Tao Te Ching, Analects,
Dhammapada, Bhagavad Gita

FOUR TESTAMENTS

SACRED SCRIPTURES
OF TAOISM,
CONFUCIANISM,
BUDDHISM, AND
HINDUISM

BRIAN ARTHUR BROWN
FOREWORD BY FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, SJ

four testaments

Tao Te Ching, Analects, Dhammapada, Bhagavad Gita: Sacred Scriptures of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism

Brian Arthur Brown

Foreword by Francis X. Clooney, SJ

ROWMAN AND LITTLEFIELD
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

Unit A, Whitacre Mews, 26-34 Stannary Street, London SE11 4AB

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Brown, Brian A., 1942– editor. | Clooney, Francis X. (Francis Xavier), 1950– writer of foreword. | Laozi. Dao de jing. English. | Confucius. Lun yu. English.
Title: Four testaments : Tao Te Ching, Analects, Dhammapada, Bhagavad Gita : sacred scriptures of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism / Brian Arthur Brown ; foreword by Francis X. Clooney, SJ.
Description: Lanham, Maryland : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016003911 (print) | LCCN 2016006183 (ebook) | ISBN 9781442265776 (hardback) | ISBN 9781442265783 (electronic)
Subjects: LCSH: Sacred books. | Religions—Relations. | Asia—Religion. | BISAC: RELIGION / Comparative Religion. | RELIGION / Buddhism / Sacred Writings. | RELIGION / Confucianism. | RELIGION / Hinduism / Sacre ON / Taoism (see also PHILOSOPHY / Taoist).
Classification: LCC BL70 .F67 2016 Copyrighted image ebook) | DDC 208/.2—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.

Printed in the United States of America

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

contents

book one: from the foundations of the earth to our common spiritual ancestors

book two: the taoist testament

book three: the confucian testament

book four: the buddhist testament

book five: the hindu testament

book six: the z factor

book seven: the "dead zee scrolls"

foreword

Francis X. Clooney

our Testaments: Tao Te Ching, Analects, Dhammapada, Bhagavad Gita is an important work, suited to the times in which we live. It is a necessary work. While we ought not assume that our world today is any worse than in ages past, today's early instantaneous verbal and visual interconnectedness accentuates everything good and bad happening around us and among us. It is hard, in this atmosphere of heightened awareness, not to see all that is good and bad about the human condition. In particular, we are accosted with the bad news of our times, religious discord and violence, the evident misunderstandings among traditions on the ground, at home and around the globe. Deep down, we know that we very much need to learn to live together as sisters and brothers, respectful and open, living in peace, and working together in justice and love for a better world. For that, we also need to understand one another better, and for that, some of us need to be better and bolder readers.

It is here that Brian Brown's visionary project makes its welcome contribution. *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran* and now this new volume of *Four Testaments* simply make it enticingly easy, first of all, for interested readers to engage with some of the great religious classics of the human race: the Torah, the New Testament, the Quran—and now the *Tao Te Ching*, the *Analects*, the *Dhammapada*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is a particular merit of both volumes that these texts are given in full and not in part. There is no rush here, no list of quotable quotes, no easy path to perennial wisdom; the reader is asked to enter upon the whole of each text, to read each beginning to end, and to learn, page by page.

It is also a merit that these very different texts are bound together under one cover. These are great philosophical and religious texts not used to such binding, and some may be unsettled to see them thus published; after all, what have the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Bhagavad Gita* to do with one another? But this unexpected proximity also makes possible (and perhaps inevitable) another real benefit of the project: to read them *together*, paging through them, moving back and forth from text to text, allowing reading and

one's imagination to bring them together. One is invited to browse religiously, intelligently, and see what one finds.

Four Testaments: Tao Te Ching, Analects, Dhammapada, Bhagavad Gita therefore offers much, but it also expects much from its readers, and rightly so. Today's needed learning cannot be delivered in a digested form or reduced to themes and bullet points. It is a much larger, longer, and deeper task of learning that is placed before us. In this book we are asked to undertake the work—all in one volume—of thinking across traditions Indian and Chinese: Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian. Of course, the reading is not so simple or arbitrary as to end with just one volume. All these great texts deserve to become good neighbors to one another in this century's greater world library. One needs to keep the *Four Testaments* on one's desk or nightstand alongside the *Three Testaments*, moving back and forth between the two volumes and their several great texts.

At several points in *Four Testaments*, particularly in the opening and closing sections, we find a different mode of reflection, concerning the Zoroastrian tradition of Vedic derivation and the "Dead Zee Scrolls" (a quest to find or imagine the lost sections of the Zoroastrian Avesta Scriptures). These are reflections of quite a different kind than the service of merely publishing the *Four Testaments* and the *Three Testaments* in close proximity. Thinking about Zoroastrian wisdom and the learning of these scrolls in a series of essays and imaginative writings fosters wider speculations that expand our interest in this project. It asks us whether it is not the case that these great traditions, now brought together in such volumes, were never really quite separate from one another millennia ago. Perhaps the intersections, indebtedness, and meeting points go back further than we can remember, and we are now rediscovering. Putting all these texts and speculative reflections under one cover may, in a certain sense, invite a homecoming, perhaps even a return of history's great travelers to some common points of origin.

This is not the first effort to bring classic religious texts together; one thinks of the *Sacred Books of the East*, that great nineteenth-century project. But in every age, the task is worth taking up again. Brian Brown and his team are to be commended for their contribution to interreligious understanding in the twenty-first century, in a true and enduring way that still manages to be fresh and new.

illustrations

DIAGRAM AT THE BEGINNING OF CHAPTER 3 ("THE GREAT INTERSECTION") WAS DESIGNED the author, executed by Indira Brown-Sinton, and copyrighted with this t. The final illustration in the appendix was also designed by the author l executed by Arthur and David Brown.

Most of the illustrations in the appendix have been coordinated for this compendium by Emma Goodliffe of the International Dunhuang project and Sanskrit curator Pasquale Manzo , both at the British Library, 92 Euston Road, London, NWI 2DB, United Kingdom. Sincere gratitude is expressed to them both and to their colleagues in the departments of Reproduction and Permissions. Other single figures and photos come from the British Museum in the United Kingdom, the Schoyen Collection in Norway, and Bridgeman Images, United States of America. Specific details of copyrights and permissions are published next to the figures.

acknowledgments

MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS OF MATERIAL TO THIS VOLUME, WHOSE NAMES APPEAR ON THE back cover, are introduced in a spirit of thankful gratitude in the prologue, in introductions to the books in which their contributions appear, and in the "About the Contributors" section. R. S. Sugirtharajah and Sharada Sugirtharajan of Birmingham University in the United Kingdom would have been in that category were they not prevented from direct contributions by the weight of other commitments, so I thank them here for their encouragement and for refining my own postcolonial perspective in their insightful books, *The Bible and Asia* (by Rasiah Sugirtharajah) and *Imagining Hinduism* (by Sharada Sugirtharajah). Their evidence that Asiatic influence is more predominant in Western scriptures than is usually realized ranks with Victor Mair's evidence that "Western" Magi were active during the composition of Eastern scriptures in ancient China, two observations that may serve as the magnetic poles of this work.

These contributors have become almost like family, and I would add to the list of such intimates the names of readers and critical reviewers of early drafts of the whole compendium or parts of it, including senior scholars Jonathan Kearney in Dublin and David Bruce in Toronto, once again, as well as my "editorial review panel" of Niagara educator Nikole Amato; Toronto seminarian Graham Wilson; and Trinidadians, Senator Joy Abdul-Mohan, Senator Rolph Balgobin, and Justice Peter Jamadar, who ensured that I dealt with the "Global South" perspective and other matters appropriately.

My final proofreader was Stanley Algoo, who came from the Caribbean to Canada as a prestigious "Island Scholar" at McGill University. He served as a career librarian at Scarborough Public Library in Toronto, where he facilitated the creation of the first Chinese character–based catalog for public library use. In putting the finishing polish on this complex text, Algoo caught not only typos and spelling errors invisible to the author but also issues of syntax with reference to the flow and meaning as he grasped it, for which my readers will join me in gratitude.

It is essential for a work of this magnitude to have an editor who demands the highest standards, and I have had that blessing in Sarah Stanton, religion editor for Rowman

& Littlefield, for both *Three Testaments* and *Four Testaments*. Her skillful editorial assistants, Karie Simpson and Carli Hansen, have been especially helpful in the present volume, as has been senior production editor Patricia Stevenson.

Colleague contributors have generously described the two-volume compendium of *Three Testaments* and *Four Testaments* as the author's *magnum opus*. If I have any such legacy to offer, I hope it is in connecting the seven world religions to their Vedic roots, whether tenuous or vigorous, and thereby to each other. In this task I have been "aided and abetted" by Jenny (Sutacriti Gosine) Brown, my life partner since teenage years in university, and my "guru" in enriching our Christian faith through ever deepening appreciation of Eastern mysticism. The assistance of other members of our family is mentioned in the "Illustrations" section. With a nod to our own Vedic roots, referred to in the dedication, we have felt that without the influence of profound Eastern mysticism, especially in mainstream Christian traditions of Western Europe and North America, the progressive expression of traditional Christianity, to which we adhere, has become somewhat insipid in our time. We hope to point here to possibilities of enrichment and renewal in this regard.

Such enthrallment actually remains vital in Catholic pageantry and Pentecostal emotionalism, but Christianity also needs an intellectual basis bathed, immersed or baptized in a profundity that goes beyond itself, even while satisfying the mental capacity with which all God's people are endowed. This historic hallmark of mainstream Protestantism appears open to renewal from these four testaments. Judaism and Islam preserve enough of their own Asiatic roots to relate to or give leadership in this quest. We join with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim monotheistic colleagues, Clooney, Glassé, Mair, Mates-Muchin, Bruce, and Freund, in this guided exploration of the depths of Eastern monism. We cannot but express grateful acknowledgment of our Chinese and Indian fellow travelers, Mates-Muchin (creatively straddling the cultures), Eduljee, Sharma, Rasiah and Sharada Sugirtharajah, and our special guides, the translators James Legge, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and Mohandas Gandhi, who have passed into glory or nirvana, and Victor Mair, who is still part of our pilgrimage.

abridgment and dramatic presentations

Some readers and certain academic programs may have accessed this compendium anticipating the "four testaments" without expecting the opening section on the Vedic context or the closing material relating to the West. This volume has been designed so such readers may begin with Book II and conclude with Book V. The Zoroastrian material in the opening and the closing may work for others as what we refer to as the thumb that facilitates the action of those four fingers, and it may be read by class members or study group participants as an introduction to the four world religions of the East in Books II–V, followed by a conclusion in the Western context.

In this connection we may point out that the reading of new concepts and words may appear easier in the *Tao Te Ching*, more difficult in dialogue between unfamiliar characters in the *Analects*, more accessible again in the *Dhammapada*, and especially manageable in the *Bhagavad Gita* as the reader has become adept through the process. Coincidentally, the reader may be following the chronological evolution of monism.

Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran in 2012 was followed two years later by a study guide, still available from Amazon under the title *Three Testaments Companion*, featuring well-designed congregational, community, and academic course outlines by Dr. David Bruce. There are no plans as yet for such a resource in support of *Four Testaments*, but the *Three Testaments Companion* might suggest structure, and the examples on the following page illustrate "discussion starters" for consideration by group leaders, clergy, and professors.

The *Three Testaments* book inspired the play *Three Testaments: Shalom, Peace, Salam*, which premiered in upstate New York in June 2015 and is available on both YouTube and DVD from Amazon. Produced by James Flood, directed by Arthur Strimling, and staged by Alison Miculan, with artistic direction by Cheryl Wood-Thomas, it anticipates presentation at the inaugural day of the Performing Arts Center at the World Trade Center in 2018. As a possible post-intermission presentation, playwright and dramaturg Bill Thomas of St. Catharines, Ontario has purchased the rights to produce a play based on *Four Testaments*. That one-act play will feature four dramatic scenes presenting Confucius visiting Lao Tzu at the Imperial Archives, Lao Tzu heading west from China on his donkey, the Buddha leaving his father's palace and wondering until finding enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, and Krishna with Arjuna in the chariot between battle lines of the struggle within each person—a consummate presentation of "east meets west."

prologue

Four Fingers and a Thumb: Tao Te Ching, Analects, Dhammapada, Gita, *and Avesta*

THIS VOLUME OFFERS THE SACRED TEXTS OR FOUNDATIONAL SCRIPTURES OF THE FOUR "WORLD religions" of Eastern tradition, four trunks plus the stump of another, with introductory comments by scholars and leaders with expertise in the field. It offers the central premise and discerning thesis that the Vedic religious tradition that influenced religious developments in China was the same Zoroastrian iteration of Vedic heritage that stimulated reform of Hinduism and the development of Buddhism in India and that intersected with Judaism during the Babylonian Captivity.

Zoroastrianism, which itself may have been exposed to even earlier Hebrew influence, was neither foundational nor dominant in any of those developments, but it was possibly simulative in all areas connected by the Silk Route in the sixth century BCE. Frequently serving as the state religion of the Persian Empire through a thousand years of association with this first superpower, it would also stimulate certain revelations in the later religious developments of Christianity and Islam. It thus influenced or at least connected the seven world religions generally recognized in the newer discipline of "religious studies," the successor to comparative religion. As an interesting sidebar, the search for the lost portions of Zoroastrian scriptures (the "Dead Zee Scrolls") is presented as almost a holy grail of archaeology in the view of some of our contributors.

Were there Magi in ancient China, connected with Persia, introducing religious concepts from the Middle East and the Middle West to the Chinese culture that was believed, until recently, to have developed in total isolation? Was Baruch Spinoza, the framer of philosophy that shaped modern Europe, actually informed and influenced by Vedanta Hinduism through his family connections with the Dutch East India Company? The proof of the first is now conclusive, the evidence for the second is mounting, and these are but a couple of the links between the major religious traditions in human history to be explored in this book.

In it, Eastern scriptures take a preeminent place in this discussion of "*Our Religions*," to use the term employed by a publication of that title associated with the Parliament of Religions to describe the seven truly "world" religions. This study of four eastern, mainly "monistic," texts is presented in tandem with the 2012 publication of *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran* of Western monotheism from Rowman & Littlefield. An interesting question to be addressed is whether monism and monotheism can be shown to have some common roots; are they as totally incompatible as is usually presumed, or might there be ways in which these traditions may enrich each other (or at least coexist)?

There was a dramatic spiritual stirring along the Silk Route early in the sixth century BCE, possibly triggered by a prophetic ministry of the Persian prophet named Zoroaster, and reaching from Europe to China through connections between Magi who were already in "The Land of the Heavenly Dragon" and their Iranian counterparts. The reverberations of this stirring may have inspired the custodian of the Imperial Archives in China's imperial palace to venture into the new dimension of religion we call Taoism, and that development led to an "equal and opposite reaction" in Confucianism, based on China's own best traditions. The response to this stimulus in India was different, beginning with Buddhism as a positive development, but, instead of a pushback Hindu reaction, a reform of Indian religion led to the renewal of Hinduism, making Buddhism redundant there but ready for export throughout neighboring lands. The scriptures to be examined and studied in this volume reflect on these developments that took place within a single century among a significant portion of the world's population.

When I entered what is now the Master of Divinity program of religious studies at McGill University fifty years ago, Western Christians were engaged in recovering the Jewish heritage of the church, despite a theology partially shaped by Greek and Roman influences and developed in Europe. This new balance in both theology and biblical studies prevailed until the end of the twentieth century, when a "postcolonial" agenda began to emerge and another change in perspective appeared inevitable. To illustrate the change as it may be seen in a wider, parallel phenomenon, dictionaries of the twentieth century gave the Greek and Latin roots of words, but as the twenty-first century dawned, dictionaries began to show the "Indo-European" roots of most words. The same is now happening in the search for the Vedic roots of Christian theological concepts in my old school, and for Vedic influences in other places as well.

Jewish and Islamic studies have been developing corresponding links in the same direction, and the influence of monistic theology and Eastern scriptural texts on all three is beginning to be recognized at last in this postcolonial era. In 2013, R. S. Sugirtharajah of the University of Birmingham could write, "In modern times there has been a grudging acknowledgement that some of the key theological concepts in Christianity might have their origins in Zoroastrianism,"[1] a Vedic imprint from the East impressed upon the West but almost invisible until recently. This observation was an echo of a "subtext" of *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran*, the compendium that preceded this one. Indeed, a Canadian reviewer in the *Presbyterian Record* referred

to my Zoroastrian subtext in that volume as a "theory of everything" and compared it to the penchant of the bride's father in the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, who attributed every idea in the world to a Greek origin. In *Four Testaments*, Zoroastrianism once again plays a significant role, though the reason may be more apparent in the current volume, which proposes it as a Vedic link between certain Eastern texts, and between Eastern and Western texts.

While four-fifths of this book is devoted to the four primary "testaments" of Eastern scripture, its Vedic subtext (via its Zoroastrian conduit) may be the single "revelation" of greatest impact. In addition to providing a link between the three Western testaments, the Vedic umbrella over all seven world religions, and also many traditional religions, signifies the linkage between all or most cultures in the world. Thus in the West the Vedic-linked Norse mythology, Wicca and Dravidic religions, and even Egyptian and other African religions display words, phrases, rituals, and concepts reflecting common themes. Likewise in the East, the identifiable commonalities of Jainism, divergent Tibetan Buddhism, earlier Shinto, and later Sikh traditions may be seen as reflecting the essence of a religions quest that is more than the coincidence of humans responding to similar phenomena. Vedic lore, as discerned in the seven world religions, may be described as the umbrella over all seven, or perhaps better as the deep subterranean aquifer from which the world draws its waters of baptism, ablution, sacred bathing, the flow of the Tao, and water sacrifice in other religions. This plausible resolution of so many issues was addressed tentatively in *Three Testaments*, but we hope to substantiate the thesis of a relationship between the seven and the many, the world religions and the traditional religions throughout the world.

Of all potential influences from "further east," Zoroastrianism is emerging as potentially the most influential, and also still the most ignored, for a variety of reasons. As the Vedic bridge between Eastern and Western religious traditions, Zoroastrianism is of special interest because its influence in the West is like the mirror opposite of its reforming impact on Eastern religion and its formative influence on Eastern philosophy during the Axial Age in the fifth and sixth centuries BCE. The derisively humorous observation that "Zoroastrianism is the next big thing, and always will be," may be about to materialize as the last laugh.

In his seminal analysis of the situation among Jews and Christians, Sugirtharajah summarizes the point by referencing the late Professor Norman Cohn of Sussex University to the effect that "the Judeo-Christian faith tradition owes an intellectual debt to Zoroastrianism for such theological ideas as a universal god, notions of angels, Satan, heaven, hell, resurrection of the body, life after death, and the final apocalyptic ending of this world."[2] Narrowing further to Christianity alone, he quotes J. C. Hindley, New Testament instructor at Serampore College in West Bengal, in saying that "it is no longer possible to relegate Zoroastrianism to the fringe of Christian interest."[3] This book will also broaden the Jewish and Christian analysis to include Islam, and more particularly to show how that process not only engages Eastern religions and philosophy through a common ancestor but also connects contextually with Western religions and philosophy today in a manner heretofore unimaginable.

If the frequent reference to Zoroastrianism seems like a stretch to some traditional scholars, let me suggest that we may be at the beginning of an epochal awareness of something like a cross-fertilization of ideas between East and West along the "Silk Route" in an era long before we have traditionally understood that conduit as primarily a trade route. It may turn out that there were links other than the Zoroastrian-tinged Vedic connection we are proposing, like perhaps Manichaeism a little later, but at this point it would appear that Zoroastrianism in the mid-sixth century BCE needs to be taken more seriously as the stimulus we are attempting to identify for what is now frequently referred to as the Axial Age. Every time this text refers to whatever Silk Route influence reached over into China, down into India and back to Israel-in-Babylon as "Zoroastrianism," the reader may mutter under her breath "or whatever." But the premise here is that the sixth-century BCE eruption of "something" under the aegis of the Persian superpower was a resophisticated Vedic influence moving through the conduit we now call the Silk Route and acting as a stimulant in all three cases. If it looks like Zoroastrianism, quacks like Zoroastrianism, and waddles like Zoroastrianism, for now we will assume that it is Zoroastrianism.

There had been hints of monism in various places in the ancient world, and monotheism had been incubating in Israel since Moses, when rather suddenly "Westernism" (i.e., in religion and philosophy) veered sharply from polytheism toward monotheism at almost precisely the same moment that "Easternism" moved just as suddenly from polytheism to monism. The parallel timing, as well as Zoroastrian geographical connections to both along the Silk Route, suggests that something was going on that may not fully explain these phenomena but nevertheless implies a link or a shared stimulation. If so, modern occidental and oriental philosophers may have more grist for their mills, and Western and Eastern religions have a clear agenda for their "interfaith" discussions in the twenty-first century. The profundity of this discussion of the relationship between monism and monotheism is so all embracing that it may turn out to be one of the more important agenda items of twenty-first-century religious studies.

Are human beings creatures who alone (aside from the instinct of animals and the "being" of inanimate matter) have the privilege of knowing, worshipping, and serving God, or are we potentially part of God, consciously seeking to realize our participation in the whole? Is the role of religion to provide "atonement" in the sense of reconciliation between creatures and their Creator, or is it truly "at-*one*-ment," meaning an integration of individual "selves" into the glorious fullness of God? If the latter, what is the role of the "individual" in striving toward realization of the divine, and what is the status of individual elements in relation to the Godhead after integration?

Is it possible to conceive of monotheism as a way station in the direction of monism, or does monism simply fail to recognize and accept God's creativity in the divine authentication of separate elements in creation? Where is the line between monotheism and monism, or is there a dynamic continuum between them? In the simplest of human terms, these may be among the questions facing analysts of religion and theologians of the twenty-first century. Lately one keeps meeting people who say they are both Jews and Buddhists, and Paul Knitter, a Catholic theologian at Union Theological Seminary

in New York, has graced the discussion with his book, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*. Similar in spirit is *Confucius for Christians*, written from an evangelical perspective, by Gregg A. Ten Elshof, without a monistic component. Hindus are usually capable of this stretching, while Muslims anchor the opposite end of the spectrum.

In my own recent volume presenting the monotheistic scriptures of Abraham's family together for the first time,[4] I began the exploration of how important Zoroastrianism is for the world, not merely for all three principal Western traditions. In this current book, with the assistance of learned colleagues, we extend the new appreciation of Zoroastrianism in the West to an equal standing in the East, another groundbreaking investigation. This is the first time the four main popular scriptures of Eastern monism are linked to one another (in mutual support or in reaction), to the Western traditions, and to the Zoroastrian iteration of Vedic lore. In this compendium we hope to help launch a field of studies with a potential to engage academic research in areas from ancient Greek and Roman classics through Mesopotamian history, back to investigations of the Vedic origins of spiritual development from one end of the Silk Route to the other, and forward to a whole new Western understanding and appreciation of religion and philosophy in India and China.

We might acknowledge that a certain level of dedication will be required to plod through the *Exordium* by Karl Friedrich Geldner in book I. *What We Once Knew* is about Zoroastrianism as the Vedic godparent of all major religions, East and West. This hundred-year-old document has considerable value, not merely in the information it presents but also in presenting a religious ethos integral to Western culture just a century ago, but foreign to many people now. That ethos is still part of life in the East and is closer to the animus of the ancient world than we are. It may both inform and enthrall those who can endure the old-world archaisms in this presentation, which lays a foundation for much that follows.

We hope to illustrate how Western and Eastern traditions of theology and philosophy may be understood as illuminating each other through their shared Zoroastrian connections. To begin with, the Vedic and Semitic traditions connect with each other through intersections on the Silk Route more than earlier realized. They do not run parallel there, and they only crisscross directly perhaps once or twice that we know of, though these momentous intersections perhaps affect the whole world. The first such intersection now appears to have happened when the Vedic tradition, migrating southward toward India, crossed the path of Israelite exiles moving northward toward Europe—significant not for the numbers involved but for the particular putative personas involved. The second intersection took place as monotheistic Vedic Zoroastrian Persian conquerors encountered their monotheistic Jewish civil service in newly captured Babylon. These two meetings were perhaps less than seventy-five years apart, and we contend that their ramifications are still reverberating, especially in the field of religious studies.

Our focus on Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism as the Eastern complement to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam was inspired and confirmed by the publication of a survey of seven religions that might be properly designated as truly

"world religions." *Our Religions: The Seven World Religions Introduced by Preeminent Scholars from Each Tradition* was authored and edited by Arvind Sharma of McGill University, one of our own commentators in this compendium. It was a response to the 1993 recognition of those seven by the Parliament of Religions, a book currently regarded by many as a preeminent text in the field of interfaith studies. We intend to indicate how these seven have some common scriptural rootage and have influenced one another more significantly than has been previously realized. We have no interest in homogenizing these religions and we recognize that the differences between them are as enlightening as what may be identified as points of common stimulation. Indeed, while we focus primarily on the scriptures and their contexts in four religions in particular, we urge the study of the *Our Religions* text to follow through on how these religions evolved or grew to the character and the status they enjoy in the twenty-first century, an area of study far beyond the mandate of this compendium.

After the publication of *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran*, and the international launch tour that followed, in addition to synagogues and churches, I found myself being invited to speak at mosques in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere from across the spectrum of Sunni, Shia, and Sufi communities. There were sometimes awkward moments when I felt members of the audience were asking themselves, "Why would our leaders invite this speaker who obviously has limited knowledge of the Quran and even less of Islamic theological understanding?" So I would begin with the story of American astronauts and Russian cosmonauts who know things about the British countryside that farmers who have worked that land all their lives do not know. From space they see the outlines of the ancient Roman occupation with walls, wells, streets, and dams that are not apparent to those on the ground who know every stick and stone of the terrain. The most recent example is the 2014 discoveries from space that redefine our understanding of the true purpose and nature of Hadrian's Wall, which provided aqueduct services to both Romans in England and the less developed world in Scotland.

