

## Exploring the Common Ground: A Comparative Analysis of Zoroastrianism and Islam

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### Abstract

Islam and Zoroastrianism share remarkable similarities in their theological and eschatological beliefs. They both believe in the oneness of God, with different names (Ahura Mazda for Zoroastrians and Allah for Muslims) but similar attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Both religions acknowledge archangels, with Zoroastrianism recognizing six and Islam recognizing four, along with other minor angels. Both religions consider humans as the pinnacle of creation and emphasize the establishment of justice and truth on earth. They share beliefs about the nature of the universe as a creation of God, and the role of prophets as messengers of God. Prayer is considered important in both religions, with similar practices of five daily prayers (Salat in Islam, Gah Worship in Zoroastrianism) and similar beliefs about the afterlife, including the immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead, balance of judgment, heaven and hell, and the existence of a bridge to be crossed after death (Chinvat Bridge in Zoroastrianism, Al-Siraat in Islam). Ethical codes emphasizing purity of mind and body are also similar in both religions. Thus, this article argues, using intertextuality theory, that Islam is not a new beginning but rather a continuation of earlier revelations, such as Zoroastrianism. This perspective further suggests that Zoroastrianism can be categorized within the Abrahamic traditions.

**Key words:** Islam, Zoroastrianism, Five Times Prayer, Chinvat Bridge, Eschatology.

### Introduction

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest known religions, founded by the prophet Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra) in ancient Persia (modern-day Iran) around 6th or 7th century BCE. The exact timeline of Zoroaster's life and the early history of Zoroastrianism are debated among scholars due to limited historical records, but it is generally believed that Zoroastrianism emerged during the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BCE).<sup>1</sup> Zoroastrianism became the dominant religion of the Achaemenid Empire, which was known for its tolerance towards different faiths. However, with

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism: Volume II: Under the Achaemenians*, Vol. 8, No. 8, Brill, 1982, p. 8

the decline of the Achaemenid Empire and the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE, Zoroastrianism faced challenges and declined in popularity.<sup>2</sup> During the subsequent Seleucid and Parthian periods, Zoroastrianism continued to be practiced by some, but it faced competition from other religions, including Hellenistic influences.<sup>3</sup>

The Sassanian Empire (224-651 CE) marked a period of revival for Zoroastrianism, with Zoroastrianism becoming the state religion and the official faith of the Sassanian rulers. The Sassanian kings promoted Zoroastrianism and implemented policies to suppress other religions. Zoroastrianism flourished during this time, with the compilation of the Avesta, the sacred texts of Zoroastrianism, and the establishment of religious institutions. However, the rise of Islam in the 7th century CE had a profound impact on Zoroastrianism. Persia was then conquered by the Arab Muslims, and many Zoroastrians were converted to Islam. And many of them migrated to other regions, such as India, where they came to be known as Parsees.<sup>4</sup> Zoroastrianism gradually declined in Persia and became a minority religion. Despite facing challenges and decline in numbers, Zoroastrianism has managed to survive and has pockets of followers in various parts of the world, including Iran, India, and diaspora communities. Zoroastrians continue to practice their faith, uphold their traditions, and maintain their unique religious identity. Today, Zoroastrianism is recognized as one of the world's major ancient religions and is appreciated for its teachings on monotheism, ethical conduct, and the importance of truth and justice.

Islam is a monotheistic religion too that emerged in the 7th century CE in the Arabian Peninsula. It was founded by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who is considered the last prophet in a long line of prophets that includes Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, among others. The history of Islam can be divided into several key periods. This was a time when Arabia was a diverse region with various tribal religions and polytheistic beliefs. Muhammad, born in Mecca in 570 CE, received revelations from Allah through the angel Gabriel and began preaching the message of Islam, calling for the worship of one God named Allah and the rejection of idols. Muhammad's message faced opposition from the tribal leaders in Mecca, who resisted his call for monotheism and social justice. Despite facing persecution,

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Boyce (ed.), *A history of Zoroastrianism: The early period*, Vol. 1, Brill, 1996, pp. 120-190

<sup>3</sup> Maneckji Nusservanji Dhalla, *History of Zoroastrianism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1938, pp. 302-309

<sup>4</sup> Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism, Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman Rule*, Vol. 3, Brill, 1991, pp. 125-151

