Lavathushtra

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
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 chhandā, which denotes the “metre” according to which Vedic Hymns are to be recited aloud. In fact, the word छन्दस् chhandās 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 chhandā 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 Zarathushtra\(^3\)—is the most ancient book of Iran. In fact the San-
Zarathushtra

**INTRODUCTION**

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 Aryan, 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 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” for which also used to be called Palestine: these two are Judaism and Christianity. Two other Great Religions, namely Hinduism and Buddhism, are the product of the Aryan genius; they also 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 Aryan 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 aarya 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, अरे (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 agriculture (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 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 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, ever 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

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, regarding which some introduction has already been given 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.
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 Nietzsche.

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.

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The 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 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 have started out as polysyllabic tongue-twisters. The commonest “word” in this regard is, of course, one of the first we all understand 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 נְכֶּר 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 mātr, which in Hindi and Gujarati becomes माँ mān, in Italian and Spanish madre, in German mutter, in Russian матерь mät’yr, in French mère, and in the mouths of children—in most European countries at least—mamma, 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”: इशु—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 हन 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 tinkling of water as it flows over stones in a brook. The Vedic ध्रक् bhrk, as its sound echoes, signifies “the blazing of the fire”; while the Avestan द्रुज 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 dhaatu “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 प्र 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 धरण dharanam “holding”, “wearing”. In like manner we find the root श्र shr “to hear”, which gives rise to the words स्रति 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 प्र pr “to fill”, which gives rise to the Sanskrit पूर्ण pûrṇa “perfect” or “complete”, and to the Iranian pouru which also means the same thing; we find इश्य 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 इच्छासिंह ichchhā “desire” and the Iranian aeshem “passion”. We find the root या yâ “to pray” giving rise to the Vedic यान्यां yânya and the Avestan cognate yânîm, 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 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 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 mishma‘at, deriving from the triconsonantal Semitic root 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 वस्त्र vas “to cover”, “to protect” has given rise to the Indian वस्त्र वस्त्र “clothes” and the Iranian वस्त्र वस्त्र “protector”, as well as the Latin vestītūra again meaning “clothes”; while नृ नृ has given rise, on both sides of the Indus, to नृवास nāra “man”, to नृवास nṛṣa (naripesh in Persia) meaning “king” or “prince”, and even to नरायण Nārāyaṇa in Sanskrit, and नारोिष-नरोिष 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 Greek songs leaves no doubt whatsoever that both of them are based on a common linguistic foundation. 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 याम Yama. In Iran he was called Yima Kshaeta, the latter part of this name derived from the root यिश kshi “to rule”. The name Yima Kshaeta means, therefore, “Yima, the King”. In India he is often simply Yama, although at times he is also referred to as a King, याम 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 Greco-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 पितृया पितृया Pitryâna, “the Way of the Fathers”; and having found the Way, became the King of the Dead. He figures prominently in the Katha Upanishad, in which he teaches a young Brahmin by the name of नाचिकेता 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 mrûtyu “Death”. But his teachings are those of a Seer, a Rishi; 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 of estate; 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 Greek 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 Râja and Râni (“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 -k, 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 Mahâesh Yogi of TM fame—simply means “great Rishi”).
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 Jamshed 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 Vivasvata (Sanskrit) or Vivanghato (Iranian), the Sun. He therefore is also called at times Vyākhyatā Vivasvata, “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 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). Vivasvata Yama and Vivasvata 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 Rājī”, who is said to have been born in a Royal family, is said to have descended from Yima Kshaeta.

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 Vivasvata.) The name Manu Chihar has come down to us as Minocher, a common name among Parsis to this day. Manu Vivasvata 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 dharma. Later, when Buddhism hit the scene with philosophical concepts refined to a degree never before—or 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, dhāma) is used precisely in this way in the very opening line of the Dhammapāda (a book whose title itself means “Path of Dhamma”: it is the most important scripture of the Theravāda or Southern School of Buddhism. To quote:"

Manopubbangamā dhāmāma manosethhā manomayā “[A]ll things emerge from the mind; [they are] sustained by the mind [and are] created by the mind.”

Rājī 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.

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

11 The word 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 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 sanātana (“eternal”) dharma. Later, when Buddhism hit the scene with philosophical concepts refined to a degree never before—or 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, dhāma) is used precisely in this way in the very opening line of the Dhammapāda (a book whose title itself means “Path of Dhamma”: it is the most important scripture of the Theravāda or Southern School of Buddhism. To quote:

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much farther than has hitherto been imagined by most people.

In the early years of the 20th century Lokmânya 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.\textsuperscript{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 Vyâsa, 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).\textsuperscript{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-

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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. 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. 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, as recorded in the Rigveda:

अपाम सोमं अमृतः अभूम
apâma somam amrita abhoom

अगन्म ज्योतिर् अशिदाम देवान्
aganma jyotir 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 “Mânasarovara, 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 “Mânasarovara”: 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 “Mânasarovara”, 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 Laurence 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!)
Zarathushtra

Mark the sound of the word अभूम abhoom “we have become”. The concept “to be” is expressed, in English no less than in Sanskrit, by two roots: the root वृ bhu 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!”

कि नु नस्त कृणधद भरति ।
किं उ श्रूतिः अभूमी मतास्य ॥

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 Bhagvad Gîtâ,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 smruti, 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 इष्ठपाणिशाद ishapanishad, 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 unforgottably beautiful lines as these:

न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न च तारकम्
नेमा विद्वृतो भाति कृतु अयमकलिषः ।
तमेव भातमनुभाति सर्वस्म
तस्य भासा सर्वाभिल 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-
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:

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.\(^\text{21}\)

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 Mundakopanishad says:

\begin{verbatim}
सत्यमेव जयते नानुतम�
सत्येन पत्या बितती देवयानः
येनाक्रमन्तव्रः शास्त्रातीधा
यत्र तत् सत्यव परम सत्याम्
\end{verbatim}

It is Truth that prevails\(^\text{22}\) 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.

\begin{verbatim}
शुच्यते तत् दिष्यं अविच्छृतम्
युक्त्वन्त्याच्छ तत् सुमयंविशालिति
दूरासुरेन तद्विदाहीतकेम
पश्चालितिहेतु निन्दितं गुहायाम्
\end{verbatim}

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.

