

TIBETAN SALUTATIONS AND A FEW THOUGHTS SUGGESTED BY THEM.

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Salutations are of two kinds. 1. Oral or by spoken words, and 2. Gestural, or by certain movements of some parts of the body. Out of these two heads, the Tibetan salutations, of which I propose to speak a little to-day, fall under the second head, *viz.*, Gestural salutations.

Colonel Waddell thus speaks of the Tibetan mode of salutation. "The different modes of salutation were curiously varied amongst the several nationalities. The Tibetan doffs his cap with his right hand and making a bow pushes forward his left ear and puts out his tongue, which seems to me to be an excellent example of the 'self surrender of the person saluting to the individual he salutes,' which Herbert Spencer has shown to lie at the bottom of many of our modern practices of salutations. The pushing forward of the left ear evidently recalls the old Chinese practice of cutting off the left ears of prisoners of war, and presenting them to the victorious chief." ¹

Different travelers on the modes of salutation. Col. Waddell.

Mons. L. De Milloué thus refers to the Tibetan mode of salutation: (I translate from his French.)

M. L. De Milloué. "Politeness is one of the virtues of the Tibetan. He salutes by taking off his cap as in Europe and remains bareheaded before every person whom he respects; but by a strange usage, when he wishes to be particularly amiable and polite, he completes his salutation by two gestures which appear at least strange to us: he draws the tongue rounding it a little and scratches his ears. When he presents himself before a superior, he prostrates himself nine times, so as to touch with his forehead the wood flooring; then, drawing backward, he seats himself on the floor at

¹ Col. Waddell's "Lhasa and its Mysteries," pp. 423-24.

the other end of the hall. If he addresses himself to some Lama of high rank, after the strict prostrations, he remains on the knees, the head inclined down to the ground until asked to get up. An indispensable element of the Tibetan politeness is the gift of a kind of scarf of silk called *Khata* (Kha-btags or dgâltag), "scarf of happiness." Two Tibetans of good company (position) never approach each other without presenting the *Khata* to each other. If they are of equal rank then they are satisfied with a simple exchange of scarf. When an inferior is received by a superior, the first thing he does, after prostrating himself according to the etiquette, is to present respectfully a *Khata*, which the superior, whatever be his rank, receives with his own hand; then, at the moment when he takes leave (to depart), the high personage, in his turn, gets a scarf placed by one of his men on his shoulders; and if he wishes to honour in a special way, he himself passes it round his neck. This usage is so universal, that one does not send a letter without joining to it a small *Khata* inside for that purpose.

"These scarfs are made of a kind of gauze of very light silk at times united and at times loose. They are more large than broad and terminated at both the ends with fringes. Sometimes, the most beautiful (scarfs) carry, below the fringes, worked up in the stuff, the sacred formula of invocation, *Om ! Mani padmé Houm* (O ! the Jewel in the lotus. Amen !) They are always of a bright colour, especially white or red, preferentially white. They are made of all dimensions and of all qualities, and naturally the value of the *Khata* depends upon the rank of the person who offers and of the person to whom it is offered."¹

According to M. Bonvalot, the Tibetan—"in order to salute us, lifts up his thumbs and protrudes an enormous tongue, while he bows profoundly."²

Bonvalot.

¹ Bod Youl ou Tibet, par M. L. De Milloué (1906), pp. 60-61.

² Across Tibet, being a translation of "De Paris au Tonkin à travers le Tibet inconnu," by Gabriel Bonvalot, translated by C. B. Pitman (1891), Vol. II., p. 2.

Further on, M. Bonvalot speaks thus of these and other similar expressions of approval. "They express disagreement by joining the thumb-nails, and agreement by putting them just the opposite way. Putting the thumb up means approval and satisfaction; raising the little finger denotes hostility, while to keep it in this position and at the same time to shake the head signifies dislike. The two thumbs placed perpendicularly one above the other, with the tongue hanging out, denotes superlative approval".¹ For an expression of thanks also, the same form of salutation is resorted to. M. Bonvalot says of a Tibetan:—"He thanked us effusively, with uplifted thumbs and protruding tongue, for all the presents we had given him; and when we gave him back the meat . . . he prostrated himself."²

Dr. Sven Hedin also refers to the common mode of saluting by protruding the tongue.³ At first this mode seemed to him "a mockery."⁴ He also refers to the custom of taking off the cap while saluting. That was done with the left hand, when they at the same time scratched their heads with the right one.⁵ In the midst of their conversation they often shot out their tongues "from politeness and friendliness."⁶ He refers to another form of saluting, *viz.*, that by rubbing foreheads.⁷

According to Rai Sarat Chandra Das Bahadur, in the Bardonia district of Khams, "when two acquaintances meet they touch each others foreheads together by way of salutation."⁸ According to Mr. Rockhill, the Editor of Mr. Sarat Chandra Das's book, this mode is also prevalent among the Mahomedans.⁹

¹ *Ibid*, p. 98.

