given rise to the Indian वस्त्र *vastra* “clothes” and the Iranian *vas-tarem* “protector”, as well as the Latin *VESTITURA* again meaning “clothes”; while नृ *nr* has given rise, on both sides of the Indus, to नर *nara* “man”, to नृप *nrüpa* (*naripesh* in Persia) meaning “king” or “prince”, and even to नारायण *Nârâyana* in Sanskrit, and *Naroish-naro* in the Zend, which connotes something like “the Supreme Man”, or “the Best of Men” (literally “the Man in men”)—that is to say, God.

An examination of the Vedic and Gathic Songs leaves no doubt whatsoever that both of them are based on a common linguistic foundation.⁷ Indeed, as we shall see, from references in later writings we can deduce that the Iranians were able to understand, even if they did not speak, the version of this common speech used by the Indians, and *vice versa*. This being so, it is also understandable that the legends of the two peoples are based on common foundations.

One of the oldest and most remarkable of these legends, found in slightly differing versions both in India and Iran—and also, to a smaller extent, in Greece and Northern Europe—concerns a personage known in Sanskrit as यम *Yama*. In Iran he was called *Yima Kshaeta*, the latter part of this name derived from the root क्षि *kshi* “to rule”.⁸ The name *Yima Kshaeta* means, therefore, “Yima, the King”. In India he is often called simply *Yama*, although at times he is also referred to as a King, यम राज *Yama Râja*. Iranians of a later age compressed his double-barrelled name into one: “*Jam-shed*”. *Jamshed* is also at times called a *Paighambar*, that is, a Messenger (of God), or Prophet. According to Indian legend, *Yama* was, with his twin sister *Yami*, the first of mortals. (The Aryan word *Yama* literally means “twin”, and this is reflected in the cognate Græco-Latin term *GEMINI* “the twins”, who also occupied the Greek and Roman pantheons.) As a result of being the first man to die, *Yama* found the way to the world beyond, the पितृयान *Pitryâna*, “the Way of the Fathers”; and having found the Way, became the King of the Dead. He figures prominently in the *Katha Upanishad*,⁹ in which he teaches a young Brahmin by the name of नचिकेतस् *Nachiketas* (*Nasi Kshaeta* in Iranian) the ultimate secret of the Life Beyond. In this *Upanishad* the name *Yama* is synonymous with Death: thus he is at times addressed as मृत्यु *mrütyu* “Death”. But his teachings are those of a Seer, a *Rishi*;¹⁰ indeed, the entire *Katha Upanishad* is devoted to his spiritual teaching as imparted to young *Nachiketas*. Therefore, although not specifically referred to as a Prophet in the Indian tradition, his rôle in this *Upanishad*, and also elsewhere, is certainly sufficient to confer upon him that status *de facto*; as a matter of fact one of his numerous epithets is धर्म राज *Daharma Râja*, “the King of *dhar-*

⁷ There is, as many people living in Europe know, something of a difference between *dialects* and *languages*, though at times it seems more like a quantitative difference than a qualitative one. Thus, for instance, although the Neapolitan dialect is almost unintelligible to many Florentines, a few weeks’ sojourn in Naples sets the matter right to a large extent, even without additional schooling—something that cannot be said for a sojourn in Zürich or even in Paris. The ambiguity is illustrated, however, by the Piedmontese dialect; for it is at times unclear whether it is a dialect of Italian or of French—or of both. It is perhaps best—given these parallels—to look upon the Vedic and Gathic tongues as two *dialects* of the same basic *language*.

⁸ This element survives in Europe too, where it was used even in ancient times, forming part of such terms as the Latin *REX* “King” and the Gaulish suffix *-rix* “chief” (as in “*Vercingetorix*” and “*Astérix*”). The *-r-* sound in these European terms also finds its way into Indian languages, as in the terms *Râjâ* and *Râñi* (“King” and “Queen” respectively), and in the word *Rakshâ* “protection” (for it was the king’s or chief’s duty to *protect* his people): whence also the name *Gurkhâ*—a contraction of *go-rakshaka* “protector of cows”. Both the *-r-* and the *-x-* sounds, therefore, were used royally by the Aryans: the latter, in a hardened version *-c* or *-ck*, surviving to our own days in such names as “*Frederick*”.

⁹ The *Katha Upanishad* is one of the 108 *Upanishads* of Hinduism. I haven’t the faintest idea why it is so called; but no doubt I shall in due course receive letters from well-informed readers dispelling my ignorance. It is a powerful work though, and contains some memorable lines (some samples are given later). For our work its importance lies, however, principally in its references to *Yama*.

¹⁰ Ancient Indian Sages were called *Rishis*: a more accurate romanisation, however, would be *Rûshi*. Nevertheless, because it is used so often as *Rishi*, in the rest of this book we shall leave it as such. The term is derived from the Indo-European root *rta* “right” (of which English word it also happens to be the origin). The term *Rishi* as well as its Iranian version *Ratu* thus means “[a] Righteous [person]”. Zarathushtra is the only Sage exalted enough in the Iranian tradition to have earned the title *Ratu*; however in Indian lore the equivalent term *Rishi* was applied to hundreds of notables; in fact anyone whose compositions merited inclusion in the Vedas was called so, and there were many post-Vedic *Rishis* too. (The term *Mahârishi*—rendered popular in the West by the followers of Mahesh Yogi of *TM* fame—simply means “great *Rishi*”).

ma”, or sometimes simply **Dharma**.¹¹

Yama, then, was a King who was also a Seer, a Sage, a **Rishi**, a “Righteous Person”. It is he who is said to have established the Iranian New Year, which is called after him **Jamshedi Navroz**, and which is celebrated to this day, even by some Muslims in Iran, and certainly by many Zarathushtrians all over the world, on the 21st of March, the day of the spring equinox, when all Nature puts forth her festive garments after the cold of the winter. The fact that his calendar is based on the Solar and not the Lunar cycle is no surprise, for Yama is the son of **विवस्वत Vivasvata** (Sanskrit) or **Vivanghato** (Iranian), the Sun. He therefore is also called at times **वैवस्वत Vaivasvata**, “the son of the Sun”. According to Iranian tradition, he lived forty-two generations before Zarathushtra, and was the originator of several of the customs of the Vedic people, many of which were taken over unchanged by Zarathushtra into the religion he founded. One of the most important of these was the worship of the Sun as a symbol of the Supreme Being.

Yama, according to Indian legend, also had a brother, whose name was **मनु Manu** (and as a matter of fact it is from his name that the word “man”—in north-European as well as in north-Indian languages—is derived). **Vaivasvata Yama** and **Vaivasvata Manu** were, therefore, among the earliest ancestors of whom the Aryans had any collective memory. From **Manu** are said to have descended the Kings of India, and from **Yama** the Kings of Iran. Zarathushtra, the “Prince of **Râjî**”,¹² who is said to have been born in a Royal family, is said to have descended from **Yima Kshaeta**.¹³

The name **Manu** also finds its way into the Iranian as **Manu Chihar**, another ancestor of Zarathushtra (although not, obviously, the same person as the original **Manu Vaivasvata**.) The name **Manu Chihar** has come down to us as **Minocher**, a common name among Parsis to this day. **Manu Vaivasvata** is also considered, in the Indian tradition, to have been a Seer: for among Hindus he is the original Law-giver, and his Code is the famous **मनु स्मृति Manu Smṛiti**, which, although not as highly revered as the **Shruti** or Vedas, nevertheless commands very high respect: so much so that the very term “mind” (**मनस् manas** in Sanskrit, **manangho** in Gathic) is derived from his name.

These, then, are legends which were themselves legendary at an epoch which to us is itself legendary: that is, they are among the oldest legends in the world. For they were current, obviously, at a time when the ancestors of the Indo-Iranians had not yet quite separated into an eastern or Indian branch on the one hand, and a western or Iranian branch on the other. So it might be interesting to speculate on the approximate dates of the epoch referred to in these tales. As we shall see, this period goes back

¹¹ The word **धर्म dharma** is in Indian philosophy a very rich one, and the evolution of its meaning is almost a vignette on the evolution of the Sanskrit language as a whole. Originally (as we said already on page ...) it derived from the term **धृ dhr** “to hold”, “[to] sustain”; and thus became the general term for what in the West one would call “religion” (indeed in ancient times the term “Hinduism” did not exist, and what we now call “Hinduism” was simply referred to as **dharma**—or sometimes **sanâtana** (“eternal”) **dharma**. Later, when Buddhism hit the scene with philosophical concepts refined to a degree never before—nor since—attained, it stretched the meaning of the term **dharma** (in its original sense of “that which sustains”) to its logical limit, and began to refer to (literally) anything and everything as **dharma**: for, it argued, even the most evanescent and ephemeral dream sustains at least the illusion of reality—which in any case is what “real” reality also appears to be, when examined minutely enough. Indeed the word **dharma** (or rather its Pali equivalent, **dhamma**) is used precisely in this way in the very opening line of the **Dhammapâda** (a book whose title itself means “Path of **Dhamma**”: it is the most important scripture of the **Theravâda** or Southern School of Buddhism. To quote:

मनोप्युद्भक्त्वा धम्मा मनोसेत्था मनोमया ।

Manopubbangamâ dhammâ manosethhâ manomayâ “[All] things emerge from the mind; [they are] sustained by the mind [and are] created by the mind.”

¹² **Râjî** being the name of the city where he was born. We shall have a lot to say about this city later, which has not gone unmentioned in the West (from references to it in the Apocrypha of the Bible). We need not go deeper into it at this point, but it is well to keep our eyes open for further references to it later on in this study.

¹³ The legends of **Yama** or **Yima**, the son of the Sun—and it is to be re-emphasised that stories about him are indeed just that: *legends*, even if they could well be based, as we may reasonably assume, on some actual facts—these legends seem to have spread (in somewhat more drastically altered form) even to Japan; for in Japanese mythology the first mortal as well as the first Emperor of Japan was **Jimmu**, born of the Sun-goddess. Since we know that the original inhabitants of Japan were a fair caucasian-like people—gradually pushed northwards by later arrivals, the ancestors of the Japanese of today, who came from China and/or Mongolia—the descendants of which aboriginal race, the Ainu, live to this day in Hokkaido, the northern-most island of the Japanese archipelago: and since it is not at all certain that the Japanese did not borrow to some extent from the Ainu (they appear to

much farther than has hitherto been imagined by most people.

In the early years of the 20th century **Lokmānya** Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the celebrated Indian patriot, took upon himself to carry out a landmark-setting labour of love: he conducted an immense amount of research on the dating and the epoch of ancient Aryans in general and of the Vedic Hymns in particular, and his conclusions are set forth in several books, of which one of the most pertinent for our present purpose is entitled *Orion: or Research into the Antiquity of the Veda*. In this study, which is extremely intricate and detailed, he has made some highly interesting correlations between certain astronomical phenomena mentioned in the Vedic Chants, and the actual occurrences of these phenomena as determined by modern science; and he has analysed these correlations in the light of internal evidence derived from the language and subject matter of the Hymns.¹⁴ According to these calculations (and leaving out for the moment the detailed analysis by which these conclusions are arrived at, although we shall return to the subject later), Tilak determined that the earliest Vedic Hymns were composed at least six thousand, and perhaps as far back as ten thousand thousand years ago. (Vedic Hymns were not all composed at the same time; in fact some of them are likely to be, not just several centuries, but several millennia, removed from others. The present arrangement of the Vedas, which according to tradition is the work of the Sage **Vyāsa**, is not chronological, so it is a little hard to tell which Hymns are the earlier ones and which the later; however, the language of several of them appears to be far more “primitive” than that of others, and closely approaches the most basic roots of the Aryan tongues, while the terminology of other Hymns is more complex and derivative in nature: a feature which enables a rough chronological arrangement to be made, into “early”, “middle period” and “late” Vedic Hymns).¹⁵

Now Tilak’s method of dating the Vedic Hymns—which has been subsequently further elaborated and refined by more recent scholars—is rather hard to challenge, based as it is on easily verifiable astronomical calculations; and on this basis alone, if on no other, one may say that the beginnings of Vedic composition go at least as far back as the earliest works of ancient civilisations anywhere in the world.

But the legends of Yama and Manu speak of a time anterior even to the dates arrived at by Tilak, and in order to determine the epoch of these Kings, we have to go back to the legends themselves for a clue.

One remarkable feature of the legend of Yima as recounted in Iran is the prediction by King Jamshed of the Ice Age. It is said that Yima the son of Vivanghat was King of a fair and pleasant land—one which, although snowy in winter, became a de-

have borrowed from everyone else!), it should not be too farfetched to conjecture that the legend of **Jimmu Tenno** (“**Jimmu** of Heaven”) was taken over by the Japanese from this very Aryan-looking folk. (There is not much doubt as to the racial identity of the Ainu with the Europeans, and their racial distinctness from the Japanese and Chinese of today: which can only mean that both the Ainu and the Europeans descended from common ancestors—perhaps originally living, as we shall have cause to show, in central Siberia. It is, by the way, surprising to see how surprised some Europeans are at being asked to believe that Aryans wandered all over Eurasia from Pacific to Atlantic, when they know very well that the Huns—referred to later also—had in later ages roamed over virtually the same vast territory! Indeed in recent times skeletons more than nine millennia old, bearing what anthropologists think are distinctly “Caucasoid” characteristics, very distinct from the bone structure of the aboriginal inhabitants of North America as we know them today, have been unearthed even in the “New World”—the most recent among them being one washed up along the shores of the Columbia River in Canada—which shows that at least some Aryans may actually have gone over from Asia to Alaska during or just after the Ice Age).

¹⁴ One criticism levelled—and fairly, I admit—against this method of dating is that we cannot be completely certain as to the interpretations of ancient astronomical terms, which were quite different from ours. However, there are a number of such references, and they cannot *all* have been misinterpreted; and moreover they are supported by other, non-astronomical clues as well. Even though each single such clue is perhaps inadequate to establish our conclusions “beyond reasonable doubt”, when taken all together they weigh upon our sense of admissible evidence rather heavily. We shall be developing this theme as we go along; for even though the jury is still out (at least in the West) on the subject of the antiquity of the Vedas, we hope by the end of our testimony to enable it to reach a fairly conclusive verdict.

¹⁵ It is to this relatively recent (*circa* 1500 BCE?) arrangement that we owe the idea that the Vedas are four in number. Originally, however, the entire body of Vedic material formed part of just one vast undifferentiated lore; and for this reason the word denoting it is often used in the singular (as **Veda**), making it clear that this is how it all started out. We shall therefore be employing in this book both the singular as well as the plural forms of the term **Veda** for denoting the same thing; for it is simply a matter of viewpoint.

lightful and glorious garden with the onset of Spring, with the coming of the New Year. However, because of the sins of the people—against which Yima the Righteous had warned them—nature, in a terrifying demonstration of Divine Judgement, turned the entire realm into an icy and bleak wilderness, where snow lay thick and heavy from the tops of mountains to the deepest valleys, and living things were killed off by fierce deadly frost. Some of the inhabitants, who fled south, escaped the wrath of Nature; but many perished under the Ice.

It would appear, therefore, that the country described in these legends is neither India nor Iran; in fact, it must have been considerably to the north of both, very possibly the inner heart of what we now refer to as Siberia, perhaps the area around Lake Baykal: the deepest, clearest, most capacious and most unique lake in the world.¹⁶ And the catastrophe to which they refer may be no less an event than the Ice Age, which covered Siberia (as well as many other parts of both Eurasia and North America) with enormously thick and vast glaciers.

And if the legends do indeed refer to the Ice Age—and, as we shall see further on in this study, there is a lot of additional evidence to support this hypothesis—we may say that Yama Vaivasvata lived anything from ten to eighteen thousand years ago:¹⁷ for that, according to the best geological evidence we possess, is when the most recent great glaciation of the northern hemisphere occurred!

Again, therefore, we are drawn back into the womb of Time: to an age when, as we pointed out earlier, language itself was taking form: a time when human sounds came to be ascribed meanings, a time when people began to speak for the first time in history. It is *this* which makes the Vedas so profound, so splendidly, deeply beautiful: sacred in their very sounds themselves. Their words are themselves filled with power, vitality, music. The Chants express, in sound made almost tangible, some of the deepest, most fundamental and inner-most thoughts, emotions, aspirations and experiences of man. Listen, for instance, to these words of a company of **Soma**-drinkers,¹⁸ as recorded in the *Rigveda*:

अपाम	सोमं	अमृत	अभूम्
apâma	somam	amrita	abhoom
अगन्म	ज्योतिर्	अविदाम	देवान्
aganma	vyotir	avidâma	devân

We have drunk the **Soma**, and become immortal;
We have seen the Light, and have known the gods.

¹⁶ During the course of this book I shall work up the theory that Lake Baykal is indeed the original “**Mâna-sarovara**, beyond the Himalayas”—the sacred Lake on the shores of which the Vedas are traditionally thought to have been composed. In more recent epochs another lake beyond the Snowy Mountains, lying however much closer to India—in what is now Chinese-controlled Tibet—began to be called “**Mâna-sarovara**”: for by then the Indians had almost forgotten that they originated in the heart of Siberia (on which theory too we shall throw some light in our treatise). This lake in Tibet is obviously not the original “**Mâna-sarovara**”, for it lies in a desert, and does not possess anything like the lush flora and fauna with which the Vedic Sages appear to have been familiar; and it is also not situated in an Aryan land. Many archaeological and other data reinforce this hypothesis, which we shall discuss several times in our pages.

¹⁷ Recent scientific evidence has indicated that around 10,000 years ago—well after the major Ice Age had come to an end—there was a “mini-Ice-Age” lasting a few decades, which was caused by a large amount of meltwater flowing down the St Lawrence Basin (in North America) into the Atlantic, thus causing the Gulf Stream to sink down below the surface of the ocean: fresh water being lighter than salt water. As a result, Europe was deprived of the warming waters of the Gulf Stream, and this plunged Eurasia into a (relatively) brief period of intensely cold weather once again. It is quite possible that this is the event referred to in the legend of **Yima Kshaeta**; and if so, it would bring forward the date of this King considerably more than the real Ice Age. Even so, however, it would still push his date far enough in the past to antedate any other Prophet or Sage ever mentioned in any other legend or religion.

¹⁸ We shall have quite a bit more to say about **Soma** further on in this book™. Just at this stage it is perhaps sufficient to mention—for those new to this term—that **Soma** was a kind of beverage (alcoholic or not we do not know) whose effect was apparently quite mind-blowing. The art of brewing it has been lost now; and we really have no idea even of the ingredients that went into it (though some claim it was extracted from a plant known to modern botanists as *ephedra vulgaris*): but there can be no doubt, from the numerous references to it in both Indian and Iranian legend, that it was in Vedic times quite a real psychotropic potion, and no mere figment of the imagination. (And many of my friends—especially western—would dearly love to uncork a bottle: for I have often been asked if I know how to concoct the stuff!)

Mark the sound of the word **अभूम् abhoom** “we have become”. The concept “to be” is expressed, in English no less than in Sanskrit, by two roots: the root **भु bhū** gives rise to our word “be”, while the root **अस् as** gives rise to our word “is”. Could there have been a better selection than **abhoom** for the singers’ ecstatic “high”, their feeling of having almost *exploded* as a result of this psychedelic experience? “What mortal can now harm, or foeman vex us more? For we beyond alarm, as gods immortal soar!”

किं नूनं अस्मद् कृणवद् अराति ।
किं उ धूर्तिः अमृते मर्तस्य ॥

The Veda is the most sacred of Indian sacred lore. It cannot accurately be termed “scripture”,¹⁹ for the word “scripture” is derived from the Latin word **SCRIBERE** “to write”. But the Veda was not written down; in fact, for millennia it was considered to be a grave sin to put to writing a single line of the Vedas—they were to be *heard*, to be *listened to*. All the sacred writings of India are considered to be less sacred than the Hymns; and even the *Bhagavad Gītā*,²⁰ in which the Supreme Lord Himself in His own words points out to Arjuna the path of duty on the battlefield of the Kurus, is considered by Hindus to be **स्मृति smṛiti**, the sanctity of which is lesser than that of the Vedic **श्रुति shruti**. Not even the *Upanishads*, which according to one tradition are **shruti** no less than the Vedas—and of which the most important, the *Īshopanishad*, is taken bodily from the 40th chapter of the *Yajurveda*, are considered quite as holy as the Chants. Even in the matter of philosophical inquiry into the Nature of the Divine—a field in which the Upanishads excel, perhaps more so than any other scripture of any other religion—even in this arena of thought is the Veda traditionally considered superior. I confess I myself doubted this tradition at one time, having found in the Upanishads such unforgettably beautiful lines as these:

न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्र तारकम्
नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतो अयमअग्निः ।
तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वम्
तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥

“There [that is, in the Divine Realm] the Sun shines not, the Moon has no splendour and the Stars are blind; there these lightnings flash not: how then shall burn this earthly fire? All that shines is but a shadow of His Shining; by His Shining all this shines.”

... and I used to wonder whether any more profoundly ex-

¹⁹ It is not often appreciated how greatly Semitic religions have influenced European thought (*via* the impact, of course, of the Bible). Thus it surprises modern Europeans to find that the sacred texts of India are not *scriptures* at all, but rely solely upon an oral record and tradition—the surprise so great that for such materials no truly appropriate word—like **shruti** in Sanskrit—even exists in European languages. This astonishment, by the way, provokes even greater astonishment in our own minds when we recall that most of the ancient religions of Europe relied upon precisely this sort of unwritten lore: for Homer, in whose works we first find the Greek gods mentioned, wrote nothing, simply singing his poems as he wandered from place to place; and we have it on the testimony of Julius Caesar (in his *Gallic Wars*) that the Celtic Druids used to “commit to memory vast quantities of poetry (**MAGNUM NUMERUM VERSUUM**)”. How well the Europeans of today have forgotten their own ancestors, and their works!—We shall also discuss, in Chapters 4 and 18, just why this has happened.

²⁰ The *Bhagavad Gītā* (often simply called the *Gītā*) is the most popular of all Indian scriptures. A comparatively short text (142 verses in all, capable of inclusion in a booklet fitting into the tiniest pocket), it is perhaps the most violent exhortation to non-violence in all the world’s literature; for its basic purport is to persuade Arjuna, the **Pāndava** prince, reluctant on the battlefield to take up arms against his own kith and kin even though they had wronged him, to fight: which persuasion is undertaken by **Sri Krishna**—revered by Hindus as an incarnation of The Supreme Being Himself—by pointing out that the soul is immortal, and can never be slain. The message of the *Gītā* has been succinctly put into terms accessible to western minds in a short work composed by the American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, entitled *Brahma*, and reproduced here below for illustration’s sake:

“If the red slayer thinks he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.
“Far and forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.
“They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.
“The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.”

pressive lines could be found in any scripture—until one day I came across these Rigvedic verses, speculating on not just the Creation of the Universe but on its state *before* its Creation, by which I was bowled over completely:

नासदासीन्नो सदासीत् तदानीम्
नासीद्भ्रजो नो व्योमा परो यत् ।
किमावरिव कुह कस्य शर्मन्
अम्भः किमासीत् गहनं गभीरम् ॥

Then was there neither Non-being nor Being;
Earth was not, nor were there Heavens beyond.
What covered all? Where? What Shelter existed?
Was it all water—unfathomed and awesome?

Death was not, nor was there aught that was Deathless.
No Sign had been set up between Day and Night.
The One Self-Created, alone aspirated;
Aside from That nothing had any existence.²¹

At one bound the Veda takes us beyond anything the Upanishads even dare to speculate upon: beyond Reality, beyond Existence, beyond even the Supreme Being Himself—to the very origin of Being, the very source of Truth; for even though the *Mundakopnishad* says:

सत्यमेव जयते नानृतम्
सत्येन पन्था विततो देवयानः ।
येनाक्रमन्त्य्क्षयो ह्याप्तकामा
यत्र तत्सत्यस्य परमं निधानम् ॥

It is Truth that prevails²² and not unrighteousness; by Truth was stretched out the path of the journey of the Gods: by which the Sages winning their desire ascend there where Truth has Its supreme abode.

ब्रुहच्च तत् दिव्यं अचिन्त्यरूपम्
सूक्ष्माच्च तत् सूक्ष्मतरं विभाति ।
दूरात्सुदूरे तदेहानतिकेच
पष्यत्स्विहैव निहितं गुहायाम् ॥

Vast is That, its form unimaginable; it shines out subtler than the subtlest; very far, and even farther than farness, it is yet here close to us; for those who have Vision it is even here, hidden in the secret heart.

Mundakopnishad 3.1.6,7

²¹ This here is my own translation—as opposed, for instance, to the Upanishadic verses rendered above and on the next page, which are by Sri Aurobindo. I have tried, in my interpretation, to give an idea not only of the *meaning* of the poem, but also of its *rhythm*: for my English version also attempts to mimic the metre of the Sanskrit, thus helping those ignorant of that magnificent ancient tongue to at least imagine, if not actually experience, some of the extremely *aural* beauty of this marvellous speech.—As regards this Hymn itself (which contains a total of ten verses, and can be found in numerous translations in many western texts), it is in my opinion the most intellectually honest of all theories of Creation, not excluding even those of modern science; for it refrains from answering, leaving the question open...which is perhaps the best humanity can ever really hope to do. (Modern cosmological theories are hardly much more satisfactory than Biblical ones; for if one accepts the “Big Bang” hypothesis, it seems hard to understand why the newly-created universe—at one time smaller than a pea, theoretically—was not swallowed up again by its own enormous gravitational force, the way a black hole is supposed to swallow up the very matter which causes it to come into being; while if one does *not* believe in the Big Bang, it seems hard to explain the microwave background radiation, which seems to pervade space uniformly and omni-directionally—and which is conjectured to be the residual “heat” of the initial explosion—nor is it easy to explain the increasing red shift of distant galaxies, which indicates an expanding universe). Even to say “God alone knows” how the Universe was created presumes a tad too much: for as the last verse of this Hymn (not quoted here) pointedly points out, *what if He doesn't?*

²² This is the celebrated **सत्यमेव जयते satyameva jayate** (“Truth Is Victorious”), the national motto of India, which appears below the three-lions crest on Indian passports (among other documents). The word for “truth” in ancient Vedic is **सत्य satya**, a term having an ancient English cognate as well: *viz.*, “sooth”. The word is itself derived, apparently, from a still more basic linguistic element, **as** or **ast** (whence also the Latin **EST**, the German **ist** and, as we already said—page ...—our own English “is”): thus indicating, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, that “what *is*, is Truth”. In Indian scriptures a key term, **Satya** or Truth was equated by more than one Indian sage with God Himself, the most prominent among them being, of course, the Father of

...yet the Veda takes us beyond, beyond even “Truth’s supreme abode”, beyond even “very far and farther than farness”:

नासद आसीन्नो सद आसीत् तदानीम्
Nâsad âsinno sad âsit tadânîm

“Then existed neither Non-truth nor Truth (neither Non-being nor Being, neither Unreality nor Reality).”

The bold leap of imagination, of abstraction, is breathtaking—especially so when one considers the context in which the verses were composed: when one remembers that it is one of the earliest philosophical and spiritual speculations attempted by the mind of any person anywhere in the world.

The importance to the ancient Aryans of the sound of Vedic Chants was so great, in fact, that the total essence of all the Vedas was said to be expressible by one single sound: ॐ Om.²³ This most holy of holy syllables is actually considered to be made up of three parts: अ -a-, उ -u-, and म् -m-. By the normal action of **sandhi**—the rules of Sanskrit devised for ease of pronunciation when certain sounds are juxtaposed—these three sounds fuse into one: ओ Om. (And when ओ is written in a flowing or cursive script, its lines round off into the familiar ॐ). It is known in India, variously, as the प्रणव Pranava, the उज्जीथ Udgîtha or the ओंकर Onkara.

The Pranava is as old as the Vedas; so it would be exceedingly surprising, given its enormous importance in the Indian system of religious thought, if it did not occur in the Iranian branch of the Aryan religion as well. And indeed, so it apparently does: it is found in its aspirated form Hon. The Iranians called it Hon-vara instead of On-kara, and their descendants later pronounced this as Honover.²⁴ They analysed it, after the Indian manner, as consisting of the three sounds -h-, -u-, and -n-, which by the normal operation of the rules of **sandhi** become Hon. This form of the Pranava was not completely unknown in India either; it has been adopted by the Shaiva and Tantra cults, who use it without the operation of **sandhi** as हँ Hun in place of the more commonly used ॐ Om, on the grounds that the -h- sound is “stronger” than the -a- sound:

अकारः सर्ववर्णाग्र्यः प्रकाशः परमः शिवः ।
हकारः व्योमस्यः स्याच्चक्ष्यामा संप्रकीर्तितः ॥

The sound -a- is the foremost of all sounds and is the supreme [or auspicious] light. The sound -h- [however] is of the nature

the Nation: whose adherence to this principle was, as a matter of fact, one main reason why सत्यमेव जयते (Satyameva jayate) was chosen to grace India’s government stationery—in retrospect, perhaps the most outrageous misuse of this noble concept perpetrated.

²³ Om. In Indian scriptures—not merely Hindu, but Buddhist, Jain and Sikh as well—this syllable is accorded a spiritual rank unrivalled by anything in western theology: the Hebrew Tetragrammaton יהוה YHVH perhaps approaching it closest in degree of sanctity (though not quite matching it). Om however—unlike YHVH—has no specific meaning: or it may be better described as being beyond all meanings and concepts, denoting Something so exalted that to speak of it in words or even think of it in thoughts is not only impossible but inconceivable. Even the Supreme Being Himself is not, in Hinduism, quite as supreme as Om, which is the origin of the Creator no less than of His Creation. It has been, in point of fact, compared at times with “the Word” or Λόγος Logos of St. John’s Gospel, which was “in the beginning”, and “was with God, and was God” (John 1.10)—a concept some think was borrowed by the Evangelist (via Greek philosophy, as I have discussed later) from Aryan religions of the East; in which, though, it was carried to heights even more vertiginous than in Christianity. Whether this is true or not—and it is a matter of some debate—the Pranava or Om certainly does possess in Aryan religions a holiness higher than anything—or anyone—else; and the point we are trying to make is that it could not, thus, have possibly been absent from Zoroastrianism at its inception, even though its use as a sacred syllable has in modern Zoroastrianism disappeared, and its very name applied to quite another manthra (see ff).

²⁴ Honover is the term most Zoroastrians of today equate with one of their most fundamental prayers, the Yatha Ahu Vairyo. However, as I shall argue later on, this appears to be the result of a wilful change of meaning; and in origin the term seems quite clearly to have designated the Iranian form of the Sacred Syllable, and nothing else. To Zoroastrian readers, whose eyebrows are already rising well above their foreheads, I pray, bear with me for the moment; I shall come to the subject anon.

of space, and is said to be made of pure energy.

*Shiva Purâna*²⁵, *Kailâsha Samhitâ 11.39*

...and

हूँकारोच्चारणेनैव समुत्थाय पराम् शिवाम् ।

By uttering the sound of Hun the supreme [energy of] Shiva is upraised.

Gandharva Tantra 11.35

... and the Tibetans have retained both **Om** and **Hun**, the Indian and Iranian forms of the **Pranava**, in their celebrated formula **Om Mani Padme Hun**.

In fact the Iranian form of the **Pranava** was very well known indeed in India; and this inference is lent support by the fact that the *Chhândogya Upanishad* contains a very interesting story about a dispute between the Deva-worshippers and the Asura-worshippers²⁶ as to which of the two, **Hon** or **Om**, should be adopted. The Asuras, according to this tale, wanted to change the form of the **Pranava**—to “pierce it”, as the Upanishad poetically puts it—by replacing the original **-a-** and **-m-** by **-h-** and **-n-** respectively, the middle **-u-** remaining unchanged. It is noteworthy that the Upanishad declares the Asuras to have been successful in “piercing” the “old” **Pranava**: that is to say, they adopted **Hon** instead of **Om** as their **Pranava**. The **-s-** sound in India was pronounced **-h-** in Iran, so the term “**Asura-worshippers**” would be “**Ahura-worshippers**” in Iranian; and the story would thus seem to hint at a doctrinaire confrontation that may have actually taken place at one time between the two rival cults, the Ahura-worshippers and the Deva-worshippers, with the former winning out in their homeland. It would seem to be clear, then that the Indians and Iranians had very close links even at the time the *Chhândogya Upanishad* was composed.

Now this brings us to the very interesting question as to the locality in which the Vedas, and perhaps even some of the Upanishads, were composed.²⁷ As we saw, the earliest Hymns of the Vedas go back more than six thousand years, perhaps much more. However, up to about five thousand years ago a flourishing non-Aryan civilisation was spread all over the Indus Valley and north-western India, extending as far south as Gujarat: the ruins of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa are only its most spectacular remains, many of which have been found in scattered archaeological sites all over that part of the Indian sub-continent—a clear indication that the Aryans had not yet arrived! The Aryan migrations into India started, according to the best evidence we possess, around 3,000 B.C.; and we are, in fact, faced with the

²⁵ “**Puranas**: The Sanskrit word *purana*, in its earliest sense, means ‘old narrative and ancient lore’ ... The term is often associated with *itihasa* (‘so indeed it was’, i.e., traditional or historical accounts), and both *purana* and *itihasa* have been used sometimes with separate senses and at other times with the same sense. Gradually, *purana* came to designate a body of works, encyclopedic in scope, incorporating legends, myths, and customary observances”. (From *The Encyclopedia of Religions* edited by Prof. Mircea Eliade, already referred to earlier). Traditionally there are eighteen major and eighteen minor *Purânas*, although there seems to be little agreement as to their titles. The *Shiva Purâna* is, of course, one of the major ones.

²⁶ **Devas** and **Asuras**: two more terms of great importance to Hinduism. As we shall have cause to see further, the present meanings of these terms—“gods” and “demons”—are contrived and artificial corruptions of their original meanings, and arose (I shall argue) as a result of Zarathushtra’s work in Iran. For our study at this point it is perhaps enough to remark upon the fact that the **Devas** and the **Asuras** came to be looked upon by ancient Aryans as rivals for spiritual supremacy; and in India the former came to be considered the “good guys” and the latter the “bad guys”, while in Iran the roles were reversed. Indeed the dispute grew so desperate that the Indians had to push it into mythology, and to poetically describe this clash of doctrines as a “war in heaven between the gods and the devils”: a conflict which was to have a lasting impact upon world history, and whose after-effects—as we shall see—are felt even by us. The subject will be elaborated at some length in our inquiry.

²⁷ In order to give a pictorial representation of the region where I believe the Vedas were composed, I have thought it fit to show a map here below. However, it is perhaps as well for me to state that this map is by no means authoritative, and other scholars may feel differently from me. My personal advice to the reader is, *don’t you think it would be best to make up your own mind about the subject?*

{When this book is finalised, a map of the locality in which the Vedas are believed by me to have been composed will be given here.}

inescapable conclusion that at least part of the Vedic literature was composed outside India: in what is today Afghanistan, southern USSR and, of course, Iran. The Vedas are, in fact, no less Iranian than Indian—a fact which scholars like the celebrated German Sanskritist Brunnhofer are at pains to point out. The Iranians have as much right to be proud of the Vedas as the Indians: they are the glorious heritage of both these lands.²⁸

We have seen that **Vaivasvata Yama** founded a system of worship which came to be known as the **पितृयान Pitryâna**, “the Way of the Fathers”. This, apparently, was the oldest form of the religion of the Aryans; and the “Fathers” referred to here were in all likelihood these very Ice Age Aryans, some of whose descendants subsequently migrated south into Iran and India. As we shall see further on, Zarathushtra, the Prophet of Iran, infused a renewed strength into the **Pitryâna** which somewhat before his time had begun to face challenges from a rival system, viz., the **देवयान Devayâna**, or “the Way of the Gods”.

One of the most basic characteristics of the **Pitryâna** was immense reverence for the two most precious warmth-giving things on earth: the Sun and Fire. (This is hardly surprising, if we remember that the **Pitryâna** originated in freezing Siberia!) The most sacred verse in the Vedas, which in all probability goes back to the pre-Indo-Iranian period, is the celebrated **Gâyatrî Mahâ Mantra**, a meditation verse in praise of the Sun:

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः । तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यम् ।
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि । धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

**Om bhur bhuvah svah. Tat savitur varenyam.
Bhargo devasya dhîmahî. Dhiyo yo nah pracho dayât.**

Let us meditate on the brilliant glory of that venerable Sun:
May he illumine our consciousness.

This **mantra**²⁹ is, in spirit, as Iranian as it is Indian; perhaps more so, for while the ancient Aryan reverence for the Sun has diminished somewhat in the more tropical climate of India, the Zoroastrians of cooler Iran retained much more of their ancestral Siberian-period attitude in this regard. It is quite possible, therefore, that this verse was at one time recited in Iran with as much reverence as it is now in India.

The Veda, in another celebrated verse, is careful to point out that reverence for **Agni** (Fire), for **Yama** (the son of the Sun) and for others who may have been awarded the status of deity, is by no means polytheism in disguise:

²⁸ It is possible that some Vedic hymns were in fact composed in India; but the majority of them describe a land very much cooler than the sub-continent. Indeed some Indian myths describe regions that may have well lain as far north as the arctic circle, for their authors were apparently not unacquainted with the fact that somewhere up there the days and nights were six months long.—The word **arctic** is also interesting, at least for our study; for it derives from a Greek term meaning “bear”, and in ancient Indian lore the arctic was supposed to be the “home of the gods”: providing a fascinating correlation with the worship of bears by the ancient Ainu of Japan (a practice which survived among some arctic peoples till fairly recently, and which was in prehistoric times prevalent in Central Europe too: again pointing to some degree of kinship between the Europeans and the aboriginal inhabitants of Japan).

