

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL
CONFERENCE "INNOVATIVE
DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL SCIENCE "



Boston, USA



INTERPRETATION OF UNIVERSAL VALUES IN ZOROASTRIANISM

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7361041>

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Abstract: In this article, the essence of the ancient Zoroastrian doctrine, its rare source “Avesta”, the main pillars of the Zoroastrian faith, four important values and sacred elements are scientifically analyzed.

Keywords: history, philosophy, good and evil, truth, labor, charity

Zoroastrism is one of the first religions in the history of the human. Although its place of birth has not been ascertained, scientists have found a lot of evidence allowing them to make a suggestion that the religion appeared in **Ancient Khorezm**. As “Avesta” was being written for several centuries, influenced by various cultures, dialects and languages, the prophet Zoroaster is mentioned under different names in it (Zaotara, Aaturvan). The principal god of wisdom and everything good was **Ahura Mazda** (also spelled Auramazda, Ormizd, Ormazd), who communicated his knowledge to Zoroaster.

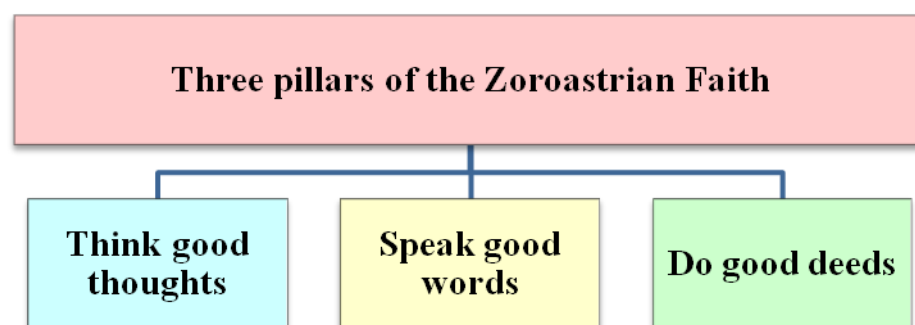
“**Avesta**” is not only a collection of **Zoroastrian holy texts** and a monument of the Old Iranian language and philosophy, but also a unique document describing the history of the first states in the territory of **Central Asia** and the social and economic relations between the people of the region. Avesta told that the first of the best places and countries created by **Ahura Mazda** was Aryanem Vaychakh (Arian spaces), the second of the best places was Guvu (Sogd), the home of the Sogdians, the third was Mauru (Merv) and the fourth place was Bahdi (Bactria).

According to the majority of scientists, Zoroaster lived in the **1st millennium BC**. **Avesta**’s first texts had only an oral form, but in the 7th -6th centuries BC they were collected and written in **Ancient Persia**. The writings were made **on bullock skin with the use of golden ink**. All those texts written on 20,000 pieces of bullock

skin were burnt up by **Alexander the Great**. At a later time Zoroaster’s teaching was restored and re-written. Today **Avesta** is considered to **consist of 21 books**, 5 of which have a written form and 16 are oral, communicated from generation to generation.

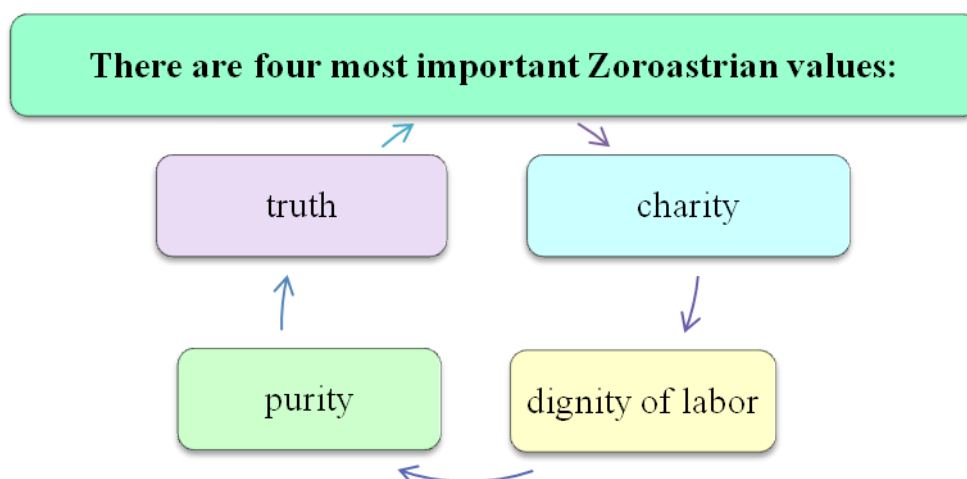
Avesta tells about the life of communities (farmers and cattle-breeders) ruled by **patriarchal** relations, about the class differentiation and about divinities and spirits, which produces a rather clear image of the people of that time.

