



# Zoroastrian

## Disclaimer

This resource has been prepared to help staff and students in raising awareness, increasing knowledge and to assist their work at MMU.

The resource has been prepared according to the Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation and guidance from

MMU Chaplains. The interpretation of the faith, observances and representation of standards etc. are part of this professional judgement and should not be construed as an authorised or official interpretation. MMU has sought to acknowledge the use of any published material in the text of this resource. Any inadvertent omissions deemed necessary will be corrected upon notification of this error.

## Key beliefs

Ahura Mazda (the one God) is said to have created a good world, consisting of seven elements of creation: sky, waters, earth, plants, cattle, humans (regarded as God's helpers) and fire. Zoroastrianism is a small religion with about 140,000 members and:

- Their theology has had a great impact on Judaism, Christianity and other later religions, in the beliefs surrounding God and Satan, the soul, heaven and hell, savior, resurrection, final judgment, etc.
- It is one of the oldest religions still in existence.
- It may have been the first monotheistic religion.

## Worship elements

Zoroastrians are not fire-worshippers, as some Westerners wrongly believe. Zoroastrians believe that the elements are pure and that fire represents God's light or wisdom. Zoroaster placed less emphasis on ritual worship, instead focusing on the central ethics of 'Good Words, Good Thoughts and Good Deeds'. Zoroastrian worship is not prescriptive. Its followers can choose whether they wish to pray and how.

Zoroastrians traditionally pray several times a day. Some wear a kusti, which is a cord knotted three times, to remind them of the maxim, 'Good Words, Good Thoughts, Good Deeds'. They wrap the kusti around the outside of a sudreh, a long, clean, white cotton shirt. They may engage in a purification ritual, such as the washing of the hands, then untie and then retie it while reciting prayers. The Zoroastrian holy book is called the Avesta. This includes the original words of their founder Zarathushtra, preserved in a series of five hymns, called the Gathas.

## Places of worship

Communal worship takes place in a Fire Temple or Agiary. It houses a burning fire called the Adur Aduran (fire of flames), which is the central part of the temple. In addition, a ritual is performed each a Zoroastrian washes his/her hands although the ritual is not always strictly performed in all its detail. When it is performed, the individual will stand on the same spot and must speak to on one during the ritual. No special facilities are required.

## Food and drink

There are no dietary requirements although sometimes, through personal choice, many abstain from pork or beef and some are vegetarian. Festivals celebrate the material so this involves feasting; ceremonial foods often revolve around the number seven e.g. having seven kinds of dried fruit and nuts.

## Festivals and days of worship

The Zoroastrian calendar presents a difficult issue for Zoroastrians, as there have been a number of changes over the centuries with the result that there are now three different calendars: Fasli, Shahanshahi, and Qadimi. This means that festivals are celebrated at different times depending on which calendar is being used by the community.

### The six gahanbars (obligatory feasts):

<b>Maidyozarem</b>	'Mid-spring' feast
<b>Maidyoshahem</b>	'Mid-summer' feast
<b>Paitishahem</b>	Feast of 'bringing in the harvest'
<b>Ayathrem</b>	'Bringing home the herds'
<b>Maidyarem</b>	'Mid-year' / winter feast
<b>Hamaspathmaidem</b>	Feast of 'All Souls'
<b>Noruz</b>	Zoroastrian New Year, occurring in spring and is dedicated to fire

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## **Khordad Sal**

Zarathustra's birthday, six days after Noruz and is one of the most important dates in their calendar. Gathering takes place in the Fire Temples to pray and feast.

## **Texts**

The Holy Book is called The Avesta. It can be split into two sections:

- The Avesta is the oldest and core part of the scriptures, which contains the Gathas. The Gathas are seventeen hymns thought to be composed by Zoroaster himself.
- The Younger Avesta - commentaries to the older Avestan written in later years. It also contains myths, stories and details of ritual observances.

## **Bereavement**

Following the death of a close family member there is a mourning period of 10 days followed by a ceremony to mark the first month, the sixth month and the twelfth month of bereavement.

The diversity calendar can be found at [www.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/equalities](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/equalities)

This fact sheet has been produced using information found in the 'Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation and [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian) with guidance from MMU Chaplains.