

and cultures on earth, is working to give Bahá'u'lláh's teachings practical effect. Their experience will be a source of encouragement to all who share their vision of humanity as one global family and the earth as one homeland.

Basic Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh taught that there is one God whose successive revelations of His will to humanity have been the chief civilizing force in history. The agents of this process have been the Divine Messengers whom people have seen chiefly as the founders of separate religious systems but whose common purpose has been to bring the human race to spiritual and moral maturity.

Humanity is now coming of age. It is this that makes possible the unification of the human family and the building of a peaceful, global society. Among the principles which the Bahá'í Faith promotes as vital to the achievement of this goal are:

- the abandonment of all forms of prejudice
- assurance to women of full equality of opportunity with men
- recognition of the unity and relativity of religious truth
- the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth
- the realization of universal education
- the responsibility of each person to independently search for truth
- the establishment of a global commonwealth of nations
- recognition that true religion is in harmony with reason and the pursuit of scientific knowledge



A Way of Life

Bahá'ís come from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Bahá'u'lláh taught that each human being is "*a mine rich in gems*" unknown even to the owner, let alone to others, and inexhaustible in its wealth. The purpose of life is to develop these capacities both for one's own life and for the service of humanity. Life in this world, as Bahá'u'lláh presents it, is like the life of a child in the womb of its mother: the moral, intellectual, and spiritual powers which a human being develops here, with the help of God, will be the "*limbs*" and "*organs*" needed for the soul's progress in the worlds beyond this earthly one.

The way of life which Bahá'ís seek to cultivate, therefore, is one that encourages personal development. Daily prayer and meditation free the soul from conditioned patterns and open it to new possibilities. Joining in projects with peoples of diverse backgrounds breaks down traditional prejudices. The use of alcohol or narcotic drugs is avoided, except when prescribed for medical reasons, because these substances eventually deaden the mind. The latter is also true of the habit of backbiting, which weakens trust between people and undermines the spirit of unity upon which human progress depends. Bahá'u'lláh's writings attach great importance to the institution of the family as the foundation of human society. The sanctity of marriage, recognition of the equality of the husband and wife, and the use of consultation are especially emphasized.

God, Faith, and Immortality

In the Bahá'í view, the purpose of this life on earth is for each individual to develop the spiritual and moral qualities that lie at the core of his or her nature. Bahá'u'lláh referred to the human being as a "*mine rich in gems of inestimable value.*" These "gems" or qualities can be "mined" or developed only when a person turns to God. But while this awesome task must remain the responsibility of the

individual, humanity has received continual guidance from a loving Creator on how to accomplish it. The Bahá'í conceptions of human nature and the soul, then, are essentially positive, as are Bahá'í views on the purpose of life and life after death.

Bahá'ís believe that there is only one God, the Creator of the universe. Throughout history, God has revealed Himself to humanity through a series of divine Messengers, each of Whom has founded a great religion. The Messengers have included Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad. This succession of divine Teachers reflects a single historic "plan of God" for educating humanity about the Creator and for cultivating the spiritual, intellectual, and moral capacities of the race. The goal has been to develop the innate noble characteristics of every human being, and to prepare the way for an advancing global civilization. Knowledge of God's will for humanity in the modern age, Bahá'ís believe, was revealed just over one hundred years ago by Bahá'u'lláh, Who is the latest of these divine Messengers.

A New Vision for Humanity's Future

One of the most distinctive aspects of the worldwide Bahá'í community is the hopeful and yet pragmatic way in which its members face the future. Far from fearing it, Bahá'ís the world over are dedicated to creating a new and peaceful world civilization based on principles of justice, prosperity, and continuing advancement. This vision reflects not only an appreciation for humanity's historic longing for peace and collective well-being, but also our understanding that humanity as a whole has now reached a new level of maturity. That it is possible to create societies founded upon cooperation, trust, and genuine concern for others is at the heart of Bahá'í belief and action. Indeed, Bahá'ís believe that humanity is on the verge of an evolutionary leap that will carry humankind to a future where "world peace is not only possible but inevitable."

A number of other characteristics evident in the Bahá'í community today will, Bahá'ís believe, come to characterize the humanity of our planet's future.



The first of these is unity, the mainspring of humanity's future in a world where disunity is increasingly recognized as the ultimate source of danger and suffering. As national, religious, and ethnic conflicts divide peoples around the globe, the imperative of building bonds of reconciliation and understanding takes on greater urgency. Bahá'u'lláh asserted, "So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth."

Second only to its unity is the universality of the community created by Bahá'u'lláh. No one is left out; no one takes second place. Embracing more than 2,100 ethnic, racial, and tribal groups, the Bahá'í community is quite likely the most diverse organized body of people on the planet. Its very existence challenges prevailing theories about human nature and the prospects for creating peaceful patterns of life.

Third is the new system of values necessary for the development of a global civilization. Such an ethos—where each member of the human race is regarded as a trust of the whole—is guided by an inner ethical orientation relevant to the challenges of the next stage of human development—an orientation that does not come only from legislation and education but from a divine source. Evidence that such a transformation in moral behavior is possible can be found in the response to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings in Bahá'í communities around the globe.

A mechanism promoting the ability to think and decide collectively is the fourth attribute of an evolving world civilization. A mode of decision-making both inclusive and cooperative and that avoids adversarial posturing and partisanship while still democratic in spirit and method now exists uniquely in the Bahá'í community. This administrative order functions at the village, regional, national, and global level.

The will to address the problems confronting humanity is a fifth attribute. In this, the Bahá'í community can offer its experience in the field of social and economic development. More than 1,500 grassroots projects in the areas of health, agriculture, education, and environmental preservation are now being undertaken by Bahá'ís throughout the world. These activities focus not on the delivery of services but rather on the development of capacities within people themselves.

Underpinning such efforts is the recognition that every culture and segment of humanity represents a distinct heritage that must be permitted to bear fruit in a global society.

Such strength of will has also enabled members of the Bahá'í community to endure through recurrent waves of persecution and suffering, particularly in the cradle of their Faith, Iran, where over 200 believers have been killed for their Faith since 1979. This strength is also reflected by the systematic growth and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith all over the globe. Tens of thousands of ordinary people have willingly accepted every type of sacrifice for this goal because of their love for Bahá'u'lláh. As a result, the five-million member Bahá'í community has become the second most widespread religion in the world.

Finally, the manner in which members of the Bahá'í community draw upon the resources of both reason and faith to address challenging problems is a significant model for a future civilization. Bahá'u'lláh stated that the greatest gift of God to humankind is reason, a quality that is continually developed through the maturation of Bahá'í administrative institutions. The turmoil and dislocations confronting present-day society will not be solved until both the scientific and religious genius of the human race are fully utilized.

While the pattern of a future global civilization already exists, in embryonic form, in their community, Bahá'ís see all of these attributes as endowments of Bahá'u'lláh's guidance to humankind in this day—guidance available to everybody and not the sole property of Bahá'ís. This conviction is the source of their inspiring and hopeful vision of the future.

SOURCE: <http://info.bahai.org>

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The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. Its founder, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), is regarded by Bahá'ís as the most recent in the line of Messengers of God that stretches back beyond recorded time and that includes Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Krishna, 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.

One of the purposes of the Bahá'í Faith is to help make this possible. A worldwide community of some five million Bahá'ís, representative of most of the nations, races