

DESERT ROSE BAHA'I  
INSTITUTE

# BAHA'I FAITH: THE BASICS

FEBRUARY 26, 2021

Christopher  
Buck

# Bahá'í Faith

the basics

lies in the Bábí  
Bahá'í Religions  
VOLUME  
FIFTY-FIVE

# BEING HUMAN

BAHA'I PERSPECTIVES ON ISLAM,  
MODERNITY, AND PEACE

**Todd Lawson**

"This excellent, beautifully organized introduction provides an accurate and unusually rich entrée into a relatively new and still somehow frequently misunderstood 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 ..., 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**

**Professor Emeritus of Islamic  
Thought, University of Toronto**



“One outstanding feature of this book ... is its contemporary relevance. Even well-informed readers could not possibly be fully aware of the overview presented by Buck of all the multifarious activities taking place in the Bahá’í world community. ... Buck’s treatment of the material is throughout well-researched, and rich in the detail that an alert reader expects. In sum, despite its unpretentious title, this book is more than the Basics of the Bahá’í Faith. ... it presents a complete contemporary picture of the remarkably diverse economic, social, and spiritual activities ... by the Bahá’í community in all countries of the world.” (See full review [here](#).)

## **Jack McLean**

**Author of *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi***

# BAHÁ'Í FAITH

## THE BASICS

Christopher Buck

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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).

Thanks also to fellow Bahá'í attorney, Anton Ware, Esq. (based in Shanghai, China, and who speaks and reads Mandarin Chinese), for directing me (on 26 March 2020) to Nima Masroori, Esq., general counsel and legal affairs contact person at the Bahá'í World Centre

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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

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## BELIEFS

### BAHÁ'Í SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS

The Bahá'í Faith, as previously stated, is an independent world religion, with faith-communities established in nearly every country of the world. Bahá'í teachings offer sound principles, precepts, and practices for individuals and society alike. As with world religions generally, beliefs are ultimately a matter of individual faith and reason. So, it is up to the reader's own judgment as to how true, valid, and relevant Bahá'í beliefs and doctrines may be, as well as Bahá'í moral, ethical, and social principles. In any case, it is good to learn about the beliefs of religions generally, as this increases one's own “spiritual literacy,” as religious studies professors often say, and enriches one's understanding and outlook as well. Therefore, before presenting Bahá'í beliefs in detail, it may be useful to say a few words about approaching world religions generally, as such an approach may be applied to the Bahá'í Faith particularly.

#### A USEFUL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF WORLD RELIGIONS, INCLUDING THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The following approach to the teaching of all religions has been used by the present writer in the course of teaching world religions survey courses. At the beginning of each semester, an introductory lecture,

# CHAPTER 1

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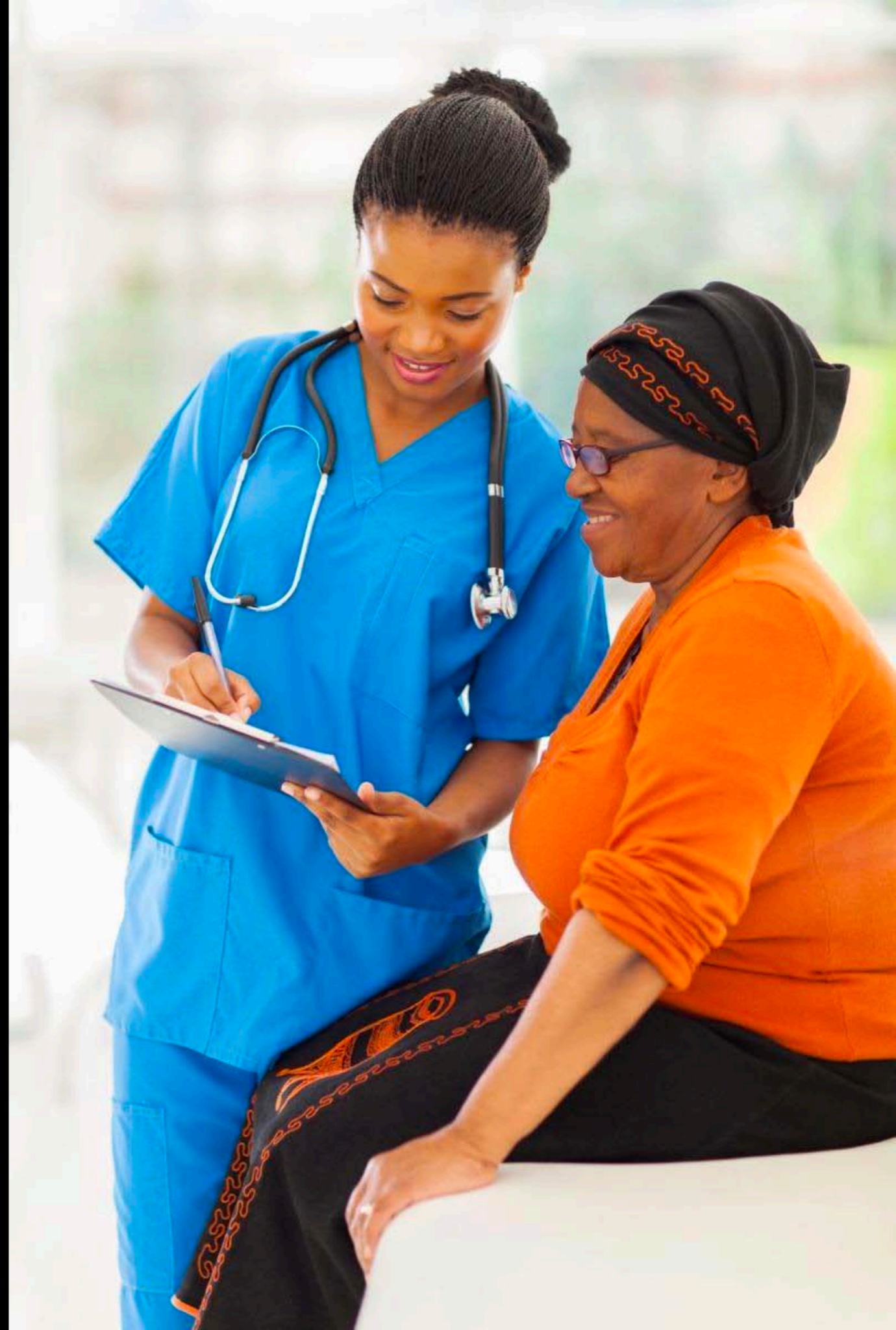
# CHAPTER 2

