

Similarities Between Islam and Zoroastrianism

In fact, some have dated it as the world's oldest monotheism, although this supposition is by no means universally accepted. Accurately describing the age of this religion is very difficult, because there is some debate over when the prophet for who it is named, Zarathustra (in Greek, Zoroaster) actually lived. Speculation ranges from 6,000 to 600 B.C.E. What is known, however, is that for a period of approximately 1,000 years, Zoroastrianism was a very prominent religion, certainly the most powerful in the Middle East, perhaps the most powerful in the world. Over this period, which is generally held to have been from 549 B.C.E. to 642 C.E.

However, and Islam was founded after Zoroastrianism, it was influenced to a much greater degree, and tenets of faith that were originally found in Zoroastrianism were incorporated into Islam on a very noticeable level. In fact, many aspects of Islam that many people think typify Islam have their roots in Zoroastrianism.

The most notable of these aspects are the notions of dualism:

1. Good and Evil
2. Heaven and Hell,
3. a savior born of a virgin,
4. a final judgement, and resurrection.
5. Devil and God

All of these concepts were originally taught in Zoroastrianism before Islam existed (Zoroastrianism, 574). Therefore, it is evident that, by preceding Islam, Zoroastrianism influenced Islam.

Some of the similarities from the ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism in comparison to Islam.

History: Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism, also called Mazdaism and Magianism, is an ancient Iranian religion and a religious philosophy. It was once the state religion of the Achaemenid Empire and Sassanid Empire. In the eastern part of ancient Persia over 1000 years BCE, a religious philosopher called Zoroaster simplified the pantheon of early Iranian gods into two opposing forces: Ahura Mazda (Illuminating Wisdom) and Angra Mainyu (Destructive Spirit) which were in conflict.

History: Islam

Islam, an Abrahamic religion that began in Mecca, claims to be the revelation of God (Allah) through the angel Gabriel to a man named Muhammad, born in approximately 570 CE.

In Muslim tradition, Muhammad is viewed as the last in a series of prophets. The content of these revelations, known as the Qur'an, was memorized and recorded by his companions. During this time, Muhammad in Mecca preached to the people, imploring them to abandon polytheism and to worship one god.

The Original Mythical Journeys To "Heaven"

Islam: Muhammad's Night Journey

The Isra and Mi'raj are the two parts of a Night Journey that, according to Islamic tradition, the prophet of Islam, Muhammad took during a single night around the year 621. It has been described as both a physical and spiritual journey.

In the journey, Muhammad travels on the steed Buraq to "the farthest mosque" where he leads other prophets in prayer. He then ascends through the seven heavens where he speaks to Allah, who gives Muhammad instructions to take back to the faithful regarding the details of prayer. In the end, Allah instructs Muhammad to tell the people to pray five times per day.

Zoroastrianism: Arta Viraf's Night Journey

A night journey to the heavens is found in an old Pahlavi book known as "The Book of Arta Viraf." The Zoroastrian story describes the journey of a saintly priest, Arta Viraf, who went into a trance and his spirit went up to the heavens under the guidance of an angel named Sarosh. He passed from one utopia to another until he reached the presence of Ormazd, the great deity of the whole universe. When Arta saw the heavens and how happy its inhabitants were, Ormazd commanded him to return to earth as his 'messenger' to tell the people all that he saw and heard. Ormazd commanded that his followers pray five times a day.

Praying Five Times A Day

In both religions there is a specified worship of five times a day commanded by god. Zoroastrianism and Islam share a specified worship in relation the movement of Sun. Zoroastrians call this specified worship 'Gah worship/prayer'. The term 'Gah' means 'period of time' or 'place'. So Gah worship means, loosely, "timed worship."

The striking similarity between Islam and Zoroastrianism in the timing of five daily worship is given below:

Time-Islam-Zoroastrianism

Dawn-Fajr-Havaan

Noon-Zuhar-Rapithwan

Afternoon-Asr-Uziren

Evening-Maghrib-Aiwisuthrem

Night-Isha-Ushaen

Religious Similarities

Call To Prayer

Just like the believers are called for Salat in a mosque by a Muezzin (caller) in Islam five times a day, the Zoroastrian believers are summoned by the ringing of a bell in the Atash Behram / Agiary / Fire Temple to perform Yasna (Gah worship) five times a day.

Ablution

Muslims are required to do ritual purification like washing of the face and limbs before commencing Salat. Likewise, Zoroastrians are required to wash their face and limbs before commencing Yasna (Gah worship).

Head Cover

In the same way as Muslims cover their heads traditionally when performing Salat, Zoroastrians are required to cover their heads when performing Yasna (Gah worship).

Facing The Direction

The direction in which Muslims are to perform prayer is toward the Kabaa in Mecca. Most mosques contain a wall niche, known as mihrab, that indicates the Qiblah (direction of the Kabaa in Mecca). Zoroastrians worship facing a blazing fire, as a symbol of God's grace.

Reading/Reciting Scripture In Original Languages

As Muslims are required to read/recite portions from the Quran in the original language of its revelation (Arabic) while performing Salat, Zoroastrians are required to read/recite portions from the Avesta (Gathas) in the original language of its revelation (Avesta) when performing Yasna (Gah worship).

Miscellaneous Parallels

Also, the Zoroastrians taught, long before Islam, there was a marvelous tree in Paradise called 'humaya', which corresponds very closely to the 'sidrah', the lote tree of Islam.

Finally, there is another Zoroastrian work the 'Zerdashtnama', which has a story of how Zoroaster himself ascended into the heavens and obtained permission to visit hell, where he found Ahriman, the Devil.