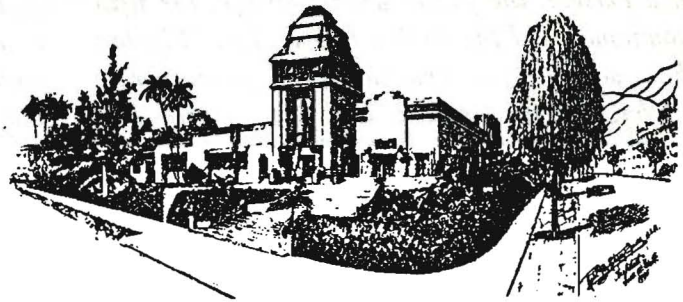


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MONTHLY LETTER

Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall

August 15, 1936.

ZOROASTER

Dear Friend:-

Zarathustrism, or Zoroastrianism as it is more commonly called, was the ancient faith of the Irano-Aryan peoples who at some remote period migrated from India and civilized Persia, Media and other parts of ancient Chaldea. According to the earliest tradition the Magian Rites of the Persians were established by the fire-prophet Zarathustra, but no reliable information is available as to the exact time of his life and ministry. He is variously placed from the first to the tenth millenium before Christ. This uncertainty results in part at least from the destruction of the libraries of the Magian philosophers by the armies of Alexander the Great.

Zarathustra, in Greek Zoroaster, is a generic name bestowed upon several initiated and divinely illumined law-givers and religious reformers among the Chaldeans. As in the case of Manu and Vyasa in India, Moses in Israel, Orpheus in Greece and Quetzalcoatl in Mexico, time has corrupted into one personality several Magian philosophers by the name of Zarathustra. The result has been a pseudo-historical account in which the actions of several men are fitted together to make one highly metaphysical tradition. The different parts can probably never

be properly ordered because the Zend language is utterly extinct and the old records have found no perpetuators in the modern world.

Greek writers derive the term Zoroaster from a combination of syllables so that the word can have one of several meanings. First, a worshipper of the stars. Second, the image of secret things. Third, a fashioner of images from hidden fire. Or most probably, fourth, the son of the stars.

The oldest of the Iranian books, called the *Sesatir*, contains a collection of teachings and revelations from fourteen of the ancient prophets of Iran, and in this list Zoroaster stands thirteenth. It is not improbable that at some prehistoric time a great sage, an initiate of the original Mysteries of the Aryan Hindus, established the line of priest-prophets which came later to bear his name and finally became identified with him. There is ample precedent for such a circumstance for in the Hermetic tradition of the Egyptians many generations of initiate-priests lost their identity and were absorbed into the one all-powerful word *Hermes*.

Greek writers distinguish at least six Zoroasters. The first was a Chaldean, the second a Bactrian, the

third a Persian, the fourth a Pamphylian, the fifth Proconnesian, and the sixth a Babylonian. The last of these, according to Apuleius, was a contemporary of Pythagoras who visited and studied with him when Pythagoras was carried a prisoner to Babylon by the armies of Cambyses.

Space prevents a detailed examination of the conflicting accounts relative to the comparative importance of these several Zoroasters and it is questionable whether even an exhaustive analysis of the information available would result in any conclusions of primary importance. The student should rather bear in mind that Zoroaster as he descends to us in modern history is the personification of a noble philosophical system founded by a semi-divine mortal at a remote period in the world's history, and carried on by a line of consecrated priests until its final dissipation by the Mohammedans.

With these restrictions we can summarize briefly the more or less legendary story of Zarathustra's life. For reasons which should be apparent from the foregoing, it is not even possible to describe with anything approaching accuracy the appearance or the temperament of the founder of the Magian Rites. The portrait of Zarathustra which accompanies this article is believed to be the only existing likeness of the old prophet. The original is a rock carving of unknown age the face of which was mutilated beyond recognition and reconstructed by some pious believer whose faith probably greatly exceeded his array of facts. Although this portrait is generally accepted as a likeness of the Magus, there is every possible doubt as to its authenticity. Those best qualified to pass an opinion on the subject hazard the guess that the sculpture was intended to represent Ahura-Mazda, the First Principle of the world in the Persian belief. The face may have been destroyed by some zealous Zoroastrian for the members of this faith are strongly opposed to idolatry. On the other hand it may have been mutilated by the Greeks or Mohammedans. From a metaphysical viewpoint it is by no means impossible that the carving represented Ahura-Mazda personified in the form of Zoroaster his beloved prophet.