²⁹ The word **मन्त्र mantra** (Indian) or **manthra** (Iranian) basically means “that which is held in the *mind*” (both the word “mind” and the word **mantra** being derived from the same linguistic root or element). Ancient Aryans (as opposed to ancient Semites, ancient Chinese, and probably ancient anybody) ascribed great importance to a concept we now regard, somewhat mistakenly, as universal: the concept of *mind*. This idea does not, in its precise form, exist in Semitic languages; and in Chinese too, the word **hsin**, which after Buddhism’s impact on the Far East began to be translated as “mind”, was in pre-Buddhistic Chinese texts more accurately equated with the *heart*—indeed the ideogram itself in its original form depicted a heart-shaped figure. “Mind” is an idea so very Aryan—and later, specifically Indian—that the Buddhist philosophers, very perceptively, added it to the Five Elementals of Nature (earth, water, fire, air and space), and called it the Sixth: realising that without the mind to realise the reality of the other Five, these others might as well not exist. (It was the Indians—the originators of the idea of zero or nothingness—who had included **vyoma** (“sky” or “empty space”) among the Five Elementals; the ancient Greeks, who didn’t know nothing, had only the first four in their list: which once again underlines the great subtlety Indian thought had attained even in ancient times; and which feature of the Indians we shall have cause to remark upon again and again in our study).

एकं सत् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति ।
अग्निं यमं मातरिश्वानमाहुः ॥

**Ekam sad viprâ bahudhâ vadanti
Agnim yamam mâtariśhvanam âhu.**

Reality is One: the Wise
By different names do call it:—
Fire, Sun, Wind ...

Rigveda 1.164.46

This is the reason Max Müller points out that the so-called polytheism of the Veda is not real polytheism; he prefers to call it by the coined term **henotheism**—that is to say, polytheism in appearance but monotheism in reality. (At another time he calls it **kathenotheism**,³⁰ a form of faith in which now one, now another, deity is considered to be divine, but not all of them together). But the line is a thin one, and both henotheism as well as kathenotheism can easily pass into full-blown polytheism. Zarathushtra, the founder of the world's first—and, as we shall see, in some respects its strictest—monotheistic system of belief, did not countenance even henotheism. However, in spirit if not in the letter, the above-quoted Rigvedic dictum is also acceptable to the Iranian religion.

Further correlations between the Indian and Iranian systems of Vedic thought are not lacking. One very significant such line, this time from the closing **mantras** of the *Yajurveda*, is the following:

अग्ने नय सुपथा राये अस्मान् ।
Agné naya supathâ rayé asmân

O Agni³¹ (Fire), lead us on the good path to spiritual felicity.

Yajurveda 40.17

As we shall see later on in our research, this line seems to have had a profound influence on Zoroastrianism, and through it, possibly on Islam as well. We shall come to this point in due course.

In addition to reverence for Fire and the Sun, an importance characteristic of the **Pitryâna** was its opposition to iconolatry, or the worship of the Divine through the medium of images and idols. This is evident from the history of the two words **Deva** and **Asura** in the speech of the early Aryans. Let us now turn to an examination of this point.

When the Aryans were living together in the northern forests,

³⁰ The term **kathenotheism** is composed of the Greek terms **καθ' ἑνα** *kath' ena* "one by one", and **θεός** *theos* "God". The idea is, in the words of Max Müller who coined this term (as well as the related term **henotheism**, which means more or less the same thing): "a phase of religious thought in which the individual gods invoked are not conceived as limited by the power of others." The "phase" however in Hinduism has lasted to this day; and in some ways it is not absent from the Christian religion either, if you count the Son to be God equally with the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is more or less a question of the degree of reverence you hold in your heart for your religion; for if you are a Christian you don't like to be called anything less than a strict monotheist, and thus can appreciate that the Hindu harbours exactly the same idea about his own faith.

¹ **Agni**, the ancient Vedic term for fire, is echoed in the Latin **ignis** which (as the English cognate "ignite" attests) is also a term for that very first of man's steps on the path of technological innovation. (An alternative word in Sanskrit for **Agni** is **प्रमति** *Pramati*, the cognate of the Greek **Prometheus**, who in mythology stole fire from heaven and brought it down to earth). This term was so important to Vedic people, and even to their later descendants both in India and Iran, that when the Rigveda was "edited" and arranged in the form we know it today—comprising 10 **manadals** or Volumes—each **manadala** (except the ninth) begins with Hymns addressed to **Agni**. (The ninth **manadala** is exclusively addressed to **Soma**—a drink the Greeks used to call **ambrosia**, and which they like their eastern brethren thought conferred immortality). And as for the Iranians: why, the Zoroastrians are to this day (mistakenly) regarded as "fire-worshippers" (the mistake lies in equating symbol with substance: such thinking would make of Catholic Christians "Crucifix-worshippers"!)

that is to say, before their migration into Iran and India, *both* the words **Deva** and **Asura** were terms of respect. Thus we find that in the older Hymns of the *Rigveda*, all the prominent Gods, as for instance **Varuna**, **Rudra**, **Agni** and even **Indra**, have at times been described by the word असुर **Asura**; while in the *Gathas* of Zarathushtra, the terms **daibitana** “divine”, **debanjangha** “possessing divine lustre”, and **debanjyati** “exalts” testify to the honourable character of the term **Daeva**³² in Iran. However, as we are aware, the words subsequently acquired an opposite connotation: the terms **Asura** in the Indian scriptures, and **Daeva** in the Iranian, came to mean “demon”.

Both, the honourable as well as the dishonourable derivations of the term **Deva** persist to this day in European languages:³³ in English we have the words “Divine” and “Deity” on the one hand, and “Devil” and “Deuce” on the other, reminiscent of the original exalted status and the subsequent fall.

The word itself has its origin in the root **div**, which originally meant “to shine”. The term **Deva**, therefore, originally signified “the Shining One”, and was probably used for such objects as the stars and the planets, and very likely also for the Moon and the Sun.

The meaning of the word **Asura** is not so easily derived. Later on in this study we shall go into this matter further, and shall also point out a derivation which, according to some scholars, is a result of Aryan-Semitic interaction. However, at this point it is pertinent to note that a principal attribute of the **Asuras** of the Vedic period was that they had *no forms*:

ये स्याणि प्रतिमुञ्चमानाः असुराः सन्तः स्वधया चरन्ति ।

Those who, casting off their forms, have become **Asuras**, and now move about by themselves [as spirits] ...

Yajurveda 2.20

The Vedic **Asura**, therefore, was an *invisible* god. The **Deva**, on the other hand, had to be *visible* (else how could he shine?) And here we have a clue to the cause of the original fall from grace of the terms **Asura** in India and **Daeva** in Iran. For this phenomenon, being in opposite directions in the two sister lands, points to a wilful rather than a natural degradation.

The difference seems to have arisen over the use in worship of the icon or idol (termed **mûrti**³⁴ in both Sanskrit and the Zend). Some people preferred to worship via the medium of a **mûrti**; these came to be called the **Devayânists**, “worshippers of the **Devas**.” Others opposed this tendency; their cult was known, in Iran, as **Ahura-tkaesha** at first, and later on as **Mazda Yasna**.

The **Ahura**-worshippers (or, as one might say in Indian pro-

³² The Iranian word is romanised as **Daeva** and not as **Deva**, because the earliest Iranian system of writing possessed the peculiarity of often adding a vowel after a consonant, even when it was followed by another vowel as well. Thus we find the Iranian words **pou-ru**, **zaota** and **haithim** written पुरु **puru**, होतार **hotâr** and सत्यम् **satyam** in the Indian style. In the matter of pronunciation, however, it is quite possible that in Iran, this additional (and obviously superfluous) vowel was silent, and that the Iranians and the Indians enunciated all these words in more or less the same fashion, except of course for the interchange of the **-s-** (or **-z-**) sound with the **-h-**.

³³ The Latin **DEUS** and the Greek **Θεός Theos** are also cognates of **Deva**, and indeed our English equivalents and derivants come to us from these old European tongues: as do most other English words derived in the ultimate analysis from Vedic originals. This feature of the English language—i.e., its harking back to Vedic roots—is a relatively recent discovery; and for some strange reason, occidental etymologists don't like to admit it except when they feel they jolly well better, or lose all self-respect. We'd like in our book to set the record straight—or at least straighter. We shall say much more about the subject in Chapter 7.

³⁴ The word in the romanised Iranian is written **murthi**—the **-t-** softened to **-th-**—a phenomenon carried over to Greek too, where we find two letters for this consonant, **θ theta** and **τ tau**. India, on the other hand, went as usual much farther, and developed *four* sounds similar to our English **t**: viz. **त् -t-**, **थ -th-**, **ट -T-** and **ठ -Th-** (these last two so hard and palatal that they have no precise equivalent in any European tongue, and the basic **त् (-t-)** being more like the Italian equivalent than the English or German—which latter does not exist, precisely as such, in Indian languages). Peculiarly enough, in the Dravidian languages of South India—which are in a class by themselves, not related to either the Semitic or Aryan groups—the word **mûrti** is often romanised as **murthi**, indicating a softening process that may have begun many millennia ago, when the Aryans and the Dravidians first came into contact with each other; and which may strengthen the hypothesis—upon which we shall expand later—that among the first Aryans to have done so were quite a few Iranians. (The very hard **-T-**, **-Th-**, **-D-** and **-Dh-** sounds of Indian languages, not being found in western Aryan tongues, are probably the result of Aryan-Dravidian interaction; for they exist in all Dravidian languages, where indeed they are pronounced with such explosive force that even Indians from the North of the sub-continent—who normally speak Aryan tongues—find it hard to imitate them accurately).

nunciation, the Asura-worshippers) were very well known in India. The Sage **Bhrigu**—whose name derives from the root **bhrk** which, as mentioned earlier, means “the blazing of the fire”—is said to have been the “Preceptor of the **Asuras**”. He is considered to be one of the “Mind-born sons of **Brahmâ**”,³⁵ and therefore must have been one of the earliest of the Aryan **Rishis**. His epithet **Shukra** “bright”, which is a variant of the term **Shukla** “white” or “fair”—and which probably described his physical complexion—also indicates his northern (that is, pre-Indo-Iranian) origins. He is known to have been extremely intolerant of idolatry: indeed, one of his more notable recorded actions is that of having kicked **Vishnu** in the breast, as related in the *Padma Purâna*:

तं दृष्ट्वा मुनिशार्दूलः भृगु कोपसमन्वितः ।
स्वयं पादं विचिक्षेप विष्णोर्वक्षसि शोभने ॥

Setting eyes upon him [that is, upon **Vishnu**], that Tiger among Sages, **Bhrigu**, became highly enraged; with his own left foot he landed a kick on the breast of **Vishnu**.”

Padma Purâna, Uttara Khânda 255.48

The cause of **Brigu**’s annoyance seems to have been **Vishnu**’s very possession of a body (and logically speaking, he *must* have possessed a body, to have had a breast on which a kick could be landed!) Apparently for the same reason, **Bhrigu** is reputed on an earlier occasion to have hotly scolded his own father, **Brahmâ**, and **Shiva** as well—each in his own heaven, at that! (Truly a “Tiger among Sages”, what?)

The **Ahura-tkaesha** was also called in Iran the **Paourya-tkaesha** “the original [or earlier] mode of worship”. It is, by all accounts, the older form of Aryan worship, anterior to the **Deva Yâna**. This would also appear from a line in the **Mahâbhârata**³⁶ which declares that “the **Asuras** are the elder brothers, [while] the **Devas** are the younger”:

असुराः भ्रातरो ज्येष्ठाः देवश्चापि यवीयसाः ।
Shanti Parva 33.25

The *Amara Kosha* also points out that

सुक्रशिष्याः दितिसुताः पूर्वदेवाः सुरद्विषः ।

The pupils of **Shukra** [that is, the **Asuras**] who are the sons of **Diti**, were born before the gods, whom they hate.”

... while the *Brihad Âranyaka Upanishad* says:

³⁵ As most students of Hinduism know (I am writing this for westerners of course: Indians surely don’t need this note), **Brahmâ**, **Vishnu** and **Shiva** constitute the **Trimûrti** or Indian Trinity: in which the first is regarded as the Creator, the second the Sustainer and the last the Destroyer or, more accurately, the Re-creator (for **Shiva**’s mighty destructive acts are immediately followed by an equally mighty renewal process). This Triad of Principles, or Three Aspects of The One Supreme Being, are—as we shall show later on also (Chapter 9)—definitely a post-Vedic idea; and in its present form does not seem to have existed in Vedic times (since it is not mentioned or even hinted at in the Hymns). However, **Vishnu** is mentioned in the Vedas, wherein He is referred to as a **deva**; and thus the concept that the **Trimûrti**—as the very term indicates—was composed of gods who possessed *forms*, became firmly entrenched in the subsequent development of Hinduism (perhaps the best-known representation of the Triad is the one carved out of solid basalt in the Elephanta caves near Bombay, reproduced in endless illustrations in books on India). This Triad can, of course, no more be taken as “proof” of Hindu polytheism than the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost be taken likewise for the Christians.

³⁶ The longest epic poem in the world—about seven times as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together—is the **Mahâbhârata**, which is in scope and scale so grand that in comparison *War and Peace* seems like a short story. Legend has it that its author, the Sage **Vyâsa**, dictated it non-stop to the god **Ganesha**, who had stipulated as a prerequisite for serving as amanuensis that his pen not pause from beginning to end: a condition accepted by the composer, with the counter-stipulation however that **Ganesha** understand the purport of every verse before setting it down. The original composition—like the *Iliad*, it is basically a historical tale, though much embellished of course—was probably not nearly as long as the version we possess, for it seems to have been added unto *ad infinitum*; but even at its inception it must still have been quite some piece. In my opinion—and I am not alone—it is certainly the most magnificent “novel” I have read, even though I am acquainted with it mostly in a highly abridged English version written for children by **Shri Chakravarty Rajagopalachari**, the honoured Indian freedom-fighter. Not the least of its several points of superiority over any western work (I already anticipate my European audience’s blood boiling, but I’m afraid they will have to bite the bullet) is its inclusion as an integral part of it the *Bhagavad Gîtâ*: a Song so Celestial that millions deem it Divine—literally. It has always amazed me that people ignorant of the very names of masterpieces like the **Mahâbhârata**

कनीयसा एव देवा ज्यायसा असुराः ।

The **Devas** are the younger, the **Asuras** are the older.

Brihadâranyakopaniṣad 3.1

In Iran the term **Paourya-tkaesha** was opposed to the term **Daeva-Yasna**, and in India these same terms became **Pitryâna** and **Devayâna**. In these terms the Sanskrit suffix **यान -yâna** was very likely a contraction of the Iranian **yasna**, which in turn is derived from the Vedic **यज्ञ yajña** (more accurately pronounced **yagña**) meaning “sacrifice”. For the **yajña** or sacrifice was the most ancient form of worship among the Aryans, dating back to the times of King Yima himself. (Animal sacrifice, except in rare and isolated instances, is no longer practised in the Hindu religion; and Zarathushtra himself put a stop to it in Iran; but it is obvious, from a perusal of both the Vedas and the Gathas, that among the ancient Aryans it was common enough).³⁷ The words **pitr-yâna** and **deva-yâna** would therefore appear to mean, respectively, “sacrifice unto the fathers” and “sacrifice unto the gods”.³⁸ At all events, the worship offered up by the Pitr-yânists was before an altar of fire, as the following words of the *Rigveda* testify—and fire is used in religious rites only to sacrifice something, even if it be but a piece of wood to fuel it:

यं त्वा द्यावापृथिवी यं त्वा आपः त्वष्टा यं त्वा सुजनिमा जजान ।
पन्थामनु प्रविद्वान् पितृयानं द्युमदग्ने समिधानो विभाहि ॥

May **Agni**, the Fire—born of heaven, earth and water, and kindled by **Twashta**—burn brightly in the **Pitryâna**.

Rigveda 10.2.7

The worship of a Formless Spirit via the medium of the Fire is, therefore, an ancient custom practiced by many Aryans, not only by the Zoroastrians. It is a way of worship that even non-Aryan peoples followed, and in some of these cases, as we shall see, it could very likely have been taken over by them from Aryan neighbours. The Zoroastrian “fire-worship” is, at all events, none other than an **अग्निहोत्र agnihotra**, a practice common to this day among the Hindus (who are certainly not, on that account, accused by unthinking people of being “fire worshippers”, as are the unfortunate Zoroastrians!)

Numerous lines of the Veda point out, as we said earlier, that the term **Asura** was at one time an honourable one among the Vedic Sages. One of them is the following mantra in praise of **Indra**:

ta should seriously assert such supercilious statements as: “Shakespeare’s supremacy as a writer is unchallenged by any author in any language”. But then, to ignorance—as to *chutzpah*—there is no end, is there?

³⁷ It is perhaps not widely known that among even the strictly vegetarian brahmins of South India there still persists a ceremony, rather rarely performed it is true, in which a goat is sacrificed to **Soma**, with recitations from the Vedas forming the bulk of the scriptures chanted as the poor beast is slaughtered—the survival of a custom so ancient and primitive (in the worst sense of this overworked term) that the blood curdles even to read about it. (We modern folk shouldn’t feel too self-righteous however, for it is probably no worse than what goes on in many slaughter-houses, and is very likely far exceeded in cruelty in many chemicals-testing labs). In the cult of **Kālī**, of course, animal sacrifice is blatantly open—at least in some localities; but this seems to have been derived not from ancient Vedic custom but from practices of the aboriginal tribal peoples of India, with whom the Aryans have always had some contact since they entered the sub-continent.

³⁸ In my writing I have sometimes spelled the word “god” with a lower-case “g” and at other times with a capital “G”. The reason for this is not mere caprice, but an attempt to translate into English the idea underlying the original **mantra**: for whenever the word **Deva** is employed in a sense which appears to signify one Supreme and unchallenged Deity, I have translated it as “God”, with an upper-case “G”, while where it is used in a sense more or less like the Greeks used their cogeneric term **theos**, as signifying one of several heavenly immortals, I have written it as “god”, with a lower-case “g”. The distinction however is not at all easy to make, and at times it has been touch-and-go which version should be used, for Vedic ideas of gods or God were by no means uniform. This is quite understandable when one remembers that hundreds of hymnists have been found worthy enough to get their works specified as **shruti**; and there is no doubt that some at least of them were indeed out-and-out polytheists (despite the fact, which we mentioned earlier, that the general theme of Vedism was “kathenotheistic” and at times even strictly monotheistic. In Indian minds in any case, these matters are not self-contradictory; or rather, the Indian **Rishi** seems to say, like Walt Whitman:

“Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself!

I am large, I contain multitudes.”

देवश्चित्ते असुर्याय पूर्वे अनुक्षत्राय ममिरे सहांसि ।

All the ancient gods, [O **Indra**], submitted their powers to thy lordly dominion”

Rigveda 7.21.7

(Note that the term translated as “lordly dominion” is given as **असुर्याय क्षत्राय asuryâya kshatrâya**, thus proving that the term **Asura** was a respectable one in those days).

As we mentioned earlier, the Vedic word **Asura** was pronounced **Ahura** in Iran. As we noted above, in the Vedas we find the term **Asura** (with an honourable connotation) mentioned quite often; and in one isolated case, we find the word **Ahura** (the Iranian pronunciation) as well. It occurs in the *Sâma Veda*:

→ अहुर इदं ते परिदाम्यहम् ।
Ahura idam te paridadâmi aham

O **Ahura**, I now give thee [this-or-that], {or}
O **Ahura**, I now dedicate this to thee.

Sâma Veda, Mantra Brâhmana 1.6.21

Here, it is very clearly **Ahura** who is mentioned by name! There can be no question, therefore, of the fact that Indian Aryans of the Vedic period knew about, and probably even participated in, the Iranian cult of **Ahura-tkaesha**.³⁹

And, as if to lay all enmity to rest between the two rival cults, the **Pitryâna** and the **Devayâna**, the *Rigveda* addresses a Hymn to **Rudra**, “who is both **Deva** and **Asura**”:

तम् उ ष्टुहि यः सुइषु सुधन्वा यो विश्वस्य क्षयति भेषजस्य ।
यक्ष्वामहे सौमनसाय रुद्रं नमोभिर्देवमसुरं दुवस्य ॥

Pray unto him who wields the good arrow and the good bow;
who rules over all and is the only source of bliss.
For the sake of the good mind, worship **Rudra**; all hail to him
who is both **Deva** and **Asura**.

Rigveda 5.42.11

(This **Rudra**, moreover, is not—as we shall see later on in this book—merely one god among many, but the One and Only Deity who does not so much as tolerate a second. However, for the present we may leave it at that.)

³⁹ The whole point of these illustrations—and of those that follow for quite a few more chapters—lies in showing just how closely related the Hindu and the Zoroastrian religions were at one time, and indeed still are. Neither the Hindus nor the Parsis of today—I am writing this for those unacquainted with either—admit for a moment that their respective faiths are sisters in origin, and to a large extent remain so in this very here-and-now: more so, for instance, than even Judaism and Christianity; they think of Zoroastrianism as being totally distinct from Hinduism—itsself a totally erroneous impression. It comes sometimes as a shock even for scholars to realise the kinship between the two creeds, and the vast majority of scholarly works on the subject play down this closeness (perhaps out of a mistaken sense of one or the other’s “superiority”). We shall therefore in our work play it *up*, and throw some light upon this fascinating facet of Aryan history.

CHAPTER 2

THE EPOCH OF ZARATHUSHTRA, THE FIRST PROPHET OF THE HUMAN RACE

It is quite clear, I think, from our study hitherto that religious belief in the Vedic period was by no means undeveloped; in other words, religion—in the sense of a systematic code of beliefs, ethics, and spiritual lore—among the Indo-Iranians, or even among the original Aryans in their arctic home, was not in any sense of the term “primitive” or unsophisticated. Great Sages were reputed to have taught even the Gods; as **Bhrigu** was the Preceptor of the **Asuras**, so **Brihaspati** was of the **Devas**; and Divine Knowledge, **ब्रह्मविद्या** **Brahmavidyâ**, is said to have been imparted not only by **Rishis** to their disciples, but by **Brahmâ** the Creator Himself to his “first-born son”. However, until the time of Zarathushtra, no single Sage, Seer, **Rishi** or Prophet—whether Aryan, Semitic, Egyptian, Chinese or of any other geographical or ethnic group—had promulgated *a complete scripture*, in the sense of having laid the foundations of an *entire and independent religion*.¹ This was first done by Zarathushtra; and we are thus justified in entitling him “The First Prophet of the Human Race”.

As we have seen, long before Zarathushtra’s time the Aryan peoples had developed the **Paourya-tkaesha** or **Pitryâna** and, somewhat later, the **Daeva yasna** or **Devayâna**. The former seems to have gained greater acceptance in Iran while the latter emerged as the more powerful force in India, although in neither case was the dominance complete until well after Zarathushtra appeared on the scene. In addition to these two major trends, there were also the various **Rishis** or Sages who sang their Hymns and made their mark upon the community; the various deities worshipped by the people (at times through the medium of idols and at times otherwise); and the various customs, conventions, rites and rituals hallowed by tradition and quasi-sacred in status, and which with the passage of time grew to become part of the Vedic religion itself.

For instance, long before the time of Zarathushtra, it had become a custom among Aryans to drink an elixir, most likely extracted from a plant, called in India **Soma**² and in Iran **Haoma**, the effect of which was, by all accounts, exhilaratingly hallucinogenic. The reader will remember the ecstatic song of the **Soma** drinkers from the *Rigveda* reproduced earlier. In time the importance of this custom grew so great that **Soma** itself began to

¹ To say that Zarathushtra promulgated a “complete scripture” is not also to assert that the entire Avesta is his own work. The **Gathas**, the only material reputed to be Zarathushtra’s own words, comprise in fact only a tiny portion of the totality of the Zoroastrian texts; but they are their core, and the final authority upon which all the subsequent hagiographa rest. In this sense however Zarathushtra’s authority is not quite as absolute or overwhelming as, for instance, **Hazrat Muhammad**’s is for Muslims. Nevertheless Zarathushtra certainly antedates Moses, Confucius or the Buddha, what to speak of Jesus Christ or **Rasul Muhammad**; and thus his chronological primacy as a Prophet is unchallengeable. (Of course, we are using the term “Prophet” rather loosely here, in the sense of “Founder of a Religion”).

² We already said something about **Soma** in the previous chapter. The use of psychotropic substances for religious ritual is by no means restricted to the Aryan culture; in fact in recent years the best-known such custom is perhaps that portrayed in the works of Carlos Castaneda, who describes the Mexican Yaqui usage in this regard in the most intriguing terms. No culture, however, pushed the practice as far as the Indo Iranian (see *ff*); and it may have reached quite unmanageable proportions by the time of the Buddha, who was evidently disgusted by it, and prohibited in his **Pancha Shîlas** or “Five Precepts” the use of all mind-altering substances. However, during Vedic times the drinking of **Soma** or **Haoma** was probably rather restricted, and carried out only on special occasions; for the drink can’t have been easily available, the art of brewing it confined to a select few; and therefore it probably did not reach levels which could be considered abusive. (Not having tried it out, moreover, I don’t think we can assert it to have necessarily been a bad habit, especially since we have no idea whether it was habit-forming at all!) In more recent times **Soma** came to be synonymous with the moon, which was worshipped under that name (as **Soma Nâth**, “Lord **Soma**”), and for whose worship enormous temples and idols were built—the most celebrated of which was the great idol of **Soma Nâth** smashed to pieces by one of the first Muslim invaders who came to India. Hindus of

be worshipped as a deity; and an entire Veda, the *Sâma Veda*, was compiled out of the Hymns addressed to it, many of which pay homage to the potion as if it were a conscient entity. In other Hymns the listener is encouraged to “drink this mead that confers immortality”:

इममिन्द्र सुतं पिब ज्येष्ठममर्त्यं मदम् ।
शुक्रस्य त्वाभ्यक्षरन् धारा ऋतस्य साधने ॥

Drink, drink, drink this immortal mead,
this drink that is the greatest.
Let waves of brilliance flow as streams
from the Eternal Righteousness.

Sama Veda 344, 946

In Iran too the **Haoma** plant and the drink distilled from it have been immortalised in the form of an entire book of prayers, the *Haoma Yasht*.³ In fact it was so important a beverage that several Iranian legends grew up around it, one of the most prominent being the story that Zarathushtra himself administered a potion to his patron, King Vistasp, as a result of which the monarch remained in a trance for three days and nights, experiencing—it is said—something of the Spiritual Realm.

It is also significant that the draught has, in the Sama Vedic **shloka**⁴ quoted above, been called **मदम् madam**; for this word derives from the root **मद् mad** which in Aryan speech connotes many wondrous things. It signifies “to rejoice”: for example **जयामीति मद्यमि jayâmîti madyâmi** “I rejoice because I am winning”. It also means “to be drunk” (*i.e.*, intoxicated)—not surprisingly, since it happens to be the origin of the English word “mead”. It is also the origin of the English word “mad” (as in “insane”, and maybe also as in “angry”!): but in its more ancient connotation it meant “mad” in a more positive kind of way—“mad about God”, let us say.⁵

The Sanskrit word for “honey”, **मधु madhu**, is also derived from it; and this word became so important to the Indians that **Sri Krishna** himself is at times called **माधव Mâdhava**, “made of honey”. Mead is, of course, also made of honey; and it is possible that the English term **Media**, which formed a large part of Iran—and which was apparently called in Sanskrit **माध्य mādhyā**, derives its name from this word: “Land of Mead, or Honey”. (And it is interesting to speculate as to whether the Aryans who migrated to Europe retained some memory of sacred syllable **Hon** used by their brethren in Iran, and found in it the origin of their own Anglo-Saxon words **honig** (German) and **honey** (English), thus establishing a kind of reverse parallel with the deification of the “immortalising mead” by the eastern

a later age too, along with the Buddhists, had come to look somewhat askance at the drug kick; and as the custom of actually drinking the beverage waned, references to it in the sacred texts were explained away as metaphorical allusions to a symbolic nectar, a spiritual essence which fortifies and immortalises as a result of its divine virtues—much like the Greek **αμβροσια ambrosia**, whose name is thought by some to be a foreshortened and degenerate form of the Persian equivalent: **Haoma Duraosa** “Death dispelling **Haoma**”. Because of this gradual mythification of the drink, **Soma** became perhaps the strangest of Vedic gods, and in legend appears in numerous forms—as a plant, a drink, a giant, a poet, a human embryo, a bird, a bull and, as we said above, the moon.—The translation given on the right here, by the way, is liberal, not literal.

³ **Yasht** is the Avestan word meaning “prayer”, from the root **ya** “[to] pray”. We shall speak more of the **Yashts** later on.

⁴ The Indian sacred texts are composed of **shlokas**, which term perhaps best corresponds with the “verses” of the Bible: a sentence or two (though not necessarily in verse form) conveying some single idea. As Dr. Irach Taraporewala—the most eminent Parsi Zoroastrian scholar of recent times—has perceptively noted, in the Vedas as well as in the Gathas “a unit of verse is [generally] a unit of sense”; and thus it is as well to become conscious of this peculiarity of the Indian scriptures.

⁵ Insanity was not, in past cultures, always looked upon in a totally negative light; and even in Shakespeare’s days it was not thought of quite as ill as we do, as illustrated by his treatment of Hamlet: indeed as Bernard Shaw points out, most Londoners went to see Hamlet, when it was first performed, with a view to seeing a madman unleashed!—And then, of course, there were the Viking **beserkers** who used to tear off their clothes and go beserk on their raids, and for which they were highly honoured by their comrades.

Aryans).

These small asides go merely to show that the commonality among Indians and Iranians did not cease after they migrated south from Lake **Mânasarovara**, but continued well into the time of Zarathushtra.

It is not my intention in this book to give a full and complete description of the life and teachings of Zarathushtra; these subjects can be found in many other books, and would in any case take us too far afield for the purposes of our study. However, I shall outline a few aspects of them, in order to establish the close links that must have existed between Zoroastrianism and Vedism during the Prophet's own lifetime.⁶

Zarathushtra, as we mentioned earlier, is said to have been born in a royal family. The city in which he was born was, as we said earlier, called **Râji**; and he is thus known as **Narepish Rajish**, "the Prince of **Râji**". Later Iranians pronounced the name of this city as **Ragha**, **Ragau** or **Rae**, and it is in these forms that it is best known to us, particularly from being mentioned in the Bible and its Apocrypha, where the pronunciation was derived from a Greek version of its name: **Ραγες (Rhages)**. Today this important city of antiquity is a ruin located not far from Teheran. It is quite possible that this was the city of King **Râji** who is mentioned in Indian legend, and may even derive its name from him (or from an ancestral namesake). According to this legend, King **Râji**, although a mortal, aspired to become the **Indra**, or Chief, of the gods. He fought a victorious war against the **Indra** of his time, who happened to be the pure and saintly **Prahlâd**. (The story of Prahlâd's trials and tribulations at the hands of wicked individuals have been recorded in several Indian texts, and notably so in the **Vishnu Purâna**).

If our conjecture is correct, then, it indicates that even in Purânic times—which were far subsequent to the Vedic epoch—Iranian Kings and cities were mentioned in Indian legends and tales without the authors having cause to point out that they lay "outside India". In fact the very term "India" was unknown: inasmuch as people did know this word (or rather its prototype in the Vedic tongue), it was known merely as **सिन्धु Sindhu** or **सप्त सिन्धु Sapta Sindhu**, meaning "[the Land of] the Seven Rivers". These rivers were the Indus and its five tributaries—the **Kabul** river being, in all probability, the seventh. (The number Seven being a sacred figure for the ancient Aryans no less than for the Jews, it was used for anything and everything, even when it wasn't quite apposite). The term **Sapta Sindhu** was pronounced **Hapta Hindu** in Iran, and it thus gave rise to the terms "Hindu", "Hind" and "India" in languages that lay farther west, its "-u" ending being reflected in the ancient Hebrew name for India: **הודו Hodu**.

⁶ This chapter—and indeed the first few of this book—are written to set the stage, so to speak, for the main theme of our study. Hence they may in places be boring, but bear with me a while; without this background much that follows might be unintelligible.

However, these words did not signify, at the time of which we speak, any territory other than the Indus Valley region. In Vedic Sanskrit the word **Sindhu** simply means “river”—any river. The Indus, being the largest river in this region, was therefore called, matter-of-factly, “**Sindhu**”. It was also, on occasion, probably called **सरस्वती Sarasvatî** (from the linguistic root or element **स sr** “[to] flow”), which was also a generic term for “river”: in Iran another stream, the **Horaqvaiti**, was so called for much the same reason.⁷ (It is one of the glories of the Aryan tongue that it has an amazingly rich vocabulary, and many words may be used to denote the same thing, with almost imperceptible differences in shades of meaning. This was sometimes done so that each word might be used in its fit and proper place; but often different terms for the same concept were employed, in wild exuberance, merely in order to avoid repetition, which was considered inelegant. Thus a river might be called, in addition to **sindhu** and **sarasvatî**, by other terms such as **daryâ**, **nadî**, and so on).

The Indus Valley region was the most fertile of the Aryan lands, and many Aryans settled there. Others, agriculturally less fortunate, settled to the west and to the east of this region. In the **Rigveda** we find names which in all likelihood were used at that time denote each of these three geographical entities: **इरा Irâ** or **इळ Ilâ** denoting the western part, that is to say Iran, and **भारती Bhârati** denoting the plains of the Ganges and the Jamuna, more or less east of what is today Delhi—the third region being called, of course, **Sindhu** or **Sarasvatî**. In the following Rigvedic verse we find all three mentioned together:

आ भारती भारतीभिः सजोषा इळ देवेभिर्मनुष्येभिर्अग्निः ।
सरस्वती सरस्वतेभिर्अवाक्सिप्तो देविर्वहिर इदं सदन्तु ॥

O **Agni**, may these three presiding deities, *viz.*, that of India [**Bhârati**], Iran [**Ilâ**] and the Indus Valley [**Sarasvatî**] take their seats here on the grass, along with the Sages thereof.

Rig Veda 7.2.8

The very name “Iran” may derive from the Rigvedic term **Irâ** or **Ilâ**. This land is also called at times **आर्ययान Âryayâna** (“Aryan Way”); in which case the stretch of territory we now refer to as North India is called **आर्य वर्त Ârya Varta** (“Aryan Region”). This was probably because the Aryans coming from the north would have to pass through Iran in order to reach India.

In the well-known **Hiranyagarbha Sûkta** of the **Rigveda**,⁸ a Hymn to the Cosmic Being, we find the following lines:

⁷ The Indo-European root **sr** also survives—as is to be expected, of course—in Europe, in such terms as the French word **source** “a spring of water” and the English word “stream”.—As for the river **Sarasvatî**, in modern times it is looked upon as a quasi-mythical stream, supposed to flow underground from its source, and join up with the Ganges and the Jamuna at their junction, called **Triveni**, situated near Allahabad (where the **Kumbha Mela**, the famous festival recurring every fourteen years, is held, and where more people—many millions—gather together in one place than anywhere else in the world). This however is a fairly recent tradition—at least in comparison to Vedic antiquity—and the name **Sarasvatî** in the Vedas themselves appears to refer far too clearly to the Indus for there to be too much doubt about it.—It may however be mentioned that recent geological evidence has shown the possibility of a large river having existed in North India several thousands of years ago, which has now dried up; and the conjecture is that it is to this river that the name **Sarasvatî** was given in ancient times. This is definitely possible, of course; however, as we have seen from the Iranian cognate **Horaqvaiti**, the same name seems to have been applied in Vedic times to more than one stream; and thus it is also quite possible that the Indus was *also* called **Saravati** by at least some Vedic people in those days. (This note is written mostly for the benefit of Hindus, who might look askance at my equating **Sarasvatî** with **Sindhu**, such being quite contrary to modern Hindu practice).

⁸ For philologists unacquainted with this Hymn—who may question my translation of the last line here—I should like to point out that although the original runs in a form which in Classical Sanskrit would indicate an interrogative (**कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम kasmai devâya havishâ vidhema**), in the *Vedic* version of the language the same word can also be looked upon as a simple affirmative (**कस्मै kasmai** being equivalent to **तस्मै tasmai**, being in this case the correlative of **यस्मै yasmai** with which the verse begins).—And for the layman I may mention that here again (as with the **Nâsadiya Sûkta** of the **Rigveda** quoted earlier) I have attempted to echo the metre of the original; and to some extent I have succeeded, though not as well I would have liked. (In this instance I have taken as a base to work from Griffiths’s excellent translation).

यस्यमे हिमवन्तो महित्वा यस्य समुद्रं रसया सआहुः ।
यस्येमा प्रदिशो यस्य बाहु कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥

His might and majesty these snowy regions,
The ocean and the **Rasa** do exhibit.
His arms outstretched are all this far-flung domain.
This God do we adore with our oblations.

These lines can perhaps be taken as a description, in a poetic sense, of the boundaries of the Aryan Land known to the people of the time. “To the north, the Great Snowy Region; to the south, the Sea; and to the west, the river **Rasa**.” The eastern boundary is not mentioned here, since the Aryans were even then in the process of expanding their settlements in that direction.

The word used here for the northern boundary is **हिमवन्त्** **Himavant**. Nowadays in Sanskrit it denotes the Himalaya mountain range, but its literal meaning is simply “snowy”. Another snowy mountain in Iran, Mt. Damavand, has been called by the same name: the word **Damavand** is, in fact, none other than the Persian pronunciation of the Sanskrit term **Himavant**. These mountains are so called because they are among the very few places in India and Iran where there happens to be an abundance of snow.

