

## **What is Zoroastrianism?**

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Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest religions and philosophical belief systems, originating around 1500 BCE with the teachings of Zarathushtra Spitama. Zoroastrians believe there is a single creator of existence, Ahura Mazda, which is ever-present in nature and attainable by the living. Moreover, it is believed that Ahura Mazda designed existence to progress towards its best or ideal state, in part by the aid of humanity. As such, Zoroastrianism heavily emphasizes ethical behavior, believing it is each person's responsibility, man or woman, to aid in this process and do good by their thoughts, words, and deeds. The search for truth and knowledge is also a key aspect of the religion, emphasized for its own intrinsic value and how it enables one to make existence better.

Fundamentally, Zoroastrianism sees life as intrinsically good and worth being enjoyed because it is an outgrowth of the perfect laws which order existence. These laws are referred to by a single term, Asha, which is the ultimate source from which all creation emerges. However, Asha is opposed by a concept called Druj, or the deception, the source from which all evil and dysfunction derives. The conflict between these two, and the many overlapping dichotomies which arise from them, make up the current 'mixed' state of existence, and, therefore, it is the responsibility of each Zoroastrian to understand Asha and actualize it in existence, working towards the betterment of all life. This state of conflict ultimately necessitates the importance of Ahura Mazda, the Divine Wisdom which enables one to properly understand the workings of the world and the precise actions needed to improve it.

In Zoroastrian theology, Ahura Mazda is seen as the supreme intellect of all existence which exists fully in the realm of mind and potentialities and is immanent in reality as the fire and energy pervading all life. As such, both fire and the natural world are given the utmost care and respect in Zoroastrianism, not to be polluted, and they are honored and worshiped by Zoroastrians as extensions of the creator. As such, Zoroastrianism is often considered to be highly environmental. Moreover, women are fundamentally equal to men, and all life is seen as fundamentally good, even if at various levels of progression or regression. Therefore, the purpose of each Zoroastrian is to venerate and enjoy life, actively emulating the creator and working toward making existence fresh and new.

Zarathushtra originally taught his teachings as a philosophical and spiritual system to a small group of followers somewhere in Central Asia, perhaps modern day Badakhshan. However, this later evolved into an organized religion and spread across many lands. It

existed as the primary religion of ancient Iran, or Persia, for thousands of years. In these times, Zoroastrians produced much science, philosophy, and religious literature and had a profound impact on Judaism and Greek philosophy. Unfortunately, this was put to an end during the Muslim conquest of Persia (642–651 AD), and Zoroastrians were steadily persecuted over many centuries, leading to the eventual decline of the religion.

Today, Zoroastrianism exists primarily among small communities in Iran and India, as well as in small diaspora communities throughout Europe and North America. While there have been a few converts in western countries, these numbers are rather small, and Zoroastrianism remains a rather obscure and rarely heard of religion. It is the Zarathushtrian Assemblies goal to introduce the profound teachings of Zarathushtra to a new, western audience and aid in the revival of this nearly forgotten religion and philosophy.