

Yx23 – Clerical Quackery 3 – Mesopotamian & Zoroastrian Speculations about Life after Death

The more I learn about the history of what I call “The God Lie”, the more I learn how little I know. The subject matter is huge. Readers who seek more reliable and in-depth information may want to start by studying the 736 page 2004 book edited (and contributed to) by Sarah Iles Johnston entitled *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* [which is partially available at Google Books and which contains the contributions of 140 (!) scholars] and by reading the 866 page 2004 book written by Columbia University professor Alan F. Segal entitled *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (which is also partially available at Google Books and the writing of which absorbed a decade of Segal’s life).

In the spirit of full disclosure, I should repeat that I’m no historian and add that I’m not even a disinterested investigator: I seek evidence to test the hypothesis that an enormous God Lie has been foisted on humanity. In this series of posts dealing with what I call “clerical quackery”, I’ve been trying to expose some history of the lies:

- That gods exist,
- That people have immortal souls imbued by the gods,
- That people’s souls are judged by the gods,
- That the dead are ruled by the gods...

Such lies are promoted by clerical quacks of all the major religions in the world. I call them clerical quacks because they claim (and profit from selling) knowledge about the unknowable.

In the previous post, I tried to show a little of the history of the Judgment-after-Death Lie as it was perpetrated in ancient Egypt. In that post, I stated my goal for these next few posts:

That goal is to provide at least a little evidence describing:

- 1) How Mesopotamian ideas about “the afterlife” seem to have dominated the first part of the Old Testament (OT),

- 2) How those Mesopotamian ideas in the OT about “the afterlife” started to change later in the OT (e.g., in the *Book of Daniel*), caused by a confusing array of influences, first from the Zoroastrians, then by the Greeks (whose ideas originally were influenced by the Egyptians and then were influenced by the Persians, whom the Greeks had conquered), and then by the Romans (whose ideas were influenced by the Greeks, Persians, and Egyptians), and then
- 3) How Egyptian (and Persian and Greek) ideas about life- and judgment-after-death completely dominated the New Testament (NT), the Koran (or Quran or Qur’an), and various “sacred scriptures” of the Mormons.

In this and subsequent posts, I’ll pursue the above-quoted goal, especially to show that, in reality, the clerical quacks who concocted the “holy books” mentioned above apparently didn’t have the smarts to concoct the Judgment-after-Death Lie by themselves; instead, as I’ll try to show, they purloined the Lie from clerical quacks of earlier cultures.

Starting toward the stated goal, one immediately finds the surprising result (at least, it’s surprising to me) that the authors of the first part of the OT (including the *Pentateuch*), authors whom I’ve been identifying in these posts as Ezra and Co-Conspirators (Ezra & C-C), adopted speculations about what happens after people die, not from the ancient Egyptians, but from the ancient Mesopotamians. Although I don’t plan to give a detailed defense of that last statement, I’ll try to provide at least an outline.

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN IDEAS ABOUT “THE AFTERLIFE”

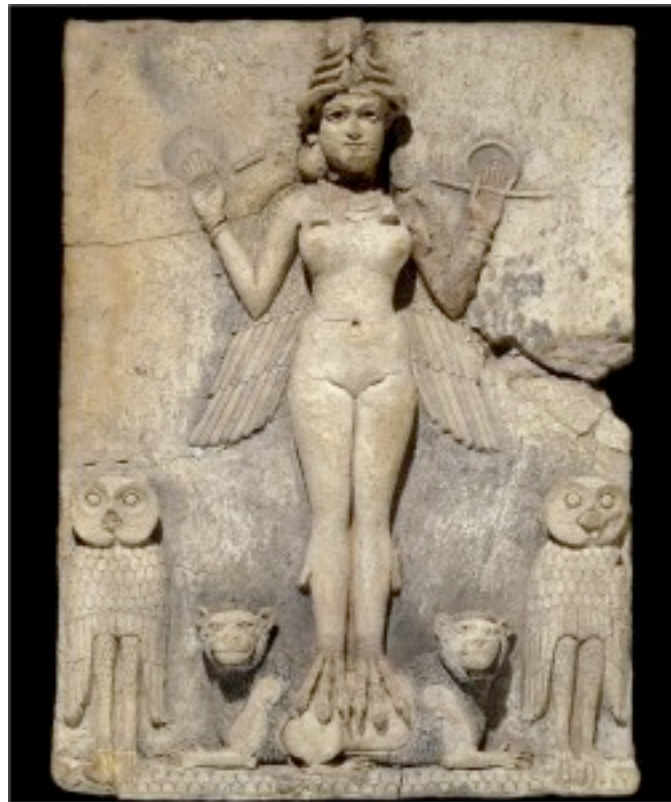
The most obvious initial feature of such an outline is that the description of “the afterlife” in the first part of the OT is dramatically different from the ancient Egyptian view: instead of adopting the Egyptian’s “happy ever aftering”, the ancient Hebrews adopted the Mesopotamian view that “the afterlife” was bleak. In an earlier chapter (namely, **Ix11**), I sketched a few features of the bleak Mesopotamian view, it’s reviewed at many websites, and it’s described in amazing detail in Segal’s book (already referenced). In this post, I’ll provide just a few illustrations of the Mesopotamian view and how it was incorporated into the first part of the OT.

Thus, in a number of Mesopotamian myths, starting with some of the earliest (recorded ~3000 BCE), the goddess Inanna (Sumerian) or Ishtar (Akkadian) – for unspecified reasons! – descends to “the underworld” (ruled by her sister, Irkalla or Ereshkigal, or in later versions of the myth, by her husband

* Go to other chapters *via*

Nergal, the god of violent destruction and war), passes through “the gates” (“gates” also mentioned in *The Pyramid Texts* of ancient Egypt), is murdered, and after being dead for three days (like other gods before and since, e.g., the Moon, Horus, and Jesus!), she’s resurrected and permitted to return to “the overworld” in exchange for the commitment to the underworld of her husband (the shepherd king, the god of vegetation, and a solar deity) Dumuzi or Damuzi (spelled Tammuz in the OT).

In the OT, Inanna/Ishtar is demonized as “the whore of Babylon”, apparently not only because the Hebrew patriarchs didn’t permit gods other than the (male) Yahweh but also because they were apparently severely hung-up on nudity (witness the myths about Adam and Eve and about Noah, Ham, and his son Canaan) – and in the most famous myth about Inanna, on her way through the seven gates to meet Irkalla/Ereshkigal, Inanna/Ishtar (the goddess of fertility) was stripped of her clothing, which presumably explains her depiction shown below (although the British Museum website¹ states that this may be a depiction of Ishtar’s sister, Ereshkigal).