However, the Aryans could not have been, at the time of the composition of the Vedas, unacquainted with abundant snow; they surely must still have retained some memory of their ancestral home in the steppes and forests of Russia, and of the vast snowy regions they had left behind. The word **Himavant**, then, in this passage at least, may well be taken to denote these snowy northern stretches of land; and such a conjecture becomes all the more credible when we note that the sea is taken as the southern boundary; for at the time this Hymn was composed the Aryans had not yet migrated much into South India; and it is hard to believe that they knew, in a widespread way, that India, like Iran, was also bounded by the sea to the south. And our hypothesis gains further support by the mention of the eastern boundary, the river **Rasa**; since this important stream—which is also mentioned in the Avesta where its name is pronounced **Ranha**—most probably refers to the Tigris, which divides the Aryan lands from the Semitic: for as the *Rigveda* also states, **Sâramâ** the messenger of **Indra** had to cross the **Rasa** to reach the land of the **Panis**—which word the Aryans may have used to denote the Phoenicians.

The Aryan Land known to the middle- and late period Vedic Sages was, then, a region comprising most of today’s Iran, all of Pakistan,⁹ only a part (the northern part) of India, and probably a considerable portion of what is today Afghanistan and southern

⁹ In our study we shall denote by the term “India” the entire Indian sub-continent, and in general avoid references to modern political entities like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and so on; for they are historically so recent and short-lived that it would merely confuse us to talk of them. To citizens of these other countries who may read my book, I should like to apologise in advance for this, and assure them that by doing so I have no political or emotional overtones in mind.

Russia, along with other southern republics of the former Soviet Union; and it is of this fairly large stretch of territory that the lines above would seem to sing.

The locality where Zarathushtra finally established his religion was known as the kingdom of **Balkh**. This region, which is about five hundred kilometres north of present-day India, is still called “Balkhash” by the Russians. The original kingdom of Balkh lay partly in what is today Afghanistan and partly in the former USSR. Balkh, along with neighbouring Herat, is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* as follows:

अरट्टा नाम ते देशाः वाहलिका नाम ते जनाः ।
Arattâ nâma te deshâh, Vâhlikâ nâma te janâh.

Karna Parva 44.32

If we take **Arattâ** here to signify “Herat”, it become clear what locality is meant: “**Herat** is the name of the place, and **Balkhis** the name of the people”. In later ages this region came to be known as Bactria.

Iran proper was divided in those days into three main parts: Parthia, Persia and Media. All three are clearly mentioned in the *Rigveda*:

प्रचा गव्यन्तः पृथुर्पशवो ययुः ।
Prachâ gavyantah PrithuParshavo yayuh

The Parthians and Persians proceed eastward in search of pasture for their cows. (This very likely refers to the migrations of the Aryans into India).

Rigveda 7.83.1

शतं अहं तिरन्दिरे सहस्रं पर्शावाददे ।
shatam aham Tirindiré shasram Parshâvâdadé

I obtained [as largesse] a hundred [coins?] in Tirindira, and a thousand in Persia.

Rigveda 8.6.46

दुर्नाशेयं दक्षिणा पार्थवानाम् ।
durnâsheyam dakshinâ Pârthvânâm

The largesse the Parthians dispense is beyond the capacity of others.

Rigveda 6.27.8

मूषो न शिशना व्यदन्ति
mûsho na shishnâ vyadanti

माध्यः स्तोतारं शतक्रतो
Mâdhyah stotâram Shatakrato

O Shatakratu [*i.e.*, Indra], the Medians gnaw at thy worshipper, as a mouse gnaws at the weaver's thread.

Rigveda 10.33.3

The three regions were even recognised to form a kind of Union known as त्रिषध Trishadha, "The Three Together". We often find references to this confederation in the Indian scriptures.

Of the three, Persia was the most important; and its name ultimately became a synonym for the entire confederation. In India it was called पशु Parshu; in Iran, Parsa or Pars. (Perhaps it was called Parshu in Sanskrit because it was close to India, for the word पार्श्वम् pārshvam signifies "side" or "flank".)¹⁰ The Hebrew word for Iran, פָּרַס Paras, also derives from the same source.

The word Parshu was quite familiar in India, and denoted the people of that country as well as the country itself. In Pânîni's rules of grammar we find the following dictum:

पशुदि यौधेयादित्य अन् अक्रौ ।

"By the addition of a suffix, the word Parshu is changed to Parshava, which means 'The Persians'."

Pânîni 5.3.117

...And, commentators note, the Parshavas were worshippers of Asura (=Ahura); weapon-wielders (*i.e.*, militant); and fond of confederation—all three of which were characteristic features of the ancient Iranians (and not quite so much of the ancient Indians). Thus the rules of Pânîni also confirm that by the term Parshu the Veda refers to Persia.¹¹

The view that Iran and India during the time of Zarathushtra were virtually one land and one folk finds support in additional references too numerous to fully note here. For instance, the Sage Kashyapa is said to have lived on the shores of the Caspian Sea, which may derive its very name from him; and the King Vasu is said to have ruled over a land called Chedi, and to have bestowed a gift of one hundred camels on the Sage Kanva; and it is obvious from this and other references to Chedi that the term refers to Bactria, renowned for its two-humped camels. The adjoining province of Khorasan most probably derives its name from King Kuru Shrivana, who ruled over it in Vedic days, as recounted in the Rig Veda:

¹⁰ The speaker of Hindi will recognise the descendant of this word in his own Hindi पास pās "near". We should, perhaps, also remark on the interchangeability of the -v- and -u- sounds, whether in western or eastern languages: for in Roman times they were both represented by the same letter (and indeed can be thus found in many Latin texts); and the same applies to the Hebrew alphabet. And in Sanskrit, as Pânîni's dictum quoted here shows, it was by no means uncommon either.

¹¹ All this is important for a later chapter in our study, for it enables us to establish a most significant link between the Indian and Iranian branches of the Aryan religion, in the person of one of the most celebrated of Indian Avatâras or "Descending High Beings", namely Parshu Râma. But we shall leave that very interesting tale to be told later.

कुरु श्रवणम् आवृणि राजानम् त्रिसदस्यवम् ।

Rigveda 10.33.4

The name **कुरु Kuru** (as in **कुरु श्रवण Kuru Shravana**) is also of great interest, as we shall later have occasion to note. For the moment it is sufficient to remind ourselves that areas close to **Balkhash** in the former Soviet Union are called **Kara Kum**, **Kara Teri** and **Kara Boghaz-Gol**; and we might thus give consideration to the hypothesis that the name **Kuru** might have originally signified “Man of **Kara**”.

There are other interesting indications of Indo Iranian interaction in Vedic times. For instance, the word **अश्व ashva** “horse” in Sanskrit, which becomes **aspa** in Zend (and **EQVVS** or **EQUUS** in Latin), was a very important one to the Persians; for they were during that period the most skilful of all peoples in equestrian ability and technique. They were among the first peoples to evolve the use of horse-riding for military purposes; and the Hebrew word for “cavalry”, **פרשים parashim**, derived (as it could well be) from the name **פרס Paras** “Persia” itself, testifies to their prowess on horseback. (Even today regions north of Persia are known for outstanding horsemanship: for those are the lands of the Cossacks or **Kazakhs**, world-famous for their riding skills).

The Latin term for alfalfa grass, **Medicago sativa**, is another indication of the Iranians’ abilities in this field, for it derives from the name **Media**—the soldiers of this region being known to carry alfalfa seeds in their pouches, for planting in distant lands when on long military campaigns, in order to provide fodder for their mounts. Many Iranian names contain to this day the suffix **-asp**, indicating a connection with horses: **Vistasp**, **Gush-tasp**, **Tehmurasp**, **Pourushasp**, **Jamasp**.

The Sanskrit name **अश्वपति Ashwapati**, which finds mention in the **Râmâyana**,¹² is also connected with horses: it means “Lord of the Steeds”. The inference is very strong, therefore, that **Ashwapati** was an Iranian or West-Aryan nobleman: the more so since he is reputed to have presented a set of fine horses to a distinguished recipient, his grandson **Bharata**, the son of King **Dasharatha** of **Ayodhyâ**¹³ and brother of **Sri Râmachandra**. The fact that Bharata was on hand to receive the horses also points to the fact that Indians periodically paid visits to Iran. The inference is further strengthened when we remember that Ashwapati’s daughter, the mother of Bharata, was called **Kaikeyi**; and that **Kekaya**, the word from which that name is derived, could well have been what the Indians called the Caucasus region (**Кавказ** [pronounced **Kavkaz**] in the former USSR). References in later writings such as the **Mahâbhârata**, to which we shall return later on, fortify the belief that **Kekaya** was in-

¹² The **Râmâyana**, the oldest Epic poem in the world—extolling the deeds of **Sri Râma** or **Râmachandra**, the most famous King in Indian history or mythology (take your pick as to which)—was composed by the Sage **Vâlmiki**. It is so familiar in India, even to the most illiterate peasant, that to find that one has actually to explain what it is feels uncomfortable: somewhat like explaining King Arthur to an Englishman. It is unfortunate that even such magnificent examples of world literature as the Indian Epics—though Indian in origin, they belong indeed to all humanity, for much of their message and interest is universal—should be so totally unknown to the Europeans: who are, moreover, genetically and linguistically related to the Indians more closely than to people of any other civilisation, ancient or modern, and not excluding even the Children of Israel. Mindful of this I am tempted to leave the **Râmâyana** unexplained here, merely closing this note with a pat on the shoulders of the reader, and a gentle suggestion to go look up the work in a decent library.

¹³ Some Indians are unwilling to accept suggestions that the tales recounted in the great Indian Epics speak of any localities other than India (after all, chauvinism is not a badge of the French alone). However, as a glance at the Atlas will show, the distance from Ayodhyâ, the birthplace of Sri Râmachandra (which lay in what is now called Avadh in northern India) to Sri Lanka, where Sri Râmachandra is said to have fought and defeated Râvana (the abductor of his wife Sîtâ), is not much less than the distance from Ayodhyâ to Armenia. In later ages, but using much the same kind of transportation technology, Chinese and Indian Buddhists travelled much greater distances, and over much more difficult terrain; and thus to speak of an Indian prince’s voyage to the Caucasian mountains can hardly be considered exaggerated.

deed somewhere near today's Armenia. If, moreover, we trace the route the offices of his homeland took in going to **Kekaya** in order to inform **Bharata** of his father's demise, and to bring him back to India to take up the throne, we find that they had to proceed further northwest after coming to **Bâhlikâ**. When Ayodhyâ and Armenia enter into matrimonial alliance, there can be little doubt that the people of both lands were socially the same. It is no longer surprising, then, to find in the Tel-el-Amarna inscriptions unearthed in Iraq references to a king called "**Dasaratta**" or "**Tursaratta**" who in a later age (around 1600 BCE) ruled over a region of Mesopotamia, and who may have called himself so after his distinguished namesake of **Ayodhyâ** of yore.¹⁴

The foregoing has been mentioned here to illustrate that during the period under discussion, the Aryan Land extended in one wide swath, so to speak, from Asia Minor (and perhaps even farther west) all the way through Iran into North India. It would be extremely surprising, therefore, if the Foremost Prophet of the Age did not leave his mark upon this entire region, and perhaps even on adjacent non-Aryan lands. As we shall see, Zarathushtra's influence did in fact extend over all this territory, and even beyond. But for demonstrating that we shall have to gather some more information, especially in order to establish the context of our study. Let us proceed to do so now.

At the time Zarathushtra appeared on the scene, several deities were worshipped by the Indo-Iranians. Of these the two main ones for our purpose were **Indra** and **Varuna**.

Far more Vedic Hymns are addressed to **Indra** than to any other deity. He is called "The Chief of the Gods"; as a matter of fact the very term **इन्द्र Indra** means "Chief", as for instance in the words **गजेन्द्र Gajendra** (*i.e.*, गज + इन्द्र Gaja + Indra) "Chief of the Elephants" or **भुजगेन्द्र Bhujagendra** "Chief of the Serpents". The term **Indra** was, therefore, a *title* rather than a proper name. In different ages, according to Hindu mythology, different individuals had been the "**Indra**": thus at one time the "**Indra**" was **Prahlâda**, at another time **Nahusha** was given that title, and so on.

The other principal Vedic God, **Varuna**, was not as popular as **Indra** in *India proper*; but he was certainly more popular in the rest of the Aryan land. He is not just an Indo-Iranian God: he is an Indo-European God, and appears in the Greek pantheon as **Ουρανός (Ouranos)**, and in the Roman as **VRANVS**¹⁵ or **URANUS**, where he is considered to be no less than the ancestor of **Zeus** himself, the King of the Græco-Roman Gods.¹⁶

As opposed to **Indra**, who was, of course, a **Deva**, **Varuna** in

¹⁴ And of course one might remember that people of Indo European and Semitic extraction are nowadays referred to, especially in the West, as "Caucasian". To find Indian names in Mesopotamia or Asia Minor ought not to be too unexpected, for our relatively modern idea of looking upon Semites and Aryans as different from each other was not known to the ancients—who did not, therefore, allow such distinctions to dictate their actions. What to speak of men, even gods borrowed names both ways: for instance the Babylonian water- or ocean-deity **Apsu**—from whose name we derive the English word "Abyss"—obviously took his title from the Vedic term **Âp** (of which many variants, including **Apsu** itself, can be found in both the Vedas and the Gathas).

¹⁵ It ought to be remembered that the Romans did not possess lower-case letters, and as we see in their ruins, wrote everything in all caps. And as we already said earlier, they also did not distinguish between the written **V** and **U**, though it is very likely that they did so in pronunciation. It is thus not known how they actually pronounced the name **URANUS** or **VRANVS**; but most likely the accent, as in Vedic and Greek, was on the first (and not the second) syllable.

¹⁶ The name **Varuna** also has an interesting homophone among the Celtic gods: **Belenos**, whose name apparently meant "shining", and who was most likely a solar and/or fire deity: for we find his name applied to the May Day Fire-Feast of the Druids, **Beltain**. It is known, of course, that the Druids celebrated solstices, and in general revered the Sun; and moreover the Celtic language shows great affinity to Sanskrit, a fact which is bolstered by Julius Caesar's statement that the Gauls "all assert their descent from **Dis Pater**"—a name sounding far too much like द्यौस् पितृ **Dyaus Pitr** (literally, "Father Sky") of the Vedic Hymns (and of which the Græco-Roman cognate was, of course, **ZEUS PATER** or **JUPITER**) to be lightly explained away. The similarity between Gaulish and Indian customs and lore is in fact so great, that it has prompted more than one occidental eccentric to assert that the Druids were in reality Brahmins who had migrated to Europe from India. This—in its literal sense—seems of course to be quite absurd; but if taken in a broader sense, as pointing to a common ancestry for both the Gauls and the Indians, it is indeed quite correct.

the *Rigveda* is more often referred to as an **Asura** (in the honourable sense of that term, of course). He is, moreover, also addressed as “Father **Varuna**”, as in the following lines from the Veda:

अपोनिषिञ्चन्नसुरः पिता नः ऋसन्तु गर्गरा अपां वरुण ।

May **Asura Varuna**, our Father, rain water down upon us.

Angirasa Veda 4.15.12

That he was highly revered in Iran is attested to in the next stanza:

अवनीचीर्षप सृज वदन्तु पृष्निवावहो मण्डुका इरिणानु ॥

May the shaven Sages¹⁷ of Iran, with the **Prishni** in their hands, hail the downpour.

Ibid

Of the two, **Varuna** is the older deity. The cult of **Varuna** was the **Pitryâna**, which, as we have seen, appears to have gained greater following in Iran, while the rival cult, the **Devayâna**, won more adherents in India. As we shall discover, it is in fact the rivalry between these two cults that prevented the teachings of Zarathushtra from spreading as such into India. All the same, the force of his personality and the enticing sublimity of the faith he founded could not be kept completely out, and his ideas certainly have, in pretty full measure, appeared in India, albeit in a veiled form. We shall see in due course how this happened. However, before we come to that, we have to do a bit more background study. In particular, we must study the Sages who sang the praises of these two deities.

The Vedas as we know them today are four in number.¹⁸ The first three—the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda* and the *Sâma Veda*—are essentially parts of the same book: as the Sanskrit scholars Goldstücker and Griffith point out, the *Rigveda* is the original collection of material, while the *Yajur* and *Sâma Vedas* are largely liturgical compilations from it, depending on the metrical quality of the text. The prose portions were in the main compiled into the *Yajur Veda*, while the *Sâma Veda* (the name possibly deriving from **सामन्** *sâman* “equal”) contains the songs having *equal* lines.

To these three Vedas, which as we saw all have the same source, was subsequently added the fourth Veda, the *Atharva Veda*.¹⁹

The name **Atharva** is of particular significance. One of the most ancient of Aryan Seers has been called **Atharvân**: the

¹⁷ It is interesting to see that this verse refers to Iranian Sages as **mandukâ** “shaver” (which probably included elimination of head hair as well as beard, after the manner of Buddhist monks). The tradition does not seem to have persisted in Persia, for in most illustrations of Zarathushtra he is portrayed with a long beard and hair. Of course all these illustrations are of relatively recent origin, and we have no idea as to whether he actually shaved or not; perhaps our mental picture of his appearance—like so many other things about him—is quite erroneous; and whatever the case, even if he did not himself shave his hair and beard completely, there is no reason to assume that all other Sages in Iran went about hirsute.—The **पृष्नि Prishni** (more accurately transliterated as **Prûshni**), is, by the way, an Indian sacred text, of which we shall speak some more later.

¹⁸ The four are, of course, the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sâma Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. However, because of the fact that they were all compiled from a single original collection of material, and of them the first three in particular share many **shlokas**, it is somewhat a matter of opinion as to whether their number should be considered as one (the original undifferentiated lore), two (as regarding the *Atharva Veda* separate from the other three, which can be taken as different versions of the same Veda), three (taking the *Rik*, *Sâman* and *Yajus* alone to be canonical, and leaving the *Atharva Veda* out altogether as apocryphal), or four. Different sects have held each of these views—a fact reflected in some Indian names such as **Dwivedi**, **Trivedi** and **Chaturvedi**—and we in our study shall leave it to the reader to choose which tradition he will follow.

¹⁹ The reader may have noted that at times we write *Rig Veda* and at others *Rigveda*, at times *Mundaka Upanishad* and at others *Mundakopanishad*, and so on. This merely reflects in roman letters the practice in Sanskrit; for the Indian tradition being in origin exclusively oral, the way a word or phrase was written was relatively unimportant, so long as the written form reflected its pronunciation more or less faithfully. This being so, the system of writing developed in India—it is neither an alphabet nor a syllabary, but something in-between the two—is completely phonetic; and had Bernard Shaw looked to India for a “phonetic way of writing English” he would have found such a system ready-made. (The reader may remember that Shaw in his will left his considerable estate to someone who would come up with just such a thing). The Indian “alphabet”, or rather the Indian system of letters used in writing called **देवनागरी devanâgarî**, is also highly systematic (pardon the pun), and is not laid out with the whimsical randomness which characterises the

Mundaka Upanishad calls him the “first-born son of **Brahmâ**, the Creator”:

ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः सम्भूव विश्वस्य कर्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता ।
स ब्रह्मविद्यां संविद्याप्रतिष्ठां अथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह ॥

Brahmâ, the first of the Gods, came into being—He who is the Creator of all, the world’s Protector. To **Atharvân**, his first-born son, He revealed the Knowledge Divine, on which all sciences are founded.

Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.1

The term **Atharvan** was well-known in Iran too; in fact, so well known that Zarathushtra himself has been called *The Atharvan* (*par excellence*, so to speak):

Ushta no jato Athrava yo Spitamo Zarathushthro

Fortunate are we that to us is born The **Atharvan**, [he who is] Zarathushtra of the Spitama clan.

Farvardin Yasht 944

The term **Atharvan**, in its different versions, was therefore a very honourable term among the Aryans, and this is hardly surprising when we realise that it is derived from the root **अत्र atr** (Sanskrit) or **atar** (Zend), meaning “fire”. The term **Atharvan** thus literally means “Keeper of the Fire”, and for this reason Zoroastrian priests are even today sometimes called **Atharvans**, for they tend the Eternal Flame in the Fire Temples.²⁰

Atharvan, then, was also among the ancient Aryans an honourable *title* of sorts, rather than a proper name. (And very understandably so too, when we consider that without a fire in the Siberian winter they would all have frozen to death!)

The *Atharva Veda* has at least some claim to have been composed by **Pitryanists**: for its name, in light of what we have seen above, means “The Veda of the Fire-priest”. The *Gopatha Brâhmana*, as a matter of fact, gives it the double barrelled name of भृग्वक्त्रिसी संहिता *Bhrigu-Angirasi Samhitâ*, and both these terms भृगु Bhrigu and अङ्गिरस Angirasa have their roots in terms for fire: भ्रक् bhrk “the blazing of the fire” and अङ्गार angâr “the (glowing) coal (or ember)”. This other appellation, thus, also points to the fourth Veda’s connection with Fire, as does its more common name **अथर्व Atharva**.

In actual fact the *Bhârgava Samhitâ* and the *Angirasa Samhitâ* are each *separate* from the other. This is the reason the *Gopatha Brâhmana* says that there are not four, but *five*, Vedas—these two, in addition to the *Rik*, *Sâman* and *Yajus*. The

western and Semitic alphabets (where, for instance, **A** is followed by **B**, a totally unrelated sound, and **B** followed by **C**, also totally unrelated). In the devanâgarî arrangement, all the vowels come first, alternating long and short (-a-, -â-, -i-, -î-, etc.); then those consonants, like -k-, -kh-, -g-, and -gh- which are pronounced in the throat, alternating aspirated and unaspirated, voiced and unvoiced; then, in similar alternating fashion, those consonants that are pronounced on the palate, like -ch- and -j-; and after them those on the teeth, like -t- and -d-; and last but-not-one those on the lips, like -m- and -p- — all sounds from the inside of the mouth outwards, in order; the list being rounded off with semi-consonants like -y- and -w-, and aspirated and sibilant sounds like -h- and -s-. In actual writing, all vowels—except the initial one if there is one—are represented not by their respective letters, but by abbreviated marks above, below or besides the consonants; and this makes for great compactness, and economy in pen strokes. No other ancient system of writing seems to have been so systematically thought out—the only systems rivalling the Indian being those developed in the last two centuries by linguistics professionals—and it is unfortunate that the system’s value is not recognised enough in India itself, and that there is a movement afoot to “romanise” Indian writing (as Atatürk did with Turkish).

²⁰ Most people think of Zoroastrians as worshipping in Fire-temples (to which, indeed, in this benighted day and age Parsis will not even allow entrance to non-Parsis); but in ancient times the worship was most likely conducted under the vault of heaven—which, to my way of thinking, calls forth from the human breast far more spiritual ardour than any man-made fane. This, of course, was the custom with most ancient Aryans; among the Celts for instance “the sanctuary was a lonely forest clearing” (as Stuart Piggott tells us in his book *The Druids*). The temple in Zoroastrianism is in fact thought by some to have been introduced as recently as the 4th century BCE by the Achamænian Emperor Artaxerxes, probably in imitation of Semitic practices (for he is mentioned in the Bible as encouraging the Jews to go back to Jerusalem, and providing them with funds for building their own Temple there). However, in the Zoroastrian temple nothing is allowed to detract from the glory of the fire; for unlike almost all other sacred buildings the sanctum sanctorum remains bare of all ornamentation other than the flame, thereby evoking “an enormously powerful sense of the holy” (John Hinneberg in *Erdman’s Handbook to the World’s Religions*).

²¹ Some think this tradition must be mistaken, and that the author of the *Mahâbhârata* could not also have

Mahâbhârata confirms this statement, and declares that the arranger or, as we should nowadays put it, the “editor” of the Vedas, the Sage **Vyâsa**, who is also considered to be the author of the *Mahâbhârata*,²¹ taught the first four Vedas to his four disciples, and the fifth in secret to his son:

चत्वारस्ते वयं ऋष्याः गुरुपुत्रस्तु पञ्चमः ।
इह देवाः प्रतिष्ठेर्षेभः वः काक्षितः वरः ॥

Mahâbhârata, Shânti Parva 335-40

The *Bhârgava Veda* and the *Angirasa Veda* must have come into existence *after* the Indo-Iranians became divided on the question of Asura-worship and Deva-worship, **Paourya-tkae-sha** and **Daeva-yasna**, monotheism and iconolatry, **Varuna**-worship and **Indra**-worship: a development we shall now proceed to study.

As we saw above (see page ...), **भृगु Bhrigu** was the Preceptor of the Asuras. **बृहस्पति Brihaspati**, the Preceptor of the Devas and **Bhrigu**’s long-time rival in Indian myth and legend, was also at times called **अङ्गिरस Angirasa**.

In time the terms **Bhrigu** and **Angirasa**, like the term **Atharvân** before them, also came to be used not so much as names but as titles. Descendants of **Bhrigu** came to be called “**Bhrigu**” indiscriminately—as well, of course, as being called “**Bhârgavas**”²²—in the Indian texts. Thus we find **Chyavana** being called “**Bhrigu**”, his descendant **Richika** being called “**Bhrigu**”, **Vashishtha** being called “**Bhrigu**”, and **Parashu Râma** being called “**Bhrigu**”. The fact that there were also many “**Angirasas**” is testified unto by the epithet **अङ्गिरष्टम Angirashtama** bestowed upon **Indra**: it means “the Greatest [patron] of the **Angirasas**”. They are also mentioned in the Gatha of Zarathushtra:

Kada ajem murthem ahya maghahya ya Angraya Karpanao
urupayeinti

(Or, to put the same lines in Vedic Sanskrit, to show how similar the two languages, Vedic and Gathic, were):

कदा अहं मूर्तिम् अस्य मघस्य यां अङ्गिरसाः कर्पणा रोपयन्ति

Kadâ aham mûrtim asya maghasya yâ Angirasa Karpanâ
ropayanti

When [O Mazda] shall I [be able to] uproot the idol from this
Congregation—this idol set up by the Agirasas and the Karpanas?²³

Gatha 48.10

been the editor of the Vedas, and that the latter was a different individual altogether (for the term **Vyâsa** is actually not a name but a title, and literally means simply “Editor”). If, however, both these works were carried out by the same person, he must be acknowledged to have been by far the greatest man of letters ever to have graced the world of literature. Can one imagine how stupendous a task it was, after having arranged in a systematic order, accurate to the last syllable, the vast quantity of Vedic material—several times as extensive as the Bible—*entirely in his head*, without jotting down a single word on paper (and which material was even then to be found only in a language almost as archaic to him as the idiom of Chaucer is to us), to have then set about composing an Epic poem eclipsing the works of both Homer and Tolstoy in size as well as scope; possessing an appeal so universal that to this day almost every Indian, no matter how “uneducated”, knows at least the main outline of the story, and often much more; and including a core—the *Bhagavad Gîtâ*—so eloquently sacred that for millennia it has been revered by not just millions but *billions* of Hindus as the Word of The Lord Himself? No person of letters born in any other land matches such towering literary eminence, Confucius conceivably coming closest; and the only other “author” who can really be compared with Vyâsa is perhaps **Hazrat Muhammad**, who—alone of all the great world Prophets—singlehandedly gave the world a scripture *so complete that nothing needs to be added to it to serve as Holy Writ*, at least for the Muslims. (It is not often appreciated by non-Muslims how stupendous *this* feat must have been!)

²² The adjective derived from the term **Bhrigu** is in Sanskrit **Bhârgava**, which term also came to be looked upon as a clan name, and in a sense remains so to this day. (This note is inserted for the benefit of non-Indian readers; my Indian audience will of course know these things, and are perhaps wondering why I take the trouble to point them out. Perhaps I should point out to *them* that India is not the whole world—though I have to admit that at times it certainly feels like it, especially to one living there!)

²³ The **Karpanas** were the followers of **Kripa**, a great favourite of **Indra**. By the way: I am aware that this verse has alternative renderings, but I prefer not to enter into a dispute here, merely satisfying myself that this rendering is also acceptable, at least to some scholars.—The reader may be intrigued by the fact that while in this book, wherever I have quoted from the Indian scriptures I have given the original in the **devanâgarî** or Indian script as well, when quoting from the Iranian texts I normally give the original only in a

The **Bhrigus** and the **Atharvans** are also referred to in the plural, as in the *Rigvedic* dictum

अथर्वाणो भृगवः सोम्यासः ।

“Soma-drinking **Bhrigus** are **Atharvans**”.

... and in the *Chûlika Upanishad*:

अथर्वाणो भृगुत्तमाः ।

“The elders of the **Bhrigus** are the **Atharvans**”.

From all these remarks one can conclude that there was the greatest amity between the **Bhrigus** and the **Atharvans**: while between them and the **Angirasas** there was a certain amount of rivalry.

And this becomes all the more obvious when we realise with a shock²⁴ that the term **Bhrigu**, which does not appear in this form in the Iranian scripture, is however present there as **Spitaman**.

The Iranian word **Spitama** is a contraction of the superlative **Spitatama** and corresponds to the Sanskrit word श्वेततम **Shwetatama** “most white”. From a softening of the **-p-** sound in **Spitama** we also derive the present-day Hindi word सफेद **safed** “white”. And **Bhrigu**’s alternate name, as we have seen, was शुक्र **Shukra** which easily varies to शुक्ल **Shukla** (the **-l-** sound often interchanges with the **-r-** sound in many languages—indeed in Chinese and Japanese they are identical)²⁵. **Shukla** means “white”, and it is easy to see, therefore, how the **Bhrigus** came to be known as **Spitamans** in Iran.

Zarathushtra was the most prominent **Spitaman**. Other members of that clan are also mentioned in the Gatha. Thus **Maidhyomaha**,²⁶ a cousin of the Prophet, is called “**Spitaman**”; **Haechad-aspā**,²⁶ another relative, is also called “**Spitaman**”; and even a lady, **Pouru-Chista**,²⁶ thought by many scholars to have been Zarathushtra’s own daughter, is called a “**Spitami**”.

All this goes to show that Zarathushtra of the **Spitama** clan was one of the **Bhrigus**. His teachings too, as we shall see in due course, were in consonance with the **Bhârgava** teachings as they are recorded in Indian spiritual texts. Being a **Bhrigu**, he was descended (*vide* quotation on page ...) from the **Atharvans**. As we delve deeper into the matter we shall find further corroboration for this inference.

One of the best-known descendants of **Bhrigu** was the Sage **Vashishtha**. His name is pronounced **Vahishta** in the Avesta,

roman transliteration. This is because although Iran did possess, not just one, but several scripts (an example of one of the more ancient of these being the one reproduced earlier, the older ones are now quite extinct, and no one but scholars can read them; while the **devanâgarî** script (along with those used in writing Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Russian, Chinese, the Japanese **hirangana** syllabary and, of course, the Roman script)—all of which are used in one place or another in this book—do survive as living means of communication. This book being written for the living and not for the dead, I thought I may as well dispense with the dead systems of writing.

²⁴ The “shock” is perhaps only so to Zoroastrians (and to some extent Hindus); most others who have read this far are probably wondering why this term has been used at all, given Zarathushtra’s Vedic antecedents. I should, however, explain that among the Parsis (of today, at any rate) there is a great reluctance to acknowledge any sort of kinship with the Hindus. This likely stems from the days of the British Raj, during which the Parsis, probably because of their fairer skin, grew in favour with the even more fair-skinned rulers, and ultimately became the most westernised of all Asians (with the exception, perhaps, of the inhabitants of Portuguese-ruled Goa). Some Parsis even adopted English nicknames; and they began, like their English mentors, to despise all things “Hindoo”—which was their own loss. Parsis in more ancient times were probably not so bigoted; this is indicated, among other things, by Dastur Nairyosangh Dhaval’s magnificent 12th-century attempt at translating the entire Avesta into Classical Sanskrit.

²⁵ The phenomenon is by no means confined to East Asia; the term **pahlwân** “muscle-man” in modern Persian and Urdu, for instance, is derived from the more ancient term **Pârthavan** “Parthian” (those people having apparently been fond of body-building, and indeed having given rise to the redoubtable heroes Rustam and Sohrab, whose exploits are known wherever Persian tales are told). In the more ancient form of the Persian written language, in fact, there did not even exist a separate letter for the **-L-** sound.

²⁶ For those interested, the meanings of these names are as follows: (a) **Maidhyomaha** (or more accurately **Maidhyomaongha**) means “mid moon”—perhaps he was born in the middle of the month, what the Romans used to call the “ides”; (b) **Haechad-aspā** is सैचदश्च **Sechad-ashwa** in Sanskrit, signifying a connection with horses; and (c) **Pouru-chista** (पुरु चैता **Puru-Chetâ** in Sanskrit) is a beautiful name for a girl, signifying “[she who embodies] the fullness of wisdom”.

where it signifies a quality: it is the superlative form of the term **vohu** “good”, and therefore means “best”. In point of fact, the very word “best” in English is a contraction of the Iranian pronunciation of this name; for in later ages in Iran its pronunciation became **Behesht**, and came to denote “Paradise”: in other words, the “Best [of all possible states of being]”.²⁷ In Vedic times it signified something like “the greatest good”, as for example, in one of the most basic prayers of the Zoroastrian creed, the *Ashem Vohu*:

Ashem vohu, vahishtem asti

Righteousness is good; it is the greatest good of all.

In the Gathas the term **Vahishta** is an attribute of the Great **Asura** Himself:

**Vahishtem thwa vahishta yem
Asha vahishta hazaoshem
Ahurem yasa va'unus
Naroi Frasoshtraï maibya cha**

(Or, to render it in Sanskrit, again to demonstrate the similarity between the two tongues):

वशिष्ठं तवां वशिष्ठं अयम् {जनः}
अषया वशिष्ठया सुजोषाम् ।
असुरं यासे वन्वानः
नरे पृषोष्ठाय मभ्यं च ॥

**Vashishtham tvâm Vashishthah ayam {janah}
Ashâya Vashishthâya sujoshâm
Asura yâse vanvânah
Nare Prishoshtrâya mabhyam cha**

“Thou art the Greatest Good; this [also] is the greatest good. I would realise Thee, O **Ahura**, Who Art the Greatest Good; with love would I worship Thee, for the good of the valiant **Fra-shoshtra**, and for my good too”.

*Gatha 28.8*²⁸

In the first line of this verse there is perhaps a hint of a pun,²⁹ in that Zarathushtra may also be applying the term to himself: the phrase “this [also] is the best” may be taken to mean “this [person: *i.e.*, Zarathushtra] is [also] “the Best”, [that is, a **Vashishtha**]. For the name **Vashishtha**, like the names **Bhrigu**, **Atharvan** and **Angirasa**, also came to be used as a sort of title, denot-

²⁷ I must confess to a great appreciation for the concept of *appreciation*, and thus appreciate immensely a notion of heaven suggested to me by my good friend Paul Wyszowski: namely, a state wherein one *appreciates* (in the sense of being sensitive to, and enjoying) just about everything. This is a faculty which, if carried to its limits, would surely “make a heaven of hell” ... and which may be taken as a philosophical vindication of Lao-Tzu’s teaching of **wu-wei** or “non-action”; for a person capable of appreciating all things fully need do nothing to make the world different from the way it actually is, and has only to relax and enjoy. This, perhaps, is the ultimate or esoteric idea intended by the term **Behesht** signifying “heaven”; for although it is obviously impossible for us imperfect mortals to retain such a calm and beatific outlook at all times (aggravating as some of our daily routines are), presumably the pure soul, perfect “as the Father in heaven is perfect”, does in fact in Paradise appreciate so perfectly.

²⁸ I might perhaps mention here (see also page ...) that the **Gatha** does not stand by itself, but is *imbedded* in another, larger text called the **Yasna**, whose 28th chapter is the Gatha’s first (or second, according to some scholars). In most books, in fact, when the **Gatha** is quoted, the chapter and verse given are those of the **Yasna**. So also here: when we write, for instance, “**Gatha 28.8**” etc., we mean chapter 28, verse 8 of the **Yasna**. This is actually chapter 1, verse 8 of the **Gatha** itself.

²⁹ This should not be taken, however, to mean a pun in the pejorative or western sense of the term; for the ancient Indo-Iranian idiom, in addition to possessing a huge vocabulary and assigning many words to the same meaning, also assigned many meanings to the same words. This was perhaps inevitable, given the vast number of mouths that gave rise to the language and wealth to its idiom. In any case, punning as a literary device was considered quite respectable in Indo-Iranian; and in Sanskrit at least it was sometimes carried to extremes, and completely overwhelmed the reader by its torrential profusion, producing an effect quite impossible to imitate in English: for as the Marxist maxim goes, “Quantity has a quality all its own”.

ing membership in a clan or sect. There were many **Vashishthas**; and, according to the Vedic scholar Griswold, the **Vashishthas** were the special guardians of the worship of **Varuna**.

The *Rigveda* recounts the story of **Varuna** saving **Vashishtha** from drowning:

वशिष्ठं हि वरुणे नावि अघात् ।

Vashishtha in the *Rigveda* is the chief of the Sages who sang the Hymns of **Asura Varuna**. This is not surprising, for **Varuna** was venerated for upholding righteousness (“good thoughts, good words, good deeds”)³⁰—in keeping with the meaning of the term **Vashishtha**—as opposed to **Indra**, who was more famous for his physical prowess:

वृत्राणि अन्यः समिधेषु जिघ्नते
ब्राताणि अन्यः अभिरक्षते सदा ।

Indra protects from the external foe;
Varuna upholds the moral order.

