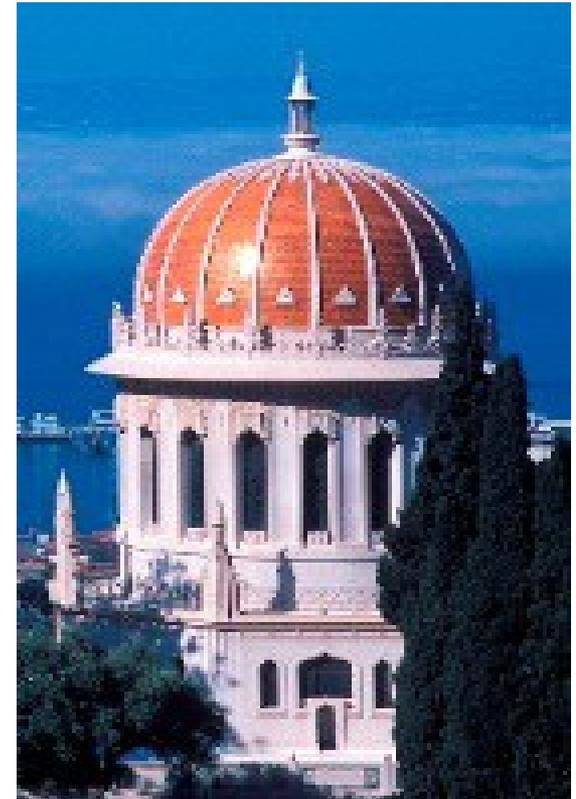


An Overview of the Bahá'í Faith



Prepared by Dr. Rob Stockman, Director, Wilmette Institute

Origins, Spread

- Emerges from Iranian Shi'i Islam, mid 19th century
- Spreads first among Shi'ites, but soon reaches Sunnis and Iranian Jews and Zoroastrians
- Middle Eastern Bahá'ís of Muslim background take the Faith to India, Burma, Indonesia, Central Asia, 1870s and 1880s
- Middle Eastern Bahá'ís of Christian background take the Faith to America and Europe, 1892
- American Bahá'ís take the Faith to East Asia, Latin America, Australasia, 1920s
- Faith spreads everywhere in the non-Communist world, 1950s
- Faith spreads to Iron Curtain countries, 1990s
- 5-6 million members worldwide, 172,000 in USA in 2012

`Ali Muhammad of Shiraz, the Báb

- Born 1819; declares himself the Twelfth Imam, May 1844
- Immediately controversial; arrested and imprisoned
- 50,000-100,000 followers, up to 20,000 were killed
- Executed by firing squad, July 1850
- Revelation: 2,000 unique works have survived, 5 million words



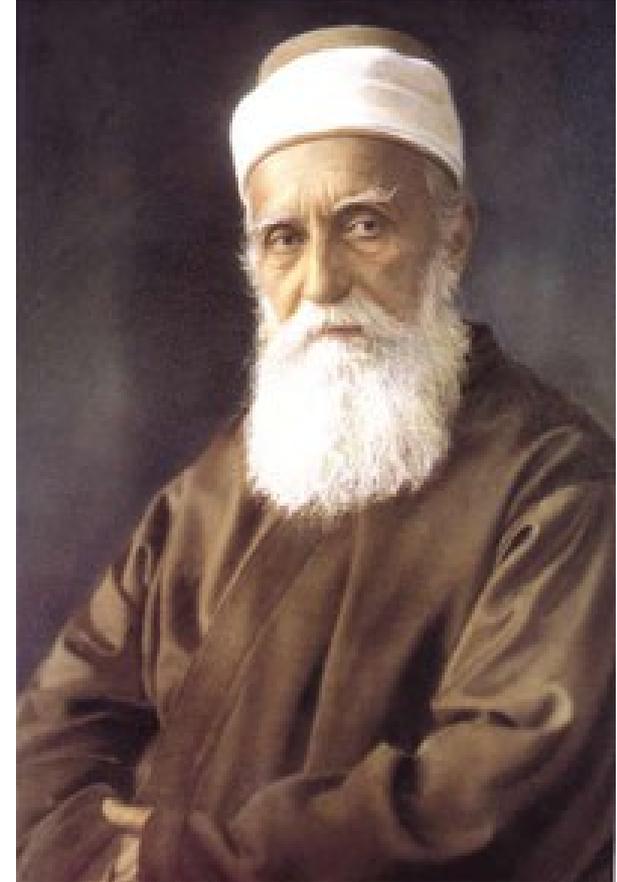
Mirza Husayn-`Ali, Bahá'u'lláh

- Born November 12, 1817, Tehran, of aristocratic background
- Accepted the Bab in mid 1844 and began to help Babis
- Exiled from Iran in 1853
- Declared himself the Promised One of the Bab, April 1863
- Revived the Babi community, they became Bahá'ís
- Exiled to Istanbul, then to Akka, Palestine, July 1868
- Passed away in Akka, May 1892
- Revelation: 18,000 works, at least 6 million words, in Arabic, Persian, and a mix of the two



