

Jena Khodadad Interview
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A four-part interview with Jena Khodadad, daughter of Hand of the Cause of God Zikru'lláh Khadem. The interview explores Mr. Khadem's early life and passion for the Bahá'í Faith, which "could not be contained," and the inspiration his life of devotion and service provided to his family. In Part 4, Dr. Khodadad explains some of the scientific principles featured in her new book, *The Dynamics of Growth: Scientific Principles at Work in the Worldwide Advancement of the Bahá'í Faith*.

Interviewer: Nicola Daniels, Marketing Coordinator & Course Creation Assistant, Wilmette Institute.

Part 1: Early Life and Passion

Jena: Wonderful. Wonderful. I have looked forward to this interview.

Nicola: Yes! Me, too. I thank you so much for being so willing and taking your time.

Jena: My pleasure. As you know, the "kh" is [Persian sound]—a sound we don't have in the US.

Nicola: Right. Right.

Jena: Zikru'lláh Khadem. [pronounced Zick-ro-lah Khah-dem].

Nicola: Zikru'lláh. And sometimes we see it with a "Z" and sometimes I also see it with a "D".

Jena: Yeah. Sometimes with a "Dh", sometimes with a "Z".

Nicola: Okay.

Jena: I think that the "Z" has been used more often, although "Dh" is also correct. So I use "Z".

Nicola: You use "Z".

Jena: In his signature, he always used "Z", when means "mention of God."

Nicola: And, Jena, what does that mean in English?

Jena: I think it comes from, maybe, from Russian? And it refers to "woman". My mother was very much westernized in her time, and so they didn't want to choose a typical Persian name, and she came upon this name. I guess she liked it, and she gave me the name. And, I spell it with one "n".

Nicola: Maybe we could start with some early memories. You were born in Iran. That's right?

Jena: Yes, I was born in Tihran, Iran. Just forget the year for the time.

Nicola: [laughter] And, when you were born, your father was not yet appointed Hand of the Cause. Is that right?

Jena: He was not.

Nicola: Tell me something about growing up in Iran as a Bahá'í.

Jena: It's been very, very oppressive environment from time to time. Persecution started. And, once in a while they would stop in the interim, but then always back to persecution of Bahá'ís, and the name-calling, and the repression. That has been the pattern ever since I can remember, from my childhood to the time I left Iran for higher education in United States. And, after that it continued with greater vehemence against the Bahá'ís in Iran. And, I remember being in settings with other children and being ridiculed. I remember being in Iranian school systems and being publicly ridiculed by the teacher and by the students. So, that was the norm. From time to time, on the pulpits, the mullahs, the clergy, would go and they would defame the Bahá'ís. And, at those times the zeal against the Bahá'ís, the animosity would grow to a crescendo. So, that's what I remember from my childhood and teenage years in Iran.

Nicola: And, your memories of your father as you were growing up—I've heard people say his kindness was remarkable.

Jena: Well, the qualities in him was his devotion. I mean, his staunchness in the Covenant, his devotion to the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. And his devotion to the beloved Guardian. This was the way he was raised from childhood. They lived in a place in an enclave in Tihiran called Hayat-i-Bágh where many other Bahá'ís lived, and there home was the center for any traveling Bahá'í teacher who would come into town—the likes of Nayer and Sina. You probably know these two individuals—very, very devoted Bahá'ís. And Na'im, the noted poet. They would all come to my grandparents home.

And, there in that enclave, there were those uplifting meetings of which I heard, later on, and when I think of that, to this day, it impassions. They would go to the basement, or something like the cellar of the house, and by the light of a single candle—there was always secrecy—the letters and messages which were received from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, at that time, were being read and discussed.

And, just imagine that a group—a bunch of people, the Bahá'ís, set on fire with their passion, sitting around the candle and reading those messages. Then that would set them aflame. It was just like that essence of spirituality that was among them, because, if discovered, they could have been imprisoned and killed. So it was all in secrecy in their own home with some of the notable Bahá'ís as they came into town, and stayed with them, and as they left.

