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## SACRED PLANTS AS SIGNS OF A BOND BETWEEN MYTHS AND DIVINE STORIES

\*<sup>1</sup>Morvarid Jafari, <sup>2</sup>Gholamreza Hatfi Ardakani, <sup>3</sup>Seied Razi Moosavi Gilani

<sup>1</sup>PhD student, Department of wisdom of Islamic art, Faculty of Thought and art, university of Religions and denominations, Qom, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Ph.D. in Persian language and literature, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Yazd branch, Islamic Azad University, Yazd, Iran

<sup>3</sup>Department of wisdom of Islamic art, Faculty of Thought and art, university of Religions and denominations, Qom, Iran

Corresponding Author: Morvarid Jafari

### ABSTRACT

Myths are among the oldest legacies of ancestors that manifest in the culture and knowledge of modern societies. Included in the mythical elements of different religions that assume special respect are trees and plants that are regarded as sacred in divine books, and are sometimes viewed as heavenly trees and plants in the religious ceremonies of Abrahamic religions. The introduction of these plants under similar names and indicators in myths and religions raises the questions: "Are the sacred plants in religious texts the same as the sacred plants in myths or not?" and "Would these sacred plants be regarded as a common ground and an indication of an underlying union between myths and religious stories or that one should be seen as influenced by the other?" To answer the questions and demonstrate the link between myths and religions, a library-based study was performed on the subject and data led to the conclusion that even if a myth was assumed to be a deviation from divine stories, it would be reasonable to accept common elements of similar sanctity and to suggest that this would not contradict the acceptance of the deviation of one from the other. Meanwhile, the surviving documentation of old times indicates the originality of myths; so, if religious figures had opposing theories in this regard, they were required to use the advantages of religions along with myths as they had failed to produce a credible religious reason to substantiate their claims; for this, work has to start from the underlying and common elements, i.e., sacred plants.

**Keywords:** myths, creeds, rituals, beliefs, sacred plants, divine stories, union of religions.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

When studying myths, especially Iranian myths, we encounter a variety of gods, deities, plants, animals, and occurrences, the likes of which are also noted in religious texts, albeit with some

changes that bear the same underlying ground. In this connection, where monotheistic religions, especially Islam, have totally rejected the existence of mythical gods, humans, and animals of the same name and character, mythical plants assume increasingly special sanctity in religion. This raises the question: “Would the sanctity of these plants arise from the grace of the Lord’s sanctity as in monotheistic religions or have their roots back in myths?”

Tracing the etymology of the word *myth*, we arrive at the word *history*, which later has its roots integrated with the word *ashti* in the Avesta and *asti* in Sanskrit, with the latter being the same as the word *Hasti* (meaning existence). [Myth] should not be taken to be the same as the Qur’an sense where it reproaches the word *Asatir al-Avvalin* against *Ghesas al-Avvalin* or *Divine Stories*. This semantic contradiction in myths can be due to transforming meanings over time and place, which is a commonplace phenomenon. By myth in the Qur’an, it meant a fiction or a tale that was common among the people of Mecca, or it may even mean part of common myths deviated from reality and thus took the form of fiction. Most religious interpretations, however, provide unreal and false senses of the word *myth*, as general negative implications have caused a variety of myths to be unattended to and thus produced adverse effects, instead of leaving useful effects that could have influenced the art, community, and psyche of the people.

Disregard the origins of disagreements, we seek traces that may demonstrate the union between myths and religions; thus, as a common definition of myths denoting the history of existence, creation, and gods, the sacred plants will undoubtedly lay the common ground between the myths and the [divine] stories.

### **Literature Review**

There is a consensus among scholars and researchers about the religious functionality of myths. “Mehrdad Bahar considers myths to account for human material and immaterial needs, arguing that myths are widely applied not only in cultural contexts but also in political contexts” (Hajian, 30).

To Ershad: “Concerning creation, myths decode anything and deal with eschatology” (Ershad, 1). In other words, like religious teachings, myths are aimed at increasing human knowledge. Ershad also maintains that the most important characteristics of myths are their sanctity and eternity (Ershad, 4), which are outstanding elements in religious stories.

Quoting Jung, Taherin suggests: “With his desire to create symbols, man changes in his unconscious mind shapes to give them artistic or religious colors”. That said, Jung considers the desire to make symbols as the origin of religion and art, i.e., the union between myths and religious teachings is fundamentally inherent. Here, it is right to suggest that a myth is an art that carries over religious teachings in a symbolic form, and “religious thinking may have lasting implications if summarized in complex symbolic layers, as religions have taken the most use of visual symbol generation” (Taheri, 12).

