

BAHA'IS

The Bahá'í Faith The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. Its founder, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), is regarded by Bahá'ís as the most recent in the line of Messengers of **God** that stretches back beyond recorded time and that includes **Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, Christ** and **Muhammad**.

The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in one global society. **God**, Bahá'u'lláh said, has set in motion historical forces that are breaking down traditional barriers of race, class, creed, and nation and that will, in time, give birth to a universal civilization. The principal challenge facing the peoples of the earth is to accept the fact of their oneness and to assist the processes of unification.

One of the purposes of the Bahá'í Faith is to help make this possible. A worldwide community of some five million Bahá'ís, representative of most of the nations, races and cultures on earth, is working to give Bahá'u'lláh's teachings practical effect. Their experience will be a source of encouragement to all who share their vision of humanity as one global family and the earth as one homeland.

Bahá'ís believe that there is one **God**, that all humanity is one family, and that there is a fundamental unity underlying religion. They recognize that the coming of Bahá'u'lláh has opened the age for the establishment of world peace, when, as anticipated in the sacred scriptures of the past, all humanity will achieve its spiritual and social maturity, and live as one united family in a just, global society., a movement that flourished in the medieval period, which retains several thousand followers today and maintains that only the Written Torah was revealed.

In modern times. Beliefs and Practices Complementary to its transformative effect on society, religion fosters the spiritual development and transformation of the individual soul. The links below explain the Bahá'í teachings on life after death, our spiritual nature and growth, morality, and the importance of prayer and meditation.

God, Faith, and Immortality In the Bahá'í view, the purpose of this life on earth is for each individual to develop the spiritual and moral qualities that lie at the

core of his or her nature. Bahá'u'lláh referred to the human being as a "*mine rich in gems of inestimable value.*" These "gems" or qualities can be "mined" or developed only when a person turns to **God**. But while this awesome task must remain the responsibility of the individual, humanity has received continual guidance from a loving Creator on how to accomplish it. The Bahá'í conceptions of human nature and the soul, then, are essentially positive, as are Bahá'í views on the purpose of life and life after death.

Bahá'ís believe that there is only one **God**, the Creator of the universe. Throughout history, **God** has revealed Himself to humanity through a series of divine Messengers, each of Whom has founded a great religion. The Messengers have included Abraham, **Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus,** and **Muhammad**. This succession of divine Teachers reflects a single historic "plan of **God**" for educating humanity about the Creator and for cultivating the spiritual, intellectual, and moral capacities of the race.

The goal has been to develop the innate noble characteristics of every human being, and to prepare the way for an advancing global civilization. Knowledge of **God's** will for humanity in the modern age, Bahá'ís believe, was revealed just over one hundred years ago by Bahá'u'lláh, Who is the latest of these divine Messengers.

The Bahá'í Concept of God The Bahá'í belief in one **God** means that the universe and all creatures and forces within it have been created by a single supernatural Being. This Being, Whom we call **God**, has absolute control over His creation (omnipotence) as well as perfect and complete knowledge of it (omniscience). Although we may have different concepts of **God's** nature, although we may pray to Him in different languages and call Him by different names **Allah** or **Yahweh, God** or **Brahma**--nevertheless, we are speaking about the same unique Being.

The Oneness of Religion The principle of the unity of religion is at the center of Bahá'í teachings. Bahá'u'lláh states that humanity is engaged in a collective growth process quite similar to the growth process of an individual: just as a person begins life as a helpless infant and attains maturity in successive stages, so humankind began its collective social life in a primitive state, gradually attaining maturity. In the case of the individual, it is clear that his or her development takes place as a result of the education he or she receives from parents, teachers, and society in general. But what is the motive force in humankind's collective evolution?

The answer the Bahá'í Faith provides to this question is "revealed religion." In one of His major works, the Kitab-i-Iqan (the Book of Certitude), Bahá'u'lláh explained that **God**, the Creator, has intervened and will continue to intervene in human history by means of chosen Messengers. These Messengers, Whom Bahá'u'lláh called "Manifestations of **God**," are principally the Founders of the major revealed religions, such as **Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad**, and so forth. It is the spirit released by the coming of these Manifestations, together with the influence of Their teachings and the social systems established by Their laws and precepts, that enable humankind to progress in its collective evolution. Simply put: the Manifestations of **God** are the chief educators of humanity.

'The Changeless Faith of **God**' When Bahá'ís say that the various religions are one, they do not mean that the various religious creeds and organizations are the same. Rather, they believe that there is only one religion and all of the Messengers of **God** have progressively revealed its nature. Together, the world's great religions are expressions of a single unfolding Divine plan, "the changeless Faith of **God**, eternal in the past, eternal in the future."

People from all of the major religious backgrounds have found that the promises and expectations of their own beliefs are fulfilled in the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'ís from Native American, African and other indigenous backgrounds, similarly, find in the Bahá'í teachings fulfillment of prophetic visions.

For Bahá'ís of Jewish background, Bahá'u'lláh is the appearance of the promised "**Lord of Hosts**" come down "with ten thousands of saints." A descendent of Abraham and a "scion from the root of Jesse," Bahá'u'lláh has come to lead the way for nations to "beat their swords into plowshares." Many features of Bahá'u'lláh's involuntary exile to the Land of Israel, along with other historical events during Bahá'u'lláh's life and since are seen as fulfilling numerous prophecies in the Bible.

For Bahá'ís of Buddhist background, Bahá'u'lláh fulfills the prophecies for the coming of "a Buddha named Maitreye, the Buddha of universal fellowship" who will, according to Buddhist traditions, bring peace and enlightenment for all humanity. They see the fulfillment of numerous prophecies, such as the fact that the Buddha Maitreye is to come from "the West", noting the fact that Iran is West of India.

For Bahá'ís of Hindu background, Bahá'u'lláh comes as the new incarnation of Krishna, the "Tenth Avatar" and the "**Most Great Spirit**." He is "the birthless,

the deathless," the One who, "when goodness grows weak," returns "in every age" to "establish righteousness" as promised in the Bhagavad-Gita.

For Bahá'ís of **Christian** background, Bahá'u'lláh fulfils the paradoxical promises of **Christ**'s return "in the Glory of the Father" and as a "thief in the night." That the Faith was founded in **1844** relates to numerous **Christian** prophecies. Bahá'ís note, for example, that central Africa was finally opened to **Christianity** in the **1840**'s, and that event was widely seen as fulfilling the promise that **Christ** would return after "the Gospel had been preached 'to all nations.'" In Bahá'u'lláh's teachings Bahá'ís see fulfillment of **Christ**'s promise to bring all people together so that "there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

For Bahá'ís of Muslim background, Bahá'u'lláh fulfils the promise of the Qur'an for the "Day of **God**" and the "Great Announcement," when "**God**" will come down "overshadowed with clouds." They see in the dramatic events of the Bábi and Bahá'í movements the fulfillment of many traditional statements of Muhammad, which have long been a puzzle.