

The First Civilized Man

The legendary figure of Zarathrustra, known to the Greeks as Zoroaster, was seen as both a lawgiver to the Persian people and as the founding prophet of Zoroastrianism, a dualist religion in which Ahura Mazda (literally “Lord of Wisdom”), a god of order, and light, opposed Ahriman, a god of disorder and darkness.

A set of writings called the *Avesta* was attributed to Zarathrustra. These contain rituals, prayers, and legends, including the story of the first civilized man, Yima. The story tells of how Ahura Mazda asked Yima to convey his law to mortals, but Yima refused; so Yima instead expanded the wealth and prosperity of the world. When the destruction of the world arrived, Yima ensured the survival of the plants and animals of the world in his enclosure.

Source: The *Zend Avesta*, Part I (SBE04). Translation and commentary: [James Darmesteter](#) (1880).

Chapter II. Yima

[This Chapter may be divided into two parts. First part (1-20): Ahura Mazda proposes to Yima, the son of Vivanghat, to receive the law from him and to bring it to men. On his refusal, he bids him keep his creatures and make them prosper. Yima accordingly makes them thrive and increase, keeps death and disease away from them, and three times enlarges the earth, which had become too narrow for its inhabitants. Second part (21 to the end): On the approach of a dire winter, which is to destroy every living creature, Yima, being advised by Ahura, builds a Vara (enclosure) to keep there the seeds of every kind of animals and plants, and the blessed live there a most happy life under his rule.]

[The tale in the first part refers to Yima as the first man, the first king, and the founder of civilisation; the tale in the second part is a combination of the myths of Yima, as the first dead and the king of the dead over whom he rules in a region of bliss, and of old myths about the end of the world. The world, lasting a long year of twelve millenniums, was to end by a dire winter, like the Eddic Fimbul winter, to be followed by an everlasting spring, when men, sent back to earth from the heavens, should enjoy, in an eternal earthly life, the same happiness that they had enjoyed after their death in the realm of Yima. But as in the definitive form which was taken by Mazdean cosmology the world was made to end by fire, its destruction by winter was no longer the last incident of its life, and therefore, the Var of Yima, instead of remaining, as it was originally, the paradise that gives back to earth its inhabitants, came to be a sort of ark.]

Zarathrustra asked Ahura Mazda: O Ahura Mazda, most beneficent Spirit, Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! Who was the first mortal, before myself, Zarathrustra, with whom thou, Ahura Mazda, didst converse, whom thou didst teach the law of Ahura, the law of Zarathrustra? 1

Ahura Mazda answered: The fair Yima, the great shepherd, O holy Zarathrustra! he was the first mortal, before thee, Zarathrustra, with whom I, Ahura Mazda, did converse, whom I taught the law of Ahura, the law of Zarathrustra. Unto him, O Zarathrustra, I, Ahura Mazda, spake, saying: ‘Well, fair Yima, son of Vivanghat, be thou the preacher and the bearer of my law!’ 2

And the fair Yima, O Zarathrustra, replied unto me, saying: ‘I was not born, I was not taught to be the preacher and the bearer of thy law.’ 3

Then I, Ahura Mazda, said thus unto him, O Zarathrustra: ‘Since thou wantest not to be the preacher and the bearer of my law, then make thou my worlds thrive, make my worlds increase: undertake thou to nourish, to rule, and to watch over my world.’ 4

And the fair Yima replied unto me, O Zarathustra, saying: 'Yes! I will make thy worlds thrive, I will make thy worlds increase. Yes! I will nourish, and rule, and watch over thy world. There shall be, while I am king, neither cold wind nor hot wind, neither disease nor death.'

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Then I, Ahura Mazda, brought two implements unto him: a golden ring and a poniard inlaid with gold. Behold, here Yima bears the royal sway! Thus, under the sway of Yima, three hundred winters passed away, and the earth was replenished with flocks and herds, with men and dogs and birds and with red blazing fires, and there was no more room for flocks, herds, and men.

