

## Faith Blossoms in a Harsh Environment - An interview of Abdou Gaye

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*Question: Abdou, you come from a Muslim-Unificationist background, with a brother and a sister who have both received the blessing. Can you tell us about this?*

The living God sent someone to witness to me in one of the most inhospitable countries of the world, Mauritania, and it worked. All the credit, or the merit, should go to my father, a man of God, and to my ancestors. My father was a very strict Muslim, so attentive to teach the proper rules of Muslim attendance to God. Yet, outwardly, he was a loving man and a man of peace. He would always wake up at 4:00 AM and wake up all the children for the morning prayer, and then he would go to the mosque, where he officiated as the muezzin. This prepared me for the Family Pledge, Hoon Dok Hae

and the deep sense of attending God that True Parents have taught us. My family background helped me a lot to do these things.

*Question: Did your father and True Father share other common points?*

My father was born in 1921, a year after True Father. I could see the relationship between the two figures through a mystical experience. My father had tried to call me in the US, but I was unreachable. He then called my sister. I promised her I would call him back in a few days, after all my work was done. I could not, though, because he died two days later. Just after he called her, my sister had a dream in which my father took our ancestors and us to some sort of palace. My sister suddenly saw True Father coming out of the palace. We prepared to welcome him, to bow to him. Suddenly, my father appeared in an alley and walking in True Father's direction. Seeing the three of us, he said to Father, "You won. Take them."

Then the dream ended. My father had never agreed with our choice, but in the dream, he somehow yielded. My sister was dear to my father for a particular reason. After 1960, my mother stopped giving birth. This lasted for seven years. We might call it a seven-year course. Finally, my special sister was born on August 25, 1967. She was so dear to my father, but I "snatched her away" and connected her to True Parents. She received God's eternal blessing on August 25, 1992, the day she turned twenty-five. My older brother had received a special blessing in April 1992, when the Women's Federation for World Peace was established.

*Question: How did the providence start in Mauritania?*

Three missionaries came in 1975, but only the Japanese one could make it. The other missionaries, from the USA and Germany, were unable to stay. Mauritania may be one of the most isolated countries in the world. This desolated and barren land may be the best place on earth for camels but the worst place on earth for men. Human beings can only survive in that huge country of 1,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> (386,102 mi<sup>2</sup>) with fewer than four million people today.

Three quarters of the country is desert or semi-desert. You come to understand why prophets like Moses, Jesus (known as a prophet in Islam) and Mohamed, who tasted life in the desert, had a bittersweet character. Our mission there has always been fragile, in a pioneer stage. Yet, whereas the mission was always difficult, three people in my family alone were picked out to be blessed, among fifteen children. Imagine if 20 percent of the whole nation had been restored! My family was the golden nugget of the nation.

I sometimes feel that God Almighty had singled out our family, our lineage, our ancestry. In that hostile environment, three souls could be claimed and offered to the providence. No nation in the world should be deprived of God's blessing. God loved Mauritania. God sees the people there. They have the right to respond to the call of the new age and to meet the one whom God appointed as the providential figure on earth. (The Nouakchott citizen, no more, no less than the citizen of Seoul, Tokyo, or New York, can be called by God.) Each individual has an infinite value, even in a barren land like Mauritania.

When I encountered this movement in 1980, I was in my senior year of high school. I was a strict Muslim because of my father's education. I was doing my five prayers every day, including all the detailed

ablutions. My father would check how carefully we made our ablutions before the prayer. If we had neglected one part of the body, we had to do it again and he would teach us the meaning. Looking back, I see this practice in childhood as if Heaven was preparing me to understand the value of attendance.

Later, when I began reading the stories of God with the first generation of Israelites, the rules and regulations imposed on Moses and his people, the rigor behind Heaven's expectations of men in the way he wants worshipping to look, I see the face of the God of Moses in my dad.



*Question: How did you encounter Unificationism?*

Kunio Iwaoji was working as an undercover missionary; he was officially a correspondent for Sekai Nippo. When the police investigated and found out who he actually was, they expelled him from Mauritania. That took place in 1983. Meanwhile, as a spiritual doctor, he had infused "manna" into the hearts of a few people, invested all his energy and skills, but they dropped out, leaving behind two young and innocent souls (my friend Abdoulaye and me) surrounded by elders desperate to find more answers to questions left unanswered. In those days, we spent long and sleepless nights discovering hidden codes from the Koran and engaging in debates with those who stood as guardians of Islamic teachings and traditions.

