



Zoroastrian Symbolism and the Digital Cosmos
Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds in the Algorithmic Age
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Preface – The Amniotic Ocean of the Digital Cosmos

We now drift in an **amniotic ocean** of symbols — a living medium where meaning forms and reforms itself. This **Digital Cosmos** is not separate from us; it is our shared **Mitwelt**, the interwoven space between minds, where truth and falsehood, *asha* and *druj*, now travel as streams of data.

Zoroastrian wisdom teaches that creation is not complete but calls for our choice and participation. So too in the algorithmic age: every line of code, every word, every design decision shapes the balance between order and chaos. To tend this symbolic ocean is our task — to bring *good thoughts, good words, good deeds* into the circuits of the world, and so guide the fire of consciousness toward clarity rather than confusion.

Asha and Druj in the Age of Algorithms: Zoroastrian Symbolism and the Digital Cosmos

The history of religion, philosophy, and symbolic thought is marked by recurring patterns: ancient myths are reborn in modern idioms, cosmic dramas are re-staged in new theatres, and the struggle between order and chaos takes on fresh forms in each epoch. Among the oldest and most enduring of these symbolic dramas is the dualistic vision offered by Zoroastrianism — a religion that arose in the Iranian plateau over three millennia ago and went on to shape some of the deepest currents of human thought. At its heart lies the tension between *asha* (truth, order, rightness) and *druj* (lie, chaos, deceit) — a polarity that has echoed from the hymns of Zarathushtra to the sermons of the prophets, from the fire temples of Persia to the algorithms of the digital age.

This essay explores Zoroastrianism as presented in Filip Holm’s comprehensive documentary “What is Zoroastrianism?” and situates it in a broader symbolic and philosophical landscape. It traces the origins and teachings of the tradition, examines its historical transformations, follows its influence into Western monotheism, and reflects on its re-emergence in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Finally, it considers how the ancient polarity of *asha* and *druj* can illuminate our contemporary struggles with truth, order, and meaning in the algorithmic age — what Memecraft calls the digital cosmos.

Origins and the Voice of Zarathushtra

Zoroastrianism emerges as one of humanity’s earliest experiments with monotheistic thought. Founded by the prophet Zarathushtra (known to the Greeks as Zoroaster) sometime between 1500 and 1000 BCE in ancient Iran or Central Asia, it was

revolutionary in both content and tone. Zarathushtra, born into a polytheistic milieu rich with Indo-Iranian deities and ritual practices, announced a vision centered on a single uncreated God: **Ahura Mazda**, the “Wise Lord.” Unlike the capricious gods of mythic pantheons, Ahura Mazda was not merely powerful but fundamentally ethical — the source of *asha*, the cosmic order that sustains creation.

Zarathushtra’s teachings were preserved in the **Gathas**, a collection of seventeen hymns composed in an archaic Iranian language and transmitted orally for centuries. These hymns, later incorporated into the larger corpus of the **Avesta**, form the theological and poetic core of Zoroastrianism. They depict a world in which creation is good but contested, where human beings stand at the crossroads of cosmic struggle and are called upon to choose between truth and falsehood, order and chaos.

Unlike many contemporaneous traditions, Zoroastrianism places extraordinary emphasis on human free will. Humanity is not a passive subject of divine will but an active participant in the unfolding of the cosmos. The ethical triad — **humata, hukhta, hvarshta** (“good thoughts, good words, good deeds”) — encapsulates this calling. Each individual’s choices ripple outward into the cosmic drama, aiding either *asha* or *druj*. This insistence on moral agency anticipates later philosophical and religious developments and remains one of Zoroastrianism’s most profound contributions to world thought.

Theology and the Symbolic Structure of the Cosmos

At the heart of Zoroastrian cosmology is a fundamental dualism — not of two equal gods, but of two opposing principles. On one side stands **Spenta Mainyu**, the beneficent spirit aligned with Ahura Mazda and *asha*; on the other, **Angra Mainyu (Ahriman)**, the destructive spirit of *druj*. The world is the arena of their contest, and creation itself is Ahura Mazda’s strategy for overcoming evil through the cooperation of conscious beings.