Muhammad and his followers continued to spread the message of Islam. In 622 CE, Muhammad and his followers migrated to Medina in an event known as the Hijra, marking the beginning of the Islamic calendar.<sup>5</sup>

In Medina, Muhammad established a community based on Islamic principles, and Islam began to gain followers. Muhammad also engaged in defensive battles against the Meccan leaders and their allies, known as the Battle of Badr (624 CE), the Battle of Uhud (625 CE), and the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah (628 CE). In 630 CE, Muhammad returned to Mecca with a large following and was able to conquer the city without bloodshed. The idols in the Kaaba, a sacred site in Mecca, were destroyed, and Islam became the dominant religion in the Arabian Peninsula. After Muhammad's death in 632 CE, Islam spread rapidly under the leadership of his successors, known as the Caliphs. The Islamic Empire expanded to include regions such as Persia, Egypt, Syria, and North Africa. This period also saw the development of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and other aspects of Islamic civilization. During this period, Islamic civilization flourished in various fields, including art, architecture, literature, philosophy, science, and medicine. Scholars translated and preserved the works of Greek, Persian, and Indian scholars, making significant contributions to human knowledge.

The Islamic Empire experienced internal conflicts and external invasions, leading to the fragmentation of the empire into various dynasties and kingdoms. The Mongol invasions, Crusades, and establishment of the Ottoman Empire were some of the significant events during this period. In the modern era, many Muslim-majority countries experienced colonization, independence movements, and the establishment of nation-states. Nonetheless, Islam has continued to be a significant global religion, with diverse interpretations, practices, and cultures among its followers. Throughout its history, Islam has had a profound impact on societies, cultures, and civilizations, shaping art, architecture, literature, sciences, and other fields. Today, Islam is one of the world's major religions, with over 1.9 billion followers around the globe, and it continues to be a source of spiritual guidance, ethical teachings, and cultural richness for millions of people.<sup>6</sup>

This paper argues, Islam as a monotheistic religion shares several beliefs and practices with Zoroastrianism, an older faith that originated in ancient Persia. In fact,

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Malcolm Holt, Ann KS Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 32-49; John L. Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 16-39

<sup>6</sup> Philip Khuri Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 1996, p. 757

Islam was influenced by Zoroastrianism to a significant extent, and many tenets of faith from Zoroastrianism were incorporated into Islam, as Islam was founded after Zoroastrianism. Several aspects of Islam have their roots in Zoroastrianism, including the belief in the oneness of God, the concept of creation rather than evolution, the concept of heaven and hell, the practice of five times daily prayer, the idea of a final judgment, and the belief in resurrection. All of these concepts were originally taught in Zoroastrianism before the emergence of Islam.

### **Methodology**

The comparative methodology employed in this analysis focuses on elucidating the striking parallels between Islam and Zoroastrianism across theological, eschatological, and ethical dimensions. Through a systematic examination, it identifies core theological concepts such as monotheism and attributes of the divine, compares the recognition and roles of celestial entities, and explores shared beliefs regarding human existence and the pursuit of justice. Delving into eschatological perspectives, it contrasts and correlates beliefs about the universe's creation, the prophetic role, ritualistic practices like prayer, and the intricacies of afterlife beliefs, including resurrection, judgment, and symbolic bridges. Furthermore, this methodology contextualizes historical, cultural, and geographical contexts to underscore the continuity between these faiths, ultimately challenging the conventional narrative by suggesting that Islam, rather than a novel inception, represents a continuation of earlier revelations like Zoroastrianism, thus potentially reshaping the categorization of Zoroastrianism within the Abrahamic traditions.

This study utilizes Intertextuality Theory to explore the theological and eschatological connections between Zoroastrianism and Islam. Intertextuality posits that no religious text or tradition exists in isolation; rather, it is shaped by previous narratives and ideas. Applying this theory allows us to analyze how Islamic beliefs may have been influenced by Zoroastrian concepts. For example, shared motifs such as the presence of archangels, the afterlife, and ethical codes are reflections of these textual connections. Kristeva (1980)<sup>7</sup> suggests that religious narratives are shaped by ongoing dialogues between traditions, revealing a continuity of theological thought. By tracing these intertextual links, the study highlights Islam as a continuation of older theological ideas, rather than a complete departure from previous traditions, underscoring shared cosmological beliefs like the Chinvat Bridge in Zoroastrianism and Al-Siraat in Islam.