Even modern authorities are not in agreement as to the date of Zoroaster's ministry. The present tendency however is to narrow down the time to the period between 1200 and 500 B. C. That a great prophet did arise in Iran during these centuries has been established as an historical certainty, but that other prophets preceded him in the propounding of the Magian philosophy is generally acknowledged as a possibility. Modern scholars view the Greek and Roman traditions rather dubiously. The Buddhist tradition in India emphatically affirms that Gautama Siddhartha was not the first Buddha but rather the principal exponent of the Buddhist system. We have the same problem in Persia. While the sacred scriptures make mention of several ancient prophets, Zarathustra Spitama is acknowledged as the chief exponent of the Magian doctrines.

A. V. Williams Jackson, in his important book ZOROASTER THE PROPHET OF ANCIENT IRAN, published by the Columbia University Press, examines critically yet impartially the available data relative to the life and time of Zoroaster and advances a well-supported opinion that Zarathustra Spitama was born on the first day of the year B. C. 660 and died on the forty-first day of the year B. C. 583, being then at the age of seventy-seven years and forty-one days. This is the time generally agreed upon by Parsee scholars but other European authors advance a somewhat earlier date.

According to the GATHAS the Prophet was born at Azarbaijan in Western Iran. As in the case of Jesus an effort is made to trace his ancestry back to the princes of his land. It is recorded that his father's name was Pourushaspa and his mother's Dughdhova. He was the third of five sons. Most accounts agree that Zoroaster was born of an Immaculate Conception. The legend tells that his father, in performing religious ceremonials, drank the sacred homa juice which is the same as the soma of the Hindus, the mysterious drink of the gods. As a result his wife conceived without knowing a man. The nativity was accompanied by supernatural manifestations and occult circumstances appropriate to the incarnation of an Avatar or divine

being. It is said that all nature rejoiced at the birth of the Prophet. Ahriman, the genius of evil, and his host of demons all hid themselves in the darkest parts of the earth to escape the splendour of the new-born sage. At the time of the incarnation a

ferent tradition which says that Zoroaster was the son of Oromasdes the spirit of fire, but the word Oromasdes seems to be a Grecianized form of Ahura-Mazda, the spirit of eternal light, the first active Principle in the Zoroastrian cosmogony.



ZOROASTER

ring of heavenly light surrounded the house of Pourushaspa. According to a most ancient Greek tradition, Zoroaster is the only mortal ever to laugh at the moment of birth. It is also said that while he was an infant his brain throbbed so that it violently pushed away a hand if it was placed upon his head. The Greeks also have a somewhat dif-

The demons being unable to prevent the birth of the Prophet, immediately seek his destruction. Many efforts were made to slay him while still a babe, but through miraculous intercession he escaped his enemies. The Turanian Karap, Durasrobo, played the part of Herod in the Zoroastrian story. He was a worshipper of idolatrous gods and was served by a priest-craft of sorcerers. The Karap and his religious advisers, though unable to destroy the child, so influenced Pourushaspa that he turned from his own son, fearing him to be a demon born in human form. But the infant discomfited his adversaries and we next hear of him at his seventh year, a precocious and amazing child who is given into the keeping of a wise and venerable sage to be educated in the mysteries of the true religion. At about this time he also escapes an effort to poison him, for the hosts of Ahriman were determined that the Prophet should never preach in Iran.

