

## Reincarnation.

I use the word 'reincarnation' here to mean the return of the soul to a physical form, ~ whether back here on earth, or in some other reality, or both (although not at the same time, obviously).

Is reincarnation specifically mentioned in the Gathas? Opinions differ because translations of Y49:11 differ, and there are differences in the manuscripts themselves in the transmission of Old Avestan words in that verse. Some translators do not see reincarnation in that verse. Some do.

In light of this uncertainty, we cannot accurately say that reincarnation specifically is, or is not, mentioned in the Gathas. But (for the sake of argument), even if we conclude that the Gathas do not mention reincarnation, as most students of the Gathas will agree, many of the Zarathushtra's most profound ideas are derived through inferences (connecting the dots). Unfortunately, we tend to think in pigeon-holes. To understand Zarathushtra's thought, we need to take a step back from the compartmentalized thinking of our pre-conditioned minds and look at the full (inter-connected) spectrum of his thought.

Based on what Zarathushtra does specifically teach, the inference is compelling that he did indeed believe in some sort of reincarnation. Indeed, in my view, no other inference is logically possible. Let me demonstrate with just two examples of Zarathushtra's teachings which require this conclusion. Unfortunately, 'reincarnation' has come to be regarded by some (who cannot have given it much thought) as a kind of 'fuzzy thinking'. So I ask that you take off the spectacles of pre-conditioned thought, and cultural bias, and look at the evidence with an open mind.

### *First example:*

There is no dispute that in the Gathas, the true (correct) order of existence (*aša-*) is the nature of the Divine and includes two qualities (among many) ~ a generous lovingkindness, and also 'justice' (being fair').<sup>1</sup>

Now think of the many inequalities and differences ~ in health, poverty, opportunities, loving relationships, and a thousand and one other life experiences ~ that exist between individual members of the human race (and also other life forms), to say nothing of the undisputed (and often unearned) calamities that some living beings endure, while others do not. In light of such differences, if we live only one life, how can the way in which existence has been ordered be good, correct, just (let alone 'beneficent')? Whether difficult experiences are inflicted by natural phenomena, or accidents, or the wrongful choices of others, if each person has only one life, the 'injustice' and 'non-beneficence' of the differences between the life of any one human being and another (to say nothing of other life forms) is undeniable, especially when suffered by persons who are innocent of having caused or provoked such natural phenomena in this life.

A four year old child who experiences the terrors of a tsunami before it kills her. If she has only one life to live, is this 'justice', let alone 'beneficence', when compared with a four year old who escapes the tsunami and lives to experience a long (but perhaps haunted) life, or a four year old who enjoys a happy childhood without tsunamis, and lives a long productive life? Or a long, wasted life?

What of child or adult who is born with a serious, life-long, mental or physical disability. If s/he has just one life to live, where is the 'fairness', the 'beneficence' in such a life, compared with that of a child who can go to school, play with friends, learn, engage in sports, dance, and grow up to enjoy an active, life?

What of a person who dies of starvation in a drought. If he has only one life to live, where is the 'fairness', the 'beneficence' in such a life, compared with a person who has never known hunger?

There are many, many, such unfair, unjust, life circumstances in our existence ~ affecting children and adults, humans and other life forms. The examples are legion, and indeed are not exceptions, but rather are the rule. Such unjust life circumstances must also have existed in Zarathushtra's society. We know that he himself endured persecution and slander, and he describes the existence of tyranny, oppression, fury, cruelty, violence, bondage, et cetera inflicted by the religious and secular authorities of his society.

So the conclusion is inescapable. If there is only one life here for each of us, then the way in which existence has been ordered is neither just, nor good, nor beneficial, nor loving. Yet Zarathushtra teaches the exact opposite ~ that the true (correct) order of existence is wholly good, wholly beneficial, just (as in fair), indeed generous, beneficent; and that the Divine in which he believes, who personifies the true order of existence, is wholly 'good' *vahišta-*, the superlative of 'beneficial' *spāništa-*, just (as in fair), generous, loving (*hudāh-*), compassionate (*mārəždika-*).

*Second example.*

There is no dispute that in Zarathushtra's thought, man in his present state of being, is a mix of qualities that are more-good, more-beneficial on the one hand, and 'bad', 'harmful', 'inimical' on the other (Y30:3, Y45:2).