¹ From http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/t/queen_of_the_night_relief.aspx.

Subsequently, in one version of the myth, Ishtar exchanges places with Dumuzi every six months; in another version, Dumuzi's sister (Belili or Geshtinanna) exchanges places with Dumuzi every six months. Similar myths (“explaining” the growth and decay of vegetation) were later adopted throughout the Mediterranean area, as can be found at literally thousands of websites by searching with the words Demeter, Ceres, Persephone, Proserpina, Aphrodite, Adonis, and the Arabian goddess Alat. In this post, however, I'll omit outlining these other myths, because most of them evolved one-to-two thousand years later and added the feature that the god (and goddesses) of the underworld judged the dead.

Not only does the Mesopotamian Inanna-Dumuzi myth not incorporate judgment after death, it doesn't dwell even on characteristics of the underworld. Some features of the underworld are given, however, in myths about King Gilgamesh, who lived ~2700 BCE. The most complete written version of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is attributed to Sîn-leqi-unninni (or Sin-leqe-unnini or Sin-liqe-unninni), about whom little is known. His name means “**O Moon God [Sîn], Accept my Prayer**”; he's described as “a scribe and scholar” who lived during the Kassite dynasty (c.1650–1150 BCE). To write his version of The Epic, Sin-leqe-unninni undoubtedly used earlier written and oral traditions. Fragments² of earlier versions of the myth have been found that date before 2000 BCE.³

In Tablet VII of the Sin-leqe-unnini version of *The Epic*, Gilgamesh's companion (the “natural man” Enkidu) describes his dream about “**the horror filled house of death**” as follows:⁴

Seizing me, he [“a man of dark visage – his face resembled the Anzu, his hands were the paws of a lion, his nails the talons of an eagle”]... led me down to the House of Darkness, the dwelling of Irkalla, to the house where those who enter do not come out, along the road of no return, to the house where those who dwell do without light, where dirt is their drink, their food is of clay, where, like a bird, they wear garments of feathers, and light cannot be seen. They dwell in the dark, and upon the door and bolt, there lies dust.

² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_of_Gilgamesh.

³ In fact (cf. http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0013_0_13515.html), a fragment of *The Epic* was recently found near the Israeli city of Megiddo (from which the word Armageddon, meaning “hill of Megiddo”, is derived); the fragment dates from approximately the 14th century BCE, leaving little doubt that the Gilgamesh myth was available to the authors of the earliest part of the OT (as I suggested in earlier posts in this series).

⁴ From <http://groups.msn.com/agodfightforallreligions/gilgameshsummerianepic.msnw>.

The ancient Hebrews apparently held a similarly bleak view of the fate of the dead, although the OT doesn't describe the underworld so completely as does *The Epic*. In the OT, the underworld is called *Sheôl* (commonly written as Sheol), which seems to have been derived from the Mesopotamian word with similar meaning, i.e., *Shuâlu*. In the OT, the first description of the afterlife seems to be at *1 Samuel 28*, which describes how King Saul went to “**the Witch of Endor**” (who, according to the allegedly earlier laws of Moses, should have been put to death for her witchcraft!) and demanded of her:

Tell me my fortunes by consulting the dead, and call up the man I name to you.

The one whom King Saul named was no less than the hero of the two books of Samuel, i.e., the “prophet” Samuel, himself. The witch reluctantly complied with Saul's demand, and reported:

I see a ghostly form coming up from the earth... like an old man coming up, wrapped in a cloak.

Upon being disturbed from among the dead, the ghostly Samuel allegedly said:

Why have you disturbed me and brought me up?

Thus, the ancient Hebrews (or at least their clerics) apparently held the view that, after death, even their “heroic” prophets were just undisturbed ghosts dwelling in some underworld, i.e., the early Hebrew ideas seem to have been similar to the ideas already held throughout Mesopotamia for thousands of years. As a particular example, the OT's *Book of Job (21 & 22)* describes Sheol as

The land of darkness and deep shadows... The land of densest gloom and not of light... Even where there is gleam, there it is as dark night.

In further conformity with Mesopotamian ideas about the fate of the dead and about the relationships between humans and their imagined gods, and in further contrast to Egyptian ideas of judgment after death, the ancient Hebrews apparently clung to the view that their god controlled, not what happens after people died, but what happens during their lives. As a specific example from *The Epic*, the following is the alleged argument among the gods about whether Gilgamesh or Enkidu should die:

[The gods] Anu, Enlil, and Shamash held a council, and Anu [the father of the gods] spoke to Enlil: “Because they [Gilgamesh and Enkidu] killed the Bull of Heaven [the constellation Taurus] and have also slain Humbaba [the forest god], the one of them who pulled up the Cedar of the Mountain must die!”

Enlil [god of earth and “the savage arts of soldiers”] said: “Let Enkidu [the man of nature] die, but Gilgamesh [the soldier] must not die!”

But the Sun God of Heaven [Shamash, god of justice] replied to valiant Enlil: “Was it not at my command that they killed the Bull of Heaven and Humbaba? Should now innocent Enkidu die?”

Then Enlil became angry at Shamash, saying: “It is you who are responsible, because you traveled daily with them as their friend.” [as the Sun, the god who can’t be looked upon (similar to Yahweh!) travels daily with everyone!]

Not only did the gods decide on people’s fates only while they were alive, even Gilgamesh (alleged to be two-thirds god and only one-third human) didn’t rank eternal life. As the barmaid (and goddess) Siduri said to Gilgamesh:

Remember always, mighty king [Gilgamesh], that gods decreed the fates of all many years ago. They alone are let to be eternal, while we frail humans die, as you yourself must someday do. What is best for us to do is now to sing and dance; relish warm food and cool drinks; cherish children to whom your love gives life; bathe easily in sweet, refreshing waters; [and] play joyfully with your chosen wife. It is the will of the gods for you to smile on simple pleasures in the leisure time of your short days.

Similar good advice has been given repeatedly. In ancient Egypt, it was relayed in *The Song of the Harper*, sung in Egypt before ~2500 BCE and quoted at the end of the previous post, e.g., “Follow thy heart and thy joy as long as thou livest upon earth.” The wisdom also appears in the OT in *Ecclesiastes* (“the Teacher”) as “Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest.” And it was re-expressed by the Roman poet Horace as *Carpe diem*, viz., “Seize the day”.

