



Reach

SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna on God

God is the Infinite Being, while the Jiva is only a finite being. How then can the finite grasp the Infinite? It is like a doll made of salt trying to fathom the depth of the ocean. In doing so the salt doll is dissolved into the sea and lost. Similarly the Jiva, in trying to measure God and Know Him, loses his separateness and becomes one with Him.

Source: Tapasyananda, Swami, *Sri Ramakrishna: Life and Teachings*, Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, p141

Sri Sarada Devi on Meditation

Sit for meditation in the morning and the evening. Keep your head cool and practise meditation and prayer. It is very difficult to do so. It is rather easy to dig the earth with a spade. Looking at the picture of the Master, she said, "You will achieve nothing without His Grace."

Source: Tapasyananda, Swami, *Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother: Life and Teachings*, Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, p109

Swami Vivekananda on Man

When you think you are a body, you are apart from the universe; when you think you are a soul, you are a spark from the great Eternal Fire; when you think you are the Atman, you are All.

Source: Mumukshananda, Swami, *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; page 195.

Zoroastrianism (Avesta) on Good Thoughts, Words and Deeds

Therefore, O Zarathushtra! . . .

Make thy own self pure, O righteous man! any one in the world here below can win purity for his own self, namely, when he cleanses his own self with good thoughts, words, and deeds.

Source: The Avesta, Vendidad, Fargard 10 (chap. 10), sec.18-19

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We welcome you all to the Vedanta Movement in Australia, as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and invite you to involve yourselves and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal Message of Vedanta.

1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES 11 SEPTEMBER 2021 TO 10 DECEMBER 2021

ADELAIDE

16 East Terrace, Kensington Gardens, SA 5068

Email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contact: Dr Raman Sharma on (08) 8431 9775

Mrs Pathma Iswaran on (08) 8379 5336

URL: <http://vedantaadelaide.org>

Daily Activities

- The Centre functions from 7.30am-12.30pm and 4.00-8.00pm. The evening vesper service to Sri Ramakrishna is performed from 7.00-7.30 pm followed by *bhajans*, devotional reading and meditation.

Regular Activities

- Swami Manyananda conducted classes and discussions on the *Vedanta Sara* - 'Fundamentals of Vedanta' every Wednesday from 11:00 am to 12:00 noon.
- Swami Manyanand also conducts classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* on Sundays from 11:00 am.
- Every alternate Saturday, Swami Manyananda conducts a reading and discussion on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* before the evening *aratrikam*.

Celebrations

- *Durga puja* was celebrated on Wednesday, 13 October 2021. The morning program included puja (ritualistic worship) of the Divine Mother/ Vedic Chanting/*bhajans*, and *prasad* distribution. The evening program included *aratrikam*, *Mahisasura Mardhini Stotram*, *bhajans* by classical singer Mr. Mayuresh Kulkarni, pushpanjali and *prasad* distribution.

Other Activities

- The 16th Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday, 19 September 2021; at 16 East Terrace, Kensington Gardens SA 5068. Swami Manyananda, the executive committee members and many devotees were present. The meeting

started with prayer and welcome and included presentation of the minutes of the 2019-20 AGM, Vice President's, Treasurer's, and Secretary's Report followed by general discussion relating to the organisational matters of the Vedanta Centre of Adelaide. As the first Managing Committee was formally elected at the meeting of the Adelaide devotees held at Dulwich Community Centre, 14 Union Street, Dulwich, SA 5065, on Saturday 17 June 2006, 12:20pm, members agreed to make changes and then elected new members to the Committee.



Durga puja in Adelaide



Durga puja in Adelaide

BRISBANE

96 Vedanta Drive, (next to 2 Poppy Crescent),
Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

Daily Activities

- Daily meditation and the chanting of hymns were conducted between 6:15 am and 7:15 am.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were held between 6:30 pm and 7:15 pm.

Regular Activities

- Sunday mornings:- (a) Yoga class from 8:00 am to 9:15 am. (b) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* Class (10:00 am—11:00 am). (c) *Bala Sangha* or children's classes and *Yuva Sangha* (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term). (d) Hindi language classes fortnightly from 11:15 am to 12:30 pm.
- A class on the *Brahma Sutras* was conducted on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 12 noon. In the evening Yoga classes are conducted from 6:30 to 7:45 pm.
- A Vedic Chanting class was held online on Wednesdays from 8:30 am to 9:30 am.
- A Monthly Satsang was held at Sunnybank Hills on the first Monday of every month at 19, Scribbly Gum Street.
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* were held from 7:30 pm — 8:30 pm at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, Qld, on the last Friday of every month.
- A reading from the direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna was conducted on their birthdates after the evening *aratrikam*.
- Chanting of the *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:00 pm).
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week

at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean, Qld.

- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes for the Vedanta Group at Toowoomba on the first Wednesday of every month.
- A class on the *Ashtavakra Gita* was conducted at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield Lakes, on a fixed day of the month.
- On alternate Saturdays, the *Bhagavad Gita* was studied by the Vedanta group on the Gold Coast from 5.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.
- On alternate Fridays, the Centre's volunteers cooked food at its soup kitchen for the benefit of the needy. An average of 100 meals per week are cooked by volunteers, packed into containers and frozen. They are distributed free of cost through the Westside Community Centre, the Base Youth Support Services and Serving Our People (SOP).
- Every Friday the Centre's food bank distributed groceries to the needy. An average of 12 grocery hampers along with cooked food and free bread were distributed to the needy. From November 2021 this was provided on an 'on demand' basis.
- The Maa Sarada's kitchen prepares and sells food at a reasonable cost to people. On an average, about 110 persons avail themselves of this service. The kitchen is efficiently managed by volunteers.
- On Fridays, a Justice of the Peace (JP) renders service at the Centre from 10 am to 11 a.m. People needing the service access this free service.



Children's Vacation Programme

Other Activities

- Swami Atmeshananda participated in an online seminar on the theme 'Peace Within' organized by Heartfulness Foundation and made a presentation on 19 September 2021.
- The Centre organized 'Children's Vacation Programmes' during school holidays from 20 to 23 September 2021. Meditation, yoga, story-telling, painting workshop, skit, gardening, creative writing workshop etc were conducted during this programme. Thirty children participated.
- Swami Atmeshananda participated and spoke at the Kingston East Neighbourhood Centre on the occasion of 'Prayer for Afghanistan' on 22 September 2021 organized by the Bahai Community.



Prayer for Afghanistan 22 September 2021

- On the occasion of the *Gandhi Jayanti* (2 October 2021), Swami Atmeshananda participated in a seminar organized at the University of South Queensland (USQ) campus, Springfield



Gandhi Jayanti at USQ, Springfield Central

Central, Queensland.

- The Annual Multicultural Programme of the Centre was conducted on 3 October 2021 at the Coorparoo Junior College Hall. The Guest of Honour was Federal Senator Paul Scarr. Other dignitaries also participated in the event. The programme consisted of Welcome to Country by an Aboriginal Elder, Tibetan Music by Tenzin Choegyal, Indian classical dance by students of the Nadananjali school of dance, Chenda Melam of Kerala, Thai dance by students of Thai Culture and Language school, Brisbane, a play by children of the Bala and Yuva sangha of the centre entitled "The Problem of Covid", Flamenco dance by The Flamenco Studio, Brisbane and Thiruvathira Kali dance by Samskruthi, Queensland. Ms. Lianne Linnard, MP, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Queensland, sent a message which was read out and Senator Paul Scarr, Mrs. Archana Singh, the Honorary Indian Consul for Brisbane, and Swami Sridharananda (by video recording) gave talks on



Federal Senator Paul Scarr at the Annual Multicultural Programme

the occasion. Around 250 persons participated in the programme.

- Mental Health Week (9 to 17 October 2021):- The centre organized, in preparation for the Mental Health Week, the following events:- a) A fortnightly gardening workshop by Ann Osborne, and b) Sewing 135 mini smiley plush toy workshops – The plush toys were distributed amongst the COVID frontline workers (nurses and carers) at the vaccination centre in Ipswich as well as at the COVID ward at Ipswich hospital.



Volunteers Making Plush Toys for Frontline Workers

- A book stall was set up by the centre at the Diwali Fair held at King George Square, Brisbane city, on 5 November 2021.
- Swami Atmeshananda and Unni Nair attended the Kristellnacht Commemoration service event held at the Brisbane Hebrew Synagogue on 9 November 2021. They also attended the Annual General Meeting of QFCC (Queensland Faiths Community Council) on 11 November 2021.
- The Ipswich Bahai Community and the Brisbane Bahai Community invited Swami Atmeshananda to participate in the Centenary of the Ascension of Abdu'l Baha which was held on 14 and 28 November, respectively.
- The Premier of Queensland invited the Vedanta Centre to participate at the Reception to the Indian Community Leaders Programme held at the Queensland Parliament on 16 November 2021. Swami Atmeshananda attended the event.
- The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Centre was held on Sunday, 5 December 2021.

