

## **The wondrous life of our Master**

### **An account of the life of Ustad Saheb Behramshah Nowroji Shroff and a history of the advent of the Zarathushtrian mystic revelation of Ilm-e-Khshnoom**

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*[Continued from Vol. 1 Issue 2]*

#### **Welcome to Firdaus**

The residents of Demavand were eager to see who this stranger from the outside world was. The entire community of Demavand had been aware that something momentous was going to happen when they saw Rashid Saheb, who was the Deputy Sraoshavarez of Demavand, step out of their protected environment. Such advanced masters never step out of their closed circuits into the outside world except on very important missions. Soon the news was given that he had stepped into the outside world to bring in a stranger into their midst, who had some pending business with the Sraoshavarez. Hence, when the caravan returned whispers of ‘*aznabih amadeh*’ - the stranger has arrived – swept through the community and all gathered to catch a glimpse of the newcomer.

Behramshah was advised to restrict his movements to only a certain area of the Demavand enclosure. In order to cleanse Behramshah of the influences of the outside world, he was administered the Bareshnum – or the special cleansing bath lasting nine nights, which is still taken by priests today. After the Nahn, Behramshah was allowed to move freely in a larger area of Demavand. A second nine-night Nahn was given to him, and followed by a third Nahn some time later. It was only after this cleansing process that Behramshah was allowed free access to all the areas of Demavand. All this processes and training made a great impact on Behramshah and his mental outlook began to change very rapidly.

#### **General description of Firdaus**

The secluded enclosure of Demavand is situated in the region of Mount Demavand, about 45 miles northeast of Tehran. Mount Demavand is actually an extinct volcano and, at 18602 ft, the highest peak of the Elburz mountain range, which runs along the

southern shore of the Caspian Sea and which marks the northern end of the Iranian plateau. Although the mountain has been climbed by a few explorers, it is supposed to be a difficult peak to surmount, with very high passes and terrifying crevices. The peak is perennially snow capped. The area of Demavand is however, not visible to the outside world as it is protected not only by the high cliffs and very deep valleys, but also because there is a spiritual *kash* – or boundary drawn around it by the sages residing there, using specific Avesta Manthras which makes the whole area invisible to the naked eye. These boundaries are also kept under strict watch by special Abeds, or sages who sit in natural made high minarets at the ends of the area, reciting the specific Avesta Manthras continuously.

As a general indicator, the various mountain ranges located a few degrees to either side of the Equator are where many hidden enclosures such as Demavand are situated. The area of Demavand is huge and can be expanded or contracted at will by these sages. The field of Demavand is connected with numerous other such hidden enclosures where sages of various other religions reside through certain concealed passageways and tunnels. Within Demavand itself, there are several smaller fields, each having a specific function which may be out-of-bounds to even the normal residents.

The area of Demavand was first created by the Peshdadian king Jamshyd and was sporadically used since his days. However, after the withdrawal of the Magi from public life in the time of King Khusro, or *Noshirwan-e-Adil*, the enclosure has been constantly occupied by their descendants.

### **The general population of Firdaus**

The general population of Demavand numbers around 2000 men, women and children, the major part of which is engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. A large area of Demavand is reserved for farming and grazing of specific animals like cows, bulls, specific breeds of sheep and goats. The farming activity is done without putting any animals to use as beasts of burden. Ploughing of the land is done by the men themselves pulling the plough. The process of growing crops is accompanied by the recitation of various Avesta Manthras and keeping in mind the seasonal calendar.

Only certain vegetables and cereals, which are governed by the planet Jupiter or the sun or moon are grown and consumed, with cauliflower being considered a delicacy. The diet of the residents is strictly vegetarian and largely based on vegetables, fruit, milk and milk products. Generally, copper vessels having a layer of tin are used for cooking as well as eating.

The agricultural processes are completely organic and natural manure from the droppings of the numerous cattle is used to further enhance the already productive soil. Situated high among the cliffs, Demavand has a very severe winter accompanied by heavy snow. There is moderate rainfall during the year. The major source of water however, are the numerous springs which run throughout the area. Earthen canals are made to divert this water to the fields for agriculture.