And this was his childhood. Reared by his father, and mother, and his grandmother, for whom he had—his grandmother was called Bibi Jan—for whom he had a lot of love and devotion because she participated in raising him. And, she was one of those lionesses of the Faith. She and one other woman, devoted Bahá'í, saw it their duty to go and retrieve the martyred bodies, the dead bodies, of the martyrs for proper burial, as there was martyrdom at that time to a great extent. And, as these were martyred, they were thrown down with a lot of disrespect to mutilate them. So she and one other woman would go to the site, fall on these dead bodies, and say, "This is my brother. This is my brother." Retrieve these bodies for proper burial.

So, this was the kind of environment he was raised [in]. His father was from Kashan. And, his grandfather was the one who first became a Bahá'í. So, I'm a fourth generation Bahá'í. There was a Shaykh of Kashan who brought the Faith to their village. And, there, persecution started for the

Bahá'ís. So, his grandfather left Kashan for Iran, and then his father, Nasru'lláh, served 'Abdu'l-Bahá for four years when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in the Cave of Elijah. You remember that story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá?

Nicola: Oh, yes.

Jena: So, that was his background. And, I suppose, all of that went into the extent of passion which he felt. But what is most noteworthy in all of this about my father is that when beloved Shoghi Effendi was then appointed as the Guardian of the Faith—that was, you know, at the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921—shortly after, like, it was in 1925, I believe, that my father wrote a message. You know, in Persian we say "arízih". I don't know how to say that in English. Arízih is a letter that is written from one who's much lower to one who is much higher.

Nicola: Ahhhh.

Jena: But, he wrote an "arízih" to beloved Guardian, pledging his devotion and love for him. And then, he received a response from Shoghi Effendi, which actually impassioned that flame to an extent that he could no longer contain himself. And, so he wanted to go to the presence of Shoghi Effendi, and he asked for permission to go. The permission was not coming.

Part 3: He Could Not Be Contained

So, what he did is: he went to one the notable Bahá'ís in Tihran, Háji Amín, and he said, "Please, you write a letter to Shoghi Effendi. And, please, Ridá, please, that I should receive permission to go to His presence." And, this—Háji Amín, knowing the faith of—my father's faith, thinking that this young man is so irrational, he wrote the letter. And then, at the end, he added a postscript: "If you permit him to come, fine. But, if you don't, so much the better."

Nicola: Very diplomatic.

Jena: Diplomatic [chuckling laughter]. He didn't know what to do with him, because he could not be contained.

The response did not come. He could no longer wait, and then he said, "Well, maybe if I go to Iraq, if I go to Baghdad, to be closer to my destination, I'll wait there, and I'll go there. So, he went to Baghdad, and no response had come.

Then he said, "Well, maybe I will just get on this taxi"—whatever they called—it was like a bus-taxi. "Maybe I'll just get on that and go anyway." And so, he did. And he did. And on his way he would constantly say, "Are we there, yet? Are we there, yet? Are we there, yet?" to the point that the other passengers were fed up with him. So, when finally the bus arrived in Haifa, next to the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he is where he wants to be.

But, all of a sudden, the thought dawns on him! "I have come here, and I have no permission!" He didn't know what to do. So when he gets out of this, we'll just call it "taxi", the other passengers, fellow-passengers, are just so happy to be rid of him.

But Dr. Esslemont from the Western Pilgrim House, overseeing, realizes that someone has gotten off this cab, and now is heading towards the house of 'Abdu'l-Baha. So, he comes down, and greets him, and my father shared his issue, his problem with him. So, anyway, they go and knock on the door of

the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, where Shoghi Effendi lived, and as the door opens the beloved Guardian's father hands him the permission. This permission was just going to be mailed out.

Nicola: Oh my gosh! He was just in time!