*Mundakopanishad 3.1.6,7*
...yet the Veda takes us beyond, beyond even “Truth’s supreme abode”, beyond even “very far and farther than farness”:

Nāsad āsinno sad āsit tadanîm

“That 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.

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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: Ṫ Om. This most holy of holy syllables is actually considered to be made up of three parts: Ā, -a-, ū-, and -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: Ṭ Om. (And when Ṭ is written in a flowing or cursive script, its lines round off into the familiar Ṭ). It is known in India, variously, as the प्रणव Pranava, the उद्गिथा Udgîtha or the आकर 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. 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 Ḥun in place of the more commonly used Ṭ Om, on the grounds that the -h- sound is “stronger” than the -a- sound:

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

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 (or 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 Aνως 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 mantra (see ff).

23 Om. 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.
...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-worshippers 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. 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 problem as to whether the Aryans had to push it into mythology.

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 eight minor Puranas, although there seems to be little agreement as to their titles. The Shiva Purana 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

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We have seen that Vaivasvata Yama founded a system of worship which came to be known as the विद्यान 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 देवयान् 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 भूर्भवह स्वाह। तत्सनितम वेशयम।
भर्गो देवसय भीमह। भृगोऽऽ्योक्तः प्राणोदयात्।

Om bhur bhuvah svah. Tat savitum varenam.
Bhargo devasya dhîmahi. Dhiyo yo nah pracho dayât.

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

This mantra29 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 acquainted 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 mantra (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 言, which after Buddhism’s impact on the Far East began to be translated as “mind”, was in pre-Buddhist 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 nothing-ness—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).
Zarathushtra

Ekam sad viprâ bahudhâ vadanti
Agnim yamam mâtarishvanam 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, 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:

Agné naya supathâ rayé asmân
O Agni (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,
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\(^\text{32}\) 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:\(^\text{33}\) 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 \textit{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:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ये स्पष्टि प्रतिमुद्धानाः अदुराः सन्नः स्वभया चरन्ति}
\end{quote}

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

\textit{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 willful rather than a natural degradation.

The difference seems to have arisen over the use in worship of the icon or idol (termed \textit{mûrti}\(^\text{34}\) in both Sanskrit and the Zend). Some people preferred to worship via the medium of a \textit{mûrti}; these came to be called the Devayânîsts, “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-

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\(^{32}\) 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-

\(^{33}\) 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 \textit{murthi}—the \textit{t} softened to \textit{-th} —a phenomenon carried over to Greek too, where we find two letters for this consonant, \textit{θ} theta and \textit{τ} tau. India, on the other hand, went as usual much farther, and developed four sounds similar to our English \textit{t}: viz. \textit{ḍ} \textit{-T}, \textit{ṭh} \textit{-Th}, \textit{ṭ} \textit{-T} and \textit{ṭh} \textit{-Th} (these last two so hard and palatal that they have no precise equivalent in any European tongue, and the basic \textit{ḍ} \textit{-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 \textit{mûrti} is often romanised as \textit{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 \textit{-T}, \textit{-Th}, \textit{-D} and \textit{-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 Bhṛigu—whose name derives from the root bhṛk 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 Brahmā”, 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 Purāṇa:

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

Padma Purāṇa, Uttara Khānda 255.48

The cause of Bhṛigu’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, Bhṛigu is reputed on an earlier occasion to have hotly scolded his own father, Brahmā, 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 Yāna. This would also appear from a line in the Mahābhārata which declares that “the Asuras are the elder brothers, [while] the Devas are the younger”:

अधुराः भातरो ज्येष्ठा: देवशापि पीतपास: ||

Shanti Parva 33.25

The Amara Kosha also points out that

सुतश्रीश्वः दितिसुवरः पुर्देवस्व: सुरविषः ||

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 Āranyaka Upanishad says:

35 As most students of Hinduism know (I am writing this for westerners of course: Indians surely don’t need this note), Brahmā, 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 Mahābhārata, 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 Vyāsa, 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 Gane- sha 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 hon- oured 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 Gîtā: 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 Mahābhāra-
The Devas are the younger, the Asuras are the older.

Brihadāranyakopanishad 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 yagna) 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 its most ancient form of worship among the Aryans, dating back to the Vedic yajña, is derived from the Vedic yagna, which in turn would therefore appear to mean, respectively, “sacrifice unto the fathers” and “sacrifice unto the gods”). 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 दायामृत्थिः यं त्वा आपः लवश्य यं त्वा सुजनिमा जजान
पश्चातेन प्रविज्ञान् पितृयानां चूमदने सचिभाने 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 Kâli, 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 cognetric 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."
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 क्षत्रय, 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:

\[
\text{हर नदे परिदाम्यहम्} \\
\text{Ahura idam te paridadâmi aham}
\]

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”:

\[
\text{उ ऊर सोमनाथ देव नमोनिर्देशमहूर्तु दुर्गश} \\
\text{Pray unto him who wields the good arrow and the good bow;}
\]

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—itself 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, 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-tkaesa 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 Soma2 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

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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 Shîla 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 Nath, “Lord Soma”), and for whose worship enormous temples and idols were built—the most celebrated of which was the great idol of Soma Nath 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 *Sàma 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”:

\[
\text{ॐमिन्द्र सुरतं विशेषतमत्तं मदम्} \quad \text{I}
\]
\[
\text{मुक्षयं त्याग्यतमं भारा अर्थस्य साधने} \quad \text{II}
\]

