

# Faith & Courage

Praying with Mandela

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# Foreword

by Graça Machel

These prayers are part of Arch's spiritual journey with Madiba, my husband, Nelson Mandela, over the years, from our home in Bishopscourt, Cape Town, where they shared quality time over long afternoons of bonding, always ending with a prayer.

As Madiba became frail, they met sometimes in Houghton, Johannesburg, and at other times in Qunu in the Eastern Cape, where Arch was regular company. He was always a comforting presence, especially in the last three years of Madiba's life.

I remember countless times in the hospital in Pretoria when Arch reached out to me with an evening prayer over the telephone, or even a kind message. He was a constant, caring presence.

How I learned to value those messages, alone in my corner whilst watching over my husband, aware of his slow departure yet unable to do anything except hold his hand.

Thank you, Arch! Your support during those times was invaluable.

God bless you!

# Preface

The writing of this book began with a decision on whether to publish the prayers I shared with Nelson Mandela and his wife, Graça Machel, when visiting them during the last years of Madiba's life.<sup>1</sup> When I told one friend what I was considering, he asked, "Do you really want to put that on paper?" Others questioned how it would affect my pastoral ministry in the future. But yet others, including some members of the Mandela family, urged me to go ahead on the grounds that reflecting something of Madiba's spirituality would be beneficial to the country, the church, and the world.

The book has since developed into a personal memoir relating how I—the son of a pastor of the Zion Christian Church, with roots in our nation's nineteenth-century resistance struggle, first interested in a career in science rather than a vocation to the priesthood—came to minister to the most respected icon of justice and reconciliation of our time. After introducing you, the reader, to my journey of faith, I turn in the concluding chapters to an account of my exchanges with Madiba and Me Graça, selecting and placing in their context some of the prayers I shared with them.

I and my wife, Lungi, shared deeply with the Mandelas during this ministry. However, I do not disclose some of our interactions, whether on the phone, in the short text messages we shared or in person—for I think those were personal and publishing the details would go against what a cleric should reveal. So I beg your indulgence as I balance the need for pastoral confidentiality with sharing a story that will help people understand the important role faith played in Madiba's life and how this impacted the spirituality of South Africa.

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1 Madiba is Nelson Mandela's clan name, by which he is popularly known in South Africa.



## Prayer for Madiba

offered by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba during a pastoral visit

*Blessed are you O Lord our God, creator of the universe;  
by your breath we were created,  
and by your will we have our being.*

*You have kindled in us a fire that never dies away.  
In our darkest night when the flames of hope began to burn low,  
you raised up your servant Nelson Mandela  
to stoke the flames of our imagination  
so that we could have a foretaste of the dream of God.*

*In him, the fullness of your love was pleased to dwell.  
You have blessed him with longevity  
and a resilient spirit that has allowed him to carry on his shoulders  
the dreams, hopes, and fears of a nation.*

*We bless and praise you for all that he has meant to us,  
the embodiment of all that is beautiful,  
all that is good,  
all that is true,  
and we ask your blessing on him at this time.*

*As he turns to face the setting sun,  
comfort and help him in his time of need,  
look upon him with eyes of mercy,  
hide him in the shadow of your wings.*

*Brood over him like a mother hen broods over her chicks  
So that this time may be a time of rest and quietness,  
free from pain and anxiety.*

*May he continue to lead the rest of his life  
in the radiance of your glory,  
and mark him as your own, forever.*

*This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ,  
Our only mediator and advocate. Amen.*

## Chapter 1

# Makgoba's Kloof

My ancestral home lies in South Africa's northernmost province, Limpopo, in a place we call Makgoba's Kloof. Afrikaans-English dictionaries translate "kloof" as a "gulf" or "ravine" but Makgoba's Kloof is far more than that—it is a huge slash cutting through the Great Escarpment separating our high-lying interior plateau, the Highveld, from the plains below, the Lowveld. It is best known to travelers by the name "Magoebaskloof," a distortion of our name by the settlers who dispossessed us of our land in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> It's been more than twenty years since our liberation, yet the official geographic names database still calls the area Magoebaskloof. We have approached the South African Geographical Names Council to correct that formally.

Makgoba's Kloof is a land of mountains, valleys, and rivers falling down the escarpment before they merge with the Great Letaba River, which—after it runs in turn into the Olifants River (the Rio dos Elefantes in Mozambique)—empties into the Indian Ocean. It's a land of thick, lush riverine vegetation and of what geographers call Afromontane forests. And it's a land of mists: Afrikaners call a nearby mountain Wolkberg (Cloudy Mountain) and travel books call the kloof Valley of the Mists or Land of the Silver Mists, which is how the local tourist industry now

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<sup>2</sup> Afrikaans is the language developed from Dutch by early settlers, whose descendants now form the Afrikaner community.



markets the area. For travelers today, says *Getaway* magazine, the “Magoebaskloof Pass,” which plunges 558 vertical meters over 6.5 kilometers, is “reminiscent of a funfair ride, the series of twisting S-bends and hairpins...offering plenty of thrills for motorbikers as well as drivers.”

For me, Makgoba’s Kloof is a land of great joy, but also of great pain. The joy comes not only from its beauty but also upon reflecting on our heritage. We Makgobas speak Sepedi, the country’s third biggest indigenous language after isiZulu and isiXhosa. But we don’t draw our primary ancestral identity from the baPedi polity or its powerful nineteenth-century king, Sekhukhune, famed for his resistance to colonial occupation. If you ask me to describe my identity, my reply is that I am South African first and a member of the Tlou clan second. We baTlou, who consider ourselves as quite distinct from baPedi, are named after our totem, which in English means elephant.<sup>3</sup> We say that we are from Bolepye, the land in the Letaba Basin where the great elephants roam peacefully. I see myself as moPedi third and as a Makgoba after that.<sup>4</sup> The Makgobas have a praise poem, which goes like this:

*Ke Makgoba a sefara, (Makgoba of the shoot)*

*A Sefara sa molapong. (The shoot of the valley)*

*Ke Tlou, (Elephant)*

*Tloukgolo ditswa Bolepye (Great elephants from Bolepye)*

*Bolopye Ba tlhaku di a liwa (Bolepye where there is abundance)*

*A gee Tlou! (Hail Elephants!)*

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3 Strictly speaking grammatically, we should not be called baTlou (or diTlou) but rather ba bina Tlou, since when someone asks what is my token or clan, they ask “u binang?” (what do you sing?) and I reply, “ke bina Tlou.”

4 In English, people call us the Pedi. One of us is moPedi, many of us are baPedi and we speak Sepedi.