Zoroastrian theology is rich in symbolic hierarchy. Ahura Mazda is assisted by six **Amesha Spentas** (“Holy Immortals”), emanations of divine attributes such as Vohu Manah (Good Mind) and Asha Vahishta (Best Truth). Surrounding them is a pantheon of **Yazatas** (“Adorable Ones”), divinities associated with natural and ethical principles — among them Mithra, guardian of covenants and contracts. This structure reflects a universe ordered yet dynamic, where divine qualities manifest in layered symbolic forms.

Fire, revered as the purest element, becomes the most visible symbol of this divine order. Zoroastrian temples house sacred flames, not as objects of worship but as representations of Ahura Mazda’s light and truth. The faithful pray facing sources of light, aligning their inner orientation with cosmic order. Nature itself is sacred, not as a collection of inert resources but as a living fabric woven from *asha*.

Zoroastrian eschatology carries this symbolic dualism to its ultimate conclusion.

After death, souls cross the **Chinvat Bridge**, where their deeds are weighed. The righteous pass safely into paradise, while the wicked fall into darkness. Yet this is not the end: in the final renovation of the world — **Frashokereti** — a savior figure, the **Saoshyant**, will lead a universal resurrection. Evil will be annihilated, creation purified in molten metal, and all souls reconciled in an eternal harmony. The cosmos is thus not a closed cycle but a narrative arc bending toward justice and restoration.

Empires, Decline, and Diaspora

Zoroastrianism's symbolic universe shaped some of history's greatest empires. Under the **Achaemenids** (550–330 BCE), it provided ideological cohesion to a vast multicultural realm. Kings like Darius I invoked Ahura Mazda in royal inscriptions, presenting their rule as an extension of cosmic order. Fire altars on palace reliefs symbolized divine legitimacy.

The **Parthians** (247 BCE–224 CE) maintained a more pluralistic environment, but the faith endured and adapted. Under the **Sasanian Empire** (224–651 CE), Zoroastrianism reached its institutional zenith. It became the state religion, the Avesta was canonized, priestly orthodoxy strengthened, and temples proliferated. Yet the rigidity that secured its dominance also made it vulnerable. The Arab Muslim conquest in the 7th century transformed the Iranian world. Zoroastrians were reduced to *dhimmi* status, subject to the *jizya* tax, and many converted under social and economic pressure.

A resilient minority fled to the Indian subcontinent, forming the **Parsi** community in Gujarat between the 8th and 10th centuries. There, they preserved rituals and texts while adapting to a new cultural environment. Today, Zoroastrianism's adherents number fewer than 200,000 worldwide, concentrated in India and Iran but present across a global diaspora. Its small size belies its immense historical and symbolic significance.

Influence on Abrahamic Religions

Zoroastrianism's ideas radiated far beyond the Iranian plateau, influencing the conceptual architecture of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. During the Babylonian Exile and Persian restoration, Jewish thought encountered Zoroastrian eschatology and angelology. Ideas of cosmic dualism, resurrection, final judgment, and a savior figure (*Saoshyant*) echo in later apocalyptic literature. The figure of **Satan** as a personal embodiment of evil may owe something to Angra Mainyu, while the angelic hierarchy resonates with the Amesha Spentas and Yazatas.

Christianity inherited and transformed many of these motifs: heaven and hell, the cosmic battle between good and evil, the apocalypse, and the final triumph of divine order. Islam, too, absorbed elements — from the imagery of jinn to the structure of

eschatological judgment. While direct lines of influence are debated, the symbolic family resemblance is unmistakable. Zoroastrianism seeded some of the fundamental categories through which Western monotheism understands the cosmos.

Zarathustra Reborn: Nietzsche's Transformation of the Prophet

In the 19th century, Zoroastrian symbolism was reborn in an unexpected form. Friedrich Nietzsche, seeking a voice for his critique of modern morality, turned to **Zarathustra** as the mouthpiece of his most radical ideas. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85) is not a work about the historical prophet but a philosophical drama in which an imagined Zarathustra descends from his mountain solitude to announce the death of God, the overcoming of man, and the coming of the **Übermensch**.

