

What did Zarathushtra teach?

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Zarathushtra Spitama was an ancient Iranian sage, philosopher, and religious innovator who taught that there was a single creator of existence, Ahura Mazda, who created existence to progress towards its ideal state and that it was each person's responsibility to aid in this process, primarily through good deeds and the obtainment of wisdom. Moreover, he taught that the entire universe was locked in a struggle of good and evil which originated from the deceit which obscures Ahura Mazda's vision for a perfect existence. As such, he emphasized the importance of envisioning the ideal way reality could be ordered and actualizing this in the physical world. He formalized these teachings into a philosophical and spiritual system he called Vanguhi Daena ('the good envisionment'), which he intended as a guiding philosophy for the attainment of the divine and the perfection of the world. He encoded this system of thought into a series of poems called the Gathas, which survive today in his own words, and form the core of the Zoroastrian religion.

Central to Zarathushtra's teachings is the notion that there is an ultimate source of truth and goodness in the universe, being the very laws which govern the universe, or Asha. However, its exact nature is far too grand and universal to be fully comprehended by any single being, leading to it often being obscured, misinterpreted, or misunderstood by those existing. In consequence of this, nothing can be entirely certain to any one individual, neither what is good or bad, nor what is true or false--nor is there any single authority on what is right or true. In consequence of state of affairs, he emphasized that it is each person's responsibility, man or woman, to seek to understand the way the world works and what is truly good or bad; to uplift their own mind and advance their wisdom; and to ultimately contribute to the betterment of reality, to the best of their ability.

This uncertain nature of reality, as he saw it, arises from the fact that the universe is still in the act of creation, a progressive, iterative process of actualizing Ahura Mazda's blueprint for the perfect existence, embedded in the very laws which govern existence. As such the universe is a mixture of overlapping, dualistic paradigms which either actualize the perfection at the core of reality, or struggle against it, hampering and obscuring the truth. More importantly, in his observations, Zarathushtra determined that throughout reality there was an inherent tendency for life to progress and evolve according to the laws which determine existence. He conceptualized this as Spenta Mainyu, a primal force or impulse in the universe existing as each and every potential for growth and progression. He concluded that ultimately, this life-growing force would fully actualize the perfect, or ideal reality, in part by the aid of humanity, through a process called Frashokereti.

However, most crucial to Zarathushtra's teachings, and perhaps most revolutionary for the time, was the idea that there is a single creator of existence, a Supreme Intellect which preceded the universe and was the very designer of it. However, he did not see this creator as some warlike and petty 'god', inherited or retrofitted from the polytheistic notions of his day, but instead as the

ultimate intelligence that exists fully in the realm of the mind and energy, ever-present throughout existence as the highest outcome of thought and mind. In this way, this supreme intellect is both individually immanent (and attainable) in each instance of mind and universally existent as a whole across reality. He referred to this concept as Mazdā Ahura, Supreme Intelligence or Divine Wisdom, and he considered the emulation and attainment of it as the highest spiritual and intellectual effort in existence. He conceptualized the process of obtaining the Divine, through attaining its component aspect, into a system called the Amesha Spentas.

After Zarathushtra, his teachings seemed to live on in a type of school, or religious institute, where students would study and learn the “good envisionment”, primarily using the Gathas as a tool for the uplifting of the mind and the realization of the Divine. After he passed away at the age of 77, perhaps sometime around 1300 BC, both the running of the school and the good envisionment as a whole passed on to his student Djama’aspa, who was aided by two of Zarathushtra daughters, Freno and Srito, alongside other important figures. A few decades later, Vohu-Nemah would take over the religion and school, and later still Saeno ‘the eagle’, who legend says was born a hundred years after the founding of the religion, lived for a hundred years, and taught one hundred pupils.

Zarathushtra’s teachings would go on in this pristine state for about 300 years, before a foreign invasion of ancient Iran nearly brought it to extinction. After a century of ‘darkness’, the religion was revived over a period of two centuries by 4 figures named Arezuua, Sruta-spadha, Zrayah, and Spento-Xratu (roughly 900-700 BC). However, the Zoroastrianism that would emerge was much more religious, in a typical sense, and incorporated many of the old polytheistic and mythological beliefs of the Iranians before Zarathushtra. However, the curriculum of this school and the core of Zoroastrianism, the Gathas, still survived. Today, many Zoroastrian organizations, including the [Assembly](#), are seeking to revive the teachings of Zarathushtra, that ‘good envisionment’, or Vanguhi Daena.