

76th Baj of Ustad Saheb Behramshah Nowroji Shroff

Capacity Crowd gathers to pay their respects to the Ustad

**Vada Dasturji Dr. K. M. Jamasp Asa praises
the work & legacy of Ustad Saheb**

**Ervad K. N. Dastoor's Splendid Talk on the Structure
of the Zarthoshti Dean as explained in Gatha 53.2**

- Ervad Marzban Hathiram

The 76th Baj of Ustad Saheb Behramshah Nowroji Shroff was observed by the Zarthosti IIm-e-Khshnoom Felavnari Committee on Monday, 7th July 2003 at the Sethna Agiary Hall, Tardeo. Over 250 Parsis gathered to pay their respects to the late Ustad, with several standing throughout the proceedings, which commenced with a Jashan ceremony at 5 p.m. After the Jashan, the main function began with a Humbandagi conducted by the Chief Guest of the function, Vada Dasturji of the Anjuman Atash Behram, Dastur Dr. Kaikhushroo Dastur Minocher Jamasp Asa, MA, Ph.D.

Welcoming the capacity crowd, Master of Ceremonies Ervad Marzban Hathiram said that in an age where those who died are soon forgotten, and some are forgotten even when alive, it is a miracle that even 76 years after his death, the memory of the revered Ustad Saheb Behramshah Nowroji Shroff is as fresh as ever. It was even more surprising since there was not a single photograph or recording of the Ustad. The reason for this is the great knowledge which he brought from the Abed Sahebs of Demavand, where he was fortunate to stay for over three years at the end of the 19th century. This knowledge, called IIm-e-Khshnoom, was given to him by the great unseen sages of the Zoroastrian religion, who reside in the hidden dimensions around Mount Demavand in Iran, and who are the protectors and spiritual nourishers of the Parsi community. The Ustad carried the message of the Abed Sahebs to the troubled Parsi community: 'do not turn your back to the religion of your forefathers, do not give up the age old and time honoured practices of the religion, pray the sacred Avesta Manthras as much as you can, and keep faith in your God Ahura Mazda and His Prophet Zarathushtra. Do this and you will be able to withstand the toughest of times and the most difficult of all circumstances.' Ervad Hathiram stated that this message of the Abed Sahebs was accepted by numerous Parsis during the lifetime of the Ustad, and continues to be accepted by a large number of Zoroastrians till this day, which was proved by the great number of people who had gathered to pay their respects to the Ustad on his Baj.

Introducing the Chief Guest of the function, Vada Dasturji Dr. Kaikhushroo Dastur Minocher Jamasp Asa, Ervad Hathiram mentioned that he was descended from one of the noblest families of the Bhagarsath Anjuman. The High Priests' chair was but a throne of thorns, and yet the Dasturji had conducted himself with dignity and honour in today's troubled times, which should be appreciated by the community. Introducing the main speaker for the evening, Ervad Kaikhushroo Navroji Dastoor, Ervad Hathiram observed that he belonged to the illustrious Meherji Rana family of Navsari, and had spent the last fifty years in understanding the mysteries of Khshnoom under the guidance of the two main disciples of Ustad Saheb, namely Dr. Framroze Chiniwalla and Jehangirji Chiniwalla. Ervad Hathiram then requested the Chief Guest to say a few words.

Commencing his address, Dasturji Jamasp Asa thanked the members of the Zarthosti IIm-e-Khshnoom Felavnari Committee for inviting him to preside over the function. Giving a broad outline of the Ustad's life, Dasturji observed that even though Ustad Saheb had only a very basic education, yet he had undergone a metamorphosis due to his meeting with the Abed Sahebs in Peshawar and his subsequent stay with them in Firdaus at Demavand. After his return, the Ustad travelled all over India and attended several meetings and conferences of learned men of other religions and amazed them with his knowledge of their religion. He then married and settled down in Surat and led an ordinary life, never revealing to anyone the great secrets which he had learnt from the Abed Sahebs. It was only after nearly 30 years of silence that Ustad Saheb began to reveal the knowledge he had obtained from the Abed Sahebs, first in Surat and later on in Mumbai, where he