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*. 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* quoted above, been called *madam*; for this word derives from the root *mad* which in Aryan speech connotes many wondrous things. It signifies “to rejoice” (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 Madhava, “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 मध्य mādhya, derives its name from this word: “Land of Mead, or Honey”. (And it is interesting to speculate as to whether the Arians 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 ἀμβρωσία 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 Vedicism 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 Râgha, 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: Ῥῆγες (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: 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 Sarasvatī (from the linguistic root or element स्र [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 sarasvatī, by other terms such as daryā, nādi, 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 Irā or इला Ilā denoting the western part, that is to say Iran, and भारती Bhārati 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 Sarasvatī. In the following Rigvedic verse we find all three mentioned together:

आ भारती भारतीक धरोधा इरा देशमिमांमनूयेभिभिनिः।
सरस्वती सरस्वतेवर्षालिक्षो देविभिष्म हद्य सदनु।

O Agni, may these three presiding deities, viz., that of India [Bhārati], Iran [Ilā] and the Indus Valley [Sarasvatī] 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 Irā or Ilā. This land is also called at times आरयाः Aryayāna (“Aryan Way”); in which case the stretch of territory we now refer to as North India is called आरय वर्त अर्या 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 Hiranyakagrabha Sūkta 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 Sarasvatī, 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 Sarasvatī 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 this river that the name Sarasvatī 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 Saravati 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 कस्मे देशम बधिः विभेद kasmē devāya havishā vidhema), in the Vedic version of the language the same word can also be looked upon as a simple affirmative कस्मे kasmē being equivalent to तस्म kasmē, being in this case the correlative of यस्म kasmē with which the verse begins).—And for the layman I may mention that here again (as with the Nāsadiya Sūkta 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).
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 Veda, 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 it 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, Sāramā 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, 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:

अर्त्रा नांम ते देशा: वाह्रकिना नांम ते जनाह: ।
Arattâ nāma te deshâh, Vâhlikâ nāma 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:

प्रच गवयतहर पर्थि पर्ववो 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 अहम तिरिंदिरे सहबं पर्ववाददेत ।
shatam aham Tirindiré shasram Parshâvâdadé

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

Rigveda 8.6.46

दुर्नास्वेयं दक्षिणा पर्ववानाम् ।
durnâsheyam dakshinâ Pârthvânâm

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

Rigveda 6.27.8
The three regions were even recognised to form a kind of Union known as त्रिशद्ध “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 पर्शु “Parshu”, in Iran, Parsa or Pars. (Perhaps it was called Parshu in Sanskrit because it was close to India, for the word पार्शवम् (pāršvam) signifies “side” or “flank”.)

The Hebrew word for Iran, יְבָשָׂר (yqParas), 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 Panini’s rules of grammar we find the following dictum:

पर्षोद्यो धिषेयादित्य अन्त अक्रो

“By the addition of a suffix, the word Parshu is changed to Parshava, which means ‘The Persians’.”

Panini 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 so much of the ancient Indians). Thus the rules of Panini also confirm that by the term Parshu the Veda refers to Persia.

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 Shravana, who ruled over it in Vedic days, as recounted in the Rig Veda:
The name कूरु Kuru (as in कूरु 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 asha “horse” in Sanskrit, which becomes aspa in Zend (and ΕΟΨ or EQUS 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”, כֹּבֵד parashim, derived (as it could well be) from the name כֹּב 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 आशवपति Ashwapati, which finds mention in the Rāmāyana, 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 Ayodhya and brother of Sri Rāmachandra. 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 Mahābhārata, to which we shall return later on, fortify the belief that Kekaya was in-
Zarathushtra
ded 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 Bhārata 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 Bāhlikā. When Ayod-
hyā 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 in-
dictions unearthed in Iraq references to a king called “Dasarat-
ta” or “Tursaratta” who in a later age (around 1600 BCE) ruled
over a region of Mesopotamia, and who may have called him-
self so after his distinguished namesake of Ayodhyā of yore. 14

***

The foregoing has been mentioned here to illustrate that dur-
ing 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 per-
haps even on adjacent non-Aryan lands. As we shall see, Zar-
athamshtra’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 de-
ities 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 इंद्र Indra means “Chief”, as for instance in
the words गजेन्द्र Gajendra (i.e., गज Gaj + इंद्र Indra)
“Chief of the Elephants” or भुजेन्द्र Bhujagendra “Chief of
the Serpents”. The term Indra was, therefore, a title rather than
a proper name. In different ages, according to Hindu mythol-
gy, 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 Όυρανος (Ouranos), and in the Roman as V R A N V S15 or U R A-
NUS, where he is considered to be no less than the ancestor of
Zeus himself, the King of the Graeco-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
to be not 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 आप Apan (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 ru-
ins, 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 actual-
ly pronounced the name ΟΥΡΑΝΟΣ or V R A N V S; 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: Be lenos, 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 solstic-
es, and in general reverence 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 Pa-
ter”—a name sounding far too much like दीव स पति
Dyaus Pitr (literally, “Father Sky”) of the Vedic Hymns
(and of which the Graeco-Roman cognate was, of
course, ΖΕΥΣ ΠΑΤΕΡ or JUPITER) to be lightly explained
away. The similarity between Gaulish and Indian cus-
toms and lore is in fact so great, that it has prompted
more than one occidental eccentric to assert that the
Druids were in reality Brahmans 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.
Zarathushtra

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:

अपेनिचिण्नां पिता न: चसुन्तु गर्गरा अपाव वृज

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:

अवनीचिंघय खूज कदन्तु पूर्णिमावहिषण्डु करिषानु

May the shaven Sages of Iran, with the Prshni in their hands, hail the downpour.

