

Summary Statement -The World Religion

The Baha'i Faith - The World Religion

A Summary of Its Aims, Teachings and History

by Shoghi Effendi

The Revelation proclaimed by Baha'u'llah, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men. The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, "abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith." His Cause, they have already demonstrated, stands identified with, and revolves around, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution. This final stage in this stupendous evolution, they assert, is not only necessary but inevitable, that it is gradually approaching, and that nothing short of the celestial potency with which a

**divinely ordained Message can claim to be endowed
can succeed in establishing it.**

**The Baha'i Faith recognizes the unity of God and of
His Prophets, upholds the principle of an unfettered
search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition
and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose
of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it
must go hand-in-hand with science, and that it
constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, an
ordered and progressive society. It inculcates the
principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges
for both sexes, advocates compulsory education,
abolishes extremes of poverty and wealth, exalts work
performed in the spirit of service to the rank of
worship, recommends the adoption of an auxiliary
international language, and provides the necessary
agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a
permanent and universal peace.**

**Born about the middle of the nineteenth century in
darkest Persia, assailed from its infancy by the forces
of religious fanaticism, the Faith has, notwithstanding
the martyrdom of its Forerunner, the repeated
banishments of its Founder, the almost life-long
imprisonment of its chief Promoter and the cruel
death of no less than twenty thousand of its devoted
followers, succeeded in diffusing quietly and steadily**

its spirit throughout both the East and the 'West, has established itself in no fewer than forty countries of the world, and has recently obtained from the ecclesiastical and civil authorities in various lands written affirmations that recognize its independent religious status.

The Forerunner of the Faith was Mirza 'Ali-Muhammad of Shiraz, known as the Bab (The Gate) Who proclaimed on May 23, 1844, His twofold mission as an independent Manifestation of God and Herald of One greater than Himself, Who would inaugurate a new and unprecedented era in the religious history of mankind. On His early life, His sufferings, the heroism of His disciples, and the circumstances of His tragic martyrdom I need not dwell, as the record of His saintly life is minutely set forth in "The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Baha'i Faith". Suffice it to say that at the early age of thirty-one the Bab was publicly martyred by a military firing squad at Tabriz, Persia, on July 9, 1850. On the evening of that same day His mangled body was removed from the courtyard of the barracks to the edge of the moat outside the gate of the city whence it was carried by His fervent disciples to Tihran. There it remained concealed until such time as its transfer to the Holy Land was made possible. Faced by almost insuperable difficulties and facing the

gravest dangers a band of His disciples, acting under the instructions of 'Abdu'l-Baha succeeded in transporting overland the casket containing His remains to Haifa. In 1909, 'Abdu'l-Baha with his own hands and in the presence of the assembled representatives of various Baha'i communities deposited those remains within the vault of the Mausoleum he himself had erected for the Bab. Ever since that time countless followers of the Baha'i Faith have made the pilgrimage to this sacred spot, a spot which ever since 1921 has been further sanctified by the burial of 'Abdu'l-Baha. in an adjoining vault.

The Founder of the Faith was Baha'u'llah (Glory of God), Whose advent the Bab had foretold. He declared His mission in 1863 while an exile in Baghdad. He subsequently formulated the principles of that new and divine civilization which by His advent He claimed to have inaugurated. He too was bitterly opposed, was stripped of His property and rights, was exiled to 'Iraq, to Constantinople and Adrianople, and was eventually incarcerated in the penal colony of 'Akka where He passed away in 1892 in His seventy-fifth year. His remains are laid to rest in the Shrine at Bahji, north of 'Akka. The authorized Interpreter and Exemplar of Baha'u'llah's teachings was His eldest son 'Abdu'l-Baha (Servant of Baha) who was appointed by his Father as the Center to whom all Baha'is should

turn for instruction and guidance. 'Abdu'l-Baha ever since his childhood was the closest companion of his Father, and shared all His sorrows and sufferings. He remained a prisoner until 1908, when the old regime in Turkey was overthrown and all religious and political prisoners throughout the empire were liberated. After that he continued to make his home in Palestine but undertook extensive teaching tours in Egypt, Europe and America, being ceaselessly engaged in explaining and exemplifying the principles of his Father's Faith and in inspiring and directing the activities of his friends and followers throughout the world. He passed away in 1921 in Haifa, Palestine, and, as already stated, was buried in a vault contiguous to that of the Bab on Mount Carmel.

