

Christopher  
Buck

**Bahá'í  
Faith**

the basics

“This excellent, beautifully organized introduction provides an accurate and unusually rich entrée into a relatively new and still somehow frequently misunderstood religion. The author, Christopher Buck, is a leading scholar of the Bahá’í religion. His book is richly enhanced with quotations from official translations of the Bahá’í sacred writings, insights into the formation of distinctive Bahá’í institutions and rare glimpses of key moments in Bahá’í intellectual history from an introduction to the influential African American Bahá’í philosopher, Alain Locke (d. 1954) known as ‘the father of the Harlem Renaissance’, to a discussion of the more recent development of the Ruhi Institute process. This introduction goes beyond existing textbooks in both scope and detail. It will be warmly welcomed by researchers and students of the Bahá’í Faith.”

Todd Lawson, *University of Toronto, Canada*



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# BAHÁ'Í FAITH

*Bahá'í Faith: The Basics* provides a thorough and accessible introduction to a fascinating, independent world religion. Examining its historical development, current “community-building” efforts and the social contributions of the Bahá'í Faith in the world today, this introduction covers:

- Beliefs: Bahá'í spiritual teachings.
- Principles: Bahá'í social teachings.
- History: Bahá'u'lláh and his covenant.
- Scripture: Bahá'í sacred texts and inspired guidance.
- Institutions: The Bahá'í Administrative Order.
- Building community: What Bahá'ís do.
- Social action: Bahá'í social and economic development projects.
- Public discourse: The Bahá'í International Community.
- Vision: Foundations for a future golden age.

With features including a glossary of terms, and references to the Bahá'í writings throughout, this is the ideal text for students and interested readers wanting to familiarize themselves with the Bahá'í Faith.

**Christopher Buck** is an independent scholar and former professor at Michigan State University, USA; Quincy University, USA; Millikin University, USA; and Carleton University, Canada.

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# BAHÁ'Í FAITH

## THE BASICS

Christopher Buck

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*Dedicated to my dear wife, Nahzy Abadi Buck,  
and our two sons, Takur Buck and Taraz Buck.*





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Advanced studies of the Bahá'í Faith must first begin with basics, which is one reason why this book, *Bahá'í Faith: The Basics*, may be of interest—not only to those readers who have little familiarity with the Bahá'í Faith, but to those readers who already have some knowledge of the Faith as well.

First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith (Bahá'í World Centre, Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel), for its kind permission (granted on 27 March 2020) to quote rather extensively from the Bahá'í writings and authoritative sources, which are readily available to the interested public—and in the public interest—on the “Bahá'í Reference Library: Authoritative Writings and Guidance” website at [bahai.org](http://bahai.org). Inclusion of a rich array of Bahá'í primary sources will put readers in touch with the heart and soul of the Bahá'í worldview, which is universal and unifying in its vision and mission which, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892, prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith), is to “unify the world” (public letter to Napoleon III, quoted in Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, BRL).

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The cover photograph is courtesy of Getty Images, which provides this caption: “Detail of the flower-shaped dome at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Santiago, October 13, 2016. The temple belonging to the Bahá'í Faith, an independent religion that originated over 150 years ago in Iran and has a temple in each continental area. The Bahá'í House of Worship in South America opens its doors on October 19, 2016. (Photo credit: Martin Bernetti/AFP via Getty Images.)” Martin Bernetti is a photojournalist (Chief of photography for the Agence France Presse), who lives and works in Santiago, the capital and largest city of Chile.

I also had great pleasure of working with my editors at Routledge—Rebecca Shillabeer (Senior Editor, Routledge Religion), Amy Doffegnies, PhD (Editorial Assistant, Routledge Religion) and Rennie Alphonsa (Senior Project Manager at Deanta, a publishing production company based in Dublin, Ireland)—for all their excellent work in bringing this introductory book, *Bahá'í Faith: The Basics*, to each and every one of you, my esteemed readers.