- A USEFUL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF WORLD RELIGIONS, INCLUDING THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH
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- (\*See below.)



# TWO KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the human predicament according to one world religion?
- What is the offer of salvation, liberation or harmony given by that same world religion?



# Disease/Cure Model

## A Paradigm Analysis of World Religions

The Prophets of God should be regarded as physicians whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples, that, through the spirit of oneness, they may heal the sickness of a divided humanity. ... The whole of mankind is in the grip of manifold ills. Strive, therefore, to save its life through the wholesome medicine which the almighty hand of the unerring Physician hath prepared.

– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, 80.

social ill facing humanity today. It is also obvious that the solution to this problem—or cure for this illness, to invoke the medical metaphor—is world unity.

## BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AS THE DIVINE PHYSICIAN FOR THIS DAY AND AGE

The Bahá'í Faith, as said, has come to unify the world. This will not happen miraculously or magically. It will be the result of hard work, guided and directed by the Bahá'í teachings, which provide a blueprint for building a unified world. This blueprint is clear and compelling. Its focus on unity is profound, yet pragmatic. So, it makes perfect sense that the type of salvation—individual and social—that the Bahá'í Faith offers is that of unity, from family relations to international relations. One representative Bahá'í text that analyzes the human predicament from the standpoint of a disease/cure approach is as follows:

The Prophets of God should be regarded as physicians whose task is to foster the well-being of the world and its peoples, that, through the spirit of oneness, they may heal the sickness of a divided humanity. To none is given the right to question their words or disparage their conduct, for they are the only ones who can claim to have understood the patient and to have correctly diagnosed its ailments. No man, however acute his perception, can ever hope to reach the heights which the wisdom and understanding of the Divine Physician have attained. Little wonder, then, if the treatment prescribed by the physician in this day should not be found to be identical with that which he prescribed before. How could it be otherwise when the ills affecting the sufferer necessitate at every stage of his sickness a special remedy? ... These are not days of prosperity and triumph. The whole of mankind is in the grip of manifold ills. Strive, therefore, to save its life through the wholesome medicine which the almighty hand of the unerring Physician hath prepared.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, BRL)

The Bahá'í Faith defines salvation both individually and collectively; both are dynamically interrelated. Each is bound up with the other. The destiny of the individual is connected with the destiny of society, and vice versa. In the “Tablet of the World” (1891), Bahá'u'lláh declared, “Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined

to your own self” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, BRL). Societies are in need of salvation as well. A spiritual solution, at the level of principle, and a practical application, at the level of implementation, is needed to address and resolve each and every pressing social problem that demands attention today. One way to refer to this betterment of society as a whole is “social salvation,” although this term is not used in the Bahá'í writings (sacred scriptures) themselves. Bahá'u'lláh expresses the idea of social salvation in this way:

That which is conducive to the regeneration of the world and the salvation of the peoples and kindreds of the earth hath been sent down from the heaven of the utterance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. Give ye a hearing ear to the counsels of the Pen of Glory.

(Bahá'u'lláh, “Book of the Covenant,” *Tablets*, BRL)

In this context, “salvation” is one of individual and social transformation and, as such, is not quite the same as the traditional Christian doctrine of Christ’s “atonement” which is said to primarily effect salvation from sin individually. Bahá'u'lláh’s mission and purpose, as expressed in terms of salvation, is to bring about world unity. Of course, “unity” is a deep, profound and complex concept.

Suffice it to say that the solutions that the Bahá'í Faith offers to the challenges and crises facing humanity today are both individual and collective in nature. When problems engulf the world as a whole, then solutions must be equally global in scope. Around 1870, Bahá'u'lláh, in his open epistle, or public letter, to Queen Victoria (1837–1901), proclaimed,

That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons*, BRL)

In this passage, Bahá'u'lláh proclaims to Queen Victoria that he is the “skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician” whom God has sent for this day and age. This view of Bahá'u'lláh as the divine Physician is an important Bahá'í metaphor, and is a key to understanding and appreciating a core Bahá'í belief.