made a great impact on not only the average Parsi but also on the leading scholars of that time including K. R. Cama, Khodabux Punegar, Sohrab Bulsara and others. Soon various publications explaining the knowledge of Khshnoom began appearing from the pen of noted Avesta Pahlavi and Pazand scholar Ervad Phiroze Masani, and later on from his brother Dinshaw Masani, Dr. Framroze Chiniwalla and Jehangirji Chiniwalla. Having lived a full life Ustad Saheb passed away on 7th July, 1927. Dasturji commented that Ustad Saheb laid great stress on the essential orthodoxy of the Zoroastrian faith, and always exhorted Parsis to follow the practices and Tarikats of the Zoroastrian religion, to recite the Avesta Manthras and to give respect to the clergy. He was a formidable opponent of those misguided reformists who were trying to destroy the Zoroastrian religion by ridiculing its ancient practices and long standing traditions. Thus he was an important figure in the history of the Parsis at the turn of the last century and has left a great imprint for future generations. Dasturji Jamasp Asa once again thanked the Zarhosti IIm-e-Khshnoom Felavnari Committee for inviting him to chair this important function and requested Ervad K. N. Dastoor to give his talk.

Ervad K. N. Dastoor began by thanking the large audience for coming to the function and paying their respects to the memory of the late Ustad. He observed that both Ervad Hathiram and Dasturji Jamasp Asa had given a broad outline of the life of Ustad Saheb. He added that several people always asked as to what was the evidence to prove that Ustad Saheb had indeed met the Abed Sahebs. While there could be no direct evidence, Ervad Dastoor pointed out that three years after the death of the Ustad, a Memorial volume was brought out in his memory, which consisted of various articles by 36 different persons who had come into contact with Ustad Saheb, including several scholars, lawyers, doctors and priests who all had to say the same thing: that there was no doubt that an event had occurred in the Ustad's life which had led to a remarkable transformation in him, and that the knowledge of Khshnoom which he laid before the Parsis was the true essence of the Zoroastrian faith. This memorial volume, which has been reprinted by the Zoroastrian Radih Society and is available today, along with several other books by Ervad Phiroze Masani, Dr. Framroze Chiniwalla and others are the essential reading list for all those who are interested in knowing more about the Ustad and his teachings. Unfortunately, most of these books are in Gujarati, but efforts are being made to present these in English also. Ervad Dastoor noted that even 76 years after the death of the Ustad, there are three separate magazines - Dini Avaz and Parsi Pukar from Mumbai and the Mazdayasni Connection from Los Angeles - that carry on the work of spreading the knowledge of Khshnoom today.

Coming to his main topic, Ervad Dastoor said that he had chosen a specific paragraph from the Vahishtoisht Gatha, Yasna 53.2, which laid out a broad structure of the Zoroastrian religion. Creating a metaphorical vision, Ervad Dastoor described that the contents of Yasna 53.2 could be better understood with the metaphor of a chariot. This chariot is drawn by two horses, and has 6 wheels. It is driven by three charioteers in the past and many others in the future, on a straight path leading to a certain destination. Explaining the metaphor, Ervad Dastoor said that the chariot is drawn by two horses: fraoret and vahma. Fraoret implies faith. Faith is the ability to believe in something that is not empirically provable. Drawing upon his considerable knowledge of modern physics, Ervad Dastoor noted that during the beginning of the previous century, science was obsessed with the idea of proving everything, and had gone so far as to remove God from the scheme of all things. However, today's latest discoveries have left scientists with great unexplained mysteries which come knocking on the doors of mysticism. He cautioned the audience that material progress or technological advances should not obscure their minds to the fact that modern science is unable to explain some very basic questions about our existence. Hence the idea of having faith in God and His scheme of the Working Universe was not at all unscientific. Faith is the glue which binds together the entire community and takes it forward. Hence the metaphor of the first horse of the chariot was taken by fraoret, or faith. Continuing the allegory, Ervad Dastoor revealed that the second horse drawing the chariot was vahma, or devotion. Ervad Dastoor decried the fact that the average Parsi feels there is no devotion in his prayers when he reads the normal philological translations of our sacred Avesta scriptures. Yet when the Master key of Khshnoom is applied to the normal translations they reveal the deepest levels of devotion. Thus devotion towards our Creator and His prophet are fundamental to the Zoroastrian and hence vahma has been taken as the second horse drawing the chariot.

