

Song Name: *Mdali Wethu*

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXHF83q4MoA>

Spotify:

<https://open.spotify.com/track/7EQKtJS7Y4pt7ycmaoF3ZZ?si=27e17ce8d6a8482f>

Released Date: Jan 28, 2007

Musicians: Caiphus Semanya and Letta Mbulu

Lyrics and Translation:

Nkosi... Mdali wethu

God... Our Creator

Yiba nathi ulethu kuzi

Be with us

Nazi izitha zethu zisimele, zisimele ngenyawo

We know our enemies are lurking, waiting to attack us

Uyazi bawo thina 'silwinamtu, nomakunjalo siyabulawa

Father, we are not at war with anyone, but we are being killed

Emakhaya, nezi timeleni igazi lethu liya phalala

In our homes and on the streets, our blood is being spilled

Mdali wethu, siphamandla sikwazuku zi vikela

Our Creator, give us the strength to protect ourselves

Siph'inhliziyu zengonyama...

Give us hearts like those of lions...

Singa bulawi o kwe zimvu

So that we may not be slaughtered like sheep

Singa bulawi nje nge zimvu

So that we may not be slaughtered like sheep

Silandela izwi lakho unceda a bazi ncedayo

We are following your word; you help those who help themselves

Siph'inhliziyu zengonyama singa bulawi okwe zimvu

Give us hearts like those of lions so we may not be slaughtered like sheep

Singa bulawi nje nge zimvu

So we may not be slaughtered like sheep

Hallelujah Amen! ahaha

Hallelujah, amen

Nkosi sivul'amehlo sithandane sihlangane

God, open our eyes, let us love and unite with each other

Sifundise ukuthi singazihlula zokizitha zethu

Teach us that we can overcome all our enemies

Amen (aaahman aman aman)2

Amen (praise, amen, amen)

Mdali Wethu

Translated and explained by Rev. Menzi Nkambule: 07-2024

Narrative—The song includes a story/parable. Below is my translation of it:
Once upon a time, there lived a man who was blessed with many children. In those days, having a large family was a source of joy. However, this man was always burdened with sadness because his children were at odds. They harbored animosity towards each other, were envious, and engaged in daily quarrels. His home was devoid of peace, a fact that deeply troubled him.

One day, he embarked on a journey to the forest. There, he carefully selected some tree branches, arranged them, and fastened them together with a rope into a bundle. Upon his return, he gathered all his children. Starting with the eldest, he asked each of them to break the bundle of branches. They all struggled and failed. Then, he untied the branches and handed one to each child, instructing them to break it. They all succeeded in breaking their individual branches with ease.

When they finished, he said, “My children, understand this: if you love each other and are united like the bound branches, no enemy can come between you and alienate you from each other. But if you remain divided, your enemies shall consume you, scatter you, kick you around, rule over you, and turn you into their slaves.”

My people, this is a parable concerning our nation. In this land of our forefathers, the nations around us are not standing against each other. They do not spill their own blood like we do. Let us hold each other together like bound branches, let us love each other, and let us have unity. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Help us, O’God; our nation is perishing. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Context and Meaning:

For context, Caiphus Semanya and Letta Mbulu are a South African couple born during the apartheid era. They moved to Los Angeles in the 1960s and have since returned to South Africa, where they are building a school for music. Semanya was raised Methodist, and the song “Mdali Wethu” is marked by his spirituality and social resilience.

The song begins with a lamentation of the violence in his nation. Considering its release year in 2007, the song addresses several social issues that persist in the post-apartheid era, including:

- White people holding proportionately more land than black people in South Africa.
- White farmers experiencing significant violent crime, often in a retaliatory manner by black people.
- Xenophobic violence against other Africans living and working in South Africa (Nigerians, Zimbabweans, etc.) by South Africans.
- Political division and ethnocentric voting patterns leading to support for politicians and policies that further divide the country.
- General crime and poverty.

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These problems contribute to bloodshed among fellow citizens, which the song laments.

Within this lament, the song also acknowledges and asks for God's protection, using strong language that might initially sound like the singer is preparing the people for war against their enemies. The singer asks God to grant his people courageous hearts, "hearts like those of lions," so that they may no longer be "slaughtered like sheep." As you ponder the violence the singer wishes to inflict on the enemy, the singer shifts gears to make it clear that courageous hearts seek peace. He prays, "God, open our eyes, let us love and unite with each other." The singer prays for civil unity, not civil war. He doesn't stop there. He delivers one more subversive message: a parable about a bundle of branches.

The singer tells a parable about a man who, desiring to unite his many children, demonstrates how easy it is to conquer divided people. As seen in the translation, the parable is easy to understand. However, it's important to note that it's not about assessing the children's individual power but about their collective strength represented as an unbreakable bundle of branches. Division weakens, and unity strengthens.

What might this song teach us about God's love? And what might it invite us to go and do? The song implicitly places the power of God in love and unity. It teaches us to GO AND SING songs that acknowledge and lament our pain. The song also invites us to go further. It urges us to GO AND SING songs that transform our justified feelings of anger and pain into courage to love and unite against the forces that divide us.