

Talks in Africa 2001

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This is the transcript of talks given by Mr. Nakhjavani (member of The House of Justice) and his wife whilst in East London, South Africa, in 2001.

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[Click here for a third transcript of another talk by Mr. Nakhjavani's to the South African Bahá'ís at the Anvari's, 31 August 2001](#)

First talk

We have been travelling for five weeks so far, and have visited Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. We have been immersed in a sea of singing and of music, and we are so happy and grateful to Bahá'u'lláh that this trip was possible. I was in South Africa 29 years ago, with Amatu'l-Baha Ruhhiyih Khanum. She left her home in Haifa in July 1969, and didn't get back until April 1973. She was travelling for three years and nine months, and during this time, she visited 60 countries,

34 of which were on the continent of Africa. South Africa was towards the end of the trip, and was very special. South Africa, and all of Africa, was a different place 29 years ago.

South Africa was very, very different. Meetings like this, with mixed races and colors present, were almost impossible. Ruhhiyih Khanum said that this country was the greatest test to her, because she was told since childhood about racial unity, amity between the different races and people, so coming here was a real shock to her. During the four weeks that she was in South West Africa, as it was called then, she would have daily prayers, to be free of any form of prejudice. She would say, Bahá'u'lláh didn't tell us to chose our prejudice, so we must feel a total lack of prejudice in life. So it was quite hard for her when she was refused permits to see the Bahá'ís in different areas, so today, she is rejoicing with us. I firmly believe that her spirit is in Africa. She loved this continent, the people, and she had the best years of her life after the passing of the Guardian here.

She believed strongly in the power of intercession, she was frank and practical, so she called on these souls on matter of fact things. For example, if the car would break down, she would say to me, do you know anyone up there who was a good mechanic? For meetings with Heads of State, she would invariably call on Martha Root, she would ask for help not to say the wrong thing. She seldom was concerned about saying the right thing, but she didn't want to say the wrong thing.

I got into the habit, from when I started travelling with Ruhhiyyih Khanum, to write down the events of the day in my diary, every evening. As a result, I have 40 volumes of diaries at home. Ruhhiyyih Khanum's idea was that the stories of the travels in Africa be put together into a book. This was not possible until two and a half years before her passing, because I was travelling till then, and didn't have time to write. I started writing the book two and a half years ago, and finished it two months before her passing. Every day, I would bring a portion of what I'd written and read it to her. It brought back all those happy memories, and sometimes, she would even feel like she was back in Africa. After reading, every day, she would reiterate her intention, that this book must be published, not for her, but for all the African friends. The flyer came out last week before we left Haifa, and it will be on sale in November. There is a whole chapter on South Africa, the places she went, the people she saw, it forms part of the archives of South Africa, the history of the Faith here. All the details are in the book, and you'll hopefully read it, so I won't go into that. But I wrote down a few important points about her trips, so I will tell you those.

Ruhiyyih Khanum was a wonderful and unique Bahá'í in many ways. She would say this about her mother, and it also applied to her. She would say that she didn't think anyone ever came across Mary Maxwell that didn't receive a portion of love, encouragement and assistance from her, sometimes in the form of loving works, sometimes in retribution. But the intention always was to help. Ruhiiyyih Khanum poured out love and encouragement wherever she went.

She travelled through Ethiopia and Eritrea. In Asmara, there was a very small Bahá'í community, two or three pioneers, and a few white people there who became Bahá'ís. There was such a spirit of love and harmony, in the five days she was there, it was almost as if confirmation and the help of the concourse was physically coming to her, she gave her most brilliant talks there. In every meeting, one could see the love of the Bahá'ís for each other. After the meetings, she would ask, what happened? How did I say what I did? She came to the result that it was because of the love and unity of the friends. It affected her, and because of that, she could give her best out.

Later, in another community, the reverse happened. It was another small community, with two pioneer families, and a few local Bahá'ís. For some reason, which we never found out, the two families didn't like each other. There was no love or effort between them. There was always backbiting, and tension. We were there for three days, when Ruhiiyyih Khanum came down with a high fever and went to bed. There was nothing wrong with her, no flu or anything like that, just sick with a fever. She was convinced it was as a result of the inharmony around her. She would often mention this as an example, that inharmony is a disease, not only of the mind, but of the body as well, it also affects health, and this is so true.

