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Article



The Ninth Person

Thirty-six hours that saved the Local Spiritual Assembly on the Isle of Wight

IT WAS the evening of Wednesday April 17, 2002, when Vafa Ram, a dear friend and teacher of mine called to ask me to take part in a "... crazy, 36 hour, mission impossible, intensive teaching campaign" which would take place in the Isle of Wight from Friday night to Sunday morning. The purpose was to save the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ryde – an assembly that after more than 25 years was in jeopardy. He sounded excited, sure of what he was saying, sure that I would not be able to decline his offer.

Ocean, the youngest travel teacher, with his new friends, Nile and Morgaine at the afternoon meeting

How could I not accept? I felt honoured because I knew that Vafa needed people who were bold enough and crazy enough to go with him. To be called a crazy Bahá'í in these days is always an honour. I left my home trying to focus as much as I could on what I was going to face, on a place which I had never seen, on a place that would still be England, the country in which I have been living for the past three years and which has a different mentality and culture from my own country, Italy. But I was ready, I felt quite comfortable. If Vafa was comfortable then I had to feel confident as well. It was a small group and we had to show maximum courage.

Once we reached the Island we met Judy, a local Bahá'í who welcomed us and kindly guided us to the house where we would be praying, consulting, sleeping and eating together for the next 36 hours. We didn't even finish our supper because we had the great idea of starting immediately. In fact we decided we should start giving out invitations for the Saturday afternoon fireside/celebration which was going to take place. There were more than 1200 invitations ready to be given to anyone we would encounter in the street. It was late at night so we decided to deliver 300 invitations into people's doors.

I was so amazed when I saw the invitation. Three words on the front page "Is it you?" and a few sentences on the back. This was the invitation. It was the most direct invitation I had ever handed out to somebody in my life. The invitation was prepared by the local Bahá'ís following an article published in the local newspaper where it was announced that the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ryde would fall if nobody would join them. Again, this was the most straight forward article I have ever read about the Faith. But this was our challenge. This was our mission. We had to go straight to people and be direct, or we would not find a ready soul within that short time. We knew Bahá'u'lláh was behind us. We knew the many hundreds of people that were praying for us. I myself had announced this to the whole of the Italian Bahá'í community (via the National Assembly) to half of the people

serving in Haifa, and to many Bahá'ís in the States, Germany and Russia. So we knew we had full spiritual support. We were confident.

On Saturday early morning we woke up and drove to a beautiful cliff on the sea to say dawn prayers. It was a wonderful morning. The sun was just about rising on the horizon and the birds were singing their sweet melodies. Vafa read the Tablet of Ahmad, which affected all of us so much as it reminded us of the "Nightingale of Paradise singeth upon the twigs of the Tree of Eternity..." We then proceeded to a beautiful cemetery where some of the Bahá'ís of the Isle of Wight have been buried. We prayed and asked them to support us and guide us to ready souls.

After a quick breakfast we delivered the rest of the invitations and went to the centre of town where we had a little stand that we used to attract people. Each one of us was doing something. Some of us were trying to stop people in the street, some of us were praying, some of us were establishing the first contacts. The spirit was there, I could feel it. It was the beginning and all of us felt a bit weird but it was just a moment because shortly after we were engaged in different conversations.

At a certain moment I decided to go home and eat something and it was then that I met Simon, a nice young man who was visiting Sarah, the local Bahá'í who had opened her house for a "Bahá'í Coffee Morning". Simon knew a few things about the Faith and was there because he had read the article in the newspaper. Sarah turned to me and asked me if I wanted to explain to Simon the reason why our group had decided to go to the Isle of Wight. It was then that I realised I had to give everything I had and so I said:

"My dear friend Simon. We are here because we need one person to become Bahá'í and form the Administrative Body of the Bahá'ís of Ryde, you could be the one."

Sarah then gave him the "Bahá'ís" magazine and told him to skip the general information about the Faith and to go directly to the part where it explains the administrative issues. He was amazed at our boldness and went home. So I decided I should go back to the stand at the square and see what had been happening.

Vafa, in the meantime, was having conversation with two interesting people he had met in the morning. On my way to the stand I met Pupak (one of the crazy Bahá'ís that joined our group) walking towards the house with another man. She looked at me and said, "This is Allan. He is the ninth person. Please welcome him."

I didn't really understand why she had told me that "he is a nice person" in front of him but I did my part and welcomed him into the house. I then proceeded to the stand. We packed everything to go back to the house to get ready for the afternoon celebration. We met in the kitchen, and looked at

Sarah Clive answers questions in Ryde's town square



each other. Something was happening. Someone had declared. I couldn't believe my ears when I heard that. Allan had declared. He had accepted the Ancient of Days. It was then that I

*Local Bahá'ís Mattie Small and Thierry March with
Vafa Ram and Nabil Robiati*

realized what Pupak had told me when she met me. "He is the ninth person." I felt like crying. I felt Bahá'u'lláh had guided this person to our stand that day at that time, a few minutes before we closed everything. I felt His Power, I felt His Generosity, I felt His Blessings and His Potency. I called Vafa in the other room and hugged him as hard as I could. I could feel his strength, I could feel he was happy, I could feel his amazement. We read the Tablet of Ahmad together and then tried to organise ourselves for the 3.30 pm celebration.

We cleaned the room, made it nice and welcoming. We had planned to give three short talks about the Faith and about the meaning of the Local Spiritual Assembly. A few people came. Among these there was an entire family of five, a husband and wife with three children and then a tall, very distinctive man.

After the talks were over he asked for information on the life of Bahá'u'lláh and left. The family stayed there till the very end. The wife was inspired, the husband was enthused and the children were also thrilled by a Bahá'í from Southampton who came with his guitar and was teaching them how to sing "Ya Bahá'u'l Abhá." So there we were teaching a whole family. While talking to one of them I felt they could immediately declare. We explained the importance of the day. They didn't declare that day but to me they are already Bahá'í in their hearts and they know it. They will declare shortly I believe.

In the evening we had a get together dinner and then listened to a beautiful recital of the Ridván Tablet by Sarah Clive. We felt exhausted. Spiritually exhausted. We had given everything we had, to accomplish what we in fact accomplished. We went to bed and woke up early in the morning to catch the first ferry back to the mainland. The spirit was still with us in the morning. That blessed Island, that blessed time. We were singing in the car, we were praying, we were still amazed, we were happy, but most of all we were grateful to Him, Who had opened the heart of a man, a man who had believed in the Supreme Manifestation.

I arrived home. I wasn't sure about whether I should have joined my study circle, which had been meeting since early morning or just go to bed and get some rest. I had to bring my spirit to the group, I had to share what had been happening. So I decided to go. And there I was, doing Ruhí with my mates. We have a non-Bahá'í who attends our Study Circle. When I saw her I thought, "How is it that someone can accept the Faith in two hours and some others are not Bahá'ís yet after months?"

So I looked at her and said, "Is there something more beautiful than declaring on the day of Ridván, on the Day of the Revelation?"

After a few minutes, to the amazement of everyone, she declared, was added to the list and elected on the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Hackney. This is the power of teaching. This is the power of travel teaching. This is the blessing, the spirit, the joy a Bahá'í transmits to someone else when he arises and teaches the Cause of the Blessed Beauty. I realised it is possible in England as well. I realised I shouldn't be prejudiced. I realised the Potency of His Word is far more reaching than anything else. I realised He is the All Potent, the All Wise, the All Merciful. I wasn't just reading it, I was realising it, for real.

Ya Bahá'u'l Abhá!

Nabil Robiati