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<sup>7</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1980, pp. 15-20

### Similarities between Zoroastrianism and Islam

Zoroastrianism has significantly influenced Islam in various aspects, resulting in notable similarities between the two religions. Here are some key similarities that are worth mentioning:

#### Oneness of God

Both Zoroastrianism and Islam share a common emphasis on the belief in the oneness of God, which is considered the most fundamental article of faith in both religions. In Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda is recognized as the sole creator and supreme ruler of all creations. The term "Ahura" translates to "Lord" and "Mazda" means "Wise, All Knowing", hence "Ahura Mazda" signifies "All Wise Lord".<sup>8</sup> Ahura Mazda is unparalleled and beyond comparison. He is the Supreme Being through whom everything exists, brighter than the brightest of creations, higher than the highest heavens, and older than the oldest in the universe. He is the epitome of perfection, knowing no equal or elder, and there is none to contest His Supremacy. He is the first and foremost, the Almighty, and the absolute sovereign. He is benevolent, changeless, and eternal, remaining unaffected amidst the manifold changes in the universe. He will ultimately decide the victory between good and evil, and He is the ultimate source of felicity and joy. There is none before Him, and He is the greatest of all. He is the one and only true God, from whom everything emanates, and He is the Lord of all, encompassing numerous attributes.<sup>9</sup> Although Zoroastrianism acknowledges the existence of two rival spirits - Spenta Mainyu (Good Spirit) and Angra Mainyu (Evil Spirit), who are identified with Ahura Mazda and Ahriman respectively,<sup>10</sup> they are considered to emanate from Ahura Mazda and are not independent entities.<sup>11</sup> Hence, this duality does not compromise the monotheistic nature of Zoroastrianism, as Ahura Mazda remains the ultimate source of all creation and the supreme deity in this faith. Thus, it can be summarized that Ahura Mazda is recognized as the sole creator and ruler of all creations, and although there are two rival spirits - Spenta Mainyu (Good Spirit) and Angra Mainyu (Evil Spirit), they are not independent of Ahura Mazda. This does not break down the monotheistic nature of Zoroastrianism, as both spirits emanate from the Supreme God.

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<sup>8</sup> Karan Singh, *Religions of India*, Clarion Books, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 179-208

<sup>9</sup> Meena Iyer, *Faith and Philosophy of Zoroastrianism*. Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2009, pp. 77-104

<sup>10</sup> Shafi Md. Mostofa, *Concept of God in Zoroastrianism*, *Far Eastern Studies*, University of Dhaka, 2015, pp. 1-12

<sup>11</sup> Kedar Nath Tiwari, *Comparative Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983, pp. 90-102

On the other hand, Islam, as a monotheistic religion, places utmost importance on the concept of Tawhid, meaning the "Oneness of God". It is the foundational belief of Islam, asserting that Allah is the One and Only God. Tawhid forms the foremost article of faith in Islam, and the declaration of belief in the oneness of God is the first part of the Shahada, the Islamic declaration of faith. According to the Qur'an, attributing divinity to anything besides Allah, known as shirk, is considered an unpardonable sin. Muslims believe that the entirety of Islamic teachings is based on the principle of Tawhid, which sets Islam apart from other major religions by its uncompromising monotheism. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the oneness of God, as stated in verses such as "There is no god but Me, so worship Me (alone)" (Qur'an 21:25), "He is Allah, the One; Allah the Self-Sufficient; He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is nothing that could be compared with Him" (Qur'an 112:1-3), "O my people! Worship Allah alone! You have no god besides Him. Will you not then be conscious of Allah?" (Qur'an 7:65), and "O my people! Worship Allah alone! You have no god besides Him" (Qur'an 7:73). The concept of Tawhid is central to Islamic belief,<sup>12</sup> emphasizing the absolute oneness of God and the need to worship Him alone, as a distinguishing aspect of Islam among other major religions.