Celebrations

- *Durga Puja* was celebrated at the Centre with special worship on the 8th day (Ashtami) on 13 October 2021. *Sri Durga Saptashati (Chandi)* was chanted for nine days (from the 6 to 14 October 2021) on this occasion. Devotees partook in the 'shanti jal' (sacred water sprinkling) ceremony on the Vijayadashami day on 15 October 2021.



The Premier of Queensland with the Leaders of the Indian Community



Durga Puja at the Brisbane Centre

Forthcoming Programmes

- During the school holidays from 13 to 17 December, the Centre will conduct holiday camps for children aged from 5 to 11.
- Christmas Eve will be celebrated on 24 December at the Centre and the birthday of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi will be celebrated on 26 December 2021. On 1 January 2022 (Kalpataru day), a prayer programme will be held at the Centre.

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612/0433 593 860

Regular Activities

- On account of the Covid 19 pandemic the *Bhagavad Gita* classes have been suspended temporarily.

ly. Friends and devotees are accessing the classes online. When the classes recommence they will be held at the Belconnen Community Meeting Room, 12 Chandler St, Belconnen, ACT. Monthly lectures are advertised by e-mail once scheduled.

MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Swami Sunishthananda (03) 8684 9594

URL <http://www.vedantamelbourne.org>

Regular Activities

- The shrine was open from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm seven days a week.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading from the Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda literature and meditation were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm daily.
- *Ramanama Sankirtanam* on Ekadasi Days.
- The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is discussed online, and onsite, when there is no lockdown, on Tuesdays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.
- A class on *Mundaka Upanishad* is conducted on Thursdays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm. This class is conducted online, and onsite when there is no lockdown.
- A scriptural class on Sundays from 10:00 am to 11:00 am on the *Bhagavad Gita* online, and onsite when there are no lockdowns.
- Guided meditation is conducted online and onsite when there is no lockdown, on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 7:30 pm to 8:00 pm and on Sundays from 9:30 am to 10:00 am.

Celebrations

- On the morning of Wednesday, 13 October 2021, *Durga Puja* was celebrated online. The programme included chanting, *bhajans* and special worship.
- On the evening of Thursday, 4 November 2021, *Kali Puja* was celebrated online. The programme included evening vesper service, chanting, *bhajans* and special worship.

Other Activities

- Swami Sunishthananda was a speaker for an Online Seminar organized by Maroondah Interfaith Network on 17 October 2021 on the topic 'Compassion: Its different perspectives and ways of expression in different faith communities'.
- Swami Sunishthananda was interviewed by M4 TV Australia on 6 November 2021 on the occasion of the *Spirit of Harmony Multicultural Festival, Australia* organized by SKGA Inc, Australia.

PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yorkine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact: Sumita Chetty (04) 3892 8136

Parthiv Parekh 0430 511 699

Regular Activities:

- *Aratrikam* was conducted each night by a person or family taking the responsibility for it.
- *Satsangs* were held on 19 September 2021 and 14 November 2021. The programmes included *aratrikam*, *bhajans* and prasad distribution.

Celebrations

- *Durga puja* and *navaratri* was celebrated on 10 October 2021 at the Vedanta Centre of Perth's Universal Church. The programme included *aratrikam*, *bhajans* and prasad distribution.

SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

144A Marsden Road, Ermington, NSW 2115 (Entry)

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Contact: (02) 8197 7351

URL: www.vedantaaustralia.org

Daily Activities

- The shrine was open from 6:30 am to 1:00 pm

and 4:00 pm to 8:30 pm seven days a week.

- Meditation from 6:30 am to 7:00 am and chanting from 7:00 am to 7:30 am.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The times change on special occasions.

Regular Activities

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* on Sundays between 9:30 am and 10:30 am. Due to the current restrictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.
- Swami Sridharananda conducted a class on the *Mundaka Upanishad* on Saturdays from 11:00am to 12:00 noon. Due to the current restrictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.
- *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.



Durga Puja in Sydney

- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.

