

The Bahá'í Faith: Building A World Civilization

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent monotheistic religions. Founded in Iran in 1844, it now has more than 5 million adherents in 236 countries and territories. Bahá'ís come from nearly every national, ethnic and religious background, making the Bahá'í Faith the second-most widespread religion in the world.

Bahá'ís see religion as a process of progressive revelation. Religion is the most potent force driving the advancement of civilization. Indeed, every major civilization known to history—Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic—has been founded on the teachings and principles revealed by a messenger from God. The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), is recognized by Bahá'ís as the most recent in the line of messengers of God that stretches back beyond recorded time and includes Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad.

The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in one global society. God, Bahá'u'lláh said, has set in motion historical forces that are breaking down traditional barriers of race, class, creed, and nation and that will, in time, give birth to a universal civilization. The principal challenge facing the peoples of the earth is to accept the fact of their oneness and to assist the processes of unification.

Bahá'u'lláh presents a vision of life that calls for "an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced." While reaffirming the core ethical principles common to all religions, Bahá'u'lláh also revealed new laws and teachings to lay the foundations of a global civilization. "*A new life*", Bahá'u'lláh declares, "*is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth.*" The worldwide Bahá'í community, composed of people from virtually every racial, ethnic and religious background, is working to give practical expression to Bahá'u'lláh's vision of world unity.

Organization and Leadership

Aside from its extraordinary diversity and wide geographic distribution, perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Bahá'í community is its unity. Explicit teachings on the institutional framework of the Faith and a clear line of succession have protected the Bahá'í Faith from schism. More than one hundred years after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, there is a single worldwide Bahá'í community knit together by a network of elected institutions. Bahá'u'lláh taught that in a modern age of universal education, there was no longer a need for a special class of clergy. Instead, Bahá'u'lláh provided a framework for administering the affairs of his faith through a system of elected councils at the local national and international levels.

Some 11,000 Local Spiritual Assemblies are elected each year from among the adult believers in every locality where at least nine Bahá'ís reside. The world's 182 National Spiritual Assemblies are elected annually by delegates representing all the believers in each country. Every five years, the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies elect the Universal House of Justice, a nine-member body that administers the affairs of the entire Bahá'í world. As with all Bahá'í elections, the selection of membership occurs through secret ballot and plurality vote, without nominations or campaigning.

Spiritual and Social Teachings

The implications of Bahá'u'lláh's message are both spiritual and social, addressing both the spiritual needs of the individual and the collective needs of humanity as a whole. Baha'u'llah proclaimed that human beings are created noble and are not inherently sinful. They are, however, imperfect and in need of spiritual and moral education.

A Vision of World Unity

A Global Democratic System

The Principle of Progressive Revelation

- Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process
- All the great religions of the world are divine in origin
- Their basic principles are in complete harmony
- Their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.

-From the Bahá'í Teachings

Baha'u'llah affirmed that all human souls are created by one God and are part of one human race. He taught His followers to observe prayer, chastity, and moral uprightness. Baha'is must avoid excessive materialism, partisan politics, backbiting, alcohol, drugs, and gambling. Every soul must independently investigate the truth and work performed in the spirit of service, He affirms, is elevated to the rank of worship. His followers, He taught, must "*Consort with all religions with amity and concord.*" The purpose of life is to "*know and worship God*", to "*acquire virtues*", to "*promote the oneness of mankind*", and to "*carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.*" The soul, created at the moment of conception, is destined by God to reach the afterlife and journey "*through all the worlds of God.*"

The Oneness of Humanity

The principle of the oneness of mankind is the pivot round which all the teachings of Baha'u'llah revolve. For Bahá'ís, this principle is not merely a call for a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among all peoples. Bahá'u'lláh taught that humanity, after a long and turbulent adolescence, is at long last reaching its stage of maturity, when its organic unity in a global and just society can finally be established. The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Baha'u'llah, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth, a world federal system, in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded.

Other social principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh include the need for a world auxiliary language, a world script, a uniform and universal system of currency and of weights and measures. He called for the reconciliation of science and religion, the cessation of national and ethnic rivalries and hatreds, and full amity, understanding and cooperation among the races. He called on all religions to recognize their common origin and fundamental unity of purpose. He called for a spiritual solution to economic problems, the removal of economic barriers and restrictions, and the abolition of extremes of wealth and poverty.

For Bahá'ís these attainments do not represent an unattainable ideal, but rather the next stage in the long and laborious evolution of the human race. Whether they are to be embraced by an act of collective will or only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. Baha'u'llah has affirmed, "*Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come.*"

Bahá'í teachings for a world civilization

- Abandonment of all forms of prejudice
- Equality between the sexes
- Recognition of the common source and essential oneness of the world's great religions
- Elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth
- Religion must be the cause of unity
- Universal compulsory education
- Responsibility of each person to search independently for truth
- Establishment of a world federal system, based on the principles of international collective security
- Recognition that religion is in harmony with reason and scientific knowledge

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