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# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH?

### A NEW WORLD RELIGION

The Bahá'í Faith is an independent world religion, which began in 19th-century Persia (present-day Iran) and is now established in virtually every country and territory around the world (except for North Korea and the Vatican City State). The Bahá'í Faith therefore is a global community. Although relatively small in numbers, the rapid “diffusion” (or spread) is quite remarkable, given the relatively recent appearance of the Bahá'í religion on the historical horizon. The purpose of the Bahá'í Faith is to “unify the world.” This vision and mandate has inspired many to join the Bahá'í religion, in which peace is made sacred, and powerful social principles are promoted and put into practice in order to build and/or strengthen those institutional foundations upon which world peace and prosperity may be based. “Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice,” wrote Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith: “No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation” (quoted by the Universal House of Justice, April 2017, BRL).

True to its purpose, the Bahá'í religion is truly worldwide. Around 2,100 indigenous tribal, ethnic, and racial groups are represented in the worldwide Bahá'í community, which currently has 188 national councils that oversee Bahá'í community life in their respective

regions. Bahá'í scriptures and prayers have been translated into over 800 languages. In September 2018, for instance, a collection of Bahá'í prayers, translated into the Maori language with the assistance of Dr. Tom Roa, professor of Maori and Indigenous Studies at the University of Waikato, was published in New Zealand.

To illustrate the recent growth of the Bahá'í Faith, the following concrete examples may be given. There are now ten Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the world, located in: (1) Wilmette, Illinois, United States (opened in 1953); (2) Kampala, Uganda (1961); (3) Sydney, Australia (1961); (4) Frankfurt, Germany (1964); (5) Panama City, Panama (1972); (6) Apia, Samoa (1984); (7) New Delhi, India (1986); (8) Santiago, Chile (2016); (9) Battambang, Cambodia (2017); and (10) Norte del Cauca, Colombia (2018). Plans are underway to build national Houses of Worship in: Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (design unveiled on 21 March 2018); and in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, design announced on 2 July 2020). Local Houses of Worship are also being constructed in: Tanna, Vanuatu (design revealed on 18 June 2017); Matunda Soy, Kenya (design disclosed on 15 April 2018); and Bihar Sharif, India (designed publicized on 29 April 2020).

Given its impressive geographic spread as the world's most widely diffused religion in the world today (second only to Christianity), the Bahá'í Faith is increasingly attracting interest. Christianity, of course, remains the world's largest religion, with approximately 2.3 billion followers (as of 2015), while the Bahá'í Faith numbers only around seven million adherents. This notable difference in size is directly related to the relative age of each faith. Christianity is over 2,000 years old, whereas the Bahá'í Faith, as of 20 March 2020, is 177 years old, considering that Bahá'í history began in 1844.

## PURPOSE OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

A young, independent world religion—co-founded by the Báb in 1844 and by Bahá'u'lláh in 1863—the Bahá'í Faith claims to have the blueprint to usher in a future golden age of world civilization. Time will tell. Bahá'ís are confident that, over time, the Bahá'í religion will fulfill its purpose, and will contribute greatly to the peace and prosperity of the world. The how and why will be explained further in this book.

Like other world religions, the Bahá'í Faith teaches how to live a better life—morally, ethically, and spiritually. The distinctive feature of the Bahá'í religion is its emphasis on promoting unity, from family relations to international relations. With this in mind, it's easy to see how the Bahá'í Faith also teaches how to live a better life socially and globally. The teachings of the Bahá'í religion originate with Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892) who was born in Persia (present-day Iran) and who, as a prisoner of the Ottoman Empire, was exiled to Acre (Akka), Palestine (present-day Israel) which is how the Bahá'í World Centre was established on the slopes of Mt. Carmel in Haifa, Israel. The Bahá'í Shrines and Gardens are now a place of pilgrimage for Bahá'ís around the world and was declared a “World Heritage Site” by the United Nations in 2008 (UNESCO 2019). This book will serve as an introduction to the “basics” of the Bahá'í Faith.