# DISEASE/CURE MODEL OF SALVATION

- In Western Christianity, humanity is plagued with the problem of “sin.” Therefore, Christianity offers “salvation from sin.”
- Similarly, in early Buddhism, the “First Noble Truth” is that all life is suffering. So, it is equally logical that early Buddhism offered “liberation from suffering.”
- ***From the perspective of the Bahá'í Faith—a new world religion that this book introduces—the human predicament is that of profound disunity, from family relations to international relations.*** A Bahá'í perspective on the human predicament may be further elaborated. On 20 January 1882, Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, framed the world's overarching problem so:

NO TWO MEN CAN BE FOUND WHO [ARE]  
OUTWARDLY AND INWARDLY UNITED.

- ***No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united.*** The evidences of discord and malice are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony and union. ***The Great Being saith: O well-beloved ones! 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.*** We cherish the hope that the light of justice may shine upon the world and sanctify it from tyranny. (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, BRL)
- Note how both problem and solution are presented here. The statement—“No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united”—is clear, yet enigmatic.

“World Religions in a Nutshell,” would be presented to students in order to orient them to the “inner logic” (in the informal sense of the term) of world religions, to better understand how religious beliefs and actions cohere as dynamic worldviews. One useful approach to the introductory study of world religions is by way of a “disease/cure” model, which can be conceived as a problem/solution approach to the world.

Religions, simply put, try to cure the world’s ills. The “cure” depends on the “illness” being treated. As the diagnoses vary, so do the remedies. The success rates of such cures vary as well. With each new social problem, moreover, a new remedy is needed. The illness/cure approach is an attempt to understand something of the internal logic of each religious system’s way of coping with the human existential challenge. Although these paradigms differ, whatever solution, or remedy, a given religion may offer will naturally be in response to the overarching problem that a particular religion may set forth.

The world, after all, is full of problems that cry out for solutions. Religions offer solutions at the level of spiritual, moral, ethical, and social teachings. These solutions, of course, vary, and are often quite distinctive. So an appreciation of how a religion approaches the “human predicament,” as scholars refer to it, can offer real insights into the inward rationale that motivates a particular religion’s outward beliefs and practices. “Human predicament” means the fundamental problem facing humanity as a whole. How a religion responds to the human predicament, of course, varies, and repays serious study with a deeper understanding and appreciation for each religion’s special outlook on life. World religions, seen in this light, are systems of salvation, liberation, or harmony. The salvation, liberation, or harmony that each world religion offers is in direct response to the human predicament, as perceived by each particular religion. The human predicament, as religiously defined, changes over time, and is partly a function of the day and age under consideration. Today’s priorities and challenges are not the same as yesterday’s.

Three simple (or simplified) examples—that of Christianity, Buddhism, and the Bahá’í Faith—should suffice to illustrate this point. In offering these three examples, no attempt is made to summarily reduce Christianity, Buddhism, or the Bahá’í Faith to the level of the illness/cure analogy itself, which is used primarily for illustrative purposes. Religions, after all, are complex systems and cannot—and

therefore should not—be oversimplified. Over time, moreover, religions tend to diversify, often as a result of theological differences that may arise, whether by internal debates or outright schisms. Cultural differences may also play a role in the phenomenological variances that manifest in a particular religion, as it may expand geographically and as it may respond to varying circumstances historically. So, the examples of Christian, Buddhist, and Bahá’í soteriologies (doctrines of salvation, liberation, or harmony) are offered here primarily for illustrative purposes. The main point here is that religions present and promote their own overarching paradigms of salvation, liberation, or harmony, as the case may be. In brief, these three illness/cure paradigms, offered as examples of such an approach, are as follows:

- In Western Christianity, humanity is plagued with the problem of “sin.” Therefore, Christianity offers “salvation from sin.”
- Similarly, in early Buddhism, the “First Noble Truth” is that all life is suffering. So, it is equally logical that early Buddhism offered “liberation from suffering.”
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No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united. The evidences of discord and malice are apparent everywhere, though all were made for harmony and union. The Great Being saith: O well-beloved ones! 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. We cherish the hope that the light of justice may shine upon the world and sanctify it from tyranny.

(Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, BRL)

Note how both problem and solution are presented here. The statement—“No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united”—is clear, yet enigmatic. What is obvious is that the human predicament, as defined by Bahá’u’lláh, is that of profound and pervasive disunity. Such worldwide discord represents the gravest

# DISEASE/CURE MODEL OF RELIGIONS: EIGHT EXAMPLES

- Here are the problem/solution paradigms that Stephen Prothero presents for the eight religions he covers in his book, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010) — see related article [here](#):
- Yoruba (West African): Problem is disconnection/Solution is connection with our destinies, to one another, and to sacred power.
- Hinduism: Problem is the perpetual cycle of birth, death, rebirth/Solution is liberation.
- Buddhism: Problem is suffering/Solution is awakening.
- Confucianism: Problem is chaos/Solution is proper social order.
- Taoism: Problem is lifelessness/Solution is flourishing, to live life to its fullest.
- Judaism: Problem is exile/Solution is to return to God.
- Christianity: Problem is sin/Solution is salvation.
- Islam: Problem is pride/Solution is submission.