The oldest primitive form of religion was totemism, referring to the respect by tribal people for and their belief in some of the plants and animals which they considered their spirits as their protectors and avoided killing and eating them. From this stage on, animals and plants began to attract sanctity and respect; for example, the Siavashan creed started from a totemic phenomenon, with Siavash turning into the god-king of agriculture. The creed still holds some ritual ceremonies that offer respect for plants and animals across the Iranian plateau. In totemic myths, the hero must lend an ear to the totem facing all types of vicissitudes and miseries so that he can win over them. Here, man is associated with plant species at two sociological and religious levels, incorporated together by myths. “Myths, in principle, strive to unify many heterogeneous beliefs and contracts” (Hosouri, 55).

Probably, the festivity of Nowruz in spring may have originated from plant gods who consider spring as the season of birth and regeneration. Nowruz ceremonies are among the oldest Iranian festivities, as the archeological findings and remnants of structures like Persepolis and Ghavi Ghal'e indicate that this special day had accurately been specified in the calendar and whose importance shows the history of the plant-god religion; this demonstrated that Persepolis was not only built for holding religious ceremonies relating to plant-god rites but was also a religious site rather than an empire palace" (Hosouri, 80).

Hajna argues that one would believe in a sacred report that explains and justifies the workings of various phenomena in the universe; this is what forms popular beliefs and shapes ideological and religious doctrine (Hajian, 30). Thus, if there was a myth that acceptably explained the way the universe was created by a single Creator, it would form a monotheistic religion, and if another myth explained the beginning of the earth's existence as a plant from the heavenly world, it would underly a plant-god creed.

"To Eliade, a myth narrates stories about gods, deities, and supernatural creatures and tells of a true and original past, at least what believers share in myths" (Ershad, 1).

### **Significance and Necessity of Study**

Religions and denominations, either divine or non-divine, show a roadmap for the puzzled man in the world of the unknown so that he applies the more complete knowledge he acquires in science and practice over formulated religious teachings to move on to a more real and truer path. In this connection, myths are the supporting girdle of ethnic groups' historical identity and enliven their past and thus help to create some emotional and mental bond, and consequently a political unity (Ershad, 212). These two elements help to get man toward felicity and transcendence. If these two saving elements are incorporated, they'll have their power increased. In our society, however, not only will these two not strengthen each other but they are not also aligned, either, with one dismissing the latter, and vice versa. Or the imperfect rationalist analyses of a semi-knowing man with limited knowledge reject both of which due to their scientific mismatch with reality and bereave the society from believing or respecting those beliefs.

If we accept, however, that "mythology lays bare the hidden aspects of the literature and art" (Komeil, 22), and that the youth are increasingly interested in myths and they learn from religions and myths, achieve self-knowledge and thus control their emotions of the stages of growth and the violence arising from them through their rites and ideologies, it will be when we get to understand the significance and necessity of finding a way to demonstrate the link between myths and religions.

### **Problem-Solving Method**

Since the study's goal was to investigate the relationship between myths and religions, we used data from library sources and analyzed those related to the subject under study, as well as the common religious knowledge and public religious teachings, to seek what is shared by myths and religions both in goals and doctrines; this would help verify the validity and credibility of theories about the so-called sacred plants in both religions and myths.