## THE “ONENESS OF GOD”

“Unity” is the watchword of the Bahá'í religion. In a nutshell, its teachings revolve around the “oneness of God,” the “oneness of humankind,” and the “oneness of religions.”

Briefly, the first of these three onenesses is the belief in one God. Thus, the Bahá'í Faith, along with Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other religions, is a “monotheistic” religion. God is regarded as an “unknowable essence,” beyond the reach and ken of human understanding. In such case, God is the supreme “mystery”—yet with the greatest number of clues throughout the universe. Creation being God's handiwork, Bahá'ís believe, there is nothing in creation that does not reflect some quality or attribute of its maker. Even so, God remains beyond comprehension. After all, the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. In short, God can be apprehended, but not comprehended. In other words, while some things may be known about God, God, who knows all things, cannot be known directly or fully. This may seem paradoxical, especially considering the Bahá'í noonday prayer, which states, in part: “I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, BRL). That is to say, to know and to love God is possible to the extent that God has revealed something of the divine nature and purpose through the prophets and messengers that God has sent in the course of human history.



Put differently, how is it that Bahá'ís—or anyone, for that matter—can believe in, love, and worship a God who cannot truly be known, fathomed, or otherwise understood? The answer is that God sends prophets, messengers, spiritual teachers (known by different names and terms of reference) to reveal the will of God and divine teachings for the betterment of humankind. These teachers are typically the founders of the world's religions. They appear throughout history and serve to enlighten humanity in their part of the world. Bahá'ís take a bird's-eye view of the world's religious history and call this process “Progressive Revelation.” So, not only do spiritual teachers bring timeless—and timely—moral, spiritual, and social truths, their teachings are also typically fuller and more complete than the ones brought before. Bahá'ís believe that the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh represent the will of God for this day and age.

## THE ONENESS OF HUMANKIND

The second “oneness” is the idea that humanity is an extended family, to use one metaphor. As Bahá'u'lláh has famously said: “The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, BRL). Like family, all human beings are related and interrelated. This is understood to be scientifically true, as well as spiritually true. The goal of the Bahá'í religion is to make this socially true as well. Bahá'í social teachings all support this overarching goal of promoting the “consciousness of the oneness of humankind” and of taking practical steps to eliminate prejudices of all kinds—whether racial, religious, ethnic, national, gender-based, class-based, etc.—which pose the major barriers to a united world. As previously mentioned, Bahá'ís believe that the will of God for this day and age is that the world should become unified. Humanity, given its spiritual and social evolution, has reached the threshold of its long-awaited “maturity.” So, now is the right time for the world to come together. World unity, therefore, is not simply a utopian dream, but a practical necessity, on which the world's future survival, as well as peace and prosperity, ultimately depends. As Bahá'u'lláh has stated: “The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, BRL).

## THE ONENESS OF RELIGION

The third oneness concerns the essential harmony of the world's religions. This teaching does not overlook the many differences that separate religions today. Sectarianism, religious prejudice, religious persecution, interreligious violence, and even interreligious wars (especially those involving terrorism) remain a seemingly intractable global problem. One approach to solving this problem is to look at similarities among religions, rather than focusing on differences. Differences can also be regarded in a positive light. The Bahá'í Faith and values "unity in diversity" and only criticizes differences if they are the cause of social conflict and injustice.

## BAHÁ'Í SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

Social principles may be thought of as the collective morals and ethics of the world. Principles embody values and operate as mandates for social action. The Bahá'í Faith has a number of social principles, a few of which will be described here. Justice, for instance, is highly valued in Bahá'í teachings. Social principles, if they attract widespread consensus and are put into general practice, have the power to transform society, each in their own way. The Bahá'í teachings show a keen awareness of the power of such principles. Social principles can be secular or religious. The Bahá'í religion, renders each secular social principle—that forms part and parcel of the overall Bahá'í social agenda—as sacred. This is a process that the present writer has referred to as "sacralizing the secular."

