

# ZOROASTRIANISM:

## 'The Parsees of Bombay'

One of the most popular and flamboyant characters ever to strut the stage of pop music was **FREDDY MERCURY**, lead singer of the rock group **QUEEN**. From the entry on WIKIPEDIA located on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freddie\\_Mercury](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freddie_Mercury) we read the following –

'Freddie Mercury (born Farrokh Bulsara; Gujarati: *Pharōkh Balsārā*; 5 September 1946 – 24 November 1991) was a British musician, record producer, and singer-songwriter, best known as the lead vocalist and lyricist of the rock band Queen. As a performer, he was known for his flamboyant stage persona and powerful vocals over a four-octave range... Mercury was a **PARSI (Cecil - or PARSEE)** born in Sultanate of Zanzibar and grew up there and in India until his mid-teens... On the evening of 24 November 1991... Mercury died at the age of 45 at his home in Kensington... On 27 November, Mercury's funeral service was conducted by a **ZOROASTRIAN priest**'.

In the 2002 edition of '**The Times: World Religions: A History of Faith**' there is a 2-page entry (pp204-205) on **ZOROASTRIANISM** and herewith are some extracts –

'Like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion that still survives today, albeit with a relatively small number of followers. There are only a few thousand practising Zoroastrians left in Iran, where the religion first emerged, with the largest groups being **the Parsees** in India who number around 125,000. It is thought by some to have been founded around 1200 BC; by others around 508 BC by Zarathrusta, later known as Zoroaster. Its first adherents were the pastoral nomads of the ancient Afghanistan-Persian border areas. Subsequently, Zoroastrianism became the chief faith of Persia before the arrival of Islam'.

What then follows has some uncanny similarities to the story of **Mohammed** and how he came to found **Islam**. The narrative continues –

'The religions of India and Persia in Zarathrusta's time were polytheistic (similar to Arabia at the time of Mohammed) Zarathrusta... formulated a new religion that attempted to concentrate the many gods of these faiths into one, (same 'course' followed by Mohammed) **AHURA MAZDA**, meaning "Wise One" (for Mohammed the one god was **ALLAH**). Ahura Mazda, it seems, appeared to Zarathrusta in a vision (for Mohammed he claimed his 'visionary' messenger was the angel Gabriel) and appointed him to preach *asha*, the truth (Muslim activists emphasise that Islam is the "true religion": 'Islam Unveiled' p5)

Interestingly we then read of a marked contrast between Islam and Zoroastrianism –

'Humans... must not debilitate themselves by fasting... forbidden in Zoroastrianism' (The 'fasting' month of Ramadan is of course one of the major 'Pillars' of Islam')

The importance and significance of **FIRE** in **ZOROASTRIANISM** is then explained –

‘AHURA MAZDA is represented by fire, which is believed to be a manifestation of the power of creation and God’s divinity. Fire is a sacred element of **Zoroastrianism** and is used in all religious ceremonies. The focal points of worship are the fire temples which house a sacred fire that must never be allowed to go out... Priests are responsible for fuelling the fire and must constantly purify themselves to avoid contamination’ (shades here of Old Testament Judaism as celebrated in the wilderness-wandering Tabernacle – In “The Tabernacle in the Wilderness” by John Ritchie we read ‘The two vessels that stood within the court of the Tabernacle were the altar of burnt-offering and the brazen laver... Apart from the altar and laver no priest could ever have entered the dwelling-place of God... The bright flame of fire burning night and day upon the altar [Leviticus 6:12-13] was the first sight that met the sinner’s gaze... The fire was never to go out’ (pp 29-30) and ‘The laver was filled with water, and thereat the priests washed their hands and feet as they went into the Holy Place to worship and as they came to the altar to serve. The neglect of this was death... It was the daily need of the priests; by its use they were kept in a condition of cleanness, in which they could exercise the functions of their priestly office before the Lord and toward His people’.

The closest things resembling ‘scriptures’ would be a series 17 hymns written in a language known as ‘**AVESTAN**’ which resembled **SANSKRIT**. This is slightly similar to the ‘scriptures’ of the Hindu sect, the Hare Krishnas. In one copy of the **Bhagavad-Gita** that I have (‘Bhagavad-Gita: As It Is’ 1990 Edition) it states the following –

‘Complete Edition... with the original **SANSKRIT** text... In this present day, people are very much eager to have one scripture, one God, one religion and one occupation. Therefore let there be one scripture only, one common scripture for the whole world – *Bhagavad-Gita* – let there be one God for the whole world *Krishna* and one hymn, one mantra one prayer – the chanting of His name and let there be one work only – the service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead’ (p 33).

However, unlike the Hare Krishnas we then read –

‘There is no belief in reincarnation or in karma, divine judgment of acts performed during life. Rather, humans are judged on whether good or evil predominated in their lives (sounds very much like ‘self-salvation’). After that, souls are consigned to Heaven, the best existence, or Hell, the worst existence. **Zoroastrianism**, a fundamentally optimistic faith, teaches that... when time ends, all souls, good or evil, will be purified’.