Rigveda 7.83.9

It is thought by scholars, moreover, that Bactria (**Balkh**) was the homeland of the **Vashishthas**. As Tilak and Griswold point out, it would not be surprising if some of the Vedic Hymns to **Varuna** had been composed there—maybe even the two quoted above.

The Iranian tradition definitively states that Zarathushtra was descended from a long line of “Sage Kings”,³¹ going as far back, as we have mentioned earlier, as **Yima Kshaeta** of the Ice Age. That he was an **Atharvan**—indeed *the Atharvan*—is of course beyond question. That he was a **Bhrigu**, or **Bhârgava**, can as we have seen be inferred. That he was a **Vashishtha** can also be inferred, particularly when we keep in mind that the **Bhrigus** and the **Vashishthas** were on very friendly terms, and each sect claimed that the other was, in fact, descended from them. (The current opinion of scholars—the legend notwithstanding—seems to be that the **Bhrigus** were descended from the **Vashishthas** and not the other way round.)

Our study hitherto has thus demonstrated quite conclusively that Zarathushtra was a Vedic **Rishi** who composed Vedic Hymns;³² and he therefore ought to be (and more significantly, to *have been* in ancient times) as important to the Hindu religion

³⁰ **Humata, hukhta, huvarshta**. (“good thoughts, good words, good deeds”). These are the three basic principles of Zoroastrian ethics, comparable in importance, one may say, with the Ten Mosaic Commandments, or the **Pancha Shîlas** of Buddhism. They are the source of our English phrase “[in] thought, word and deed”, and are reflected in the Buddha’s “Eight-fold Path” to Liberation, in which the second, third and fourth “steps” are **सम्यक् संकल्प** “perfect understanding”, **सम्यक् वाक्** “perfect speech” and **सम्यक् कर्मन्त** “perfect action” (the first, and the fourth to the eighth inclusive, being in one sense—though not in all—merely extensions to these basic three).

³¹ The idea of Kings who were also Sages, or Sages who were also Kings—a very common one among the Eastern Aryans—was to some extent familiar to the Western Aryans too; for it was reiterated by Plato in his *Republic*, where he asserted that the only happy State is one ruled by a “Philosopher” (literally, a “lover of wisdom”). The Sanskrit term for such wise rulers was **Râja Rishi**; and it has an interesting Biblical homonym in מֶלֶכ־יִזְרְקֶל **Melchizedek**, whose name is an exact Hebrew translation of **Râja Rishi**, and regarding whom we shall have a lot more to say in a subsequent chapter.

³² It has always appeared to me strange that in spite of the fact that scholars have long known that the Gathas and the Vedas are geographically, linguistically, stylistically, and in most other respects too, identical or nearly so, not one of these so-called “scholars” ever drew the obvious conclusion from all this, viz. that Zarathushtra was a Vedic Sage; and the first person to have actually said so in so many words was Shri J. M. Chatterji, who was no scholar but an amateur like myself. Indeed I find in the Preface to his book *The Ethical Conceptions of the Gatha*, published in the year 1935 or thereabouts, the following words: “I did not come across any book which points out that Zarathushtra is as much a Prophet of the Vedic Religion as Ramachandra, and as much a Reformer of the Vedic society as Gautama Buddha. ...As a matter of fact Zarathushtra stands nearer to the Vedic religion than Gautama Buddha does. For while Buddhism has sometimes been suspected of atheism, Parsi-ism (equally with Hinduism) is nothing if not theistic. ...Yet no scholar thought of presenting the matter in this light. Had anybody done so, I would have been spared the derision for the ridiculous attempts of a dwarf.”—And I

as to the Zarathushtrian. We shall see in due course how very important he was indeed, even though the name “Zarathushtra” had been virtually forgotten by Hindus of more recent days.

Another famous “Sage-King” of Vedic legend—indeed a King who, after overcoming enormous difficulties, ultimately became a Sage—was **Vishwâmitra**. As is well known (at least in India), he was a great warrior: in fact, his very determination to become a **Rishi** arose from his not being able, in spite of his great skill at arms, to defeat **Vashishtha**, who during their celebrated duel withstood all his onslaughts armed only with a staff. When **Vishwâmitra** learned to use his stupendous strength and will-power to fight his own baser self, and to that end performed the most arduous austerities and penances, **Brahmâ** Himself bestowed upon him the status of a **Brahmarishi**, the highest level a **Rishi** could attain.³³ As we shall see, **Vishwâmitra** could quite possibly have been a blood-relation of Zarathushtra; and at any rate he certainly did have a predilection for the cult of **Ahura**, and in a celebrated Hymn composed by him and recorded in the **Rig Veda**, we find the name **Mazda** clearly mentioned (in its Indian form of pronunciation, **Mahad**) for the first time in Indian sacred lore:

महद् देवानाम् असुरत्वम् एकम्

Mahad devânâm asuratvam ekam

Mahad constitutes the divinity {**asuratvam** = ‘asura-hood’} of the **devas**.

Rigveda 3.55

There are twenty-one stanzas in this Hymn and the burden or refrain (that is to say, the last line) of each of them is the above phrase. The fact that the term **Mahad** here is a noun and not an adjective is clearly evident not only from the text of the Hymn (part of which is given on page ...), but also from its first two lines:

उषसः पूर्वा अध यद् विजषुर महद् विजज्ञे अक्षरं पदे गौः ।

He Who existed before the [very] dawn [of creation], that imperishable **Mahad** manifested Himself along the wake of the world (पदे गौः **padé gauh**, lit. ‘in the footsteps of the earth’).³⁴ {It is this same **Mahad** that is repeated in the fourth line.}

However, although **Mahad** here is clearly not an adjective, it could well be a noun *derived from* an adjective; for as everyone knows, **महा mahâ** in Sanskrit means “great” (as for instance in

for another would have learned a lot more about the religion of my ancestors while I was still a young lad; for though I was quite liberally educated in this matter—my parents having been close associates of Mahatma Gandhi and my father having in fact been his personal physician and close confidante—it was never explained to me that Zarathushtra was as much a Vedic **Rishi** as **Vashishtha** or **Bhrigu**; and I for my part could not fit Zoroastrianism into any religious or historical context I could think of.

³³ Originally, it would appear, the term **Rishi** was unqualified, and there was no hierarchy among the Righteous. With time, however, the Indians—as always past masters at complicating things—devised a series of prefixes for the term, as a result of which several hierarchies were set up (I say *several* because each text had its own idea of where the different terms fit in). Thus, for instance, we get the titles *Mahârishi* “Great Rishi”, *Paramarishi* “Supreme Rishi”, and, as mentioned here, *Brahmarishi*, which term can hardly be translated at all. Most of this dates from the Purânic period, which embellished the legend of Vishwâmitra, among numerous others. However, Vishwâmitra is also mentioned in the Rigveda, and thus his legend, though adorned to the point of outrageous exaggeration, must have had some solid Vedic records upon which to base itself.

³⁴ The ancient Vedic गौः **gauh** “earth” is reflected in the Greek γεως **geos**, whence for instance our English word “geography”. However, in ancient Vedic a similar root, गौ **gau**, signifies “cow” (which English word also reflects its origins); and this ambiguity gave rise to an interesting error into which almost all scholars have fallen. At the very beginning of the Gatha there appears the phrase **geush urva**, in which the first word, **geush**, appeared to early European scholars to be derived from the latter rather than the former root; and thus most of them translated it as “The Ox Soul” (since the term **urvan** means “soul”). When professors of a later date remembered the other meaning of **gauh**, they made confusion worse confounded by translating this line as “The soul of the earth, *in the form of a cow*” ... and it has often tickled me a little to see not one of these wise persons catching on to the fact that neither geology, geography nor geometry have anything to do with cows.

महात्मा Mahâ-âtma “Great Soul”, or **महाराजा Mahâ-râjâ** “Great King”). As we shall see, this may be the first—although certainly not the last—occasion that the Almighty has been called “The Great One”. But that interesting tale, and its even more intriguing ramifications, should be recounted in their proper place. At present we may leave it here, merely pausing to point out that the Vedic root **मह mah-** “great” becomes in Gathic **maz-** (the **-h-** sound in Indian tongues becomes a **-z-** sound in Iranian: see page ...); and that the related Iranian term **mazishto** is the very source of the English word “majesty”—suggesting very strongly that the term **Mazda** was, indeed, intended by the Prophet to indicate the Greatness of God.

CHAPTER 3

THE RELIGIOUS IMPACT OF ZARATHUSHTRA ON THE PEOPLE OF VEDIC TIMES

We are now in a position to understand the impact of the teachings of Zarathushtra on the people of Vedic times, both in Iran and India, and even beyond. For, as will become more and more evident, it was not only on Iran that he exerted a great impression; India also was strongly influenced; in fact, we shall here enunciate a stupendous thesis: namely, that his teachings had so great an effect, that it can be said Zarathushtra cast the die which ultimately determined for ever the history—religious at first, and through it political and cultural too—of the entire world, and the effects of which persist to this day. That this is no exaggeration will, I think, be clear to the reader by the time he or she finishes reading this book. We shall build up to this conclusion with a gradual accumulation of facts and inferences which will leave no reasonable doubt in the matter.¹

It was, as we saw, in Vedic times that the Great **Ratu** Zarathushtra was born in Iran. Let us leave to a later chapter the attempt to determine the exact date of his birth, for the present merely contenting ourselves with observing that, as the passages from the Gatha reproduced earlier clearly demonstrate, the language of his teaching differed so little from that of the Vedas that entire verses of the Gatha can be turned into the purest Vedic Sanskrit “by the mere application of phonetic law”, as Macdonnell, the author of *Vedic Mythology*, tells us, “so as to produce verses, correct not only in form but in poetic spirit as well.” As the *Cambridge History of India* notes, “the coincidence between the *Avesta* and the *Rigveda* is so striking that the two languages cannot have been long separated before they arrived at their present condition;” and Griswold goes so far as to point out that each can be said to be “a commentary on the other”. No scholar of the *Avesta* worth the designation can do without a thorough grounding in Vedic Sanskrit.²

Thus the age of the First Prophet of Humanity cannot be dragged down without at the same time dragging down the age of the Veda. He is contemporary, at the very latest, with the late portions of the *Rigveda*, if not the middle portions.

In his youth, in that case, he must as we saw have found around himself worshippers of both the **Devas** and the **Asuras**. The worshippers of **Asura Varuna** considered their deity—like all **Asuras**—to be formless, and they also tended to be more mono-

¹ The manner in which I am approaching this subject will, perhaps, not satisfy some readers, who have grown accustomed to demanding a “proof” for every statement. I say, quite frankly, that I cannot *prove* (in the mathematical sense, as incontrovertible) many of my statements; but I also say that to demand such “proof” is both fatuous and, in a study like ours, unnecessary. What I do aim at doing—and in this, I think, I have largely succeeded—is to find so many fingers pointing in the same direction that to doubt would be rather unreasonable, though not impossible. (In this I am following, more or less, the principles we all apply in our law courts, where it is only necessary to prove beyond *reasonable* doubt—not necessarily beyond *all* doubt). I shall also, for bolstering my statements, not rely principally upon the prestige of my references, but shall couch my arguments in such terms as may enable each reader to make up his or her own mind. Fair enough, ladies and gentlemen of the jury?

² This is merely a jibe at some Universities, in which professorships in Persian studies have been awarded to individuals who, however well-read they may be in Middle Eastern languages and cultures, know next to nothing of the Vedic language and tradition. I can understand the dilemma the University Board faces: for to do justice to Zoroastrianism the Prof. must know something not of Iran alone, but of India, Israel, Arabia, Greece, Rome, Chaldea, Babylon, Assyria, Gaul and—arguably—Mongolia, China and Japan as well; and just where do you find a guy so smart, who has yet been so dumb as to put himself formally through the inanities of what we euphemistically call an academic education?—I am not, mind you, running down *all* University studies: I have a degree myself (though in agriculture, not in linguistics or religion); and I must say that at times I quite enjoyed my University days, which were in Israel—and which is quite an exciting place to live in in any case. But as I think anyone who has gritted his teeth and gone through the mill must admit, the system hardly encourages one to think for oneself: since in order to pass exams and get good grades, one must satisfy the likes and dislikes of some other person who has been foolish enough (or, in many

theistic than otherwise:

अश्वत्थामसुरे विश्वेदेदाः अमिमीत वरिमाणं पृथिव्या ।
आसीदद् विश्वा भुवनानि सम्राट् विश्वेत्तानि वरुणस्य ब्रतानि ॥

All-Wise **Varuna** created heaven and earth and is the Sovereign of the Universe. That is his glory.

Rigveda 8.42.1

In addition, the worshippers of Father **Varuna**, especially the **Vashishthas**, laid considerable emphasis on moral character, “the Greatest Good”, viz, Righteousness:

Ashem vohu vahishtem asti

Righteousness is good; it is the Greatest Good of all.

The Ashem Vohu

Zarathushtra must also have found around himself worshippers of **Indra**, the most popular deity of the Rigveda. These **Angirasas** were not quite so punctilious about declarations of monotheism; if there were no other gods, **Indra**, being their Chief, would lose much of his glory. Moreover, he was Chief for a limited period only; after his term was up, someone else became the **Indra**; so he could not be said to have “created heaven and earth”, or even to be the “sovereign of the universe” (except temporarily). Then again, his followers—as for instance the followers of **Kripa**—preferred, as we saw, to conduct their worship through the medium of the icon or idol (**mūrti**): which meant that they ascribed a *form* to their deity. This practice was, of course, in opposition to the aniconic, sacrificial type of worship practised by the followers of the **Ahura-tkesha** or **Paouryatkasha**, the Older Teaching.

The **Daeva Yasnists**, moreover, looked more to their deity to “protect [them] from the external foe”; they did not lay as great a stress on moral rectitude as on their deity’s prowess in defending them from harm.³

Zarathushtra, then, grew up in such a cultural *milieu*. Being a spiritually inquisitive person—intensely so in fact: but then again, this doesn’t seem to have been too uncommon in that *milieu*!—he must have become aware of the religious, philosophical, and even social and political contradictions underlying these two trends. According to legend, he wanted to know the Right Path, the **erejush pantho**, for himself. He decided that he would learn from the Highest Source of sources Himself what the Truth was, and was determined to spare no effort in his spiritual quest.

Around the age of twenty,⁴ then, he left his parents’ home—

cases, intimidated enough) to do likewise himself—viz., the Professor whose course one is taking. The Academic *milieu* also plays down what I think is one of the most enjoyable and important faculties of the human mind, namely emotion: and though this is done in order to try and achieve a greater degree of objectivity—a laudable motive no doubt—its actual result is only to achieve a greater degree of dullness: one reason, perhaps, why University students traditionally turn for fun to frolic, their studies being so stultifying. This, surely, is *not* as it should be; and I am happy, in fact, to be able to conduct this study unencumbered by an overdose of erudition, and to poke fun every now and then at my less fortunate critics in Academia.

³ It is to be recalled that one only prays for protection if one is seeking something *from* the Deity, not when one is seeking to fulfil a responsibility *towards* the Deity. This was probably one of the main differences between the worshippers of Varuna and those of Indra, and subsequently between the followers of Zarathushtra and the **daeva-yasnists** he denounced: for, to paraphrase President Kennedy, Zarathushtra said, in effect, “Ask not what your God can do for you, ask what you can do for your God.”

⁴ Some people say “thirty”. Let’s not quibble: it hardly makes any difference!—Zarathushtra’s life-story seems, in fact, to have been considerably embellished over the ages; and we are—if we wish to be honest—faced with the conclusion, in view of all sorts of conflicting versions, that we really do not know much about him, from the biographical point of view anyway. All the same we do feel justified, because of the recurrence of certain themes in all the tales about him, in concluding that the main circumstances of his life as delineated here are fairly close to historical fact.—About his leaving home and going into the wilderness, though, this can hardly have been an uncommon practice in those days: among the Australian aboriginal people, for example, there is a custom that when a lad gets to the age of puberty—sixteen or thereabouts—he has to leave his clan and live off the land all by himself for a few years, hunting down his own food and finding his own water in the desert and kindling his own fire and all that sort of thing. Just as our best and brightest are proud these days to graduate with top honours from a prestigious university by the time they are twenty-five or so, I’m sure the best and brightest of Vedic times felt proud to graduate from such a “school of hard knocks”, which was probably a lot harder than Harvard: and Zarathushtra at all events may certainly be credited with having graduated *summa cum laude!*

so legend has it—and went up on a high mountain to undertake a life of hard *sâdhanâ* (spiritual discipline) and meditation, resolved to know the Truth, even if need be at the cost of his life. Tradition says that it was Mt **Damavand**, close to **Râji** (the city of his birth), more than 18,000 feet in altitude and hard enough to climb even with modern equipment, that was the site of his quest. Others think that he went further west, to Azarbaijan, or the Sabilian Hills, overlooking Lake Urumiya. My own personal fancy prefers to visualise him on Damavand, a majestic mountain of spectacular aspect, which looks as if it was created by Nature specially for a spiritual seeker.

Wherever it was, he spent, according to tradition, ten long years in his *sâdhanâ*. And the ardent zeal of **Asho** (“Righteous”) Zarathushtra did not fail to evoke a response from the Great Formless One. **Ahura Mazda** gave Zarathushtra His **darshan** (vision),⁵ and as the *Mundaka Upanishad* puts it, the First of the Gods taught **Atharvân**, “His eldest son”, His **Brahmavi-dyâ**, Divine Knowledge. It is this Knowledge and this Wisdom that is embodied in the *Gatha*.

As the *Rigveda* itself admits:

यज्ञैर्अथर्वा प्रथमः पथस्तते ततः सूर्यः वेन आजनि ।

Atharvân first chalked out the way of worship.

Rigveda 1.83.5

Let it not be protested by the casual student that to read into the *Mundaka Upanishad* and the *Rig Veda* references to the Prophet of Iran is too fanciful. As I shall try to point out, veiled (and even not-so-veiled) references to Zarathushtra and his teachings positively abound in the Indian scriptures. As we study further, we shall see how and also why this took place. But before we get to that point, let us first try and know something of the substance of **Ahura Mazda**’s Message to His Prophet, and through him to Humanity.

One of the main features that distinguishes the teaching of the *Gatha* is the enunciation of strict and uncompromising monotheism. Not that this was a new teaching; we have seen how the *Rigveda* had already announced that

एकं सदिप्राः बहुधा वदन्ति ।

Truth is one; the wise call It different names.

Rigveda 1.164.46

THAT had existed even before creation:

⁵ The word **दर्शन darshan** is a very common one in India, and only needs to be explained for the sake of non-Indians. Literally it means “sight” or “vision”, for it derives from the ancient root **drs** “[to] see”; and it is normally used only by Hindus, and that only for beatific visions, such as those of a great Spiritual Master or **Guru**. Parsis as a rule eschew this term, thinking it foreign to their faith, and forgetting (if they ever did know in the first place) that Zarathushtra himself has used it for the vision of **Ahura Mazda** (I have given details later). The idea of actually *seeing* God—even a formless God—is not peculiar to Aryan religions; for in the *Torah* too (*Exodus 33.18-23*) we find a passage describing how Moses saw the “back parts” of the **LORD** passing by, and was only spared the sight of His face in order that it might not kill him. Such passages—whether in eastern or western religions—cannot be held up as “proofs” of the anthropomorphic nature of the Deities of ancient peoples, any more than mention of “the right hand of God” in the New Testament (*Acts 7.55*) be taken likewise for the beliefs of the Apostles.—By the way, have you ever noticed that neither the Mosaic Commandments nor the Upanishads actually assert that God *is* formless, but only that *we*—His worshippers—*should* not (according to Moses) and indeed *cannot* (according to the Upanishads) *ascribe* a form to Him?

आनीदवातं स्वधया तदेकम्
तस्माद्धान्यन्नः परः किं चनास ॥

The ONE, Self-created, alone aspirated;⁶
Aside from It nothing had any existence.

Nāsadiya Sūkta of the Rigveda

In this day and age we are not impressed by monotheism all that much. In other times and climes too, men who have had the Vision of the Divine have testified to the Unity of God. Moses, in later ages, told the Jews: שמע ישראל יהוה אחד יהוה אחד **Shema Israel YHVH Elohehu YHVH Ehad** “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One.” The most basic tenet of Islam is **La ilahi il’Allah** “There is no god but God.” Even Lao Tzû, the most profound and mystical of Chinese Sages, declared (*Tao Teh Ching 39.1*) “In the beginning there was the One.”

Zarathushtra too, upon his attaining Realisation, announced the One-ness of **Mazda**:

Mazdao sakhare⁷ moirishto

(or, to put it in Vedic):

महद्दाः सस्वर स्मरिष्टम् ।

Mahad-dâh sa-svara smarishtam

Mazda alone is worthy of worship.

Gatha 29.4

Consider, however, the tremendous impact of this statement in historical perspective: *no other person before Zarathushtra* had made such a powerful declaration of monotheism! *All* the other Sages mentioned above lived *after* Zarathushtra. Zarathushtra was the first Prophet we know of, who spoke of monotheism in the most uncompromising of terms.

Moreover, **Asura Mahad-dâ**,⁸ in keeping with all the **Asuras** of those days, was also *formless*. (Well of course—as we have seen, *all Asuras* were formless!) His worship was not to be conducted *via* a **mûrti** or idol; in fact, the idol was to be smitten out of the Congregation of Zathushtrians:

Kada ajem murthim ahya maghahya urupayeinti

When shall I smite the idol out of this Congregation?

Gatha 48.10

⁶ The idea of *Truth*—which to us is an abstract Principle—actually *breathing* like a person, sounds to our ears incongruous; but we at times forget that our associations have been shaped (or perhaps I should say *mis-shaped*) by millennia of education and culture; and that what is virtually “self evident” to us is hardly so to the more unspoiled mind. Let me illustrate this phenomenon—upon which we shall expand later—with an anecdote. Once while working as a shepherd on a Kibbutz in Israel I got into some conversations with a fellow shepherd, a Beduin by the name of Muhammad. He was quite a taciturn fellow, and would at times come out with statements which I in my stupid sophistication would think of as non-sequiturs; and one day he asked me, right out of the blue, if I knew how and why rain fell. I, thinking to enlighten this simple individual, gave him the full scientific explanation: starting with the sun shining on the sea and water vapour going up in the atmosphere and forming clouds, which being carried over land by aeolian forces, and raised to a high enough altitude ... you know, the whole *spiel*. He listened to my long lecture in silence: and I was getting painfully aware as I went along that it was becoming a most reproachful silence. At the end of my talk he asked me: “Have you never heard of **Allah**?”

⁷ The Gathic word **sakhare** is सस्वर **sa-svarah** in Vedic: “One Who goes by Himself; Singular; Unique”. It comes from the root **svr** “[to] go”. The cognate in the Rig Veda is **sasvartâ**, as in this sentence: यत् सस्वर्ता जिहील्लिरे यद् आविः (*Rigveda 7.54.5*) “What the Unique One conceals, or what is manifest”.—I give this derivation because scholars are not all agreed upon the meaning of the term **sakhare**, even though they certainly are on Zarathushtra’s monotheism. I give the rendering here on the right as one admitted to be possible, and one which certainly reflects the spirit of the Gatha; and is consonant, moreover, with the purport of the verse in which it occurs. (The only reason I mention this at all, in fact, is to silence Academics, who are so picky and critical that when reading their works or arguing with them, one is often reminded of Bernard Shaw’s aphorism that “those who can, do; while those who cannot, teach”).

⁸ The root **dâ** can be taken to signify “creator”, as in the *Hiranyagarbha Sūkta* of the Rigveda: स दाधार पृथिविं द्यामुतेमाम् “He created the earth and these heavens”. Thus Indian visitors to Iran, being well acquainted with the term **Mahad** (meaning “The Great One”, may well have taken **Mazda** to mean **Mahad-dâ**, *i.e.*, “The Great Creator”! We shall have more to say about this matter later.

Not just the idol; Zarathushtra was evidently not fond of an over-abundance of rites, rituals and ceremonies either; he declared that The Great One was to be realised through Love alone, and that too by people of all castes and creeds—even the **Deva Yānists** worshipped only Him, if they but knew, when Love was in their hearts:

**Ahya cha khaetush yasat
ahya verejenem mat airyamna
ahya daeva. Mahmi manoi
Ahurahya urvajema Mazdao**

Him the **khetu**⁹ worships; Him the **vrijana**⁹ and the **āryamna**⁹ worship; [even] the **Daeva[-yasnists?]** worship [only] Him. To my mind, it is [naught but] Love for **Ahura Mazda**.

Gatha 32.1

This was also the first time that **Bhakti**—devotion, intense love for the Divine—had been enunciated by a world teacher! Before Zarathushtra, not even the Vedas had mentioned the Love as the Way unto the Divine. But to Zarathushtra, Love, whether for or of God, was a very real and concrete thing, as real as the love of a friend, a brother, a father:¹⁰

Urvato varata pata va Mazda Ahura

Thou Art the Friend, the Brother, [and] the Father, O Great Spirit [of them all].

Gatha

In light of the above, let us try to visualise the impact that Zarathushtra's teaching had on those around him. On the one hand, there were the **Devayānists**, who worshipped through the medium of the idol, who laid stress on rites, rituals and ceremonies, who had a predilection for the caste system,¹¹ who flourished in the eastern part of the Aryan Land. On the other hand, there were those who stuck more closely to the original teaching, the **Paourya-tkesha**, who continued worshipping through the medium of the Fire as their forefathers had done, who had a predilection for Father **Varuna** the All-Wise **Asura**, who laid great stress on **अषम् asham** or **ऋतम् rtam**, “Righteousness”, who followed the “Way of the Fathers”. It is easy to see that Zarathushtra's Message, the **Mazda Yasna**, had a great affinity with the **Paourya-tkesha**, whereas between the followers of Zarathushtra and the worshippers of **Indra** there could be little meeting ground.

This “**Deva-Asura War**” was obviously a phenomenon re-

⁹ The terms **khaetu**, **verejenem** and **airyamna** apparently designated people belonging to three different groups. Some scholars think they signified the three upper castes among the Aryans of Iran—corresponding to the Indian **vaishya**, **kshatriya** and **brāhmin**; others think otherwise. We need not enter into the controversy here, since it is not relevant to the point we are trying to make. (Some further points regarding the caste system have been made in margin note No.11 on this page, where the reader may find some interesting facts).

¹⁰ Many Christians are of the firm belief that the concept of God as Father originated with Christ; and so they are often hurt and offended to have “pagans” prove to them that they are quite mistaken in this regard. In point even of Biblical fact the idea existed in Judaism well before Jesus's time (see for instance **Isaiah 63.16**); and Jesus himself, in employing such terms as “Our Father which art in heaven”, was simply enunciating a phrase—אֲבִינוּ שֶׁבַשְׁמַיִם **avinu sheb-shamayim**—which happened to be currently on the lips of large numbers of Jews in his days, and which is found in many contemporary Jewish texts. And as for the East, it had carried the concept much farther, and brought in other family members into it too: the most important being, perhaps, God as Mother, as in the cult of **Durga** or **Kālī**, and as Spouse, as in **Vaishnavism** and **Sufism** (upon which I have expanded in subsequent pages). All these trends, however, find their earliest expression in Vedic and Gathic Hymns—as we shall see elsewhere in this study too.

¹¹ Many people believe that the division of a people into separate hereditary castes according to their function in society is a peculiarly Hindu custom, and are not aware that it has existed in several societies in history—and not all of them were Aryan. The mediæval Japanese, for instance, had developed a similar system around the cult of the **bushi** or warrior, for at one time a **samurai** could only call himself so if he was born in a **samurai** family (and for this reason Hideyoshi, the greatest military genius Japan ever produced, who happened to be born a peasant, was never allowed to assume the title **Shōgun** or “Supreme Military Dictator”—which was reserved for **samurai** only—and had to content himself with the inferior appellation **Taikō** or “Great Prince”). Among ancient Aryans a caste system of one sort or another was, in fact, common all the way from the Bay of Bengal to the Bay of Biscay; for the Celts, for instance, as Peter Berresford Ellis tells us in his book **The Druids**, “As the ancient Celts emerged into recorded history and became known to the Classical writers, it is clear that in their society four

sulting from the mutual incompatibility of these two cults. The multiple **Daevas** on the one hand, and the One Great **Asura** on the other, were clearly not going to get along too well with each other. The Indian scriptures have symbolised this clash of ideals in the poetic form of the well-known war between the **Devas** and the **Asuras**. The outcome of the war was, in a sense, predictable. The **Devas** gained the upper hand in India, while **Asura Mazda** emerged triumphant in Iran.

A **Devayânist** cries out in the *Rigveda*:

परं मृत्योः अनुपरेहि पंथाम् यस् ते स्व इतरो देवयानात् ।
चक्ष्णते श्रुणवते ते ब्रवीमि मा नः प्रजां रीरिषो मोत वीरान् ॥

May the other cult [*i.e.*, the **Pitr-yâna**, the cult that is *other* than the **Devayâna**] be utterly ruined. We will worship a god who has eyes and ears.

Rigveda 10.18.1

On the other side of the River, Zarathushtra denounces the **Devas**:

At yush daeva vispaongho
akat manangho sta chithrem;
yas cha va'o mash yazaita
drujashcha pairimatoish cha.
Shyomam a'ipi daibitana
ya'ish asrudum bumyao haptaithe

O ye **Daevas** all,
Ye are progeny of the Evil Mind;
Whoso fondly serves you
Serves but Lie and Error.
Your deceit spreads all round
For which ye are notorious
The seven worlds over.

Gatha 32.3

A clear declaration of war on each side!

Mind you, by and large it was not a war that was fought with arms; these people were too enlightened a folk to imagine that ideological, philosophical, religious and spiritual questions could be resolved with the help of the sword.¹² It was a war of *ideas*, and even while it was being waged, the **Bhrigus** and the **Angirasas** could, and did, live side by side. Thus we find that as far west as Asia Minor the **Devas** were worshipped by Hittites as late as the second millennium BCE, as evidenced from an inscription found at Bogasköy near Ankara in Turkey, bearing the

main classes had developed, as they had done initially in other Indo-European societies: the intelligentsia, the warriors, the producers of goods and the menials or manual workers. These classes paralleled the Hindu ones of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra". It was Zarathushtra's innovative teaching that first challenged this typical Aryan trend; and although today the concept of equality between man and his fellow-man is so common as to be taken for granted, it ought to be appreciated that it was not the framers of the Declaration of Independence, but the Persian Prophet, who first enunciated it in unambiguous terms.

¹² I have expanded upon this idea in much greater detail in a later chapter. The notion that religious beliefs were something to fight—physically—over is somewhat recent among Aryan peoples, and in pre-Christian times they would have found such ideas risible. We shall not expand upon it here, since—as Solomon says—there is a time and a season for everything; let us therefore wait for the right moment to discuss the implications of this extremely important Aryan trait, and the enormous effect it has exerted upon the world's history.

declaration of King Subbilibama of Mittani,¹³, here given in transliterated form:

Mitrasya ilani Varunasya ilani Indra ilani Nasatya anya

The mention of **Indra**, along with other gods, gives us a hint that the cult was very likely that of the **Deva**-worshippers or **Angirasas**.

There were even attempts at peace-making. The **Rishi** Agastya, for instance, addresses **Indra** as follows:

किं नु इन्द्र जिघांससि भ्रातरः मबूतस एव
तेभिः कल्पस्व सअधुया मा नः समरणे वधी ।

How now, **Indra**, why art thou so inimical [to the invisible gods]? They are thy brothers! Be kind to them. Do not fight and slay us!

Rigveda 1.170.2

... but **Indra** would not be pacified:

किं नु भ्रातरगस्त्य सखा सन्न अतिमन्यसे
विद्या हि ते यथा मनो अस्मभ्यम् इन् न दित्ससि ।

How is it, brother **Agastya**, that though thou art a friend, thou dost disdain us? I know thy mind! It is not inclined toward us [*i.e.*, you have greater love for the **Asuras**].

Rigveda 1.170.3

This war of ideas was fought mainly on the battlefield of thought. Attempts were made to convert eminent teachers of the rival doctrine:

यः अक्रिरसः शौनहोत्रो मृत्या भार्गव शौनकः अभवत् ।

When the Angirasa **Shunahotra** died, the **Bhârgava Shaunaka** came into being.

Sâyana Bhâsya, 2nd Mandala

In plain language this verse can be taken to mean, that an **Angirasa** Sage, **Shunahotra** by name, was converted by the **Bhrigus**; and when he was converted, he changed his name to **Shaunaka**. This was evidently a remarkable success, for **Shunahotra** is identified with the Rishi **Gritsamada**, reputed to be the compiler of the second Book of the **Rigveda**, and therefore a most eminent Seer. (That an **Angirasa** could become a **Bhârgava** shows that strictly speaking these were two *cults*, not two

¹³ The **Mittani** were a people, Hittite by linguistic affiliation, of whom the best-known city-state was Troy. The Trojans, in the *Iliad*, are portrayed by Homer as being in religion and custom no different from the Greeks; but as the Bogasköy archeological discoveries indicate, there must have been differences between them to some extent, at least in the names of the gods worshipped. Nevertheless, the customs observed by the Aryans of India and Iran did not stop abruptly at the “Turkish” border, but gradually and almost imperceptibly blended into Greek customs. This is also understandable since the Greeks themselves—as pointed out by H.S. Robinson and K. Wilson in their *Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends of All Nations*—“evidently descended from tribes who had come westwards from the early home of the Indo-Europeans in South-Central Asia”. The notion that Europe was either demographically or geographically a separate entity from Asia was not entertained by the ancients; and it was only more recent Europeans, intent on keeping Europe Christian, who promoted the concept we now take for granted: that Europe is a “continent”. In actual fact it is no more a continent than China is, or India for that matter; and it is only the European bias that education has acquired in recent centuries which perpetrates this out-and-out lie. All the same it is a lie that—in Goebbels’s words—has been repeated a thousand times, and thereby turned into a truth (of sorts); and so we need not obliterate all references to Europe in our study. It is, however, necessary to keep in mind that strictly speaking “Europe” is a myth, and that in ancient times even that myth was unknown. (The myth itself asserts, by the way, that **Europa**—the girl after whom Europe is named—was herself not even European, but was the daughter of the King of Tyre, which lies in Asia: telling testimony indeed!)

clans. It is understandable, though, that members of any particular clan would normally also adhere to the same cult.)

The **Deva Yânist**s were also not asleep. They converted some Sages of Iran, as testified unto by the the following verse:

बहवि समाः अकरमन्तरस्मिन् इन्द्र वृणानः पितरं जहामि ।
अग्निः सोमः वरुणस्ते च्यवन्ते पर्यावद् राष्ट्रं तदवामि आयन् ॥

Many a year have I lived with them; I shall now accept **Indra** and abjure the Father. **Varuna**, along with his fire and his **Soma**, has retreated. The old regime has changed. I shall accept the new order.

Rigveda 10.12.4

Some, less disposed to dispute ideological matters, and of a conciliatory bent, tried to assimilate both cults into one:

नू मत ब्रथानि अग्ने उच शशार्वि त्वं मघवद् सुषदः ।
रातो स्याम उभयाम आ ते यूयं पात स्वस्तिभि सदानः ॥

Agni,¹⁴ teach us our prayer. Bless the **Mâghavats** [*i.e.*, those who belonged to the **Magha** or Congregation of Zarathushtra] also. May both the communities be under thy protection. Help us always to weal.

Rigveda 7.1.20

It is obvious that the two communities, both having emerged out of the same stock of original beliefs, were living together in close proximity, and moreover had no intention of resorting to armed conflict for the resolution of theological differences—at least not through large scale war.

What to speak of Iran and India, the **Angirasas** and the **Bhri-gus** lived together even in Greece, where—as pointed out by Macdonnell—they seem to have been known respectively as the **Angigos** as the **Phlegyai**.¹⁵

That it was the Persians who were inimical to **Indra** can be seen by the following line, spoken by an **Indra**-worshipper:

सं मां तपन्ति अभितः सपत्निरिव पर्शवः ।

The Persians oppress me, as a co-wife does a co-wife.

Rigveda 1.105.8

And **Indra** swore vengeance on the Persian **Asuras**:

खले न पर्शान् प्रतिहन्मि भूरि
किं मां निन्दन्ति शात्रवो अनिन्द्राः ।

¹⁴ We already said something about **Agni** earlier, but it is a very fascinating term, and has many ramifications; and thus we shall much more to say about it in the course of our study. One interesting historical fact is that the Hittites, who lived in what is now Turkey, employed a similar term—**Agnis**—which not only meant “fire” but seems also, as in Sanskrit, to have been the name of a deity. Its is strange that the term established itself in India, but not in neighbouring Persia (where the word for “fire” was usually **atar**, and where no cognate of **agni** ever took root, even though some scholars think a word similar to it was in use in the most ancient days); and yet the same word finds itself firmly established among the Trojans but again not among the neighbouring Greeks; while the Romans, on the other side of the Greeks, knew all about it, as **IGNIS** ... while the transalpine Gauls did not; and that it survives to this day (as **ugnis**) among the Lithuanians but not among the Germans. For this linguistic peculiarity—perhaps it is only interesting to linguists, but to linguists it is very interesting indeed—I have not the remotest explanation, and would be grateful for any light thrown upon the matter.