Coming to the wheels of the chariot, Ervad Dastoor explained that the first set of three wheels consists of manangh, ukhdha and shyaothna. Manangh implies the mind of Vohu Mana. Ervad Dastoor ridiculed the fact that several scholars have come up with the idea that our human mind is equal to Vohu Mana. He cautioned

that this is an insidious attempt to propagate the wrong notion that Zoroastrianism means doing what ever our mind deems fit. Ervad Dastoor wondered that if this were true, then even Hitler's action could be said to be driven by Vohu Mana, since in his mind he sincerely believed that the extermination of millions of Jews was good. Ervad Dastoor clarified that Vohu Mana is that highest state of consciousness which the mind attains when it reaches in front of Ahura Mazda. Our current minds are not even capable of being able to think only good thoughts. Therefore the idea of equating Vohu Mana with the human mind was absurd. Thus the manangh mentioned in this stanza of the Gatha refers to the process of cleansing our normal minds with the practice of harbouring good thoughts. What is in the heart should be in the mind and what is in the mind should come out on the tongue. This was a most difficult proposition in today's times. Going on to the next wheel ukhdha, Ervad Dastoor explained that it means the good word or the true word. Ukhda was another word for Manthra, or the sacred Avesta scriptures which were handed down to us by the Prophet Zarathushtra. These words not only have deep and mystical meanings within them, but they also have beneficial powers which arise out of their proper recitation. Thus the scriptures have to be understood at a much deeper level than done today, as the superficial meanings have not done justice to what the Avesta really says. The last of the first three wheels is shyaothna, meaning rightful action. Much stress is laid on the performance of the right deeds in the religion. The actions of man may either succeed in fulfilling his obligations towards others, or put him in further deeper obligations. The practice of the essential Tarikats of the religion would reveal to man the right course of action for him and enable him to untangle his numerous obligations with other people, his community and his country.

Going on to the next set of three wheels, Ervad Dastoor explained that these consisted of Khshnoom, Manthra and Yasna. Khshnoom is that divine knowledge which has been revealed in the Gathas themselves as that wisdom which will lead man to salvation. A miniscule part of this knowledge was revealed to Ustad Saheb during his stay with the Abed Sahebs of Demavand. Ervad Dastoor emphasised that numerous scholars have given nearly the same meaning of wisdom to this word. Commenting on the fact that some scholars ridicule Ilm-e-Khshnoom merely because the term consists of one Arabic word and one Avesta word, Ervad Dastoor clarified that this issue had been raised during the life time of Ustad Saheb himself, when some well-meaning scholars had requested him to change the name to Daanesh-e-Khshnoom. At that point, Ustad Saheb had clarified that he had not coined this word, but this was coined by the Abed Sahebs themselves and hence he did not have the authority to change the term. The Ustad had however revealed that it is incorrect to disparage the fact that the word Ilm is from Arabic, because Arabic has its origins in Pahlavi and Farsi. Hence there should be no objection to using the term. Ervad Dastoor pointed out that the word Khshnoom not only appears in the Gathas but several other words in our daily prayers including the opening sentence of all prayers, namely Khshnaothra Ahurahe Mazdao had the term Khshnoom contained within it. Thus Khshnoom is that knowledge which removes the intellectual cobwebs from the mind of the seeker of knowledge and leads him to bliss. The next wheel in the second set is Manthra. Manthra implies the sacred Avesta scriptures and the beneficial effects caused by their recitation. Ervad Dastoor commented that many Parsis indulged in the practice of Yoga or other such non-Zoroastrian disciplines, without realising that the Manthras are the grandfather of all such disciplines. Just the correct recitation of the sacred Avesta mantras was more than sufficient for the Parsi and he need not try to practice other disciplines. The final wheel in the second set is Yasna, generally translated as ritual. Ervad Dastoor said that Khshnoom had revealed a much deeper meaning to Yasna. Commenting on those who rubbish the practice of rituals, Ervad Dastoor criticised those who did not even know the basic types of ritual yet became self styled experts and critics of the same. He asked whether any scholar had been able to explain the various types of Yasna practices, such as why the saucer used for draining the Haoma juice had nine holes, no more or no less, or why the two fingers of the left hand needed to be placed on a particular implement during a certain part of the ceremony, or why water was sprinkled on that hand at different points in the ritual. This knowledge had been revealed and explained fully by Khshnoom. Ervad Dastoor pointed out that Dr. Framroze Chiniwalla, despite being a Behdin, had written a 500 page book on the Yasna ceremony wherein he had explained these and many more intricacies of Yasna. No priest, after reading this book could say that what was written therein did not make perfect sense to him. Ervad Dastoor noted that Khshnoom had revealed that the Yasna we do are not mere rituals but small scale models of certain divine happenings at different parts of the cosmos which were replicated by the priests on the earth, through which the ceremony would provide spiritual nourishment to the Urvan in whose memory the ceremony was being done. Ervad Dastoor explained that the performance

of the Yasna resulted in the creation of a specific force field, known as Fareshta which would then take the benefits of that Yasna to the Urvan of the deceased which needs the spiritual nourishment and vitamins to enable it to do its appointed labour.