Yet, in spite of such good advice, Gilgamesh (viz., “Gilga the hero”) pushed on to try to learn the secret of eternal life, seeking the secret from the only human to whom eternal life was granted by the gods, namely, Utnapishtim (the “original Noah”). From him, Gilga received a plant that would have provided him with eternal youth, but while Gilga slept, the magic plant was stolen by a snake (which promptly shed its skin, apparently suggesting to

ancient people that snakes possessed eternal life). The theft is depicted below.⁵



As a result,

Gilgamesh began to weep and, between sobs, said to the sailor-god who held his hand: “Why do I bother working for nothing? Who even notices what I do? I don’t value what I did, and now only the snake has won eternal life. In minutes, swift currents will lose forever that special sign that god had left for me.”

Eventually, however, Gilga learned what sensible inquiries about death teach reasonable humans. Thus, speaking to Enkidu, Gilga says:

“Only gods live forever... my friend; for even our longest days are numbered. Why worry over being like dust in the wind? Leap up for this great threat. Fear not. Even if I were to fail and fall in combat, all future clans would say I did the job.”

And then, as reported in the final paragraph of *The Epic*, Gilga sees all that there is to see:

Then they [Gilga and the sailor-god] set out again, this time upon the land. After 10 miles they stopped to eat. After 30 miles they set up camp. Next day they came to Uruk, full of shepherds. Then Gilgamesh said this to the boatman:

⁵ From <http://www.mythstories.com/snakeR.html>.

“Rise up now, Urshanabi [the boatman], and examine Uruk’s wall. Study the base, the brick, the old design. Is it permanent as can be? Does it look like wisdom designed it?”

Readers can confirm that similar wisdom is contained in the Mesopotamian myths about Adapa, about Etana, and in the “Wisdom Lament” written by Shubshi-Meshre-Shakkan. The moral of such myths from ancient Mesopotamia seems to be: wisdom is gained, not from knowledge of morality (as promoted in the OT), but from awareness of our mortality.

During the subsequent 1,000-and-more years, ideas changed about the fate of people after they die, both among the Mesopotamians and Hebrews. Details of how and why the ideas changed, however, are far from clear (at least to me). What is clear is that, by the time (~400 BCE ±50 years) when Ezra & C-C began assembling and editing (and concocting!) Hebrew stories that would become the first part of the OT, ideas about the fate of the dead depending on the person’s behavior during life had been accepted in essentially all cultures that surrounded the Hebrews. Some examples follow.

As I briefly reviewed in the previous post, ideas about life- and judgment-after-death had certainly been well established in Egypt – for at least the prior thousand years! In addition, certainly there were many opportunities for foreigners to become familiar with such Egyptian ideas. For example, although it’s uncertain⁶ who the Hyksos were (historians have suggested that they were Canaanites or Lebanese or Syrians or Hittites or...), what’s obvious is that such “foreigners” (called *Aamu*, i.e., “Asiatics”, by the Egyptians) ruled northern Egypt from about 1700 BCE until they were expelled in about 1550 BCE. As they left, surely they took with them many Egyptian ideas.

Further, by the time of the pharaoh Thothmes III, the Egyptians had many additional interactions both with Mesopotamians and with the Hittites (in what’s now Turkey) in their own lands. For example, at the 1470 BCE Battle of Armageddon⁷ “on a 12-mile-wide plain near Megiddo, he [Thothmes III, i.e., “born of (the god) Thoth”] defeated the eastern Hittite

⁶ See, e.g., <http://touregypt.net/featurestories/hyksos.htm>.

⁷ See <http://ancientskyscraper.com/339212.html>.

and Syrian kings.” Subsequently, Thothmes III conquered Syria, the Hittite town of Carchemish on the Upper Euphrates, and⁸

“crossed the river into... Mesopotamia... capturing thirty kings or chiefs and erecting two tablets in the region, to indicate its subjection. It is possible that he even crossed the Tigris...”

Possibly as a result of such invasions, at least some of the “Asiatics” apparently found at least some of the Egyptian ideas about life- and judgment-after-death to be attractive. For example,⁹ an eighth century BCE inscription on a stone monument found in 2007 during excavations in southeastern Turkey instructed mourners to commemorate the deceased’s (Kuttamuwa’s) life with feasts “for my soul that is in this stele.” As pointed out by the archaeologist in charge (David Schloen of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago):

“Normally, in the Semitic cultures [including the Mesopotamians, Israelites, and Arabs] the soul of a person, their vital essence, adheres to the bones of the deceased, but here we have a culture that believed the soul is not in the corpse but has been transferred to the mortuary stone.”



⁸ See

[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt_\(Rawlinson\)/Thothmes_the_Third_and_Amenhotep_the_Second](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt_(Rawlinson)/Thothmes_the_Third_and_Amenhotep_the_Second).

⁹ See <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/18/science/18soul.html?scp=1&sq=Kuttamuwa&st=cse>.

As stated in the referenced article from *The New York Times*:

In addition to the writing, a pictorial scene chiseled into the well-preserved stele depicts the culture's view of the afterlife. A bearded man wearing a tasseled cap, presumably Kuttamuwa, raises a cup of wine and sits before a table laden with food, bread and roast duck in a stone bowl...

Joseph Wegner, an Egyptologist at the University of Pennsylvania, who was not involved in the research, said cult offerings to the dead were common in the Middle East, but not the idea of a soul separate from the body – except in Egypt.

Farther east, in Mesopotamia, ideas about the afterlife also began to change. Illustrative is the description given in Tablet XII of the Sin-leqe-unnini version of the Gilgamesh myth, although dating this tablet seems difficult: scholars suggest that it was added to *The Epic* centuries after Sin-leqe-unnini had died. It describes the fate of dead people in the underworld that's dramatically different from the description given in Tablet VII (e.g., “**the horror filled house of death**”). For example, in Tablet XII Gilgamesh asks and the ghost of Enkidu answers:

“Did you see there anyone with five children?”

“Oh yes, they go about with laughs and shouts.”

“And could you find a man with six or seven boys?”

“You could, and they are treated as the gods.”

“Have you seen one who died too soon?”

“Oh yes; that one sips water fair and rests each night upon a couch.”

“Have you seen one who died in War?”

“Oh yes; his aged father weeps and his young widow visits graves.”

“Have you seen one buried poor, with other homeless nomads?”

“Oh yes; that one knows rest that is not sure, far from the proper place.”

