

Title: Conversations

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Quote:

History:

Most religious historians believe that the Bahá'í Faith arose from Islam, Christianity arose from Judaism. However, many Bahá'í's believe that it has historical connections to other faiths. It has grown to be a worldwide faith spelled Baha'i, although alternate spellings of Ba'Ha'i, Bahai, and Bah'ai are also used.

Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad (1819-1850 CE) assumed the title Bab which means "Door" or "Threshold". On 1844-MAY-23 He announced the "Declaration of the Bab." He explained that His mission was to herald the arrival of "One greater than Himself", Who would fulfill the expectations of all the great religions. This date is regarded as the foundation of the Bahá'í Faith. His followers became known as Babis. 20,000 were martyred for their beliefs during much religious ferment. This led to His execution in 1850 by order of the Ottoman authorities at the instigation of Muslim clerics, who saw His movement as a threat to orthodoxy.

In 1863, one of the Bab's followers, Mirza Husayn-'Ali-i-Nuri (1817-1892), known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá, succeeded the Bab to Whom the Bab had given several indications of His future station, including to His followers and to His eldest son that He was the Manifestation predicted by the Bab. On 1863-APR-21, He began proclaiming his station openly and publicly to the world under the assumed title, Baha'u'llah, by which He is generally known, was the title given to Him by the Bab. The last forty years of Baha'u'llah's life were spent in prison or in exile. He died in 1892 in or near Acre, then a prison city. The world headquarters of the Bahá'í Faith are located in the Holy Land today as a result.

Baha'u'llah's son 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921), was appointed by His father to lead the movement after His father's death.

The religion came to North America in 1893. The Bahá'í Faith states that there are approximately 7 million members worldwide: about 2.5 million adherents in India and 140,000 in Canada. The Canadian census found 14,730 in Canada in 1991. There have been many estimates of the number of Bahá'ís in the United States. The most recent estimate by Kosmin and Seymour Lachman estimated 1 million members in the US. In 1990, Kosmin and Seymour Lachman estimated 28,000 adult US Bahá'ís in their study of "Religion in the United States: A Statistical Encyclopaedia". Fredrick Glaysher estimates 26,600. 1

According to the 1992 Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year, the Bahá'í Faith had established "significant communities" in more countries and territories than any other religion except Christianity. They are organized in 205 areas vs. 254 for Christianity. As of 2000, in the rest of the World, this has increased to 235 countries and territories, including over 500 local administrative units.

tribal groups. They number about 5 million members worldwide.

The official "Bahá'í Faith <http://www.us.bahai.org>" national pages are at <http://www.ca.bahai.ca>.

Bahá'í faith is still looked upon by many Muslims as a breakaway sect of heavily persecuted in some countries because of this, in violation of the Declaration of Human Rights.

Beliefs:

Bahá'ís believe that there is only one God who is the source of all creation. God is transcendent and unknowable. However, He has sent, and will continue to send, prophets to humanity, through which the Holy Spirit has revealed the "Word". Manifestations of God up to this time have been:

Adam (? BCE)
Abraham (? BCE)
Moses (1456 BCE)
Krishna (1249 BCE)
Zoroaster (1000 BCE)
Buddha (593 BCE)
Jesus Christ (34 CE)
Mohammed (613 CE)
The Bab (1844 CE)
Baha'u'llah (1863 CE)

(Dates shown are common estimates from historical and Christian sources. Approximate) A new prophet is not expected for many centuries.

The Bahá'í's believe in an essential unity of the great religions of the world. This does not mean they believe the various religious creeds and doctrines are identical. It means that all religions as having sprung from the same spiritual source. The social and political systems of different religions vary due to the circumstances at the time that they were founded. The original doctrine and belief can be attributed to later accretions, after the death of the founder.

Every person has an immortal soul. Unlike everything else in creation, it cannot be destroyed by decomposition. At death, the soul is freed to travel through the spirit world "a timeless and placeless extension of our own universe--and not some particular removed place."

Some of Baha'u'llah's most famous sayings are: "The best beloved of all created beings is justice,"

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens"

"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable until firmly established."

Bahá'í beliefs promoted major social changes when originated in the 19th century: gender and race equality; world government; freedom of expression and a free press. In many ways, they were a century or more ahead of many other faiths.

involved in promoting these concepts today. Also, unlike many other religions, Baha'u'llah does not consider scientific inquiry as essential to expand human knowledge and deepen their understanding of God's creation. In fact, he believes that science needs to be guided by spiritual principle so that its application will always be for the betterment of humanity. Notably missing from the Baha'u'llah's teachings is the acceptance of normal, natural sexual orientation for a minority of humans. Neither the Canadian nor the American Baha'i National Councils' web sites, nor the national web sites in Canada¹⁹ or the U.S.²¹ appear to contain any information on this topic. The Canadian web site, for example, states:

"The Bahá'í teachings promote the elimination of all forms of prejudice and respect for all peoples, regardless of their racial, ethnic, religious or social origin. Equality of men and women, the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth, the promotion of justice, the right of education for all peoples, universal education, and the dignity of the individual are central principles of the Bahá'í Faith."

However, sexual orientation is notably absent from their list of protected

Another policy, which appears to contradict the faith's promotion of gender equality, is the ban on women from serving on its highest religious court.

They believe that there will eventually be a single world government, to be based on the Faith's administrative framework.

Practices:

The Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Israel, is the global governing body established by Baha'u'llah. It is an all-male body.

National Spiritual Assemblies (NSA) supervise affairs in each country. The NSA in Wilmette IL at the site of a Bahá'í House of Worship, one of 7 worldwide. In each locality where there are more than nine adult believers, affairs are managed by a local spiritual assembly. Each of these institutions has nine members and is elected by the believers. Their functions have been defined by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha in Bahá'í scripture. Bahá'ís have no clergy, sacraments or rituals.