### **Position of Human Being**

Islam has been, to some extent, influenced by the Zoroastrian concept of humanity. Allah has sent man as His representative on earth. Islam makes man the greatest of all creatures. He says, "We have indeed honored the children of Adam; spread them in the land and the sea, provided them with good things; and preferred them in esteem over many things that We have created." (Quran, 17: 70) Islam teaches that every human being is born as sinless; no child carries the burden of his or her ancestors' sins. God says, "No carrier shall carry the burden of others" (Quran, 35: 18). Each human being is born with a pure conscience which can absorb and accept the true message of God. It is only the social and familial influences which take a person away from God's message. Islam also emphasizes on the issue of responsibility and accountability of human beings. Each person is responsible for his or her own actions. Although Islam teaches that God has predetermined the span of our life and the time of our death, it does not mean that even our actions are predetermined by Him. We surely are free in our actions and are, therefore, accountable for them. God only provides guidance for us to know what is good and what is bad. He says, "We created man of a water-drop...Surely We guided him to the

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<sup>12</sup> Shafi Md Mostofa, Position of Women in Islam and Sikhism: A Comparative Study, *Arts Faculty Journal*, Vol. 58, pp. 145-160

right way--now whether he (follows it and) be grateful or (goes astray and) be ungrateful is up to him (Quran, 76: 3). On the other hand, Zoroastrianism teaches that God has provided the human soul with every kind of apparatus to enable him to perform his work successfully. The following are a few of them: energy, knowledge, consideration, wisdom, intelligence, perception, sense, mind, thought, speech, action, free will, religious animated conscience, practical conscience, memory etc.<sup>13</sup> Like Islam, Zoroastrianism also believes that man is born as pure and sinless. He is free from the burden of past actions and original sin. He is completely free to choose and his final destiny fully depends upon the exercise of his free choice. If he opts for the good and thereby assists God in his mission, he is sure to have a place in heaven, otherwise he is to be damned in hell.<sup>14</sup>

### **Concept of Evil**

The belief in the existence of evil or Satan is common among many religions worldwide, including Zoroastrianism and Islam. While there may be variations in the beliefs about evil and suffering among different religions, both Zoroastrianism and Islam share the belief that evil and suffering are allowed by God for inherent good purposes. In Zoroastrianism, evil is attributed to Ahriman, also known as Angra Mainyu, who is considered the embodiment of darkness, falsehood, and wickedness. Ahriman is believed to be constantly at odds with Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity of Zoroastrianism, and represents the forces of evil in the world.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in Islam, Iblis, also known as Satan or Shaytan, is believed to be a disobedient jinn who refused to bow to Adam and was cast out of paradise as a result. Iblis is considered the arch-enemy of humanity and is believed to tempt humans towards evil and disobedience to God. However, in Islamic belief, Iblis has free will and is not an independent force opposing God, rather a creation of God who chooses to rebel.<sup>16</sup> Both Zoroastrianism and Islam hold the belief that ultimately good will prevail over evil. They believe that one day, evil will be destroyed eternally and only good or justice will prevail on earth. This belief reflects the concept of divine justice and the ultimate triumph of righteousness in these religions.<sup>17</sup> It's important to note that religious beliefs and interpretations may vary within different sects and

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<sup>13</sup> Ervad Sheriarji Dadabhai Bharucha, *A Brief Sketch of the Zoroastrian Religion and Customs*, D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., Bombay, 1893, pp. 57-97

<sup>14</sup> Tiwari, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 92

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 97

communities within each religion, and not all adherents may hold the same views on these matters.

### **Concept of Angels**

The Islamic concept of angels appears to be significantly influenced by Zoroastrianism. In Zoroastrian belief, angels surround God and wait for His orders. Zoroaster, the prophet of Zoroastrianism, mentioned these angels in the Gathas as six divine abstractions known as the Amesha Spentas or the bountiful immortals. These angels are associated with virtues such as good mind, righteousness, absolute power, devotion, perfection, and immortality. These angels are Vohu Manah or the good mind, Asha Vahishta or the righteousness, Khsatra Vairya or the absolute power, Aramaiti or the devotion, Haurvatat or the perfection, and Ameretat or the immortality.<sup>18</sup> Zoroastrianism also acknowledges the existence of minor angels who are tasked with specific responsibilities and represent different aspects of nature. Similarly, Islam also believes in four highest angels that were created by Allah from Light. These angels are invisible to the human eye, have no gender, and are equipped to carry out Allah's commands and glorify Him. The four highest angels in Islam are Gabriel (Jibril), who is charged with bringing divine revelations and messages of Allah to the Prophets; Israfil, who will blow the Trumpet on the Day of Resurrection; Mikael (Mikail), who is responsible for arranging rainfall; and Izrael (Azrael), who is entrusted with taking souls at the time of death.<sup>19</sup> Likewise Zoroastrianism, Islam also acknowledges the existence of minor angels mentioned in the Quran and Hadith, who are assigned specific tasks, similar to the roles of Zoroastrian angels. However, it's important to note that while there may be similarities in the concept of angels between Zoroastrianism and Islam, there may also be differences in their specific roles, functions, and interpretations within the respective religious traditions. Religious beliefs and practices can vary among different sects, communities, and interpretations within a religion.

