

ZOROASTRIAN SCRIPTURES

1. “**Avesta**” is the name of the surviving collected sacred writings of the Zoroastrian religion.

The name means “The Book of the Law”

Present state of the text is fragmentary in the extreme -- much material has been lost and much garbled in transition. Only about 25% of the original work survives.

Of 21 sections (Nastas) of the Avesta mentioned in ancient summaries of the work we have portions of 11. The only preserved parts are liturgical as they had been memorized by priests for use in worship so their transition was not dependent on written documents which were destroyed in a series of invasions of the Persian homeland: Arab in the 7th century, Turk in the 11th and Mongol in the 12th.

2. **Present State of the Avesta: 4/5 parts depending on how you cut the pie**

A. Yasna (Literally “worship”) Liturgical works, including the “Gathas”

B. Visperad Invocations and rituals for festivals, especially those honoring the Ahuras

C. Yashts Hymns of Praise

D. Vidervat/Vendidat Prescriptions for purification and protection against demons

E. Kordeh Avesta Private and lay devotions

F. Two additional works were prepared after the Muslim conquest of Persia

1. Bundahishn The story of creation and the account of the structure of the world

2. Denkart A compendium of religious lore, including a summary of the Avesta.

G. In addition, Zoroastrian religious literature includes Zand, or commentaries on the Avesta.

H. Dates -- Most of the Avesta is certainly of the pre-Christian era as the language of its composition, Old Persian, was a dead language by the first century AD and used only for ritual purposes. (CF. Latin in the Roman Catholic Church)

3. **The Contents of the Bundahishn**

A. Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu exist independently from eternity

**B. Ahura Mazda dwells on high in light
Angra Mainyu dwells in hell in darkness**

C. Ahura Mazda is aware of Angra Mainyu's existence, but the converse is not true.

D. Creation is the result of evil's beginning awareness of the good and the consequent conflict it brings.

1. Both Spiritual and Material worlds are created by Ahura Mazda (The material world is the tangible expression of the spiritual world.)

2. The Original Perfect World lasts 3,000 years in its spiritual form, an additional 3,000 in perfect material form. At this point evil assaults it.

is Angra Mainyu creates the evil analog of each good thing: for beauty, ugliness; for life, death; for health, illness; and so forth. The world as we experience it the result of this assault.

3. In this assault, the archetypal Human and the archetypal Bull die, but as they die they emit sperm from which all subsequent humans and animals as we now know them emerge.

This original assault of evil is followed by the "time of mixing" (Gumezishn) in which good and evil exist together and mixed in the world.

This period is to last another 3,000 years, at which point good will finally triumph over evil.

Note: 1. Absolute ethical dualism: good and evil exist from eternity although they must be mutually aware before conflict and therefore creation, begin.

2. Creation is related to a cosmic conflict

3. Zoroaster's Birth is considered as a pivot point of history and as the means taken by Ahura Mazda for ensuring the triumph of the good. (cf. Christian attitude toward the birth of Jesus as the center and pivot point of history.)

4. The present world is a scene of struggle: Good vs. Evil

5. The presence and development of the idea of a final judgment.