# CHAPTER 3

- BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLES—NEW AND RENEWED
- The Bahá'í Faith, as noted earlier, is a new and independent world religion. This book, *Bahá'í Faith: The Basics*, is one introduction in a rich legacy of introductions to the Bahá'í Faith. ***So, it may be useful to consider how the Bahá'í Faith has been presented in the past, in order to appreciate some of its new and distinctive features in the present day. With the advent of the new religion, naturally, new religious teachings would be expected.*** This certainly holds true with the appearance of the Bahá'í Faith on the world's historical horizon, in the full glare of modernity.\*
- (\*See below.)



## PRINCIPLES BAHÁ'Í SOCIAL TEACHINGS

### BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLES—NEW AND RENEWED

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As readers will recall, Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892) had designated his eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), as the former's successor, interpreter, and exemplar. (See Chapter 4.) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks were many. His grandson and appointed successor, Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), wrote that 'Abdu'l-Bahá

had arisen not only to proclaim from pulpit and platform, in some of the chief capitals of Europe and in the leading cities of the North American continent, *the distinctive verities enshrined in His Father's Faith*, but to demonstrate as well the Divine origin of the Prophets gone before Him, and to disclose the nature of the tie binding them to that Faith.

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, BRL) (italics added)

## HISTORY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND HIS COVENANT

Originating in Persia (now Iran), the Bahá'í Faith is a world religion born in the full light of history, starting from the mid-19th century down to the present day. Today, in Haifa, Israel, the Bahá'í World Centre is established on the majestic slopes of Mount Carmel and attracts thousands of visitors and Bahá'í pilgrims each year. So impressive are its splendid gardens, shrines, and the architecture of its other edifices that, in 2008, the “Bahá'í Holy Places in Haifa and the Western Galilee” were declared a United Nations World Heritage Site. (See UNESCO 2019.) Attracting more than half a million visitors a year, this dignified site—known locally in Haifa and Akko as the “Bahá'í Gardens”—is one of the most popular destinations in the Middle East, visited not just by members of the Bahá'í Faith, but also by tourists, newlyweds for wedding pictures, and students on field trips from surrounding schools. Much Bahá'í history is enshrined in these “Bahá'í Holy Places in Haifa and the Western Galilee.”

This chapter briefly introduces the co-founders, central figures, and highest institution of the Bahá'í Faith: The Báb (1819–1850); Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892); 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921); Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957); and the Universal House of Justice (established in 1963). The Bahá'í Faith was founded by two messengers of God: the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Although the Báb preceded Bahá'u'lláh historically, the latter was born two years before the former. According to the Islamic

– 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

“I will speak to you  
concerning the special  
teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.”

2 December 1912

Talk at Home of Mr. and Mrs.  
Edward B. Kinney

780 West End Avenue, New York



## “Bahá’u’lláh has revealed certain new teachings”

“I will speak to you concerning the special teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. All the divine principles announced by the tongue of the Prophets of the past are to be found in the words of Bahá’u’lláh; but in addition to these He has *revealed certain new teachings which are not found in any of the sacred Books of former times*. I shall mention some of them; the others, which are many in number, may be found in the Books, Tablets and Epistles written by Bahá’u’lláh—such as the Hidden Words, the Glad Tidings, the Words of Paradise, Tajalliyát, Ṭarázát and others. Likewise, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas *there are new teachings which cannot be found in any of the past Books or Epistles of the Prophets.*”

– ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, qtd. in *Bahá’í Faith: The Basics*, p. 45.

they are old and familiar; we have heard them before.” Therefore, I will speak to you upon the distinctive characteristics of the manifestation of Bahá’u’lláh and prove that from every standpoint His Cause is distinguished from all others. It is distinguished by its didactic character and method of exposition, by its practical effects and application to present world conditions, but especially distinguished from the standpoint of its spread and progress.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, BRL)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s opening statement, at this public meeting held in the home of Bahá’í artist, Julia Thompson, is quoted, in full, for the simple reason that few, if any, other such declarations by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, available in English, state the case so clearly, i.e. that Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings are *sui generis* (Latin, literally “of its own kind”)—that is, unique in the history of religions. This same question, in fact, came up again a little over two weeks later. On Monday, 2 December 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave a talk in New York on the “the special teachings of Bahá’u’lláh” in direct response to the question: “You have asked me what new principles have been revealed by Him” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, BRL). In answer to this excellent question, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had responded:

I will speak to you concerning *the special teachings of Bahá’u’lláh*. All the divine principles announced by the tongue of the Prophets of the past are to be found in the words of Bahá’u’lláh; *but in addition to these He has revealed certain new teachings which are not found in any of the sacred Books of former times*. I shall mention some of them; the others, which are many in number, may be found in the Books, Tablets and Epistles written by Bahá’u’lláh—such as the Hidden Words, the Glad Tidings, the Words of Paradise, Tajalliyát, Ṭarázát and others. Likewise, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* there are *new teachings which cannot be found in any of the past Books or Epistles of the Prophets*. ...

1. A fundamental teaching of Bahá’u’lláh is the oneness of the world of humanity. ...
2. Another *new principle* revealed by Bahá’u’lláh is the injunction to investigate truth—that is to say, no man should blindly follow his ancestors and forefathers. ...
3. Bahá’u’lláh has announced that the foundation of all the religions of God is one, that oneness is truth and truth is oneness which does not admit of plurality. *This teaching is new and specialized to this Manifestation*.

