

Origin of the word NAMAZ

Khurshid Imam

A. Origin

The word **Namaz** (نماز) does not originate from Arabic or Sanskrit; it comes from Persian. It derives from Middle Persian (Pahlavi) *namāč* or *namāg*, meaning reverence, prayer, or act of worship. In Classical Persian literature, it was widely used for Islamic prayer and later spread into Urdu, Turkish, Hindi, Pashto, Kurdish, and several Central Asian languages.

In the Qur'an and Arabic, the term used is always **Ṣalāt** (صلاة), not Namaz, and Arabs have never used the word Namaz. With the spread of Islam into Persia, South Asia, Central Asia, and Turkey, local Muslims adopted the Persian term Namaz, which is why it is common in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Turkey, Tajikistan, and Central Asia. In contrast, the Arab world, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Africa continue to use Ṣalāt or its local adaptations, never Namaz.

B. Misconception

Some people wrongly assume that “Namaz” is a Sanskrit word because it looks similar to “Namas” (नमस्) in Sanskrit.

1. Namaz is not Sanskrit word.

None of the Hindu religious texts—such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Darshanas, Puranas, or the Mahabharata—mention the term “Namaz.” No classical Hindu scholar has ever referred to Namaz as a Sanskrit word. In an attempt to establish a closer connection with Hinduism, a few Muslims have made this claim – completely ignoring facts. However, it is important to remember that academic facts take precedence over emotional assertions.

2. ‘Namaz’ is not found in Sanskrit dictionary.

Look at the Sanskrit dictionary and try to find the word – Namaz. Result: 0

sanskritdictionary.org/n

nalinyam nama namabhiih namabhyah nam nama 0/39

namadheyaiih namadheyam namadheyani namah namaila

namaite namama namamahe namami namanah

namanamam namanau namani namaniya namantah

namanti namaasa namaskara namaskare namaskari

namaskaromi namaskrtah namaskrtam namaskrtasya

namaskrtva namaskrtya namaskuru namasu

namasyantah namasyanti namasyatah namasye namatah

namati name namera nameran namet nami namila

Word 'Namaz' is absent in Sanskrit dictionary

3. On the contrary, the Persian dictionary contains the word – NAMAZ.

فارسی لفظ نماز در اصل پہلوی زبان کے لفظ نماک سے ماخوذ ہے، اور یہ خود قدیم جڑ "نم" سے نکلا ہے جس کا مطلب ہے "جھکنا" اور "کرنش کرنا"۔ وقت کے ساتھ ساتھ یہ لفظ مسلمانوں کی مخصوص عبادت یعنی صلوٰۃ کے مفہوم پر منطبق ہو گیا

Dictionary 1: A concise Pahlavi dictionary D. N. Mackenzie

parsianjoman.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/A-Concise-Pahlavi-Dictionary.pdf

A-Concise-Pahlavi-Dictionary.pdf 79 / 259 175%

nab [nɒ | N nawa] grandson.
 nabānazdišt [nb'nzɒdʃt] = Av. nabānazdišta-] next of kin.
 nāf [nʰɒ | M nʰɒ] family.
 ~ag [-kʰ | N nāf(a)] navel.
 ¹naft [nɒtʰ | = M, N ~] moist, damp; naphtha.
 ²naft [nɒtʰ] descendant.
 nahang [nɒŋ] province.
 *nakkirā [nkylʰɪ] denying, repudiating.
 ~yih : repudiation.
 nāl- [nʰl- | P (nʰr-), N ~] groan, complain.
 nam [nm | N ~] moisture.
 nām [šM < A šm; nʰm | = M, N ~] name, fame.
 namad [nmtʰ | N ~] felt.
 nāmag [MGLTA < A mglʰ; nʰmkʰ | M nʰmg, N nāma] book, letter.
 namak [nmkʰ | M nmyhk, N ~] salt.
 — namāz [OSGDE < A sgdh; nmʰc | = M, N ~] reverence, prostration,
 — prayer.
 ~burdan : pay homage.
 nām-burdār [nʰm burlʰl | N ~] heir, preserving the father's name.
 nāmčīšt [nʰm-, šMcʰtʰ], (pad) ~ : in particular, especially.
 ~īg [-ykʰ] famous, well known.

Source: <https://www.parsianjoman.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/A-Concise-Pahlavi-Dictionary.pdf>

Pahlavi was the official Middle Persian language of the Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE), a significant transitional language between Old Persian and Modern Persian (Farsi).