It was the custom of that time for a boy to reach his majority at the age of fifteen and it is expressly stated that at this age he was initiated into the true faith, a ceremony which always took place at the time of majority. At this time also his father, now reconciled with his divine son, divided his properties among his children. Zoroaster chose only a mysterious belt for his share of the patrimony. At this time also the young man was invested with the Kusti or sacred thread or cord, the symbol of the ancient Mazdean faith. Already the young man was turning toward a religious life and at twenty he assumed religious orders and left home. He went out alone to fast and meditate in the Persian desert. Practically his only food during that time was a certain sacred cheese which never grew old or moldy. There may be a connection between this account and the mysterious food of Hercules which Pythagoras ate while similarly fasting in desert places. At one time during his life Zoroaster was

supposed to have lived in a sacred mountain in a deep cavern. The area where he dwelt was surrounded day and night by a ring of flames. The Prophet could pass through this sacred fire without danger but unbelievers attempting to follow him were immediately consumed.

At thirty Zoroaster began his ministry. With a small group of followers he travelled into Iran and on at least one occasion performed a miracle similar to that attributed to Moses, for he caused a sea to part and with his followers passed through the waters on dry land. It was on May 5th precisely at dawn that Zoroaster received his first vision. He was by the side of a river. Suddenly there appeared before him the vast figure of Vohumano. The celestial being told him to cast aside his body and follow him. He was lifted up into the presence of Ahura-Mazda. Here he received from the lips of the Eternal Power the doctrines he was to teach. After this first vision there came six others dealing principally with the secrets of the angels. He beheld the Amesha-Spentas, the angelic and archangelic hosts. The visions being completed, the Prophet, initiated in divine mysteries, then faced the temptation. Ahriman and the hosts of the inferno tried in every way to destroy the Prophet or turn him from his course. The temptation of Zoroaster follows in general the temptation of Buddha under the bodhi tree, or that of Jesus on the side of Tabor. Victorious over all of the forces of evil, and armed with righteousness, Zoroaster discomfited Ahriman and scattered his evil spirits.

The Prophet's first convert was his own cousin, then, following the orders of Ahura-Mazda, Zoroaster spent the eleventh and twelfth years of his mission (which began at thirty) in the conversion of the powerful Prince Vishtaspa. He was to become the Constantine of Zoroastrianism, like Asoka of Buddhism. The conversion of Vishtaspa was the most important episode in the life of the Prophet. This powerful Iranian prince, surrounded by his court, ministers and priests, was seated upon his throne in the royal palace at Balkh. Suddenly the great stones that formed the roof of the palace slowly opened as

though by magic and through the entrance thus formed the Prophet descended in the air bearing a cube of fire in one hand and a scepter of cypress wood in the other. Zoroaster seems to have been a powerfully built man who wore white robes and a turban-like cap with a long streamer. Thus attired, he faced King Vishtaspa. According to the law of the day he was examined by the priests and philosophers and after three days of constant questioning, Zoroaster was victorious.

The priests of the perverted state faith, jealous and fearful of his power, caused a number of objects used in sorcery to be concealed in his house. He was then arrested as a sorcerer and thrown into prison, but Ahura-Mazda reached the king in his weakest spot. Vishtaspa was a great horseman and prided himself upon the spirit of his horses. When Zoroaster was arrested the king's favorite black horse was instantly paralyzed. Vishtaspa sensed this circumstance as a divine warning and released the Prophet. At this time also he was converted to the faith. The black horse immediately and miraculously recovered. The conversion of Vishtaspa was followed by the conversion of most of his court. The new religion became the official faith of the country. Zoroaster had accomplished his mission and the idolatrous cults were gradually abolished in the land. Then followed years of wandering up and down through Iran. There is a tradition that Zoroaster visited Egypt, also India and Greece. But these traditions stand on their own merits. There is no way of proving them at this distant time. It is recorded of the Prophet that he performed miracles including the curing of blindness.

The deadly enemy of Vishtaspa was the Turanian prince Arejat-aspa the warlike Turk. He invaded Vishtaspa's kingdom. Isfandiar, the son of Vishtaspa, and a convert to the Zoroastrian faith, led the armies of Iran and defeated Arejat-aspa. Returning home victoriously, Isfandiar expected to receive the crown from his father's hands. But a younger brother had calumniated him before the king and Isfandiar was thrown into prison as a reward for his courage and devotion.