### **Prayer**

Prayer is a universal practice across religions, as it is seen as a means of communication with the Divine. Both Islam and Zoroastrianism place special emphasis on prayer as an important aspect of their respective faiths. In Zoroastrianism, there is a set of prayers known as the 'Gah Prayer'. The term 'Gah'

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<sup>18</sup> R. P. Masani, *The Religion of the Good Life: Zoroastrianism*, George Allan and Unwin Ltd, London, 1938, p. 63

<sup>19</sup> Shamim Akhtar, *Faith and Philosophy of Islam*, Kalpaz Publications, India, 2009, pp. 24-56

typically refers to a period of time or a place, thus 'Gah Worship' signifies 'Timed Worship'. On the other hand, in Islam, it is referred to as 'Salat', derived from the root word 's-l' which, in Aramaic terminology, means to bow, to bend, and to stretch. It is used in various Arabic dialects to denote ritual prayer, indicating spontaneous individual prayer.<sup>20</sup>

Both Zoroastrianism and Islam have a common practice of offering worship five times a day. In both religions, these daily worships are intricately connected to the movement of the Sun. Just like Muslims, Zoroastrians also divide each day into five specific periods for their religious devotions. It is noteworthy that during each of these periods, the presence of a priest is necessary to conduct the worship, as stated by Noss.<sup>21</sup> The similarity between Islam and Zoroastrianism is remarkable in terms of the timing of their five daily worships, which are structured in a similar manner.

<b>Time</b>	<b>Islam</b>	<b>Zoroastrianism</b>
Dawn	<i>Fajr</i>	<i>Havaan</i>
Noon	<i>Zuhar</i>	<i>Rapithwan</i>
Afternoon	<i>Asr</i>	<i>Uziren</i>
Evening	<i>Maghrib</i>	<i>Aiwisuthrem</i>
Night	<i>Isha</i>	<i>Ushaen</i>

In both Islam and Zoroastrianism, ablution is necessary for the performance of the five daily prayers. Muslims are commanded to perform ritual purification, known as wudu, which involves washing the face, hands, and feet before each prayer. If water is not available, sand can be used as a substitute. Similarly, Zoroastrians are required to wash their face and limbs before commencing Gah worship, a form of daily prayer.<sup>22</sup> Both religions have a call to prayer that summons their followers to perform their daily prayers. Muslims have the adhan, traditionally announced by a muezzin from a mosque's minaret, while Zoroastrians are summoned by the ringing of a bell in the Fire Temple to perform Gah worship.<sup>23</sup>

The direction in which prayers are performed is also significant in both religions. Muslims are required to face the Ka'ba shrine in Mecca, known as the Qiblah, during their prayers as instructed in the Quran. Similarly, Zoroastrians pray in the direction of the room where the Sacred Fire is kept, called the Keblaah in Zoroastrianism.

<sup>20</sup> Syed Mahmudul Hasan, *Islam*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1980, p. 139

<sup>21</sup> John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, Macmillan Publishing Company, USA, 1984, pp. 332-351

<sup>22</sup> Iyer, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-252

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 243-255

Covering the head is also a common practice in both religions during prayer. Muslims cover their heads with a hat or a turban, while Zoroastrians cover their heads with a piece of cloth when performing Gah worship.<sup>24</sup> Recitation of sacred texts is an important aspect of prayers in both Islam and Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrians believe that recitation of sacred texts provides the spoken substance of Gah worship, and their priests are required to recite from memory from the Avesta, the sacred scripture, in its original language of revelation<sup>25</sup>. Similarly, Muslims recite from the Holy Qur'an, the Islamic scripture, in Arabic during their prayers as it is considered the original language of its revelation.