Among the many Bahá'í social principles, the most well known are world peace and prosperity, the equality of women and men, the harmony of science and religion, spiritual solutions to economic problems (in which economic values should be based on human values), universal education, the adoption of an auxiliary world language, and so forth. The present writer has, in fact, identified over 50 Bahá'í principles of unity (Buck 2015b). This is simply to illustrate how deep and pervasive the Bahá'í teachings on unity actually are.

## EQUALITY OF WOMEN AND MEN

The equality of women and men, for instance, is a major Bahá'í social principle. It is said that the Bahá'í Faith may well be the first world

religion to have proclaimed the full social and spiritual equality of women and men from the very inception of that religion. Of course, today, most other religions also espouse gender equality. This is a good thing. Bahá'ís do not claim “ownership” of this, or any other, major social principle. Considering that around half of the world's population is comprised of women—a vast reservoir of social capital and potential that remains largely untapped and underdeveloped—this social principle is of huge importance, and should receive far more attention than it currently does.

## HARMONY OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

The harmony of science and religion—another major social principle as well—is also of enormous importance. Another way of looking at this principle is to consider science as the major source of empirical knowledge of the physical universe, and religion as a major source of knowledge of the spiritual dimension of the universe. (Any worldview that denies the spiritual dimension of reality may be referred to as philosophical materialism.) Without science, religion can become superstitious. Without religion, science can become unethical, even destructive. When the two major spheres of human knowledge and social influence—science and religion—exist in perfect harmony with one another, an ideal situation results, whereby spiritual and scientific knowledge work together in perfect concert to promote a better life for all.

## SYSTEMATIC GROWTH AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

For the Bahá'í Faith to serve a beneficial influence on societies worldwide, it first has to grow. The greater its growth, the greater its potential influence. To that end, since 1996, Bahá'í institutions have adopted a systematic approach to further expanding the growth of the Bahá'í community—what geographers call “expansion diffusion,” or what sociologists have referred to as “generating and applying spiritual capital” (although these academic terms of art never occur in Bahá'í discourse). In other words, Bahá'ís around the world have embarked on a coherent plan of individual and social transformation. Today, Bahá'ís worldwide are engaged in the systematic process of “community

building,” which is all about establishing a new civilization and diffusing Bahá’í principles throughout society and with the cooperation of others. This is achieved through offering children’s classes for moral education, by organizing “junior youth spiritual empowerment programs,” by hosting devotional meetings for prayer and worship, and by offering study circles for community consolidation and skill-building to equip Bahá’ís and friends to better serve their local communities. “Service” to humanity is seen as spirituality in action, where the Bahá’í religion, along with other religions, is put to good use for the betterment of the world. Such emphasis on service is the primary way in which Bahá’ís “practice what they preach,” as it were. This systematic Bahá’í plan will be explained in some detail later in the book.

## BAHÁ’Í ADMINISTRATION

That said, there are no “preachers” in the Bahá’í religion, which has no clergy. Instead, the Bahá’í Faith is organized and run by elected councils. Bahá’í elections, in fact, are rather unique since nominating candidates and campaigning are not allowed. Voting is conducted prayerfully by secret ballot, in which the members of Bahá’í councils are elected by “plurality” vote, meaning that the nine individuals who receive the top number of votes are elected to a given Bahá’í council. There are local, regional, national, and international Bahá’í councils. These are called “Spiritual Assemblies,” except for Regional Bahá’í Councils, and the international Bahá’í council known as the Universal House of Justice, first elected in 1963, and based in Haifa, Israel.