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## **Description**

### **Sacred Plants in Myths and Religions**

- A) The most important argumentative concept among Iranian people is the so-called Cosmic Tree. This very large plant encompasses all three structures of the universe, i.e., the sky, Earth, and the underworld (Taheri, 31). This cosmic tree, also called the tree of life, is the mystery behind the creation of the world and the indication of countless life and an immortal life continuation whose “branches are in the skies, fruits are as the shiny stars, trunk is on Earth, and roots are under the Earth, with the sun, the moon, and the stars shining among the branches of this tree as shiny fruits” (Ataei, 91). The Tree of Life connects together science, religion, philosophy, and myths, showing the tree with plenty of branches that indicate the continuity and integrity of all life on Earth. Theologically speaking, myths are mystical concepts referring to the reciprocal relationship between all components of life on our planet. The holy book refers to two trees in the Heavens. Adam and Eve were authorized to eat the fruits and blessings of the first tree, while barred from the second tree, called the tree of good and evil knowledge. The Qur’an introduces the heavenly Tuba Tree which is regarded as a reward for the God-fearing. The characteristics of this tree are no dissimilar to those of the Cosmic Tree when its large shade is said to pervade everywhere and reach the entire heavenly pavilions. The Sidr Tree, however, is also another example of the cosmic tree in our religious sources. The tree of life, according to sciences, resembles a diagram of the generation shared by evolving creatures and is considered to be a symbol that relates to the four *Akhshij* (the four main elements of nature), with the leaves associated with the wind, the roots with the earth, the flowing sap in the stalks with water and the wood with fire. These four elements (i.e., water, wind, fire, and earth) are the four primary matters, which our ancestors believed created our world. Ataei considers the chaos of each of these four elements as destroying the world, appearing in the form of floods, typhoons, earthquakes, and fire (volcano). This classification is derived from several Qur’anic texts describing the chaos of these elements in four stories of apostles. The chaos of water in the story of Noah, that of wind in the story of Hud, that of fire in the story of Lut, and that of earth in the story of Salih. Furthermore, the symbol Chelipa is also correlated with the four elements, with each branch or each house that likens the propeller of water and windmills and spinning spindles taking on a symbol of these elements (Ataei, 73). Although the tree of life or generally plants are associated with the four *Akhshij*, these elements already existed in Iranian myths before the creation of plants, as “the creation of fire was only correlated with herbs, maybe due to the fact that Iranians used to make fire from rubbing two pieces of wood together” (Joseph Carnoy, 31).
- B) Generally speaking, Iranians conceived of two types of the world; the first was a heavenly world lying in the skies and is home to the world of angels and souls, or what is known as the eternal Heavens or the Garden of Eden; meanwhile, the second world is the current world created following the heavenly world after going through the so-called six stages of 1) the sky, 2 and 3) water whose origins are laid between Earth and the sky, 4) trees, 5) animals and 6) humans (Ataei, 56). This is the same order of creation quoted by the Qur’an as the Six-Day Creation. The reason why Ataei calls the Third Day the day of plants and fruit trees in creation is due to the differences in sources that pertain to the four ancient Iranian religions (Ataei, 57). While Iranian religions explicitly refer to the heavenly world as the Heavens existing before the material or earthly world, Abrahamic religions provide no such rule. In other words, Adam was created in the Heavens and was made of earth, but later driven out, without having been clarified if there was a creation of the Heavens or heavenly beings; if it was, did that follow the creation of Earth or was it for the Adam’s dwelling after the descent? The sensitivity of the subject is because believing in the

Me'raj (prophethood ascent), the story of Adam's descent, and the description of green trees and large gardens beneath which fresh and translucent streams flow, the Qur'anic Heavens must have existed long before Adam and its creation must not have been delayed to after the Hereafter.

- C) According to the Avesta, three thousand years after the heavenly creation, God laid the soul of Zoroaster, which was a combination of light and the human body, in a tree inside the eternal Heavens (Ataei, 85). This heavenly tree is called Haoma, which is believed to be a god until it is in the Heavens, but when laid outside of the heavenly world, i.e., inside the world, it becomes a healing plant that produces sacred sap when its stem is beaten; this sap is believed to "create immortality and eternity when drunk. The Sepid (white) Haoma is the enemy of oldness, revives the dead and immortalizes the alive" (Joseph Carnoy, 31). Zoroastrians believe that this plant is also called the Tree of Life, which is grown in one of the summits of Mt. Alborz. Although there is little information about this plant, it is said to be intoxicating and causes some joyfulness and pleasure, giving it a divine property (Joseph Carnoy, 28). According to the Qur'an, while Adam and Eve were in the Heavens, and ate the forbidden plant and were then kicked out toward Earth, the above story, however, suggests that the soul of the Zoroaster, the prophet of Zoroastrians, was laid in the sacred tree, which thus made this heavenly tree sacred. So, Zoroaster was not the first human; rather, Keyumars was the first human who had taken up a seed form and had come to defeat the Evil on Earth; however, fighting the evil, he was killed and from whose body grew a plant that turned into the first human couples from whom all subsequent human generations developed.
- D) Thus, the Haoma plant is a heavenly plant and is sacred for being from the Heavens and blending with Zoroaster's soul; in fact, this plant had originally come from a heavenly world and a god and was immortal. When squeezed, it meant sacrificing which would cause the loss of evil and the strength of life among people. This denotes that the first sacrifice was of a plant aimed at repelling evil and the strength of life, while similarly denoting an increase in life blessing and felicity; it is a kind of sacrifice without blood with the same philosophy as in the sacrificing of sheep, which is common in our culture. "Various Jewish kings used to perform sacrifice ceremonies on the summits of mountains, but for Jehovah, they did a wrong practice" (Campbell, 47). While the relationship between sacrificing sheep in the Islamic culture to repel evil and disasters and sacrificing bulls in Mithraism warrants more research, sources have, however, suggested that the Asuric Tree, which Ataei mentioned in p. 184 of his book on the connection between the Tree of Creation and the Tree of Dates, can be considered the same tree of Haoma, whose dialogue with the goat focuses on the competition on the path to being sacrificed for giving life to people. That said, this dialogue is in line with the story of Cain and Abel who offered sheep and wheat to God; however, it should be said that sheep and goats are closely related and fall under cattle animals and wheat is a sacred plant in the Islamic culture and is believed to be the same forbidden heavenly plant. The story of the dialogue between the goat and the Asuric tree is a poem cited in a non-religious rather than a religious source; however, this [dialogue] can be the symbol of arbitration between the offerings of Cain and Abel, assuming the encounter between sedentary farmers and nomadic livestock breeders in this symbol. Ms. Arab suggests that "god Mithra maintains order and truth and controls expansive pastures, in addition to judging and arbitrating the worlds" (Arab, 48). In other words, Mithra is concerned with farming and possibly confronts vegetarian animals and livestock breeders that are menaces for those pastures. In yet another myth where the killing of the first bull is attributed to Mithra, "it is said that Mithra was born from a rock slab under the shade of a fig tree and covered herself with the leaves of the same tree" (Carnoy, 38). Here, Mithra is said to decide to kill creatures who had been born sooner than her. The sense here is a kind of unreasoned jealousy that may have been the cause of the subsequent dismissal of Mithra in Zoroastrianism. This Mithra is a god who is no longer in the heavenly world and kills the first bull; although Bandhashen quotes that the Evil killed the bull, in both bull-killing stories, the primary species used to grow from the same bull (Ataei, 171). Having said this, the Qur'anic story of Adam and Eve's use of tree leaves to cover themselves and the story of the jealousy of Cain being dismissed from the Heavens and refused the divine test, which ends up