Dictionary 2: A comprehensive Persian, English dictionary by Francis Joseph Steingass

Search for headword: نماز
1 result

1) نماز *namāz* (p. 1425)

نماز *namāz*, Prayers, those especially prescribed by law (which are repeated five times a day); adoration, worship; devotion, ministry, service; obedience; — *namāzi bāmdād*, Morning-prayers said before dawn; — *namāz burdan*, To show reverence or respect to; to say prayers; — *namāzi peshīn*, Mid-day prayers; — *namāzi jamā'at*, Friday's prayer, offered in common in the mosque; — *namāzi k̄huftan*, Prayers before going to bed, two hours or more after sunset; — *namāzi dīgar*, Afternoon-prayers; — *namāzi shām*, Evening-prayers, vespers (immediately after sunset); — *namāzi zuhr*, Mid-day prayer; — *namāz kardan (guzārdan)*, To say one's prayers, to attend divine service; — *bar hirs namāzi murda kardan*, To subdue greed and avarice; — *panj waqti namāz*, The five hours of prayers; — *dar namāzi kase būdan*, To pray for a dead person; — *quddās-namāz*, The holy prayers; mass, as celebrated by Christians.

Dictionary 3:

Hide Farsi Keyboard

Farsi Word: نماز

Criteria: ☒ Exact Word ☐ Starts With ☐ Contains

Results:

- نماز
- prayed
- نماز
- prayer

4. Sanskrit has “**Namas**” (नमस्), which means salutation, bowing, homage (like in *Namaste*). This is an older, independent word from the Indo-Aryan branch. Both

‘Namaz’ and ‘Namas’ come from a common ancient root in the Proto-Indo-Iranian language:

Root: nam नम = to bend, bow.

From this root:

Sanskrit → namas (obeisance, salute).

Persian → namaz (prayer, worship).

Instead, Namaz and Namas are “cousin words” (cognates), both descendants of the same Proto-Indo-Iranian root, but evolving separately in Persian and Sanskrit. These two are different words.

Imagine two cousins who inherited the same family trait of red hair. One grows up in Canada and styles it short, while the other grows up in India and styles it long. Same origin, different expression. These cousins **represent two distinct identities**.

C. Another blunder some people make

✗ The False Claim

Some people say:

- NAM (Sanskrit root = to bow) नमः
- AJ (Sanskrit = unborn, eternal, i.e., God) अज
- Together → नमः + अज = Namaj → नमाज़

It’s completely baseless and a classic case of folk etymology (people making up meanings by breaking words into parts that “sound” similar).

It’s like saying the word “**butterfly**” comes from “**butter**” + “**fly**” because it flies and is yellow like butter. That’s completely **baseless**—English speakers didn’t name it that way.

✓ Why This Is Wrong

1. The word Namaz is attested in Middle Persian (Pahlavi) as namāč/namāg, long before Islam reached India. It was never built from Sanskrit components.
2. We are discussing about Nama**Z** and not Nama**J**. The -z ending is distinctly Persian, not Sanskrit.

3. In Sanskrit, “Aj” does mean *unborn/eternal (a name of God)*, but it was never compounded with “nam” to mean prayer. Compounds in Sanskrit like *namas-te*, *namaskāra*, etc., exist, but “namāj/namaz” is absent in Sanskrit literature.

4. It is against the rule of Sanskrit language to say that नमः + अज = Namaj → नमाज़

Look at this example:

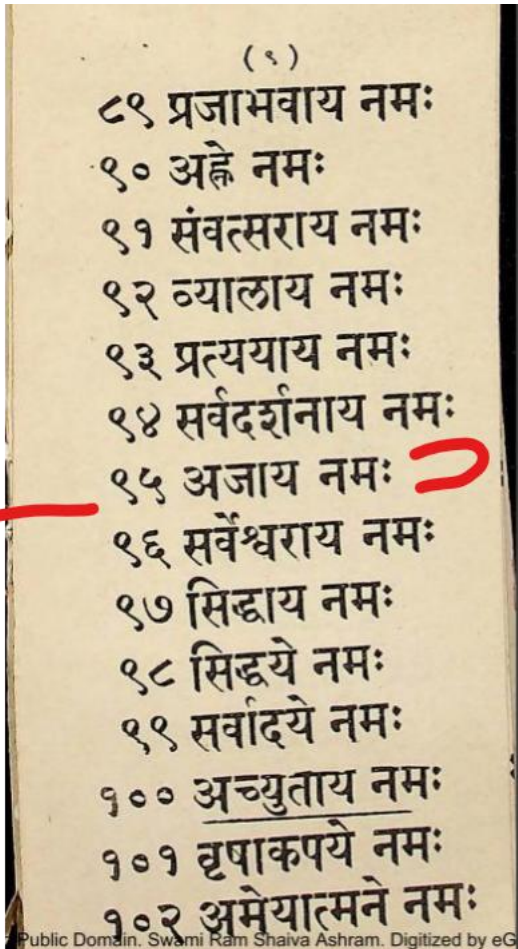
मनः+ज=मनोज

Similarly : नमः+अज=नमोज and Not Namaz (नमाज़)