² *Ibid*.

³ Trans-Himalaya, Vol. I., p. 185.

⁴ Trans Himalaya, Vol. I., p. 244.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 284.

⁶ *Ibid*. pp. 284, 434.

⁷ *Ibid*, Vol. I., p. 100.

⁸ Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet, p. 197.

⁹ *Ibid*, note.

Mr. Sarat Chandra Das says further: "Among the Golog people it is customary to greet one another with a kiss, and whoever omits the kiss when meeting or parting with an acquaintance is considered rude and unmannerly."¹ Mr. Rockhill² has some doubts about the custom of kissing, which, as Mr. Sarat Chandra Das himself says, is prevalent only among the Golog people and is held as "gross immodesty" at Tashilhunpo.

Mr. Rockhill³ thus speaks of the mode of salutation in Central Tibet:—

"In Central Tibet the salutation consists in sticking out the tongue, pulling the right ear, and rubbing the left hip, making a slight bow at the same time. Throughout Tibet, to say a thing is very good, they hold up the thumb with the fingers closed, and say "*Angé tumbo ré*" 'It is the thumb,' i.e., it is the first. Second class is expressed by holding up the index with the remark "*Angé nyiba ré*"; and so on down to the little finger, which means that it is the poorest of all, "*T'a-ma ré*," "It is the last" "⁴

Mr. Rockhill thus speaks of the mode of salutation in another part of Tibet, the region of Dre'Ch'u, the river of golden sands: "The mode of salutation among the people in this section of the country is novel. They hold out both hands, palms uppermost, bow with raised shoulders, stick out their tongues, and then say *Oji, oji*. When desirous of showing respect to a person, or expressing thankfulness, they stick out their tongue and say *Ka-drio*."⁵ This mode of salutation by "holding out both hands, palms uppermost, and bending the body slightly" is prevalent among the Mongols also.⁶

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.* p. 197, note.

³ "The Land of the Lamas" by W. W. Rockhill, p. 200 n. 1.

⁴ "The Land of the Lamas" by W. W. Rockhill, p. 200.

⁵ "The Land of the Lamas" by W. W. Rockhill p. 200.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

In another book of travels, Mr. Rockhill speaks thus of the above-named mode as observed by him :—

“The lower classes here, when saluting superiors, are in the habit of bending the knee very low, putting the right hand beside the right cheek and the left hand under the elbow of the right arm, at the same time sticking out the tongue.”¹ When they express immense pleasure, they loll out the tongues as far as they can.² Mr. Rockhill also refers to the mode of rubbing the foreheads. They kow-tow or bow three times and then crouching in front of each other make their heads touch.³

From the above accounts of the Tibetan modes of salutation, we gather, that the principal modes are the following :—

Summary of the modes.

1. The protruding of the tongue ;
2. Bending the head or making a bow ;
3. Scratching the head ;
4. Scratching the ear ;
5. Removing the cap ;
6. Pushing forward the ear, either the left or the right ;
7. Raising the thumbs of the hand with the fingers closed ;
8. Prostration ;
9. Remaining on the knees with the head inclined to the ground ;
10. Kissing one another ;
11. Rubbing the hip ;
12. Holding out both hands, palms uppermost ;
13. Bowing with raised shoulders ;
14. Bending the body slightly ;

¹ “Diary of a Journey through Mongolia and Tibet in 1891 and 1892, p. 241.

² *Ibid.* p. 240.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

15. Rubbing of foreheads.

16. Presentation of a scarf called *Khata* as a mark of politeness ;

17. Remittance of letters with scarfs attached to them.

At times, some of these modes are combined together and form one mode of salutation. At different places, at times, the same mode of salutation, for example, the protruding of the tongue, is a little varied. These different forms of salutations suggest to us several thoughts in connection with our known methods of salutation.