Then I comment, "With great humility today, and with profound respect for your more intimate understanding, I hope to tell you about my observation of the Quran from a great distance, seeing things that you may have never seen in the Quran, the holy book you know inside out." I conclude this prologue with a similar word to the many scholars of Zoroastrianism who will quickly realize that I know very little about detailed matters in which they are expert. I hope to reveal things seen from a great distance that may enhance their appreciation of a subject they love and contribute to a greater understanding of it to our world heritage. With respect to scholarship introducing the four complete scriptural texts on exhibition in Books II, III, IV, and V, we are on more like *terra firma* through the participation and contributions of experts in those fields.

These four Eastern Asian testaments, together with the "Eastern" Zoroastrian Avesta, represent the quintessence of Eastern Religion, like four fingers and a thumb, presented in the context of their Vedic glove. Archaeologists are still looking for the bulk of the Avesta, a search to be introduced in Book VII by Professor Richard Freund

of the University of Hartford, but we present the other four sacred Eastern testaments in a manner we believe renders the original as faithfully as possible in translation, portrays the understanding of these scriptures down through the ages, and appropriately represents their position in today's world.

We use the dating system BCE and CE, for "Before the Common Era" and "Common Era," instead of the Western traditional BC and AD except in quotations by contributors (who happen to be Jewish in every case in this regard) or when Muslim or other dates are also required for clarity. Likewise, while we note the classic spelling of *Daoism* by Professor Clooney, our other contributors lean toward *Taoism* as more familiar to our readers. The translations of the four Eastern testament scriptures in both quotations and exhibition sections are by Victor H. Mair in the case of the *Tao Te Ching*, for the *Analects* the classic English version by James Legge, the *Dhammapada* by Radhakrishnan, and the *Bhagavad Gita* by Gandhi, as will be discussed in each accompanying preface. Quotations of Western texts in commentary sections are usually from the *Tanakh* version of the Hebrew Scriptures of the Jewish Publication Society, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible from the National Council of Churches, except when tradition or sentiment dictate use of the King James Authorized Version or an original rendering, and we use the translations of the twentieth-century Holy Quran by A. Yusuf Ali and the twenty-first-century rendering of the Sublime Quran by Laleh Bakhtiar. Quotations in translation of the Zoroastrian Avesta come from a long list of sources represented in the bibliography as well as an extensive original paraphrase.

Like high school students overwhelmed by facts, names, and dates in history, rather than the story, many seminarians, university undergraduates in "Comparative Religion," and members of congregations venturing into the interfaith arena are overwhelmed by the number of sects and variant versions of oriental religions. In this compendium our approach is more selective, beginning with the first or primary "testament" sized scripture of each religion. Without giving breathing exercises or guidelines for meditation, our material verges on the experiential with respect to the four texts on exhibition, the core of our study. For context however, and to illustrate wider trends in passing, my colleagues and I present glimpses of past religious knowledge, current political realities affecting the religious life of the world, and future developments in religious archaeology that may unfold in our lifetimes.

The previous volume, *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran*, has been the recipient of awards not only in religious, academic, and literary categories but also for its contribution to "world peace." Likewise, this *Four Testaments* volume, while focused on religious and academic questions, is presented in a literary fashion that hopefully will contribute to a greater understanding between believers in the oneness of this world, an aspect of faith being necessary as the *sine qua non* of existence on this planet now and in the future.

We acknowledge that in some respects this book appears targeted at a North American readership and English-speaking readers elsewhere, but we are aiming far beyond the traditional, white Protestant market that constitutes a certain religious book industry in America. We are cultivating a diverse spectrum of readers from many demographics

who will be joined by others who read English as a second language, as well as many for whom the scriptures of Eastern religions are indeed their own scriptures. Among the first to see the draft manuscript of this compendium were those invited to present the foreword and the introductions to the seven books: an eminent scholar with Australian connections who teaches at Harvard, a Russian-born Muslim encyclopedist, a Chinese female rabbi born on the west coast of the United States, America's leading academic Sinologist (who happens to be Jewish), a Hindu scholar from India at McGill University in Montreal, a Catholic scholar and writer whose "day job" is providing housing for refugees in Toronto, a Jewish archaeologist whose most famous dig has provided a promising hypothesis for the location of Atlantis near Gibraltar as observed from space, and near the end a Zoroastrian blogger with street cred displayed on his scholarly website.

It is the latter, the final contributor to this compendium, with his comments on an ancient text by a fifth-century BCE Zoroastrian monarch, inscribed on fossilized horse bones found recently in China, who moves the seemingly improbable quest for the "Dead Zee Scrolls" of lost Avestan scriptures to the realm of genuine possibility and almost probability. That final contribution from a colleague prompts me to linger at this point in describing this important source of Eastern scholarly insight.

K. E. Eduljee may be regarded as the world's preeminent "Zoroastrian scholar," at least from within that community, as compared to "scholars of Zoroastrianism" from without. In *Three Testaments* I acknowledged that Zoroastrian scholarship and scholarship of Zoroastrianism are two different disciplines, and that, despite respect for the former, in that book we were there employing the latter since it conformed more easily and compared more helpfully to textual criticism and other techniques used by the Jews, Christians, and Muslims who were both intended readers and active contributors to the compendium. That was a mistake. Scholars of Zoroastrianism are feeling their way forward in a discipline that is new in the last century and full of promise, and while there is much mutual respect among them, there is little agreement among academic specialists, even when evidence is overwhelming or a consensus is possible. With help from Mary Boyce, I have tracked and explicated some of the more dramatic controversies. Beginning with *Four Testaments*, again to illustrate the growing realization that there may be a Vedic backdrop via Zoroastrianism to all major world religions, I turned to several "Zoroastrian scholars," principally Eduljee, to settle some questions for recalcitrant "scholars of Zoroastrianism." I was told, "Good luck with that."

Two things happened. The same issues remained, but I developed a new respect for those I had described as "recalcitrant," for my new tutor was as uncertain about solid dates for the life and teachings of Zoroaster and other matters not as important to the core theology of Zoroaster as some of them are (though his views are as good as theirs and well within the spectrum of our speculations). Formerly ridiculous legends about Zoroaster himself are resolved on all sides these days. However, with Eduljee I discovered that what we all need in the study of Zoroastrianism—namely, the essential spirituality at its core—is preserved not in textual studies but in tradition and practice within the community. This is largely missing from secular and

non-Zoroastrian studies, including my own, though in this compendium I attempted to develop a new sensitivity to this aspect that transcends all others. While Eduljee's influence may now be seen in this text from start to finish, I cannot claim that I have his approval for all that you read and learn here. I keenly urge readers to investigate over a thousand web pages on the subject at his Zoroastrian Heritage website, http://www.heritageinstitute.com.

To assist more formally academic scholars to appreciate this trove of treasure, let me say that this is the largest Zoroastrian website in the world, entirely from one person, with a long-term average of just under 35,000 unique visitors per month from a multitude of countries around the globe, but primarily, or almost exclusively, within the Zoroastrian community. These statistics do not include the four blogs by Eduljee, whose work is endorsed and printed by journals of the World Zoroastrian Organisation, the Federation of North American Zoroastrian Associations, the Zarathushtrian Assembly, "Parsis and Irani Under One Roof," and numerous other organizations in North America, Europe, Iran, India, Australia, and elsewhere, while Eduljee himself is a Canadian. Zoroastrians of different denominations and backgrounds have accepted his work, and it should be acknowledged that he also receives mail from academics, scholars, authors, reporters, TV producers, and individuals who have twigged to the value of this resource. Eduljee's pages are quoted in classrooms and used by people organizing weddings, initiation ceremonies, general festivals, and even funerals.

The views he publishes represent the mainstream and the "center of gravity" of Zoroastrian thinking, as evidenced by endorsements by conservatives, traditionalists, and orthodox, as well as liberals and reformers, with only a few detractors. His articles on King Cyrus the Great published by the Federation of North American Zoroastrian Associations (FEZANA) have been translated into Spanish and French by a translator in Argentina. Meanwhile, I am among the friends and members of his family who are urging him to write *The Encyclopedia of Zoroastrianism*, the sort of thing in which my own publisher specializes, as do some others. For example, as a neophyte in the study of Islam, I frequently turn to *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* by Cyril Glassé, and many of us need just such a tool for Zoroastrian studies, hopefully crafted by one who appreciates the virtues of secular and non-Zoroastrian explorations but, as with Glassé, from within the community of tradition and practice. Both Zoroastrian scholars and scholars of Zoroastrianism would benefit immensely from such a resource. Ed, are you ready to get started?

In some respects this compendium may be regarded as an academic book, but it may have other applications. Because of the manner in which "race relations" of the twentieth century are being partially supplanted by "faith relations" in the twenty-first century, *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran* has been found to be a valuable resource for conferences on such topics as "The Terror of These Times," an 2015 event in Niagara Falls, New York, in which clergy and academics of those three traditions considered how proper understanding of our own and one another's scriptures could become the first line of defense against terrorism. In similar fashion, as referenced by Francis Clooney and others, *Four Testaments* may prove to be of value in getting ahead

of the curve in potential issues involving East–West politics, immigration, economic, and military power. With regard to religion in China, nuclear threats from North Korea, Buddhist extremism in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, and Hindu nationalism in India, to name a few areas of concern, one place to begin to foster understanding may be an appreciation of the basic religious resources available. The primary and fundamental Eastern "testaments" are the *Tao Te Ching*, the *Analects*, the *Dhammapada*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and even the Zoroastrian Avesta, which provides the Vedic link among these four monistic and mixed texts, and between them and the Western monotheistic texts of the previous volume.

With a word on each of the others in order, Francis Clooney might not appreciate being called the *éminence grise* of the interfaith movement so often, but he is all of that. Victor H. Mair demolishes the old "high school lesson" about Chinese civilization developing in total isolation. Jacqueline Mates-Muchin begins the Oriental–Occidental comparative process. Radhakrishnan and Gandhi present the basis of a postcolonial perspective. Arvind Sharma helps us see how these scriptures complement one another. David Bruce resonates with the perspectives of dispossessed migrant minorities, especially Middle East refugees these days. Richard Freund verifies that our archaeological speculations may be well-grounded in scientific realities. These contributors have ensured a worldview equal to the tasks assigned to them. Their credentials are described more fully at the back of the compendium and more specifics of their contributions will be introduced as we proceed. This team has worked so well with me and with one another that it seemed appropriate that I almost belabor the point so that readers might join the team through appreciation of both the excellence of their contributions and the background spectrum of their qualifications and experience.

Finally, before we get going, I wish to acknowledge the value of a compendium that competes with this one in a certain area and to consider its value in context. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, edited by Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, was published just over a year before *Four Testaments*. It is focused on Zoroastrianism alone, whereas our compendium merely includes Zoroastrianism as providing the single most important link between Vedic spiritual lore and the seven world religions, particularly Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and reformed Hinduism. The expert scholars of Zoroastrianism in the Wiley volume offer additional (and possibly corrective) insights to our theses, even while important issues remain unresolved for them in reference to this work.

With a focus on Zoroastrianism a thousand years closer to our time than the Zoroastrianism of this study, they have been unable to reconcile their scholastic propositions with the community traditions and recent work of "Zoroastrian scholars," much less with one another as "scholars of Zoroastrianism." For example, the majority of contributors to the Wiley volume favor a date for Zoroaster in the 1200–1000 BCE range (for mainly "philological" reasons) and only acknowledge the Persian / Arabic tradition (728–652 BCE) in their preface. This is despite the views of their Susan Whitfield in her own book and Amir Hussain and others elsewhere who agree with us in adopting the more recent dates for reasons both traditional and scholarly in the approach we employ

in "reading backward" from the witness of Jewish material related to the Babylonian Exile. Their philological arguments for earlier dates are dealt with elsewhere in our text, showing why Zoroaster might have deliberately used archaic language, just as new religions today present their "scriptures" in King James English to gain "authenticity." Likewise, the Wiley contributors' argument that Zoroaster's Gatha poems exhibit none of the animals or industries of the seventh century BCE but do show earlier examples is countered by the habit of modern urban Christians continuing to sing about sheep and shepherds known in both the Bible and their own rural past.

Finally, some of the postmodern scholars of Zoroastrianism contributing to the esteemed *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism* are of the view that the Avesta existed only in oral form for a thousand years, with none of it being written down until sometime between 350 and 500 CE (when we believe it was actually codified). Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the earliest known version of the Hebrew Scriptures dated back to the ninth century CE, so until that discovery there were Jewish scholars who taught that the Hebrew Scriptures were unwritten until the fifth century CE. Both theories are nonsense, of course, with references to copies of the Avesta throughout antiquity supported by certainty that the Rig Veda, a predecessor or linguistic uncle of the Avesta, was written down around 1200 BCE, as acknowledged by those same Avesta doubters. The "Dead Zee Scrolls" have not yet been found, but there can be no doubt that they existed, and, following the model of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we might assume that some copies still exist, just waiting to be found.

Though necessarily fragmented and disjointed given the current state of research, the material in the *Wiley Blackwell Compendium* is stunning in the scholarship underlying its cautious deductions, despite a safe, minimalist approach. Its contributors are the intellectual and analytical equals of the finest scholars in more established fields such as Egyptology, and one can only sympathize with their dilemma over the growing welter of conflicting evidence about Zoroastrianism early in the Common Era. The questions they raise are important but possibly incapable of resolution without the actual discovery of the BCE documents that this study postulates as the foundational origins of Zoroastrianism and the stimulative origins of Taoism, Confucianism (in reaction), and Buddhism (as well as the reformed Hinduism that followed it).

However, the Wiley contributors offer a splendid array of Zoroastrian traditions in later Iran and contiguous areas early in the Common Era, derived in various ways from our classical Zoroastrianism a thousand years earlier, which itself spawned a wide variety of religious developments in neighboring lands in its own time. Wiley also offers impressive evidence regarding the several forms of Zoroastrianism throughout Central Asia, China, India, Korea, and even Japan in the first millennium CE, even where Ahura Mazda is somewhat absorbed into deities like the Hindu Indra and more especially Brahma. Indeed, it is important to note the Zoroastrian presence throughout even the Far East up to the present time, without acknowledgment or support from the wider community of Parsees and others, as elucidated by Takeshi Aoki in *The Wiley Blackwell Compendium of Zoroastrianism*. Such resources are not easily accessed elsewhere, and they are presented in conjunction with an array of traditions found in this exciting compilation.

Yaakov Elman and Shai Secunda raise interesting questions about recent evidence of significant Jewish activity in China in ancient times, supported by evidence in our own appendix. Nobody is entirely comfortable in connecting the exiles in Isaiah 49:12 with China—"Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim (סיניס in Hebrew, or 秦國 in the Chinese Union text)." But we can hope to hear more from the Wiley folks about recent DNA tests showing Semitic genes in more than one thousand citizens of the city of Kaifeng, some five hundred miles southwest of Beijing.

Parsee historical lore from India and legends regarding Zoroastrians in Iran through the ages since the Islamic conquest are described by John R. Hinnells, with reliable information about modern practices by Jenny Rose. These are the people we need to hear from about the current reports of "conversions" or authentic "returns to ancestral faith" by tens of thousands of Kurds and Yazidis facing ISIS in Syria and Iraq, a phenomenon receiving a warm reception by Parsees and other Zoroastrians, to the surprise of many. The Wiley team has just begun its work.

Meanwhile, to move forward in reference to the Vedic/Zoroastrian stimulation of eastward religious developments, it may be necessary to briefly summarize the progress in this field prior to the eruption of theories represented by the current spectrum of opinions expressed in Wiley, mostly concerning Zoroastrianism closer to the fifth century CE than to the Zoroastrianism of the fifth century BCE, the era of our primary interest.

In his *Historica religionis veterum Persarium, eorumque Magorum* (*History of the Religion of the Ancient Persians and Their Magi*) Oxford's Thomas Hyde (1636–1703) was the first non-Zoroastrian scholar since ancient times to suggest that Zoroaster had been a pupil of one of the Hebrew prophets and to call for a search for the missing and unknown Zoroastrian Scriptures. French Iranist James Darmesteter (1849–1894) adopted the Persian/Arabian date of 258 years before Alexander as the starting point for Zoroaster's Avesta. German scholar Friedrich von Spiegal (1820–1905) developed the theme that Semantic elements had found their way into Zoroastrianism, and he produced the first significant European translation of the Avesta in a line of translations we review in this book. Karl Friederich Geldner (1852–1929) made important improvements to translation of the Avesta text in sections released between 1886 and 1895, preliminary to his 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* articles, which we use to summarize the positions of his pioneering predecessors. Meanwhile, Geldner's friend Abraham Valentine Williams Jackson (1862–1937) confirmed the linguistic links between the Avestan language and its Sanskrit (Vedic) parent, and Geldner's contemporary, Christian Bartholomae (1855–1925), established that Zoroaster had fled from western to eastern Iran, where he found a royal patron for his monotheistic and eschatological message—all positions prevailing in this book.

Walter Henning, a leading scholar of Zoroastrianism at London's School of Oriental and African Studies through the mid-twentieth century, adopted the dates we favor, but he is best known through the further research of his pupil and protégé Mary Boyce (1920–2006), who rejected those dates. Boyce established Zoroastrian studies

as an independent discipline, and she encouraged us personally in matters related to the Hebrew connection in the *Three Testaments* precursor of this study. Every Zoroastrian scholar since then owes a debt to this doyen of the discipline, even while the wildly divergent positions of many contributing to the *Wiley Blackwell Compendium* distressed her in the last months of her life. Our interest in Zoroastrianism in some 20 percent of this book is its role as a conduit for a progressive version of the Vedic religious concepts that functioned as the stimulus for an eruption of religious and philosophical fervor from one end of the Silk Route to the other in the fifth and sixth centuries BCE, recognized first in its interplay with Judaism in Babylon during what we now call the Axial Age, when Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and reformed Hinduism came onstage.

book one

FROM THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH TO OUR COMMON SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS

introduction

East and West Meeting at the Altar of Religion

Cyril Glassé

BOOK I SETS THE ARGUMENT OF THIS VOLUME IN A UNIVERSAL CONTEXT; THE NEXT SEVERAL "books" present the primary Eastern scriptures, which speak for themselves; and the concluding books show the relationship between Eastern and Western texts and point to a greater appreciation of the connection. My comments may serve to link the starting point with the conclusion, perhaps for the benefit of Western readers in particular. This is meant to contextualize rather than ignore the preponderant weight of Eastern scriptures throughout the bulk of this investigation, a sequel and companion to Brian Arthur Brown's seminal work on the Western texts, *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran*.

In proposing a Vedic backdrop for all of the major world religions, Brown builds on previously established links between Jews and the Zoroastrian reconfiguration of Vedic religious lore. That the Jews were profoundly influenced by Zoroastrian priests, the Magi, in the court of Cyrus the Great and his successors is a given. In his previous work, and summarized again here, Brown persuasively argues that Zoroaster himself may have encountered Semitic influences long before Cyrus marched into Babylon, where the interplay continued. The mutual sway of evolving Semitic influences over such Vedic developments, and back again, is a paradigm of similar mutual influences in China and India, as we shall see. The presence of a certain Krishna (traditionally and inexplicably written as "Carshena" in Western Bibles, instead of using an obvious transliteration of the Hebrew letters for Kṛṣṇa) in the Persian court of Ahasuerus[1] represents the wider interplay so skillfully presented in this work.

Vedic "Eastern" influence in Christianity is only beginning to be seen, here and elsewhere. If I may be permitted to quote myself,

> Jesus rises from the dead in three days, an interval taken directly from Zoroastrianism. In that religion the dead linger near the grave for three days before continuing their afterlife journey. Half or more of Christianity is composed of elements from Zoroastrianism in compound with elements from Semitic religion. The Evangelists, writing after 80 AD, recording the evolving mass of traditions, took the Teacher of Righteousness (who we know from the Dead Sea Scrolls) and split him into two personae. There was John the Baptist, wearing animal skins, eating locusts, a primitive wolf-man living in the desert, a leader of a world-shunning sect (the Qumran Essenes), giving out his Zoroastrian baptism of New Life. Then there is Jesus himself, born of a virgin as Zoroastrianism said would happen, the *Saoshyant*, the world savior. Isaiah (duly repeating Zoroastrian doctrine) says: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive. And bear a son, and call his name Immanuel." (God is with us.)[2] Isaiah is quoting Zoroastrian dogma on the subject, and pretending otherwise is deliberate obfuscation. The Zoroastrian prophecy is attested by the visit of the Magi, who were Zoroastrian priests, following the "Star out of Jacob"[3] to bring gifts to the baby Jesus to certify that everything was in accordance with the most ancient of religions. This marks him as the Zoroastrian "Saoshyant," or world savior.[4]
>
> The Koran calls the Zoroastrians *Majus*. Muslim authorities, going back to the Caliph Umar, accept Zoroastrians as a People of Scripture, with a revealed religion, thus qualified for the protection of the Islamic State. Zoroaster was the first to proclaim that salvation is possible for all, the humble of mankind as well as the heroes of legend. He composed hymns called *Gathas*, whose Avestan language is close to the Sanskrit of the Rig-Veda, as pointed out some time ago by Professor Geldner.[5]
>
> The Indo-European peoples have demonstrated an intellectual propensity to think metaphorically, to idealize, to take the concrete and turn it into the abstract. The Semitic peoples have a marked propensity to concretize. When these two dynamics of consciousness came into contact with each other during the Iranian expansion into the Semitic world, being diametrically opposed to each other, a reaction took place which could be termed alchemical, a reaction which is still going on to this day. Semitic religious elements combined with Zoroastrian ones to produce new religions[6] [and to revive and reform old ones].

Brown applies this dynamic to the Axial Age developments of religion in the East, both the new religions of Taoism and Buddhism and the classical traditions of Confucianism and Hinduism. The generous and somewhat lengthy treatment of Zoroastrianism and its Vedic antecedents in Book I as themselves being Eastern religions is appropriate as our preparation for understanding the particular Eastern scriptures that are the main subject of this compendium, as well as their links to the Western scriptures, a subject that gets a book of its own near the end.

My simple goal has been to whet your appetite for the following exposition of how all this seems to have happened in ancient times, since the world we live in today continues to shrink, leading to an urgent necessity to understand each other. The East is now within the West, and the West continues its impact on the East. The religious dynamics of our New Axial Age are more important today than they have been for many centuries.

exordium

What We Once Knew

Karl Friedrich Geldner

This exordium is excerpted directly from the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1910–1911, the classic edition in which the superlative scholarship was so respected that its articles have been taken as primary sources in academic circles for over a hundred years. The following presentation on Zoroaster upheld that standard in the early education of most scholars of Zoroastrianism in the twentieth century, including those who broke the new ground that is a subtext of this book, allowing us to grow into the subject with them. Its archaic idiom may serve as one link with antiquity inasmuch as the religious ethos over one hundred years ago was almost closer to that of the ancients than to us. Please note that here the name of the Zoroastrian God is frequently abbreviated from *Ahura Mazda* to *Or-mazd*, the popular usage two generations after the death of Zoroaster, and frequently employed by Professor Geldner in this précis of his article, our entrée to the subtext of the world religions that first developed in the hemispheres we designate as East and West.

ZOROASTER, ONE OF THE GREAT TEACHERS OF THE EAST, THE FOUNDER OF WHAT WAS THE national religion of the Perso-Iranian people from the time of the Achaemenidae to the close of the Sassanian period. The name is the corrupt Greek[1] form of the Old Iranian Zarathustra.[2] Its signification is obscure, but it certainly contains the word *ushtra*, or "camel." Zoroaster was already famous in classical antiquity as the founder of the widely renowned wisdom of the Magi.

The ancients also recount a few points regarding the childhood of Zoroaster and his hermit-life. Thus, according to Pliny,[3] he laughed on the very day of his birth and lived in the wilderness upon cheese.[4] Plutarch speaks of his intercourse with the deity.[5] Dio Chrysostom, Plutarch's contemporary, declares that neither Homer nor

Hesiod sang of the chariot and horses of Zeus so worthily as Zoroaster, of whom the Persians tell that, out of love for wisdom and righteousness, he withdrew himself from men, and lived in solitude upon a mountain. The mountain was consumed by fire, but Zoroaster escaped uninjured and spoke to the multitude.[6] Plutarch speaks of his religion in his *Isis and Osiris*.[7]

As to the period in which he lived, most of the Greeks had by then lost the true perspective. Hermodorus and Hermippus of Smyrna place him five thousand years before the Trojan war, Xanthus six thousand years before Xerxes, Eudoxus and Aristotle six thousand years before the death of Plato. Agathias remarks,[8] with perfect truth, that it is no longer possible to determine with any certainty when he lived and legislated. "The Persians," he adds, "say that Zoroaster lived under Hystaspes, but do not make it clear whether by this name they mean the father of Darius or another Hystaspes. But, whatever may have been his date, he was their teacher and instructor in the Magian religion, modified their former religious customs, and introduced a variegated and composite belief."[9]

He is nowhere mentioned in the cuneiform inscriptions of the Achaemenidae, although Cyrus, Darius, and their successors were without doubt devoted adherents of Zoroastrianism. The Avesta is, indeed, our principle source for the doctrine of Zoroaster; on the subject of his person and his life it is comparatively reticent; with regard to his date it is, naturally enough, absolutely silent. The whole thirteenth section, or *Spend Nask*, which was mainly consecrated to the description of his life, is among the many sections which have perished; while the biographies founded upon it in the seventh book of the *Dinkard* (ninth century AD), the *Shāh-Nāma*, and the *Zardusht-Nāma* (thirteenth century), are merely legendary—full of wonders, fabulous histories, and miraculous deliverances.

The Gāthā poem prayers alone within the Avesta make the claim to be the *ipissima verba*, the very words of the prophet; in the rest of that work they are described as being from Zoroaster's own mouth[10] and are expressly called "the Gāthās of the holy Zoroaster."[11] The litanies of the Yasna, and the Yashts, refer to him as a personage belonging to the past. The Vendidad also merely gives accounts of the dialogues between Ormazd (a late spelling of Ahura Mazda) and Zoroaster. The Gāthās alone claim to be authentic utterances of Zoroaster, his actual expressions in the presence of the assembled congregation. They are the last genuine survivals of the doctrinal discourses with which—as the promulgator of a new religion—he appeared at the court of King Vishtāspa in Bactria.

