

Contemporary Mystic Christianity **Bible Self-Study Supplement**

Zend Avesta, The Persian Bible

Zend Avesta properly means the Avesta with its Zend, the latter signifying a commentary on the teachings of the Avesta. The most deeply esoteric portion of the Zend Avesta is The Gathas, hymns attributed to Zoroaster himself. They are in many ways similar to the Psalms of the Old Testament; and like these Psalms they will never be fully comprehended until man has re-learned the vibrational power and rhythmic value of the spoken word. When this ancient art of holy speech has been re-acquired, both Gathas and Psalms will again become mantrams of healing and spiritual regeneration as they were before their secret was lost in the increasing materiality of human consciousness.

As taught by Zoroaster, the Gathas bestowed upon a "God intoxicated" devotee the very Wine of Life and lifted him into the holy joys of the Mystic Marriage (Union with God) wherein he knew the Presence of God as immanent in all things, and sang in rapture: "Spread thou my heart into thy love so that I may feel how sweet it is to love thee and to be all molten in thy love."

The Vendidad was the Persian Book of the Law. Upon its precepts were founded the historically famous "Laws of the

Medes and the Persians which altereth not." It was the book of exoteric teaching. Its strict moral statutes were designed for the masses: "Think purely, speak purely, act purely." Such is the broad foundation of all spiritual advancement. The Gathas, on the contrary, were designed for the spiritually elect who had proved themselves worthy of initiatory instruction. In Zoroastrianism, as in all religions of every nation and age, there were parables for the multitude and miracles for the few.

Mani

The Close of an Age

The teachings of Zoroaster reached their full flowering in Mani, who came as the emissary of Christ in the third century A.D. His particular mission was the unifying of the religions of India and Persia in the Christ Light. Mani was a noted artist of his time and his Initiate-consciousness enabled him to portray the life and activities of Angels upon his canvasses. His works were called "Divine Art" by his followers. They were bound into a rare portfolio which was held in deep reverence and was often referred to by Persian poets.

The opposition of the orthodox Zoroastrian priesthood, now far removed indeed from the tolerant spirit of its great founder, influenced the King to drive Mani out of the

country. He found refuge among the tribes of Eastern Tartary near the Chinese border and also traveled into India. Everywhere he taught this new Persian Christianity in which the esoteric doctrines of Zoroaster were combined with the teachings of Christ. Upon his return to Persia he was imprisoned and crucified, even as Jesus was crucified before him.

To emphasize the exalted spiritual status of this great Being who bore the name of Mani (or Manicheus), and to indicate something of the intricate weavings of the Law of Causation in the work of the Illuminati, we quote words concerning Mani written by Dr. Rudolph Steiner, eminent occultist:

Those who see in Manichaeism more than is usually the case know Manes to be a very high messenger of the Christ. It is said that a few centuries after Christ had lived on earth there was held one of the greatest assemblies of the spiritual world connected with the earth that ever took place, and that there Manes gathered around him three mighty personalities of the fourth century after Christ. Manes called these persons together to consult with them as to the means of re-introducing the wisdom that had lived throughout the changing times of the post-Atlantean Age, and of causing it to unfold more gloriously in the future. . . .

Around Manes was gathered Skythianos (a name used by one of the highest European Initiates), Buddha and Zarathustra. In that council a plan was agreed upon for causing all the wisdom of the Bodhisattvas of the post-Atlantean time to flow more and more strongly into the future of mankind; and the plan of the future evolution of the civilization of the earth then decided upon was adhered to and carried over into the European Mysteries of the Rose Cross. These particular Mysteries have always been connected with the individualities of Skythianos, Buddha and Zarathustra.... These three are Teachers who gave their wisdom to the earth as a gift in order that through it the Christ Being might be understood.

There have been three great Persian ages; the age of the mighty kingdom built by Cyrus and his successors, Darius and Xerxes, and overthrown by Alexander; the warrior age, its history evidenced in numerous and elaborate rock carvings; and the age of the Mohammedan conquest. Islam is a religion of rigid monotheism which does not admit of any pictorial representation drawn from old vanquished religions. The Persians, however, had too much imagination and were too innately artistic to be held in bondage to literalism for long.

Under the rulership of Taurus they became a people whose soul centered in beauty. To them spiritual illumination was possible only through pursuit of the beautiful. Such longing of the soul for its native habitat in Divine Beauty finds echo during the eleventh century in the plaint of Omar. But it was not until the twelfth century that there came a real renaissance of the arts. This was an age of mural paintings, exquisitely hand-wrought miniatures in manuscripts and impressive walls of enameled bricks, all of which still evoke the admiration and wonderment of the world. The new flowering of the spirit was not absent from Persian mosques. Painting and sculpture might be forbidden for fear of idolatry, but the very mosque architecture spoke most eloquently, through design and delicacy of coloring, of the beauty which is God. The incentive for a resurrection of beauty came from a sect of Sufi Mystics which then flourished and transmitted to medieval Persia a fragment of the glory of her long-lost Golden Age.