in the killing of Abel, has the same roots as the story of Mithra. This is while Mashya and Mashyana, who were the first parents of all humans, used to wear clothes of leaves in the beginning (Ataei, 175).

- E) “Giving alms and alimony to Haoma was a common practice in ancient times. This offering was a Hindu-Iranian ceremony, a myth of the same background can be found in the Vedas” (Joseph Carnoy, 30). This rite is still being held in Zoroastrianism in a special manner. The ceremonies of Barsom, praising, and thanksgiving are aimed at benefiting from plants. Barsom is another sign associated with the tree of life which must be from the cut-off branches of such trees as pomegranates, tamarisks, and Haoma, with the very practice of offering the alimony being a combination of the kernel of the Haoma plant’s stem, and the sap of the pomegranate’s leave with milk, as pomegranate is a heavenly fruit in Islamic teachings. This plant is thus sacred in both religions and constitutes another part of the ideological commonalities of both religions.
- F) According to Zoroastrianism, when plants were being created, Amordad, the immortal god preserving plants created the Gokarn Tree, which was tasked with countering withering and old age. This tree is an earthly form and another manifestation of the heavenly plant of the sacred Haoma. Called many-seed or all-seed tree, this tree has in its own the seed of all plants, which mitigate sadness and grief and enjoy medicinal and therapeutic properties; this is the same tree of life referred to in the Torah (Carnoy, 29; Ataei, 107). Keyumars, who is the first human, has an herbal nature, like the single-created bull, which is the first creature and, from one perspective, the wife of Keyumars (Ataei, 114). When killed by the deception of the Evil, Keyumars had his body grow a bipedal plant like rhubarb, which was another manifestation of the tree of life, turning in several stages into Mashya and Mashyana, who were the first human couples, as suggested by Iranian myths. “The greatest achievement of Mashya and Mashyana is farming that relieves people of nomad life for finding herbal edibles” (Ataei, 174). The view of plant-based people may have constituted the idea of the myth of Mashya and Mashyana or distorted the original divine story. Plant people are species of nocturnal plant that have were-human roots and affect the power of imagination due to the hallucinogenic property it has, thus causing the state of delirium. The combination of these two highly rare properties would help to make up a story to be accepted by the audience and to form this myth, as it is a fixture in religious and magic ceremonies and is used in festivities. Generally, according to Iranian myths, not only the first plant but also the first human and animal had seed-like states, identified with similar length and width from whose organs grew plants, after being killed or sacrificed. Writing of the fifth battle with the Evil, Ms. Arab recalled sheep as the first sacrifice from among the domestic quadruped, stating that “it also died like the single-created bull because it held an herbal nature” (Arab, 22). In an image on p. 47 of her book, she depicts the birth of Mithra from the egg of a cosmic hen. She also names seven types of seeds and twelve types of healing plants, growing out of each of the organs of the first scarified sheep. She also talks about the Gergerou seed, which is a kind of black-color grain smaller than peas, sesame, mung bean, peganum harmala seed, and thyme, used by Amshasb Bahman to stop destruction by witches. She generally reasons that from every organ of the [animal] that [the seed] may have grown the relevant plant will heal and strengthen the same [human] organ (Arab, 23). The plant that grows out of the blood is grape. Grapes and vines are among the sacred trees, referred to in the Qur’an eleven times in different forms. Raising grapes, other trees, and vineyards in the Torah are highly important, as the Qur’an and the Bible have assumed special respect for this tree. In ancient Rome, “Dionysus was the lame god, the god of vine, wine and theater for whose honor festivities of revelry and drinking were held” (Birlin, 40). Nowadays, wine is so sacred among Christians that is regarded as the blood of Jesus and is sometimes eaten with bread in some ceremonies. In some mythologies, “unblended wine was intoxicating, and it was ritually accepted to blend wine with water (or something else) that is not intoxicating so that its power of effectiveness would decline” (Birlin, 40). According to the Qur’anic descriptions of the Heavens, a non-intoxicating wine is regarded as a reward for the