The first thing that draws our special attention, because we do not see the like of it in the salutations of other modern nations, is the method of thrusting out the tongue. According to Dr. Sven Hedin, they thrust out the tongue often, even in the midst of conversation as a kind of politeness.¹

The main signification of the different modes.

One of the cruel ways of punishment in olden times, especially by tyrants and despots, was to cut off one's ears, nose and tongue and even the head. So, by this way of salutation, the person, who saluted, said, as it were, to the person whom he saluted, that his tongue, ears, nose, etc., were at his disposal, and that he may cut them off if he liked. Col. Waddell takes this form of salutation as an excellent example of self-surrender, referred to by Herbert Spencer, lying "at the bottom of many of our modern practices of salutation."

According to Dr. Sven Hedin² and M. L. De Milloué,³ they at times scratched their heads and ears as symbols of salutation. What does this scratching signify ? I think the signification is the same as that of the above mode, *viz.*; the thrusting out of the tongue and the pushing forward of the ear. Dr. E. B. Tyler, in

¹ Trans-Himalaya, Vol. I., pp. 284, 435.

² Trans-Himalaya ; Vol. I., p. 15. ³ Bod-Youl ou Tibet (1906), p. 60.

his interesting article on salutation,¹ while referring to the "ceremonious weeping" of some members of the rude races who meet after some absence, says that "they renew the lamentations over those friends who have died in the meantime. The typical case is that of the Australians, when the male nearest of kin presses his breast to the new comer's, and the nearest female relative, with piteous lamentations, embraces his knees with one hand, while with the other she scratches her face till the blood drops."

This custom shows that the act of scratching some part of one's body was an expression of ceremonial salutation, not on occasions of joy, but on occasions of grief; and that, at times, it was carried on to the extent of dropping the blood. So, it seems, that the act of scratching in the Tibetan mode of salutation, signified that the saluter was prepared to shed his own blood, or, in other words, to lay his very life at the disposal of the person whom he saluted out of respect. We learn from the *Shāhnāmeh* of Firdousi, that the scratching of one's body as a mark of grief, or as a kind of ceremonial mourning salutation to the dead, was known to some of the ancient Persians. For example, we find Tehminā, the wife of Rustam, scratching her body till she bled, in grief for the death of her son at the hand of his father.²

¹ Encyclopædia Britannica, 9th Edition. Vol. 21, p. 236, col. 2.

بزد چنگ و بدرید پدراهنش^۲

درخشان شد آن لعل زیبا نزش

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مرآن زلف چون تاب داده کهند

بانگشت پیچیده و از بن فگند

روان گشته از روی او جوی خون

زمان تا زمان اندر آمد نگون

Vuller Schaname. Vol. I, p. 517, ll. 1401-1404. M. Mohl. Le

Livre des Rois, small edition, II. p. 149.

(a) The bending of the head or making a bow, (b) the doffing of the cap, (c) the prostrations, (d) remaining on the knees with the head inclined to the ground,—all these are ramifications of one and the same form, *viz.*, the submission of the head to the person saluted. That is another way of expressing one's willingness to place himself or herself, placing one's very life, at the disposal of the person held in respect and saluted. When one doffs his hat, as a mark of salutation, he in fact submits his head before the person whom he salutes, so that he may do whatever he liked with it. All our modern civilized forms of salutation are connected, in one way or another, with this ancient mode of salutation, though their original signification seems to have been lost. Our Indian phrases પગે પડવું (Gujarâti), पाया पडवें (Marathi) "to lie at one's feet" and the Persian phrase پای بوسیدن "to kiss one's feet,"—all these are different expressions of a kind of prostration before a higher power or person.

In this form of salutation, at first, people actually prostrated themselves at the foot of the altar of the deity or of a person. Then, to save the trouble of this long fatiguing process, they simply bent, and, placing their hands at the feet, raised them to their foreheads. Then, as the next step in the evolution of the shortening process, simply bowed a little and raised to the forehead the hands, which were stretched forth a little. The next step was the use of only one hand instead of two.

The Western method of salaming by simply lifting a finger to the forehead is another step in the shortening-process. But, in the case of an inferior saluting a superior, that shortening process is not allowed. For example, a soldier must salute his officer by raising his hand to his forehead, but the officer in return, salutes by merely raising his finger to his forehead. A soldier in saluting his officer not only raises his whole hand to his forehead, but also, after doing that, moves it in a straight line and

then drops it, perhaps indicating thereby that he is prepared to let that head be cut off in obeying the legitimate orders of his superior.