Members: pray each day
observe the 9 holy days
fast 19 days a year
work to abolish prejudice
regard work as a form of worship
make at least one pilgrimage, if they are able, to the Shrine of the Bab
Bahá'u'llah lived, which are situated near the Bahá'í world headquarters.
Reflecting their origins in Shiite Islam, Bahá'ís do not consume alcohol.

Sacred texts:

Bahá'í scripture comprises the writings of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh, together with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Among the better known writings of Bahá'u'lláh are, *The Most Holy Certitude*, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, *The Hidden Words*,

There are many others books of Bahá'í scripture.

Holy days:

The Bahá'ís have a new calendar. Its year begins on March 21, the spring seasonal days of celebration or commemoration are:

April 21, 29 & May 2: Baha'u'llah's public declaration of his mission
May 23: Bab's declaration of his mission
May 29: Passing of Baha'u'llah
July 9: Martyrdom of the Bab
October 20: Birth of Bab
November 12: Birth of Baha'u'llah

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Persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran:

There are about 350,000 Bahá'ís in Iran who are experiencing oppressive for their religious beliefs. They are looked on as heretics, because of B latest prophet of God. Mohammed, the founder of Islam, declared himself centuries earlier.

In 1996-APR, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights expressed of religious freedom in that country for members of the Bahá'í and other 1996-MAY-14, Reuters news service quoted the most senior judge in Iran Yazdi, saying that the Bahá'í faith "is not a religion but an espionage es 1970's, the government of Iran has accused Bahá'ís of spying for other c Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States stated on 1996-MA regime took power, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been executed on accoun thousands have been imprisoned. Bahá'ís have systematically been denied jobs and pensions, and both personal and Bahá'í community properties ha

Freedom of expression within the Bahá'í Faith:

Although Bahá'ís have been very active in the promotion of freedom of ex world, there are significant restrictions on freedoms of individual Bahá'í enforced through shunning or expelling non-conforming adherents. Some

Gay males and lesbians in monogamous, committed relationships who ha recognize their partnerships have had their religious rights removed Baha'i couples who were married in a non-Baha'i ceremony have had thei

The Bahá'í authorities have imposed pre-publication censorship on all members about the Faith. Until recently, all such material has to be first published by the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly of the country in which it is published. This was a temporary policy introduced many decades ago. It was discontinued in 2001-JAN for U.S. materials. Censorship responsibility has been transferred to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. Similar changes have been made elsewhere in the world.

The "Talisman" mailing list was closed down in 1996-MAY, after several posters were investigated at the orders of the Baha'i World Center in Haifa, Israel. The posters, including the list owner, were allegedly threatened with being shunned ("coming into disfavor") if they did not fall silent. 2 Baha'i authorities have denied that the threat was real. Juan Cole was one of those allegedly threatened. He resigned from the list in 1997-JUN. In 1999-FEB, he declared his private belief in Bahá'u'llah in 1999-FEB. He maintains a non-Baha'i website.

The Bahá'í electoral process does not permit public nominations or discussions of candidates. As a result, there has been no change in the nine person US National Spiritual Assembly since 1996, except for those caused by deaths, retirements, or a member leaving the church.

Michael McKenny, a Canadian fantasy writer was expelled from the church for statements he expressed in Emails.

Divisions within the Bahá'í Faith

All religions evolve. Followers of established religions break away and form new ones. Schisms are triggered by the death of the founder of the religion, or a succession dispute. Most leaders of the splinter group follow most of the beliefs and practices of the original religion. They generally regard their own faith group as being the true representative of the original religion. Most observers believe that the Bahá'í Faith arose from Islam, and Christians split away from Judaism, and the Mormons split away from Protestant Christianity. Sometimes, a new religion becomes the dominant group. The Bahá'í Faith itself has experienced a number of schisms.

The founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'llah, selected Abdu'l-Baha to inherit his authority after his death. Some members refused to accept the authority of the new leader. After the death of Abdu'l-Baha, the authority passed to Shoghi Effendi, "the infallible Centaur of the Cause." The "Center of the Cause," the generally accepted sole interpreter of the Bahá'í Faith, was recognized by most members. Some members refused to accept his authority. After his unexpected death in 1921, there was a struggle over his successor. One webmaster states that there are now 7 faith groups that claim to be the "true" Bahá'í Faith. Of the six new groups, five were created shortly after the death of Shoghi Effendi, The sixth broke off later. All of the new groups have very small memberships compared to Bahá'í World Faith. All have been declared covenant breakers by the Universal House of Justice:

The World Faith is followed by the vast majority of believers. In the United States, the Bahá'ís are represented by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States. Authority for the Bahá'ís is now transferred to the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Israel. The Universal House of Justice is the highest authority of the Bahá'ís Under the Provisions of the Covenant who recognized Mason Remond as the successor to Shoghi Effendi. They have organized a series of International Bahá'í Centers. They claim a membership approaching 144,000. Their Baha'i Center is located in Wilmette, Illinois. The Baha'i Faith of God, (a.k.a. the House of Mankind and the Universal Palace of Justice) is located in Wilmette, Illinois. They "are no longer active (listed as 'defunct' in Gordon's Encyclopedia of Religions)." 7

The Orthodox Bahá'í Faith," (a.k.a. Mother Bahá'í Council), who follow János Ákos; The Orthodox Bahá'i Faith Under the Regency, who follow Rex King; The Charles Mason Remeys Society, who follow Donald Harvey and Francis Remeys; A dissident group organized around The Friends Newsletter.

Another group teaches that a Third Manifestation is coming in the immediate future.