¹⁵ Some people with whom I have spoken have expressed surprise at my statements about the ancient links between India and Greece; and I am in turn surprised at *them*, for it is—or should be—well known even among Europeans that one of the most celebrated of Greek philosophers, Pythagoras, had some contact with India (whether first- or second-hand), and as a result of which had picked up his ideas of *metempsychosis* or Transmigration of Souls, which many of his disciples preached on European soil, and to which even Shakespeare has alluded. The land of Greece was well known to Indians, and they had a (Sanskrit) name for it as well: **यवन** **Yavana**, a corruption of **lonia** (an ancient Greek name for Greece). After Alexander’s conquests, as a matter of fact, there even grew up a Graeco-Buddhist cultural tradition in Afghanistan, called the **Gandhara** (after **Kandahar**, the principal city of that region at the time), which has left behind for our enjoyment Buddhist statuary sculpted in impeccable Greek style.

I shall crush them like leaves on a grinding stone: how dare
these incorporeal [अनिन्द्र] rogues vilify me?

Rigveda 10.48.7

But Zarathushtra was made of sterner stuff: he was not to be intimidated by **Indra**'s threats. He went on resolutely with the task of propagating the Good Religion. And **Indra** soon found to his grief that the whole of Iran had adopted **Mazda Yasna**!

Indra was so important that out of the thousand-odd Hymns of the *Rigveda*, two hundred and fifty are addressed to him, while for **Varuna** there are only twelve; **Vishnu** has a mere five, while **Rudra** is restricted to three, and by his far more common present name, **Shiva**, he is not mentioned even once.¹⁶ **Indra** is the most highly lauded of the Vedic deities; he is hailed and feared as the Great Warrior:

Through fear of thee upon the earth is shaken
E'en the immoveable—the ether, all things;
The earth, the heavens, mountains, forests tremble:
The firm foundation trembles at thy going.

Rigveda 6.31.2

“He is the mighty unrestricted lord and master, King of the worlds and people; not even the heavens can restrain the Mighty's might; the work he sets about he accomplishes, and no one is able to hinder him. In his two hands he holds the nations and their possessions; he animates the spirit of heroes in battle against their enemies, though unnoticed by the wise and by the hosts, numerous as the stars.” The opposition which a repudiation of **Indra** was likely to stir up, from a religious, philosophical, sociological and even political point of view, must have seemed simply appalling, but Zarathushtra's courage was equal to the occasion. **Mahârishi** Zarathushtra asserted simplified, aniconic monotheism, not by words alone, but by deeds; he established the **Magha**, the world's first Church or Spiritual Community,¹⁷ for the confirmation and propagation of his teachings. It was bold challenge thrown in the face of the religious establishment of his time.

However, it must be noted that the Message of **Mazda** was not altogether an unknown one to people of the time. Zarathushtra's protest seems directed against the innovations—and especially the elaborate and ritualistic iconolatry leaning toward polytheistic tendencies, and a disregard for moral principles—of the relatively more recent **Daeva-Yasnists**; but his doctrine had much in common with the pure ancestral **Paourya-tkaesha**.

Yet **Mazda Yasna** was also not quite the same old wine in a

¹⁶ This statement needs to be qualified somewhat, for the word **Shiva** is used at least once in the Veda to indicate a deity—or at least such an interpretation is possible. However, it is true that not a single one of the Vedic Hymns is specifically addressed to **Shiva** by name. **Rudra**, of course, is equated with **Shiva** by all Hindus; but it is by no means clear that the Vedic Aryans did likewise. In point of fact the worship of **Rudra** as **Shiva** owes its inception, as we shall show in a later Chapter, to the impact of **Mazda Yasna** on Hinduism. (It is also true—as we shall mention in passing later—that it is in addition a result of the interaction of between the Aryans and the **Vratyas** or non-Aryan aboriginal peoples of India; but as that interaction is somewhat outside the scope of this study, we shall ourselves not go too deeply into it).

¹⁷ The word “Church” used here is quite an accurate translation; for this English word is itself a translation (via the Greek **ἐκκλησία** *ekklesia*) of the Hebrew original **קהל** *kahal* which literally means “group of people”, or “community” (and it is implied in that phrase, of course, that they are devoted to some sort of Spiritual activity or goal). Many people believe that a religion cannot exist without a “church” or some sort, and it comes somewhat as a surprise to them to learn that neither Hinduism nor Islam (among other religions) possesses a Church (in the sense of an organised body of adherents). Zarathushtra, as far as we are aware, was the first religious leader to realise the potential of such a system (especially its political potential); and should thus be credited with having invented this concept too.

new bottle. Zarathushtra, for instance, did not see fit to retain the name **Varuna**; and this might have been because **Varuna** had been called the “Friend of **Indra**”:

अनु वृषु वरुण इन्द्रसखा ।

Varuna is the friend of **Indra** in the heavens.

Rigveda 7.34.24

... and often, when **Indra** or Varuna was worshipped, his friend (**मित्र Mitra** or **Mithra**)¹⁸ was worshipped along with him. This is the origin of the name **Mithra** who later developed into a deity in his own right, and whose cult the Romans adopted in large numbers, and carried as far west as the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. However, in Vedic times **Mitra** was not yet an independent god, for in the **shruti**, although we find **Indra** or **Varuna** (and many other gods too) often mentioned alone, we seldom find this to be the case with **Mitra**. The Vedic **Mitra** was only mentioned in the company of his “friend”:

शं नो मित्रं शं वरुणः ।

Peace be unto us, **Mitra**; peace be unto us, **Varuna**.

Rigveda; and also Taittiriya Upanishad 1.1.1

Zarathushtra gave a totally *different* name to the Supreme Being. Perhaps he did not want any loophole left through which **Indra** could re-enter, and thereby corrupt, his strictly monotheistic religion. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that he gave the Almighty one, and *only* one, name, albeit double-barrelled: *viz.*, **Ahura Mazda**. Never in his **Gathas** does he address, or refer to, God except by this name.¹⁹ In that sense, then, his monotheism is stricter than any the world has ever seen, whether before or after his time.

Compare, for example, this approach with that of Judaism and Islam—the strictest monotheistic faiths after Zarathushtra’s. In both of these faiths the Supreme Being is called by several names. The **Torah**, the most ancient (and also the most sacred) portion of the Jewish Bible, itself calls God by at least three names, יהוה **YHVH**, אלהים **Elohim**, and אל שדי **El Shaddai**. Subsequently Judaism came to address the LORD using a great number of epithets: הקדוש ברוך הוא **Ha Kadosh Baruch Hu** “The Holy One, Blessed be He”, צר יראל **Tsor Yisra’el** “The Rock of Israel”, המקום **Ha-Makom** “The Place”, and several others. The **Qur’an**, besides of course calling Him **Allah**, also calls Him, in its very first **sura** or Chapter, the **Fatiha**, by the term **Rab**.²⁰ The word **Al Rahman** “The Compassionate” also came to be

¹⁸ This term, and the deity it names, is one of the most interesting in the study of religions. In antiquity as old as the Vedas, it survives in our own days as, for instance, the name of the Buddha-to-be, **Maitreya**—in which form it has spread as far east as Japan; while the Romans, as we said, took it as far west as Wales. Literally the name **Mitra**—as in modern Hindi—simply means “friend”. The nature of the deity denoted by it, however, has varied over time and space so greatly that it rivals **Soma** in strangeness (see also page ..., margin). The Roman **Mithra** was usually linked with the bull-sacrifice or **Taurobolium** which had, possibly, its origins in the Cretan cult of the **Minotaur**, and of which traces survive, presumably, in the Spanish bull-fight; but **Mitra** or **Mithra** (the **-t-** sound, though written differently by different peoples, was probably pronounced the same by them) was more often connected with the Sun (as for instance in the Roman term **SOL INVICTUS**) or with light (as the later Persian form of his name, **Meher** “light”, indicates, and as the late Shah of Iran—the one deposed by the Ayatollah—used to grandiloquently describe himself: **Aryameher** “Light of the Aryans”). One commonly used Hindustani term for expressing gratitude, *i.e.*, saying “thank you”, is derived from the name **Mithra**: मेहरबानी **meherbānī**, which more-or-less means, “May [the Lord’s] light be upon you”. **Mithraism** (in its Persian form) was to be found in India too; and in Asia Minor a number of rulers at one time or another have called themselves **Mithridates** “Son of **Mithra**”—in fact *all* the rulers of one of the ancient Greek States at one time called themselves so.

¹⁹ This statement needs to be qualified, however, by pointing out that there is a word in the **Gathas**—**Vahma**—which seems to correspond to the Hindu concept of ब्रह्म **Brahma**, “The Absolute”. This term, in the sense in which it is used in Hinduism—it is, by the way, quite different from ब्रह्मा **Brahmā**, The Creator, whose name ends with a long **-ā-** sound, while the former is pronounced almost as **Brahm**—this “Absolute” of Vedism is very special in religious thought, and in western belief finds its closest parallels only in such relatively recent terms as the “Godhead” of mediæval Christian mystics (though in China, on the other hand, it is closely paralleled by the concept of the **Tao**, which has existed for at least than two and a half millennia). In Hinduism it is an even more ancient idea, for it is used in the **Yajurveda** itself (of which it is actually the closing word). The idea underlying **Brahma** can perhaps best be explained to westerners by saying that while God is a *personal* concept, **Brahma** is quite *im-personal*, and denotes, not a conscious Deity interfering in human affairs as and when it pleases Him, but a

used, among some Muslims, as an alternative name for **Allah**, as did **Al-Haqq** “The Reality” and **Al-Malik** “The King”. And it is a known historical fact that when people have started speaking in terms of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, they have been accused by others of tendencies towards polytheism. Perhaps Zarathushtra was aware of this danger. He insisted on one and only one name for the One and Only.

And he was obviously particular about the spiritual connotations of the name he chose: “The Great, Formless Spirit; Creator of the World and Wise Lord.”²¹ Zarathushtra did not choose a mundane name like **Agni** (“Fire”), **Vâyû** (“Wind”), or even **Savitur** (“Sun”)—all of these common Aryan names of gods, and the first and the last of them very important even to the **Paouryātkaesha**. No; he selected an appellation which carried the highest spiritual connotation he could think of.

Innovative as this tactic was, however, the term “**Ahura Mazda**” was all the same not one that sounded strange to the **Varuna**-worshipper of his day. The term **Ahura** or **Asura**, with its connotation “formless”, was already current at the time; and as for **Mazda**, why, there happened to be a common Vedic word sounding very much like it, which in the Indian style of pronunciation was articulated as **Vedhas**.

This word **Vedhas** was not new coinage. **Rudra** had been addressed as **Vedhas**:

अषाढाय महमानाय वेधसे ।

Ashâdhâya Mahamânâya Vedhase

Rigveda 7.46.1

...**Mitra** had been addressed as **Vedhas**:

राजा सुक्षत्रो अजानिष्ट वेधाः ।

Râjâ sukshatro ajânishta Vedhâ

Rigveda 3.59.4

...**Agni** had been addressed as **Vedhas**:

कीलालपे सोमपृष्टाय वेधसे ।

Kilâlape Somaprishtâya Vedhase

Rigveda 10.9.41

...and even **Soma** had been addressed as **Vedhas**:

प्र पूनानाय वेधसे सोमाय वच उद्धतम् ।

more abstract something, like an underlying substratum of reality.

²⁰ In Hebrew this same Semitic root has given rise to the word **Rabbi**. This, by the way, is a term by no means lightly employed even in Hebrew: for Moses, alone of all the Prophets, is called by Jews **Moshe Rabenu**, “Moses our **Rabbi**”—his eminence in Judaism being so much greater than that of the other Prophets of Israel that the term **Navi** “Prophet” is regarded as not quite exalted enough for him. In this respects, moreover, the term **Rabbi** (or **Rab**, of which **Rabbi** is a derivative) is to some extent paralleled by the Iranian term **Ratu**; for we shall see later, the word **Ratu** has been employed in Zoroastrianism both for Zarathushtra and for God.

²¹ As to the various meanings of the term, we shall say something later. At this stage it is perhaps sufficient to indicate that although scholars differ as to the meaning of the compound name **Ahura Mazda**, it is highly possible (see Chapter 7), that in fact *all* the differing meanings are correct, in one way or another!

Pra punânâya Vedhase Somâya vacha uddhatam

Rigveda 9.103.1

As a matter of fact, the term **Vedhas**, when used in association with the term **Asura**, referred to the Highest Lord:

पतङ्गमुक्तं असुरस्य मायया हृदा पश्यन्ति मनसा विपश्चितः ।
समुद्रे अन्तः कवयो विचक्षते मरीचीनाम् पदम् इच्छन्ति वेधसः ॥

Through the Grace of the **Asura** the Sages see clearly in their hearts the Soul flying up like a butterfly [**patangam**]. Their vision pierces the depths of the oceans. They desire from **Vedhas** the staus of “The Enlightened” [**marîchî**].

Rigveda 10.117.1

A Hymn composed, as its initial verse announces, in **Ilaspad** (Iran?), indicates that **Agni**, the Fire, is the special **hotar** or priest of **Vedhas**:

त्वामिदत्र वृणते त्वायवो होतारं अग्ने विदयेषु वेधसः ।

In this assembly, O **Agni**, the people elect thee alone to be the priest of **Vedhas**.

Rigveda 10.91.9

So it is evident that the name **Vedhas** was quite familiar in Iran—and not only there, but all over the known world of those days, if the *Rigveda* may be believed:

विदुष्टे विश्वा भुवनानि तस्य ता प्रब्रवीषि वरुणाय वेधस ।

All the worlds know Him; [it’s just that] some call **Varuna** by the name “**Vedhas**”.

Rigveda 4.42.7

Now it so happens that this term **Vedhas**, when phonetically transposed into the Iranian pronunciation, becomes **Mazda**, as illustrated in the steps indicated below:

(1) As the **Nirukta**—one of the oldest Vedic lexicons (and probably one of the oldest dictionaries in the world)²² tells us, the word **Vedhas** is interchangeable with **Medhas** (*Nirukta 3.15*);

(2) The **-e-** sound in the word **Medhas** then changes to **-az-** in the Zend style of pronunciation—as it does in words like **नेदिश्ट** **nedishta** “nearest” (Sanskrit) which becomes **nazdisht** in Iran)—and this turns **Medhas** into **Mazdhas**;

(3) The **-s-** ending of Sanskrit elides, according to the gram-

²² I know it is hard for people like us, in whose minds “education” is invariably equated with “literacy”, to grasp the idea of a *memorised* dictionary; and so we can’t believe our ears when told that in ancient times India possessed not just one but *several* such! In addition to the **Nighantu** mentioned here, there is the **Unâdi** (mentioned earlier) and the **Amara Kosha** (from which we quoted earlier too). Many such didactic works—including among them is **Pânîni**’s treatise on grammar which we spoke about in the *Introduction*—were set in verse for ease of memorisation; and although in this day and age written versions of all of them exist, the classic way of learning them even now is by rote, as schoolchildren learn multiplication tables. (In India, by the way, such mathematical tables include not just integers but fractions as well, and as a very young boy I had memorised some of them: which goes to show how important memorisation has always been in India, and still is). The importance of the spoken—as opposed to the written—word was always very great in all ancient Aryan cultures; and perhaps this is the reason why western orientologists do not credit India with as great an antiquity as, say, the Mesopotamian cultures (for they find no *written* evidence).—By the way, one question always on the minds of sceptics needs to be addressed: how textual reliability of oral material could be assured over many generations. I do not know how the Druids did it; but as far as the **shruti** was concerned, it was secured by a very ingenious method of memorisation, in which each passage was repeated aloud in three separate ways: first, in a straightforward manner; then secondly, with the syllables alternating (as, symbolically, **abc bcd cde def etc.**); and lastly in another similarly scrambled-up manner. Of course the second and the third memorisations made no sense; but they served as checks against the first, which did make sense. The extreme rigour of such a system against corruption cannot be matched by any method of writing short of computerisation; for errors are bound to creep in while copying by hand—errors which would have no chance whatsoever of slipping by the ear accustomed to hear the Vedas properly recited in the above-mentioned three ways. The Indian system is certainly much more reliable in the *very* long run; for the oldest Biblical texts we possess—and those only a few fragments—go back a mere two thousand years, all others having long ago crumbled to dust; and thus we have only inference to assure us that Daniel or David prayed from the same **Torah** which Moses brought down from Sinai—and which may not even be the one in use now. It is true, of course, that the method of Vedic recitation outlined above is more recent than the Vedas themselves, and thus as regards their *very* original words we cannot be certain that they have survived unchanged. But then, as I shall point out later too, those that have survived

metrical rule स्नोर अन्त्योर लोपः (from the *Katantra Chanda Sutra*) which says that Vedic nouns often drop the final **-s-** and **-n-** sounds optionally, thus rendering **Mazdhas** into **Mazdha**;

(4) And, since there is no **-dh-** sound in Iranian, the word in the ancient Persian tongue becomes **Mazda**.

Whether Zarathushtra *himself* derived the name **Mazda** from the term **Vedhas**, or not, is irrelevant—and in fact scholars are divided on the question. What *is* relevant for our argument—and here the scholars *do* agree—is that *once this name had been given out to the public*, it became *accepted* by them in preference to the earlier name **Varuna**, because the term **Vedhas**—or rather its Iranian equivalent—was obviously already well known in Iran, particularly as an epithet of **Varuna**. In other words, “**Mazda**” is the newer, Zarathushtrian name for the age-old proto-Aryan, Indo-European **Asura Varuna** or **Uranus**, the first of the **dityas** or sons of the Sun, the ancestor of **Dyaus** or **Zeus**,²³ the upholder of the moral order and All-Wise Lord of All He Surveys.

All serious scholars of Zend now accept this; indeed we have Prof. Max Müller²⁴ himself—than whom no more august authority can be named—telling us that “**Vedhas** came to be invoked as **Mazda** in the land of Iran”. Others say the same thing: Manicol writes that “the evidence that identifies **Varuna** with **Mazda** is too strong to be rejected”, while Bloomfield declares: “It seems to me an almost unimaginable feat of scepticism to doubt the original identity of **Varuna** and **Mazda**”. Worshipers of Father **Varuna**, then, were converted to **Mazda Yasna** in droves.

Not, mind you, that it was an easy task. When—as the Parsis like to think—Zarathushtra came down from the holy mountain with the Holy Book in his hands,²⁵ he could find nary a person to receive and accept his teaching. His first real disciple was his own cousin, **Maidhyomaha**, and in fact for many years he remained his *only* disciple. It was only after Zarathushtra managed to convert King **Vistasp** of Balkh, and his family and court as well, that his Message gained widespread acceptance, and that because the King’s subjects probably felt they should follow their sovereign’s example. Perhaps Zarathushtra knew that if his teaching was to have a chance of spreading among members of the public in a wide way, he would have to get it done through someone in a position of power; and maybe it was with this thought in mind that he approached the King, knowing, in all probability, that he was entering a veritable lions’ den, where influential people inimical to the purport of his Message had the ear of the monarch, and where they might well use this influence to get him falsely thrown into prison—as did actually happen—or maybe even killed—as, fortunately, did not; at least not

are the only ones that possessed a kind of internal quality of easy memorisation and accurate repetition (all others having long since been distorted beyond recognition, and as a result, in all likelihood, completely forgotten).

²³ In fact, an ancestor twice removed. According to Greek Mythology, **Ouranos** (Latin **URANUS**) gave birth to **Chronos** (called **SATURN** by the Romans), who in turn gave birth to **Zeus**. Of course the word **chronos** also means “Time”, and it could well have been this relationship which prompted Zoroastrian theologians of a later age to postulate the notion of **Zervane Akarne** or “Boundless Time”, as being something almost on a par with **Ahura Mazda** Himself.

²⁴ Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), the greatest Indologist the West has ever produced (and possibly the greatest it ever *will* produce, for his work far eclipses that of all subsequent western indologists). A German by birth, he did most of his study of eastern cultures at Oxford, England: and amazingly enough, never once in his entire life had the opportunity to set foot on Indian soil. He pioneered the linguistic analysis of religions, and I feel proud to be following, in this book, his footsteps; and though one need not agree with him in everything he says, his transparent love and glowing admiration for India so strongly attracts Indians that in India his name has overshadowed the prestige even of the greatest literary giant Germany has ever produced: for the **Goethe Institut**, the cultural organisation of the Republic of Germany, which has branches in every country on earth, is in India alone known instead as **Max Müller Bhavan**.

²⁵ The mental picture of Zarathushtra descending the mountain holding a Holy Book, much like Moses holding his Tablets, seems to be firmly entrenched in the Parsi mind; and many of them might thus be offended to read that this could not possibly have happened, and that Zarathushtra was almost certainly quite illiterate (reading and writing not having been invented yet!) The astounding thing, though—and something to make Parsis proud of the Persian Prophet—is that he could compose such potent poetry without so much as setting pen to paper, when modern authors can’t come close even with their micro-computers, word-processors and on-line thesauruses. The entire Vedic tradition is in this respect one of the wonders of the literary world; for the Vedas as we know them, vast as they are, must surely be only a tiny fragment of the entire store of Vedic material ever composed—the bulk of it lost over the ages because of the immense difficulties of memorising it all.

before he had managed to convert the Royal family and court.

Nevertheless, the enmity did not die down even after the King's conversion. Whether it was on ideological grounds or not we shall perhaps never know for certain, but when Zarathushtra was 77 years of age, an assassin is said to have thrust a dagger into the Holiest Prophet of the epoch while this Most Righteous Man was praying in his Fire Temple before the Sacred Fire.²⁶ However, by that time his Message had already been accepted in one of the principal kingdoms of his age, and after that there was no stopping it, certainly not west of the Hindu Kush; for in spite of the scant number of those who formally profess his Faith today, the extent of Zarathushtra's influence on the West was so great that—as we shall soon demonstrate, and astounding as such a statement may appear at first blush—his teaching may be said in a sense to be ruling over West Asia still...and not only over West Asia, but over the whole Western world too: for the impact of his reformation on subsequent religions was of tremendous consequence. *All* the major religions that have stood the test of time—and particularly those that originated in West Asia—have adopted the main tenets of his teaching *in toto*; while those that did not, whether they were Aryan (like the Greek, Roman, Nordic and Celtic religions), Semitic (like the Babylonian, Assyrian and Canaanite faiths), or other than these (like the Egyptian), have all died out; and even Hinduism—which as we shall show developed out of an elaboration of the rival cult, the **Devayâna**—assimilated the spirit of his teaching without openly renouncing **Indra** and his retinue of three-and-thirty gods, by re-interpreting these deities in a new manner, mostly in the light of his message. And as we shall show later in this book, a very strong case can be made out for the argument that Hinduism is indirectly indebted to **Mazda Yasna** for two of the three members of its **Trimurti** or Triad, namely **Vishnu** and **Shiva**; and if so, then as the remarkable Zend scholar of Bengal, the late Shri Jatindra Mohan Chatterji, succinctly puts it in his *magnum opus* *The Hymns of Atharvan Zarathushtra*, “India cannot be much too indebted to Iran”.

We shall examine these topics in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

²⁶ The mental picture Zoroastrians have created for themselves of this incident too—like that of the one on the previous page—is probably just as anachronistic; for as we already mentioned earlier, the original Zoroastrian worship did not take place in temples at all, but in the open air; and if the Prophet was indeed praying when struck down, it was in all likelihood upon a broad meadow, or in a sylvan glade. Legend has it that he was killed by a Turanian or Mongolian, and this is quite possible, for the Huns have had a murderous reputation since time immemorial; but if this legend is true, it was probably no more ideologically motivated than the plunder and pillage perpetrated by the troops of Genghis Khan. (On the other hand, the assassin could well have been an Aryan, hired by the high priests of the time for the purpose; and the deed could have been pinned on a Mongolian suspect simply to divert attention from the true perpetrators).

CHAPTER 4

THE “DEVA-ASURA WAR”: ITS CAUSE AND OUTCOME

Now at this point, before we go further into the matter of the historical outcome of the “Deva-Asura War”—as we have figuratively termed this conflict of ideals—let us try to imagine what the principal considerations of the protagonists on either side must have been, and to examine the evidence for our inferences.

As we have mentioned, the original mode of Aryan worship was aniconic fire-sacrifice; and this is also understandable, for the art of making a statue or idol must of necessity have developed later than the relatively simpler art of rubbing two sticks together to make a fire.¹ Perhaps in other, warmer cultures—like the Semitic or the Egyptian—nature’s objects, such as stones and trees, were also worshipped; but in frosty Siberia, surely the the Fire—and the Sun, which is after all “the Fire in the Heavens”—must have seemed the holiest thing the ancestors of the Indo-Europeans had ever witnessed, far more worthy of adoration than anything else. And, as we have pointed out, fire requires *sacrifice*, at least of the fuel to keep it burning; and hence the **Yajna** or sacrifice is of necessity associated with any type of fire-worship.

All the same, the human mind has a tendency to become attracted to *forms*, and to arrive at conceptions of the *Formless* a human being has often to grow *through* forms, at least to begin with. Now fire does not have much of a form—at least not a static one; and for praying unto the fire, and through it unto a Higher Power, the mind of a person is taxed somewhat heavily. The Sun admittedly does have a fairly static form, although a little hard to gaze directly upon except at sunrise and sunset; however, neither the fire nor the Sun is anthropomorphic, and many people find it easier to transfer their love to a form that looks human, than to something as flickeringly evanescent as fire or as blazingly eye-searing as the Sun. For a man² must *love* the Power he worships; otherwise his worship is no better than a cowardly submission to a greater force, and is assuredly not a willing and worshipful surrender; a man would never go for *refuge*³ to a Power he cannot love. And from everyone’s childhood experience, it is easier for a human being to love another human being—or at least a human form—than to love something inanimate. Thus we get, in the first instance, the anthropo-

¹ Although it is true that cave drawings and figurines tens of thousands of years old have been unearthed in several parts of the world, there is no indication that these were *worshipped*. And though it is true that there is no indication that fire was worshipped at that time either, it would still appear to be a more ancient “invention” than drawing and sculpture (indeed even to see, and thus presumably to draw, some of these cave drawings requires artificial illumination, which presupposes the existence of fire before ever the artist put charcoal stick—or whatever instrument he used—to cave wall. In any case it is the general consensus among those who have studied these things that the earliest form of worship among the *Aryans*—whatever it may have been among other cultures—was indeed fire-worship: which is all that we are trying to say.

² In this day and age authors tremble in trepidation every time they have to employ such words as “mankind” and “policeman”, for womankind and policewomen are ever standing by, ready to pounce on them in a flash at the teeny-weeniest such slip. For fear of more than half the world’s population I too have tried my best to expunge any words that so much as hint at a sexist attitude; but language being what it is, it is hard to always avoid such allusions, and the non-sexist words coined recently do not always fit the mood of the passage or phrase as the case may be. (I do understand and appreciate the viewpoint of women, for if we never start with such reform we shall merely prolong and perpetuate prejudice; but at times I wish the women would understand mine too, and appreciate that we still have a long way to go to completely liberate language).

³ There is a deep, and indeed unbridgeable, difference between the concept of *Surrender* (as epitomised, for instance, in the word **Islam** which literally means “Surrender Unto God”), and that of *submission* (which is what really happens when one “surrenders” in a battle or a war): the former is totally voluntary while the latter is just as totally compulsory. The concept underlying Surrender (in the spiritual sense) is perhaps best expressed by the Buddhist formula **सरणं गच्छामि Sharanam gachchhāmi** “I go for refuge” (to the Buddha,

morphisation, or ascribing of a human form, to such natural phenomena as **Agni** (the Fire) and **Savitur** (the Sun), along with **Vāyu** (the Wind), **Prithivi** (the Earth) and **Dyaus** (the Heavens), and even **Soma** (the plant or the beverage—it is hard to say which of the two exactly!)

Nevertheless, anthropomorphisation of what already exists in nature and is visible to the eye is not, at times, a very satisfactory process. One might readily imagine a disciple protesting to his teacher: “But the Sun doesn’t *look* like you just described him!⁴ There—take a look for yourself!” And such a confrontation puts the **guru** in a pretty embarrassing position, leaving him little alternative except the choice—which always remains, of course—of soundly thwacking the cheeky lad on the behind and packing him off to bed without supper for having dared to question a Higher Authority: a procedure which may *silence* the young fellow, but is hardly likely to *convince* him. And when he is grown up, and freed from his teacher’s tutelage, he may not consider the Sun so very worthy of worship after all. And then, to fill the emptiness in his heart, which cannot countenance a state of affairs in which *no one* and *nothing* is to be worshipped,⁵ he may well make unto himself a *likeness* or an *image*, an anthropomorphic god who does *not* exist in nature, and in the worship of whom no such conflict can occur. In this fashion, in all probability, were born many of the **Devas** or gods of the Aryans, the Chief of whom in Vedic times was, as we already remarked, **Indra**.

Indra was the most anthropomorphic of the Vedic gods. He had his heaven, he had his wife, he had his parents (different ones at different times, however, since he was himself a different individual filling the post); he had his Thunderbolt which was manufactured for his exclusive use by the Artisan of the gods, **Twashtra** or **Vishvakarma**. From his consort, **Indrâni**, he even had a son, **Chitrugupta** by name, who is said to write down each and every deed performed by each and every person who has ever lived. (His filing system must be quite something!) This is very likely a post-Vedic addition; but even in Vedic times Indra would gladly quaff the **Soma** cup proffered to him by his devotees, as a result of which he used to feel most graciously disposed towards them, ready to grant whatever boon they asked. At times, fortified by the heady draught, and urged on by the hymns of his devotees, he would go forth to challenge the great enemy he is best known for having vanquished: **Vritra**, “The Surrounders”.⁶ **वृत्र Vritra** (**Verethra** in the Avesta) is also supposed to be, in Indian lore, the Drought; and in India where drought is a much-to-be-feared natural calamity, it was considered to be the special glory of **Indra** that he defeated and annihilated **Vritra**, and thus came to be known as **वृत्रहन् Vritrtahan**

and the **Dharma**, and the **Sangha**). Such a thing is impossible if one does not—as proclaimed by Moses—“Love the LORD thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy might”; for this, as pointed out by Jesus, is truly the “greatest commandment”...of virtually every religion under the sun: its immense importance in Hinduism, for instance, underlined by **Sri Krishna**’s words in the **Bhagavad Gîtâ**—words which are said to express in brief the entire teaching of all the Hindu scriptures:

सर्वं धर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।
अहं त्वा सर्वं पापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुच ॥

“Abandoning all [other] supports, come unto me alone for refuge; I shall liberate thee from every sin—grieve not”. (*Gîtâ 18.66*).

⁴ The description of **सूर्य Surya**, the Sun, in Hinduism has become so elaborate over the ages that he is hardly recognisable. He is depicted with golden hair and golden arms, driving a chariot pulled by seven horses, the husband of **Usha**, the Dawn, as well as her son. His father is the Sky, **Dyaus**. and he is said to have arisen from the eye of **Purusha**, “The Lord of Being”. There’s more—much more!—but why go into it all? Suffice it to say that the description hardly fits the observable facts.

⁵ The idea that agnostics and atheists worship *nothing at all* is of course false, if by “worship” one means “[to] esteem”, “[to] revere”, “[to] honour”, “[to] extol”, “[to] adore” and/or “[to] glorify” (as **Webster** puts it); for even those who do not believe in God do believe in *something*—Truth, Beauty, Dialectical Materialism, or whatever—which to them is worthy of esteem, reverence, honour, *etc.* These feelings are so universal that those in whom they appear to be lacking are often locked up in institutions; for no sane person can go through life without *some* set of values, and *some* value or values at the top of this set. And in ancient times—as we already indicated earlier and shall have cause to expand upon later (Chapter 17)—the distinction between abstract and concrete concepts was not so clearly marked as now: which made the personification of one’s set of values much easier than it is today

⁶ The word **वृत्र Vritra** seems to be derived from **वृ vr** “[to] envelop”, “[to] cover”; and the name appears to have acquired its pejorative connotation with some association of a claustrophobic nature. The association was not always pejorative, however; for the same root gave rise to the highly honourable names **वरुण Varuna** and **Ουρανός Ouranos** (or **URANUS**—as we saw earlier). The Iranian form of the name **Vritra** underwent some strange metamorphoses, about which we shall speak in greater detail in Chapter 16.

“the Smiter [or Slayer] of **Vritra**”. Owing to this great feat he became best known as the god of storms, thundershowers, rains and rainbows.⁷ However, Indra is not The Rains personified (as **Agni**, for instance, is the Fire personified, or **Savitur** the Sun). **Indra** exists by himself, a deity in his own right, and has no need of the thundershowers to give him existence.

Now such a deity, obviously, had to be capable of being *described*—and following a description, very naturally, also of being *depicted*. A picture could easily become, specially in those days, an *icon*—maybe even a statue, a **mûrti**. The **mûrti** or idol had the advantage that it could be kept before the worshipper’s eyes, who as a result of the psycho-visual effect of the icon on his thought-forms, could immediately, and with much greater ease, concentrate upon the Great Power represented by it.

As long as the worshipper bore in mind that it was not the idol but the Power it represented which he worshipped, it was all right. But not everyone is capable of keeping in mind this rather fine distinction. And then again, not everyone wants the same sort of icon: and one worshipper may prefer one deity while his neighbour prefers another; and from the plethora of different icons and idols representing different deities and even the same deity in different forms, a society can easily break down, with quarrels (and worse) arising between the different worshippers. Aside from the deeper ontological question of whether there really is only one God or not, this sort of thing certainly doesn’t make for unity among the people—and assuredly not the unity necessary for building a nation.

Now Zarathushtra, in addition to being a highly spiritual person, seems to have also been a very practical man.⁸ This feature of his personality is apparent from even a cursory glance at the **Gathas**: they do not, like most of the **Upanishads**, as well as the Vedantic literature of **Shankara**’s⁹ time, go in for abstruse philosophical questions about This, That and The Other (especially The Other); they rather ask how a man should best live his very present life upon this very material earth:

Asha kat thwa daresani
manas cha vohu vaedemno
gatum cha Ahurai sevishtai
sraoshem Mazdai
ana manathra mazhishtem
vauroimaidi khrafstra hijva

O Righteousness [**Asha**], when shall I see thee? The Loving Mind [**Vohu Mano**] too, I would know—and also Obedience [**Sraoshem**], the way unto the most beneficent **Ahura Mazda**. And when, with the help of this prayer [**manthra**] of our tongues

⁷ The association of **Indra** with thundershowers grew so poetic that, in fact, the rainbow in Indian languages is called **इन्द्र धनुष Indra-dhanush**, “The bow of **Indra**” which, with the lightning for a string, is used by the deity to smite and slay the Drought. All this imagery is, however, plainly post-Vedic accretion, for in Vedic literature itself there seems to be no such allusion.

⁸ It is perhaps this trait in Zarathushtra’s personality which sets him most apart from other Vedic Sages; and his keenness, and indeed almost unrelenting efforts, to convert a major politician of his times—viz. King **Vistasp** of **Balkh**—to his way of thinking, underlines his practical bent of mind perhaps most forcefully. His monotheism (as we shall see anon) may have at least partially stemmed from this cast in his character; for as we saw earlier, Vedic **Rishis** were not, in theory at least, opposed to holding different and at times even self-contradictory views regarding the number of the Gods. In comparison, the Indian mind, although (or perhaps I should say *because*) it is—and always has been—the most imaginative in the world, was not overly *practical* (I think it was Prof. Mircea Eliade who wrote “The Indian thinks *fabulously* where the European thinks *historically*”); and thus India has almost always fallen behind other civilisations in such things as warfare, where practicality is at a premium. This same trait, however, promises to enable India to forge far ahead of all other nations—Japan included—in the 21st century, as the “software of civilisation” (*i.e.* the skilful manipulation of *information*, which of course requires a great deal of imagination) becomes more and more important in comparison to “hardware” (*i.e.*, manufacturing and industry).

⁹ **Shankara** or **Shankarâchârya** (9th century CE?) was perhaps the most brilliant philosophical thinker India ever produced, and certainly the most precocious: for much of his most significant philosophical work was carried out by him while still in his teens (he died quite young too, in his thirties). His philosophy, **अद्वैत Advaita** (literally, and to coin a term in English, “Not-two-ism”) goes far beyond monotheism, and asserts not only that is there only One God, but that there is only One, period. The appearance, according to **Shankara**, of the manifold nature of the universe is **mâyâ**, “illusion”: and the world (including ourselves in it) is not “other” than God; and our only fault lies in not realising this fact—in the very depths of our being. His work, though so relatively recent, is yet so highly revered by Hindus that it is often termed **वेदान्त Vedânta**, “The end (*i.e.*, the ultimate consummation) of the **Vedas**”; and to this day wizened old men take pride in calling themselves, after him, **Shankarâchâryas**. In his philosophy

shall we be able to mightily [or extensively] reclaim the ignorant, and those who have gone astray?

Gatha 28.5

Zarathushtra was not content to realise the Supreme Being for himself; he wanted to “mightily reclaim” the rest of humanity too: even “those who have gone astray”. And he was aware that, from a practical point of view, this would entail social organisation: in other words, *nation-building*.