These Persian ages are rich in meaning for the Christian Mysteries. From the tolerant spirit exemplified by the Initiate-King Cyrus the Hebrews conceived a new ideal of the Messiah, a Messiah for all the world who would bring justice and peace to all mankind. From the narrower concepts of national Zoroastrianism under Darius and succeeding monarchs, Ezra brought doctrines of racial, national and religious exclusiveness which thenceforth

characterized Jewish life. But Jahweh remained the God of all the world, of heaven and earth, like Ahura Mazda of Persian inscriptions. Under Mani the Hebrew Messiah was linked with Zoroaster of the Persians. The theosophy of the Persians and the Hebrews became the basis of a new order in Europe, the Brotherhood of the Rose Cross — for the symbol of the Manicheans was a cross bearing flowers, symbolic of the resurrection and the life which are eternal, and of the Mysteries of Initiation which make them available to man.

Mithra, The Christ of Persia

Initiation in Persia

Mithra is the genius of celestial light, the Lord of wide pastures, everwakeful, everwatchful Lord of one hundred ears and eyes.

As the power and glory of the Persian Empire increased, the influence of the Mithraic Cult expanded correspondingly. The dominant cult of the Persian empire, Mithraism, spread from Thrace and Macedonia in the West to the Punjab in the East. Overflowing the boundaries of its own native land, it was introduced into Rome in the century before Paul, where it flourished until about the fifth century A.D., the close of the Arian Age. The discovery of numerous crypts and altars

in other countries attest to its growth and expansion throughout central Europe.

In Babylon Bel Marduk had become the symbol of the One Supreme God, with all other Gods of the pantheon reduced to representing aspects of Him as manifested in time and space. In Persia the pantheon of lesser Gods was successfully translated into "messengers" or "servants," Angels of the Most High, with the seven Archangels correlated to the seven principles of the Divine All-Consciousness or the seven Hypostases which support the created universe — the Sephiroth of the Hebrew Kabbala.

The Masters of the Persian Mystery School developed an Initiation designed to break the hold of the body upon the spirit by strict discipline. In some respects this was more severe than the Indian Initiation, since the Indians were naturally more spiritually minded than their Persian brothers and acquired psychic faculties more easily.

The masses were not expected to become Initiates. They followed the Path of Law as inscribed in the Book of Law, the Vendidad. They revered Ahura Mazda as the God of Moral Law and endeavored to live according to His precepts as given in their Scriptures.

Prior to the great reformation under the historical Zoroaster, Iranian Mysteries placed greatest emphasis upon

duties related to the material world, duties which an ego took upon itself when it came to rebirth and which, under the Laws of Rebirth and Consequence, must be successfully discharged before the higher way could be taken. A candidate for Initiation could never turn his back upon his mundane responsibilities. He had to accept and, to some degree, work free of them before entering upon the path leading to the sanctuary of Mithra.

Paralleled with the Lesser Mysteries were the Greater Solar Mysteries, to which only the most advanced were admitted. These Greater Mysteries freed the Initiate from all fear of death and taught him how intimately a human being is linked with the life processes of Nature. They did not divorce the human soul from Nature but revealed its essential unity with Nature. Thus, the Initiate learned to sense his oneness with the Sun, Moon and planets, and how to draw their vital forces into himself. He learned that the spirit of the Sun was a Divine Being and that with Him dwelt a glorious celestial Hierarchy of Archangels. He also learned to know the true spiritual nature of those Orbs constituting the Sun's planetary family. When he was sufficiently elevated in consciousness he was permitted to observe the journeying of human egos through the sevenfold globes of the sevenfold planetary chain, or earthly incarnations. Finally, he was brought into attunement with the planetary keynote of the earth itself

and heard with his own ears the sublime music it intones in unison with other orbs of the solar system. Having come thus far, the golden robe of Mastership was conferred upon him a robe embellished with the Sun, Moon and stars embroidered in silver.

Christians must understand that all this is of the most intimate importance in their own spiritual life, for when a Persian Initiate looked into the Sun and beheld there the glorious Sun Being it was none other than the Christ he saw with the eyes of his spirit. Although it was the same Christ, yet there was a difference; at that time this Being had not sent down to earth the archangelic Ray which was to be embodied in the man Jesus of Nazareth. The Christ smiled upon earth from his throne in the Sun, but He had not yet descended to earth's innermost heart as He was to do later.