people of the Heavens; meanwhile, an ancient and engraved pattern shows Mithra appearing out of a rock holding a bunch of grapes, suggesting that grape has assumed a special position in Mithraism (Carnoy, 40).

- G) In plant-based human mythologies, both Mithra and Zoroaster are associated with the symbol of a tree. It is believed that firstly the Amshaspandans or the Immortals, which were gods, made from the tree of Haoma a stem the size of a man, and then blew the soul of Zoroaster into that stem, making Zoroaster's mother pregnant with him by eating the Haoma tree (Ataei, 30 and 172). This part of the myth, which is real in Zoroastrianism, is strangely similar to Christians' beliefs about Mary and her expectation of Christ. In this story, too, there were immortals, i.e., gods or angels who had made Zoroaster's mother pregnant with him by means of the Haoma tree. Doughdoyeh, the mother of Zoroaster, was 15 years old by the time of the rise of Zoroaster's Farrah (divine sign). Her house was fully illuminated for three days, which made Doughdoyeh's father suspect that she had been bewitched and gone mad before kicking her out of the house (Arab, 85). In the footnote of p. 85 of his book, Ataei quotes a sentence in one of the Jewish scriptures where the word Mashih with the Messiah fell under one single title which was in the thought of God before the creation of the world, just like Zoroaster, who was made by Amshaspandans during the heavenly period and before the rise of falsehood. Furthermore, several other sources have identified Mashya and Mashyana as the same as the Messiah. "Even the first Zoroaster was the same savior Mithra or Mashya, who was also called the Messiah". He was the same as Christ the Savior in various creeds. The bond between Mithra's star and Zoroaster is because Zoroaster has also been named the golden star and the life-giving star. The body of the three-headed Mithra is the essence of Sushians, the latest descendant of the Zoroaster race, seeing the world with six eyes. "The myth of Mithra survived in Buddhism and led to an image of a three-headed Buddha" (Ataei, 31). The body of the three-headed Mithra is plant-human, with the sacred tree of Buddhas being Peipial, which is "highly sacred because Gautama attained eternal illumination and became Buddha after sitting in the shade of this plant for forty days and nights" (Taheri, 53).
- H) "When finding his way to the doorstep of Goshtashb, Zoroaster was carrying a Cypress tree and the fire of Mithra" (Ataei, 30). In an image, on the other hand, Mithra was born from the middle of a tree like a Cypress. Moreover, Iranians considered the Kashmar Cypress as a sign of Zoroaster (Ataei, 30 and 171). This suggested that the Cypress tree was considered to be sacred among ancient Iranians, both in Mithraism and in Zoroastrianism, especially when it is 1400 years old, a number showing the age of the Kashmar Cypress in 232 A.H. (846 A.D.). There is a story that tells of the absolute sanctity of Cypress for Zoroaster. The story goes as follows: Motavakel had heard about the reputation of this tree and its blessings and had become interested in using it for building the Jafariye Palace in Baghdad. Zoroastrians strongly opposed this view due to the holiness of this tree and were even prepared to give a hefty sum of money to the Abbasid ruler for refusing to cut this tree off. Considering his request as binding, Motavakel did not heed their advice and had some people cut down the tree; however, he was murdered before the cut-off Cypress of Kashmar ever reached Baghdad, which strengthened the sanctity of the tree" (Taheri, 38). Hosouri considers the palm tree, known as a sign of the Siavashan creed, to be a combination of the Cypress tree and the Siavash's coffin both in terms of making and configuration. "The way Siavash's coffin has transformed into a palm tree has undoubtedly taken place during a long term with the integration of several beliefs", because a large part of Western Asia had faith in the plant God and the tree of life or the sacred tree, with "the plant/herbal God and the sacred tree incorporated and unified in the body of the palm tree" (Hosouri, 106). Hosouri's words show that Cypress has been the same sacred tree and the tree of life in the beliefs of Western Asian people.

