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The Avesta

Sacred Zoroastrian Texts



EASTERN  TREASURES

The Sacred Zoroastrian Texts of

THE AVESTA

(c. 7th century BC)



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The Resources

Zoroaster and the Zend Avesta (1871) by James Freeman Clarke
Avesta, the Bible of Zoroaster (1893) by A. V. W. Jackson
Zend-Avesta (1911) by Karl Friedrich Geldner
Avesta (1913) by Arthur Frank Joseph Remy
The History of Zoroastrianism (1914) by Maneckji Nusservanji Dhalla

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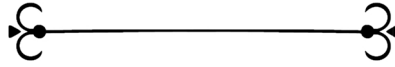
THE AVESTA



By Delphi Classics, 2025

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The Translations



An 1860 map of Persia at the time of the Qajar dynasty — Zarathushtra Spitama, more commonly known as Zoroaster or Zarathustra, was the spiritual founder of Zoroastrianism. He flourished in Greater Iran during the seventh century BC.



Ancient ruins at Ecbatana, the ancient capital of the Median kingdom, and the first capital in Iranian history. It later became the summer capital of the Achaemenid and Parthian empires. Zoroaster likely knew the city well.

Yasna



Translated by L. H. Mills, 1898

The Iranian prophet and religious reformer Zarathushtra (Zoroaster), who flourished before the 6th century BC, is traditionally regarded as the founder of Zoroastrianism. This religion centres on the worship of one God, Ahura Mazda (the Wise Lord) and the cosmic struggle between good and evil. Followers of the faith, who are divided into Iranians and Parsis (especially in India), believe in free will to choose the path of goodness and righteousness.

The ancient Greeks regarded Zoroastrianism as the archetype of the dualistic view of the world and of human destiny. Zarathushtra was supposed to have instructed Pythagoras in Babylon and to have inspired the Chaldean doctrines of astrology and magic. It is likely that Zoroastrianism influenced the development of Judaism and the birth of Christianity. The Christians, following a Jewish tradition, identified Zoroaster with Ezekiel, Nimrod, Seth, Balaam and Baruch and even, through the latter, with Jesus Christ himself. On the other hand, as the presumed founder of astrology and magic, Zarathushtra could also be considered the arch-heretic. Although Zoroastrianism was never as insistently monotheistic as Judaism or Islam, it does represent an original attempt at unifying under the worship of one supreme god a polytheistic religion comparable to those of the ancient Greeks, Latins, Indians and other early peoples.

Another significant feature of the religion is *dualism*. According to Zarathushtra, good and evil fight an unequal battle in which the former is assured of triumph. God's omnipotence is therefore only temporarily limited. In this struggle all human beings must enlist due to their capacity for free choice. They do so with soul and body, not against the body, for the opposition between good and evil is not the same as the one between spirit and matter. Contrary to the Christian attitude, fasting and celibacy are proscribed, except as part of the purificatory ritual. The human struggle has a negative aspect, nonetheless, in that it must strive for purity and avoid defilement by the forces of death, contact with dead matter, etc. Consequently, Zoroastrian ethics has a ritual aspect that is all-pervading. On the whole, Zoroastrianism is optimistic and has remained so even through the hardship and oppression of its believers.

Representing the text corpus of the Zoroastrian religion, the *Avesta* comprises several texts composed in the Avestan language (a liturgical language originally spoken during the Old Iranian period of c. 1500-400 BC). The individual texts of the *Avesta* were originally oral compositions, passed down over the centuries up until the fourth century BC. The written transmission began during the Sassanian period, with the creation of the Avestan alphabet. The resulting texts were then compiled into a comprehensive edition of 21 volumes. This edition was lost sometime after the tenth century AD and only a small part survived through a series of varying manuscript traditions. The oldest surviving fragment dates to 1323.

Unlike the Sasanian *Avesta*, which was organised thematically, the surviving Avestan manuscripts correspond to the different ceremonies in which they are used. It is assumed that it was through their regular use over the centuries that they survived to the present day. The principal text of the *Avesta* is the *Yasna*, which takes its name from the ceremony in which it is recited. Extensions to the *Yasna* ceremony include the texts of the *Vendidad* and the *Visperad*.

The function of the *Yasna* ceremony is approximately described as strengthening the orderly spiritual and material creations of Ahura Mazda, the principal God and god of the sky in Zoroastrianism, against the assault of the destructive forces of Angra Mainyu, the main adversary. The *yasna* service culminates in the *apæ zaothra*, the “offering to the waters.” The ceremony may also be extended by recitation of the *Visperad* and *Vendidad* texts. A normal *yasna* ceremony, without extensions, lasts around two hours when it is recited by an experienced priest.

