

Yazamaidē

The Avestan word, '*Yazamaidē*', quoted innumerable times in the Avestan texts, is variously translated as '*Reverence be to*', '*I revere*', '*We revere*'; occasionally as '*Worship*'. Comparatively, the term 'reverence' is noted only a few times in the Holy texts of other major faiths.

Comparatively, in the King James Version of the *Holy Bible* the word 'Reverence' is mentioned only 10 times and in the New International Version only 15 times. The Bible Gateway Index interprets the word 'Reverence' most times as '**fear of God**', and, only once each, pointing to '**knowledge**', '**sanctuary**' and '**veneration**'. To the respectful mind of the Zoroastrian faithful it appears rather extraordinary that the word 'God-fearing' indicates some form of obligatory piousness on the part of the 'faithful'.

The equivalent Vedic word is '*Yazamahé*', which is quoted in the *Rig Veda* only eight times and its derivatives '*Yazamaha*' and '*Yazamahai*' once each. '*Yazamahē*' in the Vedas has been variously translated as '**worship**' and '**worship with reverence**'. In the Religion of Zarathushtra, Ahura Mazda is described as 'all-good' and all-benevolent'. Being all-good he is a perfect Creator. The Zoroastrian concept of God as a Supreme Creator (as Shakespeare has put it in another context) is that he is 'the perfectest herald of joy' in everything that is good in life. One cannot remain fearful of an ultimate epitome of perfection in goodness. We, Zoroastrians, therefore, call ourselves God-loving.

Clearly, it appears the interpretation of the word has been overcast by a shadowy intonation. Objectively, it has, in a subtle sense, been also applied to civic and civil matters without the implication, in a reasonable manner, of the difference between Divine and Human. This oversight often leads to presumptions on both opposing sides that the Creator is on one's side in debatable social situations. This makes the given situation extremely difficult to resolve. The word, in the divine sense, to my mind has no legitimate place in politics and ethics. History has revealed ample reasons why the Pope had to be given a place of his own to rule, divorced from the inescapable and irascible political upheavals experienced in the Halls of State, where often the eagerness to win the next election gains precedence over the welfare of State or, sometimes, even common sense.

It has been noted in ancient civilizations that the 'tyrant' and in modern times the 'dictator' and even democratically elected head of State (particularly the one who has been mandated an absolute majority) find ruling in a just manner for the general good of the populace a matter not much to the liking of the masses. The hand-picked followers maintain the self-styled 'ruler' high on a pedestal for the masses to behold him, hopefully, in some form of (irreverent) respect while they mutually follow their own agenda. Such a mindset invariably leads to an explosive formula making the group somewhat wilfully blind to the plight of the masses and wilfully deaf to the yearnings of those made voiceless.

Zarathushtra talks about the modus operandi employed by such **Gathic 'Kavis', 'Karpans' and 'Usigs'**. These were groups of priests and local potentates, who had planned to remain in oppressive power. Their evil intent was fuelled by conceit, intimidation and furious agitation - clearly an indulgence in a sort of group egotism and collective self-righteousness in remaining '*.....wilfully deaf to Mazda's message and wilfully blind to Mazda's glory*' - Gatha Ahunavaiti (**Yasna 32.15**)

Human limitations, in the scheme of things, do promote humility and virtue in the rationally thinking person. This in turn, curbs the urge to become pompous and pretend to act God-like. In our scriptures '*Yazamaidé*', in a spiritual sense, is meant really to be a form of heartfelt adoration / praise of the cardinal' inner strength', which a source of virtuous behaviour in a meritorious person to the Creator and his attributes and to Yazata Fire - all, clearly worthy of such bestowing. The 'Reverence' may be in the form of individual prayer (Yasht/ Sētāyash ... etc) or a ritual ceremony. The latter is a set of liturgy rituals enacted as meaningful solemn acts of deeply pious values performed by the priest(s) with feeling, reinforced with specific body language. There are, however, some who hold such forms of rituals in a derogatory frame of mind. It is widely accepted that rituals certainly do contribute much to the solemnity of the reverence the faithful have gathered to witness.

It is interesting to note how the **body language** varies in the spiritual callings of different Faiths (as below). Figure 1 shows an early Sumerian on in spiritual obeisance with hands clasped together.