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Then I warned the fair Yima, saying: 'O fair Yima, son of Vivanghat, the earth has become full of flocks and herds, of men and dogs and birds and of red blazing fires, and there is no more room for flocks, herds, and men.' Then Yima stepped forward, towards the luminous space, southwards, to meet the sun, and (afterwards) he pressed the earth with the golden ring, and bored it with the poniard, speaking thus: 'O Spenta Ârmaiti, kindly open asunder and stretch thyself afar, to bear flocks and herds and men.'

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And Yima made the earth grow larger by one-third than it was before, and there came flocks and herds and men, at his will and wish, as many as he wished.

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Thus, under the sway of Yima, six hundred winters passed away, and the earth was replenished with flocks and herds, with men and dogs and birds and with red blazing fires, and there was no more room for flocks, herds, and men.

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And I warned the fair Yima, saying: 'O fair Yima, son of Vivanghat, the earth has become full of flocks and herds, of men and dogs and birds and of red blazing fires, and there is no more room for flocks, herds, and men.'

13

Then Yima stepped forward, towards the luminous space, southwards, to meet the sun, and (afterwards) he pressed the earth with the golden ring, and bored it with the poniard, speaking thus: 'O Spenta Ârmaiti, kindly open asunder and stretch thyself afar, to bear flocks and herds and men.'

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And Yima made the earth grow larger by two-thirds than it was before, and there came flocks and herds and men, at his will and wish, as many as he wished.

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Thus, under the sway of Yima, nine hundred winters passed away, and the earth was replenished with flocks and herds, with men and dogs and birds and with red blazing fires, and there was no more room for flocks, herds, and men.

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And I warned the fair Yima, saying: 'O fair Yima, son of Vivanghat, the earth has become full of flocks and herds, of men and dogs and birds and of red blazing fires, and there is no more room for flocks, herds, and men.'

17

Then Yima stepped forward, towards the luminous space, southwards, to meet the sun, and (afterwards) he pressed the earth with the golden ring, and bored it with the poniard, speaking thus: 'O Spenta Ârmaiti, kindly open asunder and stretch thyself afar, to bear flocks and herds and men.'

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And Yima made the earth grow larger by three-thirds than it was before, and there came flocks and herds and men, at his will and wish, as many as he wished.

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The Maker, Ahura Mazda, of high renown in the Airyana Vaêgô, by the good river Daitya, called together a meeting of the celestial gods. The fair Yima, the good shepherd, of high renown in the Airyana Vaêgô, by the good river Daitya, called together a meeting of the excellent mortals. To that meeting came Ahura Mazda, of

high renown in the Airyana Vaêgô, by the good river Daitya; he came together with the celestial gods. To that meeting came, the fair Yima, the good shepherd, of high renown in the Airyana Vaêgô, by the good river Daitya; he came together with the excellent mortals. 21

And Ahura Mazda spake unto Yima, saying: 'O fair Yima, son of Vivanghat! Upon the material world the fatal winters are going to fall, that shall bring the fierce, foul frost; upon the material world the fatal winters are going to fall, that shall make snow-flakes fall thick, even an aredvî deep on the highest tops of mountains. 22

And all the three sorts of beasts shall perish, those that live in the wilderness, and those that live on the tops of the mountains, and those that live in the bosom of the dale, under the shelter of stables. 23

Before that winter, those fields would bear plenty of grass for cattle: now with floods that stream, with snows that melt, it will seem a happy land in the world, the land wherein footprints even of sheep may still be seen. 24

Therefore make thee a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, and thither bring the seeds of sheep and oxen, of men, of dogs, of birds, and of red blazing fires. Therefore make thee a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, to be an abode for men; a Vara, long, as a riding-ground on every side of the square, to be a fold for flocks. 25

There thou shalt make waters flow in a bed a hâthra long; there thou shalt settle birds, by the ever-green banks that bear never-failing food. There thou shalt establish dwelling places, consisting of a house with a balcony, a courtyard, and a gallery. Thither thou shalt bring the seeds of men and women, of the greatest, best, and finest kinds on this earth; thither thou shalt bring the seeds of every kind of cattle, of the greatest, best, and finest kinds on this earth. 26