4. He sets forth a *new principle* for this day in the announcement that religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind. ...
5. Furthermore, He proclaims that religion must be in harmony with science and reason. ... *The harmony of religious belief with reason is a new vista which Bahá’u’lláh has opened for the soul of man*.
6. He establishes the equality of man and woman. *This is peculiar to the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh*, for all other religions have placed man above woman.
7. A *new religious principle* is that prejudice and fanaticism—whether sectarian, denominational, patriotic or political—are destructive to the foundation of human solidarity; therefore, man should release himself from such bonds in order that the oneness of the world of humanity may become manifest.
8. Universal peace is assured by Bahá’u’lláh as a fundamental accomplishment of the religion of God—that peace shall prevail among nations, governments and peoples, among religions, races and all conditions of mankind. *This is one of the special characteristics of the Word of God revealed in this Manifestation*.
9. Bahá’u’lláh declares that all mankind should attain knowledge and acquire an education. This is a necessary principle of religious belief and observance, *characteristically new in this dispensation*.
10. He has set forth the solution and provided the remedy for the economic question. *No religious Books of the past Prophets speak of this important human problem*.
11. He has ordained and established the House of Justice. ... Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. ...
12. As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, *a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past*: It is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, BRL)  
(italics and numbers added)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explicitly cites some of Bahá’u’lláh’s most well-known “Tablets” (sacred writings)—“such as the Hidden Words, the Glad Tidings, the Words of Paradise, Tajalliyát, Ṭarázát and others” including the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*—although these texts were not widely available in the West at that time. (These Bahá’í sacred writings will be discussed in Chapter Five: “Scripture and Authoritative Writings: Bahá’í Sacred Texts and Inspired Guidance.”) After being asked which of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings were new, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave some definite and explicit

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- 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 453–457. Quoted in *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (pp. 45–46). Kindle Edition.

# 1. Search for Truth

*First among the great principles revealed by Him [Bahá'u'lláh] is that of the investigation of reality.* The meaning is that every individual member of humankind is exhorted and commanded to set aside superstitious beliefs, traditions and blind imitation of ancestral forms in religion and investigate reality for himself. Inasmuch as the fundamental reality is one, all religions and nations of the world will become one through investigation of reality. *The announcement of this principle is not found in any of the sacred Books of the past.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 49).

## 2. See Humankind as One

A second characteristic principle of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that which commands recognition of the oneness of the world of humanity. Addressing all mankind, He says, “Ye are all the leaves of one tree.” There are no differences or distinctions of race among you in the sight of God. ... ***No other scriptures contain such breadth and universality of statement; no other teachings proclaim this unequivocal principle of the solidarity of humanity.***

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 51).



### 3. See Religion as One

Bahá'u'lláh has announced that the foundation of all the religions of God is one, that oneness is truth and truth is oneness which does not admit of plurality. *This teaching is new and specialized to this Manifestation [Bahá'u'lláh].*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 53).

## 4. Religions Should Unify

Another fundamental announcement made by Bahá'u'lláh is that religion must be the source of unity and fellowship in the world. If it is productive of enmity, hatred and bigotry, the absence of religion would be preferable. *This is a new principle of revelation found only in the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh. ... He [Bahá'u'lláh] sets forth a new principle for this day* in the announcement that religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind. If it is the cause of discord and hostility, if it leads to separation and creates conflict, the absence of religion would be preferable in the world.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 54).

# 5. Religion Respects Science

Furthermore, He [Bahá'u'lláh] proclaims that religion must be in harmony with science and reason. If it does not conform to science and reconcile with reason, it is superstition. Down to the present day it has been customary for man to accept a religious teaching, even though it was not in accord with human reason and judgment. *The harmony of religious belief with reason is a new vista which Bahá'u'lláh has opened for the soul of man.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 56).

# 6. Women and Men Are Equal

Spiritually, women and men are equal, but, not socially—yet. “***Another [new] teaching,***” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá announced at the Thompson event, “***is that there shall be perfect equality between men and women***” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). This is both a mandate and prophecy. For ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, this issue had great social importance, and is a distinctive feature of the Bahá’í social agenda. Bahá’u’lláh “establishes the equality of man and woman,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared at the Kinney event, hastening to add: “***This is peculiar to the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, for all other religions have placed man above woman***” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 57).

# 7. Abolish Every Prejudice

Again, Bahá'u'lláh declares that all forms of prejudice among mankind must be abandoned and that until existing prejudices are entirely removed, the world of humanity will not and cannot attain peace, prosperity and composure. ***This principle cannot be found in any other sacred volume than the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. ...***

***A new religious principle*** is that prejudice and fanaticism—whether sectarian, denominational, patriotic or political—are destructive to the foundation of human solidarity; therefore, man should release himself from such bonds in order that the oneness of the world of humanity may become manifest.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 59).

# 8. Promote World Peace

Universal peace is assured by Bahá'u'lláh as a fundamental accomplishment of the religion of God—that peace shall prevail among nations, governments and peoples, among religions, races and all conditions of mankind. *This is one of the special characteristics of the Word of God revealed in this Manifestation.*

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 60).