According to the provisions of His Will, I, as His eldest grandson, have been appointed as First Guardian of the Baha'i Faith and Head of the Universal House of Justice which must, in conjunction with me coordinate and direct the affairs of the various Baha'i communities in East and West in accordance with the principles enunciated by Baha'u'llah.

The period since 'Abdu'l-Baha's passing has been characterized by the formation and consolidation of the Local and National Assemblies, the bedrock on which the edifice of the Universal House of Justice is to

be erected. There are, according to the latest reports from Tihran, over five hundred Local Assemblies already constituted in Persia. Organized Baha'i communities are to be found in every continent of the globe. National Assemblies have already been formed and are functioning in the United States and Canada, in India and Burma, in Great Britain, in Germany, 'Iraq and Egypt. Such Assemblies are in the process of formation in Persia, Caucasus, Turkestan, and Australia. Local Assemblies and groups have been already established in France, Switzerland and Italy, in the Scandinavian countries, in Austria and the Balkans, in Turkey, Syria, Albania, Abyssinia, China, Japan, Brazil and South Africa. Christians of various denominations, Muslims of both the Sunni and Shi'ih sects of Islam, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and Buddhists, have eagerly embraced its truth, have recognized the divine origin and fundamental unity underlying the teachings of all the Founders of past religions, and have unreservedly identified themselves with both the spirit and form of its evolving institutions. All these centers function as the component parts of a single organism, of an entity the spiritual and administrative Center of which lies enshrined in the twin cities of 'Akka and Haifa.

Summary Statement - 1947, Special UN Committee on Palestine

Shoghi Effendi's Statement to the Special UN Committee on Palestine, 1947

The Faith of Baha'u'llah A World Religion

Shoghi Effendi

The Faith established by Baha'u'llah was born in Persia about the middle of the nineteenth century and has, as a result of the successive banishments of its Founder, culminating in His exile to the Turkish penal colony of Akka, and His subsequent death and burial in its vicinity, fixed its permanent spiritual center in the Holy Land, and is now in the process of laying the foundations of its world administrative center in the city of Haifa.

Alike in the claims unequivocally asserted by its author and the general character of the growth of the Baha'i community in every continent of the globe, it can be regarded in no other light than a world religion, destined to evolve in the course of time into a world-embracing commonwealth, whose advent must signalize the Golden Age of mankind, the age in which the unity of the human race will have been unassailably established, its maturity attained, and its glorious destiny unfolded through the birth and efflorescence of a world-encompassing civilization.

RESTATEMENT OF ETERNAL VERITIES

Though sprung from Shi'ih Islam, and regarded, in the early stages of its development, by the followers of both the Muslim and Christian Faiths, as an obscure sect, an Asiatic cult or an offshoot of the Muhammadan religion, this Faith is now increasingly demonstrating its right to be recognized, not as one more religious system superimposed on the conflicting creeds which for so many generations have divided mankind and darkened its fortunes, but rather as a restatement of the eternal verities underlying all the religions of the past, as a unifying force instilling into the adherents of these religions a new spiritual vigor, infusing them with a new hope and love for mankind, firing them with a new vision of fundamental unity of their religious doctrines, and unfolding to their eyes the glorious destiny that awaits the human race.

The fundamental principle enunciated by Baha'u'llah, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that Religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.

TO RECONCILE CONFLICTING CREEDS

The aim of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet of this new and great age which humanity has entered upon - He whose advent fulfils the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments as well as those of the Qur'an regarding the coming of the Promised One in the end of time, on the Day of Judgment -- is not to destroy but to fulfill the Revelations of the past, to reconcile rather than accentuate the divergences of the conflicting creeds which disrupt present-day society.