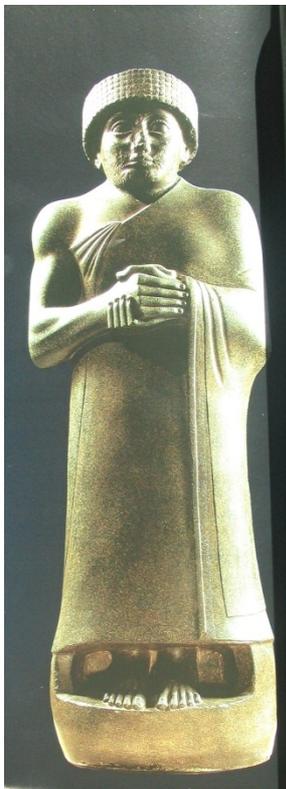


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Figure 2 shows a tribute bearer showing homage to the Great King.

Figure 3 shows king and priest holding what appear to be 4-5 feet bundles of Barsom rods in the left hand while gesturing in 'Reverence' with the right hand.

Zarathushtra enacted his deep feelings with arms outstretched, his palms partly facing each other and partly upwards towards the heavens (Figure 4) as he beseeched Ahura Mazda for 'divine guidance' during the 'Revelation'.

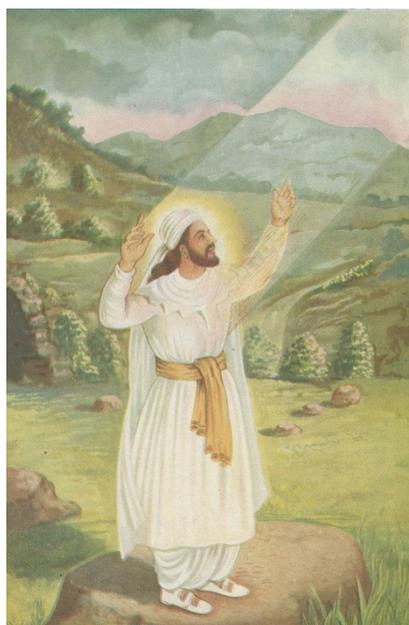


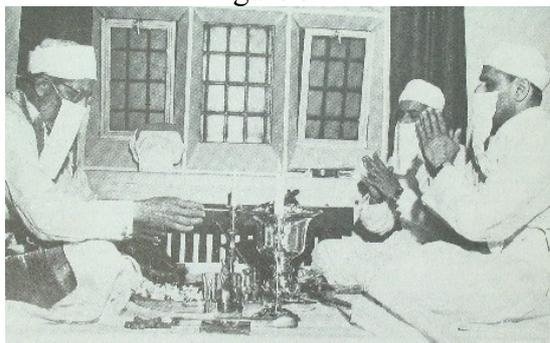
Figure 4

In Gatha Spənta Mainyu (**Yasna 50.8**) the Prophet used the utterances most effectively (as in the photo) ‘... *With audible chanting emanating with ecstasy from the very depth of my being and with my hands uplifted, I beseech thee, O Mazda ...*’

The Zoroastrians of the Subcontinent in their ‘Exilic state’ have adopted the local Indian customs of joining their palms together, fingers outstretched in the manner of a respectful ‘namaste’ (Figure 5), although there are many who have retained the ancient gesture of the outstretched hands adopted by the Prophet.

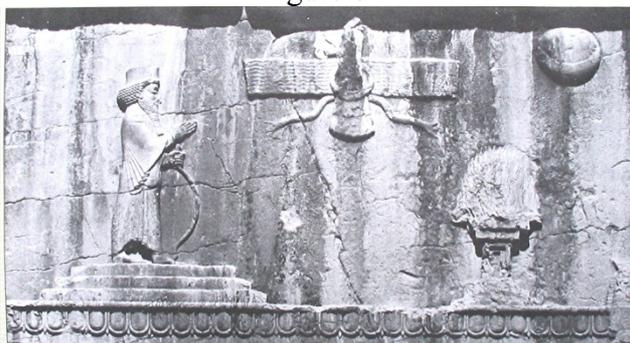
The Zoroastrians of Iran, have to this day retained the same pattern of gesture, although the raising of the hands may not always be enacted above the level of the shoulders (Figure 6). This gesture would have evolved through millennia from the fact that prayer rituals were often performed in an open air environment.