Some years passed and again Arejat-aspa invaded the lands of Iran. Vishtaspa was away from his kingdom. Isfendier was in prison. The armies of Iran were defeated. Arejat-aspa captured Balkh and destroyed the Zoroastrian temple of Mush-adar. He pillaged the Zoroastrian shrine, extinguished the sacred fire, slew the priests, and killed Zoroaster.

The description of the death of the Magian as told by the Persians is to the effect that he was performing the sacred offices of the temple when the Turanian invaders burst in. One of the barbarians threw his spear at the Prophet while he knelt in prayer before the altar. Zoroaster, mortally wounded, turned and threw his rosary at the assassin who fell as though struck by a bolt of lightning. Vishtaspa, learning of the tragedy, releases Isfendier who leads an army against Arejat-aspa. The armies of the Turanian are finally defeated and Arejat-aspa himself put to the sword.

The Greek account of the death of the Prophet is to the effect that a great flame descended from the constellation of Orion and gathered up his immortal remains. This sheet of celestial fire which consumed him was the fiery body of his father who gathered up his illustrious son and bore him back to the starry heavens from which he had come.

According to Suidas, Zoroaster left four books of which one is concerned with the mystery of astrology, the others with moral and political matters. Among the mystics of Persia there is still current a legend describing a certain great cavern near the summit of a high peak of the Thian-Shan mountains where are preserved to this day tablets of the original Zarathustra. In some future date these tablets shall be rescued from oblivion when the world has grown wise enough to interpret the secret mysteries inscribed thereon.

THE ZOROASTRIAN DOCTRINE

The Avesta is the principal religious book of the Zoroastrians. The Avesta, with its Zend or interpretation, is usually erroneously called the Zend-Avesta. The Gathas of the Avesta record the actual words of

the prophet. Other parts of the book contain doctrines attributed to him, and commentary material. The Avesta is still the principal text of the Parsee communities in India. Existing versions of the Avesta are of comparatively late composition. The earliest date from the 12th century of the Christian era. There is considerable difference in existing manuscripts of the Avesta indicating they were derived from more extensive originals or a considerable body of tradition from which various selections were made. The Avesta, as it stands today, is the last of an imposing literature, the greater part of which is now lost to the world. Tradition tells that the Avesta was originally compiled by Zoroaster, written upon twelve thousand hides which were bound together with golden bands. The writing was in the secret and sacred language of the prophet of which it is the only example. The characters were supposedly given to Zoroaster by the angels.

Although Zoroaster was unquestionably one of the greatest original thinkers of antiquity, it should not be supposed that he evolved his entire theology without contact with other religious systems. The roots of Zoroastrianism are deep in the primitive folk-lore of the Irano-Aryan peoples. Brahmanism, Chaldean philosophy, Egyptian metaphysics, and even Chinese traditions appear as elements in the Magian doctrine. Zoroaster's contribution was a new interpretation of the older beliefs. The nobility of his intellect is best revealed in his appreciation of spiritual values at a time when most men were bound by narrow and literal codes.

The ancient Zoroastrian doctrines were an extraordinary compound of monotheism, anthropomorphism and pantheism. The beginning of Persian philosophy is the establishment of the nature of the First Principle of existence. Like the Chaldeans and Egyptians, the Zoroastrians define First Cause as an infinite extension, an absolute diffusion of life. Activity they symbolize by a line extending infinitely in union with itself—a circle. The Persians regard the circle in the same way that the Greeks and Egyptians do—the absolute pattern of divine activity. Behind all the Persian philosophy

there is an absolute extension of being—the Space God—the boundless circle of unknown Time. This unknown, unaging and unpassing Principle they term Zeroana Akerne.