“Have you seen a brother crying among relatives who chose to ignore his prayers?”

“Oh yes; he brings bread to the hungry from the dumps of those who feed their dogs with food they keep from people, and he eats trash that no other man would want.”

Note that the above Q&A session between Gilga and Enkidu gives no hint of a judge who decided one's fate after death. Instead, one's fate was apparently assumed to follow from one's activities while alive. That idea is similar to the data-less assumption in Hinduism and Buddhism about *karma*, viz., “the sum of a one's actions in this and previous states of existence are assumed to dictate one's fate in future existences.”

Thus, some time during the second or (more-likely) the first millennium BCE, ideas about judgment after death apparently seeped into Mesopotamian thoughts. Whether such ideas were “home grown” or came from the west or from farther east is, however, unclear. If such ideas didn't originate from Egypt, another likely source is from Persia (and from even farther east, including India). An especially likely source (and one that had major, subsequent influences on Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) is the mysterious person Zarathustra (or Zarathushtra).

ANCIENT PERSIAN IDEAS ABOUT “THE AFTERLIFE”

Who Zarathustra was, where and when he lived, and even what his name means are unsettled. In fact, so little is known about him that I can't discern if he was one of the world's first and most distinguished scientific humanists (among the ranks including Sin-leqe-unnini, Socrates, the Buddha, Confucius, Mencius, and Epicurus) or if he was primarily responsible for such unscientific antihuman abominations as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Mormonism, etc. In either case, though, Zarathustra seems to have been one of the most influential people who ever lived, and it's therefore most unfortunate that more about him isn't known.

Plato and others “Hellenized” Zarathustra's name to ‘Zoroaster’. I like to think that ‘Zoroaster’ means “seed of the stars” (as we all are!),¹⁰ but many other possibilities have been suggested, including “golden star”, “radiant star”, “golden shining star”, “star follower”, “star of splendor”, “possessing divine knowledge”, “first born”, “seed of the woman”, and more. Literally, ‘Zoroaster’ means, “undiluted stars”.

¹⁰ See, e.g., <http://zenofzero.net/docs/Awareness.pdf>.

Meanwhile, the fellow's real name, 'Zarathustra', literally may mean:¹¹ "with aging camels", "with yellow camels", "with angry camels", "moving camels", "desiring camels", "golden camels", and more. His full name was Zarathustra Spitama.

Following the conquest of Persia by Alexander of Macedonia (336–323 BCE), the Zoroastrian priests estimated that Zarathustra lived from c.628 – c.551 BCE, known as "the Traditional date". Recently, however, serious doubts have arisen about the Traditional date. As stated in a Wikipedia article about Zarathustra:¹²

...since the Old Avestan language of the *Gathas* (that are attributed to the prophet himself; "the *Gathas* being the earliest part of the *Avesta*, the bible of Zoroastrianism") is still very close to the Sanskrit of the [Hindu's] *Rig Veda*... it seemed implausible that the *Gathas* and *Rig Veda* could be more than a few centuries apart, suggesting a date for the oldest surviving portion of the *Avesta* of roughly the 11th to 10th century BCE. This 11th/10th century BCE date [or even earlier, perhaps as early as 1400 BCE] is now widely accepted among Iranists, who in recent decades found that the social customs described in the *Gathas* roughly coincides with what is known of other pre-historical peoples of that period. Supported by this historical evidence, the "Traditional date" can be conclusively ruled out, and the discreditation can to some extent be supported by the texts themselves: the *Gathas* describe a society of bipartite (priests and herdsmen/farmers) nomadic pastoralists with tribal structures organized at most as small kingdoms.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* states:

The area in which he lived was not yet urban, its economy being based on animal husbandry and pastoral occupations. Nomads, who frequently raided those engaged in such occupations, were viewed by Zoroaster [Zarathustra] as aggressive violators of order, and he called them followers of the Lie.

From such cultural experiences – and no doubt from environmental factors experienced by everyone – Zarathustra's view was apparently of a day-*versus*-night, light-*versus*-dark, white-*versus*-black, good-*versus*-evil, friend-*versus*-foe, order-*versus*-chaos, truth-*versus*-lie, dualistic world. As I addressed in earlier posts in this series, similar can be seen in the earlier Egyptian myth about Osiris *versus* Seth, which seems to have been used as the basis for the OT myth about Abel *versus* Cain.

¹¹ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroaster>.

¹² At <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroaster>.

It's unknown, of course, how Zarathustra developed his dualistic philosophy. He may have developed it by himself, he may have had some exposure to Egyptian myths (e.g., after the army of Thothmes III entered Mesopotamia), or perhaps most likely, his ideas may have been a refinement of the earlier, more-primitive (or "proto") Indo-Iranian Mazdian religion (named after the principle god, Mazda). In particular, since Zarathustra was apparently trained as a priest, he was probably familiar with myths that were quite likely repeated orally for a thousand-or-more years and finally recorded in the *Rig Veda* roughly during the period when Zarathustra lived.

In her 1988 book *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (partially available at Google books), Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty provides the following quotation from Mircea Eliade, who in turn is described as developing the ideas of Ananda K. Coomasraswamy:

The Vedic mythology and religion present us with a situation which is at first sight paradoxical. On the one hand, there is a distinction, opposition, and conflict between the Devas and the Asuras, the gods and the "demons", the powers of Light and Darkness... But on the other hand, numerous myths bring out the consubstantiality or brotherhood of the Devas and Asuras. One has the impression that Vedic doctrine is at pains to establish a double perspective: although, as an immediate reality and as the world appears to our eyes, the Devas and the gods [sic] are irreconcilably different by nature and condemned to fight one another, at the beginning of time, on the other hand, that is to say, before the Creation or before the world took its present form, they were consubstantial...

Historians who are vastly more knowledgeable about the subject that I am (or ever will or want to be!) suggest, however, that subsequent Hindu mythology may have been influenced by Zarathustra's ideas. Thus, in the same reference, O'Flaherty writes (p. 79):

In the first, the Vedic period [of Hindu mythology], gods and demons are clearly opposed to one another, and gods unite with men against the demons. In Vedic times, when gods were thought to live on sacrificial offerings provided by devout men [as was described also in ancient Mesopotamian myths, such as *The Enuma Elish*], the gods wished men to be virtuous, for then they would continue to offer sacrifices; the demons interfered with the sacrifice in order to weaken the gods; occasionally this action may have incidentally corrupted mankind. Though men served merely as pawns in the cosmic battle, it was in their interest to serve the gods, for the demons would try to kill men (in order to divert the sacrifice from the gods) – unless men were protected by gods sated by sacrificial offerings... This straightforward alignment of forces – men and gods vs. demons – changed radically in the second period, the post-Vedic [period]...