And monotheism is a most powerful force for this purpose, and has been so employed time and again. Moses, within the relatively short period of 40 years, built a nation of the most fearsome and undefeatable warriors out of a bunch of recently-liberated slaves, and his message was also monotheism. Muhammad, with his **La ilahi il’Allah**,¹⁰ transformed a loose conglomeration of bickering, idolatrous Arabian tribes into the most powerful military and political force of his times. And even the Romans, who started off polytheistic, eventually adopted the monotheistic creed of Christianity—which in its origins is not even an Aryan religion—when the Emperor Constantine was told in a vision, and proved to himself in practice, that in the Sign of the Cross he would win (“**IN HOC SIGNO VINCES**”). It would appear, in fact, that some more or less strict form of monotheism has been historically necessary for the foundation of any sizeable empire: for even in the Chinese, Japanese, Inca and Aztec empires, the Emperor himself was worshipped by all his subjects as “The Son of Heaven”, or God.¹¹

At any rate it was clear to Zarathushtra, from all accounts, that for the good of the nation, **Indra** with his court of numerous gods had to go. Now this was a momentous decision—a decision that affected the history of humanity for ever. Humankind heard for the first time a definite, decided, resolute proclamation of monotheism from the foremost Prophet of the Indo-Iranians—indeed, of all humanity of that time. This proclamation has been, and is still being, echoed in different times and climes, right up to the present day.

But the **Deva Yanists** were assuredly not going to take it lying down. They formed a distinct group determined to obstruct the spread of **Mazda Yasna** at all costs. The Indo-Iranians became divided into two groups of people on the basis of the method of worship. And it is apparently *this* division that led to the break up of the original Aryan Land into two parts, Iran and India.

And moreover, both countries lost something in the process. Iran, on the one hand, lost the **Rig Veda**, with its two-hundred-and-fifty Hymns in praise of **Indra**—and naturally, along with it the **Sâman** and **Yajus** as well, which as we saw are liturgical compilations from the **Rik**.¹² India, on the other hand, lost half

Hinduism and Buddhism, for long rival schools of thought, achieved a near-synthesis, and indeed some Hindus for this reason accuse him of being a crypto-Buddhist; but his skill with words and perspicacity with ideas are not questioned even by his most vehement critics, the most important of whom are the followers of his contemporary, **Ramânuja**.

¹⁰ **La ilahi il’Allah**, “there is no god other than **Allah**”, is the most important statement a Muslim can make, following it up with **Muhammad ar-Rasul Allah** “Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”. The two together constitute the **Kalima**, the profession of Faith by the True Believer; and their sincere utterance immediately makes a man a **Muslim**, “one surrendered utterly unto God” (the word **muslim** being derived from the term **aslama**, “surrender to God”). The concept of **Allah** in most Muslim minds is somewhat different than that of “God” in, say, Christianity—no orthodox Muslim, for instance, ever dares call anyone a “Son of **Allah**”, or address **Allah** as “Father”—but for the purposes of the point we are trying to make here these differences are not too relevant, especially since the word **Allah** was obviously taken by **Hazrat Muhammad** to mean exactly the same thing as the Jewish term **Elohim**, which in turn is unfailingly translated into English as “God”.

¹¹ The Roman Caesars too, after Augustus—the very first real Roman Emperor—began to require their subjects to worship them as God...proving that you just can’t run an Empire on unadulterated polytheism.

¹² When used by themselves, the prefixes **Rig-**, **Yajur-** and **Sâma-** are actually pronounced **Rik**, **Yajus** and **Sâman** respectively, and their more familiar forms are the result of the operation of **sandhi** when they are used in conjunction with the word **Veda**. Some traces of this phenomenon—*i.e.*, the modification of some sounds when juxtaposed by others—survive in almost all languages; in English for instance we have the word “intelligence” from “intellect” (where the **-c-** sound has become a **-g-**, somewhat like the **Rik-Rig** transformation).

of the *Atharva Veda*, namely the *Bhârgava* portion—or, if you will, the fifth Veda taught in secret by the Sage *Vyâsa* to his son. For as we shall see from certain Indian references recorded in the *Mahâbhârata*, it is highly likely that the *Zend Avesta* is the original *Bhrâgava Samhitâ* or *Bhârgava Veda*. Those who consider the present Indian *Atharva (Agirasa) Veda* to contain the entire text of the original Veda of the Fire-Priest may not be quite correct in their belief: for as we have seen earlier, the *Mahâbhârata* as well as the *Gopatha Brâhmana* declare that there were five Vedas, not four.

In the *Nârâyaniya* section of the *Shânti Parva* of the *Mahâbhârata* we find references to a most marvelous scripture which was revered in India even then, being “as good as the *Vedas*”, and the “storehouse of eternal laws” (*Shânti Parva* 335.28, 40, 53). This new “Divine dispensation” was “adorned with the Grace of the *Om-kara*” (read that *Hon-vara* in Iranian—*Shânti Parva* 335.25, 27). *Nârada*, “the Messenger of the Gods”, apparently became inquisitive about this “novel” cult, which according to the text was practised in *श्वेत द्वीप* “*Shweta Dwîpa*”, lying to the north near “Mount *Meru*” close to the “*Kshiroda* Sea” (read that, if you will, as “the land of the white people”¹³ lying around “Mount *Damavand*” adjacent to “the *Caspian Sea*”). *Nârada* went there to see for himself, and heard this wonderful scripture from the mouth of *Nârâyana* in person. In the context of the above reference, the term “*Nârâyana*” is not, as in other portions of the Indian scriptures, used as a synonym for God, but as an appellation for a very wise man, *द्विपदां वरिष्ठं dvi-padâm varishtam* “the greatest of the bipeds”, as he is referred to in the very first verse of this chapter.¹⁴ Having learned and memorised this magnificent teaching, *Nârada* returned to India and recited it before a large audience in the “Court of *Brahmâ*”:

इदं महोपनिषदं चतुर्वेदसमन्वितम्
सांख्य योगकृतं पञ्चरात्रानुशुद्धितम् ।
नारायणमुखोक्तीतं नारदो अश्रावयत् पुनः
ब्रह्मणो सद्ने तात यथादृष्टं यथाश्रुतम् ॥

It is a great scripture, containing the summary of all the four *Vedas* and the gist of the *Sânkhya* and *Yoga* philosophies; it is known by the name of *Pancharâtrâ* [*lit.* “prayers five times a day”¹⁵—a practice common among Zoroastrians even now]. From the mouth of *Nârâyana* did *Nârada* hear it sung; and he repeated it in the Court of *Brahmâ*, exactly as he had heard and seen it.

Shânti Parva 339.111, 112

¹³ The term *श्वेत shweta* means “white”, so *Shweta Dwîpa* could well be taken to mean “The land of the white-complexioned people”. Since Indian Aryans, due to their intermarriage with the aboriginal inhabitants of India, have always been darker than Aryans outside India, this too could be a telling clue as to where this place lay.

¹⁴ The term *Nârâyana* and its Iranian cognate *Nar-oish-Naro* signifies, in root, a “Supreme Man”; and if Friedrich Nietzsche actually read Zarathushtra, it may have been this allusion in the Zoroastrian scriptures that gave rise in the mind of that German philosopher to the idea of the “Superman”, which he outlined in his *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (and which the Nazis justified beyond belief). This idea in the Persian Prophet’s own Hymns, however, seems to be one of a constant improvement in man’s character, through righteousness, benevolence and heroic disdain for the consequences thereof: *Asha*, *Vohu Manah* and *Kshathra Vairya* respectively (see especially the next chapter). In this sense he too may be said to have advocated—if one were to interpret his teaching in that light—a “Superman” of sorts: though obviously not the kind Hitler had in mind (nor, of course, the Man of Steel of Metropolis and Lois Lane’s beloved, who may perhaps be called the most important figure of the myths and legends of the United States of America—even though he was actually the creation of a couple of Jewish Canadians).

¹⁵ The practice among Hindus is to pray *three*, not *five*, times a day, which however is not practised by the Hindus who follow the *Pancharâtra*. (This is a practice followed even today by certain Hindus, though not, obviously, by all.) As this paragraph shows, this could well be a custom introduced into Hinduism *via* the influence of Zoroastrianism. About this influence we shall have much more to say later on in this book.

That it was indeed in Iran, and was indeed a Zarathushtrian scripture, can be deduced from the following several clues which are also mentioned in the *Nârâyanîya* section of the *Shânti Parva*:

—Narada had to travel *north-west* in search of it (आलोकयन् उत्तरपश्चिमेन *Ālokayann-uttarapashchimena—ibid, 335.7*), and when he arrived there, he found the religion to be *monotheistic* (एकान्तिन् *ekântin—ibid, 334.44*). It was also a *सात्वत* *sâtвата* faith, that is, it laid great stress on the *सत्व गुण* *satva guna* or holiness (*Spenta*¹⁶ *Mainyu* in the Avesta). It was *aniconic*—indeed *Brihaspati* (or *Angirasa*, the Preceptor of the *Devas*), who had been invited to one of the sacrifices being performed in *Shweta Dwîpa*, had flown into a rage at this practice; standing up with the ladle in his hand, he had declared that he was not going to tolerate the fact that an “unseen deity” would take the libation:

अदृश्येन ह्यतो भागो हरिमेधसा
बृहस्पतिस्ततः कुद्धः सुचम् उद्यभय वेगितः ।

Shânti Parva 339.111,112

He had thereupon to be pacified by some of the other Sages present, by their pointing out that this form of worship was very much current in *Shweta Dwîpa*, thus implying that *Brihaspati* as a foreigner might as well be courteous and accede to his hosts’ custom in their own land.

The One God worshipped in “thought, word and deed”¹⁷ (*Shânti Parva 336.46*) by these “highly spiritual” (*ibid, 335.13*), “cap-wearing”¹⁸ (छत्राकृतिशीर्षा *chhatrâkritishîrshâ—ibid, 335.11*), “white-complexioned” people, who were *not* divided into different castes as were those in India, but “were equal to each other” (*ibid, 336.39*), is called by *Nârada* by the name of *हरिमेधस* *HariMedhas*. Now this appears to be nothing other than a later-period Indianisation or Sanskritisation of the Iranian name *Ahura Mazda* (or *Ahuramazda* as it came to be pronounced in Achamænian times). At the time of the *Mahâbhârata* the term *Asura* (*Ahura*) had already acquired its highly dishonourable connotation in India, and the author of the *Mahâbhârata*, the Sage *Vyâsa*, must surely have disliked using such a term to refer to the Highest Lord. He evidently hit upon a smart substitution: he replaced it with the name *Hari* which happens to be very close to “*Ahura*” in pronunciation and is at the same time most honourable in Indian ears. In addition, as we have ready seen, the sounds *Medhas* and *Vedhas* are, according to the *Nirukta*, interchangeable; and we also know that *Vedhas* came to be called *Mazda* in Iran. The term *Hari Medhas*, then,

¹⁶ The word *Spenta* is, to the philologist, highly interesting; for it is the older form of the Sanskrit word शान्त *shânta* “peaceful” (found in the Rigveda, for instance, in its more ancient Indian form: शान्त *shvânta*). It holds in Indian texts a position more or less analogous to the term שלום *shalom* “peace” in the Hebrew scriptures; many Hindu prayers end with the words शान्ति शान्ति शान्ति: *shânti shânti shântih* “Peace, peace, peace”. The word thus acquires overtones of “holy” or “sacred”—after all, one doesn’t use mundane terms to end prayers, now does one?—and in the Lithuanian language, which seems to have retained its Vedic heritage more than most other European tongues, the older form of this word has survived: *szventa* (pronounced “shventa”), which does indeed signify “holy”. We shall have a great deal more to say about the word *spenta* (its Iranian form) in the next chapter.

¹⁷ An interesting allusion to the three principles of Zoroastrian ethics: *humata, hukhta, huvarshta* “good thoughts, good words, good deeds” (we spoke about this earlier too). The three as such are not too common in the Indian scriptures, and thus a reference to them in these passages is a further indication that the religion referred to in them was in all likelihood Zoroastrianism.

¹⁸ The Zoroastrian custom of always keeping the head covered, especially in holy places, has already been mentioned earlier. The Jewish custom in this regard is rather obviously a takeover from the Achamænian Persians, for it is not mentioned in the early part of the Law of Moses; indeed even when Moses himself first entered the LORD’s presence at the Burning Bush, he was told merely to take off his shoes, not to cover his head. We shall have much more to say of the Persian-Jewish interaction later in this book. The custom itself—in more ancient days among the Zoroastrians it was not just a simple cap but a turban-like padded headgear—is probably a remnant of a Siberian-period Aryan habit; for it is often claimed that in cold weather a person loses a large portion of the body’s heat through the head.

is obviously the Zarathushtrian name **Ahura Mazda** in its Sanskritised form current in India at the time of **Vyâsa**.

That “**Hari Medhas**” is a coined name, invented in imitation of “**Ahura Mazda**”, is evident also from the fact that among Indians “**Hari**” alone suffices to denote the Highest Lord, and there is no reasonable reason to append “**Medhas**” to it. Moreover, “**Hari Medhas**” is not an alternative name for any of the deities mentioned in the Vedas or the Purânas. It is found only six times in the entire collection of Indian sacred texts: five times in the *Nârâyaniya* Chapters of the *Mahâbhârata*’s *Shânti Parva* and once in the *Vishnu Purâna*;¹⁹ and in each case, in keeping with the Zarathushtrian connotations of the name **Ahura Mazda**, it denotes the Supreme Being, and not a minor deity.

It is much too evident from the foregoing that the *Nârâyaniya* Chapters of the *Mahâbhârata* refer to the religion founded by Zarathushtra; they cannot possibly refer to anything else. It is surely as faithful an account of the **Mazda Yasni** religion as can be expected from a poet writing in a distant age about a distant country.

That **Nârada** was able to recite the Scripture of the **Shweta Dwîpa** in India यथाश्रुतम् *yathâshrutam* “exactly as he had heard it” also testifies to the identity of the languages of India and Iran. He apparently did not have to hear it—or even to make it understood to others in India—in translation.

It is therefore as clear as can be that Zarathushtra’s scripture was known in India at a period as relatively recent as that of the *Mahâbhârata*.²⁰ That it was so highly praised,²¹ as the above passage demonstrates, and that too by the rival sect—the **Devayânists**—goes far to show that in those days (as, indeed, even now) the Indians had a very broad-minded attitude towards other religions. It is one more tribute to the eminent sensibility of the ancestors of the Indians of today.

As we said earlier, **Vyâsa** himself²² regarded the number of the Vedas to have been *five*, not four; and says in the Epic that he taught the fifth Veda to his son. Whether this fifth Veda was the one **Nârada** brought back from **Shweta Dwîpa**, or not, is not mentioned one way or another in the *Mahâbhârata*; but we do have references in *other* Indian literature to the *Bhârgava Samhitâ* of the *Atharva Veda*.

Thus the *Gopatha Brâhmana*, which as we said also counts the Vedas as being five in number (the *Atharva Veda* being considered by it to be actually *two* Vedas, the *Angirasa* and the *Bhârgava*), declares that the latter is better than the former, comparing the *Bhârgava* to sweet, and the *Angirasa* to brackish, wa-

¹⁹ “**Hari Medhas** is the Soul of Consciousness and the Root of Knowledge. He is both personal and impersonal, [being] One Who ever surveys the world—we bow down to Him.” (*Vishnu Purâna* 14.34). A clearer description of **Ahura Mazda** can hardly be imagined!

²⁰ It often brings a smile to the lips of a western reader, especially one living in North America, to read about the “relatively recent” times of the *Mahâbhârata*, which probably antedates Homer himself, the very earliest of European authors. It should be appreciated, however, that the Homeric Epics as well as the *Mahâbhârata* portray highly sophisticated peoples, capable of constructing Trojan Horses and even—if the fertile Indian imagination is to be believed—nuclear weapons (“**Brahmâstras**”) and aircraft (“**vimânas**”). Such imagery is obviously many millennia closer to us than that of the far more “primitive” Vedic Hymns, with their forests, waters and shining streams—and the total absence in them of the trappings of “civilisation”.

²¹ ततः ब्रह्मा नमस्करो देवाय हरिमेधसे ।
धर्मं चाग्र्यं यं स जन्माह सरहस्यं ससंग्रहम् ॥

“Then **Brahmâ** [the Creator Himself, no less!] bowed down before the Glorious **Hari Medhas** [*i.e.*, **Ahura Mazda**], and learned from him the best of religions, with all its principles and secrets.” (*Shânti Parva* 348.30). Could higher praise have been penned?

²² It is to be noted here that it is not just any Tom, Dick or Hare Krishna follower asserting this, but the very “editor” of the Vedas himself (if he is to be taken, as tradition avows, as also having authored the *Mahâbhârata*). It was he who gave us the arrangement of the Vedic Hymns as we know them today; and so surely his assertion should be given more weight than any one else’s!

ter (*Gopatha Brhâmana 1.1.1.15*). The *Sânkhyayâna Sutra (16.1)* agrees, calling the *Bhârgava Veda* भेषज bhesaja “genial” while describing the *Angirasa Veda* as घोर ghora “rough”. *Sâyana*²³ too, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Atharva Veda*, uses the term घोर ghora “rough” to describe the *Angirasa*, while he considers the *Bhârgava* to be शान्त shânta “calm”.²⁴

It was the difference between the *Bhrigus* and the *Angirasas* that led to the compilation of a supplementary *Veda*: the *Atharva Veda*; for the name *Atharva* can also be derived from the root ऋ -ri giving rise to ऋच्छति richchhati “to go”, and thereby connoting “that which goes [or comes, as we say in English] afterwards”—in other words, it *supplements* the first three *Vedas*, the *Rik*, *Sâman* and *Yajus*. The other derivation of the word *Atharva* was, as we saw, from the term अत्र Atr- or Athar “Fire”, and meant “The *Veda* of the Fire-priest”; and it is perhaps so called because it is more concerned with the preservation of the domestic fire, both in its literal sense and its more social sense (“hearth and home”, meaning the discharge of domestic duties), than the performances of elaborate and spectacular sacrifices like the *Jyotishtoma* and so on.²⁵

Even the *Bhavishya Purâna* contains a veiled reference to the Zoroastrians, in that it describes the *Atharva Veda* to be the *Veda* of the *Mâghas*. As we have seen—and as we shall further elaborate later on—the *Magha* was the name given by Zarathushtra to the Church he founded for the spread of the Message of *Mazda*.

That the *Bhârgavas* and the *Angirasas* used to worship in different ways is mentioned even in the *Mahâbhârata*:

भृगुभिरङ्गिरोभिश्च हुतं मन्त्रैः पृथग्विधै ।

The *Bhrigus* and the *Agirasas* use altogether different *mantras* in their prayers.

Vana Parva 223.14

It is clear, then, that the original *Atharva Veda*, containing as it did the *Bhârgava* as well as the *Angirasa* portions, was in reality *two* books, not one; and the *Bhârgava* portion—which has been lost to India—could well have been the *Zend Avesta* or छन्द अपिस्तक *Chhanda Apistaka*, the Hymn Book of Zarathushtra.

This inference is strengthened by the observation that whatever *Bhârgava* writings we do possess in India—like the *Bhrigu Valli* of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, for instance—do reflect quite accurately the teachings of Zarathushtra. We shall touch upon this subject in greater detail in a subsequent chapter; but before

²³ *Sâyana*, the great commentator of the Vedas: paralleled, perhaps, by Rabbi Shim'on Yitzhaki or רשב"ם *Rashi*, the commentator of the *Torah*. Much might be written about him, and in the final edition of this book I intend to do so; suffice it here to say that among Hindu theological scholars he is as highly regarded as St. Augustine, for example, among the Catholics, or Nâgârjuna among the Buddhists.

²⁴ It may be remembered that we wrote earlier regarding the Iranian word *Spenta*. This is one more finger pointing in the direction of the *Bhârgava Veda* being the Indian name for the *Zend Avesta*, for the word *Spenta* in Zoroastrian scripture signifies a very high level of blessedness indeed.

²⁵ The sacrifice or यज्ञ *yajna* must originally have been quite simple, but with time it grew very elaborate and complicated. Of course this happened to all things in India—it has been said that in sharp contrast to the Greeks, who believed in the principle of “Nothing to excess”, the Indians espoused the opposite principle, namely “Everything to excess”.

we do that it will be necessary to outline the significant tenets of Zarathushtra's teachings, and to understand a little of what he said in the first place.

However, before we come even to that, let us examine in greater detail the historical outcome of the "**Deva-Asura War**". One may say that in a sense *this ideological "War" had more far-reaching consequences on the history of humanity than any other war*—whether of arms or ideas. For upon India having won it for the **Devas** and Iran for **Ahura**, it determined forever the subsequent, specifically *Indian* development of the original Vedic religion, which, although it had the potential to spread all throughout the Aryan Land—ultimately to the very shores of the Atlantic, and even beyond²⁶—became confined, as a result of the **Asuric** victory in Iran, to the Indian sub-continent. It is only necessary to visualise how easily Vedic teaching could have spread to the Greeks, Romans, Celtic and Nordic peoples, with their great similarities to the original Vedic peoples with whom they shared their languages and even their very genes, to realise how narrowly Europe escaped being brought into the fold of the Vedic religion. And had the *kathenotheism*, and enormously superior breadth and depth of outlook of an evolved and elaborated emanation from the Vedic tradition, replaced the polytheism of pre-Christian Europe, it is inconceivable that Christianity²⁷ could have made appreciable inroads into the West, just as it has not been able to make any significant inroads into India; for as the Irish Sage points out in his *Preface to Androcles and the Lion*:

Hindus...and Buddhists...have, as a prophylactic against salvationist Christianity, highly civilised religions of their own. ...To offer a Hindu so crude a theology as ours in exchange for his own, or our Jewish canonical literature as an improvement on Hindu scripture, is to offer old lamps for older ones in a market where the oldest lamps, like old furniture in England, are the most highly prized.

There is little question, then, that one of the outcomes of the **Deva-Asura War** was *the confinement of the Vedic tradition, and its entire subsequent higher development, to India*; and this left the ancient Europeans open to the onslaught of Christianity, with its completely Semitic background, which took Europe over *faute de mieux*.²⁸ However, Western Aryans were not so very different from the Eastern, and had they been offered the choice would very likely have taken to Vedism like fish to water. This

²⁶ People brought up on the idea that it was either Columbus or Leif Ericson who "discovered" America are just now beginning to learn, from archaeological evidence unearthed on both shores of the Atlantic, that Europeans had been there several thousands of years ago; for very ancient tools and artifacts of similar shape and design have recently been found in Maine, Newfoundland and Norway. What happened to these early European settlers in North America is as yet unknown; and we do not even know how they managed the crossing—perhaps they reached there by accident, their ship having been caught up in some storm which they managed to weather, but only just, and maybe they never returned to Europe to tell the tale; but whatever the answers to these questions, it seems clear that Europeans had been in the New World long before historical times.

²⁷ It should be borne in mind that Christianity is not only a Semitic religion, but was originally intended by its Founder for Jews alone. Several of Jesus's earlier statements support this view—for instance his instructions to the twelve apostles as he sent them forth to evangelise: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (**Matthew 10.5,6**). It would appear, from a critical reading of the Gospels, that it was only towards the end—when Jesus became convinced that many orthodox Jews were inflexibly opposed to him and his teaching—that he changed his mind about this matter, and said to the disciples "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (**Mark 16.15**).—By the way, my Indian readers may find it interesting to learn that the term **gospel**, or rather its Greek original **εὐαγγέλιον eu-angel** or "evangel"—which literally means "good message" or "good news"—has its roots in the Sanskrit term **सु-अंजलि su-anjali** "good greetings"; and my European readers may find it interesting to learn that the way such greetings are expressed in India is with the hands folded as if in prayer, a gesture with which westerners are familiar through movies and illustrations of India. This gesture is not by any means universal for worship; Zarathushtra himself, from a reading of the Gathas, appears to have worshipped "with hands outstretched" (**ustana jasta**); and the orthodox Jews to this day follow yet another custom: that of **davaning**, or repeatedly bowing ever so slightly at the waist. The hands-folded way of worship, common in Christendom today, seems in fact to have arrived in Europe from India.

²⁸ It is not to be understood from this that Europeans had *no* religion; just that the religions they had were inadequate to satisfy the soul that hungers and thirsts after righteousness. One thing that really brings this

is so obvious from everything we know about the two groups: the Thunderbolt wielded by **Indra**, so similar to the one brandished by **Zeus-JUPITER** (among the Græco-Romans) and by **Thor** (among the Nordics); the close affinity of the Saxon, Iberian and Baltic languages to Sanskrit and Zend; the flavour of the Germanic and Celtic legends (such as those of **Siegfried** in Germany and **Cuchulain** in Ireland, to give just two examples), so very akin to those of India; the chariots, feasting, fighting and Druids of the Gauls and Brythons, so similar to scenes evoked by the verses of the *Mahâbhârata*; even the resemblance, in Swedish and Norwegian, for the names of these two countries, **Sverige** and **Norge**, to the Sanskrit terms **स्वर्ग Svarga** “heaven” and **नरक Naraka** “hell”, which may not be accidental, considering the geographical differences between these two Scandinavian lands—the easy, rolling, fertile flatlands and forests of Sweden contrasted with the mountainous, desolate, rocky and fjord-crossed Norwegian terrain—for under the technological limitations of those times, these differences must have seemed as great as the gap between paradise and perdition.²⁹ These and a thousand other similarities between the Asian and European Aryans indicate that a sophisticated emanation out of the Vedic tradition would have been just the right religion, socially, culturally and from the logical point of view *historically*, to have spread to Europe. Think of the similarity between the **menhirs** of the ancient inhabitants of France and Britain and the **lingams** of the Indian **Shaivites**; think of the Homeric epics and their similarities with the ones composed by **Vâlmîki** and **Vyâsa**; think of the Bards of both continents singing their tales of valour in the courts of kings ... and of the other member of the court, the jester or **wit**, so called in both old English and Sanskrit: **वित vit**. The words “sun”, “moon” and “stars” have all come down to us straight from the Iranian **hweng**, **maon** and **stare**; and when the entire voice of a people sings of both heaven and earth from a common linguistic source, there can be no doubt as to the affinity of these people for the religion that emerged out of and evolved from this very voice (**वाच vâcha**).

That this did *not* happen—there appears little doubt now—was due to the victory of **Ahura-tkaesha** in Iran. **Indra** and his **Devas** were sealed in, so to speak, east of the Hindu Kush. And along with them were the **Rik**, **Sâman** and **Yajur Vedas**, upon which depended all subsequent development of the religion of which they were the foundations. *All* the **स्मृति smṛiti** literature of the Hindu religion, vast as it is, is founded upon the authority of the **श्रुति shruti** or Vedic Chants. **Smṛiti** scriptures were permitted to be written down; they did not *have* to be memorised and sung, though this was also done. They were—and are—sacred, but *not* as sacred as the Hymns. They have to this day

home to the modern person is viewing the performance of a Greek tragedy, such as **Oedipus Rex** or **Antigone**: the awesome depth of doom and despair portrayed therein—the protagonists regarding themselves as having no hope of redemption, or peace for their tormented souls, whether in this life *or in a future existence*—making even **King Lear** or **Hamlet** appear downright cheerful in comparison.

²⁹ Even though this derivation appears to me rather fanciful, and seems to fall under the heading of so-called “folk etymology” or etymological explanations made up by common people, it still shows that Indian and European cultures stem from the same root.

enormous popular appeal, in fact far greater than the *shruti*; but in the hierarchy they were—and are to this day—regarded *below* the spiritual stature of the Chants. So: no Vedas, no Vedic religion. No matter that the two most well-beloved and highly revered of Hinduism's **Avatâras** or Incarnations of the Supreme Being Himself, namely **Râma** and **Krishna**,³⁰ appeared on the scene *after* the Vedic period; no matter that far more Hindus of today know the tales of their exploits as recounted in the *Mahâ-bhârata*, *Râmâyana* and *Srimad Bhâgvatam* than know even the more important *sûktas* of the *Rigveda*: in degree of sanctity the Chants are at the very top. And it is right, as I have tried to show in this book (see specially Chapter 17), that it should be so, for they of all the world's literary works, sacred or profane, are absolutely unique: they are the expression in sound of the innermost, deepest, most enduring, most primeval, most penetrating, most vitally, vividly vibrating thoughts and experiences of the most intensely aware and highly realised souls of the earliest times remembered by *homo sapiens*. And it was a monumental tragedy, as we shall try to illustrate later, that the Aryans of West Asia and Europe lost these priceless treasures and the messages they bore—which might easily have been theirs too.

However, there was also another outcome of the **Deva-Asura** War, not directly connected with Europe. This was the tremendous influence Zoroastrianism exerted on the three main *Semitic* religions that have survived down to our times, *viz.*, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The influence was not always direct, though at times it certainly was, and very strikingly so too. But whether direct or indirect, it was there; and as we said before, it determined the history of the world forever. It was not merely in the matter of monotheism that this influence was felt. It was also in the matter of aniconic worship; the repudiation of the caste system; the emphasis on the ideal of militancy (in early Judaism and in Islam) and of an organised Church (in Christianity). In the matter of emphasis on Righteousness and Justice. On the Love and the Fatherhood of God. On the concept of a Saviour-to-come: the very term actually invented by Zoroastrianism. On the Joy of the Life Divine: a Joy not dependent on external circumstances but transcending them. We shall be able to trace the influence of Zoroastrian teaching on these as well as many other aspects of the three main *Semitic* religions.

But, as I have said, to do this we shall first have to study some more of what the First Prophet of Mankind actually taught—at least the main tenets of his religion. Let us now proceed to do so.

³⁰ Hinduism without **Râma** and **Krishna** may almost be compared to Christianity without Christ, so strong is the Hindus' reverence for these two **Avatâras**. The story of **Râma**—the *Râmâyana*, the first great epic poem of human history—is perhaps the most touching tale of Divine incarnation ever told: for in order to destroy a **Râkshasa** or Demon called **Râvana**—who had asked for, and been granted, a boon of invincibility against all creatures in heaven or in hell—The Supreme Being Himself had to obliterate from His consciousness all traces of His own divinity, and, incarnating as an ordinary mortal (against whom Râvana had disdained to request invincibility), defeat the demon using only common human skills. No other person in whom the Divine is held to have incarnated ever suffered the pangs of human heartache, or became acquainted with the severe limitations of the human condition, as thoroughly as **Râma** did, for while he lived on earth he never knew he was God incarnate; and even though numerous **Rishis**—who, due to their spiritual insight, knew better—often tried to point out the fact to him, he could never bring himself to be fully convinced of it, repeatedly saying "I am a [simple] man; I consider myself to be [nothing more than] **Râma**, the eldest son of King **Dasharatha**". In sharp contrast to him, **Krishna**—who figures prominently (though not exclusively) in the other great Indian Epic, the *Mahâ-bhârata*—was from his childhood so very conscious of his own Divine nature that he played pranks with mortals as adults play with children: and his endearing but immensely greater superiority to humans—and his clear consciousness of it—provides a beautiful counterpose to the pathos of the story of **Râma**. The two together so well complement each other that it is upon the tales of **Râma** and **Krishna**—rather than upon western-type fairy tales—that Indian children are raised; it is these two **Avatâras** who abide in the hearts of virtually every Hindu, peasant or prince; and it is with the name of **Râma** on his lips that Mahatma Gandhi died.

CHAPTER 5

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE BASIC TENETS OF ZARATHUSHTRA'S TEACHINGS (PART I)

It would not, of course, be possible in such a brief space as two or three chapters of this book to deal in depth with *all* of Zarathushtra's religion: and such in any case is not my intention; the subject has been discussed fairly extensively by others, and it is only necessary to go to a good library to look up excellent books on the topic. Here I propose simply to outline the basic tenets of his teachings, and that more with a view to understanding how they compare with the basic tenets of other religions—and if in the process I also give some idea of their depth, impressiveness and unique position in world history, well then so much the more fruitful will my labours have been.

In the first place, let us take up the *Avesta* as a whole: the scripture of Zoroastrianism in its totality. The entire scripture was not composed by Zarathushtra himself. The *Avesta* comprises four books or volumes: the *Yasna* or Book of Hymns, the *Yashta* or Book of Prayers, the *Visparatu* or Book of “Universal Righteousness”—these are also basically prayers—and the *Vidaevadata* or Book of Laws. There are people who believe that at one time many more Books (or *Nasks*, as they are called) existed, up to twenty-one in all; and these were, they say, lost over the ages, particularly at the time of the unfortunate arson of the Great Library at Persepolis instigated by Alexander of Macedon.¹ Nevertheless the oldest and most important of them all, the *Yasna*, has survived, although perhaps what has survived is only a part of what the complete text of the *Yasna* used to be in bygone ages. The other three Books mentioned above are subsidiary to it.

There are 72 Chapters in the *Yasna* and 17 of them, containing 238 verses in all, go to form the *Gatha* or Divine Hymns, reputed to be the words of the Prophet Zarathushtra himself. The *Gatha* is *embedded* in the *Yasna*: as for example the *Bhagavad Gîtâ* is embedded in the *Mahâbhârata*, or the Sermon on the Mount is embedded in the Gospels.

The *Gatha* is the cream of the *Avesta*. It reflects the mind and personality of the Founder of the Zarathushtri religion, the First and Foremost Prophet of Humanity. Even if all the other Books of Zoroastrianism were for any reason lost, the followers of Zarathushtra would still be able to remain faithful to their Prophet's teaching, in letter and in spirit, with the help of the *Gatha* alone.

¹ This figure is known in Western history as “Alexander the Great”, but in ancient Persia, his main victim, he was much more understandably known as “Alexander the Accursed”. The arson of the Great Library of Persepolis, much like the arson by Julius Caesar's legions of the Great Library at Alexandria, was a great loss—perhaps as great a loss to the East as the latter was to the West. There is debate among scholars as to why it took place. Some think that it was carried out under the instigation of Alexander's tutor, Aristotle, who may have been jealous of the Persian scholars' grasp of philosophical concepts (for at any given epoch in history—at least until the post-industrial period—the East had always been ahead of the West in such things); while other writers, basing themselves on Persian legends asserting that Alexander was Darius's exiled half-brother, think of the entire campaign of Alexander against Persia along the lines of a family feud (of which there were plenty in those days). Yet others think Alexander ordered the arson in a fit of drunken stupor. Who knows what the truth is: it all happened a long time ago; and the records, as we say, were destroyed. But there's no debate about the fact that humanity lost many incalculably valuable documents in that arson.

If the *Gatha* were lost, all would be lost; if the *Gatha* remains, nothing is lost. The *Gatha* is as important to the Zarathushtri as the *Veda* is to the Hindu, the *Torah* to the Jew, the Gospels to the Christian.

The term “*Gatha*” is derived from the root गै *gai* “to sing”. Like the *Veda*, the *Gatha* was intended to be *sung* or *chanted*. There are metrical rules governing its mode of recitation, just as there are for the Vedas, and they are strictly followed by Zoroastrian priests or **Mobeds** to this day.

Of all Zoroastrian scriptures, the teachings of the *Gatha* are supreme. Whenever disputes arise as to the significance of Zoroastrian teachings contained in any other Zoroastrian scripture, they can be resolved by referring to the *Gatha*, which must be the final authority.² Hence a study of the main tenets of the *Gatha* should enable us to get as good a grasp of Zoroastrianism as could possibly be obtained in so short a space as three chapters of this book.

One of the distinguishing features of the *Gathas* is the enormous emphasis they place on the uniquely Zoroastrian system of **Amesha Spentas**. So to begin with we shall try to grasp what these are.

The word **Amesha** signifies “immortal”—it is cognate with the Sanskrit अमृत *amrita*, from which the English word “immortal” is itself derived—and as we already saw earlier, the word **Spenta**, like its Vedic cognate श्वान्त *Shvânta*, means “Holy”. The term **Amesha Spenta**, then, is often translated as “Holy Immortals” (using the word “Immortal” here as a noun rather than an adjective).

According to Zoroastrian doctrine there are seven **Amesha Spentas**. There is dispute, however, as to exactly which Sacred Seven the term refers. According to the most renowned Parsi scholar of this century, Dr. Irach Taraporewala of Bombay, they include the Supreme Being, **Ahura Mazda** Himself, while according to Shri Jatindra Mohan Chatterji of Calcutta they do not—and in this case they include the Angel **Sraosha**. We need not enter into controversy here, and just for the sake of argument—or rather for the sake of *avoiding* argument!—we shall adopt Dr. Taraporewala’s view here, without necessarily committing ourselves to it.³

Dr. Taraporewala in his book *The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra* has devised a visually striking diagram to show the Sacred Seven and their interrelationships. It looks something like the Jewish “Star of David”,⁴ and we have it reproduced in the margin of the facing page.

² This is not, however, the view held by some extremely orthodox Parsis, who regard *all* the scriptures of Zoroastrianism to be the word of Zarathushtra himself, revealed to him by **Ahura Mazda**. However, this view cannot be sustained by any common-sense considerations, for all the Zoroastrian scriptures other than the *Yasna* are written in much more recent forms of the various Iranian languages than are the *Gathas*, and Zarathushtra could not possibly have lived so long as to cover all these various epochs. Of course it is common to many religions to believe that all their scriptures are the word of God Himself, or at least of their Prophets. But it is obviously not so (except in the case of the *Qr’an*); for the Bible, for instance, does not even claim to be entirely the word of God, or even of the Prophets.

³ To be fair, Dr. Taraporewala does mention that **Sraosha** “is often mentioned in close association with the Holy Immortals” (in Part I of his book *The Religion of Zarathushtra*). By the way: Dr Taraporewala has sometimes been accused of injecting a considerable number of Theosophical notions into his translations and interpretations of the Zoroastrian scriptures. Now this may well be true; but it is by no means un-Zoroastrian for one who professes to follow the teachings of Zarathushtra to accept whatever he may find acceptable in the teachings of other religions, or even other philosophies: indeed he is actually *obligated* as a Zoroastrian to do so. The reason is, that a Zoroastrian is enjoined by the tenets of his religion—unlike the adherents of most other faiths—to use his Good Mind or **Vohu Manah** to diligently seek the Truth or **Asha**; and thus if he finds anything true anywhere in any text, whether its source be Zoroastrian or not, he is honour-bound as a Zoroastrian not only to accept it, but to incorporate it into his world-view. Dr Taraporewala may well have found some truth in Theosophy—I myself have found much truth there too—so it is not at all un-Zoroastrian for him to have incorporated these truths into his interpretations and translations of the Zoroastrian scriptures.