The military salute on ceremonious occasions, wherein the officers hold their swords before the Governor or Royal personage, and the latter touch the swords, is another form of expression on the part of the officers, to signify that their swords were at the disposal of their superiors. In one way, they say, that they are prepared to use their swords for all legitimate orders given by their superiors; in another way, they say, that the superiors are at liberty or have the privilege, to use the sword over them if they disobeyed their orders. In other words, in whatever sense you take it, he offers his life through his superiors to the service of the State.

The salutation of a lady is the next step in the evolution of the shortening-process. She neither raises her hand nor even her finger but simply nods. The form of salutation of an Indian lady, Hindu and Parsee, on ceremonious occasions, seems to be an expression of a similar kind, though not of the same nature. In the form of salutation, known among us as *ovârna* (*ओवार्ना*), she does not offer her head to you to signify respect or obedience. She neither raises her hand or finger to her forehead; nor nods her head, but passes her hands round your head and raises them towards her own forehead. In this process, she does not offer her head to you, but offers to take, off your head, all your difficulties and dangers, griefs and sorrows. Mark her self-sacrificing words on the occasion. She says *Tamâra uparâthi mari jâu* (*तमारा उपरथी मरीजौ*), i.e., I will die or I die for you. Thereby, she says, that she is prepared to alleviate your difficulties and grief, and even to die for you for that purpose.

The Masonic salutation in the First Degree, wherein the saluter, instead of passing his hand aside from the forehead like a soldier, passes it similarly across the throat, is a surer indi-

Salutation of ladies.

Masonic salutations.

cation of that kind. The modes of salutation to their deities, which I saw in the Tibetan monasteries at Darjeeling, as observed both by males and females reminded me, more than once, of some of the Masonic modes of salutation.

The modes of salutation observed by the Tibetans in their
 “prostration pilgrimages” round their
 Prostration pil- sacred mountains are worth noticing. Dr.
 grimage. Sven Hedin thus describes one of these prost-
 ration pilgrimages :—

“This consisted of six movements. Suppose the young Lama standing on the path with his forehead held slightly down and his arms hanging loosely at his sides:—(1) He places the palms of his hands together and raises them to the top of his head, at the same time bending his head a little down; (2) he lays his hands under his chin, lifting up his head again; (3) he kneels upon the grounds, bends forwards and lays himself full length on the ground with outstretched arms; (4) he passes his hands laid together over his head; (5) he stretches his right hand forwards as far as it will reach, and scratches a mark in the soil with a piece of bone, which shows the line, which must be touched by his toes at the next advance; and (6) he raises himself up with his hands, makes two or three strides up to the mark, and repeats the same actions. And thus he goes round the whole mountain. It is slow work and they do not hurry; they perform the whole business with composure, but they lose their breath, especially on the way up to the pass; and on the way down from the Dolma-la there are places so steep that it must be a gymnastic feat to lie down head foremost. One of the young monks had already accomplished one round, and was now on the second. When he had finished, in twelve days, he intended to betake himself to a monastery on the Tsangpo, and be there immured for the rest of his life, and he was only twenty years old! We, who in our superior wisdom smile at these exhibitions of fanaticism and self-mortification, ought to compare our own faith and convictions with theirs. The life beyond the grave is hidden

from all peoples but religious conceptions have clothed it in different forms among different peoples. 'If thou lookest closely, thou wilt see that hope, the child of heaven, points every mortal with trembling hand to the obscure heights.' Whatever may be our own convictions, we must admire those who, however erroneous their views may be in our opinion, yet possess faith enough 'to remove mountains.'" One can understand from this, what Christ meant, when, one day, he said to his disciples that "Faith moves mountains."

The prostration was a form of salutation prevalent among the ancient Persians also. Herodotus thus speaks of the ancient Iranian salutation: "When they meet one another in the streets one may discover by the following custom, whether those who meet are equals. For instead of accosting one another, they kiss on the mouth; if one be a little inferior to the other, they kiss the cheek; but if he be of a much lower rank, he prostrates himself before the other."¹

Iranian Salutations.
Expression of approval by putting up the thumb and of disapproval by putting up the last finger.

In the description of a form of Tibetan salutation as given by M. Bonvalot, which is narrated above, there are several things which draw our special attention

Firstly, why does the putting up of the thumb mean approval and satisfaction?² Is it from the practice of children? We know that children generally suck their thumbs. Indian mothers teach them to place the thumb in their mouth and to suck it, believing that thereby they remain soothed, contented and satisfied and do not often ask for milk. When a child continues to weep, its thumb is placed in its mouth, hoping that thereby it may remain appeased. Thus, it appears, that the custom of raising thumbs, as a token of approval or satisfaction, comes from what is observed in children.