Ibid

Of the two, Varuna is the older deity. The cult of Varuna was the Pitryāṇa, which, as we have seen, appears to have gained greater following in Iran, while the rival cult, the Devayāṇa, 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. 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. The first three—the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda and the Sāma Veda—are essentially parts of the same book: as the Sanskrit scholars Goldsticcker and Griffith point out, the Rigveda is the original collection of material, while the Yajur and Sāma 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 Sāma Veda (the name possibly deriving from सामन् sāman “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. The name Atharva is of particular significance. One of the most ancient of Aryan Seers has been called Atharvān: the

17 It is interesting to see that this verse refers to Iranian Sages as mandukā “shaven” (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 पूर्णि Prshni (more accurately transliterated as Prshni), 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 Sāma 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 three first 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, Sāman and Yajas 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 devanāgarī, 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 Brahmā, the Creator”:

ब्रह्म देवानां प्रथमः सम्बन्धू पद्मस्य कर्तर्था भुक्तवर्म गोपता ।
स ब्रह्मविवां संविदाप्रतिभाम् अर्थवाय ज्ञेयक्रमय प्रह ॥

Brahmā, the first of the Gods, came into being—He who is the Creator of all, the world’s Protector. To Atharvan, 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 Zarathushtra

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 (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.

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 Atharvan 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 Brāhmaṇa, as a matter of fact, gives it the double barrelled name of Bhrigu-Angirasa Samhitā, and both these terms Bhrigu and Angirasa have their roots in terms for fire: Bhrigukh orhrk “the blazing of the fire” and Angâr 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 वेदा.

In actual fact the Bhārgava Samhitā and the Angirasa Samhitā are each separate from the other. This is the reason the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa 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 devanāgarī 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-one those on the lips, like -m- and -n- — 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 rivaling 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 Hinnells 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
**Mahābhārata** confirms this statement, and declares that the arranger or, as we should nowadays put it, the “editor” of the Vedas, the Sage Vyāsa, who is also considered to be the author of the **Mahābhārata**, taught the first four Vedas to his four disciples, and the fifth in secret to his son:

![Image of a page from a book]

The **Bhārgava 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-tkaesha** 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 ...), **Bhrigu** was the Preceptor of the Asuras. **Bhrigu** was also at times called **Angirasa**.

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

Kada ajem mûrtm ahyā 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 अहैं मूर्तिम  अश्य मग्ध्यस्य यां अंकित्सा: कर्पणा रोपयति

Kadā aham mûrtim asya maghasya yā Angirasas Karpanā 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 Vyāsa 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 Gîtā**—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 Vyāsa 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 **Bhārgava**, 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 devanāgari 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 भृगक: सोम्यासः।

“Soma-drinking Bhrigus are Atharvans”.

... and in the Chûlíka Upanishad:

अथर्वाणो भृगुस्मा:।

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

Zarathushtra was the most prominent Spitaman. Other members of that clan are also mentioned in the Gatha. Thus Maidhyomaha, a cousin of the Prophet, is called “Spitaman”; Haechad-asa, another relative, is also called “Spitaman”; and even a lady, Pouru-Chista, 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 devanâgari 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.

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.

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.

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-asa is Sechad-ashwa in Sanskrit, signifying a connection with horses; and (c) Pouru-chista (Puru Chêta in Sanskrit) is a beautiful name for a girl, signifying “[she who embodies] the fullness of wisdom”.

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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]”. 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*:

\[\text{Ashem vohu, vahishtem asti}\]

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

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

\[\text{Vahishtem thwa vahishta yem} \]
\[\text{Asha vahishta hazaoshem} \]
\[\text{Ahurem yasa va’unus} \]
\[\text{Naro Frashoshray maibya cha} \]

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

\[\text{वैशिष्ठ्यं तवं वैशिष्ठ्यं अयोः} \]
\[\text{अश्रयं वैशिष्ठ्यं सूर्दशाम्} \]
\[\text{असुरं यस्य वनानः} \]
\[\text{नरे वृषोद्धाम मय्य्य च} \]

\[\text{Vashishtham tvām Vashishthah ayam [janah]} \]
\[\text{Ashâya Vashishthâya sujoshâm} \]
\[\text{Asura yâse vanvânah} \]
\[\text{Nare Prishoshtrâya mabhyam cha} \]

“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 *Frasoshtra*, and for my good too”.

\[\text{Gatha 28.8}\]

In the first line of this verse there is perhaps a hint of a pun, 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 *Vashishta*]. For the name *Vashishta*, like the names *Bhrigu*, *Atharvan* and *Angirasa*, also came to be used as a sort of title, denot-

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\[27\] 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 Wyszkowski: 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 Vashista from drowning:

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

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\[\text{Indra protects from the external foe; Varuna upholds the moral order.}\]

\[\text{Rigveda 7.83.9}\]

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,” 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 Bhargava, 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; 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 Shilas 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 śamādhi, śamatha “perfect understanding”, śamādhi, “perfect speech” and śamādhi, karman “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 מֶלְכֶּשֶׁדֶּכֶד 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. 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:

 Mahad devanâm 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:

उष्णं पूर्णं अभ यदि विजुष्ठर महद्विजज्ञेः अयस्य यदं गाहः

He Who existed before the [very] dawn [of creation], that imperishable Mahad manifested Himself along the wake of the world (पदे गाहः padé gauh, lit. ‘in the footsteps of the earth’). 

{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, महामहां 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 Puranic 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 गाह gauh “earth” is reflected in the Greek γας geos, whence for instance our English word “geography”. However, in ancient Vedic a similar root गाह 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 गृहुर्वर gauh 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 urva 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.
Zarathushtra

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- “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 passagies 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
Zarathushtra practised by the followers of the course, in opposition to the aniconic, sacrificial type of worshiping them from harm.³

A stress on moral rectitude as on their deity’s prowess in defending “protect [them] from the external foe”; they did not lay as great

takesh, the Older Teaching.

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 monothemism; 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 (mûrti): 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 Paouryatkhesha, 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 fulfill 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-yasnins 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 sādhanā (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 Rāji (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 sādhanā. 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 Brahmaniḍya, Divine Knowledge. It is this Knowledge and this Wisdom that is embodied in the Gatha.

As the Rigveda itself admits:

योजययै क्रययः प्रययः पय सतः सुयः भेन 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 monothelism. Not that this was a new teaching; we have seen how the Rigveda had already announced that

एकं सत्त्वं वहुः चदनति ।

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?


