

Maga, The Magian Fellowship

Ali A. Jafarey

Maga in Avesta and *magha* in Sanskrit are derived from *maz/mah* meaning ‘to be great, magnanimous, liberal, generous’. *Maga/magha* means ‘greatness, magnanimity, generosity’. The adjective *magavan/maghavan* means ‘great, liberal, generous, and magnanimous’. The Sanskrit adjective is used mostly in honor of Indra, the Rigvedic god of clouds and rains, who was “generous” enough to bring riches to the Vedic Aryans by driving the drought away.

Zarathushtra uses *Maga* for the “Fellowship” he founded through his Good Religion, and *Magavan* for every member of the “Magnanimity”. The two words—*Maga* and *Magavan*—are mentioned eight times in the Gathas (*Maga*: Songs 2.11, 11.14, 16.11, 16.16, 17.7 [twice], and *Magavan*: 6.7, 16.15).¹ Zarathushtra calls his *Maga* *maz*, ‘great’, in two Gathic stanzas—2.11 and 11.14.²

The gist of the above stanzas is that the Great Fellowship is based on its smallest unit—a married couple forming unity in “weal and woe”. The units aggregate to include the entire living world. It teaches radiant happiness that reaches all. A person who consults righteousness, uses his/her good mind, and lives a life of progressive peace qualifies to be a member of the Fellowship.

In the beginning Zarathushtra prays to God to lead him to expand his newly founded Fellowship. Later, he is joined by King Vishtaspa and his sagacious team, and therefore the work to promote the “Great Fellowship” gains a great momentum. Zarathushtra’s “best wishes” come true when he watches the Fellowship grow far and wide.

It may be noted that the Good Religion does not divide its followers on caste and/or professional systems. It is on geographical bases. Home (*demâna*) is the first unit. Homes make up a settlement (*vîs*). Settlements join to make the third unit, district (*shoithra*). Districts together create a land (*dahyu*). Lands unite into a world, the earth (*bûmi*). A home is made of the family (*khaetva*). A settlement encloses the community (*verezena*). The land has the fellowship (*airyaman*). The world of lands has the Great Fellowship (*Maz Maga*). No race, no color, and no profession to divide the people into upper to lower castes and classes in a pyramid, but five units to unite the entire humanity on this good earth on one level. Only one’s good and better thoughts, words, and deeds in serving humanity and promoting the world give him/her recognition.

With this ‘Introduction’, I should say I regret to tell of what happened to *Maz Maga*, the Great Magnanimity of the Magnanimous (*Magavan*) Zarathushtra after the Gathic period. The Aryans had their primitive caste system—the priests, the warriors, and the miscellany professionals. The third caste labored and produced while the first two enjoyed the fruits. The Indo-Iranians in the east (today’s Central Asia and northwestern India) had their *âthravans/atharvans*, the fire priests. It was these priest who took over the Good Religion and institutionalized it into what we have

¹ Yasna 29.11, 46.14, 51.11, 51.16, 53.7... 33.7, 51.15

² Yasna 29.11 and 46.14

today as the “Traditional” Zoroastrianism. The Âthravans do not mention the Gathic Magavans and the Zarathushtrian Maz Maga. The two terms are not found in the Later Avesta.

The only two exceptions are: (1) May the water [supply] not be available for him who is of the evil religion, who torments a friend, who torments a “*moghu*”, who torments a neighbor, and who torments a family (Yasna 65.7). (2) A married man is superior to a “maghavan” (here, evidently it means a “celibate”, Vendidad 4:47). Note the change in pronunciation: one is “maghavan” and the other “moghu”. Also, the meanings are not clear from the contexts in which the two used. Both are deductions.

In the west, the professional priests of the Median “nation” were clever enough to retain their caste (“tribe” in the words of Herodotus), and at the same time call themselves Magu, the Median/Old Persian pronunciation of Magava(n). Magu (Magush³ as nominative singular masculine) was Grecized into Magos with Magi as its plural.

The word “magic”, derived from Magu, shows how highly learned and advanced the Magi were in their knowledge and crafts. They made non-Iranians wonder and imagine that they were watching “sorcerers” at work. This could happen to any backward people if they see modern scientific implements used by the advanced. We have many stories about how people looked first at wireless, telephone, locomotive engine, train, and other inventions and imagined them to be magic and “products of the Devil”. Some still do!

With the Magi’s name and fame in mind, all the priests of the Babylonian and Assyrian priests of other creeds took the name “Magi” for themselves. It is simple to understand the rest of events, even the Three Wise Men who are said to have visited and paid their respects to the newborn Jesus. Every Magus in what we call Middle East was not Zoroastrian. He was just a “priest”.

However, in the case of Jesus, it must be the Zoroastrian Magi because by that time the institutionalized Zoroastrianism was awaiting the miraculous birth of the “savior” from a virgin womb. The early Christians, most likely the gentiles, were finding a way to strengthen their story of the virgin birth by linking it to the “famous” Magi in the east.

Even the very word priest, shortened from *presbyteros*, literally ‘elder’, was originally applied to “a member of the governing body of an early Christian Church”. Today most of the religious orders, including Traditionalist Zoroastrians, have their “priests”. We have a few more examples in Guru, Yogi, and Mogul.

³ *Moyu* is the Young Avestan pronunciation of Iranian /magu/, likely meaning ‘magi’. – CG