Abdoulaye and I were friends, and I gradually observed a change in his habits. He had a new attitude in prayer. I saw that he was praying by himself, kind of meditating, and I felt, "oh! oh! That's not Islam. What is it?" I also noticed that he

was reading a strange green book, called Outline of the Principle Level 4. It contained biblical verses and the publisher called for the Unification of World Christianity. My father had always told me to avoid Catholics, the uncircumcised. Abdoulaye brought me to their "center," and they invited me to join their "prayer." I became very attentive.

My ears witnessed that human beings, whom I knew, were talking to God, directly, calling him "Heavenly Father," so respectfully, so lovingly. They were addressing him intimately not in the official, ritualistic way that I had so far known. The next time I came, something even deeper happened to me. I was asked to pray. So, I prayed, "Father," and tears came to my eyes. The moment I called him Father, I believed it.

Even now, the taste of those tears remains. At that moment, my rebirth started. One might say that something in me died that day and another man was born as a child of True Parents. At the same time, it completed the verse, "And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and we are closer to him than [his] jugular vein." (Quran, 50.16)

*Question: You experienced God's heart before studying his word?*

Yes and no: I went through an emotional conversion that prepared my mind to receive the word. But hearing the word more deeply and practicing the word diligently prepared me gradually for a deeper and deeper experience of living as a reborn person. It is an ongoing process, in which you have to surrender your life into God's loving hands.

After a few months, Abdoulaye and I were invited to attend a workshop in Côte d'Ivoire. We went to Dakar, Senegal, took the train to Bamako and then made our way to Abidjan. This five-day trip was a nightmare: The train was jam-packed, the weather so hot, and the smells of dried fish, other goods and many other smells were difficult to endure. I wondered what I had gotten myself into. What kind of hell am I inviting into my life? When will this journey end?

As the Principle says, there is indemnity before a blessing. After going through a five-day nightmare, I spent twenty-one days in a dreamlike world. I experienced substantial brotherly love, with no barriers. People from many African countries came to attend the workshop, as did missionaries like Judith, Kathy, Kevin, Uto and other Japanese members.

These people had a wonderful quality and their relationships were close. The atmosphere was as warm as in my own family. People were caring, and they expressed their love; they would offer you food, find a

nice place for you, make you comfortable. They knew how to love others. That was something I had to learn. This was love from heart to heart, divine love but transcending religion. Until then, I had cared for those who were like me, but suddenly, my heart wanted to reach out to anyone.



I discovered that we are literally one family. We are absolutely brothers and sisters. We all were selves born anew into a universal family, our Family. I went home but did not sign any membership form. I went to another seven-day workshop, one taking place in Dakar. Something took place during the lecture on the Fall, which Bakary Camara gave. He is originally from Mali. I had already understood that the Fall was the misuse of love, but suddenly, he was inspired to talk about God's heart. He used the analogy of a great painter that has created a masterpiece of eternal value, but someone leaves on it an ugly stain, and the whole masterpiece is good for nothing. He said that this is a thousand times less than God's suffering heart. I burst into uncontrollable tears. And so it was: Allahu akbar, God is the greatest; this is indeed a cardinal statement of Islam, but Father was the first man ever to understand that Almighty God is the greatest of all in suffering and agony, not in glory. God is not the greatest on the throne but the greatest in enduring for his lost children. This is when my heart knew for sure that my life should be with such a God and his people.

However, my rebirth was not yet complete. In September 1981, I started to cultivate a conversation in the new humanities campus in Nouakchott. The national university had just opened. Students were impertinent from their knowledge of Islam or of philosophy. I was laughed at many times and ridiculed. I could only use the Quran translated into French, not the Quran in Arabic. To share my new findings was so difficult that I entered a crisis and started to offer a prayer vigil. I asked God, Please tell me. If this is the truth, your truth, why do they laugh at me instead of listening? How is it possible?

Then the most impossible answer came to me. [Abdou Gaye stops speaking and cries deeply as he remembers this experience.] As I was praying to God, suddenly I felt a third presence. Someone was coming, between God and me, and I knew who he was, though no one introduced him. It was Jesus. [Abdou cries even more deeply.] Jesus was telling me, lovingly and firmly, "You are in a better position than I am. My journey in heaven has been the journey of the shepherd looking for the lost sheep. Whenever I knock on Christians' doors, they don't open, even to see who is knocking. You are working outdoors, and people at least interact with you. At least they listen to you. They talk to you, even if they become angry, at least they are listening and they react; please keep going."