Celebrations

- *Durga puja* was celebrated at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 13 October 2021. Because of the Covid restrictions only the residents of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney attended.

2. FEATURE ARTICLE: ZOROASTRIANISM

(COMPILED PRIMARILY FROM THE BBC'S WEBSITE AND OTHER SOURCES. THE VARIOUS DATES GIVEN HERE ARE DIFFICULT TO SET IN CONCRETE AND THERE ARE DIFFERENCES AMONG THE SOURCES.)

Zoroastrianism is the ancient pre-Islamic religion of Iran that survives there in isolated areas and, more prosperously, in India, where the descendants of Zoroastrian Iranian (Persian) immigrants are known as Parsis, or Parsees.

Historical Context

Zoroastrianism was founded by the Prophet Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) in ancient Iran approximately 3500 years ago in 1000 BC. Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions. For 1000 years Zoroastrianism was one of the most powerful religions in the world. It was the official religion of Persia (Iran) from 600 BCE to 650 CE. It is now one of the world's smallest religions.

The precise date of the founding of Zoroastrianism is uncertain. An approximate date of 1500-1200 BCE has been established through archaeological evidence and linguistic comparisons with the Hindu text, the Rig Veda.

Zoroaster

Zoroaster was born in Northeast Iran or Southwest Afghanistan. He was born into a Bronze Age culture with a polytheistic religion (the worship of many gods),

which included animal sacrifice and the ritual use of intoxicants. This religion was quite similar to the early forms of Hinduism of the Indus Valley.

The name Zoroaster is a Greek rendering of the name Zarathustra. He is known as Zarathusti in Persian and Zartosht in Gujarati.

Zoroaster's birth and early life are little documented. What is known is recorded in the Gathas - the core of the Avesta, which

contains hymns thought to be composed by Zoroaster himself. Born into the Spitama clan, he worked as a priest. He was a family man, with a wife, three sons and three daughters.

Zoroaster rejected the religion of the Bronze Age. Iranians had many gods and an oppressive class structure, in which the *Karvis* and *Karapans* (princes and priests) controlled the ordinary people. He also opposed animal sacrifices and the use of the hallucinogenic Haoma plant (possibly a species of ephedra) in rituals.

Zoroaster on God

Zoroaster believed in one creator God, teaching that only one God was worthy of worship. Furthermore, some of the deities of the old religion, the *Daevas* (Devas in Sanskrit), appeared to delight in war and strife. Zoroaster said that these were evil spirits and were workers of Angra Mainyu, God's adversary.

- Zoroastrians believe there is one God called Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord) and He created the world.
- Zoroastrians are not fire-worshippers, as some Westerners wrongly believe. Zoroastrians believe that the elements are pure and that fire represents God's light or wisdom.
- Ahura Mazda revealed the truth through the Prophet, Zoroaster.
- Zoroastrians traditionally

pray several times a day.

- Zoroastrians worship communally in a Fire Temple or *Agiary*.
- The Zoroastrian book of Holy Scriptures is called *The Avesta*.
- The Avesta can be roughly split into two main sections:
- The Avesta is the oldest and core part of the scriptures, which contains the Gathas. The Gathas are seventeen hymns thought to be composed by Zoroaster himself.
- The Younger Avesta - commentaries to the older Avestan written in later years. It also contains myths, stories and details of ritual observances.

Zoroastrians are roughly split into two groups: (a) The Iranians, and (b) The Parsis.

Dualism in Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrian dualism is probably one of the most debated aspects of Zoroastrianism.

Dualism in Zoroastrianism is the existence of, yet complete separation of, good and evil. This is recognised in two interconnecting ways:

- Cosmically (opposing forces within the universe).
- Morally (opposing forces within the mind).

Cosmic Dualism

Cosmic dualism refers to the ongoing battle between Good (Ahura

Mazda) and Evil (Angra Mainyu) within the universe.

It is important to understand that Angra Mainyu is not God's equal opposite, rather that Angra Mainyu is the destructive energy that opposes God's creative energy. This creative energy is called *Spenta Mainyu*. God created a pure world through his creative energy, which Angra Mainyu continues to attack, making it impure. Aging, sickness, famine, natural disasters, death and so on are attributed to this.

With cosmic dualism we have life and death, day and night, good and evil. One cannot be understood without the other. Life is a mixture of these two opposing forces.