Zarathushtra

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: 

"Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One." 

Shema Israel YHVH Elohenu 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 sakhare moirishto

(or, to put it in Vedic):

Mahad-däh 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-däh, 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 magahaya 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 root sakhare is svar in Vedic: “One Who goes by Himself; Singular; Unique”. It comes from the root svar “to go”. The cognate in the Rig Veda is sasvartá, as in this sentence: तद वसवर्त्व निहिते यद आकि (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 däh can be taken to signify “creator”, as in the Hiranyagarbha Sûkta of the Rigveda: स्वर्ग दानव यस्मिनसरसु “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-däh, i.e., “The Great Creator”! We shall have more to say about this matter later.
Zarathushtra

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 Yânists worshipped only Him, if they but knew, when Love was in their hearts:

**Ahya cha khaetush yasat**
**ahya verejenem mat aîryamna**
**ahya daeva. Mahmi manoï**
**Ahurahya urvajema Mazda.**

Him the khetu9 worships; Him the vrigana9 and the áryamna9 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 Devayânists, who worshipped though 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-tkessha, 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 the Asham and 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-tkessha, 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-
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:

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 yazaite  
drujashcha pairimatoish cha.  
Shyomam a’ipi daibitana  
ya’ish asrudum bummyao 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. 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.
Zarathushtra declaration of King Subbililiama of Mittani, 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 न इत्तषु जिष्ठसिसि भातः महृतास्य यथा
तेषः कल्याणं समभुया मा न समरे वयो

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 न अपारगुर्वत तथा सम्म अतिमन्यते
बिष्य हि ते यथा मनो अस्मयम् हन्न न दित्तति

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:

य अक्तिरसः शौनकोऽन्त्रूत्वा भार्गव शौनकः अभिषर्वः

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 Bhâr̥ga-va 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 archaeological 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 perpetuates 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 Yânists were also not asleep. They converted some Sages of Iran, as testified unto by the following verse:

\[\text{Rigveda 10.12.4}\]

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

\[\text{Rigveda 7.1.20}\]

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 Angiras and the Bharigus 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:

\[\text{Rigveda 1.105.8}\]

And Indra swore vengeance on the Persian Asuras:

\[\text{Rigveda}\]

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: Yavana, a corruption of Ionia (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 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 immovable—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. *Mahārishi* 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-ikaesa*.

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

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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 *εκκλησία* εκκλησία εκκλησία εκκλησία εκκλησία *ekklesia*) of the Hebrew original מְקוּמַת *khalah* 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 चुप्प बसग हदसखा ।

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) 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”:

स नो मित्र से बसकः ।

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

Rigveda; and also Taittirya 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. 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 YHWH, אלוהים Elohim, and אל שדוי El Shaddai. Subsequently Judaism came to address the LORD using a great number of epithets: ה空中 ברוך Hu “The Holy One, Blessed be He”, ירושלום Tsor Yisra’el “The Rock of Israel”, מקומ 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 Fatihah, by the term Rab. 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 Mithra—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 Somn 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 bullfight; but Mithra 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: महर्भानी meherbâni, 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 ब्रह्म Brahma, The Creator, whose name ends with a long -a- sound, while the former is pronounced almost as Brahmin 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 mediaeval 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 be best explained to westerners by saying that while God is a personal concept, Brahma is quite impersonal, 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.” Zarathushtra did not choose a mundane name like *Agni* (“Fire”), *Vâyu* (“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 *Paouryatakesha*. No; he selected an apellation 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*:

अष्टाद्य महामानय वेघसे ।

Ashâdhâya Mahamânâya Vedhase

Rigveda 7.46.1

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

राजा सूखश्त्रो अजानिष्ट वेघः ।

Râjâ sukshatro ajânishta Vedhâ

Rigveda 3.59.4

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

कीलापेय सोमपृष्ठाय वेघसे ।

Kilâlape Somaprishtâya Vedhase

Rigveda 10.9.41

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

प्र पूणानाय वेघसे सोमाय च उद्वलम् ।

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:

पतझुकूँ अहूरम् मायया हदा पश्म्णि मन्यन् विषितः ||
समुद्रे अन्तः कवयो विच्छलने मरीचीनाम् पदम् इत्यत्ति वेष्ठसः ||

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 status of “The Enlightened” [marîchî].

Rigveda 10.117.1

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

त्यामिदादं चृणते त्यायो होतारं अते विद्येये वेष्ठसः ||

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:

विचुदे विश्व भुवनानि तस्म ता प्रतीषीच वर्जय वेष्ठसः ||

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)—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 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-
matical rule (from the Katantra Chanda Sutra) which says that Vedic nouns often drop the final -s- and -n- sounds optionally, thus rendering Mazdhas into Mazda;

(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, 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 Müller 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: Manicul 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”. Worshippers 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, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{Devayâna}—assimilated the spirit of his teaching without openly renouncing \textit{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 \textit{Mazda Yasna} for two of the three members of its \textit{Trimurti} or Triad, namely \textit{Vishnu} and \textit{Shiva}; and if so, then as the remarkable Zend scholar of Bengal, the late Shri Jatindra Mohan Chatterji, succinctly puts it in his \textit{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.

\textsuperscript{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 similar 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 man\(^2\) 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 “man-kind” 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 Saranam gachchhâmi “I go for refuge” (to the Buddha,
Zarathushtra

morphisation, or ascribing of a human form, to such natural phenomena as Agni (the Fire) and Savitur (the Sun), along with Váyu (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!” 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, 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, Chitragupta 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 Surrounder”.

6 The word Vritra seems to be derived from vīr “[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 Varuna and Οὐρανός 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.

4 The description of Sûrya, 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 exalt”, “[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

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“the Smiter [or Slayer] of Vritra”. Owing to this great feat he became best known as the god of storms, thundershowers, rains and rainbows. However, Indra is not The Rains personified (as Agni, for instance, is the Fire personified, or Savituir 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. 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’s 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 khrastra hijva

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

The association of Indra with thundershowers grew so poetic that, in fact, the rainbow in Indian languages is called इंद्र-धनुश 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).