- I) In the Mithra bull-killing story, the plant growing from Siavash's blood is associated with the wheat growing from Mithra's dagger's spot" (Ataei, 171). The sacred tree is not a copy of the embellished real tree; rather, the mystery behind its embellishment is due to its sacred nature generated through the development and stylistics of the completely artificial pattern (Hosouri, 106). The room-like shape of this tree is reminiscent of Siavash's coffin. Existing signs indicate that the rituals of mourning Siavash or Siavashan were used to be held in different areas of Central Asia and Iran, as well as ancient regions, with the ritual of palm-taking in Ashura of Imam Hossein being almost the same as the ritual of the Siavashan ritual. This ritual is held by Shiites only to mourn the heroes of the Karbala event. "In general, ceremonies and rituals, including magic and religious ceremonies, constitute the tangible and concrete aspects of the myths of an ethnic group, with myths described as the theoretical foundations of ethnic groups and rituals as the practical aspects of those thoughts" (Ershad, 2). This is to suggest that the creed or ritual that represents the symbol or sign of an animal, a plant, or an object is definitely based on a religion or denomination and reflects that representation. It is worthy of attention that given the definitions of sanctity, even a face like Evil, which is tabooed because of its negative aspect, encompasses two sacred and profanity (forbidden) senses (Ershad, 5). Taking into consideration each and every one of the conventional rituals and creeds around us, from the apples, garlic, and the grass of the Haft Sin to the bread and thorn of the Roghaye food cloth, to the Henna ceremony of the bride and groom and the incense stick that burns, to the grains and plants used in cooking sweets and special edibles in festivities, mourning and birth, as well as vowing ceremonies, we almost see all plants within the scope of sanctity of various religions. Many of these plants are shared by all religions and used in the same manner. These are the plants that assume importance and sanctity not just through the means of non-monotheistic myths but via many divine religions.

The Qur'an has mentioned over thirty types of plants, fruits, vegetation, and grains, which are either heavenly like pomegranates or bananas or are sworn to by God like figs and olives, or are descended down from the sky for some people like peas and onions as divine blessings; for this, they are sacred and have high values. These trees and their fruits enjoy the same value and respect as in other Abrahamic religions. Twenty-five verses of the Bible have referred to wheat and its cultivation, harvesting, and flour, with the Qur'an considering it as a divine blessing and grace. Mint, common dill, coriander, and various vegetables are also mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and are said to be subjected to taxes. Ms. Arab defines the Amordad god in Iranian thinking as the god of plants and immortality and describes it as the guardian of trees who does not allow entry to the Heavens those who have wronged the trees. Amordad or Khordad is the god of permanent water and partnership, and it is with the help of the god of water that the god of plants battles the demon of drought, as the Qur'an considers water to be the essence of life and that which enlivens the earth. These two gods, along with Amshaspandans, or the god of Earth, are three divine manifestations of God Almighty which have feminine characteristics. Amshaspandans or gods (the immortals) are representatives of the same divine angels referred to by Abrahamic religions which, in a myth, are said to amount to 6, three of which were females and the other three males. That's why the Qur'an has reproached those who used to consider the angels as females and called them the daughters of God.

In Sasanid-era Iran, we had Mithraism, Zurvanism, and Manichaeism which, together with Zoroastrianism, the ruling religion, amounted to the four main religions whose mythical elements were much similar and had much in common with Abrahamic religions. "We have poems composed by Zoroaster about the Creation 8500 years ago and are reflected by the Iranians migrating to India, as cited in the Vedas" (Ataei, 36, footnote). Thus, Buddhism and Daoism have much in common with Iranian religions. The Iranian sources of the Avesta are Gahan or Duran, written before the Achaemenians, or Yasht and Vendidad are said to have been religious collection of poems in praise of ancient gods which were composed during the Achaemenid period and referred to the pre-Zoroaster gods. The combination of religious sources led to



