

ILM-E-KHSHNOOM, THE ONLY RAY OF HOPE

By K. N. Dastoor

What is Ilm-e-Khsnoom? Is it a mere "school of thought" like the schools in the subject of Philosophy? Or is it some mystifying interpretation of the Religion of Zarathushtra-different from that Religion itself? Is it some mumbo-jumbo devised for those who have a natural craving for mysticism and who would ask for a mystical explanation of even the simplest looking teachings of Religion?

Let us make a systematic inquiry as to the origin, nature and content of Khshnoom.

Some twelve centuries ago our ancestors arrived in India. The reason is stated to be the preservation of Religion. But, to preserve what? If the Religion of Zarathushtra consists merely of a moral code described as good thoughts, words and deeds, was it necessary to leave Iran? The history, tradition and our way of life until the first half of the century, do indicate that the anxiety was to preserve not a mere moral code, but also-and more so-the yogic and spiritual institutions which were a part and parcel of the Parsi life.

The whole of the Parsi code can be expressed by the following Seven Rules:—

1. A Parsi shall during all moments of his life, put on the specially designed garment-the Sudreh and girdle-Kushti, and unwind the Kushti at specified time and in the specified manner.
2. A Parsi shall recite and chant the specially composed Manthra-prayers, in the specified manner and at the specified times. Khurshed and Meher Niyashes are to be recited at least once a day.

3. A Parsi shall present himself before the specially consecrated Fire in an Atash Beheram or Atash-Adran and recite the Atash-Niyaish.
4. A Parsi shall adopt Meher-Patet at all moments of life; Meher means: to stick to the truth and justice in all dealings with humanity and mother nature. Patet implies constant struggle with the evil embeded within man; if he falls, he has to repent, and resolve to be watchful lest he falls again.
5. When a Parsi dies, his body is to be taken to a specially designed and constructed place called Dokhma.
6. The living has to get performed Yasna-ceremonies to facilitate the onward journey of the Ruvan who left the earth.
7. A Parsi has to preserve his racial gene and not allow it to be mixed up by marriage outside the fold.

This is the full package of Parsi life. Each of the seven rules is inseperable from the rest. All the seven are to be preserved and the craving to preserve them brought our fore-fathers to this Holy Land of Yogis-India.

For 12 long centuries, we preserved our religions institutions and way of life, with tenacity, and Nature did reward us. We thrived and prospered; we were looked upon as apostles of honesty, truthfulness and character. Our dealings with people surrounding us was exemplary. We served them with all earnestness. If we prospered, the fruits of our prosperity were laid out

before all country-men. Our charities were predominantly cosmopolitan. And the community had no beggar and no prostitute. All our successes and services emanated from our spiritual strength and energy, and that energy was being constantly and continuously generated within us by our religious practices and institutions. The conduct in Rule No. 4 above was the result of the adherence to the other six Rules. And those who dealt with us were so overwhelmed by our natural goodness to all, that nobody ever raised a question: why we do not allow non-Parsis to enter our Fire-temple or why we do not marry outside the fold. "Let them do whatever they like as regards their own community and Religion; they are so helpful and so good and so truthful and so charitable and so generous to everybody; why should we disturb them and question them about their small exclusiveness in the matters of their community and Religion?" That was the way in which all non-Parsis treated us.

Alas!: All that is now to be stated in that past tense. All the seven pillars on which the grand edifice of the Parsi life stood have been shaken and shaken frightfully and we are on the way towards our own extinction. And the blame lies at our own door. Many Parsis have discarded sudreh kushti; they don't know what their Manthra-prayers are; not many of them are keen about their Fire-temples; some of them criticise Dokhma and Yasna; the tide of mixed marriages has surrounded us; and we have beggars and criminal and the unchaste in plenty. The present generation of non-Parsis has no idea of our recent past; they consider us as community of crackpots:

Let me state the theme of this article right here; Ilm-e-Khshnoon is the only

white ray of hope in these clouds of despair. Please do not brush aside this statement; I propose to elaborate it and to convince you about its truth; my only appeal to you is to be objective and open-minded and not be carried away by your past prejudices, most of which are based on nothing more than hearsay.

But to go back to the gloomy story of our degeneration, when and how did it set in? The germs were first generated at the end of the last century. Two factors were their breeding ground. One was the onslaught of sciences and the other, advent of Zoroastrian-Studies in the west.