## ORIGINS OF THE BAHÁ’Í FAITH

The Bahá’í World Centre is based in Israel—a “Holy Land” for several religions. Historically, the Bahá’í Faith has its origins in Islam, in 19th-century Persia, just as Christianity has its origins in Judaism, in the Holy Land. As will be discussed in some detail in the chapter on Bahá’í history, the Bahá’í religion evolved and developed into the independent world religion that it is today. While there are many Islamic terms and concepts to be found in the Bahá’í scriptures, Bahá’ís do not regard themselves as Muslims. (By the same token, Muslims do not regard Bahá’ís as Muslims, either.) That said, Bahá’ís do their best to promote respect for Islam and all Muslims. Unfortunately, this

respect is not always reciprocated, as in the case of present-day Islamic Republic of Iran, which continues to persecute Bahá'ís. This problematic situation will be discussed in more detail later in this book.

## BAHÁ'Í CONSULTATION

Without clergy, Bahá'ís administer their affairs through consultation, which is a tool for enlightened decision-making and for problem-solving. Bahá'ís have developed the art of consultation in some new and interesting ways. For instance, when offering an idea, an individual does so as a contribution to the general discussion and is not (or should not be) attached either to the idea or to the outcome. In this sense, there is no “ownership” of suggestions or recommendations. In addition to local, regional, national, and international Bahá'í councils, consultation also takes part in the “Nineteen-Day Feast.” Typically, a Bahá'í Feast consists of devotional, consultative, and social portions. During the consultative session, Bahá'ís discuss their community affairs and, if so inspired, offer their individual suggestions and collective recommendations for the consideration of their Local Spiritual Assembly. Their local Bahá'í council may then, in turn, consult on these ideas and, if so, may convey its decisions to the Bahá'í community at the next Feast. Bahá'í councils, in general, are not only concerned with the administrative affairs of the Bahá'í communities which they oversee and serve, but have a mandate to contribute to the commonweal and general welfare of the greater communities in which they operate.

## THE BAHÁ'Í CALENDAR

Most religions have their own sacred calendars. The Bahá'í Faith is no exception. Its calendar is rather unique, in fact. It consists of 19 months of 19 days each, with several days rounding out the calendar year. Each weekday, each day of the month, each month, each year, and any cycle of years is given a special name, each representing an attribute or quality of God, that can also be expressed as a human virtue. The names of the 19 Bahá'í months, in Arabic and English, are as follows: (1) *Bahá* (Splendor); (2) *Jalál* (Glory); (3) *Jamál* (Beauty); (4) *'Azamat* (Grandeur); (5) *Nur* (Light); (6) *Rahmat* (Mercy); (7) *Kalimát* (Words);

(8) *Kamál* (Perfection); (9) *Asmá'* (Names); (10) *Izzat* (Might); (11) *Mashíyyat* (Will); (12) *Ilm* (Knowledge); (13) *Qudrat* (Power); (14) *Qawl* (Speech); (15) *Masá'il* (Questions); (16) *Sharaf* (Honor); (17) *Sultán* (Sovereignty); (18) *Mulk* (Dominion); (19) *Alá* (Loftiness).

The precise name for the Bahá'í calendar is the *Badí'* (“Unique” or “Wondrous”) calendar. It originated with the Báb (“the Gate”), who founded the Bábí religion, which soon evolved into the Bahá'í Faith, established by Bahá'u'lláh in 1863. Adopting and modifying the *Badí'* Calendar for use by the Bahá'í community, Bahá'u'lláh invested time itself with spiritual significance. He transformed time by the naming of weekdays, days of the month, months, years, and cycles of years after spiritual perfections that can be translated into goodly virtues, such as *Jamál* (Beauty), *Ilm* (Knowledge), *Sharaf* (Honor), and *A'zamat* (Grandeur), which are names of four of the 19 Bahá'í months.