Figure 5



Gesture of reverence - manner of ‘namasté’

Figure 6



King paying homage to Fire with outstretched hands

Archeological findings in Parsagard (Greek: Pasargadae) have revealed the Main Entrance of the Gates adjoining the Gate House and the Twin Fire altars (Figures 7 & 8 - photos below). The finding of two impressive plinths set on stone foundations about seven feet high, associated with a set of white limestone (and a set of stone steps for the worshiper to ascend to light the Ceremonial Fire) meant that religious rites were also conducted in the open with fitting solemnity. Even during the early Achaemenian period there were no Fire Temples.

The solemn rituals were conducted in full view of the masses in open field, valleys and mountain tops. Figures 9 & 10 show the steps leading to the podium where the Great King stood in solemnity and deep reverence in prayers to the Fire lit in the adjacent structure holding the Fire container.



Figure 9



Figure 10

Among the Hindus and Buddhists, in addition to this gesture, it is not uncommon for a devotee to become completely prostrate, face downwards, all four limbs outstretched in front of the deity during an emotional frenzy of ecstasy (Figure 11). The Buddhists still continue to adopt this stance repeatedly as they advance slowly along their way to the temple during their slow and laborious progress to the place of their pilgrimage, which may often be several Kms away. In Buddhism there are also various finger gestures described to denote certain non-verbal communications.

The common gesture, however is the palms and outstretched fingers of both hands joined together (Figures 12 & 13).

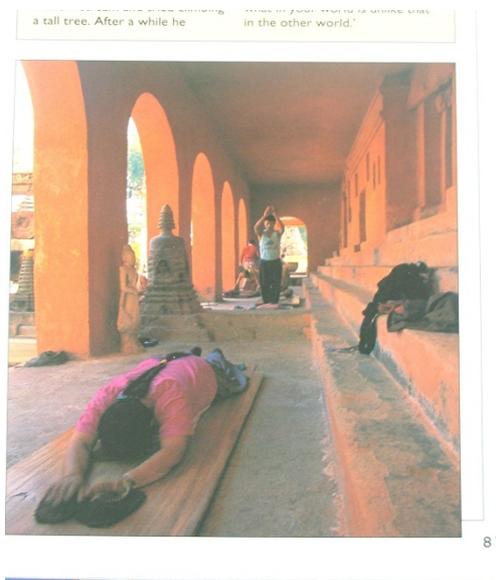


Figure 11

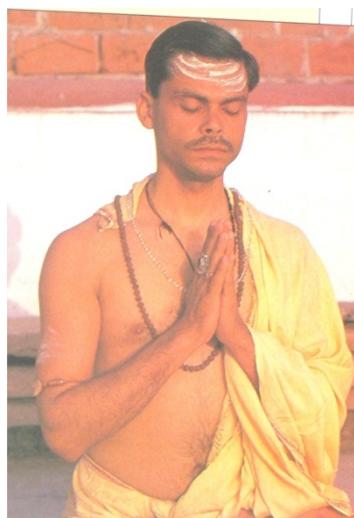


Figure 12



Figure 13

The Christians may use the 'namastē' hand language and they tend to position themselves on both bended knees, particularly when in Church.

In Islam, whether in the house of worship or outside, the faithful assumes the bended knee position facing Makkah (Mecca) and then bends the torso forwards right down until the forehead and palms of the hands touch the earth. The photo below shows a traveller

interrupting his journey to pray facing towards Makkah. On raising the torso they tend to add a sweeping motion to their face with the two hands.

We Zoastrians too, tend to adopt this position when we pay homage to the Fire in the 'sanctum sanctorum' of our Fire temples.



Figure 14

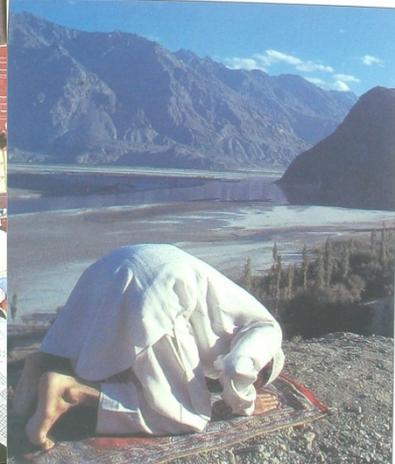


Figure 15

The Hebrew custom has for long been to bend the upper torso forwards and backwards with the hands raised towards the shoulders or holding their Holy Book. Apparently, during Biblical times a bow of the head and various positions of prostration were also adopted as gestures of reverence.

Figure 16



Jews praying facing the western wall, the remnant of their destroyed Temple in Jerusalem.

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