According to the epic legend, Vīshtāspa (Greek: Hystaspes) was king of Bactria. According to the *Arda Vīrāf*,[12] Zororoaster began his teaching before this regal convert, in round numbers, some three hundred years before the invasion of Alexander. Probably he emanated from the old school of Median Magi, and appeared earlier in Media as the prophet of a new faith, but met with sacerdotal opposition, and turned his steps eastward. It was to the east of Iran that the novel creed first acquired a solid footing, and only subsequently reacted with success upon the West.

His doctrine was rooted in the old Iranian—Aryan—folk religion, of which we can only form an approximate representation by comparison with Vedic religion. The Aryan folk religion was polytheistic. Worship was paid to popular divinities, such as the war god and dragon slayer Indra, and to natural forces and elements such as fire, but the Aryans also believed in the ruling of moral powers and of an eternal law in nature.[13] Numerous similarities with Vedic religion survive in Zoroastrianism, side by side with marked reforms. The *daēvas*, unmasked and attacked by Zoroaster as the true enemies of mankind, are still in the Gāthās, without doubt the gods of old popular belief—the idols of the people. For Zoroaster they sink to the rank of spurious deities, even while maintaining spiritual vigor.

Some few of these have names; and among those names of the old Aryan divinities emerge here and there, for example, Indra and Nāonhaitya. With some, of course—such as Igni, the god of fire—the connection with the good deity was *a priori* indissoluble. Other powers of light, such as Mithra,[14] the god of day, survived unforgotten in popular belief until the later system incorporated them into the angelic body. Beyond the Lord and his Fire, the Gāthās only recognize the archangels and certain ministers of Ormazd, who are, without exception, personifications of abstract ideas. The essence of Ormazd is Truth and Law:[15] The essence of the wicked spirit is falsehood: and falsehood, as the embodiment of the evil principle, is much more frequently mentioned in the Gāthās than Ahriman or Satan himself.

Zoroaster says of himself that he had received from God a commission to purify religion.[16] He purified it from the grossly sensual elements of *daēva* worship, and uplifted the idea of religion to a higher purer sphere. The body of Vedic Aryan folk belief, when subjected to the unifying thought of a speculative brain, was transformed to a self-contained theory of the universe and a logical dualistic principle. But this dualism is a temporally limited dualism—no more than an episode in the world-whole—and is destined to terminate in monotheism. Later sects sought to rise from it to a higher unity in other ways. Thus the Zarvanites represented Ormazd and Ahriman as twin sons proceeding from the fundamental principle of all—*Zrvana Akarana,* or limitless time.

The doctrine of Zoroaster and the Zoroastrian religion may be summarized somewhat as follows:—

At the beginning of things there existed the two spirits who represented good and evil.[17] The existence of evil in the world is thus presupposed from the beginning. Both spirits possess creative power, which manifests itself positively in the one and negatively in the other. Ormazd is light and life, and creates all that is pure and good—in the ethical world of law, order, and truth. His antithesis is darkness, filth, death, and produces all that is evil in the world. Until then the two spirits had counterbalanced one another. The ultimate triumph of the good spirit in ethical demand of the religious consciousness is the quintessence of Zoroaster's religion.[18]

As soon as the two separate spirits encounter one another,[19] their creative activity and at the same time their permanent conflict begin. The history of this conflict is the history of the world. A great cleft runs right through the world: all creation divides itself

into that which is Ahura's and that which is Ahriman's. Not that the two spirits carry on the struggle in person; they leave it to be fought out by their respective creations and creatures which they sent into the field. The field of battle is the present world.

In the center of battle is man: his soul is the object of the war. Man is the creation of Ormazd, who therefore has the right to call him to account. But Ormazd created him free in his determinations and in his actions, wherefore he is accessible to the influences of the evil powers. This freedom of the will is clearly expressed in the Avesta: "Since thou, O Mazda, didst at the first create our being and our consciences in accordance with thy mind, and didst create our understanding and our life together with the body, and works and words in which man according to his own will can frame his confession, the liar and the truth-speaker alike lay hold of the word, the knowing and the ignorant each after his own heart and understanding."[20] Man takes part in this conflict by all his life and activity in the world.

The life of man falls into two parts—its earthly portion, and that which is lived after death is past. The lot assigned to him after death is the result and consequence of his life upon earth. No ancient religion had so clearly grasped the ideas of individual guilt and of merit. On the works of men here below a strict reckoning will be held in heaven. All the thoughts, words, and deeds of each are entered in the book of life as separate items—all the evil works, et cetera, as debts. Wicked actions cannot be undone, but in the heavenly account can be counterbalanced by a surplus of good works. It is only in this sense that an evil deed can be atoned for by good deed.

After death the soul arrives at the *cinvatō peretu*, or accountant's bridge, over which lies the way to heaven. Here the statement of his life account is made out. If he has a balance of good works in his favor, he passes forthwith into paradise[21] and the blessed life. If his evil works outweigh his good, he falls finally under the power of Satan, and the pains of hell are his portion forever.

Zoroaster experienced within himself the inward call to seek the amelioration of mankind and their deliverance from ruin, and regarded this inner impulse, intensified as it was by long, contemplative solitude and by visions, as being the call addressed to him by God Himself. Like Muhammad after him he often speaks of his conversations with God and the archangels. He calls himself most frequently *manthran* ("prophet"), *ratu* ("spiritual authority"), and *saoshyant* ("the coming helper"—that is to say, when men come to be judged according to their deeds).

Like John the Baptist and the Apostles of Jesus, Zoroaster also believed that the fullness of time was near, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Through the whole of the Gāthās runs the pious hope that the end of the present world is not far distant. He himself hopes, with his followers, to live to see the decisive turn of things, the dawn of the new and better eon. Ormazd will summon together all his powers for a final decisive struggle and break the power of evil forever; by his help the faithful will achieve the victory over their detested enemies, the *daēva* worshippers, and render them impotent. Thereupon Ormazd will hold a *judicium universale*, in the form of a general ordeal, a great test of all mankind by fire and molten metal, and will judge strictly according to justice, punish the wicked, and assign to the good the hoped-for reward.

Satan will be cast, along with all those who have been delivered over to him to suffer the pains of hell, into the abyss, where he will henceforward lie powerless. Forthwith begins the one undivided kingdom of God in heaven and on earth. This is called, sometimes the good kingdom, sometimes simply the kingdom. Here the sun will forever shine, and all the pious and faithful will live a happy life, which no evil power can disturb, in the eternal fellowship of Ormazd and his angels.

The last things and the end of the world are relegated to the close of a long period of time, when a new Saoshyant is to be born of the seed of the prophet, the dead are to come to life, and a new incorruptible world to begin.

preface

Why the Z Factor Matters

ANCIENT VEDIC HERITAGE MAY BE SEEN AS THE FOUNDATION OF EASTERN MONISTIC religions, Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, and even Tao to some extent, with Confucianism perhaps a reaction to the introduction of this influence in China. The only comparable influence in world religions is the Semitic heritage that is the cradle for Western monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This compendium is intended to develop our understanding of the Eastern traditions and to show their influence upon and relationship with the Western traditions. Vedic-based Zoroastrianism is presented as both the main connector and the principal conduit of Eastern correlation in the West.

In the Vedic traditions, any situation "is what it is," and devotees are enjoined to "go with the flow" and act correctly within it (the flow being the complete One monistic universe). In Semitic tradition, no situation is what it should be (at least since the "fall" of humanity), and believers are challenged to change things and act accordingly. Aryan Vedic notions of "super race" (lamentably promoted in Germany in the middle of the last century, but not limited to that) and Semitic concepts of "chosen people" (upheld by Jews, Christians, and Muslims in equal but different ways) are both mitigated by Zoroastrian principles, as we shall see, but it is little wonder that peoples have sometimes clashed under Vedic and Semitic influences. We are entering an era in which it is increasingly necessary that they contribute to each other in our one world in ways that enhance the faith of those engaged in practically all major world religions.

It is not to be expected that many readers of this interfaith tome will be converted to another tradition as a result of considering the faith of others from the positive perspective in this particular study. However, it is to be hoped that members of each tradition might at least become better Taoists, Confucians, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and whatever else through this exercise.

Extensive missing portions of the Zoroastrian "Avesta" Scriptures may be the Rosetta Stone of common ground among the "world religions" and could contribute generously

to mutual respect among believers when found. These "Dead Zee Scrolls" will certainly contain material related to the three testaments of Western monotheistic religion (Torah, Gospel, and Quran), and they will also illuminate the early development of Eastern monistic religious texts, especially Taoist, Hindu, and Buddhist examples, all developing in the churning wake of Zoroaster.

The Avesta, as the Zoroastrian scriptural corpus is called, was once the most broadly circulated and widely translated written material in the world, disseminated east and west along and beyond the Silk Route. The Zoroastrian tradition of respect for others and tolerance of their religion was established by Cyrus the Great in the Persian Empire but eventually rejected by the Greeks in their promotion of a European vision of "civilization," and by Muslims who encountered a later Zoroastrianism that had lost its focus on the Oneness of God, a matter found to be offensive. So the main corpus of the Zoroastrian Scriptures was deliberately destroyed twice, first by the Europeans under Alexander the Great and again by Muslims after Muhammad. But copies had undoubtedly been stored by accident or hidden in various places, much like the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library, so valued now by Jews and Christians. Strange to say, the search for this Zoroastrian treasure has only now begun in earnest.

In their prayers today, Zoroastrians employ only some 20 percent of the ancient Avesta material, rescued or remembered from those destructive calamities. This book details the ancient references to that vast earlier collection and points to the near certainty that complete versions of two distinct editions will eventually be found, perhaps sooner rather than later, and conceivably equalling the Dead Sea Scrolls in both size and significance. In this compendium, we exhibit material already found and examine the prospects for an unearthing of the entire mother lode, even while looking for clues between the lines of the scriptures that emerged in the wake of the appearance of the Avesta along the Silk Route both east and west.

Archaeologists in Uzbekistan and Western China are now turning up interesting Zoroastrian artifacts from the fifth century CE, but these are just remnants of a religious tradition that actually flourished more significantly a thousand years earlier. With a pristine bronze statue of Apollo found off Gaza in 2014, the 2013 appearance of a cuneiform disk in Mesopotamia showing blueprints of the ark modeled by Noah, and the Roman eagle discovered under the streets of London in 2012, all from the prime earlier Zoroastrian era, why would we not assume that the most published book in the world of that era would turn up under the streets of Samarkand or among tens of thousands of as yet uncataloged manuscripts stored in the library of the Southwest University of Nationalities in China or elsewhere? Current archaeological expeditions employ space age technology and infrared camera techniques capable of finding troves of artifacts and caches of documents, some of which might have been hidden in circumstances remarkably similar to the concealment of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the famous Nag Hammadi Library. Whether by design or by accident, the finding of the "Dead Zee Scrolls" jackpot is now only a matter of time (and with it new clues to the origins of Eastern scriptures in particular).

The search for clues to what may have been in the Avesta text will unfold in this book, chapter by chapter. Excitement has been mounting about the possibilities of locating copies of the ancient originals, and even during the writing our interest was piqued by a press conference announcement from the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan.[1] A fifth-century BCE temple at Khorazm (a province of the ancient Persian Empire just north of Bactria, Zoroasters headquarters, near the borders of today's Turkmenistan and Afghanistan) has been positively identified as a Zoroastrian fire temple from the precise era of our interest. Being unearthed in good condition except for four towers at the corners, the 625-square-meter temple is yielding pitchers, jugs, vessels, bowls, jars, terra-cotta figurines, bronze medallions, pins, and arrowheads in intact, bright, and expressive condition. The excavation is now complete and has yielded no documents, but the search continues in this area. Other important sites to which we will refer were unearthed early in the twentieth century, as the field of Zoroastrian studies began to get organized, and the pace is picking up in the twenty-first. Even as we go to press, archaeologists in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region have discovered major Zoroastrian tombs, dated to over 2,500 years ago on the sparsely populated Pamir Plateau. This find purportedly exceeds all previously known Zoroastrian cultural artifacts, but still no complete Avesta.

We join the leading universities of Russia, China, India, Europe, and North America in the hunt for this important written artifact in the quest to discover that we are one world, and to prove that religious development has been interrelated. We already know that Zoroastrianism provides a model precedent for mutual respect in the diversity we should cherish in mixed societies of the twenty-first century. Not even the excavation of Troy near the end of the nineteenth century or the putative discovery of Atlantis in photos taken from space at the end of the twentieth century could match the communal or cultural significance for our era of finding the Avesta Scriptures. This will be a treasure for religious people, grist for the academic mill through the twenty-first century, and front-cover material for tabloids at the supermarket in the future as superficial headlines dramatically proclaim: SOURCE OF ALL SCRIPTURES FOUND.

Meanwhile, we will experience a new appreciation of the Zoroastrian Avesta from "testaments" of the religions whose monism exploded upon a vast region of the East within the same era that monotheism burst beyond its Semitic base in the West. Both developments may have happened in response to stimuli in the Axial Age, triggered by that certain Persian prophet. The initial intersection of these developments is the subject of Book I, beginning with an analysis of the religion most of us know the least about.

Indeed, in Book I we almost appear to digress from the four testaments themselves before we even start on them. This is to provide the reader with insights into Zoroastrianism and its Vedic antecedents in the relationship between monotheism and monism before we present those main features of the compendium, in order to fully appreciate the Eastern monistic perspective. Much later we conclude with an appreciation of how all this impacts upon Western monotheism and where we may be headed in a future in which East and West more fully appreciate each other.

1

From the Foundations of the Earth

Vedic and Semitic Prehistories Connecting East and West

The following depiction of two ancient and surviving traditions related to our time is not meant to settle any outstanding disagreements among either Vedic or Semitic scholars, and is therefore painted in broad strokes to give an introductory summary that is relatively beyond dispute. This is for the benefit of readers new to the material in preparation for understanding how these traditions intersected in possibly one of the most dramatic interchanges of religious ideas in world history, with repercussions east and west as reflected in the scriptures under investigation in this and the related previous compendium.

Proto-Vedic religion is the hypothesized religion of Proto-Indo-European peoples (sometimes abbreviated as PIE) around 3600–3000 BCE, based on the existence of similarities among sacred linguistic terms, deities, religious practices, and mythologies among those later referred to as "Indo-European" peoples in the Russian Steppes prior to the dynamic Aryan migrations northwest across Europe and southeast through Iran and into India.

In 1147 CE the new city of Moscow was named after the ancient Moscva River, on which the city is situated, a name cognate with *moksha*, the Sanskrit Vedic word meaning "salvation," often associated with river rites, which still remain significant among Hindu descendants of Vedic-related traditions still today. This linguistic marker is but one of the more obvious among a great number that locate the proto-Vedic religion of Aryan migrants as originating in Russia, right down to the current Russian word *vedat*, which means "knowledge," obviously derived from the Indo-European roots *veda* and *Vedic*. Other evidence for this origin of Vedic religion relates to Aryan archaeology

and religious traditions. We will limit ourselves to the latter in this study, secure in the knowledge that evidence for the overall thesis is easily accessed elsewhere.

In the religious connection, the most obvious link is the names of gods from the area we now call the Russian Steppes, as they appear in the Vedic Scripture known as the Rig Veda and other Vedic sacred materials that followed in India and Persia. Indra, Mitra, and Varuna are Vedic gods: Varuna the sky, Mitra the sun, and Indra representing the power of nature. In the various iterations of these Aryan gods found in Scandinavia, Central and Southern Europe, Persia, and India, these three also tend to represent a tripartite theology found in all Indo-European religions, excepting Greek. The three functions are sacerdotal, martial, and productivity, though we would be oversimplifying if we ignore other important gods found throughout this swath of humanity, like Agni, the god of fire and acceptor of sacrifices, whose name is actually the first word in the first verse of the ancient Rig Veda scripture. The Aryan migration into India and Persia (Iran) took place for the most part between 2500 and 1500 BCE, with trailblazers before and stragglers after.

The Rig Veda, a collection of over one thousand hymns and mythic poems, is the oldest continuously used scriptural material in the world. Written down around 1200 BCE, the Rig Veda was "composed" earlier and maintained orally in the final form we have it by the Aryans in India around 1500 BCE. While also showing influence from the ancient Harappan high culture they overran, the Rig Veda was being developed even hundreds of years earlier, before the Aryans left Russia as shown by place names, linguistic markers, names of gods, and other evidence. When it was written down, it was first written in Vedic, an early form of Sanskrit, and related to the widespread Avestan language employed by Zoroaster. If its composition began in Russia, and it was completed in India and written down later there, we can only guess what stage it was at or what status it enjoyed *en route* from the Russian Steppes to the Indus River, except that as it passed through Persia much of it appeared not dissimilar to the classic mode in which we have it, judging by the use Zoroaster makes of this material as quoted in his poetic "Gatha" prayers in the Avesta, the scriptures of his "new" reformed Vedic religion.

Indeed, by the seventh century BCE, Zoroaster may have even been familiar with the accepted written version of the Rig Veda, or at least the transitional material that led to its production. He adopted its then archaic dialect of the twelfth century BCE to authenticate his reforms in much the same way that twentieth-century Christians used the dialect of the King James Version of the Bible to endow their new hymns with authenticity, and a familiar sense of holiness, despite a similar time lapse. Radhakrishnan and Gandhi used KJV English for twentieth-century translations of the *Dhammapada* and *Bhagavad Gita* for the same reason.

While the Rig Veda is the oldest of the Vedas, there are three other Vedic Scriptures, the Sama Veda chants, the Yajur Veda rites, and the Athara Veda teachings of theology, all entirely composed and eventually written down in India. These later compositions had little or no influence on Zoroaster in Persia, and among Vedic influences it is his material, reformed from the Rig Veda alone, that impacted the Jews in Babylon under the aegis of Zoroastrian rulers and their Magi priests.

Proto-Semitic culture is the hypothetical progenitor of historical Semitic languages in the Middle East. Locations that have been proposed for its origination include northern Mesopotamia, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Levant (Greater Syria), with recent estimates that this antecedent of Semitism may have originated around 3750 BCE, the era of the very first stirrings of Aryan identity in Russia.

The word "Semitic" is an adjective derived from Shem, one of the sons of Noah in the biblical book of Genesis, from the Greek version of that name—namely, Σημ (Sēm). The concept of "Semitic peoples" is derived from biblical accounts of the origins of the cultures known to the ancient Hebrews. In an effort to categorize the peoples known to them, those closest to them in culture and language were generally deemed to be descended from their forefather, Shem. Those in other parts of the world were thought to descend from the other surviving sons of Noah as they moved out following the biblical account of the flood, his son Canaan having drowned in the deluge after refusing to get on board the ark.[1]

In Genesis 10:21–31, Shem is described as the father of Aram, Ashur, and Arpachshad, who are presented in the Bible as the ancestors of the Arabs, Aramaeans, and Assyrians, as well as Babylonians, Chaldeans, Sabaeans, and Hebrews, all of whose languages are closely related. This whole language family was accordingly named "Semitic" by linguists, with the pejorative term "anti-Semitic" only coming into existence in reference to the Jews alone since 1879, when William Marr founded the "League for Anti-Semitism" in Germany.

Mesopotamia is generally held to be "The Cradle of Civilization," where writing, the wheel, and the first organized nations or city-states arose during the mid-fourth millennium BCE. Rivaled in certain developments by only the pre-Aryan Harappan civilization in northern India (and perhaps as yet undocumented developments in China), the Sumero-Akkadian states that arose in Mesopotamia between about the thirty-sixth century BCE and the twenty-fourth century BCE were the most advanced in the world at the time in terms of engineering, architecture, agriculture, science, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and military technology. Many had highly sophisticated socioeconomic structures, with the world's earliest examples of written law, together with structurally advanced and complex trading, business, and taxation systems, a well-structured civil administration, currency, and detailed record keeping. Schools and educational systems existed in many states, Mesopotamian religions were highly organized, and astrology was widely practiced. By the time of the Middle Assyrian Empire in the mid-second millennium BCE, early examples of zoology, botany, and landscaping had emerged, and during the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the early to mid-first millennium BCE, the world's first public library was built by King Ashurbanipal in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Nineveh.

In the nineteenth century BCE a wave of Semites entered Egypt, possibly about the time Abraham and his family made their pilgrimage there. By the early seventeenth century BCE these Hyksos, as they were known by the Egyptians, had conquered the country, with possibly "Sons of Israel" as their slaves, forming the Fifteenth Dynasty, to be succeeded by the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Dynasties. The New Kingdom,

next in sequence from possibly 1550 BCE until about 1050, was the Egyptian era the world knows best, with its famous pharaohs, the biblical account of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery, and an interlude of monotheism under Akhenaten, so swayed by his wife. The beautiful Nefertiti was a Mitanni princess who may have brought monotheism from the Assyrian desert, though her Semitic community there also worshipped the Aryan Vedic gods, Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and the Nasatya twins (Sunrise and Sunset), an early preview of the coming encounter between the two main religious traditions of the ancient world.

All early Semites across the entire Near East appear to have been originally polytheist, except for the tentative emergence of what we might call the proto-monotheism of some desert people, such as Abraham, and possibly Nefertiti. Mesopotamian religion is the earliest recorded in writing in its own time, and for three millennia it was the most influential, exerting strong influence in what is today Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and the Sinai Peninsula. Its ideas—rejected, "corrected," or improved upon—may be seen in the later Semitic monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism, Mandaeism, Gnosticism, and Islam.

Some of the most significant of the Mesopotamian deities were Anu, Ea, Enlil, Enki, Ishtar (Astarte), Ashur, Shamash, Shulmanu, Tammuz, Adad (Hadad), Sin (Nanna), Dagan (Dagon), Ninurta, Nisroch, Nergal, Tiamat, Bel, Ninlil, and Marduk, representing an entirely independent subset of theological ideas, separate from the Vedic religion of the same era. Out of this welter of divinities, the above Semitic monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism, Mandaeism, Gnosticism, and Islam came forth, beginning with the Israelites, regardless of mistaken populist and new age notions about Zoroaster being the world's first monotheist, as we shall see.

Israel, as the very first among surviving examples of monotheism, gradually evolved with the founding of Judaism and the belief in one single God, Yahweh, often unpronounced in reverential respect, and frequently written using only the Hebrew Consonants, יהוה, or YHWH. The Hebrew language, closely related to the earlier attested Canaanite language of Phoenicians, would become the vehicle of the religious literature of the Torah (referred to by Muslims as *Taurat*) and the more complete Tanakh (referred to by Christians as the Old Testament), thus eventually having global ramifications. We will trace its influence in the East as well.

Scholars may observe that monotheism and its ramifications appear to have "evolved" in this culture, but religious records and the experience of many believers attest to an understanding that this development was triggered by specific incidents in which God's very self was "revealed" to leaders like Moses and the prophets who were chosen by God. These revelations were then shared with others by people who were similarly called to prophetic utterance, as we shall attempt to illustrate.

The point that there is no "Aryan gene" and no "Aryan super race" would not be worth making, were it not for the immature delusions of a miniscule but dangerous remnant of fanatics who can be found in the strangest of places. The Aryans were a hybrid tribal polyglot that was somehow concentrated in valleys west of the Ural mountains and east of the Danube River system until it burst upon the world with

great energy, moving in several directions but especially into India and "Iran" (the "Aryan" nation), from whence Magi emissaries made their way even into China. I have elsewhere compared the claim of Aryan racial superiority to a naïve child hearing from a parent that their new dog is a mongrel and going forth to proclaim to playmates with pride that "our dog is a pure-bred mongrel." Something similar obtains with respect to the Semitic peoples who are also not a "race" but a language group with dynamic histories and impacts upon the world, derived from the vibrancy of an early hybrid mix of people at the great hinge of the world where three continents connect. Again we are more interested in the ideas, including religious ideas, which emanated from this group than their particular genetic composition, except for purposes of tracking their migrations.

We shall return to the peripatetic Aryans and their Vedic religion shortly, but meanwhile some comment in passing about changing perspectives on movements of Semitic peoples might be in order. The Jews in particular are of interest with their gift of monotheism to the world, on their own and through Zoroaster and other influences, including later Christians and Muslims (the latter in perhaps a less derivative sense, by their own account). The Jews migrated in several directions in search of economic and other opportunities, sometimes triggered by expulsions or persecutions. Their presence in business along the Silk Route throughout history has been documented and is increasingly attested by DNA evidence among populations from Israel to China, amid both people who have always claimed a Jewish identity for themselves and others who have lost all memory of such a connection.

People now identified as "Jews" came up into Europe through Asia Minor and Scythia beginning with the Assyrian expulsion of the ten northern "Israelite" tribes in 722 BCE, followed by some others who went to Europe *en route* through Egypt more than a hundred years later when separate groups from Jerusalem and Judah also went into exile in Babylon in 598 and 587 BCE. Another migration took place after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, with the difference being that there were significant Jewish populations already present to greet them in the cities of Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Italy, the Balkan countries, and to a lesser extent Spain, France, and Germany, to use the current place names. Were subsequent local concentrations of Jewish inhabitants mainly recent migrants, or were they populations related to earlier exiles in 722 BCE, 598 or 587 BCE, or 70 CE? The jury is out on the question of whether these scattered Jewish communities were based on a combination of all these Mediterranean and European accumulations of monotheistic Semites over many centuries.

DNA research now attests to a long-standing Jewish presence in Central Asia, along the Silk Route, and into both China and India. Such pockets of genetically specific Semitic Jews are often also now identified with the "lost tribes of Israel" of the seventh century BCE by gravesites and historical artifacts. Similar research proves beyond doubt that Spain harbors a large Semitic presence, both Jewish and Arabic, despite the determination of Ferdinand and Isabella to expel all such populations in 1492. Similar studies are ongoing to identify a Jewish presence in Africa, from Ethiopia to Zimbabwe among tribes who have traditionally claimed a Jewish identity, and parts

of Europe where such collective memories have been suppressed or ridiculed, as in the case of "British Israel." The point of this digression is to illustrate that the extent of movement by Semitic peoples may be almost as extensive as that of the Indo-European Aryan migrations, and that the intersection of the two cultures and their religious interchange was formative in world culture. Periodic tragic experiences of interface between them, as in Germany in the twentieth century, are as much a support to this thesis as detraction from it. Obviously more was going on than meets the eye, and folk traditions are increasingly regarded as having the potential for historical veracity if corroborated by other evidence such as DNA and archaeological investigations.