Out of Zeroana Akerne emerges the radiant, glorious, manifested creator—Ahura-Mazda—space objectified as a gigantic entity. Zeroana Akerne, the Thrice-Deep Darkness, contains ever within itself the power of objectification. Periodically Ahura-Mazda, the Logos, comes forth, manifests for a certain time, then retires again into the Eternal Darkness. Space, Zeroana Akerne, has two aspects—unmanifesting and manifesting. When Space manifests it is Ahura-Mazda; when it is unmanifested it is Zeroana Akerne.

Ahura-Mazda is a triad, a blazing triangle established in the darkness of Eternal Life. Ahura is the eternal wisdom; Mazda is the vehicle of that wisdom; and Ahura-Mazda together is the light of knowledge manifesting before the created world. It appears that in some of the earlier works Zoroaster is regarded as the incarnation of Ahura-Mazda, at least his manifestor before men. Therefore it is said that Zoroaster had three sons, a king, a warrior and a priest, these representing the triad of powers which manifest from the light of God.

Light manifesting in darkness creates contrast or combat, and from this contrast comes the principle of evil, the darkness always seeking to swallow up the light. The luminous being, Ahura-Mazda, moving in the midst of space, formed the universe and incarnated himself in the luminous parts of the world, finally manifesting as Ormuzd the sun. The sun as materially objectified light, battles with the darkness to sustain the life of the world. Spirit and matter are thus contrasted. By the union of spirit and matter forms are created and in each form there is a conflict, and this conflict in men is called the struggle between the higher and lower Self. The lower or grosser elements are always regarded as the Adversary or the impediment. This Adversary is termed Ahriman, the serpent. When Ahura-Mazda, as the creative intellect, began the fabrication of living things, Ahriman, the negator,

created shadows or bodies in which the luminous principles were imprisoned. Thus we have a new triad consisting of Ahura-Mazda, Ormuzd and Ahriman; or spirit, soul and body, the creating, preserving and destroying phases of existence—the Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva of the Hindus.

The old Persians were astro-philosophers. They used astrology as a symbolical science to represent the mystery of creation, using the zodiac as a key. They said that during the first three signs the gods were created. Aries was Zeroana Akerne, Taurus was Ahura-Mazda, and Gemini the twins was the third Logos, the duality Ormuzd-Ahriman. Ahura-Mazda then caused to issue out of his own nature six secondary divinities which, with himself, constituted the septenary. These are called the Amesha-Spentas, the seven gods of the dawn, the Cosmocra-tors, the World Builders, the Elohim, or the Dhya-na Buddhas. The seven gods created the seven worlds. They are the spectrum, the seven tones, and finally descending through different states of consciousness, become the seven planets of the ancient solar system. They build the seven heavens and the seven earths. Ahura-Mazda incarnates himself in the first heaven, the sphere of Saturn, and sends forth his six regents. He then incarnates again in the lowest world and sending out his six manifestations creates continents. Thus the seven are the divine keepers of the earth—the Lords of the divisions of time and place. They are the seven patriarchs, and the seven stars of the Little Bear, the mysterious constellation within which moves the mysterious axis of the pole.

When Ahura-Mazda sends forth the six divinities out of himself a similar phenomena manifests in the shadow world below. Six demons emerge from Ahriman to become the adversaries of the gods. These are the spirits of evil, and from them issue the seven vices to oppose the seven cardinal virtues.

According to Persian tradition, the world lasts for 12,000 years, but by these years we are to understand twelve great periods of time. These periods are divided into two parts, each of 6000 years, and each of these in turn are divided into two parts of

2000 years, the whole being the great circle of the Zodiac. The Persians break the Zodiac into a quaternary of three signs each, and into an upper and lower hemisphere of six signs each. Ahura-Mazda creates twelve izeds, principles of light. These twelve are the equatorial constellations. At the same time he created other constellations which are non-zodiacal. The two hosts of gods that fight on the great battlefield of space are the stars of the Northern and Southern hemispheres, the Suras and Asuras of the Hindus. Aries to Libra are the six Lords that issued from the radiant principle of Ahura-Mazda, and Virgo to Pisces are the rebellious angels who, created in the light, became the servants of Ahriman. In the sign of Libra we have the head of the Great Serpent, and most of the constellation of the Hydra at the beginning of the dark half of the Zodiac is Libra and in it is the head of the serpent of evil. Libra therefore is the sign of Ahriman, the anti-Christ, the Adversary, the Fallen Man.