Moral Dualism

Moral dualism refers to the opposition of good and evil in the mind of mankind. God's gift to man was free will; therefore man has the choice to follow the path of Evil (*druj* - deceit) or the path of Righteousness (*asha* - truth). The path of Evil leads to misery and ultimately Hell. The path of Righteousness leads to peace and everlasting happiness in Heaven.

As with cosmic dualism, we have the polarity of happiness and sadness, truth and deception and so on but with an emphasis on choice. This choice is crucial as it determines whether we are the helper of Ahura Mazda or the helper of Angra Mainyu. When all of mankind chooses the former over the latter, evil will finally be defeated and Paradise on earth will be realized.

In practice, modern Zoroastrianism has a positive outlook. It teaches that Mankind is ultimately good and that this goodness will finally triumph over evil. This could be seen as a retrenchment from the faith's original purity of dualism.

Everyday life: Daily prayers

Zoroastrian beliefs can best be summed up by the maxim:

Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds.

Zoroastrians try to live their daily lives by this creed.

At the age of seven, Zoroastrians are given a *sudreh* (shirt) and *kusti* (cord) as part of an initiation ceremony. These garments are considered sacred. They tie the *kusti* around the *sudreh* three times to remind themselves of 'Good Words, Good Thoughts, and Good Deeds'.

From then on, Zoroastrians traditionally perform this ritual with prayers several times a day.

Family and Community

Zoroastrianism is a home and community oriented religion. There is no tradition of monasticism or celibacy. Zoroaster himself was a family man and most worship happens in the family home.

Zoroastrianism is also about action. Zoroastrians work towards improving the local community and society in general. They tend to give generously to charities and are often behind educational and social initiatives.

The Parsi community in India is particularly known for its industrious contributions to Indian society.

Man and God

Unlike some religions where man is God's child or servant, in Zoroastrianism man is considered more as God's helper. Through man's positive choices, evil will be eradicated and God's Paradise on Earth will be established.

Men and women, rich and poor, and young and old are all seen as equal. One only surpasses the other through their righteousness.

Zoroastrian beliefs about God: One God

Zoroastrians believe in one God, called Ahura Mazda (meaning 'Wise Lord'). He is compassionate, just, and is the creator of the universe.

Ahura Mazda is:

- Omniscient (knows everything)
- Omnipotent (all powerful)
- Omnipresent (is everywhere)
- Impossible for humans to conceive
- Unchanging
- The Creator of life
- The Source of all goodness and happiness

God is worshiped as supreme. Zoroastrians believe that everything he created is pure and should be treated with love and respect. This includes the natural environment, so Zoroastrians tra-

ditionally do not pollute the rivers, land or atmosphere. This has caused some to call Zoroastrianism 'the first ecological religion'.

Zoroaster and God

Zoroastrians believe that Zoroaster is the prophet of God. Zoroaster himself is not worshipped, but through his teachings man can become close to God by following the path of truth and righteousness (*asha*).

Zoroaster's Vision

At the age of thirty, Zoroaster had a divine vision whilst bathing in a river during a pagan purification rite. On the bank of the river he saw a 'Shining Being' made of light who revealed himself as *Vohu Manah* ('Good Mind').

Vohu Manah led Zoroaster to the presence of *Ahura Mazda* (God) and five other radiant beings, which are called the *Amesha Spentas* (Holy Immortals). This was the first of a number of visions in which Zoroaster saw Ahura Mazda and his Amesha Spentas; during each vision he asked many questions. The answers given to Zoroaster are the foundations of Zoroastrian religion.

Amesha Spentas

Amesha Spentas translates as 'Holy Immortals'. Just as light rays are emanated from the sun but are not the sun, so the Amesha Spentas are emanated by God but are not God. These emanations are seen as the divine attributes of God. They helped God fashion the world and each is associated with a particular aspect of creation.

Western scholars have likened the Amesha Spentas to the Archangels in Christianity. This is not strictly correct as they also represent spiritual attainments. Zoroastrians believe that man can know God through his Divine Attributes.

The six Amesha Spentas are:

- *Vohu Manah* - Good mind and good purpose.
- *Asha Vahishta* - Truth and righteousness.
- *Spenta Ameraiti* - Holy devotion, serenity and loving kindness.
- *Khashathra Vairya* - Power and just rule.
- *Hauravatat* - Wholeness and health.
- *Ameretat* - Long life and immortality.