Although there are differences of opinion among linguists as to the meanings of the words which comprise the qualities of the Divine (amesha spenta), there can be no dispute that the Gathas specifically show that mortals presently have five of these Divine qualities (although less than completely). And while mortals do not presently have the last two ~ completeness and non-deathness (*haurvatāt-* and *amərətāt-*) ~ they are capable of attaining them,<sup>2</sup> and indeed in Zarathushtra's thought, they inevitably will.<sup>3</sup> Zarathushtra teaches (and some later texts confirm) that through our choices, experiences, and mutual, loving help, we evolve or progress from a mixed state of being to one that is wholly beneficial-sacred, wholly in accord with the true order of existence ~ a 'completeness', that is *haurvatāt-*.<sup>4</sup>

Now Zarathushtra was highly intelligent. It could not have escaped his attention that none of us, by the time we die, has attained the exalted state of completeness ~ the divine quality that is *haurvatāt-*. So if there is only one life, and at death, we still are imperfect (a mix of more-good and bad) then Zarathushtra's teaching (that life is a progression towards completeness) would obviously be false. On the other hand, for those who believe in the conventional 'heaven' and the conventional 'hell', if there is only one life, and if at death we still are a mix of good and bad, then we would have the unjust situation of a person who has some bad in him going to heaven, and the person who has some good in him going to hell. And the introduction of *Hamestegan* (the equivalent of Purgatory in other religions), does not change that injustice ~ premised as it is on the idea that a lesser degree of punishment (in *Hamestegan*) resolves the injustice, because in any event, punishing a fallible being for acting in the very way in which he was created ~ fallible ~ is not just.

It has been contended that a later text states that it is *possible* to achieve completeness *haurvatāt-* in one life time. But *possible* does not cut it. The question is not, is it *possible*. The question is, does this actually happen. It is not shown to have happened in the Gathas or any later texts of which I am aware. Nor does it accord with the reality of our existence. The vast majority of us are not perfect by the time we die. In light of such evidence, I do not think it is reasonable to encumber Zarathushtra with such a foolish argument ~ especially since he never said so.

So if Zarathushtra's teaching is true ~ that life is a progression towards completeness ~ then there would have to be additional opportunities for this perfecting process to continue ~ whether back here on earth, or in some other reality, he does not say, and we do not know. As the late, great, and dearly loved high priest, Dastur N. D. Minochehr-Homji, said in discussing this subject, it is not reasonable to limit the Divine to this one reality (on earth).<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, if a given lifetime is just one segment in a long, long, chain of such segments ~ each of them part of a process of spiritual growth ~ and if each of us, in the sum total of our many segments, experience all the good things and all the hardships that everyone experiences (at one time or another) as part of this growth process, and if both the pleasant and the difficult happenings in all these segments of living are necessary catalysts for change, necessary agents to help transform us (in many small steps) from a state of being that has 'good' and 'bad' preferences, to one that is the perfection of complete goodness, lovingkindness, ~ wholly in accord with the true (correct) order of existence, a good, loving, generous, just, order ~ then the order of existence (which enables this process of transformation), and the deity who personifies this order of existence, would indeed be just, generous, loving, 'most-good', (to say nothing of intelligent).<sup>6</sup>

It has been objected that no reasonable person could believe in reincarnation, because if the whole idea of reincarnation is that we reap what we sow to enable a process of spiritual growth, how can it do so, when we cannot remember our past lives?

I agree that sometimes we learn better when we remember past misdeeds. (Remembering past misdeeds is constantly happening to me in my life, without any recollection of past misdeeds from a past life!).

On the other hand, for many misdeeds, the educational effect of the law of consequences (that we reap what we sow) would be more effective if we experience the consequences in a new setting, without past recollection. In such cases, if the consequences are severe, and if we remembered the past life misdeed, it would be human nature to try to justify it, or distinguish it from the experience we are having in consequence, and to resent the consequent experience or disagree that it is an appropriate consequence. As a result, our focus would be on excusing, complaining or resenting, instead of focusing on the consequent experience, and we would fail to learn from it. But when we experience an event, based only on what we are then experiencing ~ without the baggage of past recollection ~ we are able to think about it, react to it, on its own merits, enabling the experience to more effectively change our minds, change our preferences, because we do not think the adverse event we are experiencing is 'right' ~ we realize that this is not the way things should be, not the way we want them to be ~ thereby more effectively changing our preferences.