Nietzsche's choice of Zarathustra was not arbitrary. As he noted, Zarathustra had been the first to set morality on a cosmic foundation, to divide existence into good and evil as principles of being. It was fitting, then, that he should be the one to overturn that distinction. Nietzsche's Zarathustra does not reject struggle — he reimagines it. The cosmic battle is no longer between preordained forces of good and evil but within the human will itself, between reactive resentment and creative affirmation.

Here, the polarity of *asha* and *druj* mutates into the tension between life-affirming creativity and life-denying nihilism. The bridge that Zoroastrianism imagined as the passage to judgment becomes, in Nietzsche, the tightrope humanity must walk toward self-overcoming. Even the final renovation (*Frashokereti*) finds a strange echo in the *eternal recurrence*, the acceptance of existence in its totality.

Nietzsche's Zarathustra is thus not a negation of the ancient prophet but his metamorphosis — a new symbolic form for a new epoch. Where the original Zarathushtra called humanity to align with divine order, Nietzsche's calls us to become creators of value in a world without transcendent guarantees. Both demand an active role in cosmic becoming. Both reject passivity and fatalism. Both see humanity as the pivot of transformation.

Asha and Druj in the Digital Age

The enduring power of Zoroastrian symbolism lies in its adaptability. Across millennia, its central drama — the struggle between *asha* and *druj* — has been recast in new materials: theology, philosophy, politics, and now, code. In the age of algorithms and artificial intelligence, the cosmic contest takes on a digital form. The forces of order and chaos, truth and falsehood, are not confined to mythic realms but flow through networks, platforms, and data streams.

In our contemporary symbolic landscape, *asha* might be seen as the pursuit of

transparency, coherence, and truth within digital systems — the ethical design of algorithms, the cultivation of trustworthy information, the creation of spaces that nurture autonomy and dignity. *Druj*, by contrast, manifests as disinformation, manipulation, opaque algorithmic bias, and the exploitation of attention for profit. The battlefield is not a distant metaphysical plane but the feeds and interfaces we inhabit daily.

Here the Zoroastrian emphasis on **human agency** becomes newly relevant. Just as ancient humanity was called to choose between *asha* and *druj*, so too must digital citizens make ethical decisions about how technology is built, deployed, and used. The mantra “good thoughts, good words, good deeds” becomes a framework for digital ethics: good code, good communication, good design. It asks whether our technologies amplify wisdom or deceit, empower communities or fragment them, illuminate reality or obscure it.

This perspective aligns with Memecraft’s exploration of **symbolic forms** in the digital era. Ernst Cassirer described symbolic forms as the means by which humans structure experience — language, myth, art, science. In the digital sphere, code and interface become new symbolic forms, shaping perception and behavior. Zoroastrian dualism reminds us that these forms are not neutral: they can serve *asha* or *druj*, order or chaos. The symbolic battle continues, now written in algorithms rather than hymns.

Nietzsche’s transformed Zarathustra, too, speaks into this arena. The call to create new values resonates with the task of designing ethical digital architectures. The challenge is not merely to resist *druj* but to build systems that embody *asha* — not only to critique existing platforms but to imagine and enact alternatives that affirm life, creativity, and truth.

Conclusion: Enduring Fire

From the hymns of the *Gathas* to the pages of Nietzsche, from fire temples to server farms, the symbolic drama of *asha* and *druj* endures. Zoroastrianism, born in the highlands of ancient Iran, offered humanity one of its first visions of an ethically ordered cosmos and one of its most powerful narratives of moral agency. Its influence spread through empires and scriptures, shaping the monotheisms that followed and echoing in the secular philosophies that sought to transcend them.

In the digital age, its symbols still speak. They remind us that truth and falsehood, order and chaos, are not abstractions but choices woven into the fabric of daily life. They invite us to see algorithms not merely as tools but as participants in a cosmic drama — expressions of our collective will toward *asha* or *druj*. And they challenge us, as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra did, to become creators rather than spectators, shaping the symbolic forms that will define the next epoch.

The flame that burned in ancient fire temples was never meant to remain confined to

a sanctuary. It symbolized a living order, a luminous principle to be carried into the world. Today, that flame flickers in the glow of our screens. Whether it illuminates or blinds depends, as it always has, on our thoughts, our words, and our deeds.