

## Comparative study of *Zohd* (abstinence from worldly pleasures, avoiding humiliated and contemptible things) in Islam and Zoroastrianism

Fatemeh Ferdowsi

Teacher of Farhangian University

**Abstract:** What has been studied in this literature is a comparative study of *zohd* in Islam and Zoroastrianism. *Zohd* is an ethical-theosophical concept that has negative or positive effect on life times. Since according to Zoroastrians, there is no *zohd* in this religion, two religions of Islam and Zoroastrianism have been chosen for comparison and the most valid sources of these religions have been investigated with respect to *zohd*. The research aim is to answer following questions: 1- is there *zohd* in Zoroastrian religion? If there is *zohd* in Zoroastrian religion, to what extent is it close to its Islamic concept? Research methodology is based on library and it has been tried to use Zoroastrian books, references and the most important references of Islamic religion. The analysis shows that despite according to Zoroastrians, there is no *zohd* in this religion and there is a negative attitude towards it but there is a positive and poor *zohd* that has been extracted from Islamic references and Zoroastrian history. In Islamic religion, *zohd* has a special place and there are many topics in religious sources and Islamic history that prove both positive and negative pieties. What is emphasized by Quran, the prophet and his inmate is positive *zohd* and it is very transparent and effective compared to Zoroastrian religion and has been emphasized by Islamic leaders due to its positive effects.

[Fatemeh Ferdowsi. **Comparative study of *Zohd* (abstinence from worldly pleasures, avoiding humiliated and contemptible things) in Islam and Zoroastrianism**, *Researcher* 2013;5(11):36-39]. (ISSN: 1553-9865). <http://www.sciencepub.net/researcher>. 7

**Keywords:** *Zohd*, Islam, Zoroastrian

### Introduction

Thank God due to granting gift of praying and hymn to human beings and make them ready to understand sweetness of his hymn by approaches and methods of true religions. *Zohd* means non-desire by freedom, cleanness of heart from material ornaments. Heart that is the house of God is decorated by *zohd*. Considering importance and application of some religious concepts and their effects on material life, it was decided to study *zohd* in Islam and Zoroastrianism for which there has been no book or research under this title. In fact, the research has been aimed to answer following questions: is there *zohd* in Zoroastrian religion? If there is *zohd* in Zoroastrian religion, to what extent is it close to its Islamic concept? Research methodology is based on library and it has been tried to use Zoroastrian books and references and the most important references of Islamic religion.

### *Zohd* in Zoroastrian religion

Zoroastrians believe that *zohd* is not important in their religion rather it has been blamed and there are only texts remained from Manicheans. It is interesting that east experts have their own opinion that is effect of weather and geographical condition of Iran on this context. Therefore, it is necessary to study above-mentioned items. In a book titled as “a new view on an old religion”, Zoroastrian religion is against monasticism, not marrying and austerity. An ideal life is combined with happiness and pleasure and by attempting in this world; *zohd*

(spiritual perfection) is obtained by development. Pleasure have to be strived so that according to Asha law, there should be coordination between body and spirit in one hand and between person and society on the other hand (Mehr, 2001:69). According to the book so called *Setvat Yasan* “Gatha believes that abandoning the world and isolation or immersing in mirth and wassail or causing wrath and blood in the world are Evil deeds and he asks people to remember God all the times and social work is combined with heart and soul ” (Jafari, Bita, 8). In margins of *Bian Aladyan*, life has been admired and edified in Zoroastrian religion and philosophy. In *Avesta*, life power goes on. Zoroastrian philosophy and teachings result from thoughts that have been grown by work and labor. This meaning has been less appeared in other religions. In other religions, if one is invited to an effort or work, there will be many factors for it where friary has been admired (Al-Alavi, Bita: 391). According to Mary Bois in a book called history of Zoroastrian religion: there is no place for ascetic isolation in Zoroastrianism. Every faithful person is charged and required to help and like good people in life difficulties (Boice, 1995:302). In Zoroastrian religion, even fasting has been a kind of ascetic austerity that has been prohibited. In a book called “school of religions”, it has been stated that you have to know that fasting is nothing more than leaving sin. You have to fast during the year due to leaving sins not being hungry from morning to night. You have to try not to sin by your limbs. The goal is not

prevention of eating and drinking rather you have to prevent from bad speeches (Esfandiari, 1983:103).

