

# Theodicy in Judaism and Zoroastrianism

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The main difference between Zoroastrian and Judaic theodicy prevails in the fact that Judaism holds that one true God has done everything, good or bad, just or unjust whereas in the Gathic Zoroastrianism the twins created by God are responsible for them – Spenta Mainya for the good and Angra Mainyu for the evil in the world. Later on, when Spenta Mainyu was mistakenly merged into Ahuramazda as the knowledge of the Gathic language receded, the later tended to be markedly dualistic. However, as I have emphasized earlier, and as also asserted by Shaul Shaked, both creeds are essentially monotheistic in their essence. “Responding to the generative dialectics of monotheism,” observes Jacob Neusner, “Rabbinic Judaism systematically reveals the justice of the one and only God of all creation. God is not only God but also good.” Judaism “constructed a coherent theology, a cogent structure and logical system, to expose the justice of God. That exposition constitutes their theodicy.” (“Theodicy in Judaism,” in *Formative Judaism: History, Hermeneutics, Law and Religion, Academic Studies in the History of Judaism*, Binghamton, New York: Global Publications, 2000, pp. 71-111). “The problem of theodicy,” he adds, “contained not within the distract propositions of Job, however we read Job.”

Neusner holds that the will of God manifested in the Torah, governs, and, further God's will, for human activity is rational, that is, God's will is just and fair within humans' understanding of the rational. As God's plan ultimately comes to realization, “God's will acts as the active and causative force in the lives of individuals and nations.” God's justice in the oral Torah is “always commensurate both for reward and punishment. The sages identified “the precision of justice, the exact match of action and reaction, - and, above all the immediacy of God's presence in the entire transaction.” (p. 72), which along with so many other features of Judaic theodicy he cites are quite in consonance with what Zoroastrianism preaches. However, Neusner concedes that Judaic theodicy “is assigned an implicit limit to its power, even so logical a theodicy as that of Rabbinic Judaism,” and in conclusion, he notes: “God rules, and men in the end cannot explain, account for the

rationality of, everything God decrees.” (p. 110). This too does not run against the trajectory of Zoroastrian theodicy which is concerned with the human sphere and not outside it. Consequently it has no answers about natural calamities, etc., that fall outside of the range of human ills and adversities. These common elements in the two systems, as it appears to me, cannot be attributed so much to Persian “influence”, if it existed, as to both these faiths – one Semitic, the other Aryan – somehow sharing for long a monotheistic background even though each monotheism may be rooted on different principles, peoples and provinces. Thus, Judaism may be based on Israel being the favored nation of Yahweh and monotheism in Zoroastrianism may be based on an abstract theological or philosophical construct. Yet remarkably both somehow seem to have many theological features in common.