The point in reference to this study is that just as genes mix and migrate, so do ideas and beliefs. All people make their contributions to warlike and peaceful mentalities, sporting competition and culture, music composition and performance, scientific discovery and technology, and, of course, religion, in various measures and at various times. The thesis behind this compendium is that Vedic religion forms the backdrop behind much of what endures to our time in Eastern religions. This may be especially true of a particular Vedic tradition that crossed paths with a certain Semitic tradition in a dynamic interface that has had ramifications through the ages.

Research a hundred years ago demonstrated that well before their migrations in the 2500 to 1500 BCE millennium, the Aryans worshipped *Dyaus Pitr*, the "Divine Father," who created the universe.[2] Known as *Gitchi Manitou* on the Great Central Plains of North America, and called *Shang Di* in the "Border Sacrifice" of ancient China, *Altjira* in the Australian Outback, *Nyambe* in the west tropics of Africa, and *Brahman* in India, this religious instinct was shared by aboriginal peoples around the world. Before 1500 BCE the remoteness of God resulted in a growing Vedic adulation of life forces called "devas" (from which we get both "divinities" and "devils") that were closer at hand to these spirited Aryans.

Agni (or Igni) the fire spirit, existed in concurrence with other forces of nature that needed to be harnessed through communal worship. Varuna, representing the night, the waters, the underworld, and the unconscious, maintained order. Indra, the divine warrior, defended the people from their foes. Mythra, the deva of sun and rain, would nourish and replenish the earth. Mazda, whose name means "wisdom," would engender the cult of wisdom and all the wisdom traditions that form subtexts of many religions down through the ages. It was the Lord of Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, who rose in Zoroastrianism to represent the Dyaus Pitr, though closer at hand and available to those seeking guidance in the midst of chaos; God was at last seen to be both transcendent and immanent (echoing discussions among believers in many religions today).

Chaos had come with a new stirring of the spirit of adventure and even conflict in the era of migration. Mythra would develop from a peaceful fertility deva to become the favorite mascot-god of the Roman Legion as certain legions of that army became Aryanized. More dramatically, and even earlier, the Aryans had adopted bronze weapons from the Armenians and learned to hitch their wild horses to wagons acquired from Kazakh neighbors, leading to their invention of the war chariot. In their

sweep into India, Indra was transformed from a defensive patron to a spirit of the scourge. "Heroes with noble horses ready for war, and chosen warriors, call upon me! I am Indra, Lord of plunder. I excite the conflict. I stir up the dust. I am the Lord of unsurpassed vigor."[3]

The movement of these peoples into Persia appears less violent than the move into India in some respects. The migration to Persia appears to have attracted gentler elements of the Aryan culture, including many who sought to simply maintain the old pastoral ways. However some in their midst were stirred with the spirit of plunder and adventure, even to preying on their fellow Aryans in the name of strife that brings victory and reward to the strong. "Dog eat dog" and "every man for himself" were slogans appropriate for the times, and the price was high for women and children, farmers settling into production, the elderly, and anyone with cattle that could be rustled. What kind of gods were these devas now? This question would have been uppermost in the mind of the young Zoroaster.

The account of the revelation Zoroaster received at the river may appear to be identical to the biblical story of Daniel at the River Ulai,[4] which is also located in Persia, but the young prophet Zoroaster, in the first instance, was a hundred years earlier. No one need doubt the meaning or the significance of the reported appearance of the archangel Gabriel to Daniel just because that epiphany is identical in format to the earlier appearance to Zoroaster, as recorded in the ancient but still extant Avesta Scriptures of Zoroastrianism. Apocryphal or otherwise, Daniel's epiphany is placed at the beginning of the reign of Cyrus the Great, Persia's first Zoroastrian monarch, but similar appearances by Gabriel heralded the births of John the Baptist[5] and Jesus Christ[6] in the Gospel according to Luke.

The unexpected appearance of Gabriel to Muhammad in the Cave of Hera[7] also bears a striking resemblance to the angelic appearances to Zoroaster and to Daniel, Zechariah, and Mary. It was this same archangel who appeared time and again to Muhammad over the next twenty-three years, always unannounced and unexpected, to present the Recitations that stand now as the final chapters of scripture in the Abrahamic family compendium. This is not the forum in which to address skeptics who are unable to rationally fathom the reality or the meaning of angelic appearances. Suffice it to say that the powerful phenomenological occurrences reported in Zoroastrianism bear an uncanny resemblance to critical embryonic junctures in the three Western religions whose scriptures were the substance of the compendium prior to this one: chaotic times, a spectral appearance to a spiritually questing individual, and a commitment to share the ways of God in peace and service.

The moment when Zoroaster was confronted and instructed by the archangel was not the first or the last occasion when religion changed from ritual, from philosophy, and from theology into experience, and from communal rites into personal encounter with the divine. God's call for Abraham to leave home,[8] the story of Jacob's ladder[9] and his wrestling all night that changed him into Israel,[10] Moses at the burning bush[11] and on Mount Sinai[12] are all examples of this phenomenon. St. Paul, knocked off his horse on the road to Damascus,[13] and Muhammad, tightly embraced by the angel

Gabriel in the Hera Cave, were far into the future, but further testimony to religious convictions borne of experiential rather than philosophical phenomena.

Ritual, philosophy, and theology have also survived, in formal religious guise and otherwise, but what Karl Jaspers has helped us recognize as the Axial Age[14] of reform may be attributed in significant measure to that moment of revelation experienced by Zoroaster at the river. Within a hundred years after Zoroaster, to the east the Buddha was transforming Hinduism and founding his religion of enlightenment, and farther east Lao Tzu elucidated the Tao and Confucius taught a traditional philosophy in reaction to it. To the west the classical age of prophecy emerged with dramatic impact in Israel, while even farther west the philosophers of Greece swept away an old mythology with deeper passions of the mind, based on questions of individual responsibility to transcendent realities or even "Reality."

If Semitic Jewish genes could spread throughout the earth in ancient, middle, and modern times, how much more easily could seminal ideas spread? Much current research about Zoroastrianism comes from the Sassanian epoch as late as the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries CE, accessible to us but possibly not entirely typical of earlier Zoroastrian influence and power. In fact, the fifth-century CE era currently under international investigation along the Silk Route, while yielding exciting information and insights, might almost be characterized as a "dark age" period for Zoroastrianism, immediately before its virtual disappearance. Of infinitely greater significance would be the Zoroastrian situation and its influence a full thousand years earlier. At this point we can only examine that phenomenon through observation of its churning wake along the Silk Route and just beyond, east and west. That may be about to change, but for now there is more even in that wake than meets the eye at first.

The significance of the dates 628–551 BCE for Zoroaster has been recognized partly as a result of growing acceptance of the Axial Age theory, popularized now by writers such as Karen Armstrong in *The Great Transformation*. Sometimes called the *Pivotal Age* in English,[15] Jaspers originally used his "axis time" to describe a slightly broader era of a few centuries, though he was then still unable to identify a specific "pivot," or what we might call "the axis of the Axial Age." He locates Zoroaster just prior to Cyrus in Persia, as we do, but the connection of the Axial Age directly to Zoroaster depends on dates and other issues not resolved before Jaspers died in 1969.

It would now appear that Zoroaster died about a dozen years before Cyrus the Great occupied Babylon and began Persian rule over some 127 former kingdoms of various sizes. This empire of the world's first superpower comprised nearly one-fifth of the world's land mass, equal to the Roman Empire at its height, the British Empire at its zenith, or the Soviet Union before its collapse. The state religion was a Zoroastrianism that featured a tolerant and inclusive monotheism, and the era under Cyrus represents the Axial Age in full bloom. The influence and the power of the Zoroastrian movement over the next thousand years is difficult to picture or imagine for many now because, even at its zenith as the state religion of the world's first superpower, it was the religion of an oriental culture outside the mainstream of Western historical reportage. The Persian Empire may be compared in this regard to the Mogul Empire of the

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE in failing to register significantly in Western consciousness, but even more obscure, given its greater antiquity.

In *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran*, it was suggested that we might now think of Zoroaster as the "axis of the Axial Age." On reflection, and in subsequent discussions, it is realized that a better terminology would be to speak of the Silk Route as the axis along which Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism provided inspiration drawn from Vedic religion (possibly cross fertilized with Semitic religion) that stimulated the major religious reforms and developments which permeated that Silk Route from one end to the other over the hundred-year period following his life. The objections (and answers) to this might be that:

1. "Silk Route" or "Silk Road" were not phrases employed before 1877 when coined by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen, who designated the Silk Road as "Seidenstrasse" and the Silk Route as "Seidenstrassen" (to which we say, "so what?"). Trade was uncommon there before the first century BCE (now found in fifth century BCE).
2. Zoroastrians were not identified as such in the *Gathas* of Zoroaster (nor were Jews mentioned in the Torah).
3. None of those religions ever did become Zoroastrian as such (nobody says they did).

Zoroastrianism reached great heights, was eventually decimated both militarily and politically by Alexander the Great, and then revived for hundreds of years in a degraded form. Finally, it was practically eliminated by Islam, except for purely monotheistic elements that lived on in Iran and India, surviving today there and in pockets of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the United States.

However, the once pervasive sway of this movement, which may have contributed key elements to the spiritual foundation of the whole world, can be glimpsed in the West in the politics and theological development of ancient Israel after returning from the Babylonian Exile, and also in historical accounts of its near domination of Europe in the failed Persian invasions of Greece. A more objective appraisal of these events than that found in Hollywood film presentations, in the biased reports in Greek history, or in the adulation of Cyrus in Hebrew literature, might be seen in just a brief overview of the reigns of Zoroastrian monarchs whom we know at least peripherally. Both the Bible and ancient writers provide additional information from their own records and from inscriptions about a line of such monarchs who ruled the Persian Empire at the apex of the Zoroastrian era in a world just beyond the horizon of the West.

Vishtāspa, the first Zoroastrian monarch, is mainly known to us because of his relationship to Zoroaster. Not a lot is known about his rule beyond that connection, though the available information perhaps serves to introduce life in the court of a typical monarchy of minor but growing status in an era and in a part of the world unfamiliar to many. Cyrus, however, is well known both to historians and to readers of the Hebrew Scriptures. In 559 BCE, almost a decade before Zoroaster died, Cyrus

succeeded to the throne of Anshan, a vassal kingdom of Media (now Northern Iran) then ruled by his grandfather, another early Zoroastrian monarch who had succeeded Vishtāspa. Within two decades Cyrus had subdued Media itself, conquered Asia Minor and marched into Northern India. After consolidation, in 539 BCE his forces fought their way into the city of Babylon, then the vast urban center of the ancient world.

The supreme potentate of Babylonia, King Belshazzar, was killed and Cyrus assumed rule of the entire Babylonian Empire. This was just as prophesied by Daniel, as the apocryphal account appears in the Hebrew Scriptures, when Belshazzar and his court were feasting out of the sacred vessels stolen from the temple in Jerusalem. This travesty resulted in their guilty vision of the *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin* "writing on the wall," interpreted for them by Daniel in terms of God's judgment.[16] Babylon's time was up: it was "found wanting, divided, and ready to be conquered." In assuming and extending his control, Cyrus ruled the largest and most powerful empire the world would see until that of Alexander the Great and the later Roman Empire.

The success of Cyrus was built on combining military strategy with enlightened diplomacy based on Zoroastrian spirituality. For example, the Kingdom of Lydia had been difficult to conquer on the way to hegemony, but upon finally defeating the wealthy King Croesus, instead of killing him, Cyrus made him prime minister. He even referred to him as one of his "Companions,"[17] an inner circle of advisors to the Zoroastrian monarch, perhaps emulated by Jesus with his disciples, and almost certainly a model for Muhammad and his "Companions."

In all the places he conquered, in addition to graciousness toward the vanquished, Cyrus allied himself with those who had been oppressed by their former rulers. A famous but not entirely unique example reflects to his relationship with the elite Jewish exiles, many of whom had earned high places in the civil service of Babylon. His sponsorship of their return to Jerusalem, and his funding of the rebuilding of their temple and culture, won him the loyalty of a new province on his Egyptian flank, a buffer facing a power that would not be integrated into the Persian Empire until the rule of his son and penultimate successor.

The empire's new religion under Cyrus was Zoroastrianism in its pristine, complete, and uncorrupted manifestation, articulated at the core of his brilliantly successful policy toward enemies and subjects alike. This Zoroastrianism was monotheistic, as understood by the Jews on location, undiluted by later dualism at first, again suggesting chronological closeness to the originator of the faith who was dedicated to the Oneness of God. In a time subsequent to Cyrus, an altered form of the religion did shift the balance toward dualism in the struggle between good and evil, light and darkness. While he recognized the necessity of the struggle with evil forces, which are real in human experience, Zoroaster himself believed fervently in the ultimate exclusivity of the prerogatives and final reign of the Lord of Wisdom, and in the goodness that the religion he founded was commissioned to promote. Cyrus appears to have embraced the pristine Zoroastrian religion much as first promulgated by its founding prophet. The Jewish exiles recognized the affinity of this religion with their own, possibly even before Cyrus formally ascended the throne of Babylon.

We will return to the reign of Cyrus time and again, especially in his relationship with the Jews, as the main illustration of the Zoroastrian phenomenon triggering a "reformation" among all religious and philosophical traditions connected by the Silk Route. We will not be suggesting that the new religions appearing in China—that is, Taoism and Confucianism—were actually Zoroastrian. Nor were the new Buddhism or the reformed Hinduism of India Zoroastrian per se, in the same way that the Jews did not become Zoroastrian in spite of profound influence in that direction. We merely point to simultaneous religious upheavals or stimuli in all these cases at the same time, within a hundred years of Zoroaster and his influence through the length of the "Silk Route." Internally, the developments under the successors of Cyrus are documented by memorial inscriptions; many other developments were independent of Persian control farther east and farther west, testimonials to the power of sweeping ideas.

After Cyrus, the reign of Cambyses was a brief eight years but brought Egypt into the Persian Empire. Darius tried to do the same with Greece and Europe, but he was turned back by the "300" Greeks at the battle of Marathon. Despite the Persian employment of forces numbering in excess of a million men including soldiers, sailors, and support personnel, Xerxes failed at the same project again, by land against Greeks led by Sparta at Thermopylae and by sea at Artemnisium against a fleet led by the Athenians. These battles have been depicted by Hollywood in movies that got almost every detail wrong except for the realization that much of world history was thus determined by the outcomes. These monarchs were succeeded by Artaxerxes, who extended the sponsorship of the Jewish return by refunding Nehemiah and Ezra, before he was succeeded by Xerxes II, Darius II, and Artaxerxes II (Ahasuerus in the story of Esther).

Finally Artaxerxes III and Darius III extended the drift toward dualistic theology, and when Xerxes III was about to mount the peacock throne, Alexander the Great crossed the Hellespont in 334 BCE. This European avenger subdued the whole Persian Empire in just two years, finally sacking Persepolis in 330 BCE with a fiery holocaust of scriptures and other writings at that city's great library. During this attempt at "civilizing" Asia, the Greeks apparently imagined that nobody would think to hide a copy of the precious Avesta Scriptures.

In 224 BCE a Persian officer led a coup against Alexander's heirs and successors to establish the Sassanian Dynasty, a typically retro-naming for his grandfather Sassan, a restoration of Persian control over most of its ancient empire. The state religion was reinstated, but while monotheism appears to have survived in Zoroaster's old Bactrian stronghold, in the villages of Fars province and among traders on the Silk Route, the creeping dualism of later monarchs blossomed into a rivalry of near equals between Ahura Mazda and the Adversary (Ahriman, later Satan) in a neo-Zoroastrianism, and in the cognate Manichean religion that developed by and large out of Zoroastrianism and grew under its influence.

Even though a surviving few original Avesta poems by Zoroaster were cherished, this dualistic perversion of the pristine monotheistic faith of old flourished under the Sassanian Dynasty for 875 years, as recorded in new scriptures, which were added to the remnants of the earlier corpus. The Islamic invaders eventually disenfranchised

this version of Zoroastrianism, burned all the scriptures they could find, and enforced a strict monotheism, all the while recognizing Zoroastrians as potentially people of the book, were it not for this perversion. Were some copies of this edition of the Avesta Scriptures also buried somewhere once again? Again, time will tell, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to imagine that such a time is not imminent.

Let us return to Cyrus. The pristine Zoroastrianism appearance of edicts, inscriptions, and documents from his reign, and their similarity to prophetic pronouncements of Zoroaster, is one more aid in dating Zoroaster's life and ministry. The convergence of justice elements and the Oneness of God is among the most persuasive arguments for a new level of understanding of the Zoroastrian contribution to world culture that is emerging in our time. A reasonably complete picture may become achievable as we add the Quranic confirmations of true Zoroastrian revelations, new perspectives that Jewish sources can teach us, unique Christian Gospel material from Zoroastrianism in the time of Jesus, and material from sources in the related religious traditions much farther east, featured in the next four books of this compendium. These conjectures can stand on their own, but will be ultimately verified by the location of the early Avesta Scriptures, most of which were destroyed in the era of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE, or the later Avestan additions from the scriptures destroyed in the seventh century CE soon after Muhammad, a quest that may help define the world culture emerging in the New Axial Age of the twenty-first century.

The Zoroastrian revelation, which stimulated religions throughout the ancient Silk Route, may have been triggered by an encounter with a more Western Semitic religion, but it came out of the more easterly Vedic vortex. Religious developments in the Semitic "holy land" are sometimes attributed to its position at the hinge of three continents; Vedic religious fervor erupted in a similar crucible in the Russian Steppes between Ukraine and Kazakhstan. There a confluence of developments shaped a society that had migrated from northwestern Russia to a previously barren plain that blossomed when they adapted from hunting and gathering to planting and domestication of animals, techniques borrowed from European cultures to their west. This burgeoning population became mobile due to invention of the wheel, brought from the Mesopotamian south, adapted to the wagon from the Khazak east and eventually the war chariot.

None of these "advances" were invented on the steppes, but the cross fertilization was dynamic. The same thing happened to their "Proto-Indo-European" language in tension with Hittite and other influences, a process that expanded in Rig Veda religious terms as the still growing hybrid society began to migrate in several directions. The invention of the automobile was a development that shaped modern society in a manner similar to the influence of the wheel of old, while the advent of computers and the Internet might resemble the impact of PIE linguistic development throughout much of the world. Religious turmoil was the next stage for the ancients, followed by "worldwide" spiritual creativity along the Silk Route. We may be reliving this pattern in the twenty-first century, and there are few studies as valuable in our time as those of the interfaith discipline sometimes described as "comparative theology."

2

a priest becomes a prophet

Commissioned at the River

AMPLIFY THE EARLIER SUMMARY OF WHAT WE ONCE KNEW ABOUT ZOROASTER, THE TIMES were tough and the people of his religious community were oppressed. The young priest went down to the river to prepare the water sacrifice and to meditate on his need, and that of his people, and to hear a word from God. As he waded out of the river, quite unexpectedly an angel appeared in the shining form of a man who both confronted him and instructed him.[1]

The pensive young priest had waded into the river almost distracted from his improvisational incantations by the social disintegration all around him. As he emerged, a vision came to him in which he was personally addressed by a specter he could only identify as one of the Immortals, beings then identified with or symbolized by the seven major celestial bodies visible to the naked eye in the universe. This story is important enough that it is repeated three times in extant remnants of the Avesta Scriptures.[2] After establishing rapport, the shining figure led him in the spirit into an audience with the Lord of Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, who was also the deva of justice, and who was attended by six other Immortals. Ahura Mazda was both immanent and entirely lucid in authorizing Zoroaster to energize his people to oppose violence and to confront the terror of the times. Zoroaster had gone into the water as a priest and come out to become a prophet.

Zoroaster learned in this revelation that even divinities had to choose between order and disorder in support of either harmony or chaos. The human race was being enlisted to join the forces of nature in a new era that would lead to eventual victory of good over evil. Zoroaster had experienced the immanence of the Lord of Wisdom; the glory of the moment triggered his immediate realization that this Ahura Mazda was also transcendent and should be identified as the Creator of the Universe. The Divinity was "uncreated" and all the forces of nature must become subservient to God. Ahura Mazda is not alone in the universe, but he alone is God. Some suggest this was not technically monotheism at first, since the Immortals participated in divinity, but

they are soon correctly understood as angels in the service of the only One worthy of worship. It was also revealed or became clear that the Lord had an evil counterpart whose status appeared great, though his purpose was less lofty and destined to fail as humans joined the struggle on the side of goodness. Zoroaster was instructed to put the invitation clearly to his people.

Spiritually precocious, even as a child, Zoroaster had trained to be a priest from the age of seven and was recognized early for his ability to improvise incantations during sacrificial ceremonies.[3] Hebrew monotheism had been in the air throughout neighboring nations since the time of Moses, and the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah may have included visits to the Israelites who had been exiled by Assyria a hundred years earlier, between 730 and 710 BCE. Many Israelites were then living in Hala, Habor, and Hara,[4] communities eventually absorbed into the Median Empire, and all mentioned in Zoroaster's own story in the Avesta. Even before the matter of Zoroaster's dates was quite resolved, twentieth-century historian Arnold J. Toynbee put the matter as follows: "The date of Zarathustra is a matter of dispute and we cannot say for certain whether his religious discovery was independent . . . or whether his voice was a mere echo of the cry of forgotten Israelite prophets who had been marooned in the cities of the Medes."[5]

The scriptural evidence for a direct connection with Jeremiah is slender, but Israel's lamenting prophet did have something of a fixation with the exiles, wherever they were, visiting many such communities, as attested by several references in the Bible. Jeremiah even prophesied that if the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah reunited, they would be rejoined by the exiles from "the north."[6] He also demonstrated personal knowledge of the Scythians when he describes the "rising waters of the north," their ability and their possible interest in flooding the enemies of Israel with galloping steeds and rumbling chariots.[7]

By Jeremiah's time, many Israelite exiles may have intermarried with the Scythians in northern Syria, Media, and elsewhere, so Zoroaster may have even had Semitic Hebrew relatives. Given the meshing of their dates, as we now understand the overlap, it is entirely possible that as a teenager, Zoroaster could have heard Jeremiah, his elder contemporary, preaching monotheism and issuing a plea for the exiles to return to keep the faith. The appeal of monotheism might have had significance to a young Zoroaster at a time when religious and political turmoil was affecting his community. Would a youthful student of Vedic religion have heard this as a message that "there is One God," or was it a message that "God is One"? This fine distinction might be something with which his followers and others he influenced would struggle, whether or not he was yet aware of the difference, a subject to which we shall return in the discussion of Western monotheism in relation to Eastern monism.

The possibility of a direct connection between Zoroaster and Jeremiah is not contended here with any degree of certainty, but is offered as an example of ancient cross-border interchange. Given a plethora of hints in the Talmud and early Arab Christian references, the Jeremiah connection to Scythians and the exile communities in Zoroaster's homeland may be a promising area of future study in support of this

thesis. However, if Zoroaster's initiation into awareness of the Oneness of God was not through a connection with Jeremiah, it could well have been through one of the other prophets, commercial or other visitors to the exile community, or simply from the Jewish exiles themselves, many of whom no doubt remained devout, as they did elsewhere. We do not yet have physical proof of an intersection between Semitic and Vedic traditions at this juncture, but it is clear that before the Jews developed an expanded theology of angels, Satan, the last judgment, and paradise from Zoroastrians in Babylon, the Zoroastrians had been introduced to monotheism or the Oneness of God, as well as messianism, almost certainly from the Jews, and that this happened somewhere other than either Babylon or Israel. Our conjecture is merely a plausible example of the exchange of ideas that certainly happened among ancient peoples, but the conjunction of dates and geography facilitating such intercourse in this case is too great to discount entirely.

While unheard of among the laity, in academic circles it is increasingly recognized that Judaism was influenced, some might say "transformed," under Zoroastrian persuasion in Babylon, giving Zoroastrianism both direct and indirect sway in Christianity and Islam. What is less well recognized in academia is the near certainty that Zoroastrianism was profoundly influenced in its Vedic infancy by Semitic Israelites in exile, with whom it crossed paths. From them this particular Vedic tradition received the vision of the Oneness of God (whether monotheistic or monistic), the understanding of personal responsibility to God (the commandments, rules or dharma), and the hope for a Redeemer (an avatar, messiah, or sayoshyant), all of which appeared in Eastern religions also within a generation.

We do know that following the "revelation at the river" several years later, Zoroaster commenced his mission at the age of thirty, launched by two aspects emulated exactly by Jesus long into the future. In both cases the river rite or "baptism" at the age of thirty was followed by the attempt by a satanic adversary, "tempting" them to renounce their faith. However, through the first several years of his ministry Zoroaster gained only one reliable disciple, in the person of his cousin, Miadhyoimah. He also earned the enmity of the religious establishments and was forced to migrate from the western end of the Silk Route, where he was born, to the eastern end, where he flourished. His opportunity came in Balkh, the capital of the minor kingdom of Bactria, just west of China and north of India, and at the far eastern tip of what would become the Persian Empire, in an event regarded as a godsend by his later followers.

Zoroaster was given a chance to discuss his mission with the priests of the royal court in the Kingdom of Bactria, an area of Northern Afghanistan and contiguous Islamic republics today. After three days they dismissed him and had him jailed, but he had caught the eye of King Vishtāspa, who must have seen the divine spark in the prophet priest, now forty years old. When Vishtāspa's favorite horse became paralyzed and unable to rise, the established priests could do nothing, so the king took the opportunity to send for Zoroaster, who prayed over the beast and somehow raised it to renewed vigor, to the delight of the king, the queen, and the whole royal household. They converted to the cause of peace and justice for possibly both spiritual and political reasons

(sometimes inseparable), and Zoroaster flourished, with influence then growing rapidly throughout the region coincident with the expansion of Vishtāspa's realm, which the king's descendants would expand and parlay into the Persian Empire.

