

- I. As a person Shembe was very different from the usual, boisterous and extrovert Zionest prophet. Quiet, withdrawn and softspoken, he exercised his considerable influence over the masses by other means than by shouting and jokes - both he and his son and successor Johannes Galilee Shembe seem reticent and strangely humourless. When preaching to his faithful, and he would see before him 10,000 of them at the July festival, all in white in the Paradise section of Ekuphakameni (the Zion of the Church) - he never raised his voice.
2. Shembe came from the Harrismith district in the O.F.S. and of an old Hlubi family. ①
 3. As a young man Shembe worked on Boer farms and had a way with horses and cattle that he showed throughout his life. ③
 4. On the advice of his parents he took 4 wives. But then he heard a voice telling him to climb a mountain. He did so, and the same voice told him to go to a cave. Overcome by sleep in the cave he had a dream, he was trying to reach certain people, who walked in front of him, but all the time he seemed to be too late. Then lightning appeared and he was asked to survey the earth. As he looked down on the earth of men, he had a terrible vision of his own putrefying corpse. The voice went on to warn him "If you do not leave 'ukuhlobonga' (sexual sins) you will never see me. It is this which hinders your spirit from unity with our Spirit. Because you dwell in a filthy carcass you may not unite with us. ④
 5. Then he woke up. That day he did not work. He said "I have seen Jehovah" (Dube 8). He was always aware of this fundamental spiritual experience on the mountain. He had been set apart. He did in fact part with his four wives a very demanding decision.
 6. From time to time the heavenly powers would appear. Lightning would strike, and a voice said 'I will eat your flesh'. Shembe recorded that 'I was overcome by great fright as I heard this voice'. He fell ill, and an inyanga came to heal him. But the voice said 'you will be healed by Jehovah alone. So he paid the inyanga one head of cattle, and let him go - and his faith in Jehovah healed him. ⑤
 7. He was not baptized but went about preaching in the OFS in the lean years after the Boer war. Prior to his own baptism he felt constrained by his own experience to pray for the sick and to drive out demons.
 8. Ten one day he saw a group of men from Johannesburg baptizing people in a river. This caught Shembe's imagination. He joined the Baptist preacher William M. Leshega from Boksburg on the Rand. Shembe was part of Leshega's church for 5 years from 1906-1911. From Leshega he received most of his impressions of European missions in SA such as they were at that time. ⑥
 9. In 1911 Shembe established his own Church of the Nazarites; he called his centre Ekuphakameni (The Elated Place) It was at this time that he had his second mountain experience. He heard a voice telling him 'Go to the mountain 'Inhlangakazi' and pray there I will give unto you new power. He did not know the place and was unwilling to follow the dictates of the Voice consequently, he decided to go to Harrismith in the OFS instead. But a man approached him on the train, telling him "As soon as you put your feet on the Harrismith station, you will fall down dead. So he went to Inhlangakazi after all in 1912. ⑦
⑧

But that first time he was alone, and he stayed on the mountain for 12 days. He was pursued by ferocious people who tried to kill him; he was visited by lions, and by leopards pretending to be angels saying "We are sent by God" but he replied. "No, I am waiting for Jesus." Then he found himself surrounded by a rattling host of skeletons of the dead making a noise khehle khehle (Zulu ideogram of something utterly dry and brittle and collapsing Doko-Vilakazi) as they stood around him. He fell down in terror. But one of the skeletons who in his lifetime

had been a great White evangelist, told him. 'Brother Shembe, I am sent by God to tell of the power which you will receive by coming to this mountain. You are not going to die but you shall live'. Then 2 angels ^{when he} brought him wine and bread, a sort of sacrament, heavenly food. He knew ^{ate the} that he would never be his old self again but a new person. When he ^{food.} returned from Inhlangakazi he looked like the person he had been before, but he was in fact a different man.

2. In January 1913 he took his flock with him on a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain, there to stay together for 2 weeks living in temporary shelters, built anew for each occasion. This became the Church's Feast of the Tabernacles. When Sundkler visited it in January 1973 hundreds of these huts could be counted. More than 5,000 of the faithful were there yet there was a hush of awe and expectation- in this great crowd, Prayers preaching and teaching are followed by a sacred dance. This was to become the centre of the yearly January pilgrimage of the Church. (16)
3. As soon as he had been baptized himself, Shembe began to baptize others. He felt within himself the power to drive out demons. On a visit to the Wesleyan congregation at Georgedale he was confronted by people plagued by lunacy and hysteria. To his amazement, he saw that his prayers had power over the Demons (Dube 29). His church grew. Shembe himself felt driven to go on extended evangelistic tours throughout Natal and Zululand, and sometimes much further afield. (11)
4. Soon 2 great Church festivals established themselves.
 - a) The January feast of the Tabernacles on the Inhlangakazi Mountain (12)
 - b) The great July Festival at the Ekuphakameni headquarters. (13)All activity in the Church was determined by the yearly rhythm of these 2 great festivals. Eventually the Church spread through Zulu Society.
5. At first chiefs had been reluctant even hostile but Shembe the healer won them over. In the end some 15 chiefs were known to be Nazarites and the July festival came to include special sessions between the prophet and chiefs at which important social matters could be dealt with. The crowning glory came when Shembe was able to give his own daughter Zondi to king Solomon as one of his queens. A precious link between Ekuphakameni and Nongoma between Shembe and Zulu royalty had been forged. (14)
6. Shembe's sensitivity expressed itself in a deep sympathy with the suffering of nature. He would tell his sons not to cut a branch of a tree, adding "How would you feel if I were to cut one of your fingers from your hand." He fought any sign of cruelty against animals. (15)
7. People were greatly impressed by Shembe's ability to read their minds and their secret thoughts. On one occasion two women brought him money. Shembe answered. 'No keep it. You have taken this money from your lovers after you have sold your bodies.'
8. Shembe's mysterious power was seen particularly in connection with healing. Hundreds flocked to him to be healed and subsequently became his devout followers.
9. Shembe's Hymns of the Nazarites (Izinhlabelo zamaNazaretha) is religious poetry of great beauty. It was born in song carried by the incessant rhythm of drums shaped in order to be sung while dancing. Shembe remained illiterate until quite late in life about 40 years of age. His strongest motive for learning the art of writing were the irresistible songs that would well up from his unconscious and had to be grasped and translated into words and verses. The words and the tune of these hymns were born together. The tunes contribute to make the Nazaretha worship something altogether unique. (16)
As a Zulu poet and hymnwriter Isaiah Shembe was altogether unique. (17)

If ever words and verses were a mirror of the poet's own soul, Shembe's hymns reflect the visions and concerns of this the greatest of Zulu prophets.

5. Shembe consecrated several pastors. The first were Petrus Mkayi, Amos Mzobe and Johannes Mlangeni. He took them to Nhlankakazi mountain. Water was prepared, Shembe carefully washed their bodies, after which he put on them the special dress appointed for pastors. He led them down the mountain and after prayers took oil and anointed their heads.
6. Shembe's concern for his Zulu in race torn South Africa, was to extol the glory of God and to express the need to turn, and to return, to the God of all men. The sight of Jehova, Shembe insisted, had made him into another man, a new man, set aside for a unique task. He was inspired by the visions of the Holy Book and gloriously free to interpret the hunger of his own soul and of that of his people, in genuine Zulu words.

Shembe's followers are called the AmaNazaretha. (18)

There is a fundamental emphasis on healing as the central concern of the Church's activity.

7. Shembe died in May 1935. (19)

reference. "Zulu Zion" and some Swazi zionists" Bengt Sundkler
Oxford studies in African affairs.
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