The Sun Being's incarnation upon earth was the supreme Event of the entire Aryan Epoch and constituted the pivotal Mystery of all pre-Christian religions. This was particularly true of the Persian Mysteries which, being centered in the fiery Astral World where the archangelic life is most active, had an important role to play in the Christ Drama. Hence, it is said that the Cosmic Cross lay in the foundation of the Mithraic Mysteries and, like Esdras in the Field of Ardath, the Mithraic Initiate beheld the Christ Archangel face to face

and received word from His own mouth of His coming at the end of the age.

The Sixth Epoch, or New Galilee, follows the present Fifth or Aryan Epoch. In that period Initiation will be the common experience of the race. Only the "stragglers" will remain outside the door of the Mysteries. By then the majority of mankind will have been led through the first Initiation at least, and therefore will know the truth about rebirth and life after death. Also, they will be more or less conscious of the Christ Fire burning at the core of our globe. During the Sixth Epoch the Master Jesus will once more appear publicly, not in physical form but in an etheric body of sufficient density to be visible to all. He will lead the human race to its full flowering; and by the end of the Sixth Epoch most egos will have trod the Path of the nine Lesser Mysteries whereby they will have met the Christ face to face at the heart of the earth.

To the Persians Christ was an objective Being to be worshipped far out in space. To Initiates of the Sixth Epoch this Divine Being will be worshipped as closer than hands and feet, the indwelling planetary Logos of the earth, while the Divine Man, Jesus, will be adored as the flower of the human race, the Christ Bearer. In reality, the Sixth Epoch will be the reappearance and culmination of those spiritual forces which stirred so powerfully in Persia during the sixth

century before Christ, and which were the Power behind the Mithraic Mysteries as reformed and refined by the Prophet Zoroaster.

It may be said, therefore, that Mithraism was largely derived from the earliest Aryan religion, in which Mithra figured as a Sun God; it included both the esoteric and the exoteric aspects of the old religion, but was purified of the temporal and evanescent.

The esoteric School prescribed a rigorous discipline that in no way countermanded precepts of the Law, but ascended from the realm of Law into the world of Essences where the Law was no longer a necessity because its precepts were inscribed upon the living tablets of men's hearts. Hence, the Law could not be broken by an Initiate because he himself was the embodiment of Law. It flowed through his blood, spoke through his tongue, radiated in joy from his countenance, inspired his life with good thoughts, good words, good deeds.

Those who aspired to the higher Path sought the Light of Mithra and submitted themselves joyfully to the stern discipline of his Mysteries. Mithra was the "Rock Born." In all spiritual symbology rock signifies an Initiate. In like manner Peter was the Rock or the Rock-Born, upon which the Piscean Mysteries were founded.

So it was that the Mithraic Cult contained the most deeply spiritual phases of Persian religion. It was the gold remaining after the Zoroastrian fire had purged away base elements of the old religion. Of necessity it was a profoundly secret cult, not open to the masses but only to a very select and most worthy few. Like the Indian School, it consisted of seven Degrees, corresponding to the Ptolemaic spheres, through which those initiated ascended to the sphere of the fixed stars and beyond, into the Eternal.

The ladder of Mithraic Initiations has often been likened to Jacob's ladder in Genesis. In both instances, the ladder symbolized Initiation. The Ladder of Initiation possesses seven rungs reaching from earth to heaven. In the Mithraic School these rungs are called Portals or Gates, for they are the means of ingress and egress for the seven celestial spheres, the seven heavens. In modern metaphysical parlance these seven Degrees would be called seven states of consciousness. Initiation now, as in ancient times, consists of a soul's passage from one sphere or state of consciousness to another. A classical example of this is to be found in the story of Mohammed who, as late as the sixth century, took this Initiation. No matter what School of Initiation is entered, these seven spheres must be traversed. Categories and terminologies may differ, but the work done is always the same.

In passing through these various Gates an aspirant rids himself of vices engendered upon earth. To the Moon is abandoned the vital and nutritive energy; to Mercury, the lower desires; to Venus, wicked appetites; to the Sun, intellectual capacities; to Mars, love of war; to Jupiter, ambitious dreams; to Saturn, sensibilities. Thus stripped and freed from every earthly vice, pure and undefiled, the spirit passes into the eighth sphere, that of the fixed stars, to enter there into the final bliss supreme of beatitudes without end.