Zoroaster's utterances were poetic and couched in the evocative dialect of his proto-Vedic forebears, regarded as sacred. That was the almost primordial and rudimentary articulation of the evolving Vedic tradition that had taken root in India and would soon be reformed there under the Buddhist ripples in the wake of Zoroaster's influence. Within a few years the body of Zoroaster's writings was so precious in his expanding circle that King Vishtāspa put his literate prime minister in charge of the texts. Jāmāspa undertook this responsibility with such devotion that, according to tradition, he produced two archetypical copies with gold lettering on ox-hide sheets. This devotion to the texts themselves was emulated by Jews not long after, by Christian monogrammed texts in due course, and by Islamic adulation of sacred words in the final iteration of "The Book." Testimony to the plethora of copies and translations of these Avesta Scriptures in the ancient world has been referenced earlier, and will be elaborated upon again later, but needs to be kept in mind here too. Even among ancient Jews and in the early church there was never such prodigious production of copies of the treasured text. Are we to believe that not even a single copy has survived?

Zoroaster trained three orders of disciple missionaries who fanned out across the ancient world and organized the community of faith in the Lord of Wisdom. The horse itself became an enduring symbol of the Zoroastrian religion, and, as trends sometimes do, Zoroaster's spiritual influence galloped all over the world. Zoroaster had relocated from the gates of Greece at the western end of the Silk Route to his new headquarters near the gates of China and India at the eastern end of the Silk Route. If Billy Graham could be heard in person or through modern media by most of the world in the twentieth century, it is not a stretch to realize how Zoroaster, or his message, could extend his reach from west to east along a route in a portion of the globe little different in size and shape from the nation of Chile (in east-west "landscape" rather than north-south "portrait" orientation). Are we to continue to believe that ideas could not traverse such a space, though often erroneously described as impossibly remote and inaccessible? Such a concept is now understood to relate more to limitations in our own dark ages than to the situation in the time and location of Zoroaster. Recent evidence of the presence of Iranian Magi in China before and during Zoroaster's lifetime will be introduced at the beginning of Book II of this compendium as the *piéce de resistance* of this new realization.

Zoroaster married, possibly more than once, and established his home and religious headquarters in the city of Balkh, then the capital of Bactria, some twenty kilometers to the northwest of Mazar-e-Sharif in what is called Afghanistan today. His three sons took the lead in reorganizing society into three classes: priests, warriors, and farmers, according closely with the principal castes organized in India by related Aryan migrants some generations earlier. That social system was now to be employed in bringing order to the spiritual struggle between good and evil.

The mighty prince of darkness, introduced as Ahriman, later known as Satan or Lucifer, also had a retinue of six additional Anti-mortals, including Indra and other forces who served the cause of evil in the world. Following the revelation to Zoroaster at the river, the cosmic battle was to be joined by those prepared to struggle on earth. Zoroaster was inspired to understand that in the battle between the devas representing good and evil, the Lord of Wisdom was destined for the final victory and that mortals who joined His cause should acknowledge Him as the only One true God. This rapid blossoming of monotheism, monism, or the Oneness of God is reflected in the extant Avestas, and preserved by the modern Zoroastrian community of Parsees and others, though the seeds of an eventual flowering of dualism in much of that community were also there from the very beginning.

All of this and the subsequent Avestan Scriptures are presented in dramatic apocalyptic language, the first appearance of this genre of expression in the world. We meet this style again in Daniel and a few other places in the Hebrew Scriptures. The apocalyptic style appears in the Gospels and dominates the book of Revelation, concluding the Christian Scriptures, prior to its predominant use again through almost the whole of the Quran. This is the first hint of the closeness between the Avesta and the Quran, a core thesis of the *Three Testaments* compendium that preceded this one. We will identify similar phenomena in the Eastern testaments to be examined here.

Zoroaster lived long and well and saw the impact of his mission spread throughout all areas of Persian influence and well beyond, the harbinger of what many scholars now call the "Axial Age" of religion and philosophy. Peasants and royal families alike flocked to his banner. Until recently, it was believed that he died a mysterious and violent death at the hands of assassins in the fire temple at Balkh at seventy-seven years of age. Judging by the language used, suspicions have arisen that this story was a fabrication placed in the record by detractors some centuries later. He probably died at a great age, having seen his revelations transform his religion and beginning to influence all religions, and his reforms transform his society and influence all societies throughout the ancient world. If this was the case, it is even possible that his tomb will yet be discovered, perhaps at Mazar-e-Sharif, where the Blue Mosque is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. This shrine is considered in local legend to be the tomb of Ali, the son-in-law and putative successor of Muhammad, even though Muslims everywhere else in the world recognize his tomb as being at the Imam Ali Mosque at Najaf in Iraq. On the contrary, the tour guides of Mazar-e-Sharif have maintained their legend that the body of Ali was carried here on the back of a camel—an "ustra" (Ali's legend on top of Zarath-ustra?).

Zoroaster's name was *Zarath-ustra* in Persian, but the Greeks called him *Zorastres*, the Romans called him *Zoroastres*, and the anglicized *Zoroaster* has now become almost universal. An exception is the German title from Friedrich Nietzsche's book, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, and the music by Richard Strauss that used that title for music that was popularized by Stanley Kubrick's movie, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Once he saw the movie, the music of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* was also used as the introduction to every show

of Elvis Presley from 1969 until his death in 1977. Even in an era before scholarship had revealed as much as we now know, Zoroaster appears as "Sarastro" in Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, noted for its Masonic elements, where he represents moral order in opposition to the "Queen of the Night." He is also the subject of the 1749 opera *Zoroastre* by Jean-Philippe Rameau, set in the ancient kingdom of Bactria where the forces of Good, led by Zoroastre, the "founder of the Magi" struggle against the forces of Evil. During the Enlightenment, Voltaire and other encyclopaedists promoted research into Zoroastrianism, considering it to be a rational deism more acceptable than Christianity. In essence, Zoroaster was a reformer of the older Vedic religion, which provided the raw materials for all emerging religions at the Middle Eastern hinge of continents, the area where both monism and monotheism took root. As mentioned, the period of a hundred years after Zoroaster, when all this happened, has come to be identified as the Axial Age, a subject to which we shall return.

Despite all this, until the current era, Zoroaster remained largely off the radar screen of Western history and consciousness because of Western ignorance and confusion about his birthplace and his dates. He was born into a world of warlord "kingdoms" like Azerbaijan, Syria, Media, Lydia, Bactria, and 122 others that all later became provinces of the Persian Empire under more ancient names. Zoroaster's birthplace appears to have been the city of Urmiah, now known as Rizaijeh, in the Shiz district of present-day Azerbaijan. Arabic and Persian scholars mark his birth date as 628 BCE[8] by noting that the sacking of the Persian capital of Persepolis by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE took place 258 years after "the appearance" or epiphany of Zoroaster. This is possibly a reference to his birth, traditionally celebrated by Zoroastrians on July 25, but it more likely refers to the establishment of the Zoroastrian religion under King Vishtāspa, and Avesta records show that Zoroaster was some forty years old at that time.[9]

As referenced in our earlier exordium, an alternate ancient tradition reported by Xanthus of Lydia about 450 BCE, and adopted by Greek and Roman historians, places the birth of Zoroaster some six thousand years before Xerxes. This pushes Zoroaster's dates back to about 6500 BCE, a popular mythology that survived until very recently, though it makes Zoroaster appear approximately twelve times as ancient as in the Persian record.[10] This is the basis of the mythical image of Zoroaster adopted in "new age" circles, rather than the historical reality. While readers often abjure books with too many dates, an accurate dating of Zoroaster's impact on the world is key to the argument in this story, so some heavy plodding is necessary.

Whenever we see what appear to be fantastic or impossible dates and ages in the ancient world, the first question we must ask is whether these numbers are divisible by twelve. Most primitive societies measured time by cycles of the moon, rather than the solar calculations employed in the Common Era. This was the practice of early Hebrew, contiguous and related societies, and even aboriginal societies surviving into the modern era in many parts of the world. Methuselah[11] may have lived to a very old age for his time, but it is obvious that if divided by twelve, his age represents 969 cycles of the moon, or some eighty cycles of the sun. We might call this eighty "years" in the solar method of time measurement that was adopted just shortly before the

Common Era. By this computation Noah lived 950 moons,[12] or seventy-nine years. He was "600" when the flood came, or fifty years old by our calculations. After the adoption of solar time measurement, we are given to understand that Jesus lived approximately thirty years and Muhammad some sixty-three years, both ages described in the system employed in the Common Era. Their followers would realize that they both lived holy and healthy lives, at least as compared to Noah and Methuselah, and could have lived as long as either of these predecessors.

The confusion concerning Zoroaster's birth date might be illustrated by the current switch in measurement of temperature. The United States continues to use the Fahrenheit scale while the rest of the world has switched to Celsius. A thousand years from now, when the whole world (including America) has been using Celsius for centuries, at first glance a study of our times would reveal that while temperatures peaked at thirty or forty degrees everywhere else, a hot day in America was represented by 100 degrees or more, misunderstood as surely the hottest place on earth with almost unbelievable heat.[13]

So when Xanthus reports that Zoroaster was born six thousand "cycles" before Persian King Xerxes invaded Asia Minor and Greece in 480 BCE, we may presume that he meant six thousand cycles of the moon. The Roman historian Diogenes Laertius, among others, took this to be six thousand cycles of the sun, since they lived in the solar era, placing the birth of Zoroaster at a seemingly impossibly remote date in relation to the Aryan activities that preceded him and to the religious developments in Persia and elsewhere that succeeded him. When Xanthus recorded that period as six thousand cycles, he really meant five hundred of our solar years before 480 BCE, or the year 930 BCE according to our calculations. This is not precisely the same as the Persian record, but a difference measured in a couple of centuries, not many thousands of years. The choices for birth dates of Zoroaster are three. First, we would accept 6500 BCE if we believe Xanthus and documents like the Bible really measured time in solar years rather than moons. Second, we would accept a date of somewhere roughly around 1000 BCE if we adjust this Greek and Roman account from moons to solar years. Third, the date would be 628 BCE if we accept the Arabic and Persian records, similar to certain European estimates in the twentieth century but much older and commonly held throughout the centuries in regions of the East.

With the support of those recent European conclusions, to be described in detail in Book VII, we employ the later Arabic and Persian date of 628 BCE, partly because it fits with our thesis regarding Persian Zoroastrianism as the direct immediate predecessor of scriptural Judaism, as represented by the Hebrew Scriptures as we have them. The slightly earlier revised Greek and Roman date of 930, or about 1000 BCE, would not be a major problem, since it, too, follows Moses by some centuries, but it does not fit quite as well when we begin to compute backward from the Jewish experience, a technique to be elaborated upon later. Impressive corroboration of our position is also bolstered by information now known about the birth of Darius I, shortly before 550 BCE, the factor that tipped the balance in the recent debate in Europe. This son of the first royal convert, King Vishtāspa, grew up to succeed to the Persian throne in 522,

eight years after the birth of Cyrus, and would have known Zoroaster as the revered priest and prophet in his father's court. Cyrus, too, would have known Zoroaster as a child. Debate, controversy, and final resolution of this important matter will be presented in a subsequent chapter.

Certain scholars may continue to give weight to other factors, but leading writers on the topic, from experts such as Susan Whitfield[14] through Sol Nigosian[15] to Karen Armstrong,[16] have increasingly tended toward more recent dates as evidence mounts. The substantiation of a birth date of around 628 BCE is convincing and important in our thesis that Zoroaster's revelation at the river occurred around 600 BCE in a region populated in part by Israelite exiles who were at least nominally monotheistic. If that is conceded, permitted, or imagined, a great many other things fall into place with respect to both Eastern and Western religious developments.

Zoroaster's prophetic ministry exploded ten years later, and dramatically impacted the whole of the ancient Middle East and beyond for the next fifty years, until soon thereafter Cyrus, the rising Zoroastrian conqueror, marched into Babylon in 539 BCE to establish that faith at the heart of the first realm in history to be appropriately described as a superpower. The significance of the Zoroastrian Cyrus establishing the Persian Empire in this manner just twenty years after the death of Zoroaster (or a century after his birth) has yet to be entirely digested in either academic circles or popular imagination. Along with Zoroaster's impact both farther west and farther east, the impact of the interchange between Vedic and Semitic influences in Babylon is important as an example of what may well have happened elsewhere, though not yet as well documented.

As indicated, the late date for Zoroaster's birth (either 930 or 628 BCE) places the revelation that was given to him well after the establishment of monotheism in Israel. Future chapters will establish that religious and other ideas traveled in a fluid dynamic all through the ancient East, with the Silk Route as the conduit. For example, Vashti, the great-granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar and the first wife of Artaxerxes II, was of Indian lineage, through Nebuchadnezzar's son, Amel-Marduk,[17] who distinguished himself in the campaigns of Northern India and brought home a wife. The Vashti connection is a given among Indians, where the ancient name remains common, and the scholarly linkage is now typical of the newer interfaith research in which India is accepted as being in the farther reaches of the empire of Ataxerxes II.

To reiterate an earlier example, only recently have Westerners noted the presence of a certain Krishna in the book of Esther among those the king consulted before banishing Vashti, the Hebrew letters of his name being "KRiShNA," or Kṛṣṇa.[18] This is patently obvious in transliteration, though the name is traditionally and inexplicitly rendered as "Carshena" in English translations. However, Indians who incline to take this reference as the king's invocation of a Hindu god should perhaps be content to simply recognize Indian influence in the court, including the fluid transmission of ideas we have been describing as typical of Zoroaster's time and the age that followed.

Meanwhile, under Zoroastrian influence, the many deities of the Vedic tradition may have moved toward the Oneness of All, a monism inclusive of creator and creation,

an Eastern development seemingly opposite to related monotheistic developments in the West, requiring further discussion. While Zoroastrianism may have facilitated the spread of monotheism as an increasingly dominant belief throughout the Persian Empire and toward the west, the fact that this seminal belief had flourished for hundreds of years in the Jewish community almost next door to Zoroaster's birthplace can hardly be mere coincidence. We may regard the revelation to Zoroaster at the river as genuine, but monotheism, or something approaching monism was not exactly new to him at that moment. His worldview was Vedic, but Zoroaster's inspiration with respect to the Oneness of God was almost certainly Jewish. The exceptional Zoroastrian influence on Judaism during the Persian years of Israel's Exile in Babylon may now be understood as but the closing of the circle. A belief in the Oneness of God came to Zoroaster and to the world from the Jews, and the Hebrew Torah was facilitated and financed by Zoroastrian monarchs in Babylon. Through the return to Jerusalem it was passed on to the world. The growing evidence for this will be forthcoming, but this much has been available for a long time.

A correct dating of the birth of Zoroaster is perhaps just one of the more obvious illustrations of how the Zoroastrian record helps resolve many conundrums of later Western scriptures, and correlates with the examination of Eastern scriptures that form the core material of this compendium. Extant Avesta information testifies to Zoroaster's birth to his mother, Dughdhova, when she was fifteen years of age, reporting it as a "virgin birth."[19] The custom of attributing the birth of an outstanding figure to divine initiative eventually became relatively common in what we now call the Middle East. Zoroaster's lineage is then traced back through his father, Pourushaspa, forty-five generations to the first human, Gayomart,[20] again in a manner identical in ethos to the way in which the genealogy of another famous son of a virgin is traced by St. Luke back to Adam through his "father," Joseph.[21] Pointing out the similarities to later scriptures is not meant to challenge the veracity of either account, but rather to point to the origins of the imagery and establish the linguistic power of images that may be historical or adopted by faith—in either case, they offer profound truths that lie beneath the eternal mysteries.

To bolster our understanding that critical aspects of religion were not merely evolving, but were triggered by revolutionary incidents, such as revelations or encounters, we will pause to reflect on a plausible illustration. The following two scenes are excerpted from the play *Three Testaments: Shalom, Peace, Salam*, with an upstate New York premier in June 2015 at Niagara Falls and a DVD movie recording available on YouTube and from Amazon in anticipation of a performance on the opening day of the Performing Arts Venue in Tower Five of the new World Trade Center in 2018.

3

a chance meeting at the crossroads of history

Before the Vedic-Semitic Interface in Babylon

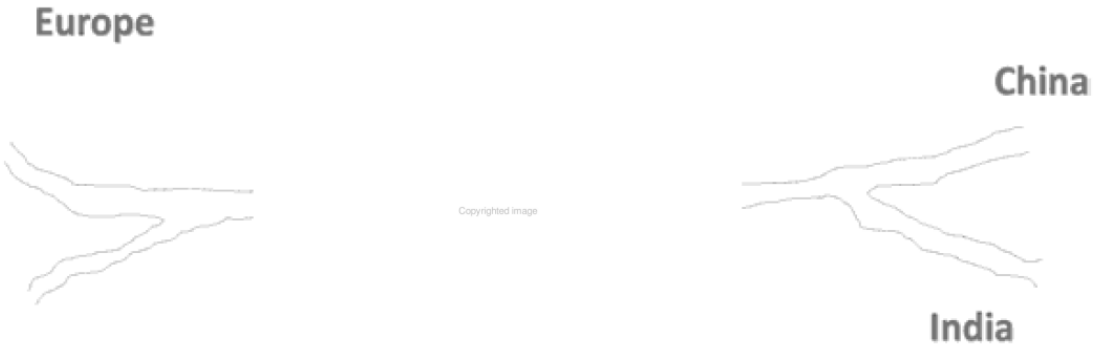

Diagram executed by Indira Brown Sinton. © 2016 Brian Arthur Brown.

the great intersection

THE VEDIC OR PROTO-VEDIC RELIGION OF MIGRANTS ON THEIR WAY FROM THE RUSSIAN STEPPES to India swept through Asia Minor (Turkey) and into Babylon (Iraq)/Persia (Iran) on their way to India. Israelite religion of Semitic monotheism stalled briefly in Asia Minor as these "lost tribes of Israel" made their

way northeast to Europe and west along the Silk Route. In this investigation, it is conjectured that the two religions may have intersected in momentous coincident exchanges—first, in passing, in places like ancient Scythia (present-day Armenia/Azerbaijan), and second, more intensely in Babylon, where exiled Jews were running the civil service when the Zoroastrian Cyrus swept into power and recognized them as something akin to co-religionists.

The profound significance of this intersection for the twenty-first century is only now being recognized as the trigger for the Axial Age in which philosophical ideas and religious ideals stirred in concert from Greece to China, connected by what we now call the Silk Route. To illustrate how such interplay could well have taken place, this chapter excerpts two scenes from the play *Three Testaments: Shalom, Peace, Salam*. Other connections are possible, as happened in Mitanni earlier, and Zoroaster may have even met itinerant Jewish prophets or profiteers other than Jeremiah. However, speculation from notes in the Babylonian Talmud, through early Arab Christian sources and Muslim sources to be quoted in Book VI, to Arnold Toynbee's speculations in the twentieth century, support the thesis of this book. Reading backward from Judaism to Zoroastrianism in Babylonia also verifies the encounter between Zoroaster and Jeremiah as a valid hypothesis in the exciting new discipline of Zoroastrian studies. Readers can pass judgment on that for themselves later, but they may enjoy an excursion to the theater first. Two scenes are excerpted from the play as an illustration of some points we have been discussing.

act I, scene 2

(Back 2,700 years to visit Israelite exiles by the Black Sea, gathering around an evening campfire. These exiles, expelled from Israel by the Assyrians a hundred years before the famous Babylonian Captivity, are often said to be among the "lost tribes" of Israel. Singers are quietly humming a *niggun*.)

CAMPFIRE HOST *(Addressing cast and audience)*

Shalom aleichem!

CAMPFIRE GUESTS

Aleichem Shalom!

CAMPFIRE HOST

Tonight we have a guest, the young prophet Jeremiah, bringing news from Jerusalem, the City of David, the home to which many of us yearn to return. Jeremiah confronts those who would forget the special destiny of our people to be a holy nation. We here in exile believe it was our failure to follow our mission that allowed the Assyrians to drive us out of our home. Jeremiah, meet Israel in exile. Few here have ever returned, but we remember the stories of our grandparents, and we look to the day of our return.

ZOROASTER *(Joining the circle)*

Cousin, don't forget to introduce those of us of Vedic faith to your guest. My tunic tells him I am training for the priesthood, almost ready to be ordained. Some have come to hear how Israel's God fits into our Vedic pantheon, though I personally question that such a thing is possible. In fact, let me serve notice of my concern about the presence of this guest. We are living in peace together here; we don't need someone dividing us.

CAMPFIRE HOST

Thank you for your thoughts, Zoroaster. Jeremiah, your audience is mainly Israelite, but yes, we welcome other faiths among us, including Zoroaster, my brash young cousin . . . from a mixed marriage . . . who is sometimes a bit confrontational. Friends, let us hear Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, High Priest in the Jerusalem Temple. He comes bearing a special scroll, and to deliver a special message, a word from the God of Israel. Join us, Zoroaster, you might learn something tonight.

JEREMIAH *(Large scroll in his arms)*

Thank you, Eliphaz. Some communities I passed through also have Israelite residents, but few have so many, and none live so far from home. It was to you that I was called to prophesy by my God and yours, and at the wish of my father.

(Speaking in falsetto voice with arms raised in the air)

The word of the Lord came to me: "Before I created you in the womb, I selected you;
Before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to Israel among the nations."
I replied, "Ah, Lord God! I don't know how to speak, for I am still a boy."
And the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am still a boy,' But go wherever I send you
And speak whatever I command you. Have no fear, for I am with you to deliver you."

Yes, I am young for a prophet, but the message I bring should enhance the faith of sincere people living together in peace. My father, Hilkiah, has been High Priest for many years. I know you possess an old scroll of Israelite history, but in my hands is a copy of the Second Scroll, found by my father during the reign of righteous Josiah. It contains the speeches by Moses, which were memorized by Levites and passed on from generation to generation. My father felt compelled by God to have me deliver this Scroll of Teachings to you. You may even know some of its words:

Hear, O Israel. The Eternal our God, The Eternal is one.
And you must love the Eternal your God
With all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.
Take these words which I command you today to heart
Teach them to your children; speak them when you sit at home
or walk upon the road, when you lie down and when you rise up.

I am called to prophesy wherever our people are in danger of forgetting God. God calls us to serve Him in Jerusalem, but also in this foreign place. Each individual is responsible to God. The commandments of God are found in the ancient scroll in your possession, so you have no excuse.

ZOROASTER

You have come to sow dissension! To persuade Israelites to return to their old ways! We have begun to include Israelites in our rites, and many of our families are intermarried now. From time immemorial we Vedic people have worshipped the divinities in many forms. Spiritual forces, good and evil, are all around us, and we lift up our voices together in fear and supplication. Is there truly but one God above all divinities? Does this God know each of us? Does your God expect things of mere individuals? I challenge your nonsense and I resent what you are doing here. Let these people become part of our community and adopt our ways. People like you always bring strife, and the next thing you know we are fighting. Can't you leave us in peace?

JEREMIAH

There is but one God, known by our Father, Abraham, and described by His servant Moses. This understanding may be the greatest gift of Israel to the world. The Great God who made heaven and earth has a plan for the world and a purpose for each person in it. God also expects each individual to take personal responsibility in the fight against evil. Only then will peace prevail.

ZOROASTER

If I understand you, the Great God is the only God. This is either nonsense or it changes everything. Perhaps I need to think about this, so I'll be at your gatherings. But we Vedic folk will keep our eyes on you before you drive a wedge between us and our neighbors. We are living at peace here; we don't want trouble! We can run you out of here, Jeremiah, and we will do so as soon as you begin to put our peaceful way of life at risk.

JEREMIAH

In the days and weeks ahead, I hope to meet with many of you, Israelites and Scythians alike, and you especially, Zoroaster. Together we will study the Second Scroll and respectfully consider the needs of Vedic people as well as Israelites and Jews. We will consider what each person must do to serve God, and also what communities must do to be at peace among the nations, since that is what you are worried about. Bring your concerns to the table, but keep an open heart and mind.

(A campfire singer leads the audience and cast in singing another niggun.*)*

act I, scene 3

(Ten years later Zoroaster is still a young Vedic priest. He wades into a river in a scene similar to the baptism of Christ many years later. He dips some water in a jug, holds it up and splashes himself in a purification rite, talking to himself in a reverie.)

ZOROASTER

Ten years since I met that Jeremiah! I fought against dividing the community, but his teachings haunt me. I have been faithful to our Vedic religion. We use the purity of water to cleanse the pollution of the land, and the heat of fire to sear away the dross of corruption and violence. But the people are oppressed by nature and by crime. Thirty! I am now the same age Jeremiah was when he opened my mind to the reality that there is but one God. I fetch this pure water from the middle of the river before I light our fire sacrifice, but I nearly despair. We need to hear a word from God.

(An angel appears in the heavens as one who confronts and instructs.)

GABRIEL

Zoroaster!

ZOROASTER

I am here!

GABRIEL

Your given name, Zarathustra, means "camel-herder." But now you are called upon to guide people, not camels, and to share with them what you believe about God, and to marshal them in the fight against evil. Only thus will you and they find peace.

ZOROASTER *(Falling to his knees)*

Sacred Spectre, are you a god?

GABRIEL

No! I am not a god; there is but One. But I am immortal like the seven planets. I patrol an orbit assigned by God. I have been sent to invite you, no . . . command you to turn to Ahura Mazda, Lord of Wisdom, the Great God described by Jeremiah. God is One, and God alone can redeem both communities and individuals. Are you at last ready to face God?

ZOROASTER

I am ready. I bow in humility. I am ashamed that it has taken me so long.

GABRIEL

Then come into the presence of the Lord of Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, who is also the deva of universal justice, and who is attended by six Immortals.