In the first 3000 years, that is three signs Aries, Taurus and Gemini, Ahura-Mazda dwells in the light of his own presence. This is the age of the gods. In the second 3000 years the creation of the universe takes place. Out of Cancer the Great Mother the Avatar principle of the world is formed. At the point between Virgo and Libra man is created, the progeny of the celestial Virgin. Thus the six days of creation. Then the kingdom of Ahriman is established. He controls the world for three cycles—Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius. In the last 3000 years the progeny of the divine instructor, the Centaur, break the rule of Ahriman. The battle of Armageddon takes place. Ahriman is defeated by Ormuzd and through his repentance is restored to the light. Therefore at the end of nine cycles the divine age is restored. In the last 3000 years, or cycle, the universal kingdom is returned to Ahura-Mazda and his son Sarosh, the Messiah. At the end of 12,000 years, or twelve cycles, comes the Deluge which is Pisces. The universe is absorbed back into its original Cause. Ahura-Mazda draws all things back into the Primitive Nature and returns to sleep, where, like the Vishnu of the Hindus, he

floats upon the waters of the Abyss, the couch of the seven serpents—the Amesha-Spentas.

From this we get a new triad of principles:

1. Ahura-Mazda the manifested Logos, the First Principle of the creating triad. Out of him issues:
2. Sarosh the Messiah, the second Logos, the Word. This being is the breath of the Creator, the mouth-born son.
3. Zarathustra, upon whom the Word descends, the Perfect Prophet, the word made flesh.

The seven Amesha-Spentas become incarnate in man, his seven bodies, his seven principles, his seven vital organs. These are the creators manifesting their energies in the sustaining of the body. The perfection of man is the Great Work. The good and evil cease when Truth is established. Wisdom destroys all the shadows in which lurk the evil genius of Ahriman. Darkness is not destroyed by violence but is dissipated by the very presence of light. The moment man contains within himself the source of light, the illusions of Ahriman disappear. Wisdom is the mysterious fire within, symbolized by the flame on the Zoroastrian altar. As fire consumes the wood, so the flame of truth consumes the lower elements created by Ahriman.

QUOTATIONS.

“Commit no slander; so that infamy and wickedness may not happen unto thee. For it is said that slander is more grievous than witchcraft.”

“Form no covetous desire, so that the demon of greediness may not deceive thee, and the treasure of the world may not be tasteless to thee.”

“Suffer no anxiety, for he who is a sufferer of anxiety becomes regardless of enjoyment of the world and the spirit, and contraction happens to his body and soul.”

“May the Creator of Wisdom teach me his ordinances through Good Thought, that my tongue may have a pathway.”

“Thou shouldst not become presumptuous through much treasure and wealth; for in the end it is necessary for thee to leave all.”

*"Turn yourself, not away from three best things
—GOOD THOUGHT, GOOD WORD, and
GOOD DEED."*

*"Purity is for man, next to life, the greatest
good."*

*"The law of Mazda cleanses the faithful from
every evil thought, word and deed, as a swift-rush-
ing, mighty wind cleanses the plain."*

*"With enemies fight with equity. With a friend
proceed with the approval of friends. With a ma-*

*licious man carry on no conflict, and do not molest
him in any way whatever. With a greedy man
thou shouldst not be a partner, and do not trust him
with the leadership. With an ill-famed man form
no connection. With an ignorant man thou
shouldst not become a confederate and associate.
With a foolish man make no dispute. With a
drunken man do not walk on the road. From an
ill-natured man take no loan."*

*"Think purely, speak purely and act purely" is
the sum and substance of the ever-living law which
Zoroaster preached to the world.*

Sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall

MAY WE ASK YOUR COOPERATION?

*Please keep us informed in advance, of any
change of address, thereby assuring prompt delivery
of your letter and saving us tripple postage on
same. —Thank You.*