It is significant that in Mani's teachings — which were a philosophy as well as a religion — the ascent of the soul was by way of a central pillar. This central pillar was the trunk of the Cosmic Tree of the Kabbala, and Upon it were inscribed the Moon and Sun, with Metatron occupying the apex. This kabbalistic Metatron is the Mithra of Persia, one of the many vestigial fragments of the Mithraic Mysteries still discernible in the Hebrew Kabbala. The Mithra of the Mysteries was not a mere Sun God. He was the symbol of the Supreme Being. Like Metatron in the Kabbala, he stands in the place of God.

To the human consciousness as it exists upon our planet, Mithra, the Solar Archangel, was the Being of the inner and Invisible Sun. He was spiritual Light personified. Here the disciple enters the portals of a more divine Mystery. He has

heard hitherto that a Ray of the Godhead may incarnate in (or overshadow) a human being; now he comes to understand that these "avatars" do not pertain merely to this mundane sphere but to all worlds and all states of consciousness in the universe. Godhead may reveal itself everywhere and in all forms.

In esoteric Christianity the Logos of the Supreme Being is incarnate in the divine archangelic Christ, the glorious Sun Being whom the Initiate sees face to face in the Solar Mysteries. The Logos is incarnated, or personified, to men as a Divine Man; to Angels, as a Divine Angel; to Archangels, as a Divine Archangel. In this Western Wisdom Teachings differ somewhat from Indian teachings about incarnations. It is recognized that God reveals Himself most perfectly in each age through certain individuals who have prepared themselves through many lifetimes and are on the threshold of Liberation. But the Solar Archangel, the Cosmic Christ, incarnates but once upon each planet of the solar system at that point in its evolution where it begins the journey back to Spirit. This point varies. Upon earth it was reached in the Arian Age prior to the advent of the Christ — although according to some authorities the nadir of materialism was reached in mid-Atlantis. From mid-Atlantean times until the coming of the Christ our earth and its humanity lay in a slough of materiality. Had Christ not come both would have been lost. For this reason, Mithra

was called the Lamb of God; in litany his worshippers chanted: "O Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us." In Mithra we have the Christ of Persia.

In Zarvan, the Ruler-Child still worshipped centuries later in Manichaeism, the Persians worshipped the prototype of the Christ Child.

December 25, our Christmas Day, was the date on which the birth of Mithra was celebrated with great festivity. At early dawn on that holy day, three Magi visited the newborn Babe bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The solar meaning of this ritual is made clear when it is realized that as the new Sun is born at the Winter Solstice, Illumined Ones ascended a high mountain to its summit and there, with faces turned toward the east, hailed the rising Sun with incense and with prayer. It is related that "shepherds" also followed this custom. Here the word shepherd is used to designate an Initiate of Aries, just as it does in the Hebrew Mysteries of Palestine.

The night of Mithra's birth was called the Night of Light because the Sun Spirit had descended upon earth to serve as intermediary between man and God. The name Mithra means friend or companion. Christ, the friend of all, said to His Disciples: "I call you not servants but friends."

The Mithraic Resurrection Rite, as in the Eleusinian Mysteries of Greece, was the most important of their Rites and was celebrated at the Spring Equinox, the time of Nature's resurrection from the death of winter. Then occurred the Murder Ritual, common to both ancient and modern mystic fraternities, in which an Initiate played the role of the slain Mithra.

The Persians believed Mithra met death for the sake of his people, spent three days in Hell, arose again on the third day. Hence, in their Mysteries, after the "Murder" and the "Placing in the Bier," they exhibited the body of a young man in a state indistinguishable from actual death. On the twenty-fourth day of March, in deep darkness and with lamentations, the disciples held vigil around the sepulcher until midnight. Suddenly the darkness was suffused with brilliant light and sorrow was changed into rejoicing as a priest chanted: "Rejoice, O ye sacred initiates, for your god is risen. His suffering and death have worked our salvation." The Resurrection Ritual followed, the "new-born brother" being ushered into the brilliantly illumined sanctuary where he came face to face with a glorified image of the beloved Mithra. Assembled about him in various attitudes of homage and reverence were the brethren who had preceded him in the work of this Degree.

Thus was fulfilled the promise held forth in the Festival of the Autumnal Equinox and the Dying Sun: "Be of good cheer, ye have been instructed in the Mysteries and shall have salvation from your sorrows."

In these Mithraic Mysteries we discover the prototypes of all familiar Christian ceremonials and sacraments, but therein they were known as Initiations as they were in the Indian Mysteries. Baptism was an Initiation; so also was the Eucharist. Some hint of this remains in the name of the Mass which is called the Morning. Sacrifice and in the Communion Wafer, symbolic of the Sun. Again, in the Rosary Ritual meditations on the Christ life are divided into three sections: the joyful Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries and the Glorious Mysteries.