8 Shankara or Shankarachârya (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 there is 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 वेदांत 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 igno-
rant, 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 human-
ity too: even “those who have gone astray”. And he was aware
that, from a practical point of view, this would entail social or-

ganisation: 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. Mu-
hammad, with his La ilahi il’Allah,10 transformed a loose con-
glomeration of bickereing, 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 sizea-
ble empire: for even in the Chinese, Japanese, Inca and Aztec
empires, the Emperor himself was worshipped by all his sub-
jects 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 deci-
sion that affected the history of humanity for ever. Humankind
heard for the first time a definite, decided, resolute proclama-
tion that affected the history of humanity for ever. Humankind
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 ly-
ing down. They formed a distinct group determined to obstruct
the spread of Mazda Yasna at all costs. The Indo-Iranians be-
came 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

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 “Mu-
hammad 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 Al-
lah in most Muslim minds is somewhat different than that of “God” in, say, Christianity—no orthodox Mus-
lim, for instance, ever dares call anyone a “Son of Al-
lah”, or address Allah as “Father”—but for the pur-
poses 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 Muham-
mad to mean exactly the same thing as the Jewish term Elohim, which in turn is unfallingly translated
into English as “God”.

11 The Roman Caesars too, after Augustus—the very
first real Roman Emperor—began to require their sub-
jects 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 transfor-
mation).
of the Atharva Veda, namely the Bhārgava portion—or, if you will, the fifth Veda taught in secret by the Sage Vyāsa to his son. For as we shall see from certain Indian references recorded in the Mahābhārata, it is highly likely that the Zend Avesta is the original Bhṛgava Samhitā or Bhārgava 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 Mahābhārata as well as the Gopatha Brāhmana declare that there were five Vedas, not four.

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In the Nārāyanīya section of the Shānti Parva of the Mahābhārata 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” (Shānti Parva 335.28, 40, 53). This new “Divine dispensation” was “adorned with the Grace of the above reference, the term “Nārāyaṇa” is not, as in other portions of the Indian scriptures, used as a synonym for God, but as an apellation for a very wise man, Nārada, “the Messenger of the Gods”, apparently became inquisitive about this “novel” cult, which according to the text was practised in the bhārata and recited it before a large audience in the “Court of Brahmā”:

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

Shānti Parva 339.111, 112

13 The term श्वेत swet evokes the Sanskrit for “white”, so Shweta Dwipa 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 Nārāyaṇa and its Iranian cognate Naroṣh-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 bastardized 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 Pancharātra. (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.
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That it was indeed in Iran, and was indeed a Zoroasthrian scripture, can be deduced from the following several clues which are also mentioned in the Nārāyanīya section of the Shānti Parva:

—Narada had to travel north-west in search of it (आलोकयन्त्र उत्तरपश्चिमन् Ālokayann-uttarapashchina—ibid, 335.7), and when he arrived there, he found the religion to be monotheistic (एकतत्त्वात् ekāntin—ibid, 334.44). It was also a सत्त्वत sātvata faith, that is, it laid great stress on the सत्व गुण satva guna or holiness (Spenta¹⁶ 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 हलो भागो हरिमेधास पूज्यतत्त्वः कुः पूज्यं उद्भभय बोगतः।

Shānti 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 accord to his hosts’ custom in their own land.

The One God worshipped in “thought, word and deed”¹⁷ (Shānti Parva 336.46) by these “highly spiritual” (ibid, 335.13), “cap-wearing”¹⁸ (छ्छात्रकृतिशिर्ष हिरस्वक्षरी—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 हरिमेधास 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 दात शंत “peaceful” (found in the Rigveda, for instance, in its more ancient Indian form: शंत हवान्त). It holds in Indian texts a position more or less analogous to the term shâlom “peace” in the Hebrew scriptures; many Hindu prayers end with the words शांति शांति शांति 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 Vyāsa.

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 Purānas. It is found only six times in the entire collection of Indian sacred texts: five times in the Nārāyaṇiya Chapters of the Mahābhārata’s Shānti Parva and once in the Vishnu Purāṇa;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 Nārāyaṇiya Chapters of the Mahābhārata refer to the religion founded by Zarathushtra; they cannot possibly refer to anything else. It is surely as faithful an account of the Mazda Yasnī religion as can be expected from a poet writing in a distant age about a distant country.

That Nārada was able to recite the Scripture of the Shweta Dwīpa in India यथास्तुत्तम्य यथास्त्रुतम् “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 Mahābhārata.20 That it was so highly praised,21 as the above passage demonstrates, and that too by the rival sect—the Deva-yānīst—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.

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As we said earlier, Vyāsa 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 Nārada brought back from Shweta Dwīpa, or not, is not mentioned one way or another in the Mahābhārata; but we do have references in other Indian literature to the Bhārgava Samhītā of the Atharva Veda.

Thus the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa, 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 Angirasas and the Bhārgava), declares that the latter is better than the former, comparing the Bhārgava to sweet, and the Angirasas 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 Purāṇa 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 Mahābhārata, which probably antedates Homer himself, the very earliest of European authors. It should be appreciated, however, that the Homeric Epics as well as the Mahābhārata portray highly sophisticated peoples, capable of constructing Trojan Horses and even—if the fertile Indian imagination is to be believed—nuclear weapons (“Brahmāstras”) and aircraft (“vimānas”). 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 तत्काल ब्रह्म नमस्ते देवय नामस्यमुक्ति || भवेन चामु ये हि जगद्धुक्त सुप्रसर्वत् ॥ || “Then Brahma [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.” (Shānti 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 Mahābhārata). 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 anyone else’s!
Zarathushtra (Gopatha Brhâmana 1.1.1.15). The Sânkhyayâna Sutra (16.1) agrees, calling the Bâhrgava Veda भृगु bhesha “genial” while describing the Angirasâ Veda as चोर ghora “rough”. Sâyana²³ too, in the introduction to his commentary on the Atharva Veda, uses the term चोर ghora “rough” to describe the Angirasâ, 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 ए-ri giving rise to रिक्ष्टिर richchhati “to go”, and therby 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 अग्नि 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 Jyotistoma 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 Bhârgava and the Angirasas used to worship in different ways is mentioned even in the Mahâbhârata:

भृगुभृगुविरोधित हुत मन्त्रेः पृथिविः

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 Angirasas 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 छट्ट 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 ר’ רashi, 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 many 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 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”.