⁴ The so-called “Star of David” (erroneously so called, by the way, since the Jews themselves call it מָגֵן דָּוִד *magen david* or “Shield of David”), although most commonly associated with Judaism, is by no means found in the Jewish religion alone: like the Swastika, it too has been found in diverse cultures all around the world, even in aboriginal North American ones (which no one can reasonably say had any contact with Judaism.)

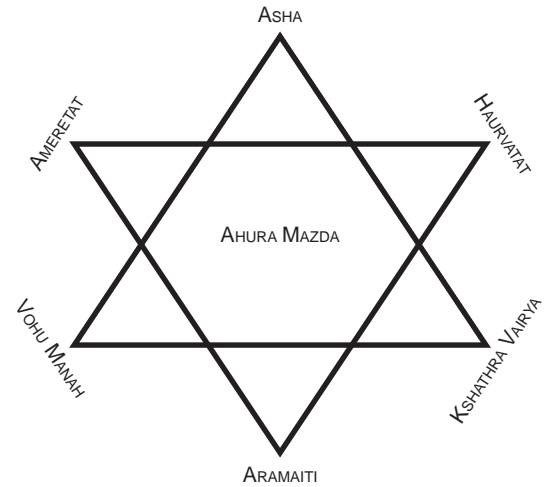
After **Ahura Mazda** Himself, the first of the Amesha Spentas—as depicted at the very top of the Star—is **Asha**. Let us read what Dr. Taraporewala has to say about **Asha**:

In the word **Asha** is contained the true essence of Zarathushtra's teaching. ...Today [among Parsis] the word **asho** implies only bodily purity, adherence to religious rites and customs, and ordinary goodness of character. If, however, we go back a thousand or fifteen hundred years, we find the same word in the literature of Sassanian Iran, where it implies, above and besides what it means today, purity of mind and soul, control of the senses, a loving heart, and other similar spiritual virtues. If we go back still further, we find it mentioned in the (late) Avesta literature that the Divine Beings, the **Yazatas**,⁵ are also **asho**. These great Divine Powers fulfil their tasks in accordance with **Asha**. Each of them has been called "Lord of **Asha**". Finally, in the fundamental texts of the Avesta, in the *Gathas* of Zarathushtra, our whole life is described as founded upon **Asha**. We are also told that the whole creation is progressing along "the path of **Asha**." ...In *Yasna 60.12* the worshippers express the wish that "Through the best **Asha**, through the highest **Asha**, may we get a vision of Thee (O **Ahura Mazda**), may we draw near unto Thee, may we be in perfect union with Thee".⁶ And in *Yasna 71.11* we are told that "There is but one path—the Path of **Asha**—all others are false paths."

The word **Asha** occurs in the Avesta Texts in a variety of forms, making a regular series: **asha, arsh, eresh, arta, ereta**. The last variant is clearly the **rita** of the *Veda*. It is also quite clear that the Avestan **asha** and the Vedic **rita** are two variants of the same word. ...In the *Vedas* we are also told that **Rita** supports and upholds all Creation. ...**Ahura Mazda** [Himself] has been described several times in the *Avesta* as "He who is highest in **Asha**, who has advanced furthest in **Asha**." In the *Gathas* He is described as being "of one accord with **Asha**". This seems to me to represent the very apotheosis of the word **asha**, for here we find **Asha** raised to the level of **Ahura Mazda** Himself. The Supreme is also pictured as journeying along the path of **Asha** at the head of His Creation. Only one conclusion can now be possible as to the meaning of the word **Asha**, viz., that **Asha** (as also **Rita**) is the Changeless Eternal law of God, His First Plan according to which all the universe has come into being, and obeying which it is progressing towards its destined fulfilment.

The Divine Songs of Zarathushtra

Asha, then, means Righteousness, Truth, Divine Law, Justice, the *summum bonum*, Spiritual Illumination, Enlighten-



DR. TARAPOREWALA'S DIAGRAM OF THE SEVEN AMESHA SPENTAS

⁵ According to tradition there are 33 **Yazatas**, and they include such things as Fire, Water, Wind and Earth, and other such forces of nature, as well as spiritual qualities such as Blessing (**Ashi**) and Wisdom (**Chisti**). The term **Yazata** has derivatives in modern languages like Urdu and Hindustani too, as for example **izzat** "honour". Thus in ancient times it essentially meant "The Honourable Ones", and in Sassanian times—that is, during the time of the last Iranian Empire, which was overthrown by the Muslims—they were personified and actually worshipped, which goes very much against the grain of the strict monotheism preached by the Prophet. For this reason there are several distinguished scholars of the Zarathushtri religion who do not accept the Sassanian forms of worship as being truly Zoroastrian at all, and claim in fact that it was due to this that the Muslims did manage to introduce Islam, with its strict monotheism, back into Iran. I myself tend to an acceptance of this view, for it makes a lot of sense to me (and I shall discuss this at greater length later on in this book.) But it is also true that many orthodox Zoroastrians do not agree with the views of these scholars, and claim instead that the Sassanian period is also part of the Bigger Picture of the religion founded by Zarathushtra, and cannot be entirely divorced from it. And I have to admit that they do have a point there.

⁶ There are some who claim that the Zoroastrian religion, unlike the Hindu religion, does not aim at an eventual merging with the Divine. The verse quoted here from the *Yasna* should put an end to such claims.

ment—no single word, in English or virtually any other language, is adequate to translate it fully, although as pointed out above the Vedic ऋत *rta*⁷ comes closest. The simplest, most oft repeated Zoroastrian prayer says:

Ashem vohu vahishtem asti.

Ushta asti.

Ushta ahmai hyat ashai vaihstai ashem.

Asha is Love;⁸ it is the Greatest [Love of all]. It is Enlightenment! [And] Enlightenment is his, who follows **Asha** for the sake of most Loving **Asha** alone.

Asha, then, is the first of the “Holy Immortals”. At times these Seven have been represented, perhaps in order to make them more easily understood to those who cannot grasp the abstract, as “Angels” or “Archangels”; but they are in actual fact *principles*—eternal and undying, and therefore “Immortal”, spiritual principles. And at the head of them all stands **Asha**, the most basic and important tenet of the Zoroastrian religion.

The second **Amesha Spenta** is **Vohu Mano**. Let us read again Dr. Taraporewala’s illuminating words regarding the meaning of this term:

The literal meaning of the name **Vohu Mano** is usually given as “Good Mind”. This name also might be considered in greater detail and from the point of view of the deeper truths implied in it. If we trace the word **vohu** its origin, we find it derived from an ancient root **vah-** (Skt. **vas-**), “to love”. And so... “**Vohu Mano**” is all-embracing LOVE. ...{Moses}⁹ taught mankind, “Love thy neighbour as thyself”, and the same teaching is implied in the name **Vohu Mano**. ...In the New Testament (*I Corinthians 13.13*) Paul has spoken of Faith, Hope and Love,¹⁰ and has declared Love to be the greatest of the three. And it is a fact that all Founders of Religions have pointed to Love as the one goal of creation. Love is indeed the Wish and the Plan of the Creator.

Ibid.

(And it is for this reason that I have translated the words **vohu** and **vahishtem**—in the **Ashem Vohu** prayer above—as “Love” and “the Greatest Love” respectively. It is also Dr. Taraporewala’s surmise that the meaning of the name of the Rishi **Vasishtha** is “the Greatest *Lover* [of God and His Creation]”; and as we also saw from the Gathic verse quoted earlier, Zarathushtra addresses **Ahura Mazda** as **Vahishtem**, and refers—probably—to himself as **Vahishta**:

⁷ Whence the English “right”. The Greek ὀρθός **orthos** meaning “right”, “true”, “correct” (as in “orthodox”) is closer to an Iranian variant of the Vedic ऋत *rta*, namely **arta**: which, when softened to **arsha** and subsequently after dropping the -r- sound, becomes the familiar (to Zoroastrians) **Asha**. Although it has, of course, extreme connotations of righteousness, it is also used, as for instance in the *Upanishads*, as the synonym of सत्य *satya* “truth”, as in the already-quoted lines सत्यमेव जयते नान्तरतम् *satyameva jayate nāntam* “It is truth that is victorious, not unrighteousness”. Thus its meaning is a *combination* of both truth *and* righteousness, a concept for which no modern language (and few ancient ones either) have a single word. Indeed as Dr. Taraporewala has shown (and you too will see if you read further), it even includes the concept of love; and thus it goes far beyond what in modern times has come to be understood as “truth” (as for instance in the term “scientific truth”). In my own view, in fact, the best elucidator of the meaning of ऋत *rta* for modern times is Robert Pirsig, the author of the ‘60s classic *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and its ‘90s sequel *Lila*, in the former of which he has gone to some lengths to equate the Vedic term *rta* with the Chinese term *Tao*, thereby according to it the very highest connotation any term can bear in any language. (Although Pirsig does not seem to have heard of Zoroastrianism, he *is* familiar with the Vedic *rta*, and thus may be considered to be dealing equally with the Zarathushtri term **Asha**.)

⁸ Literally the translation would be “**Asha** is good; it is the Greatest [Good of all]... (etc.)” However, as Dr. Taraporewala points out in a subsequent passage in the same book (and which I have reproduced on this page too), the term **vohu**, normally translated as “good”, also has connotations of “love”.

⁹ Dr. Taraporewala, like most people, mistakenly think it was Jesus who first said “Love thy neighbour”, forgetting that when he said it he was merely quoting from the **Torah** or **Pentateuch**, the first five books of the Old Testament traditionally attributed to Moses. Indeed in the **Torah** itself the passage appears dictated by the LORD God Himself, and so Dr. Taraporewala is not at all wrong when he writes “Love is indeed the Wish and the Plan of the Creator.”

¹⁰ The *King James Version* has “charity” instead of “love”, but the Greek original of the New Testament (and of St. Paul himself, who wrote in Greek), was ἀγάπη **agape** which literally means “love”. The “charity” in older forms of English is derived from the Latin **caritas** which is the Latin translation of **agape**.

Vahisstem Thwa Vahishta yem

Thou art the Greatest Love; and this one [*i.e.*, this person, namely Zarathushtra] is Thy greatest lover [*i.e.*, devotee].

The third **Amesha Spenta** is **Kshathra Vairya**. The term **Kshathra** is very familiar in India: for in Hinduism the warrior caste is called **क्षत्रिय kshatriya**. It derives from the root **क्षि kshi-** “[to] rule” or “[to] have power over”...and in an inscription hewed into rock two and a half millennia ago, the Emperor Darius of Persia proudly refers to himself using this term:

Ajem Darayavaush, kshayathiya vajraka, kshayathiya kshayathianam, kshayathiya dakhyunam.

I am Darius, the adamant¹¹ **Kshatriya**, the Ruler of rulers, the Ruler of [many] nations.

And from the term **kshayathiya kshayathianam**, which in later ages contracted to **Shah’n’shah** or “King of kings”, we derive the title Persian Emperors used to bestow upon themselves, and by which they were known the world over—even to the compilers of the Bible, who translated it into Hebrew: **המלכים מלשון Melech ha-melachim**.¹²

So the word **Kshathra** connotes “Power” or “Kingship”. And the term **Vairya** is derived from the root **वृ vr-** “[to] choose”, and means “capable of doing what he *chooses*” or, by extension, “worshipful”, “revered”, **वरणीय varaniya** “venerable”.¹³

The term **Kshathra Vairya**, therefore, stands for the All-Powerful *Will*, or *Might*, of God: a meaning reflected in a Hebrew term very possibly derived from this source: the name **אל שדי El Shaddai** “Almighty God”.

(For although it is not certain, the Hebrew word **שדי Shaddai** could itself be a contraction of the Iranian **Kshathra**. The **-r-** of **Kshathra** elides, as we saw above, even in Achamænian Iran: the **-thr-** thus becomes **-th-** or **-tt-**, and, in a foreign tongue, could thereafter easily become **-dd-**. And as there is no **ksh-** sound in Semitic languages, the **Ksh-** of **Kshayathiya** contracts (as it does in later Iranian itself) to **Sh-**, giving at this stage **Shaddiya** or **Shaddaya**. And finally, as there are no true vowels in Semitic writing, the **-y-** sound, represented by the Hebrew letter **י yod**, which is at times capable of representing Hebrew diphthongs as well, begins to be pronounced **-ai-**, rendering the name **Shaddai**. And hence the early English translation of the term **El Shaddai**, “Almighty God”, appears to me more apt and fitting than the meaning more often accepted by occidental scholars nowadays: “God of the Mountain”.¹⁴)

¹¹ The term **वज्रक vajraka** is normally translated as “strong” or “powerful”, but the literal meaning of **वज्र** is “diamond”—the other meanings obviously *derived* from the earlier one, since diamond is the strongest substance in the world—and thus the term **vajraka** may quite accurately be translated as “adamantine”.

¹² And which, after the rise of Christianity, was subsequently applied to Christ. As we shall see later on in this book, the influence exerted by the Zarathushtri religion on Judaism and Christianity is nothing short of enormous.

¹³ The implication here, that the Sanskrit term **वरणीय varaniya** may linguistically be related to the English term “venerable”, may justifiably raise a few eyebrows. However, Indo-European languages do possess the peculiarity that terms in them that *sound* similar also have similar *meanings*, even if the terms in question are not related *via* their linguistic “roots” or elements. This probably occurs because there is no hard-and-fast dividing line between one language and another, each passing into the neighbouring language over a geographical “transition zone” of sorts. People living in such transition zones—who by necessity are usually bi-lingual—when hearing a term belonging to one of the languages in question, often use a like-sounding term in the other language in pretty much the same way: after all, users of language are not normally experts in the theory of language, and cannot be expected to know in what way any term was *historically* derived from its so-called “roots”—which are in most cases hypothetical constructs of linguists anyway. And although Sanskrit and English are geographically by no means neighbours, it must not be forgotten that English derives much of its own vocabulary from ancient Greek and Latin, both of which were in close contact with the Persian languages and dialects of those times.

¹⁴ I shall have much more to say about this linguistic relationship in a later chapter; and that is why I have opened a door to the subject here. Exactly why, by the way, the term **אל שדי El Shaddai** is translated by modern scholars as “God of the Mountain” escapes me. If any of my readers does know, I shall be most grateful if they’d let me know as well!

Whatever the case, the third **Amesha Spenta** in Zarathushtra's scheme of "Holy Immortals" is the *Strength, Power, Might* of God. For it would appear that Zarathushtra, who as we have seen was a very practical man, considered it absolutely essential for God to have the *power* to do good, to be righteous, to love: otherwise all talk of goodness and righteousness and love would be futile; it would degenerate the Message of **Mazda** into a series of "goody-goody" Sunday School lessons, fit perhaps for little children, but hardly able to command the respect of even average adults, what to speak of Kings and Princes and people in positions of political power, whom—as we know—Zarathushtra was especially keen on converting in order to spread the Word.¹⁵

The Principles represented by the words **Asha, Vohu Mano** and **Kshathra Vairya** are so important in Zarathushtra's teaching that they are mentioned in *every single verse* of the *Gatha*. And it is to them the most sacred and oldest prayer in Zoroastrianism,¹⁶ the **Yatha Ahu Vairyo**, is dedicated:

Yatha Ahu Vairyo atha Ratush
Ashat chit hacha;

Vangheush dazda Manangho
Shyothananam angheush Mazdai;

Kshathrem cha Ahurai
A yim daregobyo dadat vastarem.

Yasna 27.4

This is the Iranian equivalent of the Hindu **Gâyatrî**, quoted earlier; for the **Yatha**, as it is sometimes called, is the most highly revered verse among the Zoroastrians. To this day Parsis sometimes call upon its power for help in time of trouble, or before undertaking any important task: **Yathâ, târi madad!** "Yatha, thy help!"

There are more than fifty translations of this (for Parsis) very important **manthra**, and all the interpretations differ from each other, sometimes greatly. I shall give my own, for what it is worth, and shall also give some alternative meanings for the first stanza, for I find it hard to be in agreement with all the points of any translation I have yet seen.¹⁷ I have therefore tried to give the best of whatever I have read.

Here is my first rendering:

As the Lord is capable of doing what He wills, so also the Prophet—by reason of his great store of Righteousness [**Asha**].

¹⁵ In this benighted day and age Parsis do not accept converts, but it is clear from a reading of the *Gathas* that Zarathushtra intended his religion to be for everyone, regardless of their birth or origin. Indeed he was so keen on converting Vistasp, the King of Balkh, that according to legend he is said to have performed miracles for the King—specifically, healing the King's favourite horse of lameness in all four legs—but only on condition that the King, his family, his courtiers and all his kingdom all accept and adopt the Zarathushtri **daena** (religion). It must be admitted, however, that all this seems to be a bit apocryphal, since in sharp contrast to the Judæo-Christian heritage, Zarathushtra himself does not seem to have proffered miracles as "proof" of the correctness of his teaching, relying instead on the listener's "Good Mind" (**Vohu Manah**) to accept his **daena** only because what it says is true: that is to say, in consonance with **Asha**.

¹⁶ Whether the prayer really antedates Zarathushtra—as some scholars, including Dr. Taraporewala, think—is debatable; however, it does occur in the *Yasna* just before *Gathas* themselves, which are the oldest *known* Zoroastrian texts. It does not, however, seem to be a part of the recorded words of Zarathushtra. But the *Yasna*, in which the *Gathas* are embedded, could well be composed at least partially from material that existed in some kind of recorded or remembered form during—and maybe even before—the time of the Prophet; and if so, could well contain pre-Zarathushtri concepts, and perhaps even entire passages.—It should also be noted that this verse is not a "prayer" in the Western or Christian sense, for it does not pray for anything, in the sense of making a request of the Almighty. It is, in fact, more accurately a **manthra**, a formula to be *contemplated in the mind*, so as to help the devotee realise deeper and deeper meanings in it every time it is repeated.

¹⁷ And it's not just me: many others have the same problem. The reason, as I see it, is that it is so far removed from us in time that over the millennia its words have acquired very different meanings from those which they originally possessed, at least for listeners of that epoch. In this book I have devoted an entire chapter—Chapter 17—to the problem of adequately translating extremely ancient texts, and thus I shall leave details of my arguments to that part of my book; however, it is as well to become aware that the problem does exist, and is perhaps more pronounced for the *Gathas* than for virtually any other literary work.

The gifts of the Loving Mind [**Vohu Mano**] are for those who perform deeds for the Great Lord of Existence.

The Power [**Kshathra**] of the Almighty is indeed his, who makes himself a protector of the poor, the needy and the meek.

This verse stands immediately preceding the *Gatha Ahunavaiti*, the first—and longest—of the five *Gathas*. Dr. Taraporewala says that he believes this **manthra** to be “the foundation on which the teaching of the **Gatha Ahunavaiti** rests”. If so, it would be worthwhile going into it in some depth, to try and get a good grasp of **Ahura Mazda**’s Message.

The first stanza says:

Just as God [**Ahu**] is all-capable [**Vairya**],¹⁸
So is the Prophet [**Ratu**]—
because he has a great store of Truth and Righteousness [**Asha**].

The word **Ahu** is usually translated, by most scholars, as “Lord temporal”, or Prince; and in many contexts in Gathic literature this is indeed its meaning. However, as Dr. Taraporewala himself admits, even while committing the error¹⁹ I have tried to avoid, *viz.* that of translating **Ahu** as “Lord Temporal”, the word itself is most probably derived from **Ahu** or **anghu** (Skt. असु **asu**) meaning “life-breath”. Now this is one of the roots from which the word **Ahura** or असुर **Asura** is itself thought to have been derived. In the **Unâdi**, another ancient Sanskrit lexicon, we find this phrase:

नितारं अस्ति इति असु
Nitâram asti iti asu

Asu means “the Only Reality”.

This term, then, in its Iranian form **Ahu**, is the one used in the **Yatha**, and signifies “God” or “The Formless, Incorporeal Truth [that is God]”, in resonance with the meaning of सत् **Sat** in the *Nâsadiya Sûkta* of the *Rigveda* quoted earlier.²⁰ At all events, it does not make much sense to imagine Zarathushtra, an intensely spiritual as well as practical individual, as ascribing omnipotence to anyone but the Almighty—he certainly would not, in any case, suggest to an earthly King that “Lords Temporal” are “all-capable”...being, I imagine, quite awake to the fact that even if his subjects did not, the King himself would know better, being pretty acutely conscious of his own rather severe limitations in this regard!

The translation of **Ahu** as “Lord Temporal” also spoils the

¹⁸ The term **vairya** is one more of those terms that are very very hard to translate. We shall go into it in greater detail later; suffice it to say here, however, that although the most commonly-used way in which the word is translated is “all-powerful” or “all-capable”, it is not necessarily the best way to translate it. Nevertheless, because it has been commonly so translated, I have used it here for my first rendering.

¹⁹ As Dr. Taraporewala himself puts it in the *Foreword* to his book *The Religion of Zarathushtra*, “The Gathas are *spiritual* in the fullest sense of the word. Therefore, we must never bring down their Message to the material level. The Bible speaks of ‘the Good Shepherd, ... [but] in the spiritual sense the ‘sheep’ are human souls [and the ‘Shepherd’ is Christ]. If we see [in those passages of the Bible] only ‘sheep’ [in the material sense] ... we should lose [the Biblical text’s] inspiration completely.” And so should we lose the **Yatha Ahu Vairyo**’s inspiration completely, if we translate **Ahu** as “Lord Temporal” or “Prince”—as many occidental scholars have done, and which Dr. Taraporewala has himself unfortunately copied—rather than as “The Lord” or “God”.

²⁰ It is also notable that the Iranian term **Ahu** (pronounced **Asu** in the Indian form of the Vedic language) may also be traced back to the Indo-European root **as-**, from which the English word “is” as well as the Latin **est** (also meaning “is”) are derived as well. Thus another meaning of **Ahu** could be “That which *is*”; and if we take the Vedantic dictum ब्रह्म सत्यम् जगन् मिथ्या **Brahma satyam jagan mithyâ** “God [alone] is truth, the world is a lie” to mean that in reality only God exists, then the term **Ahu** cannot legitimately be translated, in a spiritual sense, as anything but “God”.

symmetry of the entire verse; for as may be noted, in each of the three stanzas above the Almighty, along with one of the three most important **Amesha Spentas**, is mentioned. Since the Gathic name of God, **Ahura Mazda**, contains only two words, and since a repetition would probably mar the rendering in the ears of Vedic people, it seems fairly clear that the composer contracted the term **Ahura** to **Ahu**—and, in my opinion, contracted it to make it *better*, at any rate closer to its own ancient Aryan root.²¹

There is another term in this verse that needs examination, the word **Vairya**. We have translated it, as do many other scholars, as “capable of doing anything [He, or It] *chooses*”, since one possible derivation of this word is from the element वृ **vr-** “[to] choose”. (From this root is also derived the Sanskrit word वीर **vir** and its Latin cognate **VIR** “hero”, and possibly also the English “war” and “warrior”, for both the warrior and the hero may be regarded as waging war in order to be able to “do what they *choose*”). However, the Sanskrit language has another word derived from this same root, which is also used in the **Gâyatri Mahâ Mantra** quoted earlier: वरणीय **varanîya** “venerable”, “worthy of adoration”. The Avestan **Vairyo** may well be cognate with *this* term, and if so the word *Ahu* become even more applicable to God, and less so to the Princes of this world:

Just as God is worthy of veneration,
so is the Prophet—
because he is truthful and righteous.

Now *this* assuredly makes sense!

The term वरणीय **varanîya** is, moreover, the very source of the name वरुण **Varuna**, and as we saw earlier, it was **Varuna** who, through his epithet **Vedhas**, gave rise to the name **Mazda**. What could be more natural, then, if this verse indeed antedates Zarathushtra,²² that the name **Varuna** be at least hinted at in it?

यथा असुर वरुण [वरणीय] तथा ऋषिः
Yathâ Asura Varuna [varanîya] tathâ Rishih

As **Asura Varuna** [is venerable], so [is his] **Rishi!**

This rendering seems to me to make as much, if not more, sense than any of the others, considering the context—and if so accepted, the verse’s pre-Zarathushtrian date as well. It is also lent support by the closing verse of the **Shwetâshvatarâ Upanishad**—which, as we shall see, is so full of Zoroastrian concepts that an extremely strong case can be (and has been) made out for its being an attempt to introduce the teachings of Zarathushtra into India without actually mentioning his name:

²¹ Of course there may well be debate as to precisely from *which* Aryan root any particular word is derived. And if a word may be derived from two or more roots, it is often very controversial as to which of the two derivations should be taken as the “authentic” one. In this particular case, however, I know of no root from which the term **Ahu** could be derived so as to cause it to mean “Prince” or “Lord Temporal”, even though I know that the word *has* been so used elsewhere in the **Yasna**.

²² Or even if it doesn’t...it should be recalled that the name **Varuna** returned to Iran as one of the 101 Names of God in later Zoroastrianism. Of course this is understandable, as **Varuna** is one of the major Indo-European deities, appearing (under different variants of his name) in places as far away as India and Ireland.

²³ It is to be noted that the very earliest portions of the sacred texts—of any religion—do not extol “Prophets” of any nature. The **Vedas**, for instance, although composed by **Rishis**, do not extol the **Rishis** themselves, but the various Vedic deities: the **Rishis** are very much on the sidelines compared to the Vedic gods. In other scriptures too the same trend is evident. The earliest part of the Bible, for instance, speaks of the generations from Adam to Noah as all having heard the voice of the LORD, but no one among them—not even Enoch, who was so righteous that he is said to have “walked with God”—is considered to have been a “Prophet”. Even Noah is not a Biblical “Prophet”, although he alone of all the population of earth—along with his family—was righteous enough to merit being saved from the Deluge. And not even the Hebrew Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—are considered to be of the same spiritual stature as the true Prophets, the first of whom was Moses, “whom the LORD knew face to face” (**Deuteronomy 34.10**). And yet, not even Moses is regarded as being the “Son of God”, that place being reserved in Christianity for Christ alone. And although Christ is considered by Christians to be God, he is not as closely identified with the Supreme Being in Chris-

यस्य देवे परा भक्तिर्यथा देवे तथा गुरौ ।

Just as God is worthy of worship, so is the **Guru**.

Shwetâshvatara 6.23

Almost word-for-word the same as **Yatha Ahu vairyo atha Ratush!** Here in the *Shwetâshvatara*, for the first time in all of Indian literature, is the dignity and indeed divinity of the Prophet asserted in unambiguous terms: a concept that was born in Zoroastrianism, intensified in Hinduism (with its notion of **Avatâras** or Incarnations of God) and in Christianity (with its doctrine of the **Trinity** of Father, Son and Holy Ghost), and reached its culmination in Buddhism, in which the Supreme Being and the Prophet are not only equal in stature, but have become one and the same.²³

At this stage, and just for the sake of clearing up a confusion which has developed in Zoroastrian communities down the ages and unfortunately persists even among the majority of scholars—who really ought to know better—I should like to point out that the **Yatha Ahu Vairyo** and the **Ahuna Vairya** are *two different terms* denoting *two different mantras*: they are *not the same thing!* This point seems to have been missed even by the otherwise very careful Dr. Taraporewala. The **Ahuna-Vairya** (or **Ahunavar** or **Honover** as this term was contracted at later periods in Iran), was originally, as we showed in Chapter 1, the Iranian **Pranava**, namely **hun** or **hon**.²⁴ The word **a-hun-a** is made up of the three sounds **-h-**, **-u-** and **-n-** with the addition of an initial and a final **-a-**. The first **a-** is added as contra-aphesis, added for ease of pronunciation: a common enough phenomenon in many languages, illustrated in English by the term “accredit” deriving from “credit”, for instance, or “especially” from “special”; and the final **-a** is added for a similar reason: to render the following word, **Vairya**, easier to pronounce (for the **-n-** and the **-v-** sounds do not sit well in conjunction, in any language).²⁵

The word **Vairya**, as we have seen, means “venerable”, “adorable”, “worthy of worship”; and so **Ahuna-Vairya** means “the Worshipful [or Venerable] **hon**”. This is the **बीज मन्त्र beej mantra**, the “seed **mantra**”: the First and Foremost of All Sounds, as the Zoroastrian tradition unmistakably testifies no less than the Vedic:

The Sacred Word of **Ahuna-Vairya** did I, **Ahura Mazda**, repeat ... The Word which was before the Earth, before the Creatures, before the Trees, before Fire-the-Son-of-**Ahura-Mazda**,²⁶

tianity as is the Buddha in the Buddhist religion: for even though Christ said “I and my Father are one” (**John 10.30**), he also said “My Father is greater than I” (**Ibid. 14.28**). Since Zoroastrianism historically influenced all these religions, it is definitely possible that this concept born in Iran ultimately spread to India and Israel too.—And it is also to be carefully noted that although the **Yatha** does indeed extol the **Ratu** as being “as God”, Zarathushtra *personally* never speaks of himself as being Divine: as Christ in Christianity, for example, or Sri Krishna in Hinduism, always did.

²⁴ The **-u-** and **-o-** sounds are often interchangeable in many languages: indeed in Hebrew and Arabic a single letter represents both.

²⁵ There is, admittedly, another hypothesis, namely that the term **Ahuna Vairya** is composed of the terms **Ahu**, **-na**, and **Vairya**: the **-na** being equivalent to the English word “of” (as in modern Gujarati, for example, or ancient Celtic.) Thus the phrase may be taken as “The **Vairya** of **Ahu**”. But although *linguistically* this hypothesis does stand up, from the *common sense point of view* it doesn’t satisfy the inquiring mind—for then the question immediately arises: how should the phrase be *translated*? As “The Venerable [stature] of God”? The prayer—even in its first line—doesn’t speak of the venerable stature (or even heroism—that meaning derived from **vir**, “hero”) of *God*, but of the *Prophet*. The translation, in other words, doesn’t fit the meaning of the text itself.

²⁶ This phrase **Atar puthro Ahurahe Mazdao**, “Fire-the-son-of-**Ahura-Mazda**”, is commonly found in the Zoroastrian scriptures outside the **Gathas**, but is not found in the **Gathas** themselves. However, it is very likely *this* phrase that makes people think that Zoroastrians have scriptural sanction to worship fire as God,

before the Holy Man, before the Evil Ones, ... before all Corporeal Life, before all the Good Creation of **Mazda**, the Seed of **Asha**.

Yasna 19

It is quite clear from the above description that it refers to the Vedic **Pranava**, the Sound in which the Quintessence of All Wit²⁷ and Wisdom is expressed, expounded in the *Katha Upanishad* by the common ancestor of the Indians and Iranians, the Wise **Jamshed** or **Yama** the King (*cf.* यमं राजानं वरुणमग्नि-मन्वारभामहे, the **mantra** of commencing the **Pujas**) to **Nachiketas** his disciple, and illustrated in no less superlative terms:

The seat or goal that all the Vedas glorify and which austerities declare, for the desire of which men practice holy living, of That I will tell thee in brief compass. **Om** is that goal, O **Nachiketas**.

For this Syllable is **Brahman**, this Syllable is the Most High; this Syllable if one knows, whatsoever he shall desire, it is his.

This Support is the best, this Support is the highest; knowing this Support one grows great in the world of **Brahman**.

This One is not born, neither does It die; It came not from anywhere, neither is It anyone; It is unborn, everlasting, ancient and sempiternal; It is not slain by the slaying of the body.

Katha Upanishad 1.2.15-18

And almost like an echo, **Yasna** also declares:

And whosoever in this corporeal life, O Spitama Zarathushtra, doth mentally repeat this Word of Mine, and further mentally repeating it doth mutter it, and further muttering it doth chant it aloud, and further chanting it doth sing its praises—his soul will I, **Ahura Mazda**, help to cross over the Bridge into the best World, into the Highest World, the World of Truth, the Realm of Eternal Light.

It could almost be **Yama**, the King of Death, speaking to young **Nachiketas**, couldn't it?

The reason for even early Zoroastrians confusing the term **Ahuna-Vairya** (or its later versions, **Ahunavar** and **Honover**) with the prayer **Yatha Ahu Vairyo** seems to have been the antagonism the followers of Zarathushtra quickly developed for the Indian branch of the Vedic religion, which had not seen fit to adhere to Zarathushtra's injunction to abjure **Indra** and the other gods. Since the Indians laid enormous emphasis on their **Pranava**, the Iranians tried to get rid of *theirs*; and in this they largely succeeded, for it does not figure nearly as prominently in

when in actual fact they do not. Of course there is no question that fire is regarded as sacred in the Zarathushtri scriptures (no less than in the Vedic). But in all Zarathushtri scriptures, **Atar** or Fire is regarded as a **Yazata**, not even an **Amesha Spenta** (let alone the equal of **Ahura Mazda**.) And a reading of the *Gathas* makes abundantly clear that their message is one of uncompromising and strict monotheism; and Fire, "the son of **Ahura Mazda**", is definitely not sacred enough in the eyes of Zarathushtra himself to be quite on a par with the Almighty.

²⁷ The English term "wit" is derived, in fact, from the same Indo-European root as the Sanskrit term वेद **Veda**, namely **vid-**, which signifies "knowledge". Most interestingly, however, the word "wit" has come to be regarded in our own days as being synonymous with a dry sort of humour: as in "The witty Mr. Oscar Wilde". Now one thing that strikes the modern reader when reading almost any ancient sacred text is the singular lack of humour in it. Perhaps that is why anyone who speaks or writes of sacred subjects in a humorous way is regarded as being at least borderline blasphemous—as the Monty Python gang were regarded when they made their hilarious film *Life of Brian*. But it seems, at least to me, that a God without a sense of humour would show Himself up to be very imperfect, and thus not even worthy of worship! Perhaps we ought to remind ourselves, before we condemn any treatment of sacred subjects in a funny or witty way as being even borderline—if not entirely—blasphemous, that the term **wit** is derived from the same root as the term **Veda**, and thus should be considered just as sacred.

²⁸ Having spent a considerable number of years debating this subject with scholars on the Internet, I have found that the vast majority of them are reluctant to accept my thesis outlined herein with regard to the meaning of the term **Ahuna-Vairya**. However, it is not my thesis alone, but that of the redoubtable Shri Jatindra Mohan Chatterji as well—in whose translation of the *Gathas*, in fact, I first saw the thesis propounded. All I have done is take his original idea and develop it, adding arguments of my own to bolster it. It seems to me that those who refuse to accept this thesis do so because of a mental inertia they appear to have got into, not as a result of a carefully reasoned conclusion they appear to have arrived at. Thus I would

Zoroastrianism as it does in Hinduism or even Buddhism. And in order to do this they deliberately mutated the original meaning of the term **Ahuna-Vairya** and contrived to make it synonymous with the **Yatha Ahu Vairyo** prayer (and this was done in a very forced and unnatural manner, hardly convincing as a spontaneous process to even the most casual student). But the *Zend Avesta*, as its very name signifies, is a Book of Vedic Chants; and for this reason if for no other, this most Vedic of Vedic sounds, the **Pranava** or **Om**, could hardly have been absent from it at its inception. And thus there cannot be any doubt, at least in the mind of any impartial inquirer unencumbered with a load of erudition, tradition and stick-to-it-iveness, that its title in its original Iranian form was **Ahuna-Vairya**.²⁸

Furthermore, and to clinch the argument, the *Gatha Ahunavaiti*, the first and longest of the five *Gathas*,²⁹ is so called from the fact—mentioned by **Vyâsa** himself in the *Mahâbhârata*—that “it is adorned with the Grace of **Om-kara**” [or **Hon-vara**: *i.e.*, **Honover** or **Ahuna-Vairya** in Iranian]. It is because of *this* fact that it is called **हुँवति** *Hun-vati* or *Ahunavaiti*.³⁰ The matter becomes very clear when we note that the titles of all the five *Gathas*, like those of many ancient sacred works (*cf.* the Hebrew names of the Five Books of Moses; the *Nâsadiya Sûkta* of the *Rigveda*; and the *Isha* and *Kena Upanishads*) are taken from the first word or two of their text. The *Gatha Ahunavaiti* does *not* begin with the words “**Yatha Ahu Vairyo**” or even the words “**Ahuna Vairya**”; it begins quite differently (see Chapter 6). The conclusion is therefore inescapable: at the very head of this Iranian sacred text of the Vedic period is placed the **Pranava**, *just as it is at the head of every other Vedic sacred text*; and that is the reason it is called *Ahunavaiti*, which is to say, “The **Hon**-bearer”.

like to emphasise to Zoroastrian readers that even if the thesis sounds contrary to their accepted traditions and beliefs, I do have very strong and carefully considered reasons for saying what I say.

²⁹ The five *Gathas* are known as the *Ahunavaiti*, the *Ushtavaiti*, the *Spenta Mainyu*, the *Vohu Kshathra*, and the *Vahishta Ishti*. Except for the first of the five, they all take their names from the opening word or two in their first verse.

