

Zarathushtra as the Pioneering Genius of Eastern and Western Religious Thought

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According to many scholars, Zarathushtra's message is the greatest contribution Iran has made to world civilization. If Zoroastrians have excelled in their leadership role throughout the centuries it is because the human annals know of no one else who led mankind in establishing a very high order of monotheism which required not just the worship of one God but becoming Godlike by becoming his active and ardent ally, emulating Him in every possible way and bringing God's Kingdom (Vohukshathra) on earth. He laid the foundation of strong ethics for the future generations. He was the first prophet known to mankind who promised the reward of paradise (which is an Avestan word) to those who will follow God and warned those who will not of hell. But, above all, he was the first in the annals of the world to realize through divine revelation that there is a deep spiritual purpose and law governing the universe leading ultimately to the renovation of the world when this world will be purged of all evil thereby ushering into God's Kingdom much as we find in the chapter on Revelation in the Bible. These ideas are at the core of Judaeo-Christian traditions, and so sound very familiar to its adherents. The Jews came to know about Zarathushtra's teachings when King Cyrus freed them from the Babylonian captivity, and King Darius rebuilt their second temple in Jerusalem. Moreover, the Greeks and the early Christians came into contact with Zoroastrian ideas which were rife in Asia Minor right after the times and conquests of Darius and his successors. The neo-Platonists seemed to be well disposed too Zoroastrian ideas, and the echoes of Zoroastrian eschatology can be easily found even in the Jewish sects such as the Essenes that were outside of the mainstream of Judaism.

The Zoroastrians living in the West should therefore feel at home with the prevailing religious ideologies as they are not very different from those pioneered by Zarathushtra at the dawn of history, which should inspire them and their children to familiarize themselves with their traditions and stay faithful to them. For, even though we may find the idea of heaven and hell, divine retribution, individual choice and responsibility, final judgment and resurrection in the Western religious thought, it is only in Zarathushtra's theology that they evince their logical coherence as our thoughts, deeds, and actions alone and no other interventions, not even one by the Prophet himself, could lead us to them. It should also be noted that Zoroastrian doctrines offer much more than what the Western Traditions offer for the overall spiritual guidance of mankind, such

as the sanctity and spirituality pervading in the whole universe – man being just one part of it, interdependence between man and nature, and the need for man to preserve and safeguard rather than exploit nature, as man has no prudence whatsoever over other elements of nature, as in the Western traditions which placed man over everything else in Nature, until the Western wantonness with Nature brought them face to face with ecological disasters, such an irreverential attitude to Nature inherently ensures Zarathushtra's unabiding reverence to Mother Nature is evident in his choice of metaphor, such as the soul of the cow representing the soul of the universe, or religious conception and communicating urgently and directly with God about the need for a prophet, in each Amesha Spenta representing an important creation of God. Thus, Zarathushtra was not a pioneering genius of Western religious thought alone, but also of Eastern religious and reverential attitude towards nature, as man cannot be Godlike per him, unless man cares for Nature as God does, and feels duty bound by his broad religious convictions to protect it in every way.