

## **OPPOSITION IN OHRID**

This is the third time I have travelled to Macedonia with a small Teaching team. On previous trips relationships were cemented and we taught the Faith with both the spoken word and musical devotionals and gatherings.

This, the third visit, July 2018, was marked by one particular noteworthy occurrence.

It is a fascinating concept that the opposition to each new Revelation sent down by God, plays an active role in diffusing the new Teachings.

*“How great, how very great is the Cause! How very fierce the onslaught of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Ere long shall the clamour of the multitude throughout Africa, throughout America, the cry of the European and of the Turk, the groaning of India and China, be heard from far and near. One and all, they shall arise with all their power to resist His Cause. Then shall the knights of the Lord, assisted by His grace from on high, strengthened by faith, aided by the power of understanding, and reinforced by the legions of the Covenant, arise and make manifest the truth of the verse: "Behold the confusion that hath befallen the tribes of the defeated!"*

Abdu'l-Baha.

A Bahai Pioneer to the Balkans, Pippa Cookson, now in her eighties, had rented for the summer season a three story apartment in the busy centre of Ohrid. On our previous trip to Ohrid we had discussed the possibility of this particular apartment being, if not a Bahai Centre as such, then certainly a spiritual Centre and a place or residence for Bahai Travel Teachers. After consultation, the Teaching Team consisting of myself (Steve Day), Pippa, Shohreh Azarkadeh, Chabaz Azerkadeh, Deni Petrovski and Nick Saint Laurent, decided that we would create a Bahai Exhibition, both inside and directly outside the apartment, and that I would play guitar and sing in order to attract passers-by who we would then engage in meaningful conversations.

We were having great success with this format. However two doors down from us there lived a man who owned a hand-made jewellery shop. His name was Dragan, derived from the common Slavic element drag meaning "dear, beloved".

On the second day of our exhibition he angrily came out of his shop and stated that there had been complaints and we must stop. I apologised and said we would be quieter.

It might help to understand that music is everywhere in Ohrid. As well as a proliferation of street musicians there are very loud public concerts and marches and performances going on often into the early hours. The City rarely if ever sleeps!

When I related the occurrence to Deni, who is a native of Macedonia, he said immediately, “I doubt that anybody has complained, this opposition is purely because it is the Bahais and this particular gentleman has seen that we are actively Teaching again and he wants it stopped!”

We consulted on what to do and decided that we wouldn't approach Dragan as that may well be an inflammatory thing to do at this stage.

The next day I had met a street guitarist named Illirion and invited him to join us and investigate the Faith and play his music outside the centre with us. As I was discussing matters with Pippa inside the apartment, Illirion started to play his guitar beautifully in the street outside. Dragan appeared once more, even more inflamed and angry! He told Illirion to stop immediately. He then shouted angrily through the door at myself and Pippa. “I have told you Pippa you must stop this, you must

take your chairs and display in, I have warned you I will go to the Police and report you and they will investigate you, you must stop this!". He stormed off angrily!

We consulted and decided that we would cease activities for today. Illirion came inside and we discussed the Faith in detail with him. Afterwards the team consulted and we decided we would go to the Police and tell them what we were doing.

We also met with all the owners of the adjoining apartments, which comprised mainly of Artist Galleries and Jewellery Shops. None objected to our activities and even complimented us on our music and intentions.

The next day myself, Shohreh and Chabaz went to the Police Station and presented them with a leaflet on Baha'u'llah written in Macedonian, and we explained our activities and intentions and stated that we were not making any money.

They assured us that as long as we stopped playing by 11pm we were completely entitled to continue with our activities. The particular officer was very helpful and said as an added precaution we might do well to advise the Culture and Arts department at the Government Offices, of our activities, so that they are aware of our presence as well. He gave us the address of the Department, and off we went.

When we got to the Department of Art and Culture we spoke to a delightful Macedonian man who's mother loved Mexico so much she had decided to call her son, Mexico.

Mexico, known as Mexco, assured us we were well within our rights to continue playing guitar and attracting people to our Display. He further stated that everybody in the City knows him personally, and should we attract any undesirable attention from anybody, we were to phone him immediately and he will come and sort out any trouble, and if anybody asks just say Mexco has given us permission.

We had a lovely discussion with Mexco and formed a great relationship him.

The next day we travelled to Skopje to visit David and Lois Lambert and take part in two wonderful activities. we drove to Skopje in a car loaned to us by a Muslim Imam. Isa. This is another story!

The next day on returning to Ohrid, we set about planning a Public Fireside on Happiness, to be held in a lovely ornate Hotel meeting room. We decided it would be great to ask our new comrade Mexco to attend the event, so I set of to take an invite to him.

When I met him he was delighted and said he would definitely attend. He then asked me to come with him and he took me to his office and gave me two lovely packs of publicity photographs of Ohrid.

Later on that evening Mexco arrived at the Hotel and showered us with even more gifts, and presentation packs on the Wonderfull history and beauty of Ohrid. He had brought also with him his beautiful 17 year old daughter Saria. They both sat and listened as I sang songs based on the theme of happiness and then shared selections from the Writings on the same theme.

We all sat in a circle and shared a Wonderfully warm evening of spirituality and camaraderie.

Later on that evening we met Mexco's wife and son, and the next day we invited his daughter Saria to our apartment.

Saria was a revelation. She at first seemed quiet and shy at the Fireside, but when she sat in our apartment she spoke with such wisdom and strength. I only wish I had recorded her and made a video. I told her she must come to England and Teach. Myself, Shohreh and Chabaz sat in awe as she spoke with such conviction. Here is a condensed version of some of what she said:

“I don’t mix with most people of my age, they are not very intelligent, they want to drink and take drugs. This is stupid! It makes you do and say stupid things. If you are young you have to look after your brain! I want to teach about the future, the future is very special and precious. I don’t want a boyfriend who will hurt me so I don’t look for a boyfriend. He may say he loves me and then go off with another girl, no I don’t want that! I want to wait and meet someone who will stay with me forever. So I will wait. I want to help people, I say to my friends why you don’t help people who need money and things, you must help them because one day you will be like them and you will want someone to help you, so help them now!”

We are planning to return to Ohrid again soon and cement further the Wonderfull relationships we have created. Especially this relationship with the Wonderfull Mexco and Saria who will both be so valuable in furthering our capacity to attract people to the Faith with our music and Exhibition.

We all agreed we must thank the angry Dragon for making it possible for us to meet Mexco and his vibrant daughter, we even wondered if we shouldn’t buy him a gift. Who knows what avenues and doors we can now open now that we have the blessings of the Arts and Cultural Department of Ohrid, and all thanks to Mr Dragan!

*“How utterly unaware they seem to be of the truth that such adversity is the oil that feedeth the flame of this Lamp! Such is God’s transforming power. He changeth whatsoever He willeth; He verily hath power over all things.”*

Baha’u’llah