In short, we can only conclude, from the evidence of our reality and from what we see in the Gathas, that if our existence is limited to just one lifetime, Zarathushtra was either dishonest, or a blind fool. But he was neither. Throughout the Gathas, his passion for truth, and his keen intelligence, are obvious, as are his knowledge of the inequities of life ~ which he himself experienced. So the conclusion is inescapable. In light of his teachings, his own life experiences, the injustices in his society which he details, and his conclusion that life is a progression towards completeness, non-deathness, he could not have believed in a good, beneficial, just order of existence which limits each person to just one mortal life. I can think of no other conclusion that is logically possible.

*A different paradigm of reincarnation.*

It is important to be aware however, that in light of Zarathushtra's overall paradigm of existence, the reincarnation which is implied in the Gathas is quite different from conventional notions on the subject. Its focus and purpose is not punishment because of past misdeeds (a revenge-based justice).

In the overall framework of Zarathushtra's thought, the focus and purpose of reincarnation (implied in the Gathas) is to enable spiritual evolution. It is to provide the kinds of experiences ~ earned and unearned ~ necessary to enlarge understanding and change preferences from ones that harm to ones that are good, beneficial. Its purpose is to enable us to attain completely (*haurvatāt*-), the true order of existence (*aša*-), its comprehension (*vohu- manah*- ~ a state of enlightenment), its beneficial embodiment in thought, word and action (*spənta- ārmaiti*-), its good rule (*vohu- xšaθra*-), at which time, the reason for mortality ceases to exist, and a state of being that is no longer bound by mortality (non-deathness *amərətāt*-) is attained.

Another difference is that the paradigm of reincarnation implied in the Gathas has nothing to do with renouncing the desires, joys and delights of our material existence. It is not premised on the idea that life is bondage ~ bondage to our desires, bondage to events beyond our control that cause suffering. It is not premised on the idea that the purpose of reincarnation is to enable a release from desires and therefore from life's bondage and sufferings. An outstanding feature in both the Gathas and in the later Avestan texts is a joy in living ~ an enjoyment of life (lived in a good way) in all its infinite variety ~ in the existences of matter and of mind.

*The later texts.*

It has been argued, that reincarnation could not have been something in which Zarathushtra believed, because there is no mention of it in the later texts. It is true there are no discourses on reincarnation in the later texts that have survived (and that are not doubtful).<sup>7</sup> But it is not without interest that Fox and Pemberton cite ancient historians who wrote that the Magians believed in metempsychosis (a type of reincarnation), which they associated with the mysteries of Mithra.<sup>8</sup> The Magi are thought to have been Zoroastrian priests after the original religion was syncretized with pre-existing, pre-Zarathushtrian, Indo-Iranian religions, including Mithraism. So this is not clear evidence that Zarathushtra himself believed in reincarnation. But it does raise the questions: Did this belief of the Magians originate in Mithraism? Did it originate in Zarathushtra's thought and migrate into Mithraism after the syncretization? We do not know.

So far as ancient Zoroastrian texts are concerned, because of the massive loss of texts following the invasion of Alexander, and later even more so after the Arab invasion of Iran,<sup>9</sup> we cannot affirmatively conclude that reincarnation was not a part of Zoroastrian belief because it is not mentioned in the (surviving) texts. To illustrate.

We are told in the Pahlavi *Dēnkard* 8, that there were 3 Avestan Nasks devoted to commentary on the Gathas.<sup>10</sup> None of these has survived (in Avestan).

Of the 21 Avestan Nasks identified in the Pahlavi *Dēnkard* 8, only one has (purportedly) survived to our times ~ the *Videvdāt* (*Vendidad*), which is so grammatically flawed, that we know it was written long after Avestan times, when the priests were no longer fluent in even Younger Avestan. So in its present form (which in any event appears (to me) to be a collection of disparate texts), it cannot have been composed during Avestan times.<sup>11</sup>

The Avestan texts (in Avestan that is not grammatically faulty) that have survived are mostly chants of praise/worship, or texts governing priestly matters, which survived because they were memorized by the

priests as part of their priestly duties. In fact the Gathas themselves would not have survived if they had not been incorporated at some point in time into the rituals and as such, memorized as chants by the priests.

But there is a section in a YAv. text *Fragment 24*, sometimes called the *Vishtasp Yasht*, which is not evidence of reincarnation, but is not without interest. This *Fragment 24* is in (grammatically corrupt) YAv., so it could not have been composed until many centuries after Avestan times.<sup>12</sup> But it is crafted in the form of blessings and guidance from Zarathushtra (the purported speaker) to King Vishtaspa (the purported recipient), and one of the blessings given is as follows,

"And when thou has fulfilled a duration of a thousand years (mayest thou obtain) the bright, all-happy blissful abode of the holy Ones!" Darmesteter translation.