# 9. Provide Education for All

“He has also proclaimed the principle that all mankind shall be educated and that no illiteracy be allowed to remain,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared by adding: “*This practical remedy for the need of the world cannot be found in the text of any other sacred Books*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). ...

“Bahá’u’lláh declares that all mankind should attain knowledge and acquire an education,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares, adding: “*This is a necessary principle of religious belief and observance, characteristically new in this dispensation*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 61).

# 10. Economic Problems Require Spiritual Solutions

In brief, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, at the Kinney meeting in New York, introduced the idea that Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings offer spiritual solutions to economic problems as follows, “He [Bahá’u’lláh] has set forth the solution and provided the remedy for the economic question. ***No religious Books of the past Prophets speak of this important human problem***” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). ... To their credit, the Bahá’í writings set forth various economic teachings, although not systematically developed (a task for economists). ***Bahá’í teachings do so largely by anchoring economic values in human values.***

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (pp. 62–63).



# 11. The Universal House of Justice is Unique

*This “principle” is actually an institutional principal, i.e. the Universal House of Justice, which is a unique religious institution.* Ordained by Bahá’u’lláh in his Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (1873), the Universal House of Justice was established in 1963. *This august institution is the democratically elected council that oversees the affairs of the global Bahá’í community today and has no real precedent or parallel in prior religious history.* Bahá’u’lláh “has ordained and established the House of Justice. ... A universal, or international, House of Justice shall also be organized,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá proclaimed at the Kinney event. “Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind,” that this “international House of Justice shall be appointed and organized from the Houses of Justice of the whole world” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL).

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 63).

## 12. The Special Bahá'í “Covenant” Protects Bahá'í Unity

... Bahá'u'lláh designated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as successor, interpreter, and exemplar of Bahá'u'lláh himself and his teachings. As such, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is referred to as the “Center of the Covenant.” At the Kinney meeting, Abdul-Bahá briefly introduced this key Bahá'í institution. ***“As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant,”*** ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared, adding, “By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 64).

# 13. Adopt a Universal Auxiliary Language

*Another new religious teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá often spoke about, is the adoption of a universal auxiliary language: “Bahá'u'lláh has announced the necessity for a universal language which shall serve as a means of international communication and thus remove misunderstandings and difficulties,” 'Abdu'l-Bahá declared at the Thompson meeting. “**This [new] teaching is set forth in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Book) published fifty years ago**” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). This is why: “And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the origination of one language that may be spread universally among the people,” 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated in the “Tablet to the Hague,” further explaining: “This teaching was revealed from the pen of Bahá'u'lláh in order that this universal language may eliminate misunderstandings from among mankind” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections, BRL).*

– Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (pp. 64–65).

# 14. Work is Worship

*The following principle was also presented by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the context of the “new” teachings given by Bahá’u’lláh. At the Kinney event, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasized that Bahá’u’lláh “teaches that it is incumbent upon all mankind to become fitted for some useful trade, craft, or profession by which subsistence may be assured, and this efficiency is to be considered as an act of worship” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL). “If a man engageth with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in churches and temples,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, elsewhere states, adding, “In this universal dispensation man’s wondrous craftsmanship is reckoned as worship of the Resplendent Beauty” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections, BRL).*

– Excerpt from *Baha’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 65).

## 15. The Bahá'í Faith Offers Other “New Principles”

At the end of his discourse at the Kinney event on 2 December 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concluded, “The teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are boundless and illimitable. *You have asked me what new principles have been revealed by Him. I have mentioned a few only. There are many others, but time does not permit their mention tonight*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). As corroboration of this reported statement, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in a Tablet, likens Bahá’u’lláh’s “new principles” to a “new garment” for the new age: “Out of this pitch blackness there dawned the morning splendour of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. He hath dressed the world with a garment new and fair, and *that new garment is the principles which have come down from God.*” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections, BRL) (italics added).

– Excerpt from *Bahá’í Faith: The Basics* (pp. 65–66).

# CHAPTER 4

- THE BÁB: A WESTERNER'S FIRST IMPRESSION
- The only Westerner to have met the Báb was Dr. William Cormick (1822–1877), an Irish physician in Tabriz, Persia (present-day Iran).
- “He only once deigned to answer me, on my saying that I was not a Musulmán [Muslim] and was willing to know something about his religion, as I might perhaps be inclined to adopt it. He regarded me very intently on my saying this, and replied that he had no doubt of all Europeans coming over to his religion.”

## SCRIPTURES AND AUTHORITATIVE WRITINGS

### BAHÁ'Í SACRED TEXTS AND INSPIRED GUIDANCE

Presenting information about the Bahá'í Faith would be insufficient without giving readers some direct access to the Bahá'í scriptures, which are at the heart of Bahá'í life. Providing a representative sampling of these sacred texts will go far in acquainting readers with those very scriptures that inspire and guide Bahá'ís worldwide today.

