



HUMATA HŪXTA HUVARŠTA

HUMATA HŪXTA HUVARŠTA, three Avestan words which encapsulate the ethical goals of Zoroastrianism. In form verbal adjectives, meaning “well thought, well said, well done,” they were substantivized to mean “good thought, good word, good act” (Narten, 1986, p. 86, n. 1). The Pahlavi renderings are *humenišn(īh) hu-gōwišn(īh) hukunišn(īh)*. The earliest occurrence of the Av. formula is at the beginning of *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* (Y. 35.2), which (following Narten’s German translation, 1986, p. 38) runs: “We are those who welcome the good thoughts, good words, and good acts which, here and elsewhere, are and have been realized. We are not those who denigrate good (things).” The next verse declares: “That have we chosen for ourselves, O Wise Lord, that through beautiful Aša we may think, say, and do what, of the actions which there are, should be best for the two existences.” A number of scholars have assigned, with different levels of convictions, the composition of *YHapt.* to Zoroaster himself (K. Hoffmann apud Barr, p. 285, n. 7; Gershevitch, p. 18; Narten, 1982, p. 137; idem, 1986, pp. 20-37; Boyce, 1992, pp. 87-94; idem, 1995, p. 25; Hintze, pp. 31-33, 45-50); and, if this attribution is correct, the prophet can here be seen defining for his followers with simple clarity an ethical code referred to repeatedly in more complex and subtle ways in the *Gathas* (Schlerath, 1974, pp. 212-18; Humbach, 1959, I, pp. 55-56; idem, 1991, I, pp. 82-83). This code has been seen as a moral extension of the threefold professional demand made of a priest, who to perform an act of worship effectively needed right intention, right words, and correct rituals (Boyce, 1979, p. 24; Narten, 1986, p. 87; Humbach, 1991, I, p. 82).



A very important reiteration of this moral code comes at the end of *Y.* 12, the *Fravarānē* (q.v.), whose kernel may be the profession of faith required of early converts to Zoroastrianism (Nyberg, p. 274). Its last sections form part also of the daily obligatory prayers. Of them v. 8 runs: “I profess myself a Mazdā-worshipper and follower of Zoroaster, having pledged myself to and avowed the faith. I pledge myself to the well-thought thought . . . the well-spoken word . . . the well-acted act.”

The threefold formula is alluded to repeatedly in the Young Avesta (see Schlerath, 1968, II, p. 135 s. *Y.* 11.17; idem, 1974, pp. 218-20). For example, in *Y.* 57.14 a good man is defined as one “rich in good thoughts . . . words . . . acts” (*frayō.humatō frayō.hūxtō frayō.huuarštō*), and *Vd.* 5.21 speaks of the good man “who purifies himself through good thoughts . . . words . . . acts”; while in *Yt.* 13.84 (= *Yt.* 19.17) the seven great Aməša Spəntas (q.v.) themselves are perceived as meditating on good thoughts, words, and acts. It is on the sum of all these from throughout his mature life that an individual’s salvation depends, for all are weighed in the scales of justice when the soul is judged. In the *Haḍōkt Nask* 2.24-25 the Daēna (q.v.) who meets the departed soul of a righteous man identifies herself as his good thoughts, words, and acts, by which he has made her beautiful; and (2.33-34) the soul then ascends, figuratively, through the three stages of Humata, Hūxta, Huvaršta, to Paradise.

The threefold ethic is prominent also in Middle Persian texts. According to *Dēnkard* Bk. 4 (ed. Madan, p. 413.15-17; tr. Shaki, p. 120) Kōsrow I declared the effective propagation of the religion’s truth lay “not so much in discussion as in purity of thought, word, and act, the guidance of the Good Spirit and worship of the *yazads*.” Several detailed lists are given in the Pahlavi books (e.g., *Mēnōg ī xrad*, chap. 37) of activities exemplifying good thinking, speaking, and acting. In principle (as indicated in *Y.* 35.3) this amounts to behaving according to *aša* (q.v.); and, as befits a religion which teaches that happiness is a positive good, Manuščihr, asked for a criterion by which to assess virtue (*kirbag*), replied: “Every thought, word, and act whose outcome is contentment (*rāmišn*), goodness (*nīkīh*), and a praiseworthy recompense (*pādašn ī burzīšnīg*) (is) well spoken, well thought, and well done” (*Dādestān ī dēnīg*, pt. I, Purs. 37.2; tr. West, 1882, p. 121).

The threefold code remains an essential element in living Zoroastrianism, and has gained, if possible, a still greater prominence among those reformists who seek radically to simplify their ancient faith. In the words of one of them, this can “be reduced to a very simple belief in an omniscient, all bountiful,



omnipotent [sic] God, who insists on good thought, good word and good action, and ordains evil to the evildoer and blessings to the pure both in this world and the next, according to their thoughts, words and deeds” (H. J. Bhabha apud Moulton, p. 174). Since this ancient ethical code is acknowledged by Zoroastrians of every shade of doctrinal belief to have been taught by their prophet, it acts as a unifying factor for their community, a source of pride, and the basis for a far-reaching philanthropy.

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