### Analysis

Considering what has been mentioned above, it seems that zohd has no place in Zoroastrian religion and it is alien. But by looking deeper and thinking more, it is apparent that it is present either in life of Zoroastrian Ashu or in his teachings specially Gatha. Because, firstly in history of Zoroastrian life, it has been frequently emphasized that before being chosen as a prophet, He had isolated ascetically for ten years in a way that he has been placed as same rank as Buda and Yuga. Zoroaster required loneliness and thought. He needed to think in leisure time in order to find the way of people redemption so he isolated from people such as Yuga, Mahavira and other sages in order to seclude and think in silence. As Yajnavalkya, he said to his wife: I am going to seclude and think about good and evil for a while. I hope to find and solve source of people unhappiness and lead them to happiness". His wife said: lay away such thoughts and continue routines" (Razi, 1963:1159). But he did not listen to his wife's advice and in age of 20 he restored to his thought and wisdom and tried to search in his internal world what he could not find in external world. He left his wife and family in order to think comfortably away from global pressures for days and nights and he secluded in a mountain cave near his hometown (according to Qazvini, it is Sabalan mountain and according to Mirkhand, it has placed near Ardabil). He spent ten years of his life to find world secrets. It has been said that Zoroastrian Ashu prevented to eat meat and ate only bread, vegetables, fruits, dairy products and he did not speak with anybody (Shahzadi, 1992:16). Finding truth in Gatha validates this statement. According to Zoroaster's hymns: the best way to grow mind is to think in silence (15-43) so that Zoroaster thought there about everything and each thought was in form of a question that encourages more insight and introspection in order to find the answer (Jafari, 1974:30). These ten years are the most complete and severe seclusion of Zoroastrian Ashu. Long time of seclusion, leaving home and family, separating from society and refuging in the cave, preventing to eat foods and silence suggest monastic life resulting in his prophecy. Finally, after ten years for trying to recognize God, in one of days of spring in the morning, angle of Bahman or good reason appeared to Zoroaster Asha and showed him what he had tried to find during those years (Shahzadi, 1992:17). Secondly, in Gatha, Setvat Yasan and what is dependent to it, there is no place to admire and request for glory, ambition, wealth and capitalism. It is message of one who complained about poverty at the beginning of one of his hymns (Jafari, Bit, 270,

249 and 271):

God, I know that I am unable

My property is small and my followers are low

I ask you to help me, My God, I need the kindness which is granted to the beloved by the lover. Please show the true way by help of truth and good nature (Eshtodgut-Yasan, 2-46). In the second half of the same hymn, he said that the greatest king of that period had become his friend and follower. We know that Zoroaster has lived happily for 35 years and extended his religion by help of his followers and completed new order of Gatha close to the same period. But in this message, there is no sign of court dignity, property of others, retinue, bondwoman and slaves, castle and palace (the same,8). This kind of living suggests positive zohd, isn't it? Thirdly, what is interesting in Mazdayasna is three words of Humet, Hovakht and Huresht meaning good thought, good speech and good deed that have been repeated in each page and all good practices are not out of area of these three words. Everyone who has these three essences will reach secret of communion and become a perfect human with all divine attributes. According to Ahoramzda, there is no happiness for a prophet higher than these three things so that he wished in Aban Yasht (chapter 18) that sacred Zoroaster, son of Pourshasb, thinks, speaks and behaves in terms of religion. In Gatha, Zoroaster (and later in Avesta) has asked these three things for followers of Mazdayasna (Pourdavud, 1974:22, 20). All hopes and dreams of one religious Mazdayasna are to reach degree of Ashu i.e. he should be true and honest (the same).

### Zohd in Islam

Zohd has been emphasized in Islamic religion several times and has been mentioned in narratives of the prophet Mohammad and his inmate. For example, Prophet Mohammad has said that they had not served God in the world by anything except zohd (Majlesi, 1403:322). He has also said that God had not chosen a prophet except for his zohd (Noori Altabarasi, 2004). Imam Ali who is the perfect embodiment of zohd has interpreted it in different ways including zohd is a wealth and it is true because wealth is a kind of thing that makes human being independent from others and zohd is the only independency in the world. Therefore, zohd is greater riches and wealth (Ibn Abi Alhadid, 2003:91). In teachings of all infallible Imams, admiration of zohd is seen in their behaviors. There is a hadith from Imam Sadegh who said: all goodness has been placed in a house which its key is zohd in the world.