Regardless of who may have authored this *Fragment*, it is clear that no one could possibly think that 'fulfilling a duration of 1,000 years' could ever occur in one lifetime. So what was the author's intent here? Was he just speaking figuratively ~ using a thousand years to represent a long life? Possibly (but then why use the word "fulfilled"?). Was he using the fulfillment of a thousand years to refer to the full duration of multiple life times necessary for the king to reach 'the most-good existence of the truthful, light-filled, all happiness/enlightenment (my translation of *vahištām ahūm ašaonqm yazamaide raocanhām vīspō.x'āθrām* ~ a frequently repeated YAv. phrase for the ultimate 'good' reward ~ a perfected state of being, paradise)?<sup>13</sup> Possibly.

The Pahlavi texts that we have today were written a few centuries after the Arab invasion.<sup>14</sup> Some of them faithfully and lovingly tried to record ancient beliefs and traditions that were then remembered, so that they would not be lost ~ not distinguishing (perhaps not knowing) the differences between the traditions and beliefs that originated from Zarathushtra's own teachings, and those of the syncretized religion that Zoroastrianism became in YAv. times.<sup>15</sup>

But for all the loss of knowledge after the Arab invasion of Iran, it is interesting that at least two of these Pahlavi texts (without any mention of Mithra) record a traditional belief that only makes sense in the context of reincarnation. Both the following translations are by E. W. West.

The *Bundahishn*, speaking of the soul, says:

"...it is given into the body that it may produce activity, and the body is created only for activity;<sup>16</sup> hence the conclusion is this, that the soul (ruban) is created before and the body after. And both of them changed from the shape of a plant into the shape of man, and the breath (nismo) went spiritually into them, which is the soul (ruban)..." *Bundahishn*, Ch. 15:4 - 5.<sup>17</sup> Words in round parentheses were inserted by E. W. West to indicate the applicable Pahlavi word.

Another Pahlavi text, *Selections of Zad-Sparam*, Ch. 10:5 - 6, says roughly the same thing, except that it speaks of the "glory" instead of the "soul". It says:

"... the glory is given a body so that it may produce activity, and its body is created only for activity. And, afterwards, they changed from the shape of a plant into the shape of man, and the glory went spiritually into them." *Selections of Zad-Sparam*, Ch. 10:5 - 6.<sup>18</sup>

West expresses the opinion that the word 'soul' found in the *Bundahishn* version was corrupted to 'glory' in the *Zad-sparam* text, possibly by a scrivener's error.<sup>19</sup> But (with respect), I do not agree. In certain ancient texts, soul, fire, and glory are used interchangeably.<sup>20</sup> The glory (Av. *x'arənah-*) is the Divine glory which also exists in the living. In the same way, certain texts speak of the fire which is Divine and which also exists

in all things ~ in people, plants, animals, the world itself. And we are told (in a Pahlavi text) that the Divine fire is the same fire that exists in all things. Referring to fire (a metaphor for the enlightened state that is Wisdom personified ~ the Divine), it says,

"...the fire *separated* into five kinds ... And it produced the Propitious fire itself in heaven (garodman); its manifestation is in the fire which is burning on the earth, and its propitiousness is this, that all the kinds are of its nature." *Selections of Zad-spāram*, Ch. 11:1 - 2, SBE 5, p. 184. E. W. West translation. The word in *italics* indicates an insertion by West of a word not in the text, which he believed was implied.

The fires that pervade earthly existence in this text are described as follows:

"...and Auharmazd [Av. *ahura- mazdā-*] produced the creatures bodily for the world; first, the sky; the second, water; the third, earth; the fourth, plants; the fifth, animals; the sixth, mankind. Fire was in all, diffused originally through the six substances..." *Selections of Zad-Spāram*, Ch. 1:20 - 21.<sup>21</sup>

This text is a metaphoric way of saying that the Divine (whose symbol is light/glory/fire) is immanent in all things.

This changing, from the shape of a plant to the shape of a man, mentioned in both the above mentioned Pahlavi texts, finds something of an echo in the poetry of the Sufi poet Rumi, who says:

"I died as a mineral and became a plant,  
I died as a plant and rose to animal,  
I died as animal and I was Man.  
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying? ..."<sup>22</sup>

Rumi lived in the 13th century CE ~ roughly 400 years after the time of the above two Pahlavi texts which were written around the 9th century CE, recording much older traditions and beliefs of Zoroastrianism.<sup>23</sup> So the author(s) of the *Bundahishn*, and the learned high priest Zad-spāram, could not have obtained their ideas about a plant becoming a man, from Rumi.<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion.