VOICE OF GOD *(off stage, as Zoroaster falls to his knees)*

I AM . . . I AM . . . I am the transcendent Lord of Wisdom, and I am the immanent Spirit who is available to all people. Today I commission you, Zoroaster, to inspire people to oppose violence and to confront the terror of the time. All beings, human and divine, must choose between order and

4

the silk route

The Axis of the Axial Age

HRASES "AXIAL AGE" OR "AXIAL PERIOD" ARE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE GERMAN *senzeit*, "axis time," a term coined in the twentieth century by philosopher l Jaspers. He originally used the term to describe the wider period from to 200 BCE, during which, according to Jaspers, comparable transformative thinking appeared in Persia, India, China, Israel, and Greece. Described as "the great transformation" by Karen Armstrong, this concept now has near universal acceptance. The German Egyptologist Jan Assmann expresses the essence succinctly in a major new study of *Dynamics in the History of Religions Between Asia and Europe*:

> The theory of the axial age as put forward by Karl Jaspers in 1949 and elaborated since then, especially by Shmuel Eisenstadt and his circle[1] is centred on the following principal assumptions: there is but One Truth and One Mankind. At a given point in its moral, spiritual and intellectual evolution, mankind "broke through" to a much clearer apprehension of this Truth. This happened independently in several places at approximately the same time around 500 BCE. The main characteristics of this breakthrough may be summarized as universalisation and distanciation. *Universalisation* is concerned with the recognition of absolute truths, valid for all times and all peoples; this implies features such as reflexivity, abstraction, second order thinking, theory, systematisation, etc. *Distanciation* is concerned with introducing ontological and epistemological distinctions, such as the eternal and the temporal world, being and appearance, spirit and matter, critique of the "given" in view of the true, etc.: in short, the invention of transcendence and the construction of two-world theories.[2]

Fine words profoundly expressed, except for a glaring improbability: that such a major and fundamental shift in human understanding would have happened "independently at several places at approximately the same time" with no connection or mutual influence. It is possible that such a phenomenon could have occurred in two places or even three at the same time, but to happen independently everywhere that

is connected by the Silk Route, and at a time when there was already one common denominator, seems highly improbable. In his book *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (*The Origin and Goal of History*), Jaspers himself identified a number of key Axial Age thinkers as having had a profound influence on future philosophies and religions, and identified characteristics common to each area from which those thinkers emerged. Jaspers saw striking parallels in religion and philosophy, but he failed to identify any obvious direct connection or transmission of ideas between regions.

He argued that during the Axial Age "the spiritual foundations of humanity were laid simultaneously and independently in China, India, Persia, Judea, and Greece. And these are the foundations upon which humanity still subsists today."[3] Jaspers is being seen increasingly as correct, except for the failure to identify the common denominator, a factor he missed by casting his net over an unnecessarily broad a span of time. Popular and respected scholars like Richard Freund, Karen Armstrong, and Amir Hussain tend toward speaking of the Axial Age from Jewish, Christian, and Islamic perspectives as a period lasting from Lao Tzu as an elderly seer in 550 BCE and Socrates as a young philosopher in 450 BCE, a period spanning just the hundred years after the death of Zoroaster. Perhaps we might think of that hundred-year epoch as including the reign of Cyrus (538–529 BCE) as the main political marker and the rise of Jewish prophets and the Buddha as dominant religious factors, with Socrates bookending the era philosophically in the West and Confucius in the East.

Jaspers's mistake was natural enough since there were Greek philosophers like Thales and Pythagoras before Parmenides, a monist, and Socrates, a monotheist in the period as we now define it. After that span, the likes of Plato and Aristotle can be seen as simply worthy students of the trend. The point is that Greek philosophy might have been interesting, but not seminal without Parmenides and Socrates, key figures in our core definition of the Axial Age.

The same could be said of Israel's prophets, with Joel, Elijah, Elisha, and First Isaiah making earlier contributions that would have been valued anyway, except that Jeremiah, Second Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel raised the bar so incredibly high in the Axial Age that they defined the movement and left the prophets who followed them to be described as "the minor prophets." Similar predecessors and successors to the true Axial giants might be seen in China, India, and Persia, though not as well known in Western literature on the subject. Suffice it to say that in China, Lao Tzu and Confucius held sway; in India, it was all Buddha in that hundred-year era except for Mahavira, the great reformer of the Jain religion, whose teachings also fit and whose dates are too exactly in the middle of this epoch to ignore. In Persia, Cyrus himself set everything in motion with his support for monotheistic religion and his application of Zoroastrian moral principles to diplomacy and governance. The dates of these historic figures all fit the tighter timeline.

Consider the BCE dates of these worthies, and ask yourself what they might have in common, the only outlier on this list being Jeremiah, who may be grandfathered into the record for the sake of a slightly earlier connection described in earlier chapters. All in the BCE era of course, Jeremiah lived his three-score years and ten, 655–586;

Lao Tzu, 604–555; Ezekiel, 622–569; Isaiah, 582–512; Cyrus, 580–529; Buddha, 563–483, Confucius, perhaps 551–479 or slightly later; Mahavira, 540–468; Parmenides, 515–444?; and Socrates, 469–399. They all confronted their worlds with distinctive new thinking about morality and its spiritual basis, within one hundred years of the life of Zoroaster. Cyrus may be the only one to have met Zoroaster personally, which would have happened when he was a child in the court of Vishtāspa, but the others were part of a spiritual upheaval triggered by Zoroaster, and his influence shows in every one of them. It is absent from their predecessors and only found in their successors identified as minor prophets and students.

Jaspers held Socrates, Confucius, and the Buddha in especially high regard, describing each of them as an exemplary human being and a "paradigmatic personality." His linking of them as exemplary might have been his clue. We concede a similar place of preeminence to the aforementioned towering prophets of Israel, and the impact of Cyrus was such that Israel almost took him to be the Messiah, a figure who actually appears in Zoroastrianism as the *Saoshyant* or Redeemer—which Cyrus almost was to Israel, in a certain sense.

Socrates was officially executed for "atheism," by which his judges meant that he no longer believed in the "gods," plural, though, as quoted by Plato, he clearly believed in God, a radical new departure soon to be adopted throughout Greece. In the Axial Age, the gods of Olympus were dethroned in the West, and the Vedic gods continued to exist in the East only under the canopy of monism, the meaning of which (along with its relationship to monotheism) will be discussed in a future chapter. Israel's monotheism was reinforced in Babylon by Zoroastrianism at its height and the issues, in religion and philosophy, became how should individuals live in reference to good and bad, right and wrong, justice and injustice. All this was related to what was now perceived as God's claim upon them and God's invitation to them.

The Gathas are the earliest chapters of the Avesta Scriptures, written by Zoroaster and still extant, but Zoroastrians are not mentioned by name in any of them, just as Jews are not mentioned anywhere in the Torah, and Christians are not mentioned by that name in any of the Gospels. As with Jews and Christians, we rely on later generations to self-identify as Zoroastrians, so it is not surprising that Cyrus (a very young contemporary of Zoroaster) and others of his generation do not refer to themselves as Zoroastrians. The first independent description of Zoroastrian religion (the religion of the government under which the commentator grew up) comes from Herodotus, the Greek "Father of History," who was born in Halicarnassus, a Greek city in the Persian province of Caria (Turkey) in the time of Xerxes I. Even he does not yet use the Zoroastrian name but refers to its practitioners as Magians, the then common designation of Zoroastrian priests in the empire's heartland provinces where Magi converted or adjusted *en masse* from the earlier religion of that name. This "shorthand," conflation of Magianism and Zoroastrianism, or confusion of the two lasted many centuries. Indeed, this transition was so smooth that outside observers long imagined that Zoroaster founded the Magian religion.

Without much distinction between monotheism (one God) and monism (one Being or "mono-be-ism"), according to Herodotus, the Zoroastrian Magians of his region preserved many of the names of the divinities ("singing the Theogony") and held to a belief in a future immortality, going after their death to "Zalmoxis" (the "God of Moses"). They even called their country of domicile, as he knew it, "Moesia," for it was there that the people of Moses lived.[4] Moesia is best known in history as a province of the Roman Empire in the southeastern Balkans in what was the only part of Scythia controlled by the Romans. In Scythia / Caria / Moesia we can see at a glance the connection between the Persian religion as Herodotus knew it and the Israelite exiles, whose religion was acceptable to the Zoroastrianism of the general population. That is the kind of thing that was common, though not universal, from Greece to China in the first one hundred years after Zoroaster. Personal responsibility to God for good thoughts and good actions was not new or unique to Zoroaster any more than being "born again" was new or unique to Billy Graham. Graham triggered a worldwide phenomenon in a similar way, much of which was identified with his own Baptist tradition but which also affected reforms among charismatic Catholics, energized the new Pentecostal movement, and bolstered other young churches, as well as elements within the sometimes moribund mainline Protestant denominations. The relationship of Zoroastrian teachings to Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and others may be seen in a similar light.

The first direct classical Greek reference to Zoroaster and the Magi is located in the dialogue *Alcibiades I*, by Plato (429–347 BCE). In the dialogue, Zoroaster (Zoroastren in Greek) is called "the son of Oromazes" (a Greek form of *Ormazd*, the common corruption of Ahura Mazda). In the same play, Zoroaster's religion is called "the magianism of Zoroaster . . . which is the worship of the Gods." A blatant inaccuracy notwithstanding, the inference here is simply that Zoroaster is the founder of the doctrine of the Magi, also an error in historical order. Other passing Platonic or neo-Platonic references to Zoroaster are found in *Alkibiades*, *Protos*, *The Republic*, and *Anonymmi Vita Platonis*.

It is almost certainly in Zoroaster that the Vedic and Semitic traditions definitively intersected, resulting in a transformative burst of energy that provided a powerful reinforcement for monotheism as it was emerging in the West and the development of monism in the East, both major departures from earlier polytheism. Between them we have the creative tension of dynamics that form the spiritual agenda of the sixth century BCE and well into the fifth, and which might have a similar reverberation in a New Axial Age of the twenty-first century CE.

While we do propose Zoroaster as the stimulus of the Axial Age, we do not suggest that the aforenamed Axial Age prophets and philosophers were his disciples, or that they lacked their own genius. But genius rarely appears in a vacuum; it is frequently a reaction or a response to some stimulus—in this case, Zoroaster's impact in the matter of morality and personal religion. Our theses may well prove valid, even without the documents for which we are searching, though we anticipate this momentous discovery before long. There are also two additional impact factors in Zoroastrianism that may be of as much value in our quest today as they were 2,500 years ago.

5

the extant avesta

Pieces of a Jigsaw Puzzle

EARLIEST PARTS OF THE AVESTA SCRIPTURES WERE COMMITTED TO WRITING AT THE stence of King Vishtāspa, whom Zoroaster converted to the faith and o became Zoroaster's powerful patron. As a former scribe, this king's n prime minister, Jāmāspa, had responsibility for redactions of the text. Especially after the death of the monarch, Jāmāspa took special care of the portions written to date, as recorded in later verses of the Avesta.[1] Another, earlier contributor, Ṭabarī, and also Bundarī after him, affirm that Vishtāspa had instructed that two copies of the holy texts be inscribed in letters of gold upon ox-hide scrolls, a tradition illustrating Zoroastrianism's devotion to the sacred character of the texts. The Roman commentator, Pliny, made reference to the legend that Zoroaster composed no less than two million verses,[2] an obvious exaggeration unless someone multiplied two hundred verses of all possible Gathas in the Avesta by perhaps an estimate of one thousand copies of the work.

The two archetypal copies of Zoroaster's original and seminal work were to serve as the standard priestly codices of Vishtāspa's realm and are mentioned later in the *Dinkard*, the *Artā-Vīrāf*, and the *Shatrōihā-i-Airān*. Those three works are all portions of parts of the Avesta composed at a later date and witnessing to the Gathas, which introduce the Avesta much as the Torah introduces the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels introduce the New Testament. The faith was to be promulgated throughout the world in accordance with the teaching of these scrolls. We mentioned a tradition to the effect that one of these original copies came into the hands of the Greeks and was translated into copies in their language. It, too, has disappeared, but support for this tradition may perhaps be found in the Arabic lexicon of Bar-Bahlūl, according to which the Avesta of Zoroaster was available in seven languages: Syriac, Persian, Aramean, Segestanian, Mervian, Greek, and Hebrew. A still earlier Syriac manuscript commentary on the New Testament by 'Ishō'dād, bishop of Ḥadatha, near Mosul, similarly speaks of the Avesta as having been written in twelve different languages.

Even if there is hyperbole here, it is clear that there was fervor and devotion surrounding written versions of the original Avesta Scripture. Yet we are asked to believe that every single copy has perished.

This material appears to have been more voluminous than all the classical Hebrew writings in our possession—scriptural, apocryphal texts, and noncanonical materials combined. Like the Bible itself, the Avesta was, and, what still remains of it is, a compendium of documents written in various related languages. The oldest portions contain materials that were written by Zoroaster under inspiration from Vedic oral sources that were somewhat contemporary to Abraham, down to final texts composed just prior to the closing of the canon of the Christian Scriptures. The Avesta as a whole may therefore be regarded as a slightly older contemporary of the entire Bible and an influential background context for it.

Mention has also been made of the deliberate destruction of the Avesta in a conflagration under the direction of Alexander the Great in 330 BCE. This desecration was part of a program to "Hellenize" his empire, the first of many European attempts to "civilize" the rest of the world. Following the breakup of that empire, the Parthians governed Persia from 150 to 250 CE and revived the vigor of the Zoroastrian religion. This was especially evident under King Vologese, who commissioned the first attempt to recover Avesta materials from scattered fragments, to write down the oral traditions and liturgies, and to gather Zoroastrian quotations from Greek manuscripts. A brief disruption of the project by political and military upheavals was followed by a revival of the Persian Empire itself in the Sassanian era, 250–650 CE, in which Zoroastrianism again became the state religion. Its high priests succeeded in collecting the surviving Avesta documents into twelve volumes called *nasks*, producing the first official Zoroastrian canon, not long after the establishment of the Hebrew canon and just shortly before the closing of the Christian canon.

Sadly, from both monistic and monotheistic perspectives, new materials produced in these popular revivals were increasingly dualistic in nature, so that by the time of Muhammad Zoroastrian monotheism was largely a memory. The surviving portions of the Avesta itself were ambivalent in this regard, so most of what remained was obliterated by the fervently monotheistic Muslims when they took over Persia in the seventh century CE. Both confirmation of the early monotheistic truths of the Avesta and condemnation of its latter dualism are almost certainly to be found "between the lines" in the Quran, as we attempted to illustrate in Book III of the *Three Testament* compendium, and in abbreviated fashion later in this text.

So all that remains today of the original documents consists of portions from several religious nasks, both monotheistic and mixed, and one law book of social regulations. These have been put together from documents and fragments hidden by the few remaining Zoroastrian believers in Persia/Iran or spirited out of the country by refugees fleeing to India at that time and later. They were supplemented by familiar and beloved hymns, dating back to Zoroaster himself, which could be reproduced from memory by believers at any time. There is just enough remaining that we can outline the development of the Avesta as a whole, prior to tracing its influence on

the Torah, and also considering its influence in the world of the Torah, in which the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures were produced in the form we know, and reflected in the New Testament and the Quran. But even prior to that, we may now see traces of certain monistic Zoroastrian traditions further east in the investigations presented in our Books II, III, IV, and V.

Europeans were largely unaware of the Avesta until after the seventeenth century, when, in the growth of trade with India, manuscript copies began to reach Europe. The French scholar A. H. Anquetil du Perron (1731–1805) went to India, learned to read the Avestan language from a Parsi priest in Surat, acquired manuscripts, and produced a translation. European study of the Avesta subsequently paralleled and drew support from the study of the earliest Sanskrit literature, which was linguistically related. More recent translations are more reliable, using tools produced by Mary Boyce, who had a Sanskrit scholastic background and became fluent in the Persian Avestan cognate languages as preserved in the rural Zoroastrian communities of Iran, where she actually chose to live among Zoroastrian villagers for a considerable period of time.

The core of the surviving or extant Avesta is a small collection of writings called the Gathas, universally recognized as prophetic utterances by Zoroaster himself. We refer to their language as Gathic Avestan, an ancient Indo-European language that serves as a link between Sanskrit and Hindi to the southeast and Greek and Latin to the northwest, each with their own linguistic offshoots.

At each stage of the Avesta's development, it also displays a linguistic affinity with Aramaic, its linguistic contemporary as spoken in Persia, and a link with both Hebrew and Sanskrit texts, West and East. The Gathas have an oracular quality that is rhetorical and poetically melodic—an apocalyptic literature, the first of that genre in the world. Like other ancient linguistic traditions, these factors make them difficult to translate, so verses of the Avesta are cherished by Zoroastrians today in the original as memorized. There are only about six thousand words in the Gathas by Zoroaster himself, recorded in five distinct poems, each with its own meter. They present the great Persian prophet's sublime expression of belief in one uncreated Lord of Wisdom, and they outline what this God expects of people in the universal and the personal struggle between good and evil, between truth and falsehood. God's will is presented as both invitation and command, detailed equally in worship and in good deeds as opposed to false gods and bad deeds.

The second surviving "text" of the Avesta was possibly written by a school of Zoroaster's disciples, probably during his lifetime or soon after, although Mary Boyce, as the world's leading academic authority on the Gathic Avestan dialect, believed it, too, may have been composed entirely by Zoroaster later in his life. Titled "Worship in Seven Chapters" in translation, it is known in the Zoroastrian community as the *Yasna Haptanhaiti*. The prayers in these seven chapters are more like hymns than poems, invoking the Lord of Wisdom as well as the sacred devas or "guardian angels" who protect the earth, sky, and sea. In direct correspondence to the prophet's teaching, they profess devotion to the truth and seek the happiness and fulfillment of the believers in serving God in good thoughts (worship) and in good deeds (action).

The third book, simply known as *Yasna*, "Worship," begins at chapter 28, implying that the seven chapters of the Yasna Haptanhaiti was once preceded by twenty other poems, chapters, or *sutras* by Zoroaster or his disciples, including his five Gathas. This leaves fifteen missing sutras as the mother lode of what we hope to find in someday unearthing the complete Avesta. Yasna itself is primarily liturgical, consisting of rubrics and instructions for worship. The Yasna has seventy-two chapters at present and appears rather complete. Written somewhat later in a dialect known as "Younger Avestan," in it we catch a glimpse of creationism and cosmological inferences from its introduction of the old devas of the Vedic pantheon. They are called *yazatas*, and they are regarded as spirits whose only purpose now is to serve and glorify the Lord of Wisdom.

A fourth collection, titled the *Visparad*, is much smaller at this point, also written in a Younger Avestan dialect. Its purpose is to simply comment on much of what we find in the first three collections. There may be much of the Visparad yet to be found, but its value will be less than the extended Gathas referred to above.

The fifth series of documents is called the *Yashts*, or "Services" of worship. There are twenty-one complete Yashts, and other bits and pieces, all based on ancient Vedic hymns used by Buddhists and Hindus still today; the comparison is instructive. These Yashts have been thoroughly reworked in the Avesta to laud the yazatas as models for humans to emulate in service to the Lord of Wisdom. Ahura Mazda is extolled, using the Younger Avestan translation of his name, *Ormazd*, which came into use even before the Common Era, although modern Zoroastrians have maintained or returned to the use of *Ahuramazda*.

In spite of their beauty, in the Yashts the Zoroastrian religion appears to begin the transition toward dualism, a form of Zoroastrianism that did not finally survive. There are yasht hymns to specific yazatas, or reinvigorated Vedic devas, like *Mah*, the Moonlight, or *Tir*, the Starshine, and *Aban*, the Waterfall. The latter features a recycled Vedic hymn to the river goddess *Ardvi Sura Anahita*, a hymn still in use among Hindus in the twenty-first century. These days, a similar concept of angelic presences, long associated with Catholic and Orthodox Christian tradition in the West, appears to be undergoing a popular revival among Jews, Protestants, and Muslims in popular cultures of the West. Such hymn poems are among the most sublime passages in the Avesta, and they may remind us of the romantic devotion to nature found in "new age" greeting cards and recordings used for meditation today. We find some of them represented in the Quran in a more theologically complete form as revealed to the Prophet, according to Islamic understanding of such transmissions.

The danger was always in compromising the rigorous abstraction of Zoroaster's original monotheistic or monistic vision of the Oneness of God. That danger is illustrated in Yashts extolling the beauty of green pastures and still waters, but without any shepherd. Others extol the endurance of the *Fravashis*, the souls of good people, but no reference to the goodness of God. The fire may give a certain charm to the hearth, but without the warmth of God's spirit it represents, these most beautiful moments may be but fleeting illusions. This Zoroastrianism resembles a modern greeting-card

religion, with beautiful sentiment but few demands, subject only, if we are correct, to such sentiments being revealed to Muhammad in an appropriate form acceptable to God—much like their re-presentation also in Hebrew and Christian revelations.

The balance needed for the use of such imagery to experience and to reflect God's glory was about to be lost in Zoroastrianism. Once the power of these aesthetic devas was no longer used to serve and glorify God, and as they themselves became the object of meditation or worship, the direct encounter between humans and God was gone. With it went the impetus for personal morality and the imperative for social justice, both lost in the loveliness and beauty of an antiseptic religion that never dirties its hands—perhaps a precursor to sermons and discussions in many synagogues, churches, and masjids today, warning about a failure to distinguish between the requirements of the Creator and the desires of the created. This is a subject prominent in the Eastern texts we are about to examine, discussed in sermons in temples, stupas, and shrines.

The sixth and concluding section in the extant Avesta material is the *Vendidad*, intended to exorcise demons, but in confirming their power, the Vendidad reinforces many of the negative stereotypes of Zoroastrianism that have existed in many quarters. Published sometime after 300 CE, halfway between the lifetimes of Jesus and Muhammad, it continues the momentum of Vedic revival in the service of a dualistic worldview Zoroaster would possibly have found abhorrent. Without a solid underpinning based upon the Oneness of God, Zoroastrianism by this time bore little resemblance to the pristine faith encountered by the Jews in Babylon. The Vendidad appears to be a recapitulation of earlier texts, now lost, but the clumsy use of the Avestan language gives it a strained tone. Its prescriptions for the purification of women in menstruation, priests *in flagrante*, and animals and corpses are said to be still observed in remote rural Zoroastrian villages in Iran, though less so in India and abroad. The Vendidad is either ignored or scorned by many urbane Zoroastrians today in Tehran, Mumbai, London, Toronto, New York, and Sydney, where sins like adultery, child abuse, apostasy, sorcery, and profanity no longer require hanging, flaying, infestation, beheading, or dismemberment—penalties like those also abjured by Christians, Jews, and others in comparatively recent times despite the appearance of such extreme measures in scripture.

In addition to these large and significant Zoroastrian Avesta texts, there is also the *Khordah Avesta*, the "Little Avesta" still in use as their prayer book by Zoroastrians today. Composed and collected at an undetermined time during one of the attempts to recover texts and summarize the teachings in a worshipful context, the Khordah Avesta contains quotes from all the other extant collections, as well as fragments not found anywhere else. A number of verses in which God proclaims his name to be "I AM" will occasion our return to the Little Avesta when we consider Zoroaster's debt to Moses at the burning bush, similar I AM passages uttered by Jesus in the Christian Gospel, and frequently by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a late addition to the *Mahabharata* possibly dating from the Axial Age.

The extant Zoroastrian Scriptures currently represent about 20 percent of the original, which would have been somewhat larger than the entire Christian Bible. What

Revelation[4]

In accord with the laws of primordial existence,
The Day of Judgment shall come.
The wicked and the righteous together
Shall see their falsehoods and their honesty weighed up.

The person who is honest to others, whether kith or kin, O Lord,
Or even the ones who serve the needs of cattle in the field,
Shall themselves find pasture and peace.

So, God, I worship you and seek to avoid disobedience,
Whether in the challenges of family, or in the life of the clan,
In community service, or with ignorance like beasts in the field.

Reveal to me your purpose and your requirements,
So that I may attain your dominion,
The path of life that is in accord with your will.

As your priest, I call for truth and seek to fulfill my calling.
Assist me to undertake my ministry to the people,
By taking counsel with you, O Lord of Wisdom.

Come to me now, in your manifest essence, O God.
May my faith in you be vindicated among the believers.
Let all your promises to me be seen to be true.

All that was, everything that is, and all that shall be comes from You.
You reward us all according to our faithfulness, and we pray
That we may grow in righteousness in response to your dominion.

O Lord, you are the Mighty One of Wisdom.
Devotion and truth which nurture human life belong to you.
Hear my prayer and have mercy upon me in any reckoning to be made.

Arise within me, O Lord, and fulfill my desire
To serve you perfectly with unfailing devotion.
Accept my self-offering and confer your power for good.

From afar, draw near and reveal yourself to me.
Let me share in your sovereign reign, O Lord,
And instruct your people in devotion and in truth.

As an offering, this camel herder gives body and breath,
So that you may be served in good thoughts and good deeds,
Described in words that correspond to your dominion.
Everything that is good in life comes from you, O Lord of Wisdom.

Glory to God[5]

I realized that your very nature is bountiful, O God,
When I recognized you as the originator of life.
You offer both words of revelation and deeds which bear fruit.
Sun, moon and stars of creation reflect your glory, as may we.

As this turning point of realization, Lord, you come and bless.
Your sovereignty and your wisdom lead us on to truth.
Our devotion will allow you to guide us in wisdom.

When your wisdom encircled me and inquired of me,
"Who are you? To what people do you belong?
What will it take for your Lord to engage you?"

Then I answered you, first and foremost, I am a simple Camel Herder.
But I am an enemy of falsehood and lying, as best I know.
My goal in life is to respond to the glory I see in you, Lord,
To worship and praise you with songs of rejoicing.

Salvation[6]

I know I am ineffective here, My Wise Lord.
To which land shall I flee?
Where shall I seek refuge?
I am excluded from family and clan.

The community I would serve has rejected me
And the tyrants of the territory are no better.
How can I please you, Lord, where there is no response?

My cattle are few and my followers are scattered.
I lament my situation to you as my only true friend.
Give me a vision of your strength in Wisdom.

O Lord of Wisdom, when will you send your Redeemers,
To bring in the sparkling light of salvation,
The Redeemers who offer inspiration and guidance?
As for me, here and now, I rely on your Spirit alone.

This I Ask[7]

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
How are you to be worshipped?
O Lord of Wisdom, will you speak to me as a friend?
And may other worshippers gain wisdom from our encounter?

