



ISLAM AND THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

It is with great reverence to the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon Him, that I attempt to write this paper. May He accept this humble offering I lay at His threshold as a small token of my love and respect.

Similarities and Differences:

Islam is the Mother Religion of my Faith and in it I see so many similarities and concepts that I accept as part of my own religious understanding. This comes as no surprise as all of the prophets from God, or Allah, reveal the same spiritual teachings, the same tawhid. Differences are most obvious in the social teachings, which are adjusted and changed to fit the needs of the society and times. Some of the most obvious parallels can be found by comparing the five pillars. I especially love this quote by Abdu'l Baha, the son of Baha'u'llah in reference to the pillars of faith.

There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.¹
 – Abdu'l Baha

¹ (Abdu'l Baha), (Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l Baha, p. 153)

First Pillar:

In the first few lines of The Words of Wisdom in the Tablets of Baha'u'llah, we see this primary directive expressed which corresponds with the first pillar, the Shahadah.

In the Name of God, the Exalted, the Most High. The source of all good is trust in God, submission unto His command, and contentment with His holy will and pleasure. The essence of wisdom is the fear of God, the dread of His scourge and punishment, and the apprehension of His justice and decree. The essence of religion is to testify unto that which the Lord hath revealed, and follow that which He hath ordained in His mighty Book...²

- Baha'u'llah

Submission to God, the Unknowable, the All Wise, is also reflected in the daily, obligatory noon-day prayer.

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

- (Baha'u'llah, ³

The acceptance of God and His messengers is a fundamental verity of both Islam and Baha'i. A common belief among Muslims is that there can be no further revelation beyond Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon Him. Baha'is believe that God's revelation to humans is infinite and not limited. We see the allegorical reference to this in the Quran.

And if all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet would not the words of Allah be exhausted (in the writing): for Allah is Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom.

- (The Holy Quran⁴

One of the most distinguishable methods used by all of the prophets it seems is the use of metaphor as in the quote above. When holy scriptures are interpreted too literally, it leads to misunderstandings that result in wrong action such as the rigid refusal of both Christians and Jews in accepting Muhammad or any other messengers. This has led to violence, wars, and

² (Baha'u'llah), (Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 153)

³ (Baha'u'llah), (Prayers and Meditation by Baha'u'llah, p. 313)

⁴ (The Holy Quran, 31:27)

religious pogroms such as the one against Baha'is in Iran. Christians are still waiting for Christ to come down on the clouds: Jews, the Messiah. Many Muslims (not all), understand that the title Seal of the Prophets means that God's bounty is finite. Baha'is view this title as the distinction that Muhammad was the seal of the prophets in that he ended the cycle of prophesy began by Adam. The cycle of fulfillment, which is to last fifty thousand years, began with the advent of the Bab (means gate), who was the forerunner of Baha'u'llah.

In order to be a Baha'i one must declare their belief in God and acceptance of His messengers, including God's most recent one, Baha'u'llah. This is done in the heart after personal investigation of the claims of Baha'u'llah and witnessed by the nearest Spiritual Assembly, (local governing body), once they receive the signed declaration card.

Second Pillar:

Prayer is a very vital part of life for a Baha'i. There are three obligatory prayers to choose from the short noon-day prayer above, the medium prayer which must be said in the morning, noon, and evening, or the long obligatory prayer which must be said once a day. These prayers are the obligatory ones but there are many others that have been revealed by Baha'u'llah. We can also pray from our own hearts but there is a special potency when using the words from the prophet as these are seen as the words of God and have many levels of meaning.

One distinctive difference is the abolishment of congregational prayer except the prayer for the dead. Baha'is can pray in gatherings but not in any rigid or ritualistic way. The daily use of obligatory prayers are said in private. Baha'u'llah also abolished the institution of priesthood. This does not mean that one cannot have a teacher or a guide but with the understanding that the only real authority is the revelation from God through his manifestations. The Writings of

Baha'u'llah were written over a period of forty years as a prisoner and this is the first time in history that we have the original writings of the manifestation. Nothing was allowed to leave His hands unless it was signed and stamped with His seal.

Third Pillar:

Zakat is similar to Huququ'llah, meaning the rights of Allah. The payment of Huququ'llah is based on one's income. After all debts have been paid and once what is left over reaches to 19% in gold mithqals, 19% of that is considered the Right of God. A gold mithqal is equivalent to 2.2246 ounces of gold. Other than this, we donate to the Baha'i Fund throughout the rest of the year. It is confidential, voluntary, and reserved for Baha'is only. We have often re-directed funds donated by non Baha'is to other charities. Donating to the Fund is considered an honor and a way of attracting God's grace.

Fourth Pillar:

Baha'is have also been enjoined to fast. Ours is shorter and based on the calendar system revealed by Baha'u'llah. It is a solar calendar made up of nineteen months. Each month has nineteen days and is named after an attribute of God. There are several extra days which are known as Ayyam-i-Ha. This is a period that happens from February 25th to March 1st. Gift giving and acts of service during this period prepare one for the fast which begins on March 2nd to March 20th. The fast has the same requirements, no food, drink, smoke, sex, during the daylight hours. It is an intensive time of prayer and a preparation for the new year which begins on March 21st, spring equinox. This is celebrated before sunset and is Naw-Ruz, a Feast of hospitality and rejoicing.

Fifth Pillar:

Pilgrimage is also a duty for Baha'is unless ill. Baha'u'llah has exempted women as a mercy on His part. They are free of the obligation but encouraged to take pilgrimage. When Baha'u'llah was exiled to Akka Israel, He was imprisoned in the fortress prison in Akka which is across the bay from Haifa. Later He was released under house arrest. After forty years as a prisoner, He died and was buried just outside of Akka. When Baha'is go on pilgrimage, they visit the shrines of Baha'u'llah and the shrines of Abdul'Baha and the Bab which are on Mount Carmel. The Baha'i World Center is also on Mount Carmel and this is where the Universal House of Justice, (an elected body of nine members, elected from delegates who represent every part of the planet), sits as the world governing body for Baha'is.

What It All Means To Me:

As long as I can remember, I have always known that God is one. I eschewed churches or groups for years because I did not believe that anyone had *the* right way and I still don't. I love the Baha'i Faith however, because its main goal is the desire of my heart: peace on earth. I know that this is the goal of all faiths but I have not found one that has such specific instructions. I believe that the reason for this is that the religions of the past were concerned more with the individual and the tribe: salvation, enlightenment, etc. The world was not viewed as one round, blue planet hanging in space until recently. The Baha'i Teachings offer a very detailed blueprint of how to bring peace to humanity because now is the time that we can understand the statement "The earth is one country and mankind its citizens." – *Baha'u'llah*

Revelation is progressive. Although the Baha'i revelation is mystical in nature and this is the same truth revealed in the past and will be again in the future, those of us who have missed previous revelations have missed so much. If each revelation could be compared to a chapter in God's great book, missing chapters has consequences. Learning more about Islam helps me to

fill out some missing pieces. For instance, I love the deep dedication and unquestioned loyalty to the teachings I see in true Muslims. I need that piece just as I need the lessons of mindfulness I find in the Buddhist teachings. Baha'is in the west are strongly encouraged to study the Quran.

I want time to delve more deeply into Islam and Sufism. I need time to really digest these teachings and start applying them more in my daily life. It encourages me to be a more faithful Baha'i and to appreciate the context where Baha'u'llah's revelation was born. Baha'u'llah tells us that there will be another messenger from God in approximately nine hundred and some years. Will we have matured enough to welcome the next one?