### **Concept of the World**

Zoroastrians hold the belief that Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity, created everything in the universe, including the stars, sun, moon, sea, and all that is high and low, light and dark. They believe that everything in creation acts and moves in complete subservience to the will of Ahura Mazda. According to Zoroastrian teachings, humans, as microcosms, are endowed with various faculties that enable them to strive towards righteousness in this world and attain an exalted life in the next.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Muslims believe that the world was created by Allah, the one true God in Islam. According to Islamic teachings, everything in the world, including rivers, mountains, trees, animals, birds, and all that is seen and unseen, has been created by Allah. The Holy Qur'an emphasizes the omnipresence of Allah's creation in every aspect of the world, reflecting His glory and power.<sup>27</sup> Despite their differences in theological details, both Zoroastrianism and Islam share the belief that the world is real and serves as a perfect working ground for human beings. However, both religions also hold that the world is not eternal and will ultimately be destroyed according to the will of God.

### **Life after Death**

There are striking similarities between Islam and Zoroastrianism when it comes to their beliefs about life after death. Both religions share common concepts such as the immortality of the soul, the balance of judgment, resurrection of the dead, and the existence of heaven and hell. The eschatology, or teachings about the end times, in these two religions is more or less same, and there are various aspects where they can

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 243-255

<sup>25</sup> Noss, 1984, *op. cit.*, pp. 347-348

<sup>26</sup> Madhusudan Mallik, *Introduction to Parsee Religion: Customs and Ceremonies*, Visva Bharati Research Publications Committee, India, 1980, pp. 52-55

<sup>27</sup> Tiwari, 1983, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-97

find common ground. According to Zoroastrian beliefs, death is a natural phenomenon that no one can escape. Zoroastrianism views death as the result of the soul leaving the body, and the body loses its sanctity and movement when the soul departs. The religion holds that the human soul is not destroyed with physical death, rather it is eternal while the body is temporary.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, in the Holy Qur'an of Islam, it is stated that all humans will experience death, and there is no escaping it as it is inevitable<sup>29</sup>. Islam also believes that the human soul is immortal and will continue to exist in either heaven or hell after death. Zoroastrianism teaches that all souls, whether righteous or wicked, must cross the Chinvat Bridge made by Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity in Zoroastrianism. To the righteous, the bridge offers an easy passage, while to the wicked, it is as sharp as the edge of a razor, and they fall into the abyss of hell with no hope of salvation.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Muslims also believe in a bridge called the Siraat in Islam, which is established over Hell and extends to Paradise. It is believed that those who have been steadfast in their faith in God during their earthly lives will find it easy to pass the Siraat on the Day of Judgment, as mentioned in the sacred Qur'an. The Qur'an also teaches that after death, Allah will revive and restore life to humans, and this resurrection will occur on the Day of Judgment, where every living human being will be held accountable for their deeds in the world.<sup>31</sup> Zoroastrianism also shares the belief in resurrection, where on the Day of Judgment, all souls will rise from their graves and reunite with their bodies.<sup>32</sup> This concept is also present in Islam, where the Day of Judgment is believed to be a time of resurrection and accountability for one's actions in the world.

In Islam, the concept of the final judgment day entails that after the resurrection, all people will be brought before Allah for judgment. Each person will face the consequences of their actions, both good and evil, without any possibility of intervention for sinners. Allah will examine the records of their deeds, and pronounce judgment between them, rewarding the virtuous and penalizing the sinful.<sup>33</sup> Zoroastrianism also believes in a final judgment day. According to Zoroastrian belief, at the entrance to the Chinvat bridge, individual judgment takes

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 92-97

<sup>29</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-32

<sup>30</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 55

<sup>31</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-65

<sup>32</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-56

<sup>33</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-74

place in the presence of Mithra, Shraosha, and Rashnu, who weigh the life-accounts in the balance and render a final decision of good or bad.<sup>34</sup> Zoroastrianism holds that the afterlife is determined by the balance of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, as well as evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds accumulated throughout one's life. Those whose good deeds outweigh the bad are sent to heaven, while those whose evil deeds outweigh the good are sent to hell.<sup>35</sup> Some Zoroastrians also believe that souls are born in the material world as part of God's decree to overcome their defects and achieve perfection, viewing life on Earth as an opportunity to refine their character and become perfect beings of light.

