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## CHINVAT

### HOW IT BECAME A BRIDGE TO THE NEXT WORLD

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When you visit a hospice where the terminally ill are awaiting their final moments, if you talk to them, you'll find they have reflected deeply on their lives and are either at peace or agitated. This introspection, often due to having enough time, profoundly impacts them. But it's not just limited to them. It's a moment that everyone will experience at the very Edge of Their Time (*Peretum*) before the brain shuts down. It is a moment for evaluation, CHIN-VATO (*Chin-Bovat*) How Was Their Own Deeds and Words. (*Khvaish Shyaothanaish Hizvas cha*) (Gatha Ha 51.13)

In ancient times, before electricity, people often slept under the open sky, especially during summer. Gazing at the stars, they formed them into shapes and imagined stories, which became myths and gave birth to gods, angels, disciples, heroes, and even demons. These stellar patterns are what we now call constellations. Today, we believe in those stories and don't see their relation to the stars.

Ancient Iranians, along with the Chinese, Egyptians, and Indians, identified one such constellation in the shape of an archer. The Iranians in the Avesta named this archer Erekhsha; in modern terms, he is called



[Arash-e-Kamangir](#) (Arash the Archer).<sup>1</sup> In the Avesta's Tir Yasht, this constellation is described, along with its journey across the sky over different landscapes and its connection to climatic conditions, depicted by other constellations in the form of black and white horses, essentially creating an astronomical report. Later, Shahnameh mentioned Arash as an able archer without referencing any historical or astronomical connection. Decades ago, in the 1960s, the Iranian poet Siavash Kasrai wrote a patriotic poem that mistakenly linked Arash to an irrelevant historical period and the long flight of his arrow, the determinant of the border between Iran and its arch-enemy Turan. This misattribution, now part of folklore, is authenticated by erroneously connecting it to the Avesta and Shahnameh, though examining these sources reveals this error.

Similarly, there is a belief in the existence of a bridge known as the Chinvat Bridge, which Zoroastrians have to cross after death on their way to heaven or hell. Two dogs are said to guard this bridge. The Vendidad (Fargard 13.9 & 19.30) describes the dogs' role, judgment process, and the consequences of one's deeds. During the Sassanian era, the Arda Viraf Nameh expanded on the Chinvat Bridge, describing how it narrows for sinners, causing them to fall into hell, and widens for the righteous, allowing them to cross into heaven. Later, during the Islamic era, the bridge is mentioned again in the Pahlavi texts, such as the Denkard and Bundahishn (Chapter 30). The word ChinVato is originally mentioned in the Gathas of Zarathushtra (Yasna 46.10, 46.11, and 51.13), though the word "Bridge" does not appear in any of those verses in the Avesta language. Translators or paraphrasers have introduced the term "Bridge" in their translation of the Gathas.

The ancient Iranians, who worshipped Mithra (*Mehr*), saw the Milky Way in the night sky and envisioned it as a bridge to Mithra's abode. These followers of Mithra, who converted to Zoroastrianism, likely

introduced this idea. Over time, through the Vendidad and Arda Viraf Nameh, this evolved into the concept of the Chinvat Bridge.



The Milky Way above Devil's Tower National Monument, USA.  
NPS / Damon Joyce

Mithraism predates Zoroastrianism. In the Shahnameh, figures like Shah Jamshid, Hushang, and the hero Rostam were followers of Mithra. After the fall of the Akha-Manesh (*Benevolent Thoughts*) (Achaemenid) Dynasty, Alexander, following Aristotle's guidance, sought to destroy Zoroastrianism and promoted Mithraism, particularly among the Ashkanians (Parthians). Ardalan, the last Ashkanian king, tried to revive Zoroastrianism after 500 years by collecting the scattered Avesta.

The Sassanians, who overthrew the Ashkanians, completed the collection of the Avesta but encountered many incomplete concepts and unanswered questions. Many of the Magi, formerly Mithra followers, worked to fill these gaps. Arda Viraf, one such Magi, consumed ritual narcotics and, after a seven-day trance, recounted what we now know as the Arda Viraf Nameh.



The two dogs at the bridge's entrance reflect Greek influence after the fall of the Akha-Manesh Empire. What Iranians, Egyptians, Chinese, and Indians saw as an Archer, the Greeks transformed it into a dog called the Canis Major. On either side of the Milky Way are constellations depicted as dogs: Canis Major (the Big Dog) and Canis Minor (the Lesser Dog). That helps establish the origin of the Chinvat Bridge as a post-Alexander concept, rooted in Mithraism rather than the Gathas, where translators inserted "Bridge" under Mithraic-Zoroastrian influence.

In the Gathas (Ha 51.13), "*ChinVato Peretao Akao, Khvaish Shyaothanaish Hizvas cha*" translates to "*(How was) Review before death reveal Their own deeds and words*". It refers to the self-examination of one's life just before death. It can bring either peace or pain before the brain ceases to function. (*In Sanskrit, ParetaKalpa = almost dead; in Persian, Parigha = Edge; Akao = Reveal, Chin = How; Vato = Bovat = was*).

The Gathas are grounded in realism. Zarathushtra sought the Truth and urged others to search for it. Search for Ashem Vohu, the good truth, and transform the good truth into the best, Vahista-e-Ashem.

Every religion has a different story about the afterlife, which is a matter of belief. You believe what you cannot prove. The Gathas in the Avesta language reveal the Truth.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ahura.homestead.com/files/FESTIVALS/ARASH\\_e\\_KAMANGIR\\_.pdf](https://ahura.homestead.com/files/FESTIVALS/ARASH_e_KAMANGIR_.pdf)