His purpose, far from belittling the station of the Prophets gone before Him or of whittling down their teachings, is to restate the basic truths which these teachings enshrine in a manner that would conform to the needs, and be in consonance with the capacity, and be applicable to the problems, the ills and perplexities, of the age in which we live. His mission is to proclaim that the ages of the infancy and of the childhood of the human race are past, that the convulsions associated with the present stage of its adolescence are slowly and painfully preparing it to attain the stage of manhood, and are heralding the approach of that Age of Ages when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when the Kingdom promised by Jesus Christ will have been established, and the peace of the planet definitely and permanently ensured. Nor does Baha'u'llah claim finality for His own Revelation, but rather stipulates that a fuller measure of the truth He has been commissioned by the Almighty to vouchsafe to humanity, at so critical a juncture in its fortunes, must needs be disclosed at future stages in the constant and limitless evolution of mankind.

ONENESS OF THE HUMAN RACE

The Baha'i Faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His Prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race. It proclaims the necessity and the inevitability of the unification of mankind, asserts that it is gradually approaching, and claims that nothing short of the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen Mouthpiece in this day, can ultimately succeed in bringing it about. It, moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition, declares the purpose of religion to be the promotion of amity and concord, proclaims its essential harmony with science, and recognizes it as the foremost agency for the pacification and the orderly progress of human society. It unequivocally maintains the principle of equal rights, opportunities and privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth, abolishes the institution of priesthood, prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy and monasticism, prescribes monogamy, discourages divorce, emphasizes the necessity of strict obedience to one's government, exalts any work performed in the spirit of service to the level of worship, urges either the creation or selection of an auxiliary international language, and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind.

THE HERALD

The Baha'i Faith revolves around three central Figures, the first of whom was a youth, a native of Shiraz, named Mirza Ali-Muhammad, known as the Bab (Gate), who in May, 1844, at the age of twenty-five, advanced the claim of being the Herald Who, according to the sacred Scriptures of previous Dispensations, must needs announce and prepare the way for the advent of One greater than Himself, Whose mission would be according to those same Scriptures, to inaugurate an era

of righteousness and peace, an era that would be hailed as the consummation of all previous Dispensations, and initiate a new cycle in the religious history of mankind. Swift and severe persecution, launched by the organized forces of Church and State in His native land, precipitated successively His arrest, His exile to the mountains of Adhirbayjan, His imprisonment in the fortresses of Mah-Ku and Chihriq and His execution, in July, 1850, by a firing squad in the public square of Tabriz. No less than twenty thousand of his followers were put to death with such barbarous cruelty as to evoke the warm sympathy and the unqualified admiration of a number of Western writers, diplomats, travellers and scholars, some of whom were witnesses of these abominable outrages, and were moved to record them in their books and diaries.

BAHA'ULLAH

Mirza Husayn-Ali, surnamed Baha'u'llah (the Glory of God), a native of Mazindaran, Whose advent the Bab had foretold, was assailed by those same forces of ignorance and fanaticism, was imprisoned in Tihiran, was banished, in 1852, from His native land to Baghdad, and thence to Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally to the prison city of Akka, where He remained incarcerated for no less than twenty-four years, and in whose neighborhood He passed away in 1892. In the course of His banishment, and particularly in Adrianople and Akka, He formulated the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, expounded, in over a hundred volumes, the principles of His Faith, proclaimed His Message to the kings and rulers of both the East and the West, both Christian and Muslim, addressed the Pope, the Caliph of Islam, the Chief Magistrates of the Republics of the American continent, the entire Christian sacerdotal order, the leaders of Shi'ih and Sunni Islam, and the high priests of the Zoroastrian religion. In these writings He proclaimed His Revelation, summoned those whom He addressed to heed His call and espouse His Faith, warned them of the consequences of their refusal, and denounced, in some cases, their arrogance and tyranny.