In Islam, heaven is believed to be determined by having the right faith, performing good deeds, and observing prayers, while hell is associated with wrong beliefs, evil deeds, and neglecting prayers. In Zoroastrianism, heaven is generally regarded as a place of eternal light where Ahura Mazda dwells in joy, known as the fair abode, the best life, and the abode of good mind. In contrast, the concept of paradise in Islam is described as a vast garden, as broad as the heavens and the earth, filled with abundant blessings such as flowing rivers, various types of foods, fruits, vessel wine, and natural springs.<sup>36</sup> In Zoroastrianism, hell is described as a place of deep gloom, located in the middle of the earth beneath the Chinvat Bridge. It is believed to be the abode of falsehood and the worst existence, where evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds reign supreme.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, in Islam, hell is depicted as a place filled with fire and unimaginable horrors, intended to penalize the wrongdoers. It is believed that when the offenders' skins are consumed by fire, they will be granted fresh skins to continue experiencing the agony.<sup>38</sup> Both Zoroastrianism and Islam acknowledge the existence of an intermediate stage for those whose deeds are equally balanced. In Zoroastrianism, this stage is referred to as "hamistakan" in Pahlavi literature, where individuals do not usually suffer severe punishments but may experience changes of heat and cold due to the seasons.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, in Islam, there is a place called A'raf, which is situated between heaven and hell, and is believed to be inhabited by those who are evenly balanced in their sins and virtues.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 55

<sup>35</sup> Tiwari, 1983, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-98

<sup>36</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-87

<sup>37</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 55

<sup>38</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 54

<sup>39</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 55

<sup>40</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 64

### Charity

Both Islam and Zoroastrianism emphasize the importance of charity and giving to the less fortunate as a means of expressing compassion, social responsibility, and acknowledging the ownership of resources by a higher power. In Islam, charity, known as Zakat, is considered one of the five pillars of the faith, and Muslims are required to give a certain portion of their net income and holdings to those in need. Zakat is seen as a way of fulfilling one's Islamic trust and recognizing that all wealth belongs to Allah, and humans are trustees who should share their wealth with those who are less fortunate. This act of charity also serves to reduce inequalities in society and promote a sense of community and solidarity.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in Zoroastrianism, followers are encouraged to give 10% of their income to help the poor. The act of giving to the poor is seen as acknowledging the kingdom of God and is considered a way to come closer to the friendship of Ahura Mazda, the supreme god in Zoroastrianism. It is believed that helping those who live righteously and with good mind is a means of expressing devotion and righteousness.<sup>42</sup> Both Islam and Zoroastrianism view charity as a virtuous act that promotes social welfare, compassion, and generosity. It is seen as a means of fulfilling one's religious duties, acknowledging the higher power's ownership of resources, and promoting social harmony and equality.

### Ethics

Zoroastrianism is a religion that places a strong emphasis on ethics and the cosmic importance of choosing good over evil. According to Zoroastrian teachings, humans have the freedom to choose between right and wrong, truth and lie, and light and dark, and their choices have eternal consequences. The fundamental principles that guide the life of a Zoroastrian are Good Thoughts (Humata), Good Words (Hukhata), and Good Deeds (Havarashta), and these virtues are contrasted with Evil Thoughts (Dushmata), Evil Words (Duzukhta), and Evil Deeds (Duzvarshta) which are considered morally wrong.<sup>43</sup> Zoroastrianism also promotes values such as righteousness, thrift, temperance, moderation, and industry, and altruistic virtues such as charity, benevolence, and philanthropy are given a prominent place.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, Islam, which means "peace", is a religion that promotes serenity, well-being, and compassion. Muslims are encouraged to accept the moral commandments

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55

<sup>42</sup> Masani, 1938, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-78

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 89

<sup>44</sup> Mallik, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-45

of the Qur'an as a model for clemency, compassion, tolerance, and peace in the world.<sup>45</sup> Islamic teachings emphasize the sanctity of human life, and Muslims are required to uphold truthfulness, reliability, honesty, forgiveness, and kindness in their character and behavior. Prohibitions in Islam include lying, cheating, injustice, unfairness, killing, stealing, and adultery.<sup>46</sup>