Jena: So, after that, of course, the rest of it is history. And, his passion grew every day after that. When he married my mother, we were surrounded with that. He could not be contained, our house was the place where many Bahá'ís came. His special attention went to the Bahá'ís who lived in south of Tihiran. These were the Bahá'ís who you seldom found in meetings. They had their own gatherings, and they had special needs. But, his attention went, to a great extent, to these Bahá'ís. Then he was on the NSA of Iran, for many years. On the Centenary of the Declaration of the Báb, which would have been 1944, he had a very special assignment given by the beloved Guardian to take the [Persian name of Tablet]—it was a Tablet that was for that Centenary—to take it to Shíráz, so it could be chanted at the gathering in Shíráz.

Nicola: At the gathering. Ohh.

Jena: And so, that was very close to the war years.

Nicola: How did things change in your family and for you when he was appointed? He had to do a lot more traveling. Is that right?

Jena: Yes. Before he was appointed, he traveled throughout Iran, but, after he was appointed, his assignments—he traveled a lot outside Iran. And that's why the beloved Guardian called him, "Itinerant Hand of the Cause". He traveled outside Iran to all continents. I can't begin to tell you how many places—to many, many countries, under very difficult conditions. Sometimes with a two-engine plane to carry on the assignments that were given by him, by Shoghi Effendi. Most of these assignments, actually, came after his appointment in 1952...

Nicola: Right.

Jena: ...as the second contingent of the Hands of the Cause in Iran, it was an experience to behold. I cannot very well add more recollection of that, but my mother says that she was present when a cablegram came in appointing him as the Hand of the Cause. He was stupefied. He could not believe it. He said, "No. This is a hoax. I cannot be Hand of the Cause. I'm not Hand of the Cause. No way! Let's go to Mr. Furutan and tell him that people are sending such messages."

Nicola: Oh, wow.

Jena: And so, first he went to his mother to tell her that I [he] received [a spurious message]. She said, "No. No. This must be dream," because in a Tablet, many years ago, there was some kind of premonition about this. Anyway, so then they went to Mr. Furutan, the Secretary of the NSA of Iran, to verify whether this was a real message, this was actually from beloved Guardian, or a hoax.

After that, his life changed, and I'm not saying in terms of his devotion. His devotion remained at the very high level from the very beginning to the end of his life. But in terms of his assignments, he traveled internationally, extensively.

Nicola: How did this affect the family? Did you have brothers and sisters? How did it—the family

keep together, and how did you keep in touch with him?

Jena: Well, when he traveled, we had sufficient care. At times my mother was with us, and at times she traveled with him. My two grandmothers, Mrs. Javid and also Mrs. Khadem—Raḍyyih Khánum Khadem—would take on the responsibility. And at that time my father was—had maids, cooks, and chauffeurs, and servants—he was quite prosperous. So these individuals, these family members, simply provided supervision, not the labor—not the hard labor. Although that supervision was hard by itself, also. But, as a child, what I remember foremost, and do to this day, is his passion.

Nicola: Yes, yes.

Jena: I have not found anyone I have observed—of course, I could not know anyone else as well as I do my father, so I'm not saying he was unique in that fashion. But, for me, he was exemplary.

Nicola: Do you have any memories of favorite songs or quotations that your father would like to sing or to use?

Jena: Well, my memories are at different levels. First of all, my father, when he was in the presence of the beloved Guardian, mentioned that the youth should memorize. And he led them in fact memorization of the Book of Certitude. So when my father came back from pilgrimage, he set out to memorize the entire Book of Íqán in the original language—the entire book—as well as many other Tablets. So, I don't know. In this video, they talk about his carrying the original Book of Íqán to the World Center, and that is true.

As you know, the Book of Íqán was in response to one of the uncles of the Báb who had gone to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and had issue, had difficultys to accept the Báb, his Nephew, as the Promised One. And so, Bahá'u'lláh tells him, "Go back, go and come back tomorrow with your questions." So the next day, he goes to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh with his questions. And in the course of 48 hours, Bahá'u'lláh answers the questions of the uncle of the Báb. Forty-eight hours. And all of this was written, transcribed, recorded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. And Bahá'u'lláh, in the margin, has His notations.

Nicola: Wow.

Jena: So this book was in the family of the Báb, the Afnán. You know, the Afnán is the title of the family of the Báb.

Nicola: Yes.

