***The
Faith
of
Bahá’u’lláh***

**A WORLD RELIGION**

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Bahá’u’lláh***

*by*

*Shoghi Effendi*

This summary of the origin, teachings and institutions of the Bahá’í Faith was prepared in 1947 for the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine by Shoghi Effendi in his capacity of Guardian appointed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament.



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Preface

The Bahá’í Faith stands unique among the world’s religions in possessing an uninterrupted and organic unity throughout the first century of its existence. Between the Báb, its Herald, and Bahá’u’lláh, its Founder, the relationship was one of mutual recognition and acceptance. The Testament left by Bahá’u’lláh appointed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, His eldest son, the authorized interpreter of the teachings and exemplar of its spirit. Under ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guidance the Faith was established in the West and its meaning and purpose illumined for seekers in Europe and America in countless letters and public talks. Between 1911 and 1914 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá journeyed throughout Europe and North America, where in churches and synagogues, He expounded the teachings, and brought many new souls into the Faith, and likewise raised up the foundation of the future local and national communities of believers.

His own Testament nominated His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, to be the Guardian of the Faith, expounder of its teachings and interpreter of those Writings which provided for the administrative order throughout the world. The British Government, mandatory authority over Palestine under the League of Nations, officially accepted this Testament.

The Station of the Guardian was tested and publicly established by that mandatory power when, following the death of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1921, a number of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s relatives, repudiating His Testament, denied the Guardianship and attempted to seize the properties and shrines which had become the holy places of a rapidly developing universal religion.

Shoghi Effendi, meanwhile, estab-

lished the station of Guardianship among the Bahá’ís by his own spiritual wisdom, energy and devotion to the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. His letters of explanation and advice, his interpretations of the Bahá’í Writings, and his descriptions of the nature and function of its organic institutions enabled the Bahá’ís of East and West to rally their forces, direct their efforts and establish communities in many new lands.

Without the Guardian, there is no question but that the Bahá’í community, after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, would have developed in different directions, reflecting the religious backgrounds of the Bahá’ís in the East and the background of the Bahá’ís throughout the West. Shoghi Effendi’s unique service to the Bahá’í Faith was to produce an organically united Bahá’í world community.

At the time of the passing of the Guardian in November 1957, the number of National Assemblies had increased to twenty-seven, and Bahá’ís were found in more than two hundred countries in all continents.

The writings of Shoghi Effendi which have been published in the English language include: *Bahá’í Administration* (1922-1932); *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* (1929-1936); *Messages to America* (1932-1946); *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1938); *The Promised Day Is Come* (1941); and *Messages to the Bahá’í World: 1950-1957* (1958).

Moreover, Shoghi Effendi’s translations of prayers and Tablets revealed by Bahá’u’lláh have given to the West a direct access to the most important fundamental Writings of the Faith. Finally, Shoghi Effendi’s *God Passes By* constitutes an authentic history of the Faith throughout its first one hundred years.

—Horace Holley

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The Faith established by Bahá’u’lláh 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 ‘Akká and His subsequent death and burial in its vicinity, fixed its permanent spiritual center in the Holy Lind, 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 Bahá’í 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 Shí‘ih Islám, 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 Muslim 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 vigour, infusing them with a new hope and love for mankind, firing them with a new vision of the fundamental unity of their religious doctrines, and unfolding to their eyes the glorious destiny that awaits the human race.

The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh, 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.

Fulfills past Revelations

The aim of Bahá’u’lláh, 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 fulfil the Revelations of the past, to reconcile rather than accentuate the divergencies 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 Bahá’u’lláh 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 Bahá’í 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 the 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 Bahá’í Faith revolves around three central Figures, the first of whom was a youth, a native of Shíráz, named Mírzá ‘Alí-Muḥammad, known as the Báb (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 Ádhirbayján, His imprisonment in the fortresses of Máh-Kú and Chihríq, and His execution, in July 1850, by a firing squad in the public square of Tabríz. 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.

Bahá’u’lláh

Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí, surnamed Bahá’u’lláh (the Glory of God), a native of Mázindarán, Whose advent the Báb had foretold, was assailed by those same forces of ignorance and fanaticism, was imprisoned in Ṭihrán, was banished, in 1852, from His native land to Baghdád, and thence to Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally to the prison city of ‘Akká, where He remained incarcerated for no less than twenty-four years, and in whose neighbourhood He passed away in 1892. In the course of His banishment, and particularly in Adrianople and ‘Akká, He formulated the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, expounded, in over a hundred volumes, the principles of His Faith, pro-

claimed His Message to the kings and rulers of both the East and the West, both Christian and Muslim, addressed the Pope, the Caliph of Islám, the Chief Magistrates of the Republics of the American continent, the entire Christian sacerdotal order, the leaders of Shí‘ih and Sunní Islám, 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-Bahá

His eldest son, ‘Abbas Effendi, known as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (the Servant of Bahá), appointed by Him as His lawful 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 the liberation of Palestine by the forces under the command of General Allenby, who extended the utmost consideration to Him and to the small band of His fellow-exiles in ‘Akká 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 Bahá’u’lláh, for the remains of the Báb, which had previously been transferred from Tabríz to the Holy Land after having been preserved and concealed for no less than sixty years.