³⁰ It is to be noted that the second *Gatha*, the *Ushtavaiti*, begins with the words **Ushta ahmai**, which is not *exactly* the same as the name of the second *Gatha*; while the third, fourth and fifth *Gathas* begin with the words **Spenta Mainyu**, **Vohu Kshathra** and **Vahishta Ishti**, all of which are *exactly* the same as the names of these *Gathas*. Thus the meaning of the term **-vaiti** in the term *Gatha Ushtavaiti* seems to be something like “The word with which this *Gatha* begins”, namely **Ushta** (which can be translated, more or less, as “Radiant Happiness” or “Enlightenment”). If the term **-vaiti** in the name *Ahunavaiti* signifies much the same thing—and it is reasonable to assume that it does—then the term *Ahunavaiti* as a whole must mean that this *Gatha* begins with the word **Ahuna** (*i.e.*, it bears at its head the **Hun** or **Hon**, namely the Iranian version of the ancient Vedic **प्रणव** *Pranava*).

CHAPTER 6

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE BASIC TENETS OF ZARATHUSHTRA'S TEACHINGS (PART II)

Now let us pass on to the consideration of the other three **Amesha Spentas**, namely **Armaiti**, **Haurvatat** and **Amere-tat**. In contradistinction to the three mentioned in the previous chapter, all of whom are masculine in gender, these latter three are feminine; and it is perhaps for this reason that they are considered by some to be complementary to the former.¹

Armaiti or **Spenta Armaiti**, the first of the three “rays” of the “Mother Triad” (if so they may be termed), often stands paired with **Asha** in the *Gathas*. The name **Armaiti** consists of two parts, **are** and **maiti**. The former means “Yes” in ancient Aryan speech; in fact, even in modern Persian **âri** means “yes”². In the *Rigveda* too we find the word **âramati** in the phrase:

स्याद् अस्मे आरमतिर् वसुयुः ।

syâd asme âramatir vasuyuh

Rigveda 7.34.21

The second part of the term **Armaiti** is derived from **manas**, “mind”; and so the word **Are-maiti** means “Yes-mindedness”, if such a term may be coined (for its nearest equivalent in standard English, “Positive thinking”, has somewhat different connotations nowadays and does not quite reflect all shades of the meaning of this term). **Armaiti** or “Yes-mindedness” signifies that innocent affirmative faith which **Yama** in the *Katha Upanishad* enjoins upon his pupil **Nachiketas** as a *sine qua non* for the ultimate realisation of the Divine:

Not with the mind has man the power to get God, no, nor through speech, nor by the eye. Unless one first says “He is”, how can one ever ultimately realise Him?

Kathopanishad 2.3.124

Armaiti is the open-minded, child-like, “Yea-saying”³ faith which we must have if we are to even begin to seek the Truth. “Yes-mindedness” is not to be confused with gullible credulity;

¹ Because of the fact that they are of the opposite gender, there is a parallel of sorts between the relationship of the first three **Amesha Spentas** with the last three, and the relationship of the **Trimûrti** or three main deities of Hinduism—**Brahmâ**, **Vishnu** and **Shiva**—and their “consorts”, namely **Saraswatî**, **Lakshmî** and **Pârvatî**. As we shall see later on in this book, it is very likely that **Brahmâ**, **Vishnu** and **Shiva** all acquired their present prominence in Hinduism as a result of Zarathushtri influence; and thus the parallel is not all surprising. Indeed it is very likely that the concept of the Trinity in Christianity is also derived from Zarathushtri sources, and it is widely known that the Archangels of late-period Judaism are Zarathushtri in origin; all of which would mean that the diagram drawn by Dr. Taraporewala (and reproduced earlier) is not at all off the mark!

² The older English form “ay” or “aye” (as in “Aye, aye, sir!”) may also be derived from this root: or else it may just be a case of similar-sounding words acquiring similar meanings over time.—By the way, this phenomenon is alive and well in modern English too: I just heard yesterday that a US government official in Washington, DC was fired for using the word “niggardly” (as in “stingy”) in a document, which his superiors felt sounded too much like the word “nigger”! And even more significantly, although after a proper review he was later re-instated to his job, when people on the street were interviewed to see what their reaction was, a large number felt the firing was justified, and that in the interest of political correctness, government officials should not even use words which are *similar* to those which might be offensive to someone or other in our society, simply because similar-sounding words might cause their listeners to ascribe to them a meaning similar to the other, *really* offensive term.

³ This reminds us, does it not, of passages from Nietzsche’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Although there

it does not mean accepting as true whatever anybody may happen to say; it is rather belief in the words of those who have spent their whole lives, often at enormous cost, trying to find out the truth about The Truth—the Seers, the Sages, the Prophets. It would be sheer perversity to dismiss their vast experience, which alone might give us a clue to the solution of the riddle of Existence. **Armaiti** asks us to give, at the very least, due weight to the work of past experts in the Science of Being and Becoming. It is not blind faith; it is only a provisional acceptance of the word of the Prophet, until one finds out for oneself. If, after seeking, one discovers that what the Prophet teaches about the Soul and God and Reality and the Life Eternal is mere fabrication, one is entitled to disbelieve—but one should at least seek *first*, seek in the *right way* and *unto the end*, with “Yes-mindedness”. This, as a bare minimum, is what **Armaiti** expects us to do: and this is what we all actually *do* do as children. (And “except ye become as little children”, as Jesus truly said, “ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven”).⁴

The next **Amesha Spenta** is **Haurvatat**. This word is derived by compounding the common Aryan prefix सु **su-** (**hu-** in Iranian, and εὐ **eu-** in Greek—as in “eulogy”, “euphony” and “euphemism”) which signifies “good”, appended to the term उर्वन् **urvan** “soul”⁵—and thus meaning, literally, “The [state of the] Good Soul” (सर्वतात). A word similar to it is found in the *Rigveda*, where it connotes something like “Perfection”:

{to give original and translation}

Rigveda 7.57.74

It is perhaps best, then, to understand **Haurvatat** as “Perfection, [which is] the state of the Good Soul”.⁶

And the last Holy Immortal is **Ameretat** (or **Ameretetat**), which, as the Sanskrit cognate अमृतत **amrtata** also indicates, means “Immortality”. These two, **Haurvatat** and **Ameretat**, are usually found together in the *Gathas*.

These, then, are the **Amesha Spentas** or “Holy Immortals”. Their position in Gathic theology is extremely high; so very high, indeed, that in many places the *Gathas* seem to address themselves to the **Amesha Spentas** as if they were living, breathing,

is no reason to believe that Nietzsche ever read the *Gathas* or knew what the real Zarathushtra spake, there are nevertheless points of similarity between the two. But then, why should this be surprising? After all, Nietzsche, for all his faults, was a brilliant thinker; and it is one of Zoroastrianism’s strongest points (in comparison, at least, with most other religions) that it encourages the adherent to think things out for himself or herself, and to find out the truth independently. Indeed this trait was so strong among the Zarathushtris of ancient times that they were widely known in those days as “truth-loving Persians”.

⁴ This sort of faith is not just required for children, but for all seekers after the truth. In science, for instance, one progresses by first formulating a hypothesis, and assuming (provisionally) that the hypothesis is true, one tests it. If it turns out not to be true, one rejects it; but not until one has at least provisionally accepted it in order to test it. If one were to take as true only that which is *known* to be true, without assuming as true that which is not yet known in order to test it, one would never advance in one’s knowledge. In this sense, then, **Armaiti** means “faith”, not so much in the Roman Catholic sense of *credo quia absurdum est* (“I believe because it is absurd”), but rather in the sense of “I believe because I want to know the truth”. This, in fact, is the reason it has traditionally been paired in Zoroastrianism with **Asha**, “Truth”.

⁵ The modern Persian for “soul” is **ravan**, obviously derived from **urvan**. *A propos*, I have recently learned an interesting thing, namely that in the New Testament—which, as I think all people know, was originally written in Greek—there is no precise word for “soul” (in the sense of a part of the personality that survives bodily death)! The Greek word translated as “soul” in the King James Bible is in fact ψυχη **psyche** (pronounced “psüche”, with a hard “ch”) which is also used in the Greek New Testament as meaning “life” (in the earthly sense, *i.e.*, from birth till death.) Thus the translators seem to have used the English words “soul” and “life” capriciously to translate the Greek ψυχη **psyche**, which in any case in classical Greek means neither the one nor the other. (The original New Testament uses another Greek word, ζωη **zoê**, to signify “Eternal Life”, such as one may hope for in heaven. In classical Greek, of course, **zoê** does signify “life”, as in “zoology”.)

⁶ Another translation has often been “Wholeness”.

conscious entities, not incorporeal Principles⁷ or attributes of the Divine. At times we find them all addressed together as **Mazdao Ahuraongho**, “The **Mazda Ahuras**” (plural), a term which includes the Supreme Being as well. There is virtually no verse in the *Gathas* which does not speak of one or the other of the **Amesha Spentas**. The *Gathas* are, in a sense, Hymns *specifically addressed* to these Eternal Holy Ones.

One point, therefore, which makes Zarathushtra’s teaching stand out from that of Vedic teaching in general⁸ is their emphasis on specific, abstract *Principles*—as opposed, certainly, to rites, rituals and ceremonies, of which he was certainly never fond: he evidently liked keeping things simple.

Zarathushtra’s emphasis on Principles is also reflected in the *Gatha*’s stress on strict and uncompromising monotheism—a monotheism so strict, as we have seen, that it did not countenance even other *names* conferred upon the Great Spirit: a lesson his followers seem to have forgotten over the ages, when at a later period they compiled a list of 101 names of **Ahura Mazda** (of which the 44th, by the way, is **Varuna**). Zarathushtra’s insistence on absolute monotheism—the first such proclamation ever made in the history of humankind—has been the inspiration of every single subsequent religion that has stood the test of time; and as we shall show, this inspiration was not always indirect: a great deal of research carried out by numerous scholars indicates that both Judaism and Islam, and through Judaism Christianity as well, were directly influenced by **Mazdayasni** ideas. We shall examine these matters in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

That God is not only One, but that He is in addition *Formless*, is also clear from Zarathushtra’s selection of the term **Ahura** or **असुर Asura**, which, as we saw, is probably derived from the root **असु asu** “life-breath”. This word has a very interesting history. The expression in English which most closely corresponds with it is “Spirit”, a term directly descended from the Latin **SPIRITUS** which also initially meant “breath” or “life” (*cf.* **SPIRARE** “to breathe”.) In translations of the Bible the originals of the Latin **SPIRITUS** are **πνευμα pneuma** “air” (Greek) and **רוח ruah** “wind” (Hebrew), both of which are in the Bible closely connected with the spiritual meaning of the term **असुर Asura** or **Ahura**: for the word **רוח ruah** first occurs at the very beginning of *Genesis* with this same connotation:

רוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים ...
...ve-ruah Elohim merahefet al-pnei ha-mayim

...and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.⁹

Genesis 1.24

⁷ This trait, however, is common to almost all ancient texts, especially Aryan. The Vedas anthropomorphise just about everything in nature, starting with their very first line **अग्निमिळे पुरोहितम् agnim ilé purohitam** “Fire, thou preceptor of Iran”; and the Greeks too used to ascribe a human form to just about everything, including **Ψυχη Psyche**, who according to them was a maiden. In this way, most probably, were born the “gods” of the ancient Aryans. In our benighted day and age we seem to have lost the ability to commune with nature and with spiritual principles such as Goodness, which probably explains our blatant disrespect towards both. This may also be due to our Judæo-Christian heritage—even those of us who are not Jews or Christians are affected by it, due to the enormous influence Western thought has exerted on the world since the dawn of Industrial Age—and the emphasis in the Bible of miracles wherein God overpowers nature, for example by causing the Red Sea to part or the Sun to stand still, such subjugation of nature being proffered as “proof” of God’s Divinity. And in addition, due to our modern stress on monotheism—and our subsequent feelings of superiority over polytheists—we think it was our distant forefathers who were misled, rather than ourselves; but given the mess we have made of our own environment, who is say we are right in so thinking? Maybe those who worshipped the forests, waters and shining streams were actually more enlightened than we are, after all. I have discussed these matters at much greater length in Chapter 17.

⁸ It is true, no doubt, that the Vedas emphasise the more material things in creation far more than what we today call the spiritual—that they sing the glories, for example, of the Earth, the Waters, the Wind and Fire with far greater gusto than they do those of Faith, Righteousness or the Good Mind, even though they don’t altogether neglect these latter principles. This is one additional reason scholars think Zarathushtra lived the *late* Vedic period, when people were beginning to realise that abstract values and qualities were far more important in life than concrete material things, even the most glorious of them like the Sun. But then again, are the Vedas wrong to emphasise the glories of nature, even more than those of the spirit? Would not our planet have been a much better place today, had we demonstrated towards it even a fraction of the reverence our Vedic ancestors did? And if the answer to this question is “Yes”, shouldn’t one call the Earth or Fire, for example, just as decidedly “spiritual” entities as Truth or Righteousness? I leave it to the reader to decide.

Even Islam has adopted this terminology (in the word **ruh** meaning “soul”); and when so many tongues and so many religions have used the same imagery to illustrate the same concept, it is as clear as can be that the term **Ahura Mazda** which Zarathushtra selected for the Supreme Being is best translated into English by the expression “Great Spirit” or “Mighty Spirit” (and we discussed earlier the meaning of the term **Mazda**). When one considers in addition that Judaic doctrine, which from its inception eschewed any and every form ascribed to the Almighty, nevertheless accepts **רוח** **ruah** as a perfectly appropriate term to be coupled with **אלהים** **Elohim** “God”, it also becomes clear that Zarathushtra too meant **Ahura** to connote the *Formlessness* of the Divine: about which we are left in no doubt whatsoever when we read his forceful invectives against the **daevas** and their graven images or **murthis**.¹⁰

Perhaps it is as well at this stage to clear up a misconception, common unfortunately among many people especially in the West and even—sad to say—among some Parsis, that Zarathushtra’s teaching is *dualism* and not *monotheism*,¹¹ and that he has postulated an “eternal struggle between **Ormuzd** and **Ahriman**, God and the Devil, or Good and Evil”, and that in this struggle the two sides are more or less evenly matched.¹² It should be emphasised that Zarathushtra himself never postulated any such thing; it was the benighted theologians of a later epoch (witness the loose **dvandva** [couple] **Ahura Mazda** compressed into the compact **Ormuzd**—a transformation that must have taken many centuries) who cooked up all this silly stuff; another reason, in my opinion, for the decline of formal Zoroastrianism. What the Prophet *himself* said was that **Ahura Mazda** creates two **mainyus** or forces, the **Spenta** “Peaceful” or “Holy” force and the **Angra** or “unholy” force, which are never in agreement with each other; and of these two, “the Wise”, says Zarathushtra, “choose aright; [but] the unwise choose not thus—and go astray”. It is clear from the very first verse of Chapter 3 of the *Yasna*, which deals with the subject, that Zarathushtra considers *both* of these forces as created by **Mazda** (**Mazdatha**), and “it is only in later Zoroastrian works”, as Dr. Taraporewala says, that “this doctrine has undergone a strange transformation: from being a ‘creation of Mazda’ the Evil Spirit has become the rival and almost the co-equal of God”. In point of fact, Zarathushtra indicates that these **mainyus** are at a lower level than the Mighty Spirit, for he prays:

Mainyush hacha thwa eaongho

⁹ More literally, “The Wind of God moves hither and thither across the face of the water.” As you can see, in its initial parts even the Bible has nature’s imagery at heart. Later on, of course, the Bible gets much more abstract: “And what does the LORD require of thee, but to do justice and walk humbly before thy God?” But in **Genesis** itself the picture of the LORD God that emerges is much more akin to that of the Greek **Zeus** or the Vedic **Indra**, taken however to a higher extreme.

¹⁰ The idea that the Deity should not have a form did not *originate* with Zarathushtra; but there can be no question that it was he who first laid so big a stress on this concept, which was subsequently taken over by Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

¹¹ The idea that **Mazda Yasna** is dualistic is very ancient indeed—as old, in fact, as the *RigVeda*, wherein we find the following verse: **द्विता यदीम् किशतासः अभिष्व नमस्यन्तः उपवोचन्त भृगवः** “Even as the **Chistis** [mystics] of the **Bhrigu** clan, splendid and respectful *dualists*, greet him [*i.e.*, the Fire]...” As we have seen (Chapter 2), Zarathushtra seems to have belonged to the clan of the **Bhrigus**, and thus it is very possible that the dualistic trend in Zoroastrianism antedates even Zarathushtra. However, as we shall see, this dualism is *not* to be construed so much as a struggle between Good and Evil, but more as the basis of Zoroastrian ontology (science of Being and Becoming; or, as we may say in Western terms, the Zarathushtri view of Creation—*i.e.*, as to how, from the undivided Unity of **Ahura Mazda**, the multifaceted universe comes into existence.) We shall discuss this matter further in the following pages.

¹² So evenly matched, in fact, that according to later Zoroastrian theologians, unless humanity comes to the aid of God, at the end of the day it might be the Devil who ends up the winner! Certainly no other religion has ever portrayed the struggle between the Divine and Anti-Divine as being so very closely contested. This was probably a way to make the populace realise that they, too had an obligation to be righteous, and should not merely sit back on the sidelines and watch Good and Evil slog it out between themselves; and from that viewpoint the idea is worth taking seriously, for unless we ourselves participate in the struggle to enthrone the Good and to dethrone Evil, religion—of any sort—doesn’t make any sense.

From the [level of the] **mainyus**, I would rise up to Thee, [O Ahura Mazda].

Gatha 28.11

The **mainyus** are the *forces*, or *powers*, of **Mazda**. They did not come into being all of a sudden, out of nothing; they issued out of the transcendent status of **Mazda**, and the belong to the Great Spirit.

The reason for Zarathushtra’s postulation of the two **mainyus** or forces appears in actual fact far more complex and all-embracing than an illustration of the struggle between Good and Evil, which is only a part of it. We should go into this matter in some depth, for it forms an important aspect of the Iranian Prophet’s teaching, particularly from the ontological point of view.

One of the verses of the 30th Chapter of the *Yasna*, in which as we said earlier this subject is discussed at length, says:

**At cha hyat ta hem mainyu jasetem paourvim dazda gaem
cha ajyaitim cha**

Now when these two **mainyus** first came together, they created motion and also inertia [or “non-movement”].

Gatha 30.44

From the philosophical perspective this verse is of very great importance, for it elucidates the Zoroastrian view of Creation: the process by which the multifaceted Universe came into being. It is the basis of Zoroastrian ontology, or Theory of Existence.

The Hindu stand on the matter, as epitomised by the **Sânkhya** doctrine, is that the multifarious phenomena of nature came into existence by the action of *three* forces, namely **सत्त्व sattva**, **रजस् rajas** and **तमस् tamas**¹³—as in the following verse:

अजामेकां लोहितशुक्लकृष्णाम् ।
ब्रह्मी प्रजाः सृजमानां सरुपाः ॥

Prakriti, [*i.e.*, the primeval, undifferentiated, “pre-created” substance of Nature], which is of red, white and black hue,¹⁴ and is unborn and unique, gives birth to many offspring resembling herself [and thus gives rise to the manifested Universe].

Shvetâshvatara Upanishad 4.5

Now Zarathushtra does not recognise the second of these, **rajas**, as an independent force, although he does allude to it, as for example **hen-kereta** (Sanskrit **सं-कृत्** or **सं-कुर्वतः**: “the equi-

¹³ The Hindu terms **sattva**, **rajas** and **tamas** may loosely be translated as “[the spirits of] truth, [of] energy [and of] darkness”. These are the three **गुण gunas**, or properties, of things and people. Each object or person, according to Hindu doctrine, contains all three in varying proportions; and the characteristics of that particular object or individual is a result of the variation in the proportions of these properties. Thus, for example, a **Rishi** would contain a great deal of **sattva** in his personality, while a warrior would likely contain a great deal of **rajas** in his, and a thief might contain a great deal of **tamas**: not, however, that the other **gunas** would be entirely absent from the personality of any of them.

¹⁴ The colours of these three **gunas** are traditionally taken to be white (for **sattva**), red (for **rajas**) and black (for **tamas**), and that is how the **shloka** quoted here refers to them. The reason is that objects too, in addition to persons, are regarded as possessing these three properties in varying proportions. For instance, the red fire would be considered very “energetic”, and thus to be highly **râjasic**; the burnt-out and blackened ember would be considered to be rather dark, and thus **tâmasic**; while the extremely white Sun would be regarded as **sâtivic**, and thus more “righteous” than any other object on earth or in the heavens.

doer”—*Gatha 31.14*); he considers **rajas** to be only a state of *balance* between the other two, **सत्त्व sattwa** or **spenta** and **तमस् tamas** or **angra**. Evidently, by the principle of the “razor” enunciated millennia later by William of Occam, Zarathushtra felt the need to eliminate the unnecessary.

It is to be noted, moreover, that although **Sânkhya** speaks of *three* forces, the *Rigveda* itself speaks only of *two*:

स सन्नीचीः स विषुचीर्वसानः ।
आ वरीवर्ति भुवनेषु अन्तः ॥

Wielding the two forces, the **Sadrichi** [or centripetal] and the **vishuchi** [or centrifugal], He rotates in the Universe [or, “this is how the Universe evolved”].

Rigveda 10.177.3

Thus the *Gatha*—as is of course to be expected—is more representative of the original Vedic point of view. It is also, in effect, the same as that of the widely accepted modern philosophical point of view, as represented by Hegel, who says that on account of the contradiction inherent in the Absolute, which can be neither Real nor Unreal (*cf.* **नासदासीन्नो सदासीत् तदानीम्** “Then there was neither non-Being nor Being”—*vide* Chapter 1), there arises a process he calls “dialectics”: the continuous sequence of Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis; and the Universe is the result of the onward recurrence of these. Hegel is careful to note that of these three, Thesis and Antithesis are the only *real* forces, and that Synthesis is only a stage of unstable equilibrium, which breaks up again and again into Thesis and Antithesis: in fact, this is the reason he calls the process *dialectics* and not “*trialectics*”: that is to say, the interplay of *two* forces, not three. (So the *Gatha* is quite up-to-date in this regard!)

But Zarathustra does not stop at describing the origin of the Universe: he goes on to show how these same two forces affect us, as thinking, feeling, living human beings.¹⁵ For the next lines of the same verse say:

**Yatha cha anghat apemem angheush achishto dregvatam
at asuaune Vahisitem Mano**

[These two forces] ultimately, at the end of life, become the Vilest Lie for the villainous [on the one hand], and the most Loving Heart for the Righteous [on the other].

Ibid.

It is *this* which gave rise to the concept—correct in its own way, no doubt—that **Mazda** wishes us to side actively with **Spenta mainyu** against the **Angra**. However, unthoughtful theolo-

¹⁵ We have to remind ourselves that in ancient times, people did not subscribe to the modern notion of dividing the sciences into those dealing with matter and those dealing with the mind, each group separate from the other. Thus whenever ontology and creation were discussed, so also were morality and ethics: they *had* to be connected, for it was inconceivable in the minds of the ancients that the Almighty would even think of separating His function as Creator of the World from His function as The Lord Most Righteous and Merciful.

gians of a later age promoted **Spenta mainyu** to the level of the Great **Asura** Himself,¹⁶ which was philosophically speaking quite wrong; this elevated **Ahriman** (the degenerate form of the Gathic term **Angra mainyu**) to the status of **Ormuzd** (the degenerate form of **Ahura Mazda**), and made Satan a rival in the Battle of Existence, quite capable of overthrowing even God if we humans did not come to His aid. Zarathushtra himself did not say, or for that matter even imply, any such thing. For him, **Ahura Mazda** was always supreme.

In point of fact Zarathushtra does not even deem evil-doers *eternally* condemned; there is hope for them too, for their evil passion must, perforce, wear off one day; and then even these lost ones are taken back by **Mazda**, in His infinite mercy, unto His bosom:

**At cha yada aesham
kaena jamaiti aenanghamat Mazda taibyō kshathrem
Vohu Managha voi-vidaitiaibyō saste Ahura yoi Ashai
daden jastyō drujem**

And when the frenzy departs from these sinners, then **Mazda** Himself, with the help of His Loving Mind, makes them understand, and inspires in them His Strength; **Ahura** Himself instructs those who surrender the Lie into the hands of Righteousness.

Gatha 30.8

Why, Zarathushtra envisions the ultimate collapse of the Evil One himself:

**Yad ji ava drujo avo bavaiti
skendo spayathrahyaat asishta yaojante a hushitoish
Vangheush Manangho**

Then forthwith the inflated Devil collapses, while those who are purest in heart are yoked to the cord of the Loving Mind.

Gatha 30.10

It should be remarked that in the above two verses, as also elsewhere, Zarathushtra does not refer to the Devil as **Angra mainyu** but as **Druj**: a word which connotes something far more debased, evil, vile and maleficent than merely *anger*.¹⁷ It is, in the deepest (and unholy) sense the very opposite of **Asha**, and signifies “The Lie”, “Unrighteousness”, “the Wickedest of the iniquitous”, the “Prince of Darkness”. We saw (page ...) that our very word “dark” is probably an offshoot of this term. The Sanskrit cognate **द्रुह** means “fiend” or “evil power”, while the

¹⁶ I think it ought to be remembered that in contrast to Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity—in which there have been many Prophets, **Rishis** and even **Avatāras**—in Zoroastrianism the *only* person deemed to have been in contact with the Divine is Zarathushtra himself. As a result, Persian theologians who came after Zarathushtra, whenever they injected a notion of their own into Zoroastrianism, did so claiming that it had been **Ahura Mazda** Himself who had revealed these notions to Zarathushtra. Thus even the **Vendidad**, which as its language amply shows could not have been composed even in the same millennium as Zarathushtra—let alone the same century—nevertheless purports to be teachings imparted to Zarathushtra by **Ahura Mazda** (and orthodox Parsis still believe this to have been the case!) The result is that the Zoroastrian scriptures subsequent to the **Gathas** were composed by many people who, in all probability, knew nothing of the Mind Divine—which might have been one reason why Islam so readily overthrew Zoroastrianism in Iran, while it was incapable of doing the same to Hinduism in India (despite India having been conquered by Muslim invaders again and again, and in fact having been under Mogul Islamic rule for almost two centuries.)

¹⁷ Of course **angra mainyu** doesn’t *really* mean the “angry mind”, but as I explained earlier, in Indo-European languages words which *sound* similar begin to acquire similar meanings too, and so I thought I might contribute to this process myself a little bit!

Old Persian **draoga** or **drauga** (also derived from **druj** or **drug**) means both “enemy” as well as “the untruthful One”—a term used, for instance, by the Emperor Darius in rock edicts carved out under his orders. The Rev. J.H. Moulton, a Christian divine and scholar of the Avesta who taught the subject at Oxford during the early years of this century, remarks on this: “We can see that the king’s language is most remarkably in accord with the Gathas, since every form of evil reduces itself to this one term”. And he adds: “For Zarathushtra himself, as studied in his own Hymns, ‘The Lie’ is beyond all computation the name for the spirit of evil.”

But enough of these dark and dismal thoughts. Let us turn to what Zarathushtra regarded as the *ultimate aim of his teaching*: indeed, of Existence itself.

Nietzsche’s **Zarathustra**, virtually echoing the original Prophet, sings:¹⁸

<i>Eins!</i>	<i>One!</i>
© Mensch! gib Acht!	O Man! attend!
<i>Zwei!</i>	<i>Two!</i>
Was spricht die tiefe Mitter- nacht?	What doth deep midnight’s voice contend?
<i>Drei!</i>	<i>Three!</i>
“Ich schlief, ich schlief—	I slept my sleep—
<i>Vier!</i>	<i>Four!</i>
Aus tiefen Traum bin ich er- wacht: -	And now awake at dreaming’s end:-
<i>Fünf!</i>	<i>Five!</i>
Die Welt ist tief,	The world is deep,
<i>Sech!</i>	<i>Six!</i>
Und tiefer als der Tag ge- dacht.	Deeper than day can compre- hend.
<i>Sieben!</i>	<i>Seven!</i>
Tief ist ihr Weh—	Deep is its woe—
<i>Acht!</i>	<i>Eight!</i>
Lust—tiefer noch als Herze- leid:	Joy—deeper than heart’s agony:
<i>Neun!</i>	<i>Nine!</i>
Weh spricht, Vergeh!	Woe says: Fade! Go!
<i>Zehn!</i>	<i>Ten!</i>
Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit—	But all Joy wants Eternity—
<i>Elf!</i>	<i>Eleven!</i>

¹⁸ You may notice that Nietzsche spells the name of the Prophet **Zarathustra**, eliminating the “h” between the “s” and the “t”. This is also how many books and even encyclopædias—including the famous **Grolier’s Encyclopedia**—spell the Persian Prophet’s name today. But it should be remembered that Nietzsche wrote in German, not in English; and in German, an “s” before a “t” is pronounced exactly like “sh” in English. Thus Nietzsche intended the name to be pronounced in exactly the same way as we pronounce **Zarathushtra** in English; and indeed that is exactly how it was pronounced originally (as far as we are aware.)—By the way, it is a sign of the utter @\$%& of scholars today, that when I saw the name spelled **Zarathustra** in the **Grolier’s Encyclopedia**, I wrote (by e-mail) to the editors pointing out their error; but all I got in reply was a polite note acknowledging my comment, without anyone doing anything to rectify that mistake! One wonders, doesn’t one, how the world gets along at all with “scholars” graduating from our universities.

—Will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit!”
Zwölf!

—Wants deep, deep Eternity!”
Twelve!

Also Sprach Zarathustra 3.15.3

And the very first verse of the *Gatha* describes the goal of life in the most unambiguous terms:

**Ahya yasa nemangha
Ustana jasto rafedhrahya
Manyeuhs Mazdao paourvim spentahya**

For this I pray—I call upon Thy Name
With hands outstretched—for *Rapture*, Holy Bliss:
O Great Spirit, first I pray for this!

Gatha 28.1

Truly, all Being is hard to demonstrate; it is hard to make it speak. But tell me, brothers: is not the most wonderful of all things the most clearly demonstrated?

Thus Spake Zarathustra—“Of Otherworldsmen”

Is it not, indeed?

Beethoven:

<i>Freude, schöner Götterfunken, Tochter aus Elysium— Wir betreten, feurtrunken Himmliſcher, dein Heiligtum. Deine Zauber binden wieder Was die Mode streng geteilt: Alle Menschen werden Brüder Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt!</i>	<i>Joy, thou Lovely Spark of God Daughter of the Highest Heaven, We now tread, drunk with Fire Sacred, thy holy sanctuary. Thy magic bonds again together All that custom rends asunder; All men bretheren do become Where fly gentle wings of thine!</i>
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*Schiller, “Ode to Joy”:
as sung in the last movement of
Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony*

The Upanishads:

यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते
अप्राप्य मनसा सह
आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्वान्
न बिभेति कुतश्चेति
एतं ह वाव न तपति
किमहं साधु नाकरवम्

किमहं पापमकरवमिति
 स य एवं विद्वानेते आत्मानं स्पृणुते
 उभे हि एवेषेते आत्मानं स्पृणुते
 य एवं वेद
 इत्युपनिषद् ॥

The Delight of the Divine—the voice returns thence without being able to describe it, and neither can the mind grasp it. Who knows the Bliss of **Brahman**? Such a one shall fear nought, in this world or in the next. Verily, remorse and her torment shall not consume him, bewailing “Why have I left undone that which was good, why have I done that which was evil?” For having known them for what they are, he delivers his spirit; yea, having known both good and evil to be alike he sets free his innermost self, he who knows this Eternal Joy. And this indeed is the *Upanishad*, the very secret of the *Veda*.

Taittirīya Upanishad, Brahmānanda Valli

King David:

לבו נרננה ליהוה נריעה לצור ישענו:
 נקדמה פניו בתודה בזמרת נריע לו:

O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a Joyful Noise unto the Rock of our Salvation; let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a Joyful Noise unto Him with Psalms.

Psalm 95.1,2

For *Joy* is to Zarathushtra, as it is to Nietzsche, to Beethoven and Schiller, to the author of the *Upanishad* and to the Psalmist—indeed, is it not to all of us?—its *own* justification: *it is the one thing that needs no further justification*. And it is the great glory of Zarathushtra that of all the Sages, all the Seers, all the Prophets and composers and authors and poets of history, he was the first to say so in the most unambiguous terms:

Vahishta ishtis sravi Zarathushtrahe Spitamahya
 Ye ji hoi dat ayapta
 Ashat hacha Ahuro Mazdao
 Yavoi vispai a hvanghevim
 Yaecha hoi daben sasken cha
 daenyao vanghuyao ukhdha shyaothnena cha
 At cha hoi schantu managha
 ukhdhaish shyaothnenaish cha
 KSHNOOM MAZDAO VAHMAI
 fraoret yasnans cha

Fulfilled has been the Prophet's dearest wish—
Of Spitaman Zarathushtra;—for on him
Is **Ahura Mazda**'s greatest gift bestowed:
A marvelous existence filled with Joy!
Those who mocked him, even they have learnt
To reverence the teachings of his Faith,
And follow this good Creed in words and works:
May they too, in thought, word and deed attain
The Bliss of Transcendental **Mazda** now;
May every act of theirs sing of His praise!

Gatha 53.1,2

This is how the fifth and last *Gatha* begins. The theme, in fact, of the first verse of the first *Gatha* is taken up by it, and the Rapture (**Rafedhra** or **रफत्र rafatra**—from which the very term “rapture” would seem to be derived) for which Zarathushtra prays with outstretched hands at the beginning of his Hymns, is his at the end; and not his alone, but for all who tread the path of Righteousness. **Rafedhra** is not mere pleasure or contentment, or even happiness; it is the Soul's Ecstasy, the experience of supreme Bliss Divine; a Joy not dependent on any external circumstance whatsoever; that which beggars description and eludes the imagination, and yet is more real than Reality itself:

Khshanauthra Ahurahe Mazdao!

The Bliss of **Ahura Mazda**!

Virtually every prayer session of a Zoroastrian is preceded by this phrase.

K H S H N O O M !

This is how we find the word written in ancient Zoroastrian literature. It is a powerful word, and it packs a lot of meaning. Its origin, **क्षनु kshanu-**, is an ancient Aryan root signifying “[to] please”, “[to] delight”, “[to] rejoice”. It also has connotations of “[to] improve”, and more—it also connotes “[to] sharpen”. The word **Khshnoom** thus signifies something far more intense than the modern terms “Joy”, “Bliss” or “Delight”: it denotes a Joy that not only delights, but ravishes; a boundless Bliss which continually improves upon itself; an Ecstasy as sharp as the sharpest pain—and as unbearable too, except to the purest of souls and most Righteous of spirits. It is that Rapture which almost makes one feel one's heart would break: have you never, gentle reader, when experiencing something supremely, exquisitely, even excruciatingly lovely—a Florentine street in the hazy au-

tumn twilight, perhaps, or the snow-capped peak of Mount Hermon glimpsed over the hills and Sea of Galilee in the spring-time; a Michelangelo sculpture or a Beethoven sonata seen or heard again after a long interval; the cheery chortle of your first-born, or a single wild flower on the shores of a deep blue ocean—or maybe a dream you dreamed that was so vivid, so full of clarity, colours and sounds and even smells and taste and touch that it remains alive in your memory to this day: have you never felt that it was so *hurtfully* beautiful to your heart that you couldn't stand it any more, that you almost cried out inside "Please, *please* make it *not* so beautiful!" Did it not affect you both physically and psychologically; did it not grip your very guts, was as intense—but in an opposite sense, so to speak—as the keenest pain you have ever known. **Khshnoom** is all this, and more. It wells up from within; it arises from no external factor; *you* can do nothing to make it happen; it is the gift of the Great Spirit alone. But when you do experience it,—even if it be but for a moment!—it is as real as all the rest of reality put together; indeed the rest of reality appears almost unreal in comparison, and even the sharpest pain and the intensest suffering turns into a comparative illusion in confrontation with this concentrated quintessence of *Is-ness*. Was it not *this* that enabled Beethoven to continue composing—and composing his greatest works at that—after a cruel fate had robbed him of his hearing: in gratitude for which he could not leave his last, the most sublime symphony ever composed, in purely instrumental form, but had to complete it with the Choral "*Ode to Joy*"? Is it not this ecstasy that enabled Michelangelo to not only bear his agony, but almost to invite the latter upon himself—to "ask for it", so to speak—in order to somehow balance, as it were, the former. Have we not heard how the Sufi Saint Mansur al-Hallaj, in the ravishment of the "caresses of Infinite Beauty", at the ecstasy of the realisation that Reality was the real *he*—himself and no other!—announced in the most awestruck tones **An'al Haqq** "*I am the Truth!*" and begged the astonished townsfolk of Baghdad to pelt him with rocks: "So that", he said, "we may all go to heaven: you for having killed an infidel who has dared to equate himself with the Most High, and I too, having died at the height of Beatitude"! Did not St. Stephen, at the moment of being stoned to death, declare "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." Innumerable Prophets, Saints and Martyrs have died the cruelest of deaths, and even—what is crueller still—lived the most persecuted of lives, with an eternal smile on their radiant faces and genuine good will for their fellow men—nay, for their persecutors and oppressors themselves—in their hearts; for they "rejoiced, and were exceeding glad", their inmost being filled to overflowing with **Khshnoom**

Mazdao Vahmai, “the Bliss of **Mazda**, [Who is] the **Brahman**”.
सैष भार्गवि वारुणि विद्या, “This is the lore of **Bhrigu**, the lore of **Varuna** Who has His firm foundation in the highest heaven.”—So even the *Taittirîya Upanishad* admits, even as it re-introduces **Bhârgava** Zarathushtra’s and **Asura Vedhas**’s sublime teaching into the India in which Mighty **Indra** himself, along with his three-and-thirty thousand **devas**, had been victorious over the **Asuras**. . . . And is this not as grand a compliment as ever was paid by one religious movement to another—one that, moreover, was its arch-rival?