The practice of what happens to Zoroastrians who die is also mentioned. We read –

‘Death and dead matter are polluting elements in **Zoroastrianism** and disposal of dead bodies have been traditionally carried out at private ceremonies within the Dakhma-nashini, better known as *The Towers of Silence*... The only people who can touch a body which, it is believed, is filled with the evil spirit of putrefaction up to three hours after death, are specially designated corpse-bearers. The body is first bathed in the urine of a white bull... and the body is placed on a stone slab. A dog which can chase away evil spirits is brought in to look on the face of the dead person. The body is then taken to a circular stone structure, the Dakhma. The corpse is then left for disposal by a combination of the sun, the rain and the vultures... This practice is increasingly rare among modern Zoroastrians and... has been replaced by burial or cremation.

One final comment about the write-up in ‘**The Times: World Religions: A History of Faith**’. There are 3 illustrations interspersed on the two pages dealing with **Zoroastrianism** and one of them has this description –

**'THE KABAH-e-ZARDOUCHT or Zoroaster's Cube, a black and white stone tower at the Achaemenid necropolis. It was erected by the Persian king Darius (521-486 BC) to house the sacred flame of Zoroastrianism'.**

On this Wikipedia site [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naqsh-e\\_Rustam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naqsh-e_Rustam) there is a photo of this building (shown below) with this description – Ka'ba-ye Zartosht (cube shaped construction in the foreground) against the backdrop of Naqsh-e Rostam. We also learn that this 'necropolis' is 'located about 12 km northwest of Persepolis, in Fars Province, Iran'.



Again, some uncanny similarities with Islam and its **KABAH** in Mecca. In the 'glossary' for the book '**Islam Revealed**' by **Dr Anis A Shoris** we read the following on page 311 –

**KABAH: A small stone building located in the court of the great Mosque in Mecca, containing a black stone (a meteorite) supposedly given to Adam by Gabriel and subsequently found by Abraham, who allegedly built the KABAH with Ishmael.**

On this link [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ka%27ba-ye\\_Zartosht](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ka%27ba-ye_Zartosht) we find a probable explanation for some of the similarities with Islam –

**'The name *Ka'ba-ye Zartosht* probably dates to the 14th century, when many pre-Islamic sites were identified with figures and events of the Qur'an'**

In his booklet '**Islam Unveiled**', **Abdullah Al-Araby** makes this comment on page 16

**'It is interesting to note that much of Islam's practices and rituals were borrowed from the pre-Islamic pagan Arabs. This is the period that Muslims refer to as "al-JAHILYYA" (Ignorance age). Some of these rituals are: Exalting the Kaaba and the Black Stone...'**

If this information has whetted your appetite on **ZOROASTRIANISM** you may now wish to view the video of a TV programme that looked at, in particular, **'The Parsees of Bombay'**. You can do so by going to this link –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTGhmWVTbo4>

I would now like to make a few observations about aspects of the TV programme.

1. After about 28 minutes reference is made to the coming of Christian missionaries (**Cecil – it would appear with questionable methodology and theology**) and the programme then goes on to show what are clearly Roman Catholic buildings etc.
2. The allegation is then made that the 'Christian God' created both **'good and evil'**. This is just not true although the allegation is often made. By way of refutation let me quote the following web link. On is <http://www.gotquestions.org/Isaiah-45-7.html> we read

**Question: "Why does Isaiah 45:7 say that God created evil?"**

**Answer: Isaiah 45:7** in the King James Version reads, **"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things."** How does Isaiah 45:7 agree with **the view that God did not create evil**? There are two key facts that need to be considered.

(1) The word translated **"evil"** is from a Hebrew word that means **"adversity, affliction, calamity, distress, misery."** Notice how the other major English Bible translations render the word: **"disaster"** (NIV, HCSB), **"calamity"** (NKJV, NAS, ESV), and **"woe"** (NRSV).

The Hebrew word can refer to moral evil, and often does have this meaning in the Hebrew Scriptures. **However, due to the diversity of possible definitions, it is unwise to assume that "I create evil" in Isaiah 45:7 refers to God bringing moral evil into existence.**

(2) **The context of Isaiah 45:7 makes it clear that something other than "bringing moral evil into existence" is in mind.** The context of Isaiah 45:7 is **God rewarding Israel for obedience and punishing Israel for disobedience.** God pours out salvation and blessings on those whom He favors. God brings judgment on those who continue to rebel against Him. **"Woe to him who quarrels with his Master" (Isaiah 45:9).** That is the person to whom God brings **"evil"** and **"disaster."**

**So, rather than saying that God created "moral evil," Isaiah 45:7 is presenting a common theme of Scripture – that God brings disaster on those who continue in hard-hearted rebellion against Him.**