Returning to the Persian Mysteries, at the conclusion of the initiatory Rite of Baptism the Sign of the Cross was made upon the forehead of the candidate. In all Mystery Schools the cross is a symbol of the processes of redemption by which the ego is liberated, or resurrected, from the dense body of mortality. It is a curious fact that while crucifixion as a means of capital punishment was common in Persia it was not common among the Hebrews. The Crucifixion Rite was the supreme trial of the Persian Mysteries which, for masculine candidates at least, involved undergoing certain hardships not to be borne except with

strength derived from spiritual sources. When we learn from ancient writers that Cyrus was crucified, it is clear he was an Initiate in the Mysteries of Mithra. This explains why he showed more than his usual tolerance and generosity toward the Hebrews who at this time entered upon the last stage for their age-long preparation for bringing the Fire of the Christ Archangel down to the very hearths of men.

As the Sun Being, Mithra was the great intermediary between God and man, and he abode in the middle spaces between the upper and lower regions. In conformity with this idea, the sixteenth or middle day of each month was dedicated to him. At that time elaborate ceremonials depicted him as the divine bridge between the unknowable God of the highest heavens and His struggling, aspiring humanity upon earth. Astronomically, this has reference to the fact that in the Ptolemaic system the Sun occupies the middle place among the planets: Saturn, Jupiter and Mars on one side of it; Venus, Mercury and the Moon on the other: Persian theosophy, however, completely separates the spiritual principle from its astronomical corollary, presenting a divine metaphysics which is complete in itself yet correlative to Chaldean (and modern) astronomy.

Thus, the coming of the great Sun Being was to be the signal of a Millenium wherein peace, plenty and happiness

would become the permanent heritage of the human race. The Hebrews affirmed the same of their Messiah.

The four districts of heaven were governed by four great stars: Aldebaran in Taurus, Antares in Scorpio, Regulus in Leo and Fomalhaut in Aquarius, all worshipped as great Angels. Modern esotericists agree that they exert a remarkable influence upon humanity, for they are the guardians of its destiny. A candidate for Initiation does well to attune himself to their powerful spiritual radiations. As in Egypt, the star Sirius was also venerated. It is said that its spiritual influence upon an aspirant was, and is, exceedingly potent. But greater than all other spiritual lights for the earth dweller is the Sun. Therefore, to Mithra was accorded the highest worship. "Be satisfied with nothing under the Sun, nothing less than the Sun. When you reach the stellar splendor go beyond it. Love and the divine hunger for Truth will lead you to the vision sublime." Christians, as well as the Hindus and Persians, may chant:

Thou Real Sun infill us,
Shine with perpetual Light.
Splendor of holy cosmic Spirit
Pervade our minds.

In the Persian Mysteries Mithra, like the Christ in the Christian Mysteries, was hailed as the New Born Sun. To the Magi the solar luminary was the visible agent of the glorious

invisible First Cause, whom they styled "Time without Limit" or "the Great Unknowable" in esoteric Christianity, the Absolute Supreme Being. Says the Zend Avesta: "We look on the Sun, Moon, Fire and other glorious objects filled with splendor and light as centers of worship, for the Most High God has declared that they are His Glory." The reference here is not to mere physical heat or flame but to the inner Fire of Life which is visible to the eye of the Seer — as when Moses saw it leaping in the bush and Zoroaster saw it in the mountain that burned. "So wonderful," runs the text, "was this Fire that it blazed of itself without fuel and had no need of a human servant to make it burn with brilliancy." Such is also the blazing Fire of the purified aura of Masters, and such was the "fiery chariot" in which Elijah ascended to heaven. It is a Fire which can be handled and used. It is written that Zoroaster held it in his hands and passed it on to his disciples without their sustaining any physical injury.

"God is light," declares John in our Christian Bible. This statement is a reality to the Seer. Initiation is birth into Light. The Light is not a physical flame that burns but a spiritual Fire that illumines. In the words of Parsi Mystics: "This Fire is the glory of God, wherefore it is necessary to worship it."

Each Mystery School has its central activity in one of the four spiritual elements, Fire, Earth, Water or Air. All of the

elements are active in every Initiation, but one is preeminent. The Mysteries of Atlantis and their inheritors, of the Aryan Epoch were centered in Water. The Mysteries of Aryana center in Earth and Fire. The Mysteries of the coming age will be centered in Air. St. Paul has said that it is necessary to meet the returning Christ in the air.

— ***Corinne Heline***