These dynamic “names of God” each highlight a distinctive quality of sterling character and human nobility, in a process of transformation that could be called “theophoric metamorphosis” (Buck and Melton, “Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship,” 2011). Literally, the term “theophoric,” as its Greek root indicates, means “God-bearing.” Here, the names of God may be conceived as qualities or, better still, as powers of God that individuals can potentially develop. In the Báb's *Kitáb al-Asmá'* (*Book of [Divine] Names*), which exceeds 3,000 pages and is said to be “the largest revealed book in sacred history” (Saiedi 2008, 36), the Báb treats human beings as reflections of divine names and attributes. To the extent that a person is a “bearer” of one of the “names” (i.e. qualities or powers) of God, that individual is empowered to express that quality in human action. Through the progressive spiritualization of all persons, the Báb wished to transform all of reality into “mirrors” reflecting the perfections represented by these divine names. Of course, the mere fact that the name of a given Bahá'í month suggests a spiritual quality that can be acquired as a human virtue does not, alone, accomplish that result. No burst of insight will emanate from the simple recitation of, say, “Grandeur.” Meditating on a virtue and then manifesting it is part and parcel of Bahá'í self-transformation. Each of these goodly qualities can be expressed as goodly virtues in our thoughts and actions. This is just one example of how the Bahá'í religion cultivates good character, civic virtues, community service, and unity in all walks of life.

## AVOIDANCE OF PARTISAN POLITICS

In this way, Bahá'ís do their part to contribute to society, free of all partisan politics, which Bahá'ís regard as divisive. Since the purpose of the Bahá'í Faith is to promote unity, participation in partisan politics will be contrary to that purpose. That said, Bahá'ís have a healthy patriotism for the countries in which they respectively live, superseded by a wider loyalty as “world citizens.” Bahá'ís are concerned with the “body politic,” as it were—in other words, with the world at large. The Bahá'í worldview is universal in scope, all-inclusive in its outlook, cosmopolitan in its outreach, and egalitarian in practice.

## VISION OF THE FUTURE

Not only do Bahá'ís have a clear purpose and mission to promote unity far and wide, but they have a vision of a future golden age as well. This inspires confidence in the process of promoting unity, with the assurance that “peace is inevitable.” That peace is inevitable does not mean that there is a fixed time for it since the conditions for world peace have to be ripe. So, the preconditions for peace can vary, depending on time and circumstance. Peace is a process. It is gradual and, ideally, progressive. The Bahá'í Faith envisions the advent of the “Lesser Peace” (i.e. a political peace, with progressively closer-knit harmony among races, religions, and nations) followed by the “Most Great Peace” (a world commonwealth leading to a golden age of world civilization). This grand vision is not merely visionary, but is a mission, with clear objectives and concrete steps for its realization. In that sense, the Bahá'í religion is an authentic peace movement in which utopia becomes utilitarian. World peace requires world effort. To mobilize the social forces and to optimize the social conditions needed to bring about world peace requires a comprehensive vision and plan, which the Bahá'í Faith offers. In this sense, the Bahá'í concept of “salvation” is both individual and social.

The Bahá'í Faith, from its inception, has precociously anticipated the emergence of a global society. The Bahá'í Faith positively contributes a set of corresponding universal values on which such world unity may solidly be based. Thus, the Bahá'í Faith presents a remarkable case study of a global community in the making, i.e. actively engaging in the process of its own enlightened, self-directed development.

As such, the Bahá'í religion offers a social model that demonstrates that world unity—in which races, religions, and nations prospectively can be united in a common global civilization—can be successfully achieved.

Until fairly recently, the Bahá'í Faith has been little known. But it is emerging from its former obscurity, as readers of this book, *Bahá'í Faith: The Basics*, may well appreciate. Suffice it to say that, if Bahá'ís succeed in promoting peace and prosperity by way of fostering the unity of races, religions, and nations worldwide, then the world will be a better place—and the Bahá'í Faith will be better known and appreciated as well.