¹ Herodotus, Bk. I. 134. Cary's translation (1889) p. 61.

² Among the Mahomedans also, the thumb has the same signification. In their form of marriage, the two parties press their thumbs together.

When viewed in connection with the modes of salutation which signify self-surrender, this custom of holding up the thumb, pointing it heavenwards, seems to have a similar signification. The saluter holds out his thumb or finger, and, pointing it out towards the Heaven, seems to point to God and to say, as it were, that as directed by God he yields and pays respect to the person saluted.

The modern custom of raising hands at meetings to express consent or approval seems to have some connection with the show of thumbs.

The statement, that raising the little finger denotes hostility, reminds us of another practice among Indian children here. When children, while playing, quarrel among themselves, one puts forth the last little finger saying *Katti* (कट्टी) or *dushman* (दुश्मन), meaning, that they have *cut off* friendly relationship and have become *hostile*. The other child, if it takes a similar view of the difference, also exclaims *Katti* and lets its last small finger meet with that of the first child.

The use of the thumb, as an expression of approval among the Tibetans, seems to throw some side-light on the signification of a ritual observed in the Âfringân ceremony of the Parsees. In the recital of a part of the Âfringân, the officiating priest, the Joti, and the Râthwi or Âtravakhshi keep a flower in their hands, holding it upright. Among the Zoroastrians of Persia, the Râthwi or Âtravakhshi and the other priests, if there are more than one attending with him in the ceremony instead of holding up a flower in their hands, hold up their fingers. The fingers are held up in the ritual by these priests to express their approval of the prayer of the officiating priest in honour of the ruling king of the land. He prays for God's bless-

¹ "Nehâdend angusht bar chashm-o-sar. Vuller Schahname Vol. II, p. 673, l. 2,648. Mecan's Calcutta edition, p. 482, l. 3. Mohl's Paris edition, Vol. II, p. 420.

ings upon the king and the other priests express approval and their association in the prayer by holding up their fingers. Firdousi¹ also refers to the custom of expressing assent by raising fingers and placing them upon one's eyes. The Parsees of India seem to have substituted the practice of holding up a flower in place of a thumb. Thus, then, this ritual of holding up a flower during the prayer for the king, signifies the approval of the other members of the congregation.¹

We saw above, that the Tibetans present scarfs to one another as a form of salutation. I learnt at Darjeeling, that when the Delai Lama was last at Darjeeling for some months, before his restoration to power at Lhasa, even Parsee visitors followed this custom, when they paid him ceremonial visits of respect. What does that custom signify? I think this custom is a symbol or relic of the ancient custom of presenting dresses to one another. When a friend from one city or town visited another, they exchanged presents, one form of which was the presentation of dresses. Latterly, instead of full dresses, small pieces of cloths were substituted as a symbol. We know, that even now in India, when one speaks of presenting a *vâgô* (འཕྲུལ) or a suit of dress, the presentation takes the form, not necessarily of a full dress, but of *tâkâs* (འཕྲུལ་མེད་), *i.e.*, pieces of cloths. The scarf seems to be a symbolic presentation of that kind.

We have seen above, that friends exchanged scarfs, not only when they met in person, but also when they exchanged letters. In fact, the letters themselves were covered with such scarfs. This seems to be a very old custom. We find that Firdousi refers to this custom. When kings sent letters to other kings, the letters were placed in handsome pieces of cloth. The Indian custom of presenting shawls to one another on ceremonial occasions, is connected with this old custom of presenting scarfs.

¹ I have spoken at some length on this subject, in a paper, to be published in the Sir Jamshedjee Jejeebhoy Zarthoshti Madressa Jubilee Volume, which I edit.

At one time, there was a custom among the Parsees of India that one, who was for some fault excommunicated, gave, on readmission after an expression of regret, a small fine or a piece of cloth (ઢેલ) ¹ to the Parsee Panchayet. This presentation of a piece of cloth seems to have some connection with the above custom of presenting scarfs. This was, as it were, an expression of respect towards the elders of the community.

¹ Kholaseh-i Panchat (Gujarati) by Sir Jamsetji Jejeebhoy, First Baronet (1843), p. 72.