Jena: And so, Fátimih Khánum Afnán, one of the descendants of this family, finds this book in their possession. So s/he contacts Mr. Samandari and one other Hand of the Cause, says he has found this book in his possession. So, the message goes to Shoghi Effendi that the original book has been found by one of the descendants of the Báb. And they set out—not Shoghi Effendi, but these wonderful individuals who knew of his existence, they set out to ask Fátimih Khánum for the book. She did not want to give the book. And, I understand that. Don't you? Yes. She did not want to give up the book.

And Shoghi Effendi, very graciously, said, "You should not force her. This really—do not force her. Do not put her under pressure." But some years after, she said she wanted to offer the book for the World Center. And, so my father's wish and prayer had been that he would be entrusted with carrying that book—hand-carrying that book to the World Center. But, he spoke of this wish to no one. And then, on

one of his pilgrimages to the presence of Shoghi Effendi, Shoghi Effendi cabled: "SEND THIS BOOK THROUGH KHADEM."

And so, this book, on this pilgrimage, when my older brother was also going on the same pilgrimage in the same plane, he relates that throughout that flight my father constantly came out with - the verses of Íqán poured from him; he knew them from his memory. And when they arrived in Haifa, and he offered the book to Shoghi Effendi, Shoghi Effendi said something to the effect of "This unique present—this unique present". You asked about, "What would he say?" He would just quote from Íqán.

Nicola: From the Íqán.

Jena: But he also would quote from Qayyumu'l-Asmá. very normal. His chant, in the Arabic from Qayyumu'l-Asmá, which was the "Commentary on the Súrih of Joseph", just reverberates in my mind. He had a lot of memorization. And in the Western world, what he would often in his talks, say, "O God, increase my astonishment in Thee!" This, I think, is also in "Seven Valleys". "God, increase my astonishment in Thee!"

Nicola: Indeed.

Jena: When he reached a point, which was unspeakable for him, unfathomable, in those mystical realms, he would say, "O God, increase my astonishment in Thee."

Nicola: What about when you came to the United States? Tell us about that.

Jena: Yes. I came to United States after 11th grade, high school, and that high school was in the American school, which is now called Iranzanih (sp?). It was a Presbyterian Missionary school to pursue higher education. And my parents came in 1960 when he was assigned to North America by Hands of the Cause.

Part 3: Family Inspiration

Nicola: Okay. What were your impressions, as a young woman, coming to this country?

Jena: To this country, all my expectations were very high—all that had been said and fantasized about America. And I found it very accepting. I found the American Bahá'ís close to the college where I—I went to Wooster College, Wooster in Ohio, the first few years. The reason being that Wooster College is Presbyterian college, and the high school I went to was a Presbyterian Missionary school, and they recommended Wooster College. And it was a solid, very solid small college. I was pleased with that.

But it was amazing the love and attention that the Bahá'ís nearby Wooster, in Cleveland—that's quite a few hours away from Wooster—paid to me. And also my brother, who went to a different college. They would come weekends to visit us, with love, and food, and books, and invite us to meetings. It was just an amazing, amazing thing. And I remember quite a few of those Bahá'ís who are still with us.

That was my impression of America, and that helped a lot because later on, I had impressions of America, and I saw also the other aspects, which puzzled me much: the racial issue, the Native American, the African-American—injustices that have been done to these two precious sectors of society. And then I began to really see what also needs to be done. I think, perhaps, the situation now

has somewhat improved, but still there is a lot of work to be done. So, those were my impressions of America. Certainly, it's the land of opportunity for learning and of freedom, especially after leaving Iran, with that repression, where there was no freedom of belief. Those were my impressions of America—and still are! They still remain as such.

Nicola: And so, tell us a little bit about how you decided to study what you eventually ended up studying at university.

Jena: Yes. I have always been interested in science, knowing how things work, so after the Bachelor's Degree, then for a couple years we went to Canada because my husband applied for a fellowship. He's a surgeon. Applied for fellowship to Canada. And that ended up being Winnipeg, Canada. Extremely cold.

Nicola: Very cold.