Physical sciences pretended to explain away the whole Universe. Every event and every phenomenon had a "natural" explanation, which did not require that curious creature: God. Earth? An accident and an explosion? Men? Life by 'natural' selection and survival of the fittest: Matter? A combination of atoms and nothing more No need to introduce any mystical force; all forces are known and understood and, therefore, God and Religion are just superstitions, "unscientific and unscholarly": All Religions were shaken to the foundation. "The infidel half century"-even Bernard Shaw shouted.

This poisonous mind blew our Religion and added to it was the radio-active fall out of the Western studies, They reduced our scriptures to mere historical and geographical records. The verbal and grammatical translations drowned in them all the devotional and spiritual fervour of our Holy Writings. Our religious traditions and spiritual institutions were branded as superstitions. Our own 'Scholars' and 'Savants' fell victims to this further onslaught. The pillars of the Parsi life began having tremors.

From the muddy whirlpool, where the degeneration germs were breeding, a monster suddenly drew its long neck. That was the notorious question of Juddin-marriage and marriage mix-ups. Some Parsis desired to marry non-Parsi ladies and brand them as Parsis. "What is wrong in that?"—it was asked. Nothing wrong! Scriptures are history and geography; institutions are superstitions; and add to that some scholars reading in the Scriptures that Zoroastrian Religion preaches conversion!

This happened at the beginning of this century. The faithful in the community resisted; but it was a different task. If physical sciences have discarded God and Western Studies have discarded our religious institutions, how can the Community sustain its faith in Sudrah Kusti, and Mantra and Yasna and Holy Fire and Dokhma and above all the preservation of the racial gene?

And yet the Community sustained its faith, and that was mainly because of Theosophy and thereafter Ilm-e-Khshnoom.

Behramshah Shrooff arrived on the Scene in about 1911. I will not repeat here the whole of his story. He claimed to have come in contact with certain Zarathustrian sagas residing in a secret place in the Daymavand mountain in Iran. He learned from them a portion of the Mystical knowledge contained in the Religion of Zarathustrian and the Holy Scriptures. Behramshahji repeated the great Truth that ordinary non-saintly man is capable of perceiving and experiencing only a small part of Nature; his senses have a barrier; they cannot go beyond a limit. There are vast regions in the cosmic geography which are beyond him. And man himself has in him (i) a physical body, (ii) an ultra-physical

body, and (iii) Ruvan (Soul). Ruvan is the ray of Ahura's Light in him, ultra-physical body is the store-house of spiritual energy with 16 energy centres — known as Chakhras; the physical body is a garment woven from two elements — one good and other evil. Aim of man is to deliver himself from that evil element. This can be achieved by resisting the bad thoughts, words and deeds, which naturally emanate from it that the evil element. That resistance is not easy to offer. Man has natural tendency to be swept away by evil. He therefore requires special energy to be able to resist evils. That energy is within himself, stored in 16 energy centres of the ultra-physical body, and is required to be liberated by activating in the centres. Different Religions prescribe different Yoga's, exercises and practices — tersely described as 'tarikats' — for liberating the Chakhras-energies. The seven Rules set out earlier constitute such 'tarikats' as prescribed in the Religion of Zarathushtra.

Behramshahji also explained, on the basis of Divine Science of Zarathushtra, the mechanism behind each of the seven Rules. Why are Sudreh and Kushti made as they are? Why should Sudreh have nine stitches and Kushti, 72 threads? How do they and the Mantra-prayers activate the 'Chakhras'? Why 15 fires brought from 15 different classes of homes are required to prepare the holy fire of Atash — Behram? Why, while constructing the Dokhma, 301 nails of different specified weights are used? What is the effect and efficacy of Yasna — ceremonies? How by resisting evil with the help of the 'tarikats' Ruvan of man is delivered? These questions and many more were answered by Behramshahji in a wonderfully consistent manner. Like all Sciences, his exposition has several technical terms and those terms

are found in our Scriptures. Once you apply the meanings as coming from those terms to our Scriptures, hundreds of doubts in their interpretation were erased. The late K. R. Cama could realise this and he spoke highly of the esoteric knowledge brought by Baheramshahji.

Baheramshahji said that the very composition of a Parşi is such that if he abandons 'tarikats', like Sudrah — Kushti and Manthra — Prayers, he will not be able to resist evil thoughts, words and deeds. The secret of all the goodness of

a Parsi lies in his 'Tarikats'. Once he rejects them, the goodness is gone. This explains our present downfall.