Having explained the six wheels of the chariot in detail, Ervad Dastoor now explained that this chariot was running on a certain road, mentioned in the stanza of Yasna 53.2 as erezush patho. This is the straight path, or the true path which leads one to Ahura Mazda. The only path for Zoroastrians is the following of essential Zoroastrian practices, and not in adopting the practices of other faiths. The most important and difficult practice was to speak truth always. Only this would result in our progress and ultimate salvation. Thus armed with the chariot of six wheels drawn by the horses of faith and devotion, man was riding on the path of eternal truth. But the chariot needs an efficient and skilful driver. Thus Yasna 53.2 explains that there are three drivers of this chariot: Kava Vishtaspa, Spitama Zarathushtra and Frashaoshtra. Kava Vishtaspa was the great spiritual king and warrior who first accepted the Zoroastrian religion. Ervad Dastoor cautioned that Kava Vishtaspa was not some ordinary earthly king. He pointed out that in the Fravardin Yasht, Kava Vishtaspa has been given the same adjectives as those used to describe the Yazata Sraosha. This proves that Vishtaspa was a divine personage, who was given the authority to accept and spread the Zoroastrian faith. Frashaoshtra was one of the main disciples of Zarathushtra and is acknowledged as the Master of Yasna. Finally, it was Zarathushtra himself who is also one of the drivers of the chariot of Yasna 53.2. Ervad Dastoor explained that these were the drivers of the chariot in the past. But Yasna 53.2 reveals that this chariot will always keep on running through the agency of the Saoshyant or the future saviours of the Zoroastrian faith. In the Fravardin Yasht, these saviours are known as Astvat-Ereta. It was Ustad Saheb who got the glad tidings from the Saheb Dilan of Demavand that it would not be long before the next great saviour of the Zoroastrian faith, Behram Varzavand would appear. Ervad Dastoor pointed out that this was not Ustad Saheb's prophecy but it was also contained in numerous Avesta, Pahlavi and Pazand scriptures. But it was Ustad Saheb, who indicated the correct time frame for the appearance of the promised saviour. Finally, Ervad Dastoor described that this awesome chariot was driving on the straight path towards Ahura Mazda and hence would lead man to his ultimate salvation.

Skillfully using this allegory, Ervad Dastoor explained the true structure of the Zoroastrian religion as explained in Yasna 53.2, thereby demonstrating how the knowledge of Khshnoom could be used to go beyond the literal and superficial meanings to a much deeper and richer understanding of our scriptures. Ervad Dastoor concluded by thanking Dasturji Jamasp Asa for presiding over the function and the huge audience which had patiently listened to him, some of them standing throughout the talk. He expressed the hope that the spark of Khshnoom would be ignited in the hearts and minds of all those who were present in the hall, and they would therefore truly understand their great religion and offer thanks to their Creator and His Prophet Zarathushtra and remember with respect the Urvan of the late Ustad Behramshah Nowroji Shroff.

Noted astrologer and editor of Dini-Avaz, Gustad Forbes, gave the vote of thanks. In addition to thanking Dasturji Jamasp Asa and Ervad K. N. Dastoor, Mr. Forbes thanked the hidden working of the Abed Sahebs, which had ensured that even 76 years after the death of the Ustad, the stream of Khshnoom was still flowing with great strength. He also thanked the Panthaky of Sethna Agiary, Ervad Parvez Dordi and the Trustees for allowing the use of the Hall, the various suppliers who had worked together to make the function a grand success and finally the large audience who had braved a very rainy day and heavy traffic to pay their respects to Ustad Saheb. The meeting concluded with a Humbandagi conducted by Dasturji Jamasp Asa, after which the participants did full and ample justice to a meal of Saria, Lagansara Stew, Tarkari par Eda, Rotli, Masala Dal Rice, salad and ice cream, catered by Mrs. Yasmin Bhesadia.

(Parsi Pukar Apr.-May.-Jun. 2003 - Vol. 8; No. 4)