According to Zoroaster, the world is a battleground between the forces of **good and evil**. Ultimately, good will prevail over evil. The mission in life is to conduct oneself in such a manner that this ultimate victory is achieved. He urged his followers to live a full and useful life in this world, to appreciate all things that are good and beautiful in creation, not only to do good and desist from evil but also to fight evil, and to make others happy. He assured his followers that the strength of God would be given to those who fought evil, and stressed that an evil deed could be offset by a good one. As for happiness, the way to seek happiness was by making others happy. He pointed out that in each of us there is a divine spark. It is up to us to recognize this divine spark or essence within us, to understand its capabilities and to try and so conduct ourselves that we reach the state of perfection in this world.



Zoroaster emphasized free choice. In one his first sermons he preached: “Who seek knowledge, please listen carefully to what I say, and perceive the truth in the light of reason, because it is possible for each man to have a separate creed.”He also taught that one should be liberal in thinking and to respect all that is good, true and beautiful: “We reserve and love all good thoughts, words and deeds that may

have been presented here or elsewhere, now or at any future period, because we are on the side of goodness.”



“There are four most important Zoroastrian values:

First, truth. Zoroastrianism stresses truth more than anything else. Man is equipped through mental consciousness to discern truth from falsehood, and has the free will to choose between right and wrong. The very first prayer a Zoroastrian child learns is devoted to truth. A free translation of that prayer – called Ashem Vohu – is: “Truth is the greatest virtue. It is happiness. Happy is who is truthful for the sake of truth”.

Second, charity. In the very second prayer a Zoroastrian child learns – the “Yatha Ahu Vairyo” – there is a line which says: “He who give assistance to the poor acknowledges the kingdom of God.”

Third, purity. Zoroastrianism puts value on purity – of both the body and the mind.

Fourth, dignity of labor. Hard work and the dignity of labor are emphasized in Zoroastrianism. In the *Gathas*, which are a record of the prophet’s conversations with Ahura Mazda, Zoroaster asks “What is the way of furthering the Mazdayasni religion?” and Ahura Mazda replies “Incessant cultivation of corn, O Spitama Zoroaster. Who cultivates corn cultivates righteousness” [1].

“**The struggle of the good with the evil** was the basic principle of **Zoroastrianism**. In his teaching Zoroaster called upon people to love and help each other and to unite at moments of disaster. The dog, a friend guarding one’s home

and cattle, had to be treated with care and love. On the contrary, killing a **wolf, a symbol of the evil**, was regarded a noble deed.

The **earth, fire, water and air** were sacred elements. That was why the dead were not buried or burnt, but were brought onto a special hill, **dahma**, where their flesh was eaten up by predators. After that the bones were put into special containers, **ossuaries**. *Risto-kasha*, people, whose job was to carry dead bodies, were cursed to the end of their days and were forbidden from contacting fire or water and from approaching too close to other people.

Avesta also mentions the architecture of that period and the building material used in construction (mud brick and pakhsa blocks).

No doubt, Zoroastrianism influenced all the four world religions - Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and Judaism (with candles as an inherent attribute and god assuming the form of fire to descend onto the earth in Judaism and Christianity). One of the most important **holidays** mentioned in Avesta was **Navruz** (Nowruz, Novruz), which is to this day celebrated as a major official holiday in a number of Asian countries.

Avesta's postulates calling to good deeds are as usable today as they were thousands of years ago. A **monument to Avesta**, an image of a large white-leaved book in the flame of red stone over a marquee was erected in **Urgench**. Avesta is being largely studied in Uzbekistan and throughout the world. In 2001 UNESCO organised a celebration of **Avesta's 2,700th anniversary**" [2].

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