`Abbas Effendi, `Abdu'l-Bahá

- Born May 22, 1844; same night the Bab declared himself
- Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son and chief assistant
- Became head of the Faith on Bahá'u'lláh's passing, May 1892
- Oversaw spread of Bahá'í Faith to the West
- Visited US, Canada, and Europe, 1911-13
- Laid cornerstone of Bahá'í temple outside Chicago
- Wrote detailed instructions for Bahá'í organization and dissemination worldwide
- Passed away November 1921
- Authorized interpretation: 30,000 works, over 5 million words



Shoghi Effendi Rabbani

- Born March 1897; grandson of `Abdu'l-Bahá
- Educated at Oxford; knew Arabic, Persian, English, French well
- Appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith in `Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament
- Oversaw establishment of Bahá'í organization and spread of Faith worldwide
- Authorized interpretation: 34,000 works, over 5 million words
- Died suddenly, November 4, 1957



Universal House of Justice

- Establishment called for by Bahá'u'lláh, method of election and authority defined by `Abdu'l-Bahá
- Nine members
- First elected April 1963; reelected every five years
- Oversees spread of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide
- Has a staff in Haifa, Israel, of 500-700
- Elucidation and legislation: hundreds of thousands of letters



Central Teaching: Unity

- Oneness of humanity; we are all of the same stock and therefore are all equal in rights
- Unity is a process, not a result; it is always developing
- Fingers of one hand; one soul in many bodies
- Unity requires access to education and appreciation of diversity
- It means encouraging interracial marriage and breaking ties in favor of minorities
- It means no involvement in partisan politics



Consultation and Elections

- Unity also requires principles of consultation: of listening, trusting, honesty, frankness, detachment
- Unanimity is preferred but not required
- Once a decision is made, everyone should support it, unity is more important than being right
- Decisions can be appealed upward to a higher institution
- Bahá'í elections involve no mention of names, no campaigning, no nominations
- Vote for people one feels have selfless devotion, well trained mind, recognized ability, mature experience
- Influencing the opinion of another is forbidden; it is a human right to decide who you will vote for independently
- Voting is a spiritual act that involves prayer

Governance

- No clergy; minimum of ritual
- Local spiritual assembly: 9 members, elected by local Bahá'ís every April 20-21
- National Spiritual Assembly: 9 members, elected annually by a national convention of locally elected delegates
- Universal House of Justice: elected every five years by an international convention consisting of all members of the National Spiritual Assemblies (172 NSAs in 2012)
- Universal House of Justice appoints 81 Counselors to meet with NSAs and local Bahá'ís to consult with them, learn about local conditions, tell them about international priorities
- Counselors appoint Auxiliary Board members (currently, 990 of them) to meet with local Bahá'ís and their communities
- Auxiliary Board members appoint Assistants locally

God and Revelation

- Bahá'í sacred texts describe God as an unknowable essence beyond complete human comprehension
- This unknowable one is manifest through the Primal Will/Logos, which created the world
- All created things reflect attributes of God
- The Logos also appears on Earth in the form of the Manifestation, a human being chosen as God's mouthpiece
- Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Zoroaster, Krishna, Buddha, the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh are Manifestations
- Manifestations found religions and influence civilizations
- Lesser prophets, philosophers, "seers" also receive divine inspiration

Personal Transformation

- We exist on Earth to know and worship God and to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization
- Human beings potentially reflect all the divine attributes; perfecting them is all we can take with us to the next world
- Failure to perfect them is separation and distance from God and from our purpose
- Prayer helps with transformation; the Bahá'í Faith has three obligatory prayers; one should choose one to say every day
- Fasting helps as well, the Bahá'í Faith has a fast, March 2-20 (no eating, drinking, smoking, sunrise to sunset; exemptions exist for children, seniors, the ill, pregnant, laborers)
- Studying the word of God helps; Bahá'ís should “recite” it twice a day

Laws, Practices

- Bahá'ís are urged to go on pilgrimage at least once
- No alcohol, illegal drugs
- Smoking discouraged as unhealthy, but not forbidden
- No sexual relations outside marriage
- No gossip and backbiting
- Cleanliness is important
- No elaborate rules about all these matters
- Marriage is a “fortress for wellbeing and salvation”
- Parental permission to marry is required; arranged marriages are forbidden
- Birth control is permitted as long as it doesn't kill fertilized embryos
- Husbands and wives are equal, but husbands are obligated to provide for wives and children
- Couples should have at least one child
- Adoption is praised

Civilization

- Service to family, humanity is strongly emphasized
- All should have training in an occupation; work performed in the spirit of service is worship
- Wealth is a positive thing if used to support one's family and serve others
- Huququ'llah: 19% of one's surplus income (after necessary expenses are excluded) should be paid as a "tithe"
- The Bahá'í House of Worship is a center of prayer but should have schools, hospitals, and charities as part of the institution
- Bahá'ís should teach their Faith to others, but in ways that are consultative and courteous
- Bahá'ís offer as services to others spiritual education classes to children, youth, and adults, and hold many devotional programs where they pray with others

Global Civilization

- One should have loyalty to ones family, one's community, one's nation, and to all humanity
- Because humanity is one, it needs coordinating institutions at the global level
- Nation states must build international coordinating institutions to solve problems such as war, unequal wealth distribution, drug trafficking, environmental degradation
- Economic matters must be adjusted to reduce extremes of wealth and poverty
- The Bahá'í texts predict that eventually the "Lesser Peace" will be achieved by the nations of the world
- The "Most Great Peace" will take centuries and will be a Bahá'í-inspired global civilization