The Bahá'í Faith, as previously stated, was co-founded by the Báb in 1844 and by Bahá'u'lláh in 1863. Bahá'ís see the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as direct revelations from God. Therefore, these sacred texts are considered the “Word of God,” just as Christians typically regard the Bible. The sacred writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are considered universal. Their intended audience includes all the peoples of the world. That said, the immediate cultural matrix of Baha'i origins was Islamic in nature. This important fact will help readers better understand the context and content of the writings of the Báb, which are transitional in nature, serving as a bridge from the Islamic social world from which the Bahá'í religion originated, to the cosmopolitan Bahá'í message of world peace through world unity and justice, the bedrock foundations of which Bahá'ís are endeavoring to establish and bring into reality today.

Other Bahá'í texts have a special status by virtue of their “conferred infallibility,” meaning that they are also considered divinely guided, and therefore provide unerring directives and guidance—in principle, for the world at large, and, in practice, for Bahá'ís themselves.

## INSTITUTIONS

### THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

#### HOW BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION WORKS

Councils, not clerics, guide Bahá'í administration. So, how does the Bahá'í Faith operate as an organization, without clergy? It does so primarily through a series of elected councils—local, regional (which exist in some countries), national, and international councils. Each of these Bahá'í councils generates wisdom and makes decisions based on full and frank consultation, conducted in a spirit of camaraderie and reciprocal respect, guided by Bahá'í principles, policies, and practices.

Even before Bahá'í councils ever existed, consultation was the watchword of all Bahá'í decision-making. And so it remains today. The Bahá'í art of consultation, as well as its system of elections and councils, is quite unique in the history of religions, and is the subject of this chapter.

#### BAHÁ'Í CONSULTATION

Readers, no doubt, are familiar with the expression, “Two heads are better than one.” In other words, collaboration can be a good thing, especially for problem-solving. Of course, it all depends on the competence of the individuals themselves, and on the quality of their communication and interaction. This principle can be extended to groups

# CHAPTER 5

- ***Presenting information about the Bahá'í Faith would be insufficient without giving readers some direct access to the Bahá'í scriptures, which are at the heart of Bahá'í life.*** Providing a representative sampling of these sacred texts will go far in acquainting readers with those very scriptures that inspire and guide Bahá'ís worldwide today.
- ***The present writer, based on some relevant statements by Shoghi Effendi, has developed the following proposed classification of Bahá'u'lláh's "nine modes" (or styles of discourse):***
- ***See pp. 111–112.***



# CHAPTER 6

- HOW BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION WORKS
- Councils, not clerics, guide Bahá'í administration. So, how does the Bahá'í Faith operate as an organization, without clergy? It does so primarily through a series of elected councils—local, regional (which exist in some countries), national, and international councils. ***Each of these Bahá'í councils generates wisdom and makes decisions based on full and frank consultation, conducted in a spirit of camaraderie and reciprocal respect, guided by Bahá'í principles, policies, and practices.***
- Even before Bahá'í councils ever existed, consultation was the watchword of all Bahá'í decision-making. And so it remains today. ***The Bahá'í art of consultation, as well as its system of elections and councils, is quite unique in the history of religions, and is the subject of this chapter.***

## 7

## BUILDING COMMUNITY WHAT BAHÁ'ÍS DO

Readers will recall that Chapter Two introduced the disease/cure model for understanding religious worldviews. The “human predicament,” from a Bahá’í perspective, is seen as profound disunity, from family relations to international relations. “Disunity is the crux of the problems which so severely afflict the planet. It permeates attitudes in all departments of life,” the Universal House of Justice points out, adding,

It is at the heart of all major conflicts between nations and peoples. More serious still, disunity is common in the relations between religions and within religions, vitiating the very spiritual and moral influence which it is their primary purpose to exert

(Universal House of Justice, November 1992, BRL).

The Bahá’í solutions to these overarching global problems, therefore, are profound principles of unity, from family relations to international relations—put into action. This chapter, “Building Community: What Bahá’ís Do,” demonstrates how some of these Bahá’í principles of unity are being effectively and creatively implemented, as Bahá’ís endeavor to create social models that work and are worthy of emulation and replication.

## 8

## SOCIAL ACTION SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Bahá’ís are committed to social and economic development, locally and globally. “That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race,” Bahá’u’lláh declares in the “Tablet of Maqṣúd,” adding: “The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth” (Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets, BRL). At both grassroots and international levels, Bahá’ís sponsor and carry out various community service projects, as part of an overall “culture of growth,” in which service to others plays a central role. Some of these Bahá’í-inspired projects include individual initiatives, while others are formal, Bahá’í-sponsored projects at the institutional level. Together, these contribute to the betterment of society. For the most part, these are small-scale projects on a large scale (i.e. collectively, worldwide in distribution). Many of these projects are creative and innovative. This direct approach, however, steers clear of politics. Bahá’ís avoid partisan politics, seen as divisive in nature, and therefore contrary to the primary Bahá’í purpose, which is to promote unity and justice throughout the world, i.e. for “the body politic.” If there is genuine government interest and cooperation—as in the case of the Republic of Kiribati (see below)—then all the better, so long as such involvement is for the common good. Bahá’í social and economic development projects are prime examples—and prospective models—of faith-based initiatives, *par excellence*.