That change in Hinduism could have been stimulated by Zarathustra's ideas, ideas that eventually seeped into Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.

Although Zarathustra's theological ideas were just wild speculations (as is all theology, since it's based on zero data) and are illogical, yet they were apparently sufficiently attractive that approximately half the people in the world still "believe" them to be "true"! His principal idea was that an alleged omnipotent god, whom he called Ahura Mazda (viz., "Lord of Wisdom", and whose subsequent names in other cultures include Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, Yahweh, "just plain God", or Allah), wants and/or needs humans to help in fighting evil. The idea is illogical, because an omnipotent god wouldn't want anything (a 'want' is an unfulfilled desire — and it's naughty to suggest that an omnipotent god has a 'want'!) and because certainly an omnipotent god wouldn't "need" the help of puny little humans! But regardless of such deficiencies, Zarathustra's ideas persist — not only because they no doubt were (and are) consistent with people's instinctual inclinations to fight "evil" (i.e., anything that threatens their survival!) but also because they apparently led (and still lead) people to think that they're important, with something important that they must do.

Nonetheless, although Zarathustra's basic idea is thereby easily mocked, I expect that most Humanists would admire the way he promoted his ideas for the benefit of humanity. I'll provide some illustrations below, which are taken from the verses of the Zoroastrian "holy book" (the *Avesta*) that etymologists, linguists, and historians have concluded were probably written by Zarathustra himself, namely, the 17 hymns called the *Gathas*. But before considering some of these verses, readers will probably benefit from reading the following impressive overview written by K.D. Irani:¹³

THE THEOLOGY OF THE *GATHAS*

It is important, as a preliminary consideration, to note that the type of religion preached by Zarathushtra is what may be called reflective religion. It is a fusion of a View of the World and a Way of Life offered to the prospective believer to be adopted upon due reflection as worthy of acceptance. A believer is one who chooses to encounter the world as the religious view declares it to be, and importantly, commits himself or herself in the Way of Life presented therein.

¹³ From <http://www.zarathushtra.com/z/gatha/dji/introduc.htm>.

What then is the religious view of Zarathushtra in the *Gathas*? Zarathushtra conceives of the world we live in as a theater of conflict between two diametrically opposed moral spirits (*mainyus*); they stand for mental attitudes in the psychological domain and also opposing moral vectors in all of creation. They are the Spirit of Goodness (*Spenta Mainyu*), and the Spirit of Evil (*Angre Mainyu*, not so named in the *Gathas*, but in the later literature). Their characters are defined in relation to the pivotal concept of Zarathushtra's theology, *Asha*, usually translated as Truth.¹⁴

Truth [*Asha*], in this context means the Ultimate Truth, that is, the Ideal form of existence of the world as envisioned by *Ahura Mazda* [Literally, Zarathushtra's "wise deity"; the omnipotent, omniscient... creator god]: the form the world would have had but for the Spirit of Evil, and hence the form the world ought to have. Acting in accordance with Truth is the right thing to do; hence, *Asha* is also translated as Righteousness. Indeed, since Zarathushtra's theology is always projected with a moral dimension, *Asha* always carries the joint meaning of Truth and Righteousness.

Thus, [Zarathushtra] comprehend[ed] the world as an intrinsically good, divine creation, contaminated by evil, but capable of being perfected by the actions of humans by reason of their capacity of moral choice. Human action can promote good and reject evil leading to its ultimate banishment from the world, though it may continue to exist as a conceptual possibility.

From this follows the Way of Life in Zarathushtra's theology. According to it, each human being possesses, perhaps cultivated to different degrees, the quality of the Good-Mind, *Vohu-Mana*, in itself a divine creation. The Good-Mind enables us to grasp *Asha*, the Ideal Truth; it also enables us to see any aspect of the world and recognize it for what it is, i.e., the way and the extent to which it is flawed. This is grasped by seeing reality and realizing how it deviates from its ideal state, i.e., *Asha*. This form of moral awareness is what is termed good-thought. From this good-thought one is inspired to do the right thing, to right the wrong, to perfect the state of imperfection. When the appropriate course of action is formulated and articulated it is called good word.

The inspiration that leads to action is *Spenta Armaity*, translated in the religious context as Piety or Devotion, and in the moral context as Benevolence or Right-Mindedness. This spirit is another aspect of Divinity; it inclines us to move from right conceptions to right actions. We thereby, with courage and confidence put our well-thought-out and well-formulated intentions into actions. This is called good-deed. Here we can crystallize the oft-repeated trilogy of Zoroastrianism: Good-thoughts, Good-words, and Good-deeds [or *Humata, Hukhta, and Huvarshta*].

¹⁴ As mentioned in the previous post, *Asha* is similar to the earlier Egyptian concept of *Ma'at*, the perhaps-earlier Indian concept of *Ritam* (from which the Western notion of 'right' may have been derived), and the probably earlier, Sumerian concept of *Mummu*.

The following, then, are some illustrations of what scholars have concluded are Zarathustra's own descriptions (from ~3,000 years ago!); the complete set¹⁵ of his 17 hymns (of 238 verses, ~1300 lines, or ~6,000 words in total), as translated by Dinshah J. Iran (1881–1938), are available on the internet.

Yasna 29, 5–10:

And thus we two [Zarathustra and Asha], my soul and the soul of creation, prayed with hands outstretched to the Lord [Ahura Mazda]; And thus we two urged Mazda with these entreaties: “Let not destruction overtake the right-living; Let not the diligent good suffer at the hands of evil.”

Then, thus spake Ahura Mazda, the Lord of understanding and wisdom: “As there is no righteous spiritual lord or secular chief, So have I, as Creator, made thee [Zarathustra] the protector and guide, For the welfare of the world and its diligent people. ”

The Wise Lord [Ahura Mazda], with the spirit of Truth and Righteousness [Asha], made these holy hymns, The Benevolent Providence gave these teachings for the well being of the world and its righteous people. Whom hast Thou, O Mazda, ordained, verily to give forth, through the Good Mind, these bounties to mortals?

(Thus spake Ahura Mazda): “The one who alone has hearkened to my precepts is known as Zarathushtra Spitama; For his Creator and for Truth he wishes to announce the Holy Message, Wherefore shall I bestow on him the gift of eloquent speech.”

