

# *An Overview of Zoroastrianism*

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Zoroastrianism is based on the teachings of Prophet Zarathushtra (called Zoroaster by the Greeks), who lived in ancient Iran over 3000 years ago. The primary sacred book is the Avesta, a collection of prayers and hymns that contains the Gathas, direct teachings of Zarathushtra. The religion was influenced by older religions and in turn significantly influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Due to 1000 years of persecution, the number of adherents is now less than 200,000. As with other long-lasting religions, many contrasting viewpoints have arisen, but certain of its teachings and traditions have maintained general acceptance:

The universe was created by the all-wise all-good Ahura Mazda, who often is referred to as Lord of Wisdom or Wise Creator. Ahura comes from a (masculine) word meaning Creator/Bestower of Life. Mazda comes from a (feminine) word for Wisdom. The universe (and all creatures in it) was created inherently pure and good; however it is flawed by the presence of evil. We humans are given freedom to choose between good and evil, and are held individually responsible for our choices. It is through our intentions towards choosing the Good and actively living accordingly that Good will prevail, leading to the ultimate perfection of the universe.

Thus the message of Zarathustra has a strong ethical emphasis: we are called upon to lead a life of Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds.

The most sacred prayer concludes by saying we best serve Ahura Mazda by nurturing and helping our fellow creatures who are in need. Another prayer praises living rightly/appropriately, without thought of reward nor fear of punishment, but simply for the sake of living rightly/appropriately.

Ahura Mazda has six primary attributes, often personified as 'archangels', (three each, male and female, emphasizing the importance of balance), each assigned dominion over one of the six 'elements' of our world.

These attributes also manifest as virtues in each one of us.

- 1) Vohu Manu: Good Mind/Thought/Intention; associated with the element of 'cattle', or more generally with all animal life.
- 2) Asha Vahishta: Truth/Righteousness/the Divine Order of the Universe; associated with the element 'fire', which is the most pure creation.
- 3) Kshathra Vairya: Dominion/Strength/Power, appropriately applied with a nurturing conscious choice; associated with the element 'metal' which is extended to include 'sky/air'.
- 4) Spenta Armaiti: Holy Devotion; associated with the element 'earth'. Ahura Mazda is devoted to this world, to all its creatures. We can manifest this virtue through our good thoughts, words, and deeds.
- 5) Haurvatat: Well-Being; associated with the element 'water'. This attribute/virtue emphasizes the process of purification and perfection.
- 6) Amertat: Immortality; associated with the element 'plants', especially with trees as the highest form of plants.

These attributes/virtues teach that beginning with Good Thought, following the path of Truth and Righteousness, with the appropriate application of Power under the guidance of Holy Devotion, we (both as individuals and the world as a whole) ultimately attain to Well-Being and Immortality.