Good and Evil

In Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda has an adversary called *Angra Mainyu* (meaning 'destructive spirit'). Angra Mainyu is the originator of death and all that is evil in the world.

Ahura Mazda, who is perfect, abides in Heaven, whereas Angra Mainyu dwells in the depths of Hell. When a person dies they will go to Heaven or Hell depending on their deeds during their lifetime.

It is generally accepted that in the Abrahamic religions, the concepts of Heaven and Hell, as well as the Devil, were heavily influenced by Zoroastrian belief.

The Parsis: The Beginning

In the 10th century a group of Iranians fled Iran as refugees in search of somewhere to practise their religion freely.

They finally ended up on the shores of Gujarat and were granted leave to stay there, thus founding the Indian Parsi community (*Parsi* being Gujarati for Persian).

The following centuries and modern Zoroastrians

Over the next centuries, Zoroastrianism survived with just a few minor cultural differences creeping in, both in India and Iran.

It wasn't until the systematic doctrinal attacks of the 19th century by Christian missionaries in India that Zoroastrianism had to seriously re-examine itself in order to survive.

The confused response of the Parsi priesthood to these early campaigns marked the beginning of an era of re-interpretation of the Avesta, the effects of which soon began to filter back to Iran.

- The Parsis began to introduce deliberate religious reforms
- The Zoroastrian response to the increasing urbanisation and cultural diversity of the 20th century was one of flexibility and integrity that reflected the three core values of good thoughts, good words and good deeds
- Respect for Zoroastrianism

grew through its generous and healthy contributions to the societies it encountered, and its reputation for the honesty of its businessmen

The decline of the priesthood and the global dispersion of the sparse population of remaining Zoroastrians has become a serious issue for the survival of the Zoroastrian faith. However, the same readiness to defy adversity and insistence on remaining true to the values of Zoroastrianism prevails. These are the same qualities which have ensured its survival for the last 3000 years.

The Zoroastrian Calendar

The Zoroastrian calendar is full of holy days, feasts and festivals, giving Zoroastrians the reputation of being a joyful religion full of celebration.

Festivals are a very prominent aspect of Zoroastrian worship and are closely linked with the seasons. The origins of many festivals, such as the six Gahanbars, date back to pre-Zoroastrian times; and some festivals, as in the case of Noruz, the Iranian New Year, have become part of Islamic Iranian culture.

The Zoroastrian calendar is split into twelve months. Each day of the month is named after Ahura Mazda, an Amesha Spenta or a Yazata.

The Yazatas (venerable ones) are personified aspects of nature or mythical gods and goddesses.

In addition, each month is named after Ahura Mazda, an Amesha

Spenta or other holy principles from the Avesta.

The Zoroastrian calendar presents a difficult issue for Zoroastrians, as there have been a number of changes over the centuries with the result that there are now three different calendars: Fasli, Shahanshahi, and Qadimi. This means that festivals are celebrated at different times depending on which calendar is being used by the community.

The dates given on these pages follow the Fasli calendar.

Khordad Sal: The birthday of Zoroaster

Khordad Sal is celebrated as the birthday of Zoroaster. This is known as the 'Greater Noruz' and happens six days after Noruz.

The chosen date is symbolic since the actual date of the Prophet's birth cannot be identified accurately.

This festival is considered one of the most important in the Zoroastrian calendar. Zoroastrians gather in Fire temples for prayers and then celebrate with feasting.

The Six Gahanbars: Obligatory feasts

Zoroastrians have seven obligatory feasts, six of which are the *Gahanbars* (or *Gahambars*):

- Maidyozarem ('mid-spring' feast)
- Maidyoshahem ('mid-summer' feast)

- Paitishahem (feast of 'bringing in the harvest')
- Ayathrem ('bringing home the herds')
- Maidyarem ('mid-year'/ winter feast)
- Hamaspathmaidyem (feast of 'All Souls')

Zoroastrian Religious Calendar

The origins of the gahanbars date back to the pre-Zoroastrian agricultural people of the Iranian Plateau and relate to the changing seasons. They became religious observances in Zoroastrianism and are jovial communal celebrations with feasting and general merry-making.

Noruz: New Year

Noruz (also known as Jamshedi or Jamshidi Noruz) is the seventh obligatory feast and it is dedicated to fire. It is the Zoroastrian New Year celebration, and occurs on the spring equinox.