Thereupon the Soul of Creation [Asha] cried: “In my woes I have obtained for help the feeble voice of an humble man, when I wished for a mighty over-lord! Whenever shall I get one to give me help with power and with force?”

O Ahura Mazda, and O Spirit of Truth and Right! Do Ye grant me and my followers such authority and power through Truth, That with the Good Mind, we may bring the world peace and happiness...

Yasna 30, 2–3, 9, 11:

Hearken with your ears to these best counsels, Reflect upon them with illumined judgment. Let each one choose his creed with that freedom of choice each must have at great events...

[Or, in the translation of J.H. Moulton:

Hear with your ears the best things; Look upon them with clear-seeing thought, For decision between two beliefs, Each man for himself before the Great Consummation...]

¹⁵ At, e.g., <http://www.zarathushtra.com/z/gatha/dji/yasna29.htm>.

[Or, in the translation by T.R. Sethna:

Hear the best (truth) with your ears and decide by your pure mind. Let everybody judge for his own self and find out what he ought to do...]

In the beginning there were two primal spirits, Twins spontaneously active, These are the Good and the Evil, in thought, and in word, and in deed. Between these two, let the wise choose aright. Be good, not base!

So may we be like those making the world progress toward perfection; May Mazda and the Divine Spirits help us and guide our efforts through Truth; For a thinking man is where Wisdom is at home.

By Thy perfect Intelligence, O Mazda, Thou didst first create us having bodies and spiritual consciences, And by Thy Thought gave ourselves the power of thought, word, and deed. Thus leaving us free to choose our faith at our own will.

Yasna 43, 1, 15:

Happiness be the lot of him who works for the happiness of others...

Verily I believed Thee, O Mazda Ahura, to be the Supreme Benevolent Providence, When the Good Mind came to me and told me assuringly, That a reflective, contented mind is the best possession.

Yasna 47, 4:

Whether a man's possession be great or small, let him ever aspire to righteousness and abjure the wicked...

Yasna 48, 5, 7, 12:

Let man be active, zealously caring for his land and creatures so that they may flourish...

Suppress all anger and violence; Abandon all ill will and strife!

Such are the saviors of the earth, Who, inspired by the Good Mind, cause betterment, By actions in tune with the laws of Truth and Justice.

Yasna 53, 6:

This, indeed is the case, O ye men and women! No happiness can be yours if the spirit of Falsehood directs your lives. Cast off from your selves the bonds that chain you to Untruth. Satisfaction linked with dishonor or with harm to others is a prison for the seeker...

How amazingly advanced, how amazingly Humanistic, were Zarathustra's ideas! The reader is asked to compare Zarathustra's ideas of an omnipotent, omniscient god who created the universe and advocated universal truth and

justice, freedom of choice, rewards for the diligent, and happiness for everyone versus the ideas of contemporary Hebrews (as depicted in various places in the first part of the OT) of a jealous, warrior, mountain god who protected the little Hebrew tribe and demanded obedience. Small wonder, then, that after the Hebrews came under the influence of the Persians, Ezra & C-C modified the OT, transforming their old god into Zarathustra's more powerful god (e.g., immediately, by using the "seven-period" Persian creation myth to start their *Book of Genesis*).

In fact, though, the seven-period creation myth seems to have been a creation of later Zoroastrian priests. Instead, Zarathustra's ideas were less complicated, as given in *Yasna 31*, 7–9:

He who in the First Beginning thus thought: Let the glorious heavens be clothed in light; He by His supreme understanding created the principles of Truth and Light; Enabling mortals thereby to maintain the Good Mind. O Wise Lord, O ever-the-same Ahura, by Thy Holy Spirit make these realms flourish.

Not only did I conceive of Thee, O Mazda As the very First and the Last [the alpha and the omega], As the Father of the Good Mind, As the veritable Creator of Truth and Right, As the Lord Judge of our actions in life, I beheld these with my very eyes!

Thine was Armaity, the Spirit of Benevolence, Thine was the Wisdom, which created Life, Thine was the Divine Spirit which established choice between the diligent protector of creation and the not diligent.

Unfortunately, however (at least it's viewed as unfortunate by Humanists), Zarathustra added to his theology some wild speculations about life- and judgment-after-death. If we were generous to him, we might speculate that such an intelligent person knew it was all nonsense, but he decided that he'd need such "enticement" to sell his ideas (which, even then and according to the *Gathas*, he apparently had great difficulty selling). In any case, the following summary by K.D. Irani provides an overview of Zarathustra's ideas about life- and judgment-after-death.¹⁶

The consequence of actions according to this way of life [advocated by Zarathustra] is that, being in accord with *Asha*, it brings the world toward perfection in any way and to whatever extent it may be. In the social world we bring about a change toward a worthy social order. And as the social order is transformed to an ideal form we achieve the ideal dominion in which the right-minded person is happy and contented.

¹⁶ From <http://www.zarathushtra.com/z/gatha/dji/introduc.htm>.

This ideal social state is referred to by the Gathic term *Khshathra Vairya*, another divine aspect.

The individual who lives in accordance with this way of life reaches a state of well being, a state of psychic and spiritual integrity which one might plausibly characterize as perfection in this earthly state. This state is referred to by the Gathic term *Haurvatat*. A person who has lived such a life comes, upon death, to a state of immortal bliss, known by the Gathic term, *Ameretat*.

Life after death in the Gathas is viewed as a state, the character of which is a consequence of the moral quality of one's life. The notion of the final judgment upon the person is expressed dramatically in the crossing of the Bridge of the Separator (*chinvad peretu*), where the virtuous cross to the Abode of Songs, the heavenly abode, and exist in a state of "Best Consciousness." The wicked fall away into the House of Falsehood, existing in a state of "Worst Consciousness," detached from Truth.

The focus of Gathic teaching is one of a world afflicted with suffering, inequity, and imperfection, the goal being to transform it and bring it to perfection, that is, in consonance with Truth, by the comprehending power of the Good-Mind. Such a perfecting world would progressively bring satisfaction to all the good creation. And it would inaugurate the desired kingdom, *Khshathra Vairya*, where the ideal society would manifest peaceful social existence in which all interests would be harmonized and balanced in a just order, for that is an implication of *Asha*. This achievement depends on enlightened human thinking and right-minded human resolve. These are the religious goals according to the *Gathas*, and bringing them about, the commandment of *Ahura Mazda*.

Some illustrations of Zarathustra's terribly unfortunate theoretical concoction, in his own words, are the following.