We can see from the above evidence that the concept of reincarnation ~ as defined here ~ is a compelling (and indeed the only logical) inference both from Zarathushtra's teachings, and also from the YAv. and Pahlavi texts discussed above (which are not deemed of doubtful authenticity). There well may be more such references in other ancient Avestan and Pahlavi texts. I am not as familiar with the later texts as I am with the Gathas.

In the final analysis, in this as in all things, each of us needs to decide for ourselves whether reincarnation is consistent with Zarathushtra's thought and, in our own quest for truth, whether it makes sense in the context of our own experiences ~ of existence as we perceive it, and of the nature of the Divine, as we believe it to be.

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<sup>1</sup> The chapter *Part One: Truth, Asha*, demonstrates that the 'justice' that is implicit in the true order of existence (*aša-*) is not the revenge/punishment based notion of human justice extrapolated on to the Divine.

<sup>2</sup> See *Part One: Completeness & Non-Deathness, Haurvatat, Ameretat*, for the evidence on which this conclusion is based.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed in *Part Two: Asha & The Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>4</sup> This teaching of the evolution of a soul from a mixed state of being, to one that is wholly in accord with the true order of existence ~ a wholly good, beneficial, order of existence ~ appears throughout the Gathas, and is touched on in many chapters of this book. Here are a few examples (I have probably missed many others):

We see it in Zarathushtra's understanding of the nature and identity of the Divine, some of whose divine qualities mortals have (incompletely), and all of which they are capable of attaining (completely).

We see it in Zarathushtra's idea of how evil is defeated (see *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*).

We see it in the many puzzles that indicate that 'heaven' is a state of being in which man attains the qualities of the Divine completely, see for example in *Part Two: A Question of Reward & the Path; The Puzzle of the Most-Good, Vahishta; The Houses of Paradise and Hell; The Puzzle of the Singular and the Plural; Molten Glowing Metal; The Puzzle of Creation* (and many others); and in *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts*; and the many Gatha verses translated in *Part Six*.

<sup>5</sup> Dastur N. D. Minochehr-Homji's unpublished Chicago Lectures, which at one time I had on tape.

<sup>6</sup> See *Part One: A Friendly Universe*; and *Part Two: Asha and the Checkmate Solution*.

<sup>7</sup> Taraporewala 1951 tells us that the *Desatir*, a later text which he says is neither in Avestan nor Pahlavi, does specifically mention reincarnation, but that its authenticity is not accepted by many scholars. (p. 730).

<sup>8</sup> Fox and Pemberton (1928), in their work *Passages in Greek and Latin Literature Relating to Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism*, (K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, Publication No. 4) mention an ancient Greek text (called today *De Abstinencia*) authored by Porphyry, a Greek philosopher whose date is uncertain but is believed to have been around 234 - 305 CE. This would have been in Sasanian times ~ long after the syncretization of Zarathushtra's religion with that of the deities of his culture which we see in YAv. texts. (see *Part Four: The Syncretization*). In this text, Porphyry states,

"In ... Persia those who are expert in the love of the divine, and who attend to its worship, are called Magians; ... According to Eubulus, ... the Magians are divided into three orders ... all three orders believe that metempsychosis is true in the case of primordial existences which belief they seem to illustrate in the mysteries of Mithras." Fox and Pemberton, p. 86.

The Magi were the 'official priests' of the Persian nation during middle to later Achaemenian times, and are said to have been the priests of the syncretized Zoroastrian religion (many centuries after Zarathushtra).

'Metempsychosis' is "the passing of the soul at death into another body either human or animal." Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1983).

As you can see from the quotation above, we cannot tell from Porphyry's account (of what Eubulus said ~ double hearsay) whether the Magi obtained this belief in metempsychosis from Zarathushtra and simply extended it to the mysteries of Mithra, or whether they obtained this belief only from the religion of Mithra, which by then was a part of the syncretized Zoroastrian religion.

<sup>9</sup> Evidence of the loss of knowledge following the invasion of Alexander (331 BCE), and the Arab invasion of Iran (641 CE) is detailed in *Part Four: Next Of Kin Marriage & The Pahlavi Texts*. I hope to write a separate chapter in *Part Four* on the loss of knowledge caused by these 2 destructive wars (and the long passage of time, during which the grammar and vocabulary of Avestan became unknown).

