



THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

The First Pillar:

The Shahadah is the act of testifying to one's belief in God, recognition and acceptance of His prophet, Muhammad. This is the pillar upon which all other pillars are supported and it is the core of Islamic life.

In every dispensation, this is the challenge facing humanity; the recognition of the prophet sent from God to deliver the Divine teachings necessary for the advancement of civilization and the progress of the human soul. Some people never question it: they are born into it and accept it because their father and their grandfather before them belonged to that faith and so there is no question: it is an automatic decision. For others, a search is involved that may take a whole lifetime or a blink of an eye. However one comes to this choice, the choice must be made. "I bear witness that there is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" is a statement of faith that sets the rest of the practice in motion. It is the commencement of the journey toward nearness to God.

Before hearing about the Baha'i Faith, I knew I believed in Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, the White Buffalo Calf Woman and so on. I somehow knew they were all part of a giant light. I couldn't join any church or religion because I could not find anyone else that accepted them all until I found Baha'i. I was fascinated by prophecy: I had researched many faiths that left me wondering how all of these faiths could have a messenger or prophet coming back? Would they all arrive at once or is there really only one? Or maybe it was all hogwash! I prayed to God about it a lot. It was the most intense time of prayer I have every experienced. I believed the time of the 'return' was at hand but where? Who?

One morning, I awoke with what sounded and felt like God was speaking to me. I had not an inclination of doubt as to the authority of that voice. He told me that I was about to receive what I had been looking for and I must not allow my ego to stand in the way. As the voice spoke, I saw my dear friend Russell downstairs with friends I had never met. Someone was knocking at the door. I ran down and there was Russell who I had not seen in three years. He was standing there with the friends I saw earlier in my vision. That was the day I learned about Baha'u'llah.

It took me over a year of serious study and scrutinizing Baha'u'llah's claim before I accepted Him. I was looking for the worm in the apple but the more I researched, the more my certitude grew. Because of the Writings of Baha'u'llah, I also fell in love with Islam which was one Faith I knew little about other than I believed Muhammad was a prophet from God. It is so sad that there is such a

misunderstanding about progressive revelation that produces such hostility toward Islam and the beauty it brings. I pray it will someday change.

The process of accepting Baha'u'llah is very similar to that of the acceptance of Muhammad. Essentially, it is a process of the heart. It is the entering into a Covenant with God. An agreement and acceptance of His laws and a promise from God to not abandon us. I struggle with my Faith at times, I don't always agree with every last detail but nowhere does Baha'u'llah ask for blind obedience. I believe it is an ongoing process that takes commitment because of the love we have for God and the desire to enter into a closer relationship with Him.

The Second Pillar:

Revealed prayer is a new concept for many North Americans, as it was for me. As Muslims do, we too have the duty to pray daily. We have the choice of three obligatory prayers: the short one, said between noon and sunset, the medium one, said three times a day, and the long one which is said at any time during the 24 hours.

The medium and long obligatory prayers also have positions or genuflections the body must perform. After ablutions, the prayer takes you from standing, a position of the forehead on the ground, standing with hands upraised, bowing with hands on knees, and finally to sitting. One of the biggest differences is that Baha'u'llah instructed us to pray these particular prayers in private. All of the other prayers can be said in community but not these ones.

The Third Pillar:

Zakat is very similar to how Baha'is give to the Baha'i Fund which is considered the 'life blood' of the Cause. It is considered an honor and a privilege to give and it is one of the only activities reserved for Baha'is only. In other words, when money is donated to the Baha'i Fund from a non-Baha'i, that money cannot be kept and it is given to another charity. Also, how much a person gives is completely confidential and although we are apprised of the needs of the community, no individual is approached for money. You give after you have paid off your debts and you give sacrificially. At the same time that Baha'u'llah exhorts His followers strongly to support those in need, He also prohibits begging.

The Fourth Pillar:

Fasting is very similar although not as long. The Baha'i solar calendar is made up of 19 months of 19 days. Each day and month is named after an attribute of God. This leaves four or 5 days at the end of the year called Ayyam-i-Ha. This is a time of gift giving and service after which time, the fast commences. The fast lasts for 19 days and ends on the spring equinox: Naw-Ruz.

“Praised be Thou, O my God, that Thou hast ordained Naw-Ruz as a festival unto those who have observed the fast for love of Thee and abstained from all that is abhorrent unto Thee. Grant, O my Lord, that the fire of Thy love and the heat produced by the fast enjoined by Thee may inflame them in Thy Cause, and make them to be occupied with Thy praise and with remembrance of Thee.”