3. It was interesting that a Parsee spokesman then rejected the **'Christian'** notion of seeking to instil the **"fear of God"** into people and instead he highlighted the **'Parsee' focus** on the **'love of God'**. (Cecil – this unfortunately is a trait that is also common in many of today's so-called 'churches'). This obviously would be the main message of the 'Parsee god' **AHURA MAZDA** which we learnt earlier means **'Wise One'**. In stark contrast, the Word of the only true and living and **'wise'** God (1 Timothy 1:17) , the God of the Bible, states **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy (Cecil – God's supreme attribute is 'holiness' and not 'love') is understanding"** (Cecil – God's 'love', as demonstrated at Calvary [Romans 5:8], can only be truly be understood when viewed in the light of His utter 'holiness')

3. In the programme reference was made to the Parsee view of a **'broad bridge for the righteous'** and a **'narrow bridge for the wicked'**. Contrast this belief put forward by **AHURA MAZDA ('Wise One')** with the words of One who identified Himself in **Matthew 12:42**, in an answer to scribes and Pharisees, in these words – **"The queen of the south shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold a greater than Solomon is here"**. The Lord Jesus Christ identified Himself as being **"greater than Solomon"** who supposedly was the **'wisest'** man who ever lived. The **'wisdom'** of Christ in **Matthew 7:13-14** totally refutes the **'bridge wisdom'** of **AHURA MAZDA**. Christ stated in these verses **"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gait and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it"**. What a total and absolute rebuke and rejection of **'the wisdom'** of **AHURA MAZDA** by the One **"greater than Solomon"** the Lord Jesus Christ.

In conclusion and for further study, three other web sites that give details, to varying degrees, on what exactly **Zoroastrians** believe are as follows –

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian/beliefs/god.shtml>

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/658060/Zoroaster>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/zor/toz/toz04.htm>

And finally, one to whom **'Thanks'** was given in the closing titles of the video was **Mary Boyce** and some of her writings on **Zoroastrianism** can be read online on

<https://archive.org/stream/AHistoryOfZoroastrianismVoll/BoyceMaryaHistoryOfZoroastrianismI#page/n1/mode/2up>

As really very much of a tragic footnote to this article, the world at large in recent days has witnessed the plight of the **YAZIDI** people in Iraq who have been forced to flee their homes to escape the brutal Muslim militia known as **ISIS**. Many have fled to a mountain and, as I write, Western aid is being dropped to them. In the **Daily Mail** of **Saturday 9 August** there was an item (page 5) written by **Michael Burleigh** and entitled '**Ancient tribe they couldn't wipe out... until now?**' These words in particular caught my attention -

'They adhere to a 4000-year-old faith passed down and adapted through the generations by word of mouth and composed of elements of several religions. **Their reverence for fire and light derives from the ancient faith called Zoroastrianism, the religion of Persia long before Islam arrived.** They combine such Christian practices as baptism with Jewish or Islamic circumcision. Like Buddhists they believe in perpetual reincarnation.... What makes the **YAZIDI** still more vulnerable is the insular nature of their community. No one can convert to their religion; you have to be born into it. They also practice endogamy – that is, they only marry members of the same faith... with the Islamic State's (ISIS) determination to wipe them out they perhaps face their greatest test of all'.

I would like to end with message of hope to many following 'unusual' faiths in far-flung places such as the **YAZIDI** and the **ZOROASTRIANS**. It comes in the form of extracts from a book called '**Charles Spurgeon: The Boy Preacher of the Fens**'. The author, **Kathy Triggs** wrote as follows on pages 18-20 –

'He (Spurgeon) was gripped by a sharp sense of his own sinfulness... His profane and blasphemous thoughts troubled him... he was horrified by the images of evil that swarmed... The experience convinced Charles that he desperately needed salvation. He prayed... His prayer was soon to be answered although he did not know it... In August 1849 he went to Newmarket Academy... Spurgeon's first term at Newmarket ended when fever broke out in the school, He returned to Colchester (and) resolved to attend all the different churches in Colchester *"in order that I might find out the way of salvation"*... On Sunday the sixth January 1850 he set out to walk into the centre of Colchester. However a snow storm quickly made progress impossible, and he turned into Artillery Street, not far from Hythe Hill, where there was a Primitive Methodist Chapel. The snow prevented the minister from reaching the chapel, and one of the members of the congregation took his place in the pulpit. Spurgeon was not at first impressed *"At last a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach"*. The man was uneducated, and could do little more than repeat the words of his text which was *"Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth"* (Isaiah 45:22). But seeing the young Spurgeon sitting under the gallery, he addressed him directly: *"Young man, you look very miserable. And you will always be miserable – miserable in life and miserable in death – if you don't obey my text"*. In that instant Charles felt as if the darkness had rolled away and he saw the sun. **He looked to CHRIST and felt himself saved.** *"I could have leaped, I could have danced; there was no expression, however fanatical, which would have been out of keeping with the joy of my spirit at that hour"*.

**"The Gospel of Christ... is the power of God unto salvation to everyone (including the YAZIDI and the ZOROASTRIANS) that believeth"** (Romans 1:16). May God be pleased to graciously make that a reality in the lives of many of these religious people that form part of **"all the ends of the earth"**.