62
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.

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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 beyond—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 Christianity 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. 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 εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εὐαγγελίον εulerAngles, eu-

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 hungered and thirsts after righteousness. One thing that really brings this
Zarathushtra

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 Aryan families 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 Britian 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: विट 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 smruti literature of the Hindu religion, vast as it is, is founded upon the authority of the स्मृति shruti or Vedic Chants. Smruti 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

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 Avatāras or Incarnations of the Supreme Being Himself, namely Rāma 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 Mahābhārata, Rāmāyana and Srimad Bhāgvatam than know even the more important sūktas 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.

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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 exterior-to-come: the very term actually invented by Zoroastrianism. On the concept of a Sav-
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 Visparatru 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 the 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 Gita is embedded in the Mahabharata, 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 गीति “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. 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.

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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.

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”, 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 Qur’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 מגן大卫 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, 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”. 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 sumnum bonum, Spiritual Illumination, Enlighten-
ment—no single word, in English or virtually any other language, is adequate to translate it fully, although as pointed out above the Vedic र्ता (rta) comes closest. The simplest, most oft-repeated Zoroastrian prayer says:

Ashem vohu vahishtem asti.
Ushta asti.
Ushta ahmai hyat ashai vahistai ashem.

Asha is Love, 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] taught mankind, “Love thy neighbour as thyself”, and the same teaching is implied in the name Vohu Mano. ...In the New Testament (1 Corinthians 13.13) Paul has spoken of Faith, Hope and Love, 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 ὀρθος orthos meaning “right”, “true”, “correct” (as in “orthodox”) is closer to an Iranian variant of the Vedic र्ता 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 हस्तमस ', जयते नान्तम satyameva jayate nántam “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 र्ता 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 Zarathushtrianism, 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]...” 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 αγαπη 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.
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Vahishtem 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 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 vairaka, kshayathiya kshayathiyanam, kshayathiya dakhyunam.

I am Darius, the adamantine11 Kshatriya, the Ruler of rulers, the Ruler of [many] nations.

And from the term kshayathiya kshayathiyanam, 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: מֶלֶךְ הַמְּלָכִים Melech ha-melachim.12

So the word Kshathra connotes “Power” or “Kingship”. And the term Vairya is derived from the root वै vr- “[to] choose”, and means “capable of doing what he chooses” or, by extension, “worshipful”, “revered”, वर्णीय 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 א' שדְדַאי El Shaddai “Almighty God”.

(For although it is not certain, the Hebrew word שדְדַאי Shaddai could itself be a contraction of the Iranian Kshathra. The -r- of Kshathra elides, as we saw above, even in Achamaenian 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 क्षत्र Kshayathiya is derived from the root वै vr- “[to] choose”, or, by extension, “worshipful”, “revered”, वर्णीय varaniya “venerable”.

12 And which, after the rise of Christianity, was subsequenctly 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 शरण Sharan 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 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!
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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 Ratus
Ashit chit hacha;

Vangheush daezda Manangho
Shyothananam angheush Mazdai;

Kshathrem cha Ahurai
A yim daregobyo dadat vastarem.

Yasna 27.4

This is the Iranian equivalent of the Hindu Gayatrî, 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: \textit{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],
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 error 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. Ashu) meaning “life-breath”. Now this is one of the roots from which the word Ahura or Asura is itself thought to have been derived. In the Unâdi, another ancient Sanskrit lexicon, we find this phrase:

निर्वातां अस्ति त्वं अशु
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 सत्य Sat in the Nâsadiya Sûkta of the Rigveda quoted earlier. 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 सत्यम जगन्नथियाः Brahma satyam jagat mithyā “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”.

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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 Gāthic 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 Gāyatri Mahâ Mantra quoted earlier: वरणिया varâniya “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 वरणिया varâniya 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 चुंरु [ वरणिया ] तथा रिषि:
Yathâ Asura Varuna [varâniya] 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 Shwetâshvatara 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 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-
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

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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 -hun, -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 unmistakeably 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

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,
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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 Wit 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. यर्म राजानं वर्णामश्च-मन्त्रानामेवे, 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, Ahunavard and Honover) with the prayer Yatha Ahi 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 विद्या 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
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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 Vyāsa himself in the Mahābhārata—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 हुनव-वैति 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 Nāsadiya 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”.

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 Amerceatat. 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 "ari" means “yes” 2. In the Rigveda too we find the word âramati in the phrase:

\[
\text{syâd asme âramatir vasuyuh}
\]

\[\text{Rigveda 7.34.21}\]

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?

\[\text{Kathopanishad 2.3.124}\]

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 Saraswati, Lakshmi and Pârvati. 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 at 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. Armaítī 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 Armaítī 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”.)

The next Amesha Spenta is Haurvatat. This word is derived by compounding the common Aryan prefix सु- (su-) in Iranian, and ευ- in Greek—as in “eulogy”, “euphony” and “euphemism”) which signifies “good”, appended to the term उर्वन् (urvan “soul”) and thus meaning, literally, “The [state of the] Good Soul” (सूर्वतात). 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 (amṛtatā) 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 Zarathushtras 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 (provicially) that the hypothesis is true, one tests it. 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, Armaítī 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 (psūche), 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 (zōē), to signify “Eternal Life”, such as one may hope for in heaven. In classical Greek, of course, zōē does signify “life”, as in “zoology”.)

