

BAHA'I TEACHINGS

Some of the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith are:

1. The oneness of mankind

"It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens."

--Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 250.

2. The oneness of religion

"All these divisions we see on all sides, all these disputes and opposition, are caused because men cling to ritual and outward observances, and forget the simple, underlying truth. It is the outward practices of religion that are so different, and it is they that cause disputes and enmity -- while the reality is always the same, and one. The Reality is the Truth, and truth has no division. Truth is God's guidance, it is the light of the world, it is love, it is mercy. These attributes of truth are also human virtues inspired by the Holy Spirit."

--`Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, pp. 120-1.

3. Independent investigation of truth

"Furthermore, know ye that God has created in man the power of reason, whereby man is enabled to investigate reality. God has not intended man to imitate blindly his fathers and ancestors. He has endowed him with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth, and that which he finds real and true he must accept."

--`Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 291.

4. Religion as a source of unity

"He (Bahá'u'lláh) sets forth a new principle for this day in the announcement that religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind. If it be the cause of discord and hostility, if it leads to separation and creates conflict, the absence of religion would be preferable in the world."

--`Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 247.

5. The evolutionary nature of religion

Bahá'ís view religion as a progressive, evolutionary process which needs to be updated as humanity evolves mentally, socially, and spiritually. Every so often a new Prophet is sent to humanity to update religion to the current needs of mankind. These Prophets bring essentially the same spiritual message to mankind; in a form that meets the needs of the people of Their time. Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh has brought an updated message for mankind today.

"There is no distinction whatsoever among the Bearers of My Message. They all have but one purpose; their secret is the same secret. To prefer one in honour to another, to exalt certain ones above the rest, is in no wise to be permitted. Every true Prophet hath regarded His Message as fundamentally the same as the Revelation of every other Prophet gone before Him... The measure of the revelation of the Prophets of God in this world, however, must differ. Each and every one of them hath been the Bearer of a distinct Message, and hath been commissioned

to reveal Himself through specific acts. It is for this reason that they appear to vary in their greatness...

It is clear and evident, therefore, that any apparent variation in the intensity of their light is not inherent in the light itself, but should rather be attributed to the varying receptivity of an ever-changing world. Every Prophet Whom the Almighty and Peerless Creator hath purposed to send to the peoples of the earth hath been entrusted with a Message, and charged to act in a manner that would best meet the requirements of the age in which He appeared."

--Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp.78-9.

6. Harmony between religion, science, and reason

"Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism."

--`Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p.143.

7. Peaceful consultation as a means for resolving differences

In the Bahá'í Faith, difference of opinion is not squelched, in fact it is encouraged.

"The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions."

--Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p.87.

However, differences of opinion can be expressed in a way that doesn't humiliate another human being. The Bahá'í principle of consultation requires that an individual be detached from his or her opinions and always be open to the truth, from whoever or wherever it comes from.

"They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every manner search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honoured members (of the consulting body) must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth..."

--Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p.88.

8. An international auxiliary language

"It behoveth the sovereigns of the world -- may God assist them -- or the ministers of the earth to take counsel together and to adopt one of the existing languages or a new one to be taught to children in schools throughout the world, and likewise one script. Thus the whole earth will come to be regarded as one country."

--Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Bisharat (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 22.)

9. Universal education

"Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet. He that putteth away that which is commanded unto him, the Trustees of the House of Justice are then to recover from him that which is required for their instruction, if he be wealthy, and if not the matter devolveth upon the House of Justice. Verily, have We made it a shelter for the poor and needy. He that bringeth up

his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My Loving-Kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world."
--Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Ishraqat (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p.128).

10. The elimination of all forms of prejudice

"...again, as to religious, racial, national and political bias: all these prejudices strike at the very root of human life; one and all they beget bloodshed, and the ruination of the world. So long as these prejudices survive, there will be continuous and fearsome wars."
--Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p.249.

11. Equality of men and women

"To accept and observe a distinction which God has not intended in creation is ignorance and superstition. The fact which is to be considered, however, is that woman, having formerly been deprived, must now be allowed equal opportunities with man for education and training. There must be no difference in their education. Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible."
--`Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.76.