The banquet last night reminded me of an example of Khanum, and how she would introduce the Faith to others. When she would want to give the message to people, she would say that the Faith is like a banquet table, with all sorts of food, drinks, and desserts. We should tell the guests, help yourselves, take what you want from the table. We Bahá'ís have bought the whole menu, now you choose what you like. It occurred to me how possessive the Bahá'ís can be. For example, we hear about an international conference on the equality of the sexes, and we say, they have stolen our teachings, instead of saying, wonderful, the message of Bahá'u'lláh is permeating the world!

Khanum was very self possessed, she would stand in front of 30,000 Bahá'ís and talk to them, no one believed how she would suffer before public talks. She would turn her heart to Bahá'u'lláh and ask for help, especially before press conferences for the radio and television. She would say about press conferences, don't give them too many facts, what the press wants is an impression. After they meet with you, they should think that the Bahá'í Faith is a good thing. If they think like that, they will come back. If you give them all the twelve principles, and the history, starting with 1844, etc, they will become confused, and after they leave, they will forget everything.

Another wonderful thing about Khanum was her behaviour when she came across authority. Whether she was meeting an emperor of a country, like Haile Selassie from Ethiopia, or a chief of a village, her attitude was one of extreme courtesy and humility - she respected ranks. An example of this - she was once in a big conference in Canada, and it was time for questions. A young man, who was a new Bahá'í, asked, why must we stand up whenever you come into the room? She said - you don't have to stand up, it's not required. But if the Mayor of this city enters this hall now, I will be the first one to stand up for him. It is respect for his rank, not humiliating yourself.

Every action she took always had a purpose and a meaning. When she was in banquets where lots of non-Bahá'ís were present, her approach was to never prejudice people against the Faith, and that people must not say something that will be a test for someone there for the first time. An example was Allah'u'Abha. If there are lots of non-Bahá'ís there, and if they keep on hearing us say this, they will think it's a password, a secret word among the Bahá'ís. Why test people before they have a chance to learn about Bahá'u'lláh?

The last thing, for the ladies here, Khanum almost always addressed the women wherever she went, and she reminded them that yes, in this age, we are equal, and the world will soon adopt this. She was very sweet, she would say, if you read the words of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá, you will see that there is a bit more in favour of women than men. For example, a great responsibility given to women is the raising and education of the next generation, and we mustn't take this lightly.

If a woman is upright, she will bring her child up as upright. Similarly, if she is truthful, clean, God-fearing and prayerful, she will instill all these in her child as she raises it. Also, we use Allah'u'Abha as a greeting, but it is also a prayer, and it can be the first prayer one teaches their child.

Once in Cameroon, she spoke about this in a village.

There were lots of children in the front of the group, and she said to them that they could use Allah'u'Abha as a prayer. For instance, one can say it five times, and she counted on her fingers, saying Allah'u'Abha for each finger. After the meeting finished, I saw a little boy, about four years old, standing alone, apart from everyone else, practicing on his fingers, looking very serious. I got so excited, I had a sweet in my pocket, so I gave it to him. We slept in that village that night, and at five in the morning, there was a chorus of Allah'u'Abha's from under the window, and there was the little boy, with lots of other little children, all repeating this. I don't know if it was for sweets or not, but they all got their sweets. :-)

It was wonderful to be with you. Allah'u'Abha.

Second Talk

Another talk in Africa
by Mr. Nakhjavani:

Last night, at the banquet, with the non-Bahá'ís there, I said a few things that I want to repeat, because they are important. I spoke about the importance of the teachings on Africa, for example, Bahá'u'lláh says that God's message is not for any one race, people or country. It is for the people of the entire planet. The human body is used as a symbol of humanity, just as in the body, each organ has a function, in the same way, each race has a function to perform.