This ancient and authentic knowledge regenerated by Baheramshahji had a tremendous impact on the Parsis. I would request you to just see one book to get an idea of this impact, and that is Baheramshah Shroff Memorial Volume (1930). You read in it the amazing effect Baheramshahji produced on classes of people — from a high brow scholar to an inquiring layman.

KHSHNOOM, THE ONLY RAY OF HOPE (2)

K. N. DASTOOR

Renowned Savant K. R. Kama's views on Baheramshah shroff's Teachings.

"What this man has, we have not."

"This is surely Zoroastrian Philosophy."

Have our Seholars understood "Mystical writings"?

Baheramshah Shroff Memorial Volume published in 1930, gives an excellent account of what he was, how he learnt, what he taught, how he imparted knowledge and how immensely he impressed the learned and the layman alike. The Volume mainly contains articles written by those who had come in contact with him and views and opinions about him expressed by several prominent persons.

One of the articles is by Pirojshah Rustomji Mehta (pages 142 to 155). In it are narrated the answers to certain questions about Baheramshah, which he had asked to the late Khodabax E. Poonegar, a renowned scholar and professor of our Religion. One of the questions was:—

"Is it true that the late Savant Khurshedji R. Kama refused to believe whatever was expunded by Baheramshah?"

(I presume my reader is aware who K. R. Kama was. He was the pioneer who introduced the Western Studies of our Religion amongst the Parsis of India. He was a highly respected scholar and teacher of Avesta Scriptures and other holy writings, and the Guru of a series of renowned scholars. During his studies he had encountered many doubts. A prominent

illustration is the version of Zarathushtra having three wives and three sons and three daughters, which Kamaji found to be extremely entangled with inconsistencies, (see his Gujerati Zarathushtra-Nameh). Nothing surprising in this, since the Western Studies of our Religion have completely missed its spiritual and mystical aspects. Most amazing phenomenon was that Kamaji could find solutions to several of his doubts from Baheramshah's teachings and explanations. And here are the proofs for this. First is Poonegar's answer to the above question :

"I had a pleasant opportunity of coming in close contact with the late Kamaji and I was surprised to observe that Baheramshah Shroff's teachings had created quite an impression on Kamaji He used to tell me, without hesitation, about certain difficult words and thoughts in Avesta: "We the students of Avesta do not understand the proper meaning and interpretation of these words and thoughts; What Baheramshah explains is the correct interpretation." (Memo. Vol. page 151).

There is another article in the Memorial Volume written by Manchershah P. Kekobad, the Head Master of Surat Mission High School. He was one of the first disciples of Baheramshah and was able to persuade him to go to Bombay (from Surat) to propagate his knowledge. Manchershah writes :

"Baheramshahji then came to Bombay. His first lectures were delivered. As expected, opposition did arise from certain quarters. But in one of the lectures Kamaji was the President. He admitted that this was "surely Zoroastrian philosophy" and that although there were some new technical terms, "we will understand more and more as we go on hearing him." In that very meeting one Avesta scholar said, "Where has he got the knowledge of Avesta and Paharvi?" Kamaji's reply is still remembered by many. "Brother, what more have you done than merely translating words? Where have we been able to find out the explanations of mystical writings? I feel that what this man has, we do not have. Let us wait and see." (page 253)

"Mystical Writings"! Kamaji says, mere translation of words won't do in Zoroastrian Studies. Any Scripture of any Religion is ordained to contain mystical writings, technical terms, spiritual language, parables, expressions containing deeper truths than meet the ordinary eye, and even seeming absurdities. Without having the correct key of interpretation, the Holy Scriptures cannot be comprehended. 'cattle' in Avesta does not mean mere animals of that species; 'river' is not always meant to be an earthly river; 'city' does not just refer to the physical geography of a country; 'mountain' is not a mere swelling on physical earth; 'horse' denotes something much more than that animal; 'Haoma' does not merely denote a kind of plant; 'Ashavan' does not just mean a holy man; 'Asha' does not mean just righteousness; 'Alaat' does not just indicate some material articles; 'Gatha' does not just mean 5 Chapters written by the Prophet;

'Manashni' does not mean just good thoughts

There is much more to these words than appears on surface. Without that we are in a jungle of confusion.

Max Mueller says:

"Unless we learn to understand this metaphorical or hieroglyphic language of the ancient world, we shall look upon the Upanishads and on most of the Sacred Books of the East as mere childish twaddle."