'ABDU'L-BAHA

His eldest son, Abbas Effendi, known as 'Abdu'l-Baha (the Servant of Baha), appointed by Him as the successor and the authorized interpreter of His teachings, who since early childhood had been closely associated with His Father, and shared His exile and tribulations, remained a prisoner until 1908, when as a result of the Young Turk Revolution, He was released from His confinement. Establishing His residence in Haifa, He embarked soon after on His three-year journey to Egypt, Europe and North America, in the course of which He expounded before vast audiences, the teachings of His Father and predicted the approach of that catastrophe that was soon to befall mankind. He returned to His home on the eve of the first World War, in the course of which He was exposed to constant danger, until liberation of Palestine by the forces under the command of General Allenby, who extended the utmost consideration to Him and the small band of His fellow-exiles in Akka and Haifa. In 1921 He passed away, and was buried in a vault in the mausoleum erected on Mount Carmel, at the express instruction of Baha'u'llah for the remains of the Bab which had previously been transferred from Tabriz to the Holy Land after having been preserved and concealed for no less than sixty years.

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

The passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha marked the termination of the first and Heroic Age of the Baha'i Faith and signalized the opening of the Formative Age destined to witness the gradual emergence of its Administrative Order, whose establishment had been foretold by the Bab, whose laws were revealed by Baha'u'llah, whose outlines were delineated by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will and Testament, and whose foundations are now being laid by the national and local councils which are elected by the professed adherents of the Faith, and which are paving the way for the constitution of the World Council, to be designated as the Universal House of Justice, which in conjunction with me, as its appointed Head and authorized interpreter of the Baha'i teachings, must coordinate and direct the affairs of the Baha'i community, and whose seat will be permanently established in the Holy Land, in close proximity to its world spiritual center, the resting-places of its Founders.

The Administrative Order of the Faith of Baha'u'llah which is destined to evolve into the Baha'i World Commonwealth, and has already survived the assaults launched against its institutions by such formidable foes as the kings of the Qajar dynasty, the Caliphs of Islam, the ecclesiastical leaders of Egypt, and the Nazi regime in Germany, has already extended its ramifications to every continent of the globe, stretching from Iceland to the extremity of Chile, has established in no less than eighty-eight countries of the world, has gathered within its pale representatives of no less than thirty-one races, numbers among its supporters Christians of various denominations, Muslims of both Sunni and Shi'ah sects, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians and Buddhists. It has published and disseminated, through its appointed agencies, Baha'i literature in forty-eight languages; Has already consolidated its structure through the incorporation of five National Assemblies and seventy-seven local Assemblies, in lands as far apart as South America, India and the Antipodes -- incorporations that legally empower its elected representatives to hold property as trustees of the Baha'i community. It disposes of international, national and local endowments, estimated at several million pounds, and spread over every continent of the globe, enjoys in several countries the privilege of official recognition by the civil authorities, enabling it to secure exemption from taxation for its endowments and to solemnize Baha'i marriage, and numbers among its stately edifices, two temples, the one erected in Russian Turkistan and the other on the shore of Lake Michigan at Wilmette, on the outskirts of Chicago.

This Administrative Order, unlike the systems evolved after the death of the Founders of the various religions, is divine in origin, rests securely on the laws, the precepts, the ordinances and institutions which the Founder of the Faith has Himself specifically laid down and unequivocally established, and functions in strict accordance with the interpretations of the authorized Interpreters of its holy scriptures. Though fiercely assailed, ever since its inception, it has by virtue of its character, unique in the annals of the world's religious history, succeeded in maintaining unity of the diversified and far-flung body of its supporters, and enabled them to launch, unitedly and systematically, enterprises in both Hemispheres, designed to extend its limits and consolidate its administrative institutions.