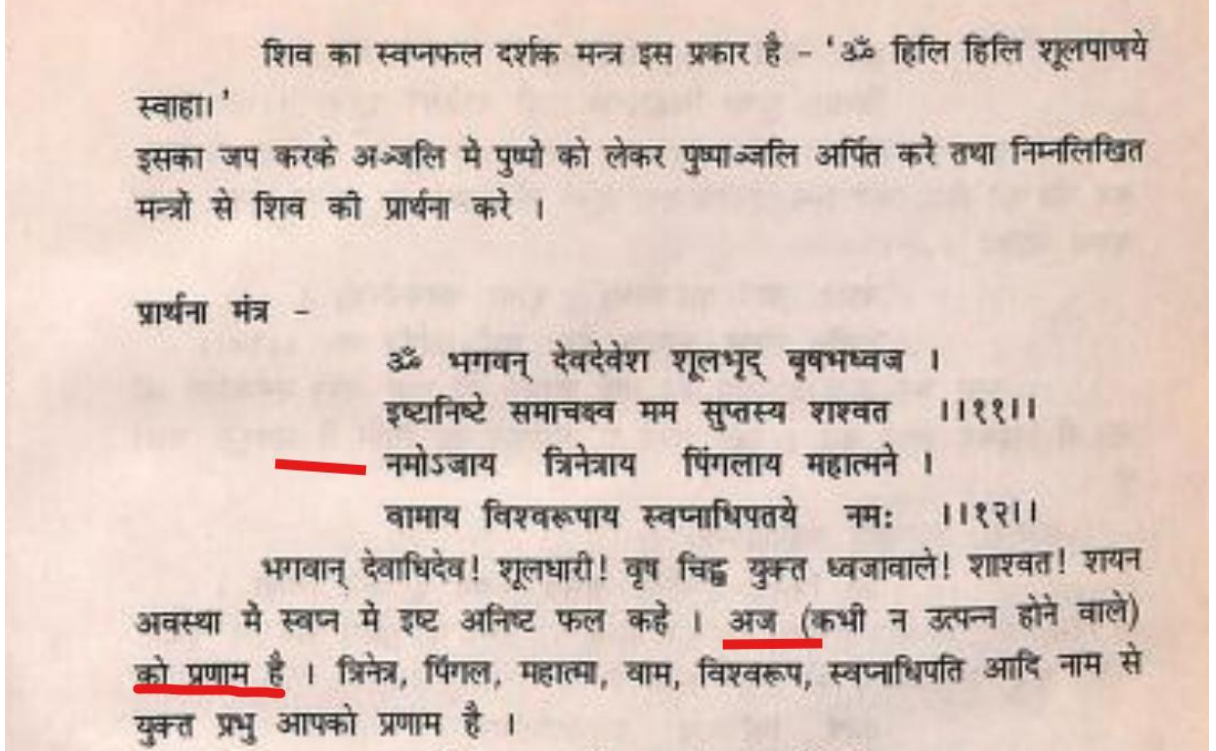
5. To form a word that denote ‘to bow down to unborn (अजन्मे को नमन)’ the resulting word will be as follow:

नमः + अजाय = नमोऽजाय . Final word will be Namojaae and not namaz.

6. Look at ‘Vishnu sahastra naam book’, 95th name - wherein word नमः has been used with different words. See the pattern. So in our context proper word should have been : 'अजाय नमः' i.e. *Ajaay Namah*.



7. Another startling fact is that Sanskrit literature uses the exact term – ‘**Bowing to AJ (अज, One who is unborn)**’, but word **NAMAZ is not formed**, rather **Namojae (नमोऽजाय) is formed**.



8. Look at another example.

Same word NAM (नमः) is used along with sanskrit word AJAR (अजर : One who does not grow old) The **resulting word is Namojraay**. It is on similar line of Namojae. Namah + Ajaraay = Namojraay. There is no scope of NAMAZ word formation in Sanskrit.