Recently I have come across a book "Dictionary of All Scriptures and Myths" by G. A. Gaskell (Avenel Books, New York) which attempts to give the esoteric and mystical meanings of more than 5,000 words and phrases spread in the Sacred Books of all Religions. Those words and phrases are not what they seem. The words of Max Mueller quoted above are the title quotation of that book. In its Introduction Max Mueller is quoted again:

"I confess it has been for many years a problem to me, how the Sacred Books of the East should, by the side of so much that is fresh, natural, simple, beautiful and true, contain so much that is not only unmeaning, artificial and silly, but even hideous and repellent. This is a fact and must be accounted for in some way or other."

"There will always remain in the Upanishads a vast amount of what we can only call meaningless jargon, and for the presence of which in these ancient mines of thought, I, for my part, feel quite unable to account."—S.B.E. Vol. I, XII, Vol. XV, XX.

Any student of our Scriptures is bound to experience this dilemma. He must be

honest enough to admit his incapability to comprehend, as Max Mueller does. And he must be inquisitive and imaginative enough to be on a look out for any branch of knowledge which explains or tries or claims to explain the mystical meanings. Kamaji was that honest truth-seeker.

Kamaji could see, and had the courage to declare, that Baheramshahji did expound the interpretation of mystical writings, which is the most essential and vital element of any Avesta study.

Baheramshahji presented a clear and consistent picture of how and why the Creation was created, what is the place of man in the creation and what are the duties of man in his day-to-day earthly life. He explained why there are more than one Religions and Prophets and how all Religions are in accordance with the Divine Plan of Ahura as ordained in the Ahoonvar, the First Word. And how conversion is a violation of Nature's Good Order.

The failure to understand the mystical meanings of Avesta words led the Western Scholars and their Parsi disciples to the hypothesis that Gathic concepts are different than and even inconsistent with the contents of non-Gathic Scriptures. This in turn led many 'scholars' to discard the non-Gathic Scriptures like Vendidad, Visperad, Yasna (other than Gatha) Yashts and Khordeh Avesta, they are not 'Zarathushtrian', they said. And this then further led them to discard all the traditions and tenets, for the preservation of which our forefathers migrated.

Scriptures are not just literary writings. They proceed from the Divine Wisdom and arrive through a Prophet or

Soshayant. The above referred dictionary in its introduction says :

"The Scriptures, as proceeding from the Omniscient Wisdom, are therefore in their undermeanings quite consistent treatises, never contradicting each other, and teaching universally the great truths of the nature of man, of the soul-process, and of the cosmos. The cryptic language of the sacred books is not at all of arbitrary formation, but accords with correspondences in nature, higher and lower, and being quite simple in its general features, can be readily made out by all open-minded, intelligent students who set themselves to learn it. When the clue to the language is found, it can be deciphered just in the same way as the hieroglyphs of Egypt were made out. Each hieroglyph when revealed aided the revelation of associated hieroglyphs. In the Scriptures, to make decipherment easier, there are certain spiritual ideas which are partly expressed on the surface and so can greatly help interpretation. These ideas have been embodied in the different religions of the world and constitute the active spirit of the religions, and are the source of their idealistic power over the mental and emotional nature of mankind."

Where are we and our 'scholars', who go on attempting to find inconsistencies even in one class of Sacred Scriptures viz. Avesta, and try to say: this Avesta Scripture is 'pure' and that is impure or mutilated or confused or even absurd! If they give more importance to truth than their

ego, they will find the light. That light is Khshnoom. Kamaji did appreciate that.

Baheramshahji has given a consistent explanations of all the Holy Scriptures and Writings, Gathic and non-Gathic including Pahalvi and Pazand and showed that there are no inconsistencies and contradictions in them. The Mystical Knowledge — Khshnoom — which he propounded, is an answer to all the doubts and confusions, which bother and trouble the Western Studies since inception till today. Religion is not mere history or geography or philology or philosophy. It is the Science of all sciences, physical, ultra-physical, astral, spiritual, mystical, salva-

tional. That Science has been taught in Khshnoom. It is Khshnoom which can demonstrate how the Mystical Science of Nature has been contained and interwoven in our Holy Scriptures, in our 'Tarikat's, our tenets and traditions, in our moral code, and even in our way of day to day life. As Kamaji's words indicate: What Khshnoom has, Western Study has not.

Would you like to know where you can read the Khshnoomic interpretation of our Religion?

Baheramshahji's disciples Ervad Phiroze S. Masani and Dr. Faramroz S. Chiniwala have written a lot. More about that later.