The Faith which this order serves, safeguards and promotes, is, it should be noted in this connection, essentially supernatural, supranational, entirely non-political, non-partisan, and diametrically opposed to any policy or school of thought that seeks to exalt any particular race, class or nation. It is free from any form of ecclesiasticism, has neither priesthood nor rituals, and is supported exclusively by voluntary contributions made by its avowed adherents. Though loyal

to their respective governments, though imbued with the love of their own country, and anxious to promote, at all times, its best interests, the followers of the Baha'i Faith, nevertheless, viewing mankind as one entity, and profoundly attached to its vital interests, will not hesitate to subordinate every particular interest, be it personal, regional or national, to the over-riding interests of the generality of mankind, knowing full well that in a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no lasting result can be achieved by any of the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are neglected.

Nor should the fact be overlooked that the Faith has already asserted and demonstrated its independent religious character, has been emancipated from fetters of orthodoxy in certain Islamic countries, has obtained in one of them an unsolicited testimony to its independent religious status, and succeeded in winning the allegiance of royalty to its cause.

TRIBUTERS BY LEADERS

"It is like a wide embrace," is Queen Marie of Rumania's own tribute, "gathering together all those who have searched for words of hope. It accepts all great Prophets gone before, it destroys no other creeds and leaves all doors open....The Baha'i teaching brings peace to the soul and hope to the heart. To those in search of assurance, the words of the Father are as a fountain in the desert after long wandering....It is a wondrous message that Baha'u'llah and His son 'Abdu'l-Baha have given us. They have not set it up aggressively, knowing that the germ of eternal truth which lies at its core cannot but take root and spread....It is Christ's Message taken up anew, in the same words almost, but adapted to the thousand years and more difference that lies between the year one and today....If ever the name of Baha'u'llah or 'Abdu'l-Baha comes to your attention, do not put their writings from you. Search out their books, and let their glorious, peace-bringing, love-creating words and lessons sink into your hearts as they have into mine."

"The teaching of the Babis," wrote Leo Tolstoy, "...have great future before them....I therefore sympathize the Babism with all my heart, inasmuch as it teaches people brotherhood and equality and sacrifice of material life for service to God....The teachings of the Babis which come to us out of Islam have through Baha'u'llah's teachings been gradually developed, and now present us with the highest and purest form of religious teaching."

"Take these principles to the diplomats," is the late President Masaryk's advice, "to the universities and colleges and other schools, and also write about them. It is the people who will bring the universal peace." "The Baha'i teaching," is President Eduard Benes' testimony, "is one of the great instruments for the final victory of the spirit and of humanity....The Baha'i Cause is one of the great moral and social forces in all the world today. I am more convinced than ever, with the increasing moral and political crises in the world, we must have greater international coordination. Such a movement as the Baha'i Cause which paves the way for universal organization of peace is necessary."

"If there has been any Prophet in recent times," asserts Rev. T. K. Cheyne in his "The Reconciliation of Races and Religions", "it is to Baha'u'llah that we must go. Character is the final judge. Baha'u'llah was a man of the highest class -- that of Prophets." "It is possible

indeed," declares Viscount Samuel of Carmel, "to pick out points of fundamental agreement among all creeds. That is the essential purpose of the Baha'i religion, the foundation and growth of which is one of the most striking movements that have proceeded from the East in recent generations."

"Palestine," is Professor Norman Bentwich's written testimony, "may indeed be now regarded as the land not of three but of four faiths, because the Baha'i creed, which has its center of faith and pilgrimage in Akka and Haifa, is attaining to the character of a world religion. So far as its influence goes in the land, it is a factor making for international and inter-religious understanding."

And, finally, is the judgment passed by no less outstanding a figure than the late Master of Balliol, Professor Benjamin Jowett: "The Babi movement may not impossibly turn out to have the promise of the future." Professor Lewis Campbell, an eminent pupil of Dr. Jowett, has confirmed this statement by quoting him as saying: "This Baha'i Movement is the greatest light that has come into the world since the time of Jesus Christ. You must watch it and never let it out of your sight. It is too great and too near to this generation to comprehend. The future alone can reveal its import."