The *Yasna* text is comprised of 72 chapters, composed at different times and by different authors. The middle chapters include the linguistically oldest texts of the Zoroastrian canon. These ancient texts, written in the archaic form of the Avestan language, include the four most sacred Zoroastrian prayers, as well as 17 chapters consisting of the five Gathas, hymns that are considered to have been composed by Zoroaster himself. Several sections of the *Yasna* include exegetical comments.

The theological function of the *yasna* ceremony is to further *asha* — that which is right and true. The *yasna* seeks to strengthen one’s belief in the existence and creation of divine order. A principle objective of the ceremony is to ensure maintenance of the cosmic integrity of the good creation of Ahura Mazdā. Zoroastrianism’s cosmological perception of the purpose of humankind is to reinforce the orderly spiritual and material creations of Mazda against the assault of the destructive forces of Angra Mainyu. In that conflict, theologically speaking, mankind’s primary weapon is the *yasna*, which is understood to have a direct and immediate effect.



A sixteenth century manuscript of the 'Yasna', British Library MSS Avestan 17, ff. 127v–128r



A Sassanid era relief at Naqsh-e Rostam depicting Ahura Mazda, who presents the diadem of sovereignty to Ardashir I

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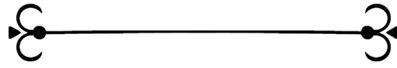
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Faravahar, one of the most prominent symbols of Zoroastrianism, on the Fire Temple of Yazd, Iran

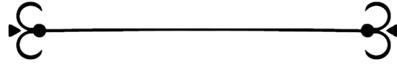
NOTE.



IT IS NOW hardly necessary to say that the Yasna is the chief liturgy of the Zarathurtrians, in which confession, invocation, prayer, exhortation, and praise are all combined as in other liturgies. Like other compositions of the kind, it is made up of more or less mutually adapted fragments of different ages, and modes of composition. The Gathas are sung in the middle of it, and in the Vcndidad Sadah, the Visparad is interpolated within it for the most part at the ends of chapters.

We have no reason to suppose that the Yasna existed in its present form in the earlier periods of Zarathu^trianism, but we have also no reason to doubt that its present arrangement is, as regards us, very ancient. The word Yasna means worship including sacrifice. Introductory excerpts occur in several MSS. and are now printed by Geldner. They are to be found in Y. I, 23; Y. III, 25; Y. XI, 17, 18; Y. XXII, 23-27; Y. XXVII, 13, 14; Ny. 1,2.

CHAPTER 1.



1. I ANNOUNCE (and) carry out (this Yasna) for the creator Ahura Mazda, the radiant and glorious, the greatest and the best, the most beautiful (?) (to our conceptions), the most firm, the wisest, and the one of all whose body is the most perfect, who attains His ends the most infallibly, because of his Asha, to him who disposes our minds aright, who sends His joy-creating grace afar; who made us, and has fashioned us, and who has nourished and protected us, who is the most bounteous Spirit!

2. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) to Vohu Mano, and to the Highest Asha, and to Khshathra Vairya, and to Spenta Armaiti, and to the two, the Haurvatat and Ameretat, to the body of the Kine, and to the Kine's Soul, and to the Fire of Ahura Mazda, that one who more than (all) the Amesha Spentas has made most effort (for our succor)!

3. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for Asnya, the masters of Asha, to Hawan, Asha-sanctified, master of Asha; and I celebrate, and I carry out (this Yasna) for Savanghi and for Visya, Asha-sanctified, master(s) of Asha. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for Mithra of wide pastures, of the thousand ears, and of the myriad eyes, the Yazad of the spoken name, and for Raman Khwastra.

4. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for Rapithwin, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and for Fradat-fshu, and for Zangtuma, the holy master(s) of Asha; and I celebrate and carry out (this Yasna) to Asha the Best, and to the Fire of Ahura Mazda.

5. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for Uzerin the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and for Fradat-vira and Dakhyuma, the Asha-sanctified master(s) of Asha, and for that lofty Ahura Napat-apam (the son of waters), and for the waters which Ahura Mazda made.

6. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for Aiwisruthrem (and) Aibigaya, the Asha-sanctified master(s) of Asha, and for the Zarathushtrotema, and for him who possesses and who gives that prosperity in life which furthers all. And I celebrate and carry out (this Yasna) for the fravashis of the saints, and for those of the women who have many sons, and for a prosperous home life which continues without reverse throughout the year, and for that Might which is well-shaped and stately, which strikes victoriously, Ahura-made, and for that Victorious Ascendency (which it secures).

7. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for Ushahin, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and for Berejya (and) Nmanya, the Asha-sanctified master(s) of Asha, and for Sraosha, companion of Ashi, possessing rewards, victorious, who furthers the world, and the very straight Rashnu and Arshtad, who further the world, who augment the world.

8. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for the Mahya, the monthly festivals, masters of Asha, for the new and the later moon, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and for the full moon which scatters night.

9. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for the Yairya, yearly feasts, the Asha-sanctified masters of Asha. I celebrate and carry out (this Yasna) for Maidyozarem, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and for Maidyoshahem, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and for Paitishahem, and for Ayathrem the advancer, and the spender

of the strength of males, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and for Maidyarem, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and for Hamaspathmaidyem, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha; yea, I celebrate and carry out this Yasna for the seasons, masters of Asha.

10. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for all those who are the thirty three masters of Asha, which, coming the nearest, are around about Hawan, and which (as in their festivals) were instituted by Ahura Mazda, and were promulgated by Zarathushtra, as the masters of Asha Vahishta.

11. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for the two, for Ahura and Mithra, the lofty, and the everlasting, and the Asha-sanctified, and for all the stars which are Spenta Mainyu's creatures, and for the star Tishtrya, the resplendent and glorious, and for the Moon which contains the seed of the Kine, and for the resplendent Sun, the swift-horsed, the eye of Ahura Mazda, and for Mithra the province ruler. And I celebrate and carry out this Yasna for Ahura Mazda (once again, and as to him who rules the month), the radiant, the glorious, and for the Fravashis of the saints.

12. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for you, o Fire, son of Ahura Mazda, together with all the fires, and for the good waters, even for all the waters made by Mazda, and for all the plants which Mazda made.

13. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for the Bounteous Manthra, the Asha-sanctified and effective, the revelation given against the Daevas; the Zoroastrian revelation, and for the long descent of the good Mazdayasnian Faith.

14. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for the mountain Ushi-darena, the Mazda-made, with its sacred brilliance, and for all the mountains glorious with sanctity, with their abundant Glory Mazda-made, and for that majestic Glory Mazda-made, the unconsumed Glory which Mazda made. And I announce and carry out (this Yasna) for Ashi the good, the blessedness (of the reward), and for Chisti, the good religious Knowledge, for the good Erethe (Rectitude?), and for the good Rasastat (persisting zeal?), and to the Glory and the Benefit which are Mazda-made.

15. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for the pious and good Blessing of the religious man, the Asha-sanctified, and for the curse of wisdom, the swift and redoubted Yazad of potency (to blight).

16. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for these places and these lands, and for these pastures, and these abodes with their springs of water(?) and for the waters, land, and plants, and for this earth and for yon heaven, and for the Asha-sanctified wind, and for the stars, moon, and sun, and for the eternal stars without beginning, and self-disposing, and for all the Asha-sanctified creatures of Spenta Mainyu, male and female, the regulators of Asha.

17. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for that lofty lord who is the Asha (itself), and for the masters of the days in their duration, and of the days during daylight, for the moons, the years, and the seasons which are masters of Asha at the time of Hawan.

18. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for the fravashis of the saints, the redoubted, which overwhelm (the evil), for those of the saints of the ancient lore, for those of the next of kin, and for the fravashi of (my) own soul!

19. I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for all the masters of Asha, and for all the yazads, the beneficent, who dispose (of all) aright, for those both heavenly and earthly, who are (meet) for our sacrifice and homage because of Asha Vahishta.

20. O Hawan, Asha-sanctified master of Asha, and Savanghi, Rapithwin, and Uzerin, and Aiwisruthrem, (and) Aibigaya, (you who aids life!) if I have offended you, and you, o Ushahin, Asha-sanctified master of Asha!

21. If I have offended you, whether by thought, or word, or deed, whether by act of will, or without intent or wish, I earnestly make up the deficiency of this in praise to you. If I have caused decrease in that which is your Yasna, and your homage, I announce (and carry out) to you (the more for this)!

22. Yea, all ye masters, the greatest ones, Asha-sanctified masters of Asha, if I have offended you by thought, or word, or deed, whether with my will, or without intending error, I praise you (now the more) for this. I announce to you (the more) if I have caused decrease in this which is your Yasna, and your praise.

23. I would confess myself a Mazda-worshipper, of Zarathushtra's order, a foe to the Daevas, devoted to the lore of Ahura, for Hawan, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, for (his) sacrifice, homage, propitiation, and praise, for Savanghi and for Visya, the Asha-sanctified master of Asha, for (his) sacrifice, homage, propitiation and praise, and for the sacrifice, homage, propitiation and praise of the masters of the days in their duration, and of the days during daylight, for those of the monthly festivals, and for those of the yearly ones, and for those of the seasons!



End of Sample