

Honorable Mention of 2022 Essay Contest
Ms. Mantra Roointan from California, USA
Zoroastrian Center of attendance: CZC-LA

Can one be a Zoroastrian without a belief in God?

When defining a religion, it is said to be the belief or worship in a god, spirit, or divine being. The Gathas which is a collection of poems that were written by Zarathustra, the prophet of Zoroastrianism, elaborates on ideas such as the divine truth or Asha, the Vohuman, or good mind, righteousness, and more. Throughout this scripture, we also observe mentions of Ahura Mazda which Zarathustra calls God. With the translation of Ahura Mazda being Lord of Wisdom or Wise Being, Zarathustra describes his realization of God as a result of his intellect and good mind. Although the teachings in the Gathas are universal and can be adopted by anyone, according to the Gathas, the belief in God, Ahura Mazda, is an essential part of Zoroastrianism as a religion.

The Gathas include Ahura Mazda throughout the verses and this reference of God, emphasizes it as an essential aspect of the Zoroastrian faith. The Gathas were created by Zarathustra as a form of religious expression through hymns and poems. At times such as in Yasna 28 Verse 10, Zarathustra prays for guidance asking, "O, Mazda Ahura (Lord of Wisdom and Life) fulfill the desires of those whom you know to be upright and enlightened, because of their purity of mind and truthfulness. I believe that no prayers offered devotedly to Thee by sincere persons with high and noble objectives shall remain unanswered on your part" (Translated by Mobed Firouz Azargoshasb). In this verse, Zarathustra describes how those who have "purity of mind" and believe in Ahura Mazda shall be granted their wishes and prayers. Those that have good intentions and follow the path of Asha will receive answers to their prayers for Ahura Mazda. According to this verse, Zarathustra emphasizes how the belief in Ahura Mazda is necessary to find one's right path. With guidance from Ahura Mazda, we can identify the path of righteousness and once we do, our prayers will be responded to. Additionally, Zarathustra alludes to the idea that Ahura Mazda is watching over all the followers of the faith and recognizes those that strive to follow the path of Asha.

Therefore, those who do not believe in God or Ahura Mazda are unable to establish the connection that Zarathustra describes in the Gathas.

In a later verse, Zarathustra acknowledges what he calls “daevas” which are beings that are mentioned repeatedly throughout the scripture meaning adversaries of Ahura Mazda. These individuals “separate themselves from Vohuman and Will of a Mazda Ahura (Lord of Wisdom and Life). They escaped from the path of Asha” (Yasna Hath 32, Verse 4). Zarathustra highlights the daevas or those that do not believe in Ahura Mazda as people who will not be able to find their path of righteousness and goodness. Their lack of belief creates a barrier that prevents them from identifying the good deeds and thoughts without guidance from Ahura Mazda. Therefore, Zarathustra’s message in this verse was to highlight the importance of the belief in Ahura Mazda or God in Zoroastrianism. In addition, Zarathustra later explains that “One who acts with love and justice, O Ahura... and one who fosters zealously the good creation of God, he shall truly enjoy the realm of Asha and Vohuman, that is the paradise” (Yasna Hath 33 Verse 3). Again, Zarathustra recognizes the importance of believing in Ahura Mazda in order to find one’s good mind and the path of Asha. Once this is achieved, Ahura Mazda’s faithful supporters will find happiness and “paradise” within their lives.

Overall, Ahura Mazda’s recognition as the God of Wisdom and Creator of Life throughout the Gathas highlights it as an essential aspect of Zoroastrianism. Without believing in God, the ideas of Zoroastrianism that Zarathustra obtained from Ahura Mazda’s teachings are essentially disregarded. Moreover, Zarathustra, who created this doctrine of “good conscious”, realized Ahura Mazda through his righteous mind and therefore, emphasizes God’s role in allowing him to understand teachings that he shares through the Gathas.