Administrative Order

The passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá marked the termination of the first and Heroic Age of the Bahá’í 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 Báb, whose laws were revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, whose outlines were delineated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 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 the authorized interpreter of the Bahá’í teachings, must co-ordinate and direct the affairs of the Bahá’í community, and whose seat will be permanently established in the Holy Land, in close proximity to its world spiritual centre, the resting-places of its Founders.

The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, which is destined to evolve into the Bahá’í World Commonwealth, and has already survived the assaults launched against its institutions by such formidable foes as the kings of the Qájár dynasty, the Caliphs of Islám, 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

been established in no less than eighty-eight[[1]](#footnote-1) 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 Sunní and Shí‘ih sects, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists. It has published and disseminated, through its appointed agencies, Bahá’í 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 Bahá’í 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 Bahá’í 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 the 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 Bahá’í 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 results 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 demon-

strated its independent religious character, has been emancipated from the 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.

Tributes by leaders

“It is like a wide embrace,” is Queen Marie of Rumania’s own tribute, “gathering together all those who have long searched for words of hope. It accepts all great prophets gone before, it destroys no other creeds and leaves all doors open …. The Bahá’í 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 Bahá’u’lláh and his son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 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 Bahá’u’lláh or ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 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 teachings of the Bábís,” wrote Leo Tolstoy, “… have a great future before them. … I therefore sympathize with 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 Bábís

which come to us out of Islám have through Bahá’u’lláh’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 Bahá’í teaching,” is President Eduard Benes’ testimony, “is one of the great instruments for the final victory of the spirit and of humanity. … The Bahá’í 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 Bahá’í Cause which paves the way for universal organization of peace is necessary.”

“If there has been any Prophet in recent times,” asserts the Rev. T. K. Cheyne in his ‘The Reconciliation of Races and Religions’, “it is to Bahá’u’lláh that we must go. Character is the final judge. Bahá’u’lláh 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 Bahá’í 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 Bahá’í creed, which has its center of faith and pilgrimage in ‘Akká 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 Bábí 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 Bahá’í 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 for this generation to comprehend. The future alone can reveal its import.”

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Excerpts touching on the nature of religion, the spiritual nature of man, and the transformation of human society.

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Prayers and devotional passages.

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Explanations on a wide variety of spiritual and philosophic questions, with emphasis on Christian subjects.

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Addresses and letters on the theme of the spiritual foundations of world unity.

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Seven communications which define the relation of the Faith to the process of social evolution in this new age.

THE DAWN-BREAKERS by Nabíl (Bahá’í Publishing Trust) 668 pp.

A superb account of the early days of the Bahá’í Era, centering around the mission of the Báb.

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH by Eunice Braun (Bahá’í Publishing Trust) 64 pp.

A brief history of the growth of the Bahá’í Faith throughout the world from 1921 to 1973.

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Invaluable reference works, recording the international activities and progress of the Faith, containing basic statistical information, many illustrations, and a

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THE PROMISE OF ALL AGES by George Townshend (George Ronald) 164 pp.

A former Canon of the Anglican Church examines the spiritual content of religion, tracing it through the Dispensations of the past, culminating in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

THE LIGHT SHINETH IN DARKNESS by Udo Schaefer (George Ronald) 186 pp.

A collection of five separate studies of the Bahá’í Faith and Islam.

RELIGION FOR MANKIND by Horace Holley (George Ronald) 248 pp.

Essays and talks from several decades, dealing with the application of Bahá’í principles to the solution of modern man’s dilemma, by a leading American Bahá’í.

MYSTICISM, SCIENCE AND REVELATION by Dr. Glenn A. Shook (George Ronald) 145 pp.

A physicist discusses the nature of mysticism and shows the harmony of science and true religion.

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These books can be found in many college and public libraries, or obtained from the local Bahá’í Center in your city. For further information on the Bahá’í Faith, contact the Bahá’í Center in your city, or, if none listed, write to Bahá’í National Center, 112 Linden Avenue, Dept. C, Wilmette, IL 60091.

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1. Written in 1947. In 1979 the Bahá’í Faith was established in some 340 independent countries, significant territories and island groups, with a total of 125 National Assemblies. Literature had been published in nearly 700 languages and dialects, five temples had been erected, and land had been purchased for additional temples in many countries around the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)