Noruz is so deeply embedded in Iranian culture that it is still celebrated as the Iranian New Year in Islamic Iran, although without the religious connotations. Many fires are lit and there is feasting and celebrations. In modern times fireworks have also become part of the festivities

Rites and Rituals: Navjote

Initiation

The Navjote is also known as Sedreh-Pushi. This is the initiation ceremony where a child, between the ages of seven and

twelve, receives his or her sudreh and kusti and performs the 'Kusti Ritual' for the first time.

The child will have already learned the daily prayers and will engage in ritual washing as part of the ceremony. The ceremony is performed by a *mobed* (Zoroastrian priest) and is obligatory for all Zoroastrian families.

Zoroastrian funerals

Towers of Silence

Zoroastrians are famous for their tradition of exposure or 'laying out the dead'. In Mumbai the Zoroastrian 'Towers of Silence' have been a focus of interest because it is one of the few places in the world where this tradition can still be upheld.

Zoroastrians believe that as soon as the breath has left it, the body becomes impure. Death is considered to be the work of Angra Mainyu, the embodiment of all that is evil, whereas the earth and all that is beautiful is considered to be the pure work of God. Contaminating the elements (Earth, Air, Fire and Water) with decaying matter such as a corpse is considered sacrilege.

Instead of burying the corpse, Zoroastrians traditionally laid it out on a purpose built tower (*dokhma* or 'Tower of Silence') to be exposed to the sun and eaten by birds of prey such as vultures.

In Mumbai, where more than half of India's seventy thousand Parsis live, huge towers have been built and set within fifty-seven acres of forest gardens.

In western countries where exposure is either impractical or illegal, Zoroastrians usually opt for cremation.

Zoroastrian weddings

There are two stages to a Zoroastrian wedding, whether Parsi or Persian.

In the first stage the bride and bridegroom, as well as their guardians sign a marriage contract. The second stage is the service followed by feasts and the celebrations, which traditionally last from 3 to 7 days.

During the service married female relatives hold a fine scarf (nowadays usually white) over the couple's heads. At the same time two crystallized sugar cones are rubbed together, to sweeten the couple's life.

Then two parts of the scarf are sewn together with needle and thread to symbolize the uniting of the couple for the rest of their lives.

Traditionally, both bride and the bridegroom dress in white. The colour white is a symbol of purity in Zoroastrianism.

Worship: Purification

Zoroastrians are not fire-worshippers, as some Westerners wrongly believe. Zoroastrians believe that the elements are pure

and that fire represents God's light or wisdom.

Zoroaster placed less emphasis on ritual worship, instead focusing on the central ethics of 'Good Words, Good Thoughts and Good Deeds'.

Zoroastrian worship is not prescriptive. Its followers can choose whether they wish to pray and how.

Communal worship is usually centred around seasonal festivals (of which the Zoroastrians have many), but there are other opportunities for worshipers to gather, such as the Navjote, the initiation ceremony where a child is accepted into the Zoroastrian fellowship.

Prayers

Zoroastrians traditionally pray several times a day. Some wear a kusti, which is a cord knotted three times, to remind them of the maxim, 'Good Words, Good Thoughts, Good Deeds'. They wrap the kusti around the outside of a sudreh, a long, clean, white cotton shirt. They may engage in a purification ritual, such as the washing of the hands, then untie and then retie it while reciting prayers.

Prayers are primarily invocational, calling upon and celebrating Ahura Mazda and his good essence that runs through all things. Prayers are said facing the sun, fire or other source of light representing Ahura Mazda's divine light and energy.

Purification is strongly empha-

sised in Zoroastrian rituals. Zoroastrians focus on keeping their minds, bodies and environments pure in the quest to defeat evil (Angra Mainyu). Fire is seen as the supreme symbol of purity, and sacred fires are maintained in Fire Temples (*Agiaries*). These fires represent the light of God (Ahura Mazda) as well as the illuminated mind, and are never extinguished. No Zoroastrian ritual or ceremony is performed without the presence of a sacred fire.

Conclusion:

Zoroastrian ethics focuses on maintaining life through procreation and by earning one's living. Combating evil and doing good are essential. The afterlife is determined by the balance of good versus evil deeds. Human weakness is allowed for, however. All faults do not have to be weighed; they may be erased by confession or the transfer of merit from saints.

Source:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian/>

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Zoroastrianism/277888>

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