The process of animal husbandry practiced by the sages and the general population is unique. The produce of the cow is regarded as highly nutritious – physically as well as spiritually and in addition to milk, various by-products like curd, cheese, buttermilk, and clarified butter are made and consumed by the populace. Moreover, only a certain proportion ( about one eighth) of the milk of the cow is used, while a larger part of the milk is left for the calf. This proportion is determined by letting the new born calf drink to its content for the first few days after birth. Thereafter the cow is milked and a rough estimate is obtained as to how much milk can be taken for human consumption.

A specific breed of sheep, called *Balota*, is reared for their wool, which is then spun and woven to make the Kusti or sacred girdle which every Zarathushtrian wears constantly. Separate sheep are raised by each of the sages from which they take the wool, to make their personal Kusti. On the death of the animal, the Kusti too is discarded and a fresh one made from an alternative animal kept ready. The wool obtained from the other normal sheep is used to make ordinary clothes and gloves. Generally the area of Demavand is deficient in cotton, iron and spices. These items are obtained by exchanging the excess wool produced there by the caravans which leave Demavand once every two to three years to come to Peshawar for barter. Certain families within the general population are trained in the various forms of

metal work and carpentry. The fire used by the metal workers is treated in a very careful manner and not allowed to be extinguished at all.

There is a separate area where the residential quarters of the general population are situated. The houses are constructed in a particular manner, starting with certain organic chemicals being applied to the rock face which render the rock as soft as clay. Thereafter the living area is carved out of the softened rock and properly designed. There are adequate enclosures to allow natural sunlight and fresh air to come in and naturally ventilate these houses. Such rows of houses, facing each other are made along long cliff walls in a pleasing and well thought out manner. Each house has a separate area where the family fire is preserved for generations together. There are separate rooms where the cooking and washing is done as well as separate bedrooms and living areas. Specially made canals run along the edges of the kitchens from where fresh and snow melted water is available for domestic use. The steep slopes are cleverly put to use to carry away the dirty water without any artificial plumbing. There are no toilets within the houses but these are located in a separate area some distance away from the living quarters. The residents use the dry system and never pollute water by mixing it with human excreta. The toilets are hewn out of cliff ends, and the refuse is carried away by the steep slope at the end of the cliff, from where it disintegrates through the sunlight.

At the very end of such colonies, separate enclosures are made for the use of women during their menses and for the 40-day period after childbirth. Here elderly ladies take care of the needs of the young women during these special days and all the Tarikats, or religious kinetics relating to the special observances during these difficult days is followed by them. At the end of their periods, the women take a special cleansing bath (*Nahn*) and return to their homes.

The residents wear simple, yet attractive cotton clothing. The men keep long hair reaching upto the shoulders, and round rolled bushy beards much like those seen in the statues at Persepolis. In addition to the Sudreh and Kusti, the men wear pyjamas which are loose at the thighs and tapering down to the ankles, though not so slender as to be able to make out the shape of the calf. The shirts are double breasted and secured with tassels, much like the *badians* worn by the *Kathiawadi* men of Gujarat.

Over this the men wear something like an English tail coat, with slits at the side. The head is always covered with a turban of somewhat same shape as tied by priests today. On festive occasions, these are supplemented by more elaborate turbans. Footwear consists mainly of wooden *padukas*, covered on the top with a layer of thin copper or strong shoes made out of cotton canvas. During winter, they wear thick woollen gloves over their hands.

The women too are dressed simply but attractively. In addition to the *Sudreh* and *Kusti* and the double breasted shirt like the men, they wear a dress similar to the *Salwar-Kameez* worn by women today. The pyjamas are always loosely tailored and never figure hugging. They tie up and decorate their hair and then cover it with beautiful turbans such that the hair never fly around. In addition, they wear a very thin, see-through cotton veil such that it covers only the mouth. The women too wear flat soled shoes made of cotton canvas and use woollen hand gloves during winter.

