



Short Introductions to the World Religions - Bahai

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1. The Baha'i faith has about five million adherents worldwide and close to twenty thousand in Canada. Its spiritual and administrative World Centre is in Haifa, Israel.

2. The word "Baha'i" is derived from the name of the founder of the faith, Bahá'u'lláh, which means "Glory of God".

3. The Faith had its origin in Persia (Iran). In 1844, a young merchant of Shiráz began to teach a new faith. He called himself

"the Báb" (the Gate) and promised that within nineteen years "He whom God would make manifest" would appear and bring the basic laws and principles for a new age.

4. Bahá'u'lláh was the son of a Persian nobleman. With thousands of others who followed the Báb he was persecuted, imprisoned and exiled. After the Báb's death of martyrdom in 1850, Bahá'u'lláh became aware that he was the one promised by the Báb. He declared this publicly on April 21, 1863. Most of his life he spent in successive imprisonments and exiles, which finally lead him to the prison city of Akka. Bahá'u'lláh died in the Holy Land in 1892.

5. The writings of Bahá'u'lláh contain not only spiritual meditations, prayers, laws, and advice, but also principles for a new world order. The administrative order of the faith was further developed by his son, Abdul-Bahá, the "Exemplar of the Teachings", who in

turn appointed his grandson, Shogi Effendi, as "Guardian of the Faith" in 1921.

6. The Baha'i faith has no priesthood or clergy. The Baha'is of each city elect nine of their members annually to form a "Spiritual Assembly" for the administration of local affairs, and an annual convention elects a "National Spiritual Assembly". The elected supreme administrative body is, since 1963, the "Universal House of Justice" in Haifa.

7. Baha'is believe in the unity of God, the creator and sustainer of the universe. He is known only through his manifestations in divine prophets who, like perfect mirrors, reflect God's attributes and his will. Bahá'u'lláh is seen as such a manifestation of God. Baha'is believe that he is in fact the returned Krishna of Hinduism, the expected fifth Buddha of Buddhism, the Messiah of Judaism, the returned Christ of Christianity and the fulfillment of the Great

Announcement of Islam.

8. Since the founders of all religions are believed to be manifestations of the same God, they must all have taught the same faith. Each one of them adapted it to meet the needs of a particular culture and a particular period in history. Bahais call this unfolding of religion through the ages "progressive revelation". Bahais believe that Bahá'u'lláh is God's latest manifestation. They are zealously spreading the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh but see themselves not as a proselytizing religion.

9. The principles of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are:

(1) The oneness of humankind: The human race has socially developed from the basic unities of family, tribe, village, city-state and nation. The next step has to be world unity. Bahais believe that the spiritual impetus and the practical guidance for the achievement of this goal has already

been given by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

(2) Independent investigation of truth.

(3) The common foundation of all religions.

(4) The essential harmony of science and religion.

(5) Equality of men and women.

(6) Elimination of prejudice of all kinds.

(7) Universal compulsory education.

(8) A spiritual solution of the economic problem.

(9) A universal auxiliary language.

(10) Universal peace upheld by a world government.

10. The present problems of humankind have their origin in the imbalance between the spiritual and the material aspects of human life.

Therefore individuals must rediscover a spiritual purpose and direction in their lives before society can find its own direction.

11. A Baha'i is expected to love God and all humankind, to be just, trustworthy, humble and courteous. One's daily work is to be

performed in the spirit of service and as an act of worship. The soul, which is immortal, develops its spiritual faculties in this world. Earthly life is just the first stage in each soul's journey towards God.

12. Bahá'u'lláh revealed three "obligatory prayers". Bahá'is say one of these prayers daily among others, which are also read at informal gatherings. These gatherings do not include rituals or sermons.

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