नमो देवाधिदेवाय स्वभावाय नमो नमः ।
 नमो जगत्प्रतिष्ठाय गोविन्दाय नमो नमः ॥ ३५
 नमोऽस्तु पद्मनाभाय नमो योगोद्भवाय च ।
 विश्वेश्वराय देवाय शिवाय हरये नमः ॥ ३६
 नमोऽस्तु तस्मै देवाय निर्गुणाय गुणात्मने ।
 नारायणाय विश्वाय देवानां परमात्मने ॥ ३७
 नमो नमः कारणवामनाय
 नारायणायामितविक्रमाय ।
 श्रीशार्ङ्गचक्रासिगदाधराय
 नमोऽस्तु तस्मै पुरुषोत्तमाय ॥ ३८
 गुह्याय वेदनिलयाय महोदराय
 सिंहाय दैत्यनिधनाय चतुर्भुजाय ।
 ब्रह्मेन्द्ररुद्रमुनिचाराणस्तुताय
 देवोत्तमाय वरदाय नमोऽञ्जुताय ॥ ३९
 नागेन्द्रदेहशयनासनसुप्रियाय
 गोक्षीरहेमशुकनीलघनोपमाय ।
 पीताम्बराय मधुकैटभनाशनाय
 विश्वाय चारुमुकुटाय नमोऽञ्जराय ॥ ४०
 नाभिप्रजातकमलस्थचतुर्मुखाय
 क्षीरोदकार्णवविकेतयशोधराय ।
 नानाविचित्रमुकुटाङ्गदभूषणाय
 सर्वेश्वराय वरदाय नमो वराय ॥ ४१
 भक्तिप्रियाय वरदोपितसुदर्शनाय
 फुल्लारविन्दविपुलायतलोचनाय ।
 देवेन्द्रविग्रहमनोद्यतपीरुपाय
 योगेश्वराय विरजाय नमो वराय ॥ ४२
 ब्रह्मायनाय त्रिदशायनाय
 लोकाधिनाथाय भवापनाय ।
 नारायणायात्महितायनाय
 महावराहाय नमस्करोमि ॥ ४३
 कूटस्थमव्यक्तमचिन्त्यरूपं
 नारायणं कारणमादिदेवम् ।

आप देवाधिदेवको नमस्कार है। स्वभावस्वरूपी आपको बार-बार नमस्कार है। जगत्की प्रतिष्ठा करनेवाले (आप)-को नमस्कार है। गोविन्दको बार-बार नमस्कार है। पद्मनाभको नमस्कार है और योगसे उत्पन्न होनेवाले (आप) योगोद्भवको नमस्कार है। विश्वेश्वर, देव, शिव, हरिको नमस्कार है। निर्गुण और गुणात्मक उन (प्रसिद्ध) देवको नमस्कार है। विश्वात्मा, नारायण एवं देवोंके परम आत्मा (आप)-को नमस्कार है। कारणवश वामनरूप धारण करनेवाले, अतुल विक्रमवाले नारायणको नमस्कार है। श्री, शार्ङ्ग, चक्र, तलवार एवं गदा धारण करनेवाले उन पुरुषोत्तमको नमस्कार है ॥ ३५-३८ ॥
 गुह्य, वेदनिलय, महोदर, दैत्यके निधनके सिंहे सिंहरूप धारण करनेवाले, चार भुजाओंवाले, ब्रह्म, इन्द्र, रुद्र, मुनि तथा चारणोंके द्वारा स्तुत किये गये वरदानी देवोत्तम अच्युतभगवान्को नमस्कार है। शेषनागके शरीरपर प्रसन्नतापूर्वक शयन करनेवाले, गोदुग्ध, स्वर्ण, शुक एवं नीलघनको उपमासे युक्त, पीला वस्त्र धारण करनेवाले, मधु-कैटभका विनाश करनेवाले, सुन्दर मुकुट धारण करनेवाले, वृद्धावस्थसे रहित, विश्वकी आत्मा आप देवको नमस्कार है। नाभिसे उत्पन्न हुए कमलपर स्थित ब्रह्मसे युक्त, क्षीरसमुद्रको अपना निवास बनानेवाले, यशस्वी, अनेक प्रकारके विचित्र मुकुट एवं अङ्गद आदि आभूषणोंसे युक्त, वरदानी तथा वरस्वरूप सर्वेश्वरको नमस्कार है। भक्तिके प्रेमी, श्रेष्ठ दीप्तिसे सर्वथा पूर्ण सुन्दर दिखलायी देनेवाले, खिले हुए कमलके समान विज्ञात और खोजे गये, देवेन्द्रके विघ्नोका विनाश करनेके लिये पुरुषार्थ करनेको उद्यत वरस्वरूप, विरज योगेश्वरको नमस्कार है ॥ ३९-४२ ॥

ब्रह्मा और अन्य देवोंके आधारस्वरूप, लोकाधि-
 नाथ, भवहर्ता, नारायण आत्महितके आश्रय-
 स्थान महावराहको नमस्कार करता हूँ। मैं कूटस्थ,
 अव्यक्त, अचिन्त्य रूपवाले, कारणस्वरूप, आदिदेव

श्लोक 40 में अंतिम शब्द नमोऽञ्जराय

Source: Vaaman Puran, Adhyay 84

D. Conclusion

For nearly 800 years, Persian was the language of power, culture, and spirituality across South and Central Asia. As the official court language of India (11th–19th century), it left a lasting impact on Urdu, Hindi, Turkish, and Central Asian languages.

Persian words such as **Namaz**, **Roza**, **Mehfil**, **Dost**, **Khawab**, and **Zaban** remain embedded in South Asian languages.

The word **Namaz** is entirely of Persian origin—it is not Sanskrit.