Sanaviyat (Duality) and Taslis (Trinity). In the Manichaeic creed, for example, we have the duality of illumination and darkness, with “the influence of Manichaeic myths being greater on the Islamic-Iranian culture than Zoroastrian myths” (Ershad, 6). In Zurvanism, the trinity of Zurvan, Hormuz, and the Evil (Ahriman), which is the same Gahan-based trinity of Angare Minou and Sepand Minou, is similar to the trinity found in Hinduism with Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, though with slight differences that may finally associate with the Christian Trinity. We have a single God in Abrahamic religions, while the first God may or may not be the Creator in other religions. It is often seen that a god like Ormuzd is omniscient and before creating something he has by himself the Evil (Ahriman) somewhere in this world, with the difference between the two being that Ormuzd is aware of the existence of the Evil but not the other way around. The existence of Ormuzd is illumination by which he separates from the Evil, who is probably in darkness and thus commences his creation by spreading his illumination across the world (Birlin, 56). This is followed by the Evil waking up. Of course, Ormuzd has Amshaspandans who sometimes perform the act of creation, though they may no longer perform god-like actions after the creation of one stage of existence, thus entrusting the practice to another god. In many religions, there is already one god, followed by other gods who perform the act of creation. While Plato’s creating god is Demiurge, he is not the creator of the world of imagination (archetype), with the world of imagination and other gods already existing before him. Here, gods are thought of as created by themselves and Amshaspand means immortal. gods are not created by anyone. May their period of tenure end and be pervaded by death? Amshaspandans, however, are eternal, as this does not suggest they may have necessarily been created by themselves or have had a creator; rather, there is no death or nothingness for them. These Amshaspandans on the earth are characterized by herbal properties, as was described by the soul of Zoroaster and the stem of Haoma. We read from other cultures that “God was born out of a tree and we find Him on lotus in Mithraism” (Hosouri, 107). The key point is that all religions have discussed creation and the nature of all creatures, with the creations in most cases explained by the growth of trees from seeds and soil. No [religion] has given a clear explanation about the existence of the first being who created or willed the rest, except for Zurvanism, which did not consider the creation of the world as an act of God; rather, they considered infinite time and place to be formless primary matter constrained to what has a form; in other words, Zurvanism was the religion of thinkers who believed in the gradual material evolution of the world without the need for a creator, the afterworld and the system of reward and punishment (Arab, 128). That said, Iranian religions even included modern atheistic religions that explain the existence of the world based on the gradual evolution theory. In the footnote to p. 62, Ataei regarded Abu Reyhan as the theorist of gradual evolution, before Darwin, quoting Ezzat al-Din Nasafi that the gradual evolution of souls was partial and their first forms were as follows: Tahlab is a green plant that initiated all plants and herbs. This plant grows and reproduces in waters and then takes the form of other plants and trees “in as much as trees approach the [form] of animals like the palm tree and the tree of fertilization” (Ataei, 62). Here, Nasafi may be referring to a plant like algae or coral that is the in-between of the plants and creatures. It is worthy of note that corals are among the oldest sedentary living creatures characterized by such signs as being a plant and a creature, whereas not identified as plants or creatures by some other scientific proofs. Algae also fall between plants and creatures, being both and none of them, at the same time. For this, they fall into another separate class. This same position is taken by Jews about the first aquatic plant-animal species, referred to in the Torah.

Mr. Hajian considers myths to be the description of gods’ acts and practices and the retelling of their divinity, calling myths to be sacred reports. That said, myths are aligned with divine religious teachings. Sacred art represents transcendental, metaphysical, and religious facts in the form of symbols which becomes successful if it explains religious concepts in a way that the inward truth of objects and events is manifested (Rahnavard, 19). “Psychologically, myths are the transformed remainders of human dreams, which are not human-based but God-based”. Mythical

characters serve as leaders on top that manifest leadership properties and move toward achieving and understanding truths (Hajian, 24 and 25). These characters are not necessarily human or they may take human forms and thus appear as symbols. “Symbols are exchanged between cultures, and many of which are integrated into their new destinations between the ancient thoughts of the masses and find new meanings”. “Inside a culture, symbols may take on new meanings in the transition from one generation to another, as symbolic meanings are internalized based on social contracts within a culture”. “To be redefined, a symbol needs collective acceptance” (Taheri, 13 & 14). In case of collective acceptance, the new religion or creed will be founded on the same symbol automatically, without considering whether the originality of the symbol is divine or derived from a human dream. “Evidence suggests that in this connection, myths did not belong to specific ethnicity” (Hosouri, 25). Thus, like traditionalists, one could believe in the transcendental unity of religions, the unity of originality of the myths and religious teachings.