<sup>10</sup> E. W. West, commenting on information contained in the Pahlavi text *Dēnkard* 8, SBE 37 p. 4, ft. 2.

<sup>11</sup> See *Part Five: The Vendidad, An Overview*.

<sup>12</sup> See *Part Four: Zarathushtra's Date and Place*, in which YAv. texts are quoted which describe Zarathushtra as a figure of great antiquity. Skjaervo has estimated the dates of the Avestan texts as follows:

1,700 to 1,200 BCE composition of the Old Avestan texts;

1,200 to 900 BCE transition period;

900 to 400 BCE composition of the Young Avestan texts.

Skjaervo, *Introduction To Old Avestan*, (updated to Feb. 24, 2022), p. xii.

As you can see, even the earliest YAv. texts were composed many centuries after the Gathas.

<sup>13</sup> See *Part Three: Heaven in Other Avestan Texts* for a discussion of the many YAv. texts that use this phrase (which includes the words *vahištām ahūm ašaonqm* '(the) most good existence of (the) truth-possessing' (a state of being) to describe the 'good' reward that today is called 'heaven' (a place).

<sup>14</sup> See *Part Five: The Pahlavi Texts*.

<sup>15</sup> See *Part Four: The Syncretization*.

<sup>16</sup> This thought echoes the two Gathic verses which are discussed in *Part Six: Yasna 31:11 and 12*.

<sup>17</sup> E. W. West's translation of the Pahlavi text *Bundahishn*, chap. 15:4 - 5, SBE 5, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> E. W. West's translation, *Selections of Zad-Sparam*, SBE 5, p. 184.

<sup>19</sup> West makes the following comment in ft.1, the words in round parentheses are West's.

"The old word *nismō* 'soul' (see Bund. XV, 3, 4), has become corrupted here (by the omission of the initial stroke) into *gadman* 'glory.' This corruption may be due either to Dād-sparam [sic?] not understanding the word (in which case the Bundahish must have been an old book in his time), or else to some later copyist confounding the old word for 'soul' with the better-known 'glory' of the Iranian sovereigns." SBE 5, p. 184, ft. 1.

With respect, I do not agree, because we know from the Younger Avestan and Pahlavi texts that the 'glory' *x'arənah-* in those ancient times was not just the glory of the Iranian sovereigns, but was the glory of the Divine which existed in the members of each segment of society ~ the warriors, the herdsmen and the priests. See *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*, for the evidence on which this statement is based.

<sup>20</sup> See *Part Two: Light, Glory, Fire*.

<sup>21</sup> E. W. West translation of *Selections of Zad-Sparam*, chap. 1:20 - 21, SBE Vol. 5, p. 159.

<sup>22</sup> Rumi (1207 ~ 1273 CE), as translated by A. J. Arberry, and obtained from the website [www.consolatio.com/2005/04\\_i\\_died\\_as\\_a\\_min.html](http://www.consolatio.com/2005/04_i_died_as_a_min.html).

<sup>23</sup> E. W. West estimates (based on factual evidence) that the age of the earliest forms of these two Pahlavi texts, as they exist today would likely have been in the 9th century CE, SBE 5, pp. xli - xliii.

<sup>24</sup> Did Rumi and the Sufis obtain the idea from the Zoroastrians of their time? We have no way of knowing for sure. Even if Rumi did so, it would not detract from the significance and beauty of Rumi's thought and poetry.

Although Sufism is now a sect of Islam, Robert Graves has expressed the opinion that:

"The characteristic Sufic signature is found in widely dispersed literature from at least the second millennium BC..." Graves Introduction, in Idris Shah, *The Sufis* (Anchor Books, Doubleday, paper back ed. of 1964 original), p.viii.

Graves does not identify the "widely dispersed literature" (which would be surprising for such an early date as the 2d millennium BCE among people who used ancestral forms of Iranian languages in that time period). But even if

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Graves intended to say 'the 2d **century** BC" (instead of the "second **millennium** BC") both such time periods were many centuries before the advent of Islam (the prophet Mohammad's birth occurred around 570 CE). I think that Sufism did indeed derive some of its ideas from Zoroastrianism. I am not (I regret to say) an authority on Sufism. But in my (superficial) readings, I have found many startling similarities between Sufi beliefs and Zarathushtra's teachings, and also some very significant differences. Some of these have been set forth in *Part One: Differences, in the Spirit of Friendship*.