Yasna 31, 20:

The follower of the righteous shall attain the Abode of Light; But he who deceived the good and the righteous, For him shall the future be long life of misery and darkness, woe and despair, O ye of evil lives! Your own deeds will lead you to this dark existence.

To him, who is Thy true friend in spirit and in action, O Mazda Ahura! To him shalt Thou give the perfection of integrity and immortality; To him shalt Thou give perpetual communion with Truth and the Holy Dominion, And to him shalt Thou give the sustaining power of the Good Mind...

Yasna 32, 3–7:

O ye, evil ones, You are products of the Evil Mind And of arrogance and perversity; And so are those who honor you! Your evil deeds have long been known in the seven regions of the earth.

For ye liars confound the human mind, and make men act their worst, Make men speak as lovers of Evil, Separated from the Good Mind, Far removed from the will of Ahura Mazda, Departing from the path of Truth and Right.

And thus the liars defrauded humanity of a life of happiness and immortal bliss; For the Evil One preaches with Evil Mind and Evil Word, Evil actions to the lying soul promising supremacy, But bringing it to ruin.

These evil-doers, attaining notoriety by their aggression, Shall surely receive their due, before Thee, O Ahura, Lord of the Best Understanding, ever mindful of man's desserts. For the reign of Right shall be honored when Truth prevails in Thy realms, O Mazda!

These sinners, none of them, know the end in store for them. None of them know of the destruction of evil with the flood of glowing metal. The final end is indeed known to Thee, O Most Wise Lord!

Yasna 45, 7:

Those who are living, those who have been, and those who are yet to be, Shall attain one of the awards He ordains. In immortality shall the soul of the righteous be ever in splendor. But in misery the soul of the wicked shall surely be. These laws hath Mazda Ahura ordained through His Sovereign Authority.

Yasna 53, 6:

This, indeed is the case, O ye men and women! No happiness can be yours if the spirit of Falsehood directs your lives. Cast off from your selves the bonds that chain you to Untruth. Satisfaction linked with dishonor or with harm to others is a prison for the seeker; The faithless-evil bring sorrow to others and destroy their own spiritual lives hereafter.

In his essay on “Sin and Salvation”, S.G.F. Brandon adds:¹⁷

In the extant teaching of Zarathustra only cryptic references are made to the consequences of this choice [between good and evil]. Thus there was to be an awful ordeal of crossing the Bridge of the Separator (*Činvat*); but the devotees of *Ahura Mazdā* are assured that they would be led safely across by Zarathustra himself (*Yasna 46:10*). Mention is also made of molten metal and fire as forms of *Ahura Mazdā*'s retribution (*Yasna 30:7; 51:9*). The just are promised that they will abide with *Ahura Mazdā* in the House of Song (*Yasna 45:8, 48:7*), while the unjust are doomed to the House of the Lie (*Drūjō-nmāna 46:11*). There is reason for thinking that the Bridge of the Separator was an ancient Iranian concept, concerned with proving the ritual fitness of the dead to enter the next world, and that Zarathustra readapted it as a post-mortem test of allegiance to *Ahura Mazdā*.

¹⁷ From <http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhiana.cgi?id=dv4-31>.

Subsequently, during the ~500 years after Zarathustra's death until the "Zoroastrian" religion became established in Persia and then the Persians led by Cyrus the Great permitted the Hebrews to return from Babylon to their homeland (which, Segal points out, the Persians called the district of *Yehud*, residents of which were called *yehudi*, which eventually came to mean "a Jew"), Zoroastrian priests elaborated on Zarathustra's ideas – rarely to their improvement!

One such glaringly foolish mistake, which seems clearly contrary to Zarathustra's ideas, was to restrict membership in the Zoroastrian religion to those whose both parents were Zoroastrian. That mistake, plus horrible discrimination against Zoroastrianism by conquering, Islamic Arabs, led to the almost-complete extinction of Zoroastrianism: currently, there are about 200,000 Zoroastrians, approximately one half of whom live in India and are called *Parsees*. Yet, Zarathustra's wild speculations about life- and judgment-after-death live on in their foundational influence on Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc. In other words, this judgment-after-death concoction of Zarathustra has horribly hobbled humanity for more than 3,000 years.

Meanwhile, though, Zarathustra's best ideas live on in Humanism. To illustrate my meaning, I'll start by quoting from an essay by Professor Paul DuBreuil entitled "New Scope on some Aspects of Zoroastrian History and Philosophy":¹⁸

In every religion there are always two kinds of believers: those who look for the spirit and those who follow the letter, the letter which, according to the Gospels [of Christianity], kills the spirit...

With that idea in mind, consider again some of Zarathustra's statements, this time as translated¹⁹ by Mobed Firouz Azargoshasb (1912–1996) and consider how the spirit of the same statements might be rendered without reference to the primitive idea of gods.

Yasna 43, 1: Mazda Ahura, the Absolute Ruler, has specified that good fortune is for him who makes others happy.

¹⁸ From http://www.vohuman.org/Article/New_Scope_on_some_Aspects_of_Zoroastrian_History_and_Philosophy.htm.

¹⁹ From <http://www.zarathushtra.com/z/gatha/az/yasna43.htm>.

In more modern language, this could be rendered as: **you'll profit from trying to make others happy.**

Yasna 43, 5: As divine and sacred I recognize Thee, O Mazda Ahura, when I realized Thee as the First and eternal when life began; and when Thou ordained rewards for good thoughts, words and deeds; and when Thou specified through Thy wisdom that evil shall be the lot of wicked persons and that good persons shall reap the fruit of their goodness. Thus it will continue up to the end of creation.

In more modern language: **good thoughts, good words, and good deeds yield their own rewards; others yield otherwise.**

Yasna 43, 8: I replied thus: I am Zoroaster, the staunch enemy of liars and falsehood. I shall fight against liars as long as I have strength and shall uphold truth and righteous people whole-heartedly.

Language that needs no updating!

Yasna 43, 13: As Divine and Sacred have I recognized Thee, O Ahura Mazda, when Vohuman entered within me, and light of Truth and Knowledge brightened my heart. Do grant me a long life, O my Lord, so that I may achieve my best wishes and desires, the gift which no one else, except Thee, can grant: a life full of service to humanity and activity for the progress of the world which depends upon Thy Khashathra.

Or, in more modern language: **I seek to help humanity to go on.**

Yasna 48, 4: One who makes his mind better or worse, O Mazda, his deed, word, and conscience shall follow sure. The path selected by one's voluntary choice, his will and faith shall also follow the same and shall be in tune with them. According to Thy wisdom, O Mazda, their destiny shall be distinct from each other.