### Zohd from view of Quran

In Quran, the word zohd has been named only once in Surah Yusuf, Ayah 20:

و شروه بثمان بخرس دراهم معدوده و كانوا افية من الزاهدين

he (Yusuf) has been sold with low price and they

were reluctant to him (Abdolbaghi, 1985:332). The late Tabatabaee has interpreted this ayah in Almizan interpretation as follows: *ثمن* means a price that is lower than its real value and *دراهم معدوده* means a low price. It is said to be a low price because during those days too much money was not counted but it was weighed and only trivial money was counted. *دراهم* means coins made of silver that were common among people. Here *شراء* means selling and *zohd* means being reluctant to everything and it is possible to mean avoidance (Tabatabaee, 1984, volume 11:167). However, in this ayah, the word *zohd* has been used lexically. Other ayahs will be discussed for more familiarity such as Surah Al-Hadid (The Iron), Ayah 23, because Imam Ali has described *zohd* in Nahjol Balaghe as follows:

الزهد كله بين كلمتين من القرآن: قال الله سبحانه "لكيلا تأسوا على ما فاتكم، و لا تفرحوا بما آتاكم" و من لم يأس على الماضي و لم يفرح بالآتي فقد اخذ الزهد بطرفيه

*Zohd* is described by two words in Quran. God says: do not be afraid for what you have lost and do not be happy for what you have obtained. One who is not afraid of past and is not happy towards future, has considered both sides of *zohd*. In another hadith, it has been said that people are divided into three groups: devout, patient and inclined. Pious people remove sorrows and pleasures from their hearts so they do not become happy for worldly deeds and they are not cheerful. They also are not afraid of anything so that they are in comfort (Al-Qomi Al Mashadi, 1411:1055-106) The great Mohyaldin Arabi interpreted this ayah as follows: problems faced by people such as external, physical and spiritual events are included in a book. Here book means general heart that is called protected board. You have to know that certainly your protection, avoidance and guidance do not affect what you have obtained and your inability, ignorance, non-protection, non-avoidance do not affect what you have lost. Therefore you do not have to be sorry for losing goodness and obtaining wickedness and you must not be cheerful for obtaining goodness and removing evil deeds because all of them have been predestinated for you.

"والله لا يجب كل مختال فخور"

*مختال*, means a person who has become proud due to intense pleasure and cheerfulness and he is pride on what has been given to him. it is due to lack of certainty and separation from God and because of affection of material world and attraction to weak and humble direction, denial of divine presence and not being able to see the light due to darkness (Ibn Arabi, 1978, 606-607). In Makarem Alakhlagh, the late Tabarasi has cited from Imam Ali about *zohd* of the prophet Mohammad (peace upon him): The prophet contented with the world to grant his request and did

not stare at it, did not fill his mouth with food and did not pay attention to them. He was the thinnest and the hungriest person. Treasures were granted to him but he did not accept them (Altabarasi, Bita:17). The prophet patched his cloths, repaired his shoes, milked his sheep, ate food with slaves, sit on the ground, rode donkey and rode another person on his donkey back without any shame, supplied his requirements from market and carried them to his house, and shook his hand with poor and rich people equally (Deilami, Bita:115). In brief, the prophet did not want the world inly and disappeared the world in himself such that he did not want to see world decorations in order that not to wear its fine clothes, not to see the world as his eternal place and not to hope to reside in the world. So he totally removed and forgot the world from his heart. If one dislikes something, he will not look at it even he will not like to remember it (Tabatabaee, 1965:14).

### Results and discussion

Considering research on Zoroastrian texts that emphasize on reaching Ashu degree (truth and cleanness), a question is arisen that is whether Ashu degree can be reached without avoiding most of thoughts, speeches and performances? Is the meaning of positive *zohd* something other than it?

Many corruptions Result from dependency on the world. When human being does whatever he can to reach the world, there is no place to think about good thought, speech and deed. Therefore, one cannot think, speak and act in a good manner unless he/she thinks about the world in a balanced form. This thought has been validated by Minoo Kherad:

1- A wise man asked Minoo Kherad 2- who is the most dervishes among rich people and who is the richest among dervishes? 3- Minoo Kherad answered that 4- the most dervish is one who is not happy about what he has and 5- he is sad about what he has more than his needs 6- the richest dervish is who that is happy about what he has obtained 7- and does not think about more than what he has (Tafazoli (translator), 1985).

4- However, even today by studying Gatha, a positive *zohd* is appeared in a way that Nietzsche interpreted from a book called: what Zoroaster has said" that in fact there are people who are totally pious. They are more comfortable and better than you (Nietzsche, 1991:75).