6 Another translation has often been “Wholeness”.
conscious entities, not incorporeal Principles or attributes of the Divine. At times we find them all addressed together as Mazda Ahuraoongho, “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 general 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 condenxe 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 अहूर असुर Asura, which, as we saw, is probably derived from the root अहु सु “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 πνεῦμα pneuma “air” (Greek) and ruah “wind” (Hebrew), both of which are in the Bible closely connected with the spiritual meaning of the term अहूर असुर Asura or Ahura: for the word ruah first occurs at the very beginning of Genesis with this same connotation:

...ve-ruah Elohim merahahef 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 अग्निमें पुर्वधितम् agnim ilé purohitam “Fire, thou preceptor of Iran”; and the Greeks too used to ascribe a human form to just about everything, including Ψυχή 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.
Zarathushtra

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 ruah as a perfectly appropriate term to be coupled with Elohim “God”, it also becomes clear that Zarathushtra too meant Ahura to connot 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

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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:

Mainyeush 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: र्वन्त पिथनिर्वन्त निन्वत्स अनिल नसस्मिन् उपोच्छन्त भुक्ता: “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 enthron the Good and to dethrone Evil, religion—of any sort—doesn’t make any sense.
Zarathushtra

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

Gatha 28.11

The mainyu 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 mainyu 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 mainyu 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 sattva, rajas and tāmas13—as in the following verse:

Prakriti, [i.e., the primeval, undifferentiated, “pre-created” substance of Nature], which is of red, white and black hue, 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 allude to it, as for example hen-kereta (Sanskrit सेतक्रत or सेतुक्रत) “the equi-

13 The Hindu terms sattva, rajas and tāmas may loosely be translated as “[the spirits of] truth, [of] energy [and of] darkness”. These are the three 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 tāmas: 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 tāmas), 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 tāmasic; while the extremely white Sun would be regarded as sâttvic, and thus more “righteous” than any other object on earth or in the heavens.
doer”—\textit{Gatha 31.14}); he considers \textit{rajas} to be only a state of \textit{balance} between the other two, सत्त्व or \textit{sattwa} and तमस् or \textit{tamas} or \textit{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 \textit{Sānkhya} speaks of \textit{three} forces, the \textit{Rigveda} itself speaks only of \textit{two}:

स रश्चैव स विषूर्वज्ञानः ।
आ च विश्वास्ति भवनेनु अतः ॥

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

\textit{Rigveda 10.177.3}

Thus the \textit{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 Absoluted, which can be neither Real nor Unreal (\textit{Then there was neither non-Being nor Being”—\textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{dialectics} and not “\textit{trialectics}”: that is to say, the interplay of \textit{two} forces, not three. (So the \textit{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.\footnote{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 \textit{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.} For the next lines of the same verse say:

\textit{Yatha cha anghat apemem anheush achishto dregvatam at asuaune Vahishtem 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].

\textit{Ibid.}

It is \textit{this} which gave rise to the concept—correct in its own way, no doubt—that \textit{Mazda} wishes us to side actively with \textit{Spenta mainyu} against the \textit{Angra}. However, unthoughtful theolo-
gians of a later age promoted Spenta mainyu to the level of the Great Asura Himself, 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 taibyo kshathrem
Vohu Managha voi-vidaitiaibyo saste Ahura yoi Ashai
daden jastyo 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 maleficient than merely anger. It is, in the deepest (and unholiest) 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 druḥ 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 anga 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.”

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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

Eins! O Man! attend! Two!
O Mensch! gib Acht! What doth deep midnight’s voice contend?
Zwei! Three!
Was spricht die tiefe Mitternacht? I slept my sleep—
Drei! Four!
“Ich schlief, ich schlief— Five!
Fier! The world is deep,
Aus tiefen Traum bin ich erwacht: Six!
Fünf! Deeper than day can comprehend.
Die Welt ist tief, Seven!
Sex! Deep is its woe—
Und tiefer als der Tag gedacht. Eight!
Sieben! Joy—deeper than heart’s agony:
Tief ist ihr Weh— Nine!
Acht! Deep is its woe—
Lust—tiefer noch als Herzeleid: Ten!
Nin! Joy—deeper than heart’s agony:
Weh spricht, Vergeh! Eleven!
Zehn! Woe says: Fade! Go!
Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit—
Elf! But all Joy wants Eternity—

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

Ahya yasa nemangha  
Ustana jasto rafedhraya  
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:*

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,  
Tochter aus Elysium—  
Wir betreten, feurtrunken  
Himmelscher, dein Heiligtum.  
Deine Zauber binden wieder  
Was die Möde streng geteilt:  
Alle Menschen werden Brüder  
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt!

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 brethren do become  
Where fly gentle wings of thine!

*Schiller, “Ode to Joy”:*  
as sung in the last movement of  
*Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony*

*The Upanishads:*

यतो बाचो निभतन्ते  
अप्राय भनसासह  
आनन्द ब्रह्मणो विभान्न  
न विभेति कूतथनेति  
पंत ह वावन तपस्ति  
किमाहि सापु नाकरयम्
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.

_Taittiriya Upanishad, Brahmananda Valli_

_King David:_

_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
daenyo vanghuyao ukhdha shyaothnena cha
At cha hoi schantu managha
ukhdhaish shyaoothnenaish cha
KSHNOOM MAZDAO VAHMAI
fraoret yasnans cha
Zarathushtra

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 रफ़द्रा राफ़द्रा—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 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:

_Khshanaauthra Ahurahe Mazdao!_

The Bliss of Ahura Mazda!

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

_KHSHNOOM!_

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 springtime; 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 Beatitudes”! 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 crueler 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 “re joiced, and were exceeding glad”, their inmost being filled to overflowing with Khshnoom
Zarathushtra

Mazdao Vahmai, “the Bliss of Mazda, [Who is] the Brahman”. झेि भेििि बारिि विििा, “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?