Both men and women have striking features and are extremely attractive. The average height of both is over 6 feet with many residents averaging over 7 feet. The noses are long and hooked, and the men have long, but thick necks, while the women are well built yet with thin waists. Their beauty is such as to inspire awe in the eye of the beholder, yet never any lust.

To keep their bodies clean, both men and women use special earths and mud of various colours and fragrances. There are different earths for normal cleansing of the body and special earths for the hair. Each bathroom has carved out niches where these different earths are kept for use as required. The population is extremely fond of natural fragrances and flowers and gardening is a common hobby. They also brew a non-intoxicating liquor from the various dried fruits and flowers which they grow, which is consumed on festive occasions. In addition, various extracts of flowers and essences made from different ingredients are used to cure common ails. This science is the basis for the modern science of homoeopathy.

Right from childhood, the residents of Demavand are taught three things – to always speak the truth, regardless of the consequences; horse riding, and archery. Both men

and women use horses for moving from place to place within Demavand and every family has its own horses which they breed for generations together.

### **The Special population of Firdaus**

In addition to the normal population described above, Demavand has two more sections of society: the *Khas* (special) and the *Khas-ul-Khas* (very special). The special class consists of the *Abed Saheb-i-Dilan*, or the Master of the hearts. This title has great resonance. Every human has the seeds of goodness as well as evil in him. It is our duty to firmly plant the seeds of goodness, enrich them with the teachings of the religion and by leading a life in synchronicity with nature, and at the same time, tame the seeds of evil in us, without allowing them to take over the running of our life. Yet, as we realise, it is easier said than done. But if a human sticks to the path of his religion and consciously tries to conquer his evil inducing tendencies, a time comes, when he achieves complete mastery over his passions. Such an extraordinary human, who has completely subdued his ego and his passions, who is in complete control of his five physical and five spiritual senses, whose every breath is permeated with unflinching love and devotion towards his Creator, who strives to improve the lot of others less fortunate than him by carrying their load on his broad shoulders, such a selfless individual is known as *Saheb-e-Dil* – the Master of the Heart. These special, highly advanced souls are the cream of Demavand and bear the responsibility of leading the general population to achieve a status similar to theirs.

Among the special group, there exists the group of *Khas-ul-Khas*, who always number 72. These are not humans, but Divine Lustrous Beings, who have achieved complete perfection and unity with their other soul fragments. They are known as the *Magavs*, the Magi and collectively referred to as the *Magav Mandal*. These 72 extraordinary souls include a number of women who too have achieved completion. The head of this council is known as the *Sraoshavarez* and he is the guide and head of the entire community. The *Sraoshavarez* controls the destiny of not only those 2000 residents of Demavand, but also the entire Zarathushtrian population situated in the outside world. It was to discharge such a function that *Sraoshavarez Marzban* pulled *Behramshah* to the enclosure of Demavand.

The entire administration of the enclosure of Demavand is handled by the Sraoshavarez with the assistance of the Abed Sahebs. In accordance with the Zarathushtrian religious law, every individual of Demavand contributes 1/9<sup>th</sup> of his total produce or wealth to the Sraoshavarez for the common use of the entire community. The Sraoshavarez maintains an office which he attends during the evening where detailed accounts of the entire community are maintained for several generations. The period after sunset and upto midnight is the time for education. There exists a huge community hall where the entire population of Demavand can fit in, with separate seating for ladies, gents and the members of the special class. The evening classes begin with community prayers and then a talk either by the Sraoshavarez or a person deputed by him on a particular topic. After the talk the general population returns to their respective quarters while separate classes or debates are held by the members of the special class. These debates are of the highest intellectual order and some go on for years together.

The last watch of the night is totally devoted by the special class in specific prayers and the performance of high spiritual disciplines. This time is used to give fight to the evil forces which become active in the normal world. It is also the time when heart to heart communication takes place between the advanced masters. Thus the time of the special class is used totally for the welfare of other less-advanced souls.