INTERACTIONS WITH THE GREEKS AND ROMANS

The Greeks studied the philosophy of the Persian prophet, dating him “5,000 years before the Siege of Troy” [Plutarch]. His doctrine is mentioned by Plato, Socrates and Aristotle, who studied under the Magi.

In Roman times the image of Persia was a land of mystery, wisdom and learning. Its religious teachings, in the form of ‘Mithraism’ appealed to the conquering Roman soldiers, who spread it through the Empire, until the rise of Christianity in the 4th century CE. Hundreds of Mithraic temples have been discovered across Europe, the latest one unearthed in London in the 1970s.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The survival of the Zoroastrian religion over 3,500 years, is remarkable when one considers the devastations it has suffered in conquests, destruction of scriptures, annihilation of priests, persecution of believers and forced conversions, and more recent doctrinal disputes, threat of declining numbers and cultural and religious assimilation -- compounded by the fact that Zoroastrianism is traditionally a non-proselytizing faith.

But the religion is not ready to be relegated to the history books just yet. It is perhaps its core beliefs that impel its followers to excel in all arenas of human endeavor and contribute for the benefit of humankind.

Despite the vicissitudes of time and history, the essence of Zarathushtra’s timeless and universal message has been preserved and perpetuated, as new generations recognize the remarkable relevance of this ancient faith in today’s world.

ZOROASTRIANS IN IRAN

For centuries after the Arab invasion, Zoroastrians in Iran practiced their faith in quiet seclusion, in the face of extreme persecution. As opportunities presented themselves in the 20th century, they excelled in all walks of life – government, business, industry, arts and sciences, and built an impeccable reputation for honesty and philanthropy.

ZOROASTRIANS IN INDIA – THE PARSIS

A miniscule minority in India (less than .01% of the population), the Parsis have influenced the country well out of proportion to their numbers. Enterprising, highly literate and reputed for their honesty, philanthropy and pioneering spirit, the Parsis have led the shipbuilding, aviation, steel, textiles, chemicals, and nuclear industries; and excelled in arts and sciences. They founded hospitals, schools, libraries and other institutions, liberally extending their philanthropy beyond their own community.

HISTORY

The origins of Zoroastrianism are lost in antiquity, but it has left a timeless legacy to world religious thought that is as relevant today as when it was revealed over three millennia ago. Zarathushtra (Zoroaster), prophet of the world’s oldest revealed religion, lived in remote antiquity, circa 1,800 – 1,100 BCE in Central Asia, near the Aral Sea. In his thirtieth year, Zarathushtra received the revelation and set out on his mission to bring His message to mankind.

One of Zarathushtra’s earliest disciples was King Vishtaspa, ruler of Bactria. Thereafter, the religion spread far and wide. For a thousand years (559 BCE to 651 CE) it was the dominant religion during three mighty Persian empires, that stretched west towards Rome and Greece, east into India, north into Russia and south into Egypt, with followers in the millions.

It was the State religion of the Persian Achaemenian Empire founded by Cyrus the Great in 559 BCE, but suffered a setback with the conquest of Persia in 334 BCE by Alexander of Macedonia, when the magnificent Persepolis, seat of the Persian empire, was destroyed, libraries and religious texts burned, and the treasury plundered. The Persian Empire of the Parthians (250 BCE to 227 CE) witnessed the birth of Christ and the rise of Christianity. Zoroastrianism was rejuvenated as the Imperial religion of the Sasanian Persian Empire (226 to 651 CE) but reeled once again with the advent of Islam. After a crucial battle with the Arabs in 641 CE, sovereignty passed into the hands of the Islamic Caliphs.

Over the ensuing dispiriting years, a large number of Zoroastrians accepted Islam, some continued to practice their faith under oppressive conditions, while a few fled in sailing vessels, landing on the western shores of India in the 10th century, and were given refuge by the native Hindu ruler. Their descendants, the Parsis, still keep their faith alive in India.
The quintessence of his teachings is embodied in the triad: achieved honestly, and used for good and charitable purposes. No place for asceticism. The generation of wealth is part of the ethos, as long as it is intelligent reflection and active benevolence.

A Zoroastrian is taught to lead an industrious, honest and charitable life. There is ethic, based on obedience, fear or love, but rather, an ethic of personal responsibility. Zarathushtra asked his listeners to think with a clear mind, and choose a life of belief, as reason and action on the part of every individual. His was not a prescriptive (Wise Lord). His message is a positive, life-affirming one, which demands not so much Zarathushtra preached the monotheistic religion of one supreme God, Ahura Mazda (Attributes of Ahura Mazda) fire" -- the religion denounces the worship of idols or deities. Enlightenment and Truth. It is important to note that Zoroastrians do not "worship burns in each and every heart; a physical representation of the Illumined Mind, Fire is revered as a visible symbol of the Inner Light, the divine spark, that inner sanctum of Zoroastrian 'fire-temples' also called a 'Dar-e-Mehr' (Door of Devotion) or 'Atash Kadeh' (House of Fire). Zoroastrian rituals are solemnized in the presence of a Fire, which is scrupulously tended with sandalwood and frankincense and kept burning in a silver urn in the silver urn in the temple. A child is officially initiated into the Zoroastrian faith with the Navjote ceremony, where he or she is invested with the sacred Sudreh (a white muslin shirt) and the Sudreh pushi ceremony (initiation) ceremony

Zoroastrian ideals have played a vital role in the development of western religious thought. Some theological concepts shared by Zoroastrianism with Judaism and Christianity are:

- Belief in one supreme God.
- Heaven and Hell, and individual judgment.
- Ultimate triumph of good over evil.
- Strict moral and ethical code.
- The Messiah to come for the final restoration.
- Concepts of resurrection, final judgment and life everlasting.
- The words sartan, paradise and amen are of Zoroastrian origin.

The interchange of Zoroastrian thought with Judeo-Christian ideology first took place when Cyrus the Great defeated the Assyrians and released the Jews from Babylonian captivity. They heralded Cyrus as their Messiah, as prophesied in the Bible [Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1-3]. The Old Testament is replete with references to the Babylonian captivity. They heralded Cyrus as their Messiah, as prophesied in the Bible [Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1-3] and Christianity.

The central ritual of worship begins to show an increase in light. “birthday of the unconquered Sun,” which, following the winter solstice, once again in Rome proclaimed Christmas be celebrated on the day of “natalis solis invicti”, the place when Cyrus the Great defeated the Assyrians and released the Jews from Babylonian captivity. They heralded Cyrus as their Messiah, as prophesied in the Bible [Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1-3]. The Old Testament is replete with references to the Babylonian captivity. They heralded Cyrus as their Messiah, as prophesied in the Bible [Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1-3] and Christianity. Some theological concepts shared by Zoroastrianism with Judaism and Christianity are:

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