

Zoroastrianism

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Article Summary

Zarathushtra, better known to the Classical and modern world in the Greek form of his name 'Zoroaster', revealed his vision of truth, wisdom and justice in the verse texts known as the [Gāthās](#) (c.1200–1000 BC) and is revered by Zoroastrians as their holy prophet. The religion is correctly described as *mazdāyasna*, 'the worship of Ahura ('Lord') Mazda, creator of the world and source of all goodness. Since the Avestan word *mazdā* means 'wise, wisdom', Zoroastrians see their prophet as the original *philosophos*, 'lover of wisdom'. Zarathushtra's message is primarily ethical and rationalistic. Zoroastrianism teaches a life based on (1) the avoidance of evil, through rigorous discrimination between good and evil, and (2) the service of wisdom through the cherishing of seven ideals. These latter are personified as seven immortal, beneficent spirits: Ahura Mazda himself, conceived as the creative 'holy' spirit; Sublime Truth; Virtuous Power; Good Purpose/Mind; Beneficent Piety; Wholeness/Health and, finally, Immortality. Evil originates neither from God nor from his creatures, but from a wholly other source, personified as Angra Mainyu, the 'Hostile Spirit', whose existence is ritually and doctrinally rejected as being pretended and parasitic. Real existence is solely the domain of Ahura Mazda and his creation; Angra Mainyu and his demons are actually states of negativity, denial or, as the religion puts it, 'the Lie'. Thus the charge that the religion is ontologically dualistic is no more true than it is of other systems which conceive of good and evil as being in fundamental opposition. Equally, the allegation that its theology is ditheistic or polytheistic is a misunderstanding of the Zoroastrian theological and ritual tradition. The influence which this religion has exerted on classical philosophy and the thought and practice of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is being reappraised by scholars in modern times.

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