Jena: But after a few years in Canada, we came back to United States. Then, at that time, I wanted to continue my education. I've always been interested in science, and so I applied to Northwestern University, which has a nice science faculty, in particular in biological sciences. My interest was finding out how cells and molecules work. So, that's where I entered for my graduate studies. And, I selected Northwestern because it was not too far away from the city where my husband had started a surgical practice. But then I realized, soon after, that the biological sciences I had applied to was going to be exactly in my area of interest, because right around those times – well not right around – sometime before that, the findings in molecular biology, the findings of the structure of the DNA, the genetic material, had been disclosed with Watson and Crick. And so, it had made a great impact in the field.

So the biological sciences I wanted to study in fact, had been revolutionized with what became my passion: molecular level. No longer the study of zoology or botany, all of which are very important, but that had never been my interest. But actually, delving into the structure of cells and molecules, and into molecular genetics.

Then after that I went for a post-Doctoral fellowship in, also very close by, to—in Chicago, and then became the faculty at Rush Medical College. And, relatively, in recent times, I have been retired, so that I decided to do that so that I can devote some years to those areas that really impassion me, such as writing books, writing articles, wondering whether I can sufficiently complete all of the projects underway [she chuckles].

Nicola: While he was still alive, your father, he was supportive of your field, your work in the sciences?

Jena: Oh yes, very much. He was very much supportive of what I was doing. Yeah. In his wallet, after he passed away, I actually found clippings of newspapers where they had mentioned that I was giving a presentation, or, I was given an honor, so I knew it meant a lot—much more than I had realized.

Nicola: I want to talk just a little bit about the book. You mentioned that some of the inspiration that you got to do this book was from your father, and I want to find out what the link is there.

Jena: Okay. How should I put it? The inspiration came because from childhood the growth of the Bahá'í Faith was central to our life. It was a subject that was always discussed. It was ingrained in us

that the growth of Bahá'í Faith is very important, and whatever we do, and whatever we say, however we carry ourselves, would be very important in the growth of the Bahá'í Faith.

I soon came to the realization, on my own, that a whole new premise, let's say theory, but actually more premise of religion is needed, because I went to missionary school, as I mentioned to you, which was just dominated by Christian missionary zeal, in a country which was dominated by the Shi'ih. And, confronted with these two, each of which was actually working against the other, I asked myself, "Would it not be wonderful to have a unified theory/premise of religion, that would make sense of all of these?" Now, these thoughts were actually in early stages of my life, like in 4th, or 5th, or 6th grade. I was overwhelmed with these. And then, suddenly, I realized, "Oh gosh, such a unified premise is here among us." It's the Bahá'í paradigm of oneness of religion and progressive revelation. And therefore, if it is among us, and if that is the solution, why is it that we are not growing at the rate that we should be growing. However, as a child, I was very impatient.

Nicola: Just like your father!

Jena: It was not that we were not growing. In fact, every day messages were coming in that the Bahá'í Faith had penetrated yet one territory, and one island. And yet it seemed insufficient, because, as a child, I felt the whole world needs to know about this.

So this is the beginning of my concern and my passion for growth. So, later on then, as I went in particular, into the scientific field, and as each instance of the scientific principle would come forth, I said, "Ah! You know, this can provide insight to the growth of the Bahá'í Faith." And so I had accumulated many of these metaphors. Suddenly it made sense to me why we were not growing like wildfire. And what could possibly be an explanation? And so I set out in writing this book. This is actually what the book is about. There are 10 chapters, and it discusses the nature of growth, what are those factors from within the Bahá'í community that can impact growth, what are those factors outside the Bahá'í community on which we have no control but can enhance to a thousand fold our growth, the growth of the Bahá'í Faith under the Plans to the present day, and the process of crystallization of the Bahá'í community. So there are 10 chapters in this book, and they all center on certain metaphors, mostly from science, but also from philosophy of history and philosophy of science, to somehow elucidate this process of growth.