1- A wise man asked Minoo Kherad 2- which one is better, friary, wealth or power? 3- Minoo answered that 4- friary accompanied with truth is better than wealth from others property (Tafazoli (translator) 1985). Considering what has been said, it is concluded that what is rejected is extreme *zohd*. It means that it is accepted that Zoroaster Ashu like other leaders of Aryan religions does not teach that

everybody is saved by death and they have to avoid material and physical pleasures, seclude and pray with hard labor rather he says that human being has been created for social life and living period is an eternal conflict and fight between good and evil and one who supports truth has to struggle with evil deeds throughout his life. He has to know that his redemption depends on labor, endeavor and serving others (Shahzadi, 1992:78). Unlike Manicheans who place matter and mind opposite to each other, humiliates the body and thinks that life is null, according to Zoroaster, the matter is not evil in its own rather the way it is used can be source of good and evil deeds. Therefore, Zoroaster does not humiliate life rather he thinks that using life blessings are right that all people should use them (Mehrin, 1982). Thus, what is claimed by Zoroastrians is that it is not true that there is no zohd in their religion because according to what has been said about their books, it is proved that there is zohd in Zoroastrian religion because these concepts reject negative and extreme zohd and accept balanced and positive zohd. In Islamic religion, zohd has been emphasized on because the great and perfect religion of Islam is seeking ethical and spiritual sublimation of human being. It is not reached unless rejection of the world and its manifestation. Of course, extreme and deceptive zohd has not been advised in Islam. In summary, after searching on zohd in Zoroastrian and Islamic religions, following results were obtained:

1- Zohd has been advised in Zoroastrian religion

2- Zohd in Zoroastrian is poor and indirect such

that its followers think that it is not present in their religion but in Islam, this subject has been dealt with clearly and in religious texts (Quran, Nahjolbalaghe, books of hadith), life of the prophet and his household, there is a positive and reasonable zohd that causes ethical and spiritual sublimation of human being.

#### References

- 1- Quran
- 2- Ibn Abi Alhadid, research: Mohamad Abolfazl Ibrahim, (2003), Ismailian institute, description of Nahjolbalaghe, Vol 18, Qom
- 3- Ibn Arabi, Mohayldin, research and presentation: Mostafa Ghaleb (1978), interpretation of Quran, second volume, Altaba Alsanieh, Naser Khosro press.
- 4- Esfandyar, Keikhosro, attempted by Rahim Rezazade (1983), religions' school, first edition.
- 5- Bois, Mary, translator: Homayon Sanati zadeh, (1995), history of Zoroastrian religion, Tehran:

Toos press, first edition

- 6-Pourdavoud (1974), Avesta (Yashtha), Tehran: Froohar press, second edition
- 7- Tafazoli, Ahmad (translator)- Minoo Kherad (Attorney Minoo Kherad-Pahlavi advices), Toos press, second edition, 1985.
- 8- Jafari, Ali Akbar, Setvat Yasan, Bita
- 9- Deilami, abi Mohammad Alhasan ibn Mohammad, Ershad Algholob, Qom: Razi press, Chapter 30, Bita
- 10- Razi, Hashem, history of religions, third book, appearance of philosophy, Kaveh press, 1963
- 11- Seyyed Razi (compiler), translator: Mostafa Zamani (1992), Nahjolbalaghe, Mashad: Nabavi press, sixth edition
- 12- Shahzadi, Rostam (1992), Zoroaster and his teachings, Froohar press, first edition
- 13- Tabatabaee, Seyyed Mohammad Hossein, translator: Seyyed Mohammad Bagher Mosavi Hamadani (1984), Almizan interpretation, Vol 11, scientific and intellectual institute of Great Tabatabaee.
- 14- Altabarasi, Razi Aldin Abi Nasr Al hasan ibn Alfazl, translator: Seyyed Ibrahim Mirbagheri, Makarem Alakhlagh, Farahani press, Bita.
- 15- Abdolbaghi, Mohammad Foad (1985), Almoajam Almofheres lalefaz Al Quran, Cairo, Matba Darolketab of Egypt.
- 16- Alalavi, Abolma'ali Mohammad Ibn Al Hossein, correction, codification and compilation: Hashem Razi, Bayan Al Adyan, Farahani press, Bita
- 17- Alghomi Almashadi, Mohammad Ibn Mohammad Reza, translated by Hossein Dargahi (1411,(lunar year), interpretation of Kanz Aldaghayegh andb Bahr Algharayeb, Vol 3, institute of Altaba and Alnashr, altaba Aloula
- 18- Majlesi, Mohammad Bagher (1403 (lunar year)), Behar Alanvar (Vols 70, 73, 77, 78, 88), Dar Ahya Altorath Alarabi, Beirut, Altaba Alsaleth
- 19- Mehr, Farhang (2001), a new view on an old religion (Zoroastrian philosophy), Tehran: Diba press, fourth edition
- 20- Mehrin, Mehrdad (1982) review of Mazdayasan regulations, Froohar press
- 21- Noori Altabarasi, Mirza Hossein (2004), Mostadrak Alvasael, second chapter, Islamic school, scientific school of Najaf Alashraf
- 22- Nietzsche, Fredrick Wilhelm, translated by Dariush Ashouri (1991), what has been said by Zoroaster (a book for everyone and nobody), Agah press, edition 7

9/11/2013