12. The abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty

*"O Ye Rich Ones on Earth!
The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease."*
--The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, p.41.

"We see amongst us men who are overburdened with riches on the one hand, and on the other those unfortunate ones who starve with nothing; those who possess several stately palaces, and those who have not where to lay their head. Some we find with numerous courses of costly and dainty food; whilst others can scarce find sufficient crusts to keep them alive. Whilst some are clothed in velvets, furs and fine linen, others have insufficient, poor and thin garments with which to protect them from the cold.

This condition of affairs is wrong and must be remedied. Now the remedy must be carefully undertaken."
-`Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p.151.

13. Universal peace

"The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realised. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories."
--Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 249.

EARLY HISTORY

In May of 1844, a young Persian by the name of Siyyid `Ali Muhammad declared that He was the promised Qa'im of Shi'ah Islam. He assumed the title of The Báb (Gate). The Báb's mission was twofold: He first announced to the people of His native land His own station as an independent Messenger and He also prepared the way for the coming of another Manifestation (messenger) of God, a Prophet who would announce His station soon after The Báb.

The next six years marked a dramatic increase in both the number of persons who became followers of the Báb and in the energy spent by the Shi'ah clergy of Iran to stamp out this new religion. Eventually 20,000 Bábís would be put to death for their beliefs. The Báb Himself was imprisoned and was executed in July of 1850.

Many Bábís were also imprisoned. Among them was Husayn-`Ali, entitled Bahá'u'lláh (The Glory of God) by The Báb. Imprisoned for several months in 1853 in Tehran and then exiled to Iraq, in the city of Baghdad in 1863 Bahá'u'lláh announced to the world His station as the One for Whom the Báb had prepared the way. The majority of the Bábís accepted Bahá'u'lláh's claim and became known as Bahá'ís (the followers of Bahá).

Shortly after His declaration, Bahá'u'lláh was again banished, even further From His native land: from Baghdad to Constantinople, and then to Adrianople. Finally in 1867, Bahá'u'lláh was exiled for the last time. He was sent to the prison city of Akka (Acre) in Palestine. He would stay in and around Akka until the end of His life in 1892.

Before Bahá'u'lláh passed away, He appointed His eldest son, `Abdu'l-Bahá, to be the centre of His Covenant and the interpreter of His writings. `Abdu'l-Bahá was leader of the Bahá'í Faith until His own passing in 1921. Although He is not considered to be a Manifestation of God like the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá's decisions are believed to have been divinely guided and His writings (along with the Báb's and Bahá'u'lláh's) are considered a part of the Bahá'í sacred scripture. After being released from the prison in Akka, `Abdu'l-Bahá made several journeys to the West, including a trip to America in 1912.

RECENT HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS

`Abdu'l-Bahá stated in his Will and Testament that leadership of the Bahá'í community was to be passed on to his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, who became the "Guardian" of the Bahá'í community after `Abdu'l-Bahá died. Shoghi Effendi led the Bahá'ís until his passing in 1957. It was under Shoghi Effendi's leadership that the Bahá'í Faith spread to all corners of the world. Today there are Bahá'ís in over 200 countries and territories and Bahá'í literature has been translated into over 700 different languages.

Consistent with the Bahá'í principle of independent investigation of truth, according to which no individual Bahá'í may offer an interpretation of the Bahá'í Writings by which others are bound, there is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'í institutions govern the administrative affairs of the Faith. In each locality, nine-member boards known as Local Spiritual Assemblies are elected annually. At the national level are National Spiritual Assemblies, also consisting of nine members, elected annually by representatives of the Bahá'ís in each country. At the international level is the Universal House of Justice, centred in Haifa, Israel (just across the bay from the prison city of Akka, where Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá were imprisoned). The Universal House of Justice also consists of nine members and is elected every five years by members of the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world. The Universal House of Justice has final responsibility for overseeing the international Bahá'í community.

REFERENCES

For those interested in reading more about the Bahá'í Faith, a few references are listed below. Some of these volumes can be found at your local public library. In addition, many Bahá'í

communities have lending libraries and, in varying degrees, bookstore capabilities.

Where links are given they lead to ZIPped ASCII versions of the publications.

General

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Article found in *Baha'i* website (no changes made).