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
Can life be renewed by salvation during this existence,
And can human beings be blessed through understanding,
With your truth acting as the healer, and you as our friend?

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
At the beginning of creation, who was the father of order?
Who set the sun and the stars in their orbits
and caused the moon to wax and wane?
These things and many more I long to understand, Lord God of Wisdom.

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
Who holds up the earth and who keeps the sky from falling?
Who brought water into being to nourish the plants?
Who but you, Wise Lord, is the breath of the wind and the spirit of the cloud?

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
Which worker of wonders called forth the speed of light
Across the expanse of darkness, in rhythms of sleep and waking?
From whom came times of dawn, mid-day and nightfall to regulate our work?

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
How am I to grow in understanding of
Your revelations enshrined in sublime teachings?
I learned of them first through your wisdom, my greatest joy.

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
How am I to remain faithful to you in daily living?
Will you teach me, Lord, how to be loyal to your sovereignty?
Or is it only you that can dwell in truth and wisdom?

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
Is the revelation I received for everyone,
And will it be enough to sustain my livelihood?
Or am I to live a life of devotion apart from the world?

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
How shall others who see the vision express their devotion?
I was chosen to spread abroad your truth,
But I look upon others with apprehension.

This I ask of you, so tell me truly Lord,
Who is really a disciple of the truth and who lives by lies?
Am I to proclaim your truth to those who are hostile,
Or is salvation intended for those who receive it gladly?

Day of Judgment[8]

Protect me as long as this perishable world is dominant, O Lord,
Until wickedness and lies are obliterated in the Day of Judgment.
Mortals and immortals alike, both good and evil, abound,
But your promise of salvation gives your devotees the courage to go on.

Tell me, O Lord of Wisdom, since you know all things,
Will the just overcome the unjust in this life,
Or do we await the Day of Judgment
For the glorious renewal of life that is to come?

Right teaching is available to the one who is able to understand
The truth from you, O Lord of Wisdom, giver of all good.
In your benevolence, you provide the most profound insights,
Those that are integral to your wise understanding.

So in your great wisdom, O Lord,
Welcome those mortals who respond to your invitation.
Those whose thoughts and actions are in accord
With your desires and purposes.

Let good rulers govern us rather than corrupt,
So that surrounded by good governance,
We may live in piety and in harmony with nature,
As symbolized by the contentment of the cow.

For it is our cattle that provide for us,
Even as we provide for them.
And the vegetation so prevalent in creation
Remains as the context for the life we share.

In such a life, why should cruelty and violence prevail?
Let all who would triumph do so with understanding
Of the truth which underlies our existence,
And which draws us together for worship in your house, O God.

Truly I acknowledge your dominion, O Wise Lord,
What will you provide for me in response to my devotion?
Where will I find the resources for the followers you desire
To promote your cause of justice and of truth?

When will I be able to perceive the manifestation of sovereignty
Which will pit your truth against the hostile malice all around us?
Let me see the specific expression of your truth
In the coming Savior, who brings his reward with him.

O Lord of Wisdom, when will mortals see salvation?
When do we eliminate our intoxication with power,
Which deludes both the rulers and their people
And through which these lands are corrupted?

When, O Wise Lord, can we expect to see devotion and justice combine
To give safety and good pasture beneath your sovereign control?
Who will establish peace and security in the midst of blood-thirsty conflict?
From whom will the penetrating insights come to set us free in truth?

Such will be the Saviours and Redeemers of the lands,
Working through wisdom in harmony with truth.
Your Saoshyants will fulfill your purposes in the universe.
They are destined to prevail against all the forces of doom.

This selection of clustered verses, paraphrased after the pattern used by Mary Boyce and some others, serves to illustrate the intimacy between Zoroaster and God. It is limited to excerpts from Gathas widely accepted as being by Zoroaster himself, expressed with a spiritual sophistication that is a breakthrough as compared with both the older theological constructs of his Vedic predecessors and the awkward caricatures of his religion represented by previous Western translations. It is not suggested that the above paraphrases represent an advance in linguistic scholarship. If there is any improvement in the presentation, it is derived from a more flowing English syntax and the application of our growing knowledge about Zoroaster, his influence, and his prophetic passion.

In the cadences presented here we may at last glimpse the turning point in which belief develops into the spiritual power that transformed the people of the ancient world, as stated, "from a creaturely dependence to active partnership with the Divine"

6

The Fraternal Twins of World Religions

Monism for Monotheists

READERS MAY HAVE BARELY TAKEN NOTE OF THE COMMENT BY KARL FRIEDRICH GELDNER IN the exordium, "The Zarvanites represented Ormazd and Ahriman as twin sons proceeding from the fundamental principle of all—*Zrvana Akarana*, or limitless time." Few have even heard of the Zarvanites, and yet this Zoroastrian cult in the Near West may be illustrative of the Zoroastrian influence in mainstream Eastern and Oriental thought, Hindu and Buddhist in particular. Monism and monotheism do not look alike—hence "fraternal" in the title of this chapter—but twins they may be, with spiritual DNA indicating perhaps two strands of common parentage in different Zoroastrian manifestations, East and West.

Zurvan, as a name for the *Ultimate*, or God, from the Sanskrit word *Sarva*, via the Avestan *zurvan*, came to mean "infinity," and was referred to as *The Ancient of Days* in hymns and prayers. The name is freighted with semantic inferences describing a monistic deity, as found in India and throughout the East. In the Middle West (Western Persia and west from there), Zurvanism, as it existed for centuries, refers to Zurvan as the God of infinity in time and space, known simply as the One. The name Zurvan was revived from Vedic tradition about a hundred years after Zoroaster, whose teachings the cult claimed to correctly interpret, rightly or wrongly regarding monotheism as merely a step to monism. The latent dualism in Zoroastrianism was a problem thus solved by regarding good and bad, justice and evil, right and wrong, and other opposites as manifestations of the two divinities, *Spenta Mainyu* (Benevolent Spirit) and *Angra Mainyu* (Malevolent Spirit), twin brother offspring of Zurvan and his creation. They were known to people as Ahura Mazda (Lord of Wisdom) and Ahriman (The Adversary). By correct dealing with both these devas, the devotees aspired to ultimate Oneness with the eternal and infinite Zurvan.

None of this might matter very much, except that Zurvanism is an illustration of Zoroastrian monism accessible to Western scholars, assisting us to understand the impact of Zoroastrianism in the development of monism in the East. The Zurvan cult simmered through western areas of the Persian Empire in the last half of the Achaemenid period, during the rule of the descendants of Cyrus, and actually held sway in most of the later Sassanid period, ending in 651 CE under the Muslims. Zurvanism disappeared by the tenth century, while monotheistic Zoroastrianism has survived in reduced circumstances until the modern era. The importance of Zurvanism to us is as an illustration of how Zoroaster's message acted as a stimulus, triggering a variety of responses in the Axial Age including monism, prevalent in the East but also visible in the West early in the Common Era, through Spinoza to "New Age" religion and other trends in our time.

The connection between Zoroastrianism and monism is perhaps easily documented in the West but possibly more dominant in the East, where it may be pervasive in most religious traditions. The particular dichotomy between monism and monotheism, inherited by the world from the followers of Zoroaster, may form the basis of one of the main religious discussions in the twenty-first century. We will return to what this means shortly, but before affirming the Zoroastrian heritage of Eastern monism, let us at least establish the bona fides of Zurvanism and monism in the Middle West, since the whole concept may be new to many readers. This will be an esoteric exercise to prepare us for Books II, III, IV, and V of this compendium, devoted to monism in the East, before returning to a new appreciation of what this may mean to the world of the twenty-first century in Books VI and VII.

The oldest reference to the Zurvan sect is attributed to Eudemus of Rhodes (370–300 BCE) in his *History of Theology*, cited by Damascius in his *Difficulties and Solutions of First Principles* in the sixth century CE. In it Eudemus describes a cult among the Persians that considered Infinity/Eternity the primordial parent of Light and Darkness,[1] seeming references to Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. There are also contemporary inscriptions invoking the name of Zurvan, but most written sources on this subject during the Sassanian period are from Christian critics, both Armenian and Syrian.

For that matter, if all we had to go on were those early Christian commentaries on the lengthy Sassanian era, we would assume that Zoroastrianism was through and through monistic, as it certainly was (by names other than Zurvanite) in the Far East. As it was, Mazdean monotheism was the norm through most of the classical Achaemenid era, again after the Sassanians, and then down through the ages to modern times. But we highlight the Zurvanites to show how the monistic phenomenon was an option, even in the West, where they were always the minority party. Even under Sassanian rule their *modus operandi* might be compared to modern "Charismatic Catholics," who are enthusiastic in private or in small groups but also attend regular mass as loyal members of the Roman Catholic Church. Even when the ancient Persian royal family embraced Zurvanistism for a time, the state religion maintained the rituals of what was considered orthodox monotheistic Mazdianism.

After Zoroaster's time, and in extant Avesta texts published previous to the Sassanian era, Zurvan appears in the evolving scriptural compendium only twice. Zurvan is praised as represented by *Vata* and *Vayu* (Space and Air),[2] and plants only thrive as they develop according to the pattern established over "time" as embodied in Zurvan.[3] Zurvan also appears twice in passing in the more recent extant Vendidad section of the Avesta, but without significance, and makes no appearance in the Gathas of Zoroaster himself, nor in the Yazatas, and certainly not in the *Khordeh Avesta* (Little Avesta) of enduring popularity.

However, something had apparently given these Zurvanites the idea that Zoroastrianism (even if they did not yet all use that name) should be interpreted in a monistic fashion. In the Avesta as we have it, the Yasna section on worship begins as "chapter 28" of the whole. Obviously somewhere between the five opening Gatha poems by Zoroaster and the seven chapters of *Yasna Haptanhaiti*, there were once fifteen chapters, poems, or sutras of other material that might have been highly influential at some stage of the religion's development. Three scraps of verses usually prepended to the Gathas may be from that corpus, where the Gathas habitually address Ahura Mazda (Lord of Widsom), whereas the Yasnas after the gap are mainly about the Mindful Lord. As perhaps from the prayer poems now missing in between, the scraps of these "detached mantras," as they are sometimes called, address a "Mindful One" (a term we will see again when we consider monistic aspects of Buddhism and Hinduism).

This is not much to go on, since with five Gathas containing six thousand words, we may assume the missing fifteen early sutras could contain eighteen thousand words or more. But the opening words of the first one, for example, could have come straight out of the *Dhammapada* or the *Bhagavad Gita*:

> Just as he is the Master one would choose,
> So the guidance of right and good thoughts,
> Of actions is assigned to the Mindful One,
> With power to the Lord as guru to the destitute.[4]

In later reconstructions of verses remembered by the majority, were most of these verses neglected or forgotten because they were the treasure of only the heterodox Zurvanites? Is this the basis of Zoroastrian stimulation that was taken farther east by Magi in China and Zurvan travellers and interlocutors in India? We will know if and when we find the "Dead Zee Scrolls."

In the seventh century CE, Zoroastrianism was supplanted by Islam throughout the Persian Empire, gradually in areas of Mazdean orthodox monotheism like the northwestern provinces of Zoroaster's heartland, and in the villages, but rapidly among the ruling Sassanian elite with their Zurvanistic tendencies. Islam would have had little patience with a monism in which people strive to unite with God rather than to worship and serve God, especially since that monism presented itself in twin divinities of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman and other dualistic manifestations. However, Islamic

respect for Zoroastrian monotheism continued down through the ages in a Persian Islamic culture that still today respectfully reserves a seat in the parliament of Iran for a Zoroastrian representative.

Meanwhile, in Greece, Parmenides of Elia propounded a monistic view of reality in his poem *On Nature*. In a section of one poem[5] Parmenides says that "what is (i.e., reality) must be understood as being One," that "change is an illusion," and that "existence is timeless." In another section called "The Way of Opinion," he argues that the world of appearances is a false realm from which we must become detached in order to enter into the reality of the One. The monism of Parmenides is virtually identical to Vedantic Hinduism, though it is hard to imagine any link except Zurvanic Zoroastrianism. Of course, Parmenides never quotes Zoroaster, but he greatly influenced Plato, who does. Indeed, Plato presents Parmenides as being in conflict with Socrates in the play *Parmenides*, where the monism of Parmenides stands in contrast to the monotheism of Socrates, both conceivably responding to the Zoroastrian stimuli that were in the air. Monotheism won out in the West, but we may observe that the collapse of faith in the gods of Olympus happened at the very same time that in the East the old Vedic gods became subsumed under the umbrella of monism, both developments taking place in the wake of Zoroaster's life and ministry.

There is enough similarity between Zurvan and the Lord of Creation (Prajapati) in Vedic literature,[6] as well as in literature ascribed to the mythical poet Orpheus concerning the origins of the gods, for us to at least recognize the fluidity of these ideas in the fifth century BCE, when both Zurvanites in Persia and philosophers in Greece were seeking ancient sanction for their understandings of Zoroastrian ideas. To go a step further, these inferences begin to look like mounting evidence that monotheism and monism have roots that are similar, if not intertwined. This is a helpful appreciation of the Vedic subtext of religions east and west, before we move on.

In the west, an ultimate "One," drawing "all" to itself by operating through the facade of twin deva divinities, good and evil, finally led to a pessimistic fatalism that characterized a classical Zurvanism, not too different from the fatalism sometimes identified with Indian religions. This might stand in contrast to a more positive Mazdeanism in which devotees are encouraged to serve Ahura Mazda in the attainment of the victory of good over evil in an eternal kingdom. Of course, if we acknowledge the fatalism in serene monism, we must also concede the damage of activist monotheism, from warfare to climate change, brought about by human activity among monotheists.

For Zurvanism to have simmered for several centuries, to have survived foreign domination, and to have flourished in the new Sassanian era, there must have been an agency, if not a separate organization, of these monistic Zoroastrians. Such a zealous minority can be identified as the Magi, whose earlier religion, before virtually all of them identified with the Zoroastrian state religion, may well have been dualistic. The indications of this would take up too much space to document here, but the opportunity to highlight the potential dualism in Zoroaster's message might have helped the Magi to feel at home under the Zoroastrian umbrella. It blended well with the Zurvan tendency to present the conflict between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman as a creative ten-

sion leading to resolution in the Oneness of God rather than the victory of good over evil. Is this the face of Zoroastrianism the Magi presented in China?

This is speculation, but the Magi did disappear from the stage of world history during the quashing of Zurvanism by Islam, while more orthodox Mazdean Zoroastrians survived. Another speculation of interest might be regarding the effect, if any, that the conflict between Zurvanism and Islam might have had on the development of militant Shiism in Iran as a distinct branch of Islam. More to the point in reference to future material to be presented in Book II of this compendium is the current and irrefutable evidence that the Magi became established in China even before Zoroaster's time. They would surely have maintained their Iranian connections and may well have been the conduit of Zoroastrian monistic ideas to the East.[7]

Monotheism dominated the scene throughout the Middle East and all over the West all through the Middle Ages in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, while the exact opposite was the case in Southeast Asia and the Orient, where monism prevailed in Taoism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. That equilibrium was challenged in the East perhaps first by Confucianism and later by the arrival of European missionaries following the Renaissance and Reformation eras, and in the West by the philosophical writings of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677). Regarded by many as the thinker who laid the groundwork for the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as well as for modern biblical criticism, current conceptions of the self, and, arguably, the universe, Spinoza has come to be considered one of Western philosophy's most important thinkers. Indeed, philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel said of all contemporary philosophers, "You are either a Spinozist or you are not a philosopher at all."[8]

It is traditionally assumed that Spinoza worked his way into a profound monism in isolation from any monistic precedents elsewhere in the world. However, a careful analysis, not of his writings but of his connections, might stimulate some interesting second thoughts in that regard with reference to this study. A resemblance between Spinoza's philosophy and Eastern monistic traditions has been the subject of many previous investigations based on textual evidence alone; we will build on that by taking a different approach.

Theodore Goldstucker of Germany, a noted scholar of Sanskrit literature, was one among several in the nineteenth century who noticed one particular connection that seemed too obvious to ignore. He described the similarities between Spinoza's religious ideas and the Vedanta beliefs of India in some detail. Spinoza's conception of God is "so exact a representation of the ideas of the Vedanta that we might have suspected its founder to have borrowed the fundamental principles of his system from the Hindus, did his biography not satisfy us that he was wholly unacquainted with their doctrines."[9] Others have been equally spellbound by the comparison. "Spinoza was a man whose very life is a picture of that moral purity and intellectual indifference to the transitory charms of this world, which is the constant longing of the true Vedanta philosopher. Comparing the fundamental ideas of both, we should have no difficulty in proving that had Spinoza been a Hindu, his system would in all probability mark a last phase of the Vedanta philosophy."[10]

equate as a summary of this great philosopher's religion, but American critic Harold Bloom has written, "As a teacher of reality, Spinoza practiced his own wisdom, and was surely one of the most exemplary human beings ever to have lived."[24] Since Spinoza, there have been countless individuals in the West who have exemplified a monistic faith, but there has been no significant *movement* as such, akin to Zurvanism. The late twentieth-century vogue of interest in Hinduism and Buddhism in the West may have been a harbinger of profound discussions to come in the interfaith environment of the twenty-first century, in which religion is both fluid and dynamic.

Indeed, the religious situation is suddenly fluid and dynamic throughout the whole world, and the relationship between monotheism and monism is a critical issue. Western monotheism continues to attract interest in the East with the spectacular growth of Christianity in China, Korea, the Philippines, Africa, and elsewhere, even as churches appear to diminish in parts of the West while they recover strength in Russia and Eastern Europe and take new forms in South America. At the same time, Eastern religious influence grows daily in the West through the influx and increasing pervasiveness of millions of monistic immigrants, establishing temples of many kinds among the churches, synagogues, and also mosques in cities large and small where Judaism remains the anchor of monotheism, Christianity witnesses to God's immanence, and Islam reflects God's transcendence as a bridge between East and West. With such influences affecting us all where we live and even where we worship, in a New Axial Age the phenomenon known as New Age religion may actually find its place within various religious communities, coming to mean more than movie stars like Shirley MacLaine running along a beach, exclaiming to the heavens, "I am God."

Monotheism and monism might be regarded as the double-helix DNA of the spiritual life of humanity. By coincidence or otherwise, both strands of this double helix appeared West and East in the philosophies and religious expressions of the Axial Age, immediately following a burst of energy emitted by the Persian prophet Zoroaster (628–551 BCE), whose spectacular career flared into prominence around 588 BCE, at least according to Iranian and Arabic records, now accepted by something approaching a broad consensus, except in certain strictly academic circles.

Monotheism appeared among the Israelites much earlier and got a tremendous boost among the Jews in the Babylonian Exile with the advent of rule there by Zoroastrians whose founder may have received monotheism from Israelite exiles in the first place—just seventy-five years earlier. With phenomenal consequences at the beginning of the Axial Age, monism came on the world scene later than monotheism's first appearance with Moses, but it blossomed in the East in the writings and preaching of Lao Tzu in China and the Buddha in India in precisely the same post-Zoroaster historical epoch as monotheism began its spread and flourished in the West. Lao Tzu and the Buddha were followed by the ethical reforms of Confucius in China and a reformation of Hinduism in India, respectively, with Confucianism as perhaps a reaction to foreign religious influence on behalf of Chinese traditional values, and developments in Hinduism building on such influences, much as Christianity and Islam eventually followed Judaism to the fore as champions of monotheism.

Lao Tzu and Buddha may have both been stimulated by a degree of animation surrounding the spread of Zoroastrian influence, but it is not contended that either they or their followers were Zoroastrians. Rather, in response to that vision of personal intimacy with the transcendence of divinity, and the impact of the Zoroastrian program of "right deeds" to accompany these "right thoughts," they would have presented their own genius in concert with spiritual advances that, while perhaps not "worldwide," seem to have extended throughout the length of the Silk Route and into its peripheral offshoots at either end.

At the risk of obfuscation of the issues, let us attempt to address the differences and the relationship between monotheism and monism in practice. Many in the West have adopted the misconception that oriental religions require those who seek unity with the One to give up their individuality, to perhaps retire to a mountain retreat, and to forswear family, business, and other responsibilities. Later Buddhism may make the case that such withdrawal is permitted or even required, but that is not our understanding of the *Tao Te Ching*, where we become One with God in the very thick of community activity and "go with the flow" in the midst of responsible family life, as will become apparent.

In a fulsome understanding of monism, does the individual identity endure in this life and in the life to come? In a marriage, we sometimes employ the biblical image of two becoming one, even described in the scripture as "one flesh," but their oneness allows for individual particularity within the union. This may be a helpful illustration of the *at-one-ment* with God that monistic faith offers, in contrast to the Western view of "atonement" for sins, which implies not oneness but reconciliation of particularities, which remain very separate as creator and creature. Both "monotheism" and "monism" are relatively new terms, originating in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and completely unknown to the ancients, East or West. Rather than being seen as contradictory, in this early period of the twenty-first century, we might begin to consider the two concepts as poles or endpoints on a continuum. Some believers are at one end and some at the other (and perhaps many in between), but in our time it may be possible to maintain one's own faith position with integrity while benefitting from an enriching vision from the other end of the spectrum.

The three most familiar forms of monotheism in the West were explored in *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran*. Monism too may take a variety of forms, the three most widely recognized being Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism as featured in this compendium. The Oneness we seek is described as the *Flow of Life* in Taoism, in which a person swims against the current, spits into the wind, or rows against the tide at one's peril, while another person experiences fulfillment as an individual by finding one's destiny within the flow as a part of the whole. Buddhism finds unity in the liberation that comes from an emptying out of individual particularities into a fullness that is the essence of enlightenment. Confucianism, if not a reaction to these concepts and trends, is at least distinguished by some distance from monism, though it can hardly be described as merely monotheistic, given its respect for polytheistic aspects of ancestor worship. Hinduism, as exemplified in the *Bhagavad Gita*, will be

described in this study as a bridge between monotheism and monism, with monotheism as a way station *en route* to the Ultimate, despite the necessity of a respectful nod to polytheism along the way.

At the risk of oversimplification, in the interest of stretching the understanding of those for whom this is religious "new think," let us attempt to explore the relationship of monotheism to monism from a Christian perspective. Christianity is chosen for this exercise not only as the religion of some contributors to this study (and possibly the majority of our readers) but also as being, by about a billion adherents, the largest religion in the world, providing an example most likely to be easily understood by many others, monistic and monotheistic alike.

To begin with, it is perhaps often presumed by casual observers that monotheists pray and monists meditate. But while prayer is addressed "to God" as one who is separate and meditation is thinking "about God" as a means to become One with God, it is easily observed that monotheists recite little poems about God and monists do address God directly. The prayers of Christian children like "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep" and "God is great and God is good, let us thank God for our food" are not actually prayers because they are *about* our intentions, and *about* God, rather than directly addressed to God. (Prayers would be "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray You Lord my soul to keep" and "God you are great, God you are good, and we thank you for our food.") However, the following Hindu "meditation on peace" from the *Atharva Veda* is actually a proper prayer, addressed *to* God:

> Supreme Lord, let there be peace in the sky and in the atmosphere.
> Let there be peace in the plant world and in the forests.
> Let the cosmic powers be peaceful.
> Let the Brahman, the true essence and source of life, be peaceful.
> Let there be undiluted and fulfilling peace everywhere.

This distinction is important as it goes to the heart of spiritual practice, so let us continue in a practical vein. The object of either prayer or meditation is "God" for traditional Christians and "The Godhead" for orthodox Hindus. However, Christians actually see Christ as the manifest presence of God and think of him as the head ("God has put all things under the feet of Christ and has made him the head over all things"),[25] while, as noted, Hindus may indeed address God as "Supreme Lord."

St. Paul goes further by linking all believers into the one body:

> The body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each of them, as he chose.[26]

The believer is not the Head, but the believer is in one body with the Head, perhaps a humble toenail offering praise, laments, thanksgivings, supplications, and listening to the Head in prayer.

This Oneness for Christians comes about as unity with not only the Head but also other members. Perhaps we should have taken a moment to connect the concept of "metaphor" with meaning and truth, but suffice it to say that this casts a whole new light on the prayer of Jesus for his disciples and the church: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that may all be *one*. As you, Father, are in me and as I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me, I have given them, so that they may be *one*, as we are *one*" (italics added).[27]

This nontraditional emphasis on *oneness* between believers and God and between believers and one another may be uncomfortable for Christians who see such headship and oneness language as merely symbolic, but for literalists these words point to the possibility of a more monistic understanding of Christianity, leading on to an understanding of heaven with perhaps less anthropomorphic individualism, though there, too, the *oneness* may enfold many parts. In Christian prayer, the Godhead may have the face of Jesus; for Jews and Muslims, the face is veiled; for Hindus, it may appear as the face of Vishnu, Krishna, or perhaps Kali, the latter being the feminine face of divine empowerment. While Taoists will have no such image of the face of Godhead, they may prayerfully picture the great Flow of life, a wide river in which each drop plays a role and has both character and purpose. But to appreciate monism, Christians and others may not need to leave traditional doctrines they find efficacious, as their monotheistic dichotomy between Creator and creature could gently expand in the direction of monistic enrichment in wholeness. To offer a Christian example, "To tell the truth in love, we must all grow up into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."[28] The scriptural texts in Books II, III, IV, and V will provide grist for the mill, concluding with the *Bhagavad Gita*, which bridges these seeming differences more completely from an Eastern perspective. Before we go there, we should confirm our grasp on the issue to be raised from the perspective of the believer, the devotee, the religious practitioner.

Thomas Jefferson, framer of the American Declaration of Independence and third president of the United States, never called himself a deist but is often regarded as such—deism being the belief that God has created the universe but remains apart from it and permits the creation to administer itself through natural laws. Deism rejects the supernatural aspects of religion, such as belief that revelation is contained in the scriptures, and rejects the notion that God intervenes in human affairs, but it stresses the importance of moral conduct. While both monists and monotheists can be deists, so as to prevent misunderstanding it may be important to point out that neither usually are.