# CHAPTER 7

- Readers will recall that Chapter Two introduced the disease/cure model for understanding religious worldviews. ***The “human predicament,” from a Bahá’í perspective, is seen as profound disunity, from family relations to international relations. “Disunity is the crux of the problems which so severely afflict the planet. It permeates attitudes in all departments of life,” the Universal House of Justice points out, adding,***
- “It is at the heart of all major conflicts between nations and peoples. More serious still, disunity is common in the relations between religions and within religions, vitiating the very spiritual and moral influence which it is their primary purpose to exert.” (Universal House of Justice, November 1992, BRL).
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# CHAPTER 8

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## PUBLIC DISCOURSE

### THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The world is in crisis. Social unrest, civil wars, religious sectarianism, structured economic injustice, racism, political corruption, moral decay, and a host of other global problems are signs and symptoms of a world in travail. Nothing short of a worldwide, concerted effort to bring about its transformation can ever hope to resolve this global crisis. The Bahá'í Faith is doing what it can to promote positive social change. Closely allied with Bahá'í-inspired social and economic development projects is public discourse on important issues of this day and age. Engaging in the public discourses of society is another way to exert a positive, leavening and progressive social influence. One goal, or outcome, of public discourse is to promote further social action and transformation for the common good.

The Bahá'í Faith exists for the betterment of the world. The will of God for this day and age, Bahá'ís believe, is for humanity to realize the reality of its own inherent unity—i.e., to become fully alive to the oneness of humankind—and then, energized and empowered by this fundamental principle, to actively take measures to dispel any and all prejudices that stand in the way of human solidarity, peace, and prosperity. For this to happen, individual and social transformation is needed. This spiritual and societal quest is necessary not only for the well-being of society, but for the continued survival of our planet as well.

## VISION

### FOUNDATIONS FOR A FUTURE GOLDEN AGE

#### A VISION OF THE FUTURE

Bahá'ís have a clear vision of the future. As previously said, Bahá'ís are building the future in the present. Bahá'ís adopt short-term goals to achieve long-term objectives. This is accomplished by a series of well-thought-out and goal-driven plans issued, usually once every five years, by the Universal House of Justice. These global plans provide a framework for concerted, systematic actions by Bahá'ís worldwide in furtherance of community development and sustained growth. They see a dynamic connection between present-day efforts and future outcomes. In other words, Bahá'ís are pursuing short-term objectives for long-term individual and social transformation.

On 11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi wrote an impressive and remarkably detailed vision statement of the future golden age, toward which the human race ideally is heading. Originally written as a letter addressed to Western Bahá'ís (“To the beloved of God and the handmaids of the Merciful throughout the West”), this vision statement—which takes the form of a definite and definitive prophecy—was later published as “The Unfoldment of World Civilization,” reprinted as the final section in the anthology of selected letters by Shoghi Effendi to America, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. The central part of this extraordinary vision of the future “world commonwealth” is as follows:

# CHAPTER 9

- The world is in crisis. Social unrest, civil wars, religious sectarianism, structured economic injustice, racism, political corruption, moral decay, and a host of other global problems are signs and symptoms of a world in travail. Nothing short of a worldwide, concerted effort to bring about its transformation can ever hope to resolve this global crisis. The Bahá'í Faith is doing what it can to promote positive social change. Closely allied with Bahá'í-inspired social and economic development projects is public discourse on important issues of this day and age. ***Engaging in the public discourses of society is another way to exert a positive, leavening and progressive social influence. One goal, or outcome, of public discourse is to promote further social action and transformation for the common good.***

# CHAPTER 10

- A VISION OF THE FUTURE
- ***Bahá'ís have a clear vision of the future. As previously said, Bahá'ís are building the future in the present. Bahá'ís adopt short-term goals to achieve long-term objectives.*** This is accomplished by a series of well-thought-out and goal-driven plans issued, usually once every five years, by the Universal House of Justice. These global plans provide a framework for concerted, systematic actions by Bahá'ís worldwide in furtherance of community development and sustained growth. They see a dynamic connection between present-day efforts and future outcomes. ***In other words, Bahá'ís are pursuing short-term objectives for long-term individual and social transformation.***

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## GLOSSARY KEY BAHÁ’Í TERMS

### ABBREVIATION:

- BWNS: Bahá’í World News Service. “Media Information: Style Guide, Glossary and Pronunciation Guide.” <https://news.bahai.org/media-information/style-guide/>.

### KEY BAHÁ’Í TERMS

- **‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921):** “The son of Bahá’u’lláh who was the head of the Bahá’í Faith from 1892 to 1921. Bahá’u’lláh in His will had designated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as His successor. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá occupies a special station as the authoritative interpreter of the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and as the perfect example of how a Bahá’í should live. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá traveled widely through Europe and North America from 1911–1913, explaining his Father’s teachings in talks, interviews, and addresses at universities, churches, temples, synagogues, and missions for the poor.” (Source: BWNS)
- **Acre:** “English rendering of the name of the city north of Haifa where Bahá’u’lláh was exiled in 1868. He lived in or near the city until His passing in 1892. Bahá’ís often use the Arabic name, ‘Akká, which was the name in general use during the time of Bahá’u’lláh. In Hebrew the name is Akko.” (Source: BWNS)



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# HOW TO ORDER

- Amazon:
- <https://www.amazon.com/Bahai-Faith-Basics-Christopher-Buck/dp/1138346160>
- Routledge:
- <https://www.routledge.com/Bahai-Faith-The-Basics/Buck/p/book/9781138346161>

Christopher  
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# Bahá'í Faith

the basics