

USTAD SAHEB BEHRAMSHAH N. SHROFF

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Ustad Saheb Behramshah Navroji Shroff was not exactly a saint or a martyr. However, he certainly was a mystic teacher (Ustad) who helped Parsis of this century understand the esoteric side of their ancient religion.

Born on 3rd August, 1857, in a priestly family at Bombay, Behramshahji had very little formal education and could speak with great difficulty. At the age of eighteen, he left home and travelled northwards from Ahmedabad to Kathiawad, to the Punjab and finally the frontier provinces of Peshawar. While in Peshawar, he came across a caravan of strange-looking but radiant men. The leader of the group was Rasheedji Saheb who established a rapport with the young Behramshahji by showing him the sudreh-kusti he had worn on his person, All others in the group were also wearing the sudreh-kusti. Behramshahji later learned that they were the Saheb-e-Dil (Masters of Heart) who lived a pious and secluded life in an unknown area near Mount Daemavand.

To devout Zarathushtis, Mount Daemavand is as sacred as Mount Kailash is to devout Hindus and Mount Fujiyama is to the Japanese.

Behramshahji joined the caravan which took him from Peshawar to Kafistan and then to Afghanistan and Khorasan in Iran. From Khorasan, the caravan proceeded in the north-west direction towards Azarbaijan which, in ancient times, was a Zarathushti stronghold and, according to some, possibly the birthplace of Asho

Zarathushtra. Finally, the caravan moved towards the Alburz range whose peak is Mount Daemavand. The place where these highly evolved Masters dwell is called Firdaus (paradise).

It appears the Masters had retreated to the mountains decades before the fall of the Sasanian empire and the Arab invasion.

According to Behramshahji, the inhabitants of Firdaus lead a simple, pious life dedicated to the service of Ahura Mazda. They mainly thrive on a diet of milk, fruits and vegetables. The colony, according to Behramshahji, had a population of 2000 men, women and children all highly evolved souls.

Behramshahji used to say that these Masters work for the progress of all humanity. Some of these Masters were present at the birth of Jesus Christ (the three Magis). One of them also had a deep and abiding influence on prophet Mohammad (Dastur Dinyar or 'Salaman-i-Fars).

According to Behramshahji, different religions have come into being to cater to the needs of different types of souls. He stressed the importance of every human soul seeking salvation only through his/her own religion.

Behramshahji reported that among the 2000 inhabitants of Firdaus, there were 72 Maghavs whose leader was Sraoshaverez Marzban.

Behramshahji lived among the Masters for more than three years and acquired a

deep understanding of the ancient Zoroastrian lore. He was blessed with many spiritual gifts and the stammer with which he was born completely vanished. From an illiterate boy with a terrible stammer, Behramshahji had been transformed into an Ustad (Guru or teacher) who, during his lifetime, fascinated scholars like K.R. Cama and Khodabux Poonegar, among others, with his deep knowledge and understanding of the Zarathushtian religion.

It appears that for the first thirty years after his return from Firdaus, Behramshahji remained silent and incognito. Perhaps he was waiting for the right time in Nature to begin his work. He delivered his first talk at a religious congregation at Baug-e-Parsa in Surat. He spoke about the different fire energies operating in Nature and thrilled the Parsis with inner joy. He revived the science of Ilm-e-Khshnoom (or the science that brings inner joy). He devoted the last twenty years of his life to spreading the message of his Masters and reviving the sagging faith among Zarathushtis in India. Those were the days when the winds of materialism were beginning to sweep over India. Modern science, Christian missionaries and theosophists were already puncturing holes in the Zarathushti doctrine and faith. It was the arrival of Ustad Saheb Behramshah Navroji Shroff that brought about a revival of faith. For the first time, the priests and laity understood the rationale behind various traditions, customs and tarikats (spiritual disciplines). He explained the inner and esoteric meaning of various prayers and rituals and widely promoted the faith on orthodox lines.

Dasturji Dr. Hormazdyar K. Mirza in a treatise titled "The Zoroastrian Religious

Studies" published in the "Late Ardeshir B. Homavazir Memorial Volume" writes, "The Ustad Saheb's expositions revived and restored the waning faith of Zoroastrians. He kindled a torch of religious faith, which burns upto now with spiritual brilliance. He instilled religious fervour, enthusiasm, and zeal among the Zoroastrians. The religious philosophy, expounded by the Ustad Saheb, is generally known as Zarthoshti Ilm-e-Khshnoom-'the Zoroastrian Wisdom of Bliss'."

Behramshahji passed away in Surat at the ripe old age of seventy years on 7th July 1927. To this day, his pious name is invoked as "Osta Behramshah, Osta Navroji" in all religious ceremonies, various scholars also paid glowing tributes to this humble teacher, which are recorded in the "Behramshah Shroff Memorial Volume".

During his lifetime and after him, the Masani brothers-Pheroze and Dinshaw, as also the Chinivalla brothers-Framroze and Jehangir, continued the work of spreading Ilm-e-Khshnoom - the science or religious lore that brings spiritual wisdom and inner bliss.

Once a saint, to test his disciples to find out if they are conscious of God's presence everywhere, called a few of them, gave them a banana each and asked them to eat it in a place where nobody could see them. They all went with their given fruit and except one, returned and reported that none saw them eating the banana. But that one disciple, who was exception came back with the banana still held in his hand, and told to the Guru that he could not find a place where he was not watched by God, who is everywhere and sees and hears everything.