Thither thou shalt bring the seeds of every kind of tree, of the greatest, best, and finest kinds on this earth; thither thou shalt bring the seeds of every kind of fruit, the fullest of food and sweetest of odour. All those seeds shalt thou bring, two of every kind, to be kept inexhaustible there, so long as those men shall stay in the Vara. 27

There shall be no humpbacked, none bulged forward there; no impotent, no lunatic; no poverty, no lying; no meanness, no jealousy; no decayed tooth, no leprous to be confined, nor any of the brands wherewith Angra Mainyu stamps the bodies of mortals. 28

In the largest part of the place thou shalt make nine streets, six in the middle part, three in the smallest. To the streets of the largest part thou shalt bring a thousand seeds of men and women; to the streets of the middle part, six hundred; to the streets of the smallest part, three hundred. That Vara thou shalt seal up with the golden ring, and thou shalt make a door, and a window self-shining within.' 29

Then Yima said within himself: 'How shall I manage to make that Vara which Ahura Mazda has commanded me to make?' 30

And Ahura Mazda said unto Yima: 'O fair Yima, son of Vivanghat! Crush the earth with a stamp of thy heel, and then knead it with thy hands, as the potter does when kneading the potter's clay.'

And Yima did as Ahura Mazda wished; he crushed the earth with a stamp of his heel, he kneaded it with his hands, as the potter does when kneading the potter's clay. And Yima made a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square. There he brought the seeds of sheep and oxen, of men, of dogs, of birds, and of 32

red blazing fires. He made Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, to be an abode for men; a Vara, long as a riding-ground on every side of the square, to be a fold for flocks. 33

There he made waters flow in a bed a hâthra long; there he settled birds, by the evergreen banks that bear never-failing food. There he established dwelling places, consisting of a house with a balcony, a courtyard, and a gallery. 34

There he brought the seeds of men and women, of the greatest, best, and finest kinds on this earth; there he brought the seeds of every kind of cattle, of the greatest, best, and finest kinds on this earth. 35

There he brought the seeds of every kind of tree, of the greatest, best, and finest kinds on this earth; there he brought the seeds of every kind of fruit, the fullest of food and sweetest of odour. All those seeds he brought, two of every kind, to be kept inexhaustible there, so long as those men shall stay in the Vara. 36

And there were no humpbacked, none bulged forward there; no impotent, no lunatic; no poverty, no lying; no meanness, no jealousy; no decayed tooth, no leprous to be confined, nor any of the brands wherewith Angra Mainyu stamps the bodies of mortals. 37

In the largest part of the place he made nine streets, six in the middle part, three in the smallest. To the streets of the largest part he brought a thousand seeds of men and women; to the streets of the middle part, six hundred; to the streets of the smallest part, three hundred. That Vara he sealed up with the golden ring, and he made a door, and a window self-shining within. 38

O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! What lights are there to give light in the Vara which Yima made? 39

Ahura Mazda answered: 'There are uncreated lights and created lights. There the stars, the moon, and the sun are only once (a year) seen to rise and set, and a year seems only as a day. 40

'Every fortieth year, to every couple two are born, a male and a female. And thus it is for every sort of cattle. And the men in the Vara which Yima made live the happiest life.' 41

O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! Who is he who brought the law of Mazda into the Vara which Yima made? Ahura Mazda answered: 'It was the bird Karshipta, O holy Zarathustra!' [*The bird Karshipta dwells in the heavens: were he living on the earth, he would be the king of birds. He brought the law into the Var of Yima, and recites the Avesta in the language of birds.* As the bird, because of the swiftness of his flight, was often considered an incarnation of lightning, and as thunder was supposed to be the voice of a god speaking from above, the song of the bird was often thought to be the utterance of a god and a revelation.] 42

O Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! Who is the lord and ruler there? Ahura Mazda answered: 'Urvatad-nara, O Zarathustra! and thyself, Zarathustra.' 43