When it comes to the black race, it is like the pupil of the eye of the human body. The black race has more capacity given to them by God to see the light of truth. Shoghi Effendi followed this teaching, added to it, and said wonderful things about the black race. In his letters, he said about the black race that they are "pure hearted", (their spirit is noble", "have patience", and "have a great capacity for the Faith". There were words chosen for you, and I am so glad to see, as I look over the audience, that 90 % of you are black. Africa was asleep, but is now awakening, and it has a great message to give to the world. Now, if you only remember one sentence from today, it should be the following. The African people have a great contribution to make to the advancement of world civilization. Those of you who belong to the black race should be proud, you should be grateful to the Creator that you belong to the black race. You should also realise that God expects you to do great things, not only for Africa, but for the world! When Abdu'l-Bahá went to America,

he saw many black people, in large groups, for the first time in his life. When we read the words with which he addresses them, in his talks, we see how he showed such tender love to them.

When Shoghi Effendi started the Africa campaign, it was in 1951. There were Bahá'ís in Africa, but very few. There were Bahá'ís in Cape Town, in South Africa, in Tunisia and Egypt. The rest was empty. So, in 1951, he started the Africa Campaign, and asked people from all over the world to arise, and to pioneer to Africa. Even though there were some Bahá'ís in Cape Town, South Africa was also part of the campaign. When Shoghi Effendi passed away, there were only four National Spiritual Assemblies on the African continent, in Cairo, Kampala, Johannesburg and Tunisia. Now, there are 45 National Assemblies on the continent. Throughout Africa, when the Guardian passed away, there were a total of 400 Local Spiritual Assemblies. At the beginning of the African Campaign, there were only 25. Today, we have 4750! In 1957, there was literature translated into 100 African languages, today, we have literature in 2700 major African languages and dialects.

The Guardian called for pioneers from all over the world to go to Africa. He waited three or four years, then called on the new African Bahá'ís to arise and go pioneering to other African countries.

As a result, ten Africans became Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, one of which was Enoch Olinga, the Hand of the Cause. Apart from the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi gave him two more titles, Father of Victories, and a Hand of the Cause of God.

Before Mr. Olinga became a Bahá'í, he was a drop, after, through his services, he became an ocean. You must believe this -- it is in prayers that a drop can be changed into an ocean. In prayers we read that God changes an atom into the sun. This is true, it can happen, it has happened. The question is, how? How to go from a little mosquito to an eagle? This is also in the Writings. We saw Mr. Olinga before he became a Bahá'í. He was a heavy drinker, very timid, afraid of people. If he didn't become a Bahá'í, he would have remained in bars, drinking.

You must believe that Bahá'u'lláh can change us. We must pray to Him, beg Him to change us. If our prayer is sincere, on a daily basis, combined with action and deeds, sincerity and purity of motive, real effort on our part, bit by bit, we will change, and can do what Mr. Olinga did.

For every one of us in this room, there is a destiny. God has given each one of us a special measure of capacity and destiny. Our destiny is to try, every day, all the time, to achieve what God has ordained for each one of us. When Mr. Olinga was in Haifa, Shoghi Effendi told him that many people would be interested in the Faith, but they will not all be attracted. Only some are attracted.

Stage 1 is attraction.

Stage 2 is conversion, when the attraction leads the seeker to enroll as a Bahá'í.

The third stage is dedication, consecration to God.

Dear friends, the Guardian explained to Mr. Olinga, I believe, so he can explain it to the African Bahá'ís. So, as it requires a big jump from attraction to conversion, it requires as big a jump from conversion to dedication. Stage 2 is only a believer. Stage 3 is a lover, that's what He wants us to be, that's where Mr. Olinga finally ended, I believe that's God's first choice for us all. If we follow the divine teachings, we will reach it. We must ask ourselves a few questions, not now, but at home, quietly. If the answer is yes, we know we are on the road to becoming a believer.

Am I reciting one of the three obligatory prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh? Am I reading the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh twice a day, in the morning and evening? Am I repeating Allah'u'Abha 95 times a day? Am I teaching the Cause every day? To do that, am I asking God every day to send me receptive souls? Shoghi Effendi explains that contributions to the fund are a measure of our Faith. Am I making contributions to the Fund? Am I living the Baha'I life? Have I stopped drinking alcohol, etc? Am I living a chaste life? Do I have prejudice towards any race? (Here, the answer should be no)

The list is very long but I have given you what I consider is the foundation. By doing these things, sacrificing for God, we become true lovers, and our life will be accepted in His sight.