## MISCONCEPTIONS OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Those who know of the Bahá'í Faith may have a limited or even incorrect understanding of it. For instance, a common misconception is that the Bahá'í religion is somehow “eclectic” or “syncretic”—that is, a mix of religious teachings adapted from other religions. This is far from the truth, considering that the Bahá'í scriptures are revealed, in large part, by its founder, Bahá'u'lláh, who was quite prolific and wrote a large volume of works that Bahá'ís consider to be sacred texts. Taken together, these texts are estimated to comprise the equivalent of some one hundred books. In addition to Bahá'u'lláh's writings, there are the writings of two other central figures of the Bahá'í Faith: the Báb (1819–1850) who foretold the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), who was Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son and designated successor, interpreter, and exemplar of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. In addition to these, the writings of Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), although not considered sacred scripture, are regarded as authoritative. Also authoritative are the letters issued by the Universal House of Justice (1963–present). So, there is no need for anything to be borrowed, as it were, from other religious traditions.

## PURPOSE OF *BAHÁ'Í FAITH: THE BASICS*

This book, *Bahá'í Faith: The Basics*, is a primer—a relatively brief introduction. Advanced studies on the Bahá'í Faith must also begin with basics. Routledge's *The Basics* series therefore offers an ideal introduction to the study of world religions, including study of the Bahá'í Faith itself. The Bahá'í religion is relatively new on the



historical horizon and has only recently begun to emerge from its former obscurity. In the pages that follow, information is presented in an informal, yet systematic and fairly comprehensive way, that can be easily understood by just about any informed reader who is interested in learning more about the Bahá'í Faith, even if only out of mere curiosity. This book can be read from start to finish, or the chapters may be read in any order desired, as the chapters themselves are more or less self-contained units within this book.

Learning about world religions prepares one for an increasingly globalized world, in which “spiritual literacy” can prove meaningful and possibly useful as well. *Bahá'í Faith: The Basics* offers essential information to assist readers in understanding and appreciating the ways in which the Bahá'í community fits into the larger picture of present and future social development. The information that this book provides on Bahá'í Faith is a contribution to “spiritual literacy,” as educators say. Learning about world religions is a useful, and perhaps necessary, part of understanding what our increasingly globalized world is all about. Not only are Bahá'í social principles global in scope, they may even play an auxiliary role in the globalization process itself. As a former professor of world religions, the present writer's objective is to further promote “spiritual literacy” by way of providing some fundamental information about the Bahá'í religion, ideally in an interesting and engaging way.

The present book will include brief selections from representative Bahá'í scriptures throughout (primarily presented in text boxes) so that readers can read and experience the rich quality of these sacred texts. Bahá'u'lláh's writings alone comprise an estimated equivalent of one hundred volumes. One rather unique feature of the present book is that one chapter—Chapter Five: “Bahá'í Scripture and Authoritative Writings: Bahá'í Sacred Texts and Inspired Guidance”—is devoted to Bahá'í scriptures, in which selections are offered to give the reader a first-hand sense of how “the sacred” inspires, motivates, and guides Bahá'ís in their individual and collective lives. In certain parts of this book, the structure closely follows information that is presented on official Bahá'í websites today, in order to better ensure that *Bahá'í Faith: The Basics* offers an accurate and contemporary portrayal of this emerging world religion. Doing so ensures that information presented in this book is consistent with how the Bahá'í Faith is publicly represented on official Bahá'í websites.

Since this chapter is introductory and therefore brief, each of the foregoing Bahá'í precepts and practices will be explained more fully throughout the rest of this book.

## SUMMARY

- The purpose of the Bahá'í Faith is to “unify the world.”
- The Bahá'í Faith was co-founded by the Báb (1819–1850) in 1844 and by Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892) in 1863.
- The Bahá'í Faith is the second-most widely diffused religion in the world today.
- Since 1996, Bahá'ís around the world have embarked on a systematic plan of individual and social transformation.

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