When the believer or devotee addresses God as "Eternal One," the word "One" may have one of two meanings. The address may be to "One who is separate from us" like

an individual, even the greatest individual, in which case the monotheistic believer's inflection in the address is likely to be "ETERNAL One." Or the address may be to "One who embraces all," meaning that the devotee aspires to feel a part of a greater whole, in which case the monistic inflection would be closer to "Eternal ONE." If this seems to be splitting hairs, it is not, and it leads on to another question.

Is it possible that while the concepts of God are different, the praxis, or the practical requirements of religious life may be the same? Might monistic and monotheistic experiences of God result in similar behavior (or not)? Is this possibly an area of fruitful discussion in interfaith conversation moving forward? Is going with the Taoist Flow, as a toenail cooperating with the Godhead, the monist's equivalent of the monotheist seeking to know the will of God and to serve the Creator Lord? To further conceptualize monism from a monotheistic perspective, it might be said that while Jews, Christians, and Muslims might have no difficulty *praying* to the Godhead, they would be more likely to see themselves as *meditating* on the Flow as the ongoing will and purpose of God.

We have not here touched on an important distinction between monism and monotheism in popular cultures, East and West—namely, the relationship or connection with the environment of natural world. It is commonly supposed that monists are more inclined to live in harmony with nature, since they see themselves as being one with it, while monotheists may feel more free to exploit nature for their own benefit. However, the extreme pollution in countries where much of the population espouses monism raises a question about that theory, and for monotheists the Hebrew Scripture teaches that humanity is "to have responsibility for the earth and to replenish it,"[29] in a passage thought now to have come down from Vedic tradition, equally dishonored in practice in both monistic and monotheistic traditions.

Before leaving this exercise of attempting to define the line between monotheism and monism, and finding it perhaps thinner than traditionally imagined, it may be of interest to note that while monotheistic Judaism flirted with polytheism (in scripture), or at least henotheism (worshipping a God who is merely the best among gods), it has rarely manifested monistic tendencies, except in the case of certain notable individuals like Spinoza. This is passing strange, given that the bedrock monotheistic verse in the Torah is where God says to Moses, "I am who I am,"[30] at least in English translation. Many books have been written on the exact meaning of this verse in Hebrew, but the most obvious possibility is rarely mentioned. Where Exodus 3:14b has the word *ehyeh*, Exodus 3:15 has the name YHWH, both derived from the verb *hayah,* conveying the meaning of "to exist" or the verb "to be." In a footnote in the 1985 *JPS Tanakh*, the uncertainty over the meaning of *ehyeh* is noted, and two possible literal translations identified: "*I am*" and "*I will be*." Neither of these is as entirely satisfactory in Hebrew as something more essentially monistic, like "I am what is" or "I am Existence."

Perhaps Buddhism, as we shall see, takes us to a place where humanity finds its most intimate connection to divinity when an astonishing fullness is discovered once

book two

THE TAOIST TESTAMENT

introduction

Magi in China and Intellectual Ferment in Eurasia at the Middle of the First Millennium BCE[1]

Victor H. Mair

XT TO THE BIBLE AND THE *BHAGAVAD GITA*, THE *TAO TE CHING* IS THE MOST TRANSLATED book in the world. Well over a hundred different renditions of the Taoist classic have been made into English alone, not to mention the dozens in German, French, Italian, Dutch, Latin, and other European languages. There are several reasons for the superabundance of translations. The first is that the *Tao Te Ching* is considered the fundamental text of both philosophical and religious Taoism. Indeed, the Tao, or Way, which is at the heart of the *Tao Te Ching*, is also the centerpiece of all Chinese religion and thought. Naturally, different schools and sects bring somewhat different slants to the Tao, but all subscribe to the notion that there is a single overarching Way that encompasses everything in the universe.[2] As such, the *Tao Te Ching* also shares crucial points of similarity with other major religious scriptures the world over.

The second reason for the popularity of the *Tao Te Ching* is its brevity. There are few bona fide classics that are so short, and yet so packed with food for thought. One can read and reread the *Tao Te Ching* scores of times without exhausting the insights it offers.

The third aspect that accounts for the wide repute of the *Tao Te Ching* is its deceptive simplicity: In the words of the author himself, it is supposedly "very easy to understand," when actually it is quite difficult to comprehend fully. Paradox is the essence of the *Tao Te Ching*, so much so that even scholars with a solid grounding in classical Chinese cannot be sure they have grasped what the Old Master is really saying in his pithy maxims. For this reason I vowed two decades ago that I would never attempt to translate the *Tao Te Ching*. However, an unexpected event forced me to recant: the

recent discovery of two ancient manuscripts in China made it possible to produce a totally new translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, far more accurate and reliable that any published previously. These manuscripts are at least half a millennium older than any commonly translated versions (a matter not unrelated to the quest described in this compendium to find certain other documents of that era).

This translation of the *Tao Te Ching* is based wholly on these newfound manuscripts. Their availability has made it possible to strip away the distortions and obfuscations of a tradition that has striven for two millennia to improve the text with commentaries and interpretations more amenable to various religious, philosophical, and political persuasions. And they have provided me with the means to make the translation in this book significantly different from all other previously existing translations.

In late 1973, when Chinese archaeologists working at Ma-wang-tui in central China, about a hundred miles south of the Yangtze River, unearthed two silk manuscripts of the *Tao Te Ching*, scholars of ancient China around the world were overjoyed. Forty-nine other important items, including the earliest extant version of the *Book of Changes*,[3] were also found. It will be many years before sinologists fully absorb the wealth of new materials made available by the Ma-wang-tui manuscript finds, but we are already beginning to reap important benefits.

By relying on the Ma-wang-tui manuscripts for the present translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, I have solved a number of problems that have puzzled interpreters of the text for centuries. For example, line 8 of chapter 77 reads, "To die but not be forgotten." In previously available editions of the *Tao Te Ching*, this reads, "To die but not to perish," which does not really make sense even in a religious Taoist context. There are dozens of such incidents in which the Ma-wang-tui manuscripts are much more intelligible than the old standard editions, which are the basis of almost all other translations.[4]

In Chinese indigenous religion, the individuals charged with divination concerning questions and interpreting the responses from the gods were called *wu*, who were also healers. The usual translations given for *wu* are "shaman, sorcerer, wizard, witch, and magician." Although it is the most common rendering, "shaman" is not really appropriate, since it signifies a type of Tungusic medium whose activities are altogether different from those of the *wu*. The term "sorcerer" is even less suitable for *wu*, inasmuch as it signifies the use of supernatural power over others through the assistance of evil spirits. "Wizard" and "witch" are also poor matches for *wu* because they cast spells and are thought to have dealings with the devil—hardly the types of concerns displayed by the *wu*. "Magician" is slightly preferable to the other four translations, but its modern English connotations of "illusionist" and "prestidigitator" are likewise inappropriate for *wu*. However, as we shall soon discover, "magician" in its ancient etymological sense offers a much better fit than any of the other customary renderings of *wu*.

Just who were these mighty Magi (*wu*)? Two small heads carved from mollusk shells and discovered in the autumn of 1980 within the precincts of the Zhou royal palace at Fufeng in Shaanxi Province provide valuable clues to the identity of the *wu*. Dating to early eighth century BCE, the tiny (about 2.85 centimeters in height) figures clearly de-

pict the features of Caucasoid or Europoid individuals. What is more, one of the heads has carved on its top the archaic character for *wu*, 巫, unmistakably identifying him as a religious specialist. Still more astonishing are the facts that Old Sinitic reconstruction of *wu* is roughly *m(y)a(g), that the archaic character for *wu* (*m(y)a[g]) is identical to the ancient sign of magicians (in the old, primary sense) in the West, and that the duties and abilities of the *wu* were roughly the same as those of early Iranian Magi.

A Magi or magus (from Persian *maguš*) signifies someone who has power or who is able, from the Indo-European root <**magh*- ("be able"). The Magi were members of the Zoroastrian priestly caste who possessed special knowledge of astrology. They represent the "old" religion, and *magu* is a western Iranian term for priest (the comparable term in Avestan was *athravan*, and in Sanskrit it was *atharvan*) that was still in use in Sassanian times (by then modified to *mog*). Originally, it seemed to have conveyed an ethnic designation, as Herodotus describes the *magoi* as one of the Median tribes (and Media is in western Iran). They appear at first to have been involved with polytheism, but by Achaemenid times they associated themselves with the worship of Ahura Mazda and consequently came into the Zoroastrian "fold." Their presence was thought to be essential for the success of sacrificial rites. Like their *wu* *m(y)a(g) cousins in East Asian history, the West Asian Magi specialized in taking omens, interpreting dreams, and carrying out ritual sacrifices, and they were experts in cosmogony, cosmology, astronomy, and astrology.[5]

> Of the three major doctrines (the "San Jiao") of China—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—the first is fundamentally a native product, the second is mainly a foreign importation, and the third is a fusion of indigenous and alien elements. As established doctrines or religions, the San Jiao evolved chiefly during the late classical period through the early medieval period, roughly the second century BCE through the sixth century CE. If we seek to identify the single most important characteristic of indigenous Chinese religion, nothing can compete with ancestor worship.[6] Indeed from the very first historically verifiable dynasty, the Shang (from around 1600 BCE to the middle of the eleventh century BCE), rituals dedicated to the ancestors were essential to the wellbeing of the state and its rulers. But it is evident that the study of the history of religion in late classical and early medieval China cannot ignore the interface between Sinitic and non-Sinitic elements and influences.[7]

> It is often claimed that China and India did not have any significant cultural intercourse until the first century A.D. This is false, for there is now available artifactual evidence of Buddhism in China from no later than the middle of the first century B.C. and China is mentioned by name, particularly as the source of silk, in a number of still earlier Indian texts. Trade between India and China, through a variety of overland and ocean routes, flourished well before the sayings of the Old Master came to be written down. As suggested earlier, wherever trade occurs between two countries, mutual cultural borrowing is inevitable.[8]

> In spite of the political disruption and the social chaos of the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), intellectually this was by far the most exciting and lively era in the whole

have actually come more than a generation later. The Buddha may have offered his earliest verses of the *Dhammapada* as early as 563 BCE by traditional dating, though it is recently seen as a widespread teaching in India during the fifth century, followed by the *Bhagavad Gita* as a reform of Hinduism sometime around 400 BCE. Again, none of this was Zoroastrianism per se, and some of these other dates are almost as uncertain as were Zoroaster's dates until recently. However, if a spiritual revolution erupted in Balkh or Bactria, somewhere halfway along the Silk Route early in the sixth century BCE, the philosophical and religious ripple effect to the east fits as well as it does for the classical age of prophets in Israel and the golden age of philosophy in Greece to the west.

Beginning with the *Tao Te Ching*, we will see that unity with the One facilitates the highest and finest of personal, family, vocational, business, and community relationships. Is this One to be iMagined as "God"? The answer is "yes," in a monistic sense, but there are difficulties in this manner of thinking for those to whom such a concept is new.

When commentators say that the Chinese *Tao* of Lao Tzu or the *Mind* of Indian religions are not "deities," they almost sound like Buddhists and other monists today who announce in popular media that they "do not believe in God." By this they mean that they do not believe in a separate divine entity, worthy of worship but eternally separate from a created universe. To monists, the destiny of each "individual" is to overcome this separation and "realize" the individual's being as part of the One, intimately integrated though perhaps remaining identifiable.

Though he had an important disciple in Zhuangzi, whose book *Chuang Tzu* expounds and expands the vision of the *Tao Te Ching*, the latter is the obvious choice of a testament for the work of Lao Tzu and the essential introduction to Taoism, an indispensable testament of the monistic East. While the *Analects* of Confucianism, the *Dhammapada* of Buddhism, and the *Bhagavad Gita* of Hinduism are about the size of the Torah, the Quran, and the New Testament, respectively, in our related *Three Testaments* compendium presenting the scriptures of Western monotheism, the *Tao Te Ching* is slightly smaller than the others. These portable and popular testaments became mass produced in the East at about the time the New Testament and the Quran were introduced there, and they serve well as primary "testaments" and testimonial summaries of the vast bodies of Eastern monist scriptures.

Many translations of the *Tao Te Ching* from earlier centuries reflect the best scholarship of those times but are almost unintelligible, mirroring our current experience with the Zoroastrian Avesta, partially solved by my own paraphrases in this text. Some popular editions of the twentieth century are inspirational but of questionable scholarship, given recent discoveries of textual variants. We are happy in this text to feature the text that resolves these issues for the *Tao Te Ching* in a rather complete manner. The translation by Victor H. Mair of the University of Philadelphia is also the first, and so far the only, presentation to rearrange the order of the chapters to conform with the 1973 Ma-wang-tui discovery of two most ancient silk manuscripts

of the *Tao Te Ching* by Chinese archaeologists. This numbering of verses represents the order in the most recent manuscripts; in parentheses we show the traditional order. Mair thus resolves a host of difficult problems with the text, to the delight of leading scholars around the world.

According to tradition, Lao Tzu worked at the Imperial Palace as a custodian of the Imperial Archives, where he might have collected information from home and abroad, observing the way of human beings, the way of the natural environment, and the way of the stars in the heavens. It can be assumed that here any new ideas from the Magi of the Persian Empire would come to his attention through the agency of any Magi operating in China.

Upon retiring, Lao decided to leave China and departed on an ox. As he reached the Han-Ku pass, the border guard, Yin-His, refused to let him pass until he left some evidence of his highly regarded teaching, so that those remaining and future generations could benefit from it. Lao Tzu consented, sat down, and wrote out the eighty-one short chapters of his *Simple Way*, which we know as the *Tao Te Ching*. As the story goes, he then remounted his ox and departed, travelling west, never to be seen again.

The little that we are told about the life of Lao Tzu makes him sound more myth than man. Traditional stories say that he lived in the sixth century BCE. After being in his mother's womb for many years, he was finally born with a beard, looking like an old man and given the name Lao Tzu, meaning "Old Master." Stories claim he was born laughing, a possible direct connection to Zoroaster, of whom the same story is told in the extant Avesta Scriptures.

Our translator, Victor Mair, was invited to contribute certain materials to this study because his evidence for the presence of Magi in China, even before Zoroaster, illustrates that Chinese civilization may not have developed in complete isolation from the rest of the world after all. He also briefly elucidated the relationship between Taoism and both Confucianism and Buddhism in China, and, later in this compendium, Mair illuminates even more cogently the connections between the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

After Zoroaster, the Magi in Iran had converted *en masse* to the Zoroastrian state religion in deference to the reign of Cyrus and out of respect for Zoroastrian theology, the latest thing. Their confreres in China would certainly have had influence with thinkers like Lao Tzu, possibly reflected in the oriental monism of his *Tao Te Ching*. This putative link is not a *sine qua non* of ancient religious connections at that pivotal moment in history, but it offers a thread that forms a subtext of our study and inquiry. Having already seen Professor Mair's brief introduction, explaining what makes this translation unique to date, and contextual evidence for the influence of the Magi in China, so critical to the argument of this book, we will now let the *Tao Te Ching* speak for itself.

While our four Eastern testaments appear in chronological order in this compendium, it is almost passing strange how they also seem to succeed each other in meaning and in development of our understanding. The *Tao Te Ching* is inscrutably enigmatic at

points, but Rabbi Mates-Muchin, herself Chinese, successfully employs Taoist-sounding phrases in the opening paragraphs of her introduction to the Confucian *Analects*. Likewise the *Analects*, to some extent, raise questions about traditional morality that are addressed, if not answered, by the Buddha in the *Dhammapada* . . . and on to the *Bhagavad Gita*, which draws the Eastern testaments together in a manner none of the participant contributors might have intended or expected.

7

tao te ching

Translated by Victor H. Mair

integrity

1. (38)*

The person of superior integrity
does not insist upon his integrity;
For this reason, he has integrity.
The person of inferior integrity
never loses sight of his integrity;
For this reason, he lacks integrity.

The person of superior integrity takes no action,
nor has he a purpose for acting.
The person of superior humaneness takes action,
but has no purpose for acting.
The person of superior righteousness takes action,
and has a purpose for acting.
The person of superior etiquette takes action,
but others do not respond to him;
Whereupon he rolls up his sleeves
and coerces them.

Therefore,
When the Way is lost,
afterward comes integrity.

*Parentheses indicate "chapter" numbering in translations and "originals" prior to discovery of the earlier Ma-wang-tui manuscripts in 1973 by Chinese archaeologists and adopted by Victor H. Mair and others.

When integrity is lost,
afterward comes humaneness.
When humaneness is lost,
afterward comes righteousness.
When righteousness is lost, afterward comes etiquette.

Now,
Etiquette is the attenuation of trustworthiness,
and the source of disorder.
Foreknowledge is but the blossomy ornament of the Way,
and the source of ignorance.

For this reason,
The great man resides in substance,
not in attenuation.
He resides in fruitful reality,
not in blossomy ornament.

Therefore,
He rejects the one and adopts the other.

2. (39)

In olden times, these attained unity:
Heaven attained unity,
and thereby became pure.
Earth attained unity,
and thereby became tranquil.
The spirits attained unity,
and thereby became divine.
The valley attained unity,
and thereby became full.
Feudal lords and kings attained unity,
and thereby all was put right.

Yet, if pushed to the extreme,
It implies that,
If heaven were ever pure,
it would be likely to rend.
It implies that,
If earth were ever tranquil,
It would be likely to quake.
It implies that,

Therefore,
That which people teach,
After deliberation, I also teach people.

Therefore,
"The tyrant does not die a natural death"
I take this as my mentor.

6. (43)

The softest thing under heaven
gallops triumphantly over
The hardest thing under heaven.

Nonbeing penetrates nonspace.
Hence,
I know the advantages of nonaction.

The doctrine without words,
The advantage of nonaction—
few under heaven can realize these!

7. (44)

Name or person,
which is nearer?
Person or property,
which is dearer?
Gain or loss,
which is drearier?

Many loves entail great costs,
Many riches entail heavy losses.

Know contentment and you shall not be disgraced,
Know satisfaction and you shall not be imperiled;
then you will long endure.

8. (45)

Great perfection appears defective,
but its usefulness is not diminished.
Great fullness appears empty,
but its usefulness is not impaired.

Great straightness seems crooked,
Great cleverness seems clumsy,
Great triumph seems awkward.

Bustling about vanquishes cold,
standing still vanquishes heat.

Pure and still,
one can put things right everywhere under heaven.

9. (46)

When the Way prevails under heaven,
swift horses are relegated to fertilizing fields.
When the Way does not prevail under heaven,
war-horses breed in the suburbs.

No guilt is greater than giving in to desire,
No disaster is greater than discontent,
No crime is more grievous than the desire for gain.

Therefore,
Contentment that derives from knowing
when to be content
is eternal contentment.

10. (47)

Without going out-of-doors,
one may know all under heaven;
Without peering through windows,
one may know the Way of heaven.

The farther one goes,
The less one knows.

For this reason,
The sage knows without journeying,
understands without looking,
accomplishes without acting.

11. (48)

The pursuit of learning results in daily increase,
Hearing the Way leads to daily decrease.

Decrease and again decrease,
until you reach nonaction.
Through nonaction,
no action is left undone.

Should one desire to gain all under heaven,
One should remain ever free of involvements,
For,
Just as surely as one becomes involved,
One is unfit for gaining all under heaven.

12. (49)

The sage never has a mind of his own;
He considers the minds of common people to be his mind.

Treat well those who are good,
Also treat well those who are not good;
thus is goodness attained.

Be sincere to those who are sincere,
Also be sincere to those who are insincere;
thus is sincerity attained.

The sage
is self-effacing in his keeling with all under heaven,
and bemuddles his mind for the sake of all under heaven.

The common people all rivet their eyes and ears upon him,
And the sage make them all chuckle like children.

13. (50)

A person comes forth to life and enters into death.
Three out of ten are partners of life,
Three out of ten are partners in death,
And the people whose every movement leads them to the
land of death because they cling to life
Are also three out of ten.

Now,
What is the reason for this?
It is because they cling to life.

Indeed,
I have heard that
One who is good at preserving life
does not avoid tigers and rhinoceroses
when he walks in the hills;
nor does he put on armor and take up weapons
when he enters a battle.
The rhinoceros has no place to jab its horn,
The tiger has no place to fasten its claws,
Weapons have no place to admit their blades.

Now
What is the reason for this?
Because on him there are no mortal spots.

14. (51)

The Way gives birth to them and integrity nurtures them.
Matter forms them and function completes them.

For this reason,
The myriad creatures respect the Way and esteem integrity.
Respect for the Way and esteem for integrity
are by no means conferred upon them
but always occur naturally.

The Way gives birth to them,
nurtures them,
rears them,
follows them,
shelters them,
toughens them,
sustains them,
protects them.
It gives birth but does not possess,
acts but does not presume,
rears but does not control.

This is what is called "mysterious integrity."

15. (52)

Everything under heaven has a beginning
which be thought of as the mother

of all under heaven.
Having realized the mother,
you thereby know her children.
Knowing her children,
go back to abide with the mother.
To the end of your life,
you will not be imperiled.

Stopple the orifices of your heart,
close your doors;
your whole life you will not suffer.
Open the gate of your heart,
meddle with your affairs;
your whole life you will be beyond salvation.

Seeing what is small is called insight,
Abiding in softness is called strength.

Use your light to return to insight,
Be not an inheritor of personal calamity.

This is called "following the constant."

16. (53)

If I were possessed of the slightest knowledge,
traveling on the great Way,
My fear would be to go astray.
The great Way is quite level,
but the people are much enamored of mountain trails.

The court is thoroughly deserted,
The fields are choked with weeds,
The granaries are altogether empty.

Still there are some who
wear fancy designs and brilliant colors,
sharp swords hanging at their sides,
are sated with food,
overflowing with possessions and wealth.

This is called "the brazenness of a bandit."
The brazenness of a bandit is surely not the Way!

The more clever devices people have,
the more confused the state and ruling house;
The more knowledge people have,
the more strange things spring up;
The more legal affairs are given prominence,
the more numerous bandits and thieves.

For this reason,
The sage has a saying:
"I take no action,
yet the people transform themselves;
I am fond of stillness,
yet the people correct themselves;
I do not interfere in affairs,
yet the people enrich themselves;
I desire not to desire,
yet the people of themselves become
simple as unhewn logs."

21. (58)

When the government is anarchic,
the people are honest;
when government is meddlesome,
the state is lacking.

Disaster is that whereon good fortune depends,
Good fortune is that wherein disaster lurks.
Who knows their limits?

When there is no uprightness,
correct reverts to crafty,
good reverts to gruesome.

The delusion of mankind,
How long have been its days!

For this reason, be
Square but not cutting,
Angular but not prickly,
Straight but not arrogant,
Bright but not dazzling.

22. (59)

To rule men and serve heaven,
there is nothing like thrift.

Now
Only through thrift
can one be prepared;
Being prepared
means having a heavy store of integrity;
With a heavy store of integrity,
he can overcome everything.
Able to overcome everything,
no one knows his limits;
If no one knows his limits,
he can have the kingdom;
Having the mother of the kingdom,
he can long endure.
This is called "sinking roots firm and deep,
the Way of long life and lasting vision."

23. (60)

Ruling a big kingdom is like cooking a small fish.
If one oversees all under heaven in accord with the Way,
demons have no spirit.
It is not that the demons have no spirit,
but that their spirits do not harm people.
It is not merely that their spirits do not harm people,
but that the sage also does not harm them.

Now,
When neither harms the other,
integrity accrues to both.

24. (61)

A large state is like a low-lying estuary,
the female of all under heaven.
In the congress of all under heaven,
the female always conquers the male through her stillness.
Because she is still,
it is fitting for her to lie low.
By lying beneath a small state,

a large state can take over a small state.
By lying beneath a large state
a small state can be taken over by a large state.

Therefore,
One may either take over or be taken over by lying low.

Therefore,
The large state wishes only to annex and nurture others;
The small state wants only to join with and serve others.

Now,
Since both get what they want,
It is fitting for the large state to lie low.

25. (62)

The Way is the cistern of the myriad creatures;
It is the treasure of the good man,
And that which is treasured by the bad man.

Beautiful words can be traded,
Noble deeds can be used as gifts for others.
Why should we reject even what is bad about men?

Therefore,
When the son of heaven is enthroned
or the three ministers are installed,
Although they may have large jade disks
And be preceded by teams of four horses,
It would be better for them to sit down
and make progress in this.

What is the reason for the ancients
to value this so highly?
Did they not say:
"Seek and thou shalt receive;
Sin and thou shalt be forgiven"?

Therefore,
It is valued by all under heaven.

26. (63)

Act through nonaction,
Handle affairs through non-interference,
Taste what has no taste,
Regard the small as great, the few as many,
Repay resentment with integrity.

Undertake difficult tasks
by approaching what is easy in them;
Do great deeds
by focusing on their minute aspects.

All difficulties under heaven arise from what is easy,
All great things under heaven arise from what is minute.

For this reason,
The sage never strives to do what is great.
Therefore,
He can achieve greatness.

One who lightly assents
will seldom be believed;
One who thinks everything is easy
will encounter much difficulty.

For this reason,
Even the sage considers things difficult.
Therefore,
In the end he is without difficulty.

27. (64)

What is secure is easily grasped,
What has no omens is easily forestalled,
What is brittle is easily split,
What is minuscule is easily dispersed.

Act before there is a problem;
Bring order before there is disorder.

A tree that fills the arms' embrace
is born from a downy shoot;
A terrace nine layers high

starts from basketful of earth;
An ascent of a hundred strides
begins beneath one's foot.

Who acts fails;
Who grasps loses.

For this reason,
The sage does not act.
Therefore,
He does not fail.
He does not grasp.
Therefore,
He does not lose.

In pursuing their affairs,
people often fail when they are close to success.
Therefore,
If one is as cautious at the end as at the beginning,
there will be no failures.

For this reason,
The sage desires to be without desire
and does not prize goods that are hard to obtain;
He learns not to learn
and reverts to what the masses pass by.

Thus, he can help the myriad creatures be natural,
but dares not act.

28. (65)

The ancients who practiced the Way
did not enlighten the people with it;
They used it, rather, to stupefy them.

The people are hard to rule
because they have too much knowledge.
Therefore,
Ruling a state through knowledge is to rob the state;
Ruling a state through ignorance
brings integrity to the state.