One last thing before I sit down. Abdu'l-Bahá says that most of the time, I am in a prayerful attitude. He also said, Be as I am, follow me. What would he do? He would see people, visit the sick, the poor, attend to his correspondence, see government officials, that was his life. While doing all this, he was in a prayerful attitude, with God, with his Father. An example, you are seated here, listening to me, you can be in a prayerful attitude, feel as if God is seeing you, because God is All-Seeing, All-Knowing, Ever-Present. In the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh says "We behold you from Our realm of Glory". We must feel that we are in the presence of God all the time. If we feel that we are in the presence of God, He will be with us, if we love Him, He will love us, it says this in the Writings.

We also read, if we are with God, then He will show us that He is with us, we will see that He is with us. We are seated

here, we can be in communication with Him, thank Him that we could come here and be with all the friends. I should say, while I am talking, see how weak I am, how pitiful, needy, help me to say what will be helpful.

Finally, I should have said this at the beginning of the meeting, but I will say it now, the Universal House of Justice asked me, before I left, to convey their love to everyone, so I convey to each and every one of you the love of the House of Justice. When Violette and I go back to Haifa, we will also pray for everyone at this meeting in the Shrines.

Allah'u'Abha!

Third Talk

Transcript of Mr. Nakhjavani's
informal talk to the South African Bahá'ís at the Anvari's,
31 August 2001

Alright, are you ready?

I was asked to say a few words to the dear South African believers who are here today. I thought I could tell you about a tablet, a very short tablet, revealed by Abdu'l-Bahá. The contents of this Tablet are as follows.

He says that the relationships of the believers to the Cause of God are of two kinds. One kind is like the relationship of the flower to the garden. The other relationship is that of the ray of the sun to the sun. "I hope", He says, "that your relationship will be of the second kind". And that is the end of the Tablet.

Now, I have been thinking about this Tablet, and I have been wondering why Abdu'l-Bahá says that he prefers the second kind to the first kind. There is nothing wrong in being a flower in the garden of Bahá'u'lláh. In fact, we have prayers, "O God, make me a flower in Thy garden". Why is it that Abdu'l-Bahá prefers the other type, which is the ray of the sun? The sun is the Cause of God, and the ray emanates from it. So I am offering my views, my humble views, about this beautiful, simple tablet of Abdu'l-Bahá.

I thought like this, I said, OK, we have a flower in a garden, the flower says, "I like this garden", in other words, we say, we like the Cause. "I like this garden, I grow in this garden, I am proud of my garden, I am named after this garden". (I am a Bahá'í.) OK, this is all good. We take the ray of the sun. The ray says exactly all these things, he says, "I am from the sun, I am proud of the sun, I depend everything, all my life on the sun," etc, etc, exactly the same thing. But, if you bring one ray and you bring a second ray, what happens? The two rays become one. But if you bring one flower and you bring another flower, they remain two flowers.

If on an Assembly or a Bahá'í committee, you bring nine rays and bring them together, they become one strong united ray. But if you bring nine flowers and bring them together, they are a beautiful bouquet, a beautiful flower arrangement, but they are nine different flowers, and everyone, if we credit the flower with some thinking, some intelligence and some ego, the flower will say, "Really, I don't want to say, but I think I'm better than the others. I think I'm more beautiful, I think I have a more beautiful scent. I don't want to talk about it, but... never mind..." This is what the flower will do. Why, because of the ego. The ego is inside. And believe me, this animal ego is in all of us. If we have 20 people in this room, there are 20 egos, no exception. And this ego will be with us till the very last breath. When we go to the next world, we separate, we say goodbye. But until that day, it is with us, it suggests things to us, it deviates us from the right path, because that is the animal in us, it wants everything for itself.

OK, lets go to the ray now. The ray says, "I have no name, it doesn't matter. I don't have colour, it doesn't matter. I am from the sun. My job is to be faithful and to carry the light of the sun, the heat of the sun. That is my duty. And I am doing it." It is so pure that if you take a chair, and you go outside where there is the sun, you say, "I am sitting in the sun." Ha! You are not sitting in the sun. The sun is up there! But the ray is so faithful, so pure, that it carries all the qualities of the sun, in a pure way, so much so that you say I am sitting in the sun.