Or, in more modern language: **People choose – and consequences follow.**

Yasna 48, 5: We should toil for the Mother Earth and progress of the world, leading all the creatures on to the Light and the Truth.

Or, in more modern language: **Do your best to help humanity continue, which necessarily includes respect for nature.**

Yasna 48, 10: When shall my friends arrive for spreading the faith, O Mazda? When shall they smite down the rotting mass of lie and greed from the world? [The] wicked Karapans (priests) falsely fascinate the people, and the tyrant rulers rule over countries with evil intentions.

That language, too, requires no revision!

Yasna 53, 8: The evil doers and wicked ones, indeed, shall finally be deceived and stung by men's ridicule, chiding themselves. May men and women helped by good leaders and just kings enjoy peace and rest in their own clans and villages. May deceit and tribulation which drag down mankind to destruction disappear from this world. May the Almighty God, who is the Greatest of All, come to our help, as soon as possible.

Of course, the modern mind is inclined to criticize Zarathustra's naivety, displayed in his prayers for help from some god to achieve such goals and in his expectation that help would soon arrive (which is another of Zarathustra's ideas later adopted by Jews, Christians, Muslims, et al.), but if we recognize that Zarathustra lived when gods were assumed to control everything, examine the prime goal for which he strove (namely, to help humanity), and the methods that he proposed to reach his goals ("good thoughts, good works, good deeds"), then I'm certainly impressed that someone, alone and so long ago, saw so much, so clearly. In fact, I would go so far as to say that, if all references to all supernatural nonsense were removed from his religion, then I, too, would be pleased to be called a Zoroastrian, or equivalently, a Humanist.

In any case, it could be argued that Zarathustra was the world's first, great philosopher. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), however, mercilessly criticized Zarathustra, writing:²⁰

Zarathustra was the first [although that claim is debatable] to consider the fight of good and evil the very wheel in the machinery of things: his work is the transposition of morality into the metaphysical realm, as a force, cause, and end in itself...

In his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,²¹ which contains his famous pronouncements, "God is dead", "Plato is boring", and "The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently", Nietzsche had his fictitious Zarathustra take the next step:

Zarathustra created this most calamitous error, morality; consequently, he must also be the first to recognize it. [...] His doctrine, and his alone, posits truthfulness as the highest virtue; this means the opposite of the cowardice of the "idealist" who flees from reality [...] Am I understood? The self-overcoming of morality, out of

²⁰ Copied from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thus_Spoke_Zarathustra.

²¹ Available at <http://philosophy.eserver.org/nietzsche-zarathustra.txt>.

truthfulness; the self-overcoming of the moralist, into his opposite – into me – that is what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth.

This fictitious Zarathustra was what Nietzsche called an “Übermensch” (overman or superman):

Behold, I teach you the overman! The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so let them go!

Nietzsche thus reprimanded Zarathustra for concocting a “repressive moral code” (promoted in all organized religions); instead, Nietzsche promoted that people attain self-mastery and, thereby, become Übermenschen.

Yet in reality, in thought, in words, and in deeds, Zarathustra seems to have been a true Übermensch. His mantra “good thoughts, good words, good deeds” would have been inadequate if he hadn’t specified goals against which “good” was to be measured, but in fact, he did specify such goals: to diligently help humanity, make others happy, and protect the rest of nature. Moreover, as Nietzsche desired, Zarathustra advocated that others, also, use their own minds, as their highest authority, to make their own choices, saying: “Let everybody judge for his own self and find out what he ought to do...” I therefore suspect that, if subsequent translations of Zarathustra’s work had been available, along with distinctions now available between Zarathustra’s ideas and those of subsequent Zoroastrian clerics, Nietzsche might agree that “the real Zarathustra” was, in fact, the first Übermensch.

Later philosophers have heaped similar praise on Zarathustra. For example, in his essay quoted and referenced above, Professor DuBreuil adds:

Modern Zoroastrians have the huge responsibility to prove to the world that ‘eternal’ Iran is not what we see today, that they are still worthy of the fame that ancient Persians had in the eyes of the Greeks and the great Western thinkers. Remember that *Yasna Astuyē* (Y2.8) says: “the religion of Mazda restrains quarrels and puts weapons down.” Voltaire wrote that the best expression of morality he had ever known stands in this Zoroastrian precept of the Saddar: “When you are not sure if an action is right or wrong, just abstain from doing it, i.e., when in doubt, don’t.”

This brings us to make this statement: If religions and nations had followed the contrary of the proverb, “the end justifies the means”, which conducted many powers

to think that killings and persecutions were permitted to reach their political goals, the opposite would be that the nobility of any goal depends on the means used to reach it. Thus, we could be sure that many dreadful slaughters, cruelties, and persecutions of all kinds may have been avoided and the world would have known far less misfortune. This ethic comes from the close Zoroastrian conjugation of doing good deeds that are in full agreement with good thoughts and words...

Meanwhile, instead of the happy possibility described by DuBreuil, we have (as just a single, horrible example) the Iranian president Ahmadinejad:

- Almost certainly promoting development of weapons of mass destruction,
- Apparently practicing any available means to sustain Iran's fascist theocracy and his own dictatorship,
- Seemingly endlessly preaching the religion of Persia's barbaric, Arab conquerors, which is based on Muhammad's genius, not to see how astoundingly brainless religious people can be (since that had already been long established by Christian clerics), but to see the military implications of such mindlessness (as the original weapons of mass destruction),
- Proposing that no society could be “superior to the society of Ali [ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad's son-in-law, the first Shi'ite Imam – who didn't have the philosophical stature to cleanup the dung of Zarathustra's camels] and the Mahdi [the phantom Shi'ite messiah whose social views are therefore phantasmal]”, and
- Bombastically promising to annihilate the Jews, i.e., those who for ~2500 years have been most faithfully following the original Persian religion of Zarathustra (as I'll try to outline in the next post).

Actually, in most societies, a person would be considered traitorous to support the culture of one's conquerors; yet, Ahmadinejad supports Islam rather than Zoroastrianism. Similar occurs throughout the Muslim world (save in Arabia) and, for that matter, throughout the Christian world (save in Italy): people preaching, practicing, and promoting the religion of their conquerors! Would that, instead, everyone would consider adopting Zarathustra's good thought:

Let everybody judge for his own self and find out what he ought to do...