Purity, modesty, and decency in behavior, appearance, dress, and speech are also emphasized in Islam, and behaviors such as gossiping, back-biting, prying into others' affairs, suspicion, and violating others' privacy are discouraged.<sup>47</sup> Both Zoroastrianism and Islam promote ethical values and virtues such as righteousness, compassion, tolerance, and peace, and emphasize the importance of choosing good over evil in one's thoughts, words, and actions. These religions encourage adherents to cultivate positive character traits and behaviors that contribute to a just and harmonious society.

### **Prophethood**

In Islam, the belief in Prophets, known as nabi or rasul, is a fundamental principle of the Muslim creed. Muslims acknowledge that God has sent Prophets throughout history to guide humanity away from disbelief and superstition, and to teach them the religion and laws of God. The Holy Qur'an states, "Righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah and the Books and the Prophets" (Qur'an, 2:77). Similarly, Zoroastrianism, based on the teachings of the Prophet Zoroaster, believes that God has manifested Himself to Zoroaster in a vision and has given him religious instructions to be followed by people on earth in order to pursue the path of righteousness. The Holy Zenda Avesta, the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism, contains the teachings of Zoroaster. Zoroaster recognized the importance of Prophets as lawgivers who enforce Divine laws that are acceptable to all, promoting peace, harmony, and rooting out tyranny, deceit, and ill-feeling from the world. Zoroaster stated, "A prophet is needed for enforcing such laws which everybody could abide by. Men are inter-dependent and they stand in need of Divine laws acceptable to all of them, which could root out tyranny, deceit and ill-feeling and give peace and harmony to the world. These lawgivers should be divinely inspired men so that all could submit to them".<sup>48</sup> Both Islam and Zoroastrianism emphasize the role of

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<sup>45</sup> Shamim, 2009, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-87

<sup>46</sup> Suzanne Haneef, *Islam and Muslims*, Saeed International (Regd.), New Delhi-110014, 1999, pp. 42-74

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 36-64

<sup>48</sup> "Zoroaster", 2022. Accessed on 22 November 2023, the article is available here <https://mb-soft.com/believe/txo/zoroastr.htm>

Prophets as messengers of God, guiding humanity towards righteousness and promoting harmonious living according to Divine teachings.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it is evident that there are remarkable similarities between Islam and Zoroastrianism. Both religions share common theological and eschatological beliefs. They both believe in the oneness of God, with Zoroastrians referring to Him as Ahura Mazda and Muslims as Allah. Both religions believe in the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of God. While Zoroastrianism acknowledges six archangels, Islam recognizes four archangels, along with other minor angels with specific tasks. Both Islam and Zoroastrianism consider human beings as the pinnacle of creation, with everything on earth created for their betterment. They emphasize the establishment of justice and truth on earth. Both religions also believe that everything in the universe is not a part of God rather a creation of God, which is controlled and sustained by Him. Prophethood is also a shared belief in both religions, and prayer is considered as the means of communication with God. Muslims and Zoroastrians both pray five times a day, with similar timings, referred to as Salat in Islam and Gah Worship in Zoroastrianism. The concept of life after death or eschatology in Zoroastrianism aligns with Islamic beliefs. Both religions believe in the immortality of the soul, which persists after physical death, and that the soul is eternal while the body is temporary. They share beliefs in the resurrection of the dead, the balance of judgment, heaven and hell, and an intermediary place. Both religions acknowledge the existence of a bridge that must be crossed after death, known as the Chinvat Bridge in Zoroastrianism and Al-Siraat in Islam. Ethical codes are also similar in both religions, with emphasis on the purity of mind and body.

The argument presented challenges the notion of Islam as a radical departure from previous traditions, positing it as a continuum of earlier beliefs like Zoroastrianism. If Islam indeed shares foundational elements with Zoroastrianism, it prompts us to reconsider the rigid categorization of religious traditions. This nuanced understanding might reshape how we perceive the evolution and interplay of faiths, emphasizing the intricate tapestry of shared beliefs and ideas throughout history. Ultimately, it invites a broader exploration of the rich complexities within religious narratives and their interconnectedness across time.