Since the people of the Orient were the older dwellers of the earth and had less information about the environment, they used to encounter more unknowns as they were closer to the diverse wildlife and experienced more natural events. For this, they could provide a world of imagination and a creative mind to make up the metaphysical world as answers. Traditional habits also helped to transfer and perceive concepts to future generations. This does not contradict the fact that the stories and responsibilities of the first human were exchanged by his offspring which thus had its appearance change due to geography and traditions and manifested in each region in the form of a religion under a different rite or creed, with a strong cultural backing and its attractions. Hosouri considers the distance from the centers of power and the neighborhood of major cultures, including China, and the dominance of the Iranian culture as evidence that central Asia must have been free from any religious bias compared to all human cultural manifestations, especially religion (Hosouri, 24). In sum, Hosouri considers the agreement between religions and myths to be dependent on the past which is lost with rising power ambitions. “The Jehovah creed was a special movement in the Hebraic community, which finally became victorious and pioneered a temple-bound God against praying nature and was respected everywhere” (Campbell, 47). The biggest service offered by religious teachings is to take serious myths (Campbell, 32). Myths have mystical functions and help to perceive the world, humans, the universe, and society, thus dictating adherence to a certain social order and life wisdom (Campbell, 62). The war between religions in Beirut was the result of the metaphorical captivity of different followers, as the authority of religion was the same and only had a difference in names, with followers communicating with each other to find the same originality (Campbell, 46).

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## **CONCLUSION**

Myths are unwritten and agreed-upon laws by which people live and think and thus train their children their systematic thinking in the form of creeds, traditions, symbols, and stories and transfer them to future generations. So, behind any aspect of a myth is a world of thinking and perception that should not be rejected without an understanding of them. For followers, religions are transcendental laws that seek human felicity; however, a world without religions and myths could lead to mental disturbance and cause violence in the youth. So, to have a healthy and safer society, what makes religions and myths alongside each other needs to be understood and the benefits of the strengthening of this unity should be utilized. Tangible ideological commonalities will meet this desire more than anything else and thus help to strengthen the relationship between religious followers with other followers of other religions in terms of respect and compromise. All religions have talked about gods, angels, rewards and punishments, humans, objects, places, animals, and plants. In this connection, gods, angels, and the Heavens and the Hell are transcendental matters that can specifically manifest for each group. These are what distinguish religions from each other, not the commonalities. Sacred characters, objects, and places are also differentiating indicators and cannot be viewed as commonalities between myths and religions,

since they do not get repeated over time. Sacred animals mostly play the role of gods for religious followers, and for this, they are competitors to the main God in other religions, thus being stripped of divinity and sanctity. A number of plants, however, which could have been the gods of the totemic era, have still maintained their sanctity. Fruit trees, including dates and grapes, which were symbols of life and fertility in ancient Iran are still important in the religious ceremonies of divine religions. The growth and greenery of such trees as plantain and cypress, which have a long life and were used in religious ceremonies in ancient times, are still respected in religious and ritual ceremonies. The cultivation and harvesting of wheat in Abrahamic religions have as much respect and reward as in other religions. While in the totemic era, the killing and eating of a number of animals and plants, whose spirits were regarded as their protectors, were avoided, no such avoidance of vegetarianism could be advised in the modern world even if this sanctity could emerge as a diet of avoiding carnivorousism. It is believed that the sanctity of plant totemism had resulted in the eating of plants under special circumstances, thus being generalized among the believers in a specific manner of sanctity, disregarding religion, rituals, and the type of plants. For this, it can be regarded as a tangible common aspect in all religions and myths.

Religious authorities across Iran, who are following with regret the ever-increasing data of religious aversion among the youth, would see if they acquire the art of seeing from the view of others, that religious aversion and religious antagonism are not due to the non-acceptance of religious truths and the repetition of religious practices; because the youth have shown the most interest in imaginary stories and myths, whose non-real nature is clear. They perform some rituals and ceremonies better than older believers and it is quite interesting and comforting for them to repeat and review those myths and rituals. Compared to the past youth, modern youths have greater amounts of information about nations and cultures. Upon a closer look, what has drawn the youth to antagonism against religion is the compulsion to be observed in some religious indicators, as the intensity of this sanctity has sometimes led them to desecrate some religious rituals. This means that their aversion to religion is a conscious escape from an unwanted conflict with others' sacred matters. For this, it is required to adopt a natural and reasonable reaction that should make us decisive in softening and suspending the boundaries that cause belligerence against religion.

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