And as it did for me, elucidate, I thought perhaps I should put it in form of a book. But then, the challenge became, as I have discussed in the preface of this book, that I have to explain to the reader the "how" and the "what" and the "if" of this involvement. I had to explain why I'm talking about the growth of the Bahá'í Faith in such an unconventional matter, because, to my knowledge, it had never been done before—to talk about scientific metaphors and take them and apply them to the Bahá'í Writings.

And then I convinced myself that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has encouraged us to use metaphors from nature, from science, for spiritual matters.

Nicola: He always did that. He would always say, you know, "Look at this rose here on the table." And, He would talk about the rose and relate it to the Faith. Yeah.

Jena: Yes. The next challenge was how to elucidate, or use these scientific principles for an audience who may be from different disciplines. And that was even a bigger challenge. But, I tried to do that, to

explain it with clarity, and revise, and revise, and revise. So finally, with clarity, but however, without compromise of accuracy.

Nicola: So, it is a book that someone who is not an academic could read and appreciate.

Jena: Yes. Yes. I'm sure that all Bahá'ís—because the readership will be mostly Bahá'ís, because of the title of the book—I'm sure that most Bahá'ís can, without a doubt, get it and get even more.

Part 4: Dynamics of Growth

Jena: But, to present it to, let's say, someone who may be in other areas, other fields, and explain the scientific principles, such as, for example, the laser beam in the second chapter, Chapter 2. How to explain that with utmost clarity. Or, how to explain cell division, mitosis, with utmost clarity, and relate it to the growth of [the] Bahá'í Faith. Or, how to express the nervous connection, that reflex, nervous reflex, to the growth of [the] Bahá'í Faith.

As I'm saying these things you're probably wondering, "My gosh! These do not relate!" But they really do relate. Each of these examples...

Nicola: I'm sure. Would it be possible for you to give us, briefly, a glimpse into just one of them? One of the metaphors that you use?

Jena: Sure. Let me go to the cell division—mitosis. The cells within the body are different sorts. Some of them remain dormant for many years, and then all of a sudden, under a certain influence of a hormone, they start to divide. For example, our germ cells are like that, our gametes are like that. And some cells divide routinely every—they have a cycle.

And let's take as an example, a cell in the body which has a cycle of 24 hours. It takes 24 hours for it to duplicate. One cell becomes two larger cells. Now, if we look at the life cycle of this cell, we see that all of a sudden it's only one hour of the 24 hours that the cell divides into two. The other 23 hours, when you look at the cell, it seems to be dormant, as if nothing is happening. But, that, in reality, is not the case. If we use biochemical assays, we can show that in those 23 hours, which have three phases, in the cell, a lot is happening. Actually, all of the resources of the cell—all its proteins, its organelles, its carbohydrates, its lipids, is multiplied by two.

Nicola: They're preparing.

Jena: Yeah. But, you don't see it. It is only in that one hour when the cell divides that you see two cells. So, the point being that there is a period where the growth is not visible. But it's a preparation, it's a building up of resource for that one hour when the cell becomes two.

So, this can be easily be applied to the growth of Bahá'í Faith, because what, in particular at these times when the questions would come up, "We are not growing. What is happening?" But we are building up resources. You know, we are building up resources with all of the plans, with plans directed by the Universal House of Justice, in anticipation for the right time to become two.

And, furthermore, in the three phases of interphase, where apparently nothing is happening, also there's

a lot of monitoring of growth to see whether the cell should proceed, has it reached a certain level that it should proceed? And there's a lot of monitoring of [the cell]. So, I think this beautifully applies to our situation, our growth of the Bahá'í Faith.

I don't know if this is making sense to you?

Nicola: Yes, it reminds me, you know. One of the things Bahá'ís are asked to do is to read the Writings, every morning and every evening, and not to just read as in mechanically reading the words on the page, but to read them with a deep feeling of understanding, trying to understand what it is, and to grow from that. That's such a simple thing. But, to me, that's like a preparation that you need to have, and when you don't have it, and don't have that kind of preparation for when you're going out to do the active service, now, in the field, then it's not going to have the same effect.

