

FROM
A DROP
TO
AN OCEAN ¹

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The pioneer had returned home after nearly five decades. He looked across a room full of his African brothers and sisters. His deep and passionate voice echoed through the room and across the crowd.

He was telling them a story about one of the dearest friends he had ever had. He was telling them about the great Enoch Olinga, one of the first African Bahá'ís...

¹ Based on a biography which appears in Baha'i World, volume XVIII, pp. 618-626 and Lights of Fortitude, pp. 462-472

"Before Mr. Olinga became a Bahá'í, he was a drop. Through his service, as a Bahá'í, he became an ocean. "

"This is true. It can happen!"

"The question is how? How to go from a little mosquito to an eagle?"

"Bahá'u'lláh can change us. We must pray to Him, daily, and beg Him to change us. If our prayer is sincere – and it's combined with action and deeds and purity of motive – bit by bit, we will change. We can do what Mr. Olinga did." Let's look at Enoch Olinga's life. See if you agree with the wise pioneer ...

Enoch Olinga was a translator. He was very good at it. But despite this, he had, over time become sad and disheartened. To escape his disillusionment, he turned to alcohol, which only made him feel worse. He drank so much that he eventually lost the job he was so good at.

He didn't know what to do. How would he support his family? What would he tell his parents? He felt hopeless until he heard about the Bahá'í Faith. At the time, in 1951 there were few Bahá'ís in Africa.

He began trying to find an answer to his problem by going to meetings in the homes of Bahá'í pioneers. One very special evening the pioneers held a meeting that coincided with the time that Shoghi Effendi visited the Holy Shrines in Haifa to pray. Mr. Olinga attended the meeting and left when it was over, only to return later.

He asked lots of questions. The most important one he left for last: "How does one become a Bahá'í?"

He came back the next morning and brought with him a letter asking to be accepted as a Bahá'í. That's how Enoch Olinga became one of the first Bahá'ís in the country of Uganda.

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When he became a Bahá'í, Mr. Olinga gave up drinking alcohol immediately. His behavior changed so remarkably that his wife also became a Bahá'í. His neighbors also noticed how he had changed. So they became Bahá'ís too. Within a few months there were enough Bahá'ís in Kampala, the city where Mr. Olinga lived, to form a Local Spiritual Assembly.

He had been so successful in Kampala, that he decided to travel to his parents' hometown and teach the Faith there too. During a short time nearly 100 people, including Enoch's own parents, accepted the message of Bahá'u'lláh. Within a few years the number of Bahá'ís in Uganda had reached over 200. Shoghi Effendi was so happy about this that he wrote a letter to the entire Bahá'í world praising the success of Enoch Olinga and his friends.

His success in teaching, served as an example to his Bahá'í friends – an example of how to reach the heart through loving kindness and a cheerful nature. These qualities shone forth

from Enoch. Their source was Mr. Olinga's love for Bahá'u'lláh and His Teaching, and obedience to His Laws.

When Shoghi Effendi wrote letters to the African Bahá'ís encouraging them to travel around and teach about the Faith, Mr. Olinga and two of his Bahá'í friends responded immediately. They decided to make a 3,000 mile trip all the way across the African continent to carry Bahá'u'lláh's message to the British Cameroons.

The trip was hard. Heavy rain turned the dirt roads on which they drove into rivers of mud. The travelers' car got stuck in the mud so many times that one day it finally gave out and died. There was nowhere to go. The nearest city was more than 50 miles away. Enoch Olinga, who had never lived outside the big city, told his friends to stay in the safety of the car and walked away to bring help. He walked through the wet dangerous jungle, through the mud that covered his feet up to his ankles,

past trees that housed poisonous snakes, and bushes that hid wild and hungry animals. He kept on walking until he fell down and passed out in exhaustion.

Shoghi Effendi had promised that his prayers would accompany the travelers on the journey. Now, passed out on the ground in exhaustion, Enoch Olinga really needed Shoghi Effendi's prayers. In this moment of desperation and need, Shoghi Effendi came to him in a dream. He helped him to get back up on his feet. Then he praised and encouraged him and assured him that he will succeed.

Mr. Olinga woke up a different person. He felt determined to continue. As he began to walk again, his friends caught up with him. They had been able to repair the car and had come to rescue him.

Two months after they set out, the pioneers reached their destination. Because there were no Bahá'ís living there, Mr. Olinga decided to

settle down and live in the country we now know as Cameroon. For this, Shoghi Effendi gave him the title "Knight of Bahá'u'lláh".²

Several years later, Enoch Olinga made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to visit the Shrines, becoming the first black African to make the pilgrimage. On this visit he also met his beloved Shoghi Effendi for the first time. Shoghi Effendi named Mr. Olinga the "Father of Victories" for his services to the Faith and all that he had accomplished as a pioneer and travel-teacher in Africa.

When he returned to Africa, after his pilgrimage, Shoghi Effendi appointed Enoch Olinga a Hand of the Cause of God. He was the youngest of all the Hands and he had been a Bahá'í for only four years.

As a Hand of the Cause, Enoch Olinga carried the news of the spread of the Faith to Bahá'ís

² These were devoted and courageous individuals, who were the first Baha'is, during a special period of time, to settle in countries where the Faith had not been established.

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all over the world. "Are you happy?" he always asked. He wanted all the believers to be happy. The believers should be happy, he said, because they recognized Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings.

Mr. Olinga traveled around the world. He would tell all the Bahá'ís he met to carry Bahá'u'lláh's special message to others in their families, their towns, and around the world. He was reminding them of Bahá'u'lláh's words: "The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation... Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good... It behoveth every one ... to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other..."³

Enoch Olinga's obedience to Bahá'u'lláh's laws and teachings changed him from a small and

³ Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book), p. 19

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troubled soul to one who influenced thousands of people around the world.

He transformed himself from a drop into an ocean. We can do that too...