— Baha'u'llah¹

The Fifth Pillar:

¹ (Baha'u'llah); (*Prayers and Meditations* by Baha'u'llah, p. 67)

Pilgrimage is also a requirement with many similarities. When Baha'u'llah was exiled from Persia to Turkey, to Andrianople and Constanstiole, he was eventually put on a small boat and sent to Akka prison, across the bay from Haifa. When I went on pilgrimage in 1984, I visited that fortress prison and was amazed that anyone could survive there. The whole town was a prison city and to this day, there is not a blade of grass to be found! Eventually, Baha'u'llah was put under house arrest in Baji which is a few miles from Haifa. This is where His burial shrine is. The Baha'i world center is on Mount Carmel where Baha'u'llah, although still a prisoner, pitched his tent and revealed the Tablet of Carmel. (see last page)

Summary:

There is so much and so little space! Islam is the mother faith that my faith sprang out of, and although Baha'i is an independent religion, the similarities and differences are fascinating. It is distressing that the western viewpoint about Islam is so distorted. Thankfully, Baha'is revere Muhammad and in fact, one cannot be considered a Baha'i without accepting Muhammad. So much of my education spiritually, was missing because I knew so little of the Muslim Faith. It is as though God sent many chapters to His holy book and I missed a major chapter! That is the situation with so many people who have no understanding of the majesty of Islam.

As of late, my own personal path is taking me more and more, where I am having to reach for God within. For many years, I guess I would be considered a pillar of the community, but in the last seven years, I have dropped out

somewhat: Not because of any other reason except I have felt such a calling to stand alone. I don't expect this to last forever but it has been a necessary step for me. What I am learning about Islam, especially Sufism, is giving me a larger perspective of where I came from and where I may be going. It is as if I may have found a bird's eye view of the terrain. I look forward to where it leads me. In the end, it comes back to love and the blossoms of compassion and kindness one cultivates in the heart.

LAWH-I-KARMIL

(Tablet of Carmel)

ALL glory be to this Day, the Day in which the fragrances of mercy have been wafted over all created things, a Day so blest that past ages and centuries can never hope to rival it, a Day in which the countenance of the Ancient of Days hath turned towards His holy seat. Thereupon the voices of all created things, and beyond them those of the Concourse on High, were heard calling aloud: 'Haste thee, O Carmel, for lo, the light of the countenance of God, the Ruler of the Kingdom of Names and Fashioner of the heavens, hath been lifted upon thee.'

Seized with transports of joy, and raising high her voice, she thus exclaimed: 'May my life be a sacrifice to Thee, inasmuch as Thou hast fixed Thy gaze upon me, hast bestowed upon me Thy bounty, and hast directed towards me Thy steps. Separation from Thee, O Thou Source of everlasting life, hath well nigh consumed me, and my remoteness from Thy presence hath burned away my soul. All praise be to Thee for having enabled me to hearken to Thy call, for having honoured me with Thy footsteps, and for having quickened my soul through the vitalizing fragrance of Thy Day and the shrilling voice of Thy Pen, a voice Thou didst ordain as Thy trumpet-call amidst Thy people. And when the hour at which Thy resistless Faith was to be made manifest did strike, Thou didst breathe a breath of Thy spirit into Thy Pen, and lo, the entire creation shook to its very foundations, unveiling to mankind 4 such mysteries as lay hidden within the treasuries of Him Who is the Possessor of all created things.'

No sooner had her voice reached that most exalted Spot than We made reply: 'Render thanks unto thy Lord, O Carmel. The fire of thy separation from Me was fast consuming thee, when the ocean of My presence surged before thy face, cheering thine eyes and those of all creation, and filling with delight all things visible and invisible. Rejoice, for God hath in this Day established upon thee His throne, hath made thee the dawning-place of His signs and the dayspring of the evidences of His Revelation. Well is it with him that circleth around thee, that proclaimeth the revelation of thy glory, and recounteth that which the bounty of the Lord thy God hath showered upon thee. Seize thou the Chalice of Immortality in the name of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, and give thanks unto Him, inasmuch as He, in token of His mercy unto thee, hath turned thy sorrow into gladness, and transmuted thy grief into blissful joy. He, verily, loveth the spot which hath been made the seat of His throne, which His footsteps have trodden, which hath been honoured by His presence, from which He raised His call, and upon which He shed His tears.

'Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed. Beware lest thou hesitate or halt. Hasten forth and circumambulate the City of God that hath descended from heaven, the celestial Kaaba round which have circled in adoration the favoured of God, the pure in heart, and the company of the most exalted angels. Oh, how I long to announce unto every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the

glad-tidings 5 of this Revelation -- a Revelation to which the heart of Sinai hath been attracted, and in whose name the Burning Bush is calling: "Unto God, the Lord of Lords, belong the kingdoms of earth and heaven." Verily this is the Day in which both land and sea rejoice at this announcement, the Day for which have been laid up those things which God, through a bounty beyond the ken of mortal mind or heart, hath destined for revelation. Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Baha who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.'

Sanctified be the Lord of all mankind, at the mention of Whose name all the atoms of the earth have been made to vibrate, and the Tongue of Grandeur hath been moved to disclose that which had been wrapt in His knowledge and lay concealed within the treasury of His might. He, verily, through the potency of His name, the Mighty, the All-Powerful, the Most High, is the ruler of all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth

—Baha'u'llah²

² (Baha'u'llah); (Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 67)