Jena: Yes, exactly. And at another level, all of the activities that are now underway—the study circles, devotional meetings, children's classes, junior youth empowerment programs, and whatever other activity will be added—that is all building up of resources. You see? Which you don't actually see yet in numbers. Or, I don't see it in numbers. If you go access the numbers, how many have... So, it's all that preparation for that division.

Nicola: It makes a lot of sense.

Jena: So, there are many other metaphors, each one of them provides its own insight. Would you like me to go to laser beam?

Nicola: Yes, please! Why not?

Jena: OK. I'm going to use the metaphor of "laser beam" for "action". Growth of Bahá'í Faith for action, and empowerment to act.

The laser beam, you know, light, as we talked about, has a spectrum of wavelengths. By itself, it doesn't have that much power. But if you take this light, which is composed of many wavelengths, and under optimal conditions, connect it to a source of energy—under optimal conditions, with the appropriate equipment, what happens is you can generate a laser beam. And you can generate the laser beam of such strength that can carry out very specific functions, even welding of metals, even surgery.

Nicola: Wow.

Jena: So, I have used this metaphor to say that if we connect to the Source of our Faith, to Bahá'u'lláh, His Writings, to the Covenant, that light, which is now of different spectrums, is diffused, and regenerated into very strong light of wavelengths which has coherence, and that—in fact, it's fascinating that once over half of the population falls into that particular level of the beam, then a very strong beam is generated. But, it really doesn't matter, with the others that doesn't, because the crest of one cancels the trough of the other. And so, the lesson is, if we connect to the source of our Faith, a laser beam can be generated that is strong and able to carry out its function, which in this case that I'm talking about, is the growth of the Bahá'í Faith.

Nicola: You mentioned the principle of coherence. So, in the Faith, that would be sort of analogous to unity, everyone working in unity for the same purpose and cause, and focusing.

Jena: Yes.

Nicola: Yes, very, very interesting.

Jena: Right. Thank you. This book has many delicious metaphors.

Nicola: I look forward to reading it.

Jena: You know, writing this book, what it has done for me, aside from just completing this writing project, has been that my devotion to the House of Justice has been strengthened. Strengthened is not the word, because the devotion has been there, but it has really—what—you give me the right word for this! [laughter]

Nicola: I can think about it. I'll probably dream about it and tell you tomorrow.

Jena: Okay. [laughter] Strengthened means that it was weak before, but it wasn't. Kind of all of a sudden gelled—I don't know—anyway, something like that. You know, he [my father] provided us children, he provided an example, and this is also my mother. She was his companion throughout life, and she was very strong in the Faith. And in this video, also, there is a portion where it says when my father married my mother, he was quite a well-to-do businessman. He told her, "There is nothing I expect from you. I don't expect you to cook. I have help for all of that. What I expect you to do is to love the Faith – be devoted to Shoghi Effendi as much as I am."

And she said, "I will try." So she became that in her life. As children, I remember both of them being so strong. I remember our Fast. We would get up in the morning—this was the setting in Iran—we would get up early, the breakfast would be prepared and the samovar would be on the side preparing the tea, but before that, we would have our prayers together. And the voice of my father—he had a very, very strong voice that came out with passion, reading from the Writings. And there is one particular prayer for the Fast: "I beseech Thee..." and it has this refrain on and on and on, so if you're familiar with it, there is a refrain that comes after every segment. So, he would chant that, and when we would get to this refrain, we were all to say it in unison. It made the Fast very special.

So, my belief is, I really am convinced, because of not only my own experience, but observation of many Bahá'ís I have known from that time, is that once the Bahá'í Faith, the strength, is inculcated in a child, then it will never leave them. Because our—as the myelination of our nerves, of our axons, does not complete until some years after birth, and it is then that our personality forms. So, if we miss that period, early period, we have missed a lot.

Nicola: Right.

Jena: I'm not saying that it cannot be recouped—I'm not saying that. But there's something that happens. Because even in this day, some Bahá'ís of my generation I meet are not particularly devoted. I mean, they would say that when it came to the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran, all those memories of their childhood sustained them, and they became as giants. So, the education of children, early education of children—not only the book reading, but also providing that conviction—is very important.