Now, another difference is that the flower is on the receiving end. "Soil, give me good soil, water, give me good water, light and sun, I want more light." It's all the time receiving. "Give me." What does the ray do? It doesn't want anything, the ray gives, it helps the flowers to grow. Big difference between the two.

So, that is why I think Abdu'l-Bahá says, "It's good to be a flower in the garden, but better still is to be a ray of the sun. This is my first choice for you, this is what I prefer you to be. To be a ray from the sun, so that you give to others, you are a way of helping others. You are not thinking of yourself. You are thinking of others, to assist others all the time, to give the light, to give the heat, the warmth."

So that is the end of the tablet, and that is the end of my little talk. *Finita la musica!*

...And one day, someone was passing by, and saw this rusted, muddy, piece of iron in the valley. And this piece of iron is a human being. This is an example. So, there is a conversation between the piece of iron and this gentleman or this woman. This is what this Bahá'í says. "Do you know that there is a fire which is burning and blazing in the world of existence?"

The piece of iron says, "Really, surely I'm interested."

He says, "Come along, I will show you."

They go along, and from a distance, he says, "You see that smoke? Where there's smoke, there's fire." Sometimes, we are so quick in getting the declaration cards of the non-Bahá'ís that at that point, we say, "You accept that where there's smoke there's fire? Now sign this!" That's too soon, he has not even seen the fire. We go along.

Now, there is a prayer from Bahá'u'lláh, speaking about this fire. "I know not what the fire is which thou dost kindle in thy land, earth can never cloud its splendour, nor water quench its flame." He is talking about this fire. It's the fire of the Cause. He's talking about that. Then He says, "Blessed are those who hear its roaring."

QUOTE:

"Great is the blessedness of him
that hath drawn nigh unto it, and heard its roaring."
(Bahá'u'lláh: Prayers and Meditations, Page:
76)

In other words, as you are approaching the fire, you hear the crackle of the fuel. Already, you see something, you hear something. You haven't seen the fire yet, you approach again, ah, you see the fire, the flames.

The teacher says, "This is not enough, my dear.
Let us get closer."

When you get closer, what happens? The metal, the iron feels the warmth and receives the warmth. It was cold, it becomes warm. At that point, you know, I told you this morning, Mr. Olinga was told by Shoghi Effendi, first is attraction, then there is conversion. This is the stage of conversion, when the piece of iron feels the warmth, and accepts the warmth. It was cold, it becomes warm. At that point, he says, "I am a Bahá'í."

What about the rest that Mr. Olinga heard from Shoghi Effendi? The teacher says, "This is not finished, my brother, or my sister. Wait, this is not enough... I don't want to frighten you, but I must tell you this, because the process is not complete. It must be completed."

So, the teacher says, "Let us throw ourselves into the fire."

What happens to the metal? It is warm, yes, but something else happens, it acquires the qualities of the fire. It has rust all over its body, it shakes off the rust, it becomes brilliant, it acquires the qualities, as I said, of the fire, so much so that you look at the fire, and you look at the piece of iron, you don't know where the fire

ends and where the metal begins. They become one. That is dedication. That is consecration. That is the end of the process, when we shake off this rust of selfishness and we become purer and purer all the time, and we acquire the qualities of ... (?)

Now, having said this story about this piece of iron, and the three stages I explained to you this morning, I want to tell you that this story is not mine. It is in one of the tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá.

He gives the story of this piece of iron. But I explained it a little bit more, I added few things here and there which were of me, for example, in the valley and going here and seeing the smoke, this is all mine, but the essential part, which is seeing, hearing the fire burning, seeing the flame, acquiring the warmth, and the last stage, throwing oneself into the fire, to become brilliant, to become luminous, to acquire the qualities of this Divine Flame, this is why when we describe some people who are on fire with the Cause, we say, he is a flame, that's why, because of this tablet of Abdu'l-Bahá. It is a very short tablet which I tried to open up. And explain in the form of this story. Now this is a second music which I sang to you, so this is the end, the real end.

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