



# BAHAISM I. THE FAITH

---

## BAHAISM

### i. The Faith

*History.* Baháism as a religion had as its background two earlier and much different movements in nineteenth-century Shi'ite Shaikhism (following [Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī](#)) and Babism. Shaikhism centered on theosophical doctrines and believed that a perfect Shi'ite existed on earth at all times, and many Shaikhs (as well as other Shi'ites) expected the return of the hidden Twelfth Imam in 1260/1844. Shaikhs in particular joined the messianic Babi movement of the 1840s, which shook Iran as Sayyed 'Alī-Moḥammad Šīrāzī proclaimed himself, first the *bāb* or “gate” of the Twelfth Imam, and then the return of the imam himself. As the new creed spread, violence broke out between Shi'ites and Babis, ending when Qajar government troops intervened to besiege and massacre the Babis. The government executed the Bāb in 1850. Some Babi leaders in Tehran plotted, in revenge, the death of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah, but the assassination failed and large numbers of suspected Babis were tortured and killed.

An Iranian notable and important Babi figure, Mīrzā Ḥosayn-'Alī Nūrī, “Bahā'-Allāh” was imprisoned but found innocent after the attempted assassination. He was exiled to Iraq, in the Ottoman empire, then to Istanbul and Edirne in Turkey. He was accompanied by his younger half-brother, Mīrzā Yaḥyā Šobḥ-e Azal, whom the Bāb appears to have pointed to in 1850 as leader of the Babi community. The Bāb had also spoken of the advent of another messianic



figure, “he whom God shall make manifest (*man yoẓheroh Allāh*),” and in 1863 in the garden of Necip Paşa in Baghdad Bahā’-Allāh informed a handful of close followers that he was the messianic figure promised by the Bāb (Ostād Moḥammad-‘Alī Salmānī, *Kāṭerāt*, ms., International Bahā’i Archives, Haifa; Eng tr. M. Gail, *My Memories of Bahādu’llāh*, Los Angeles, 1982, p. 22). While in Edirne (1863-68) Bahā’-Allāh wrote letters to Babi followers in Iran openly proclaiming himself to be the spiritual “return” (*raj’a*) of the Bāb. During the Edirne period relations between Bahā’-Allāh and Şobḥ-e Azal became increasingly strained, and in 1867 Bahā’-Allāh sent his younger brother a missive demanding his obedience to the new revelation, which Azal rejected. Babis in Iran were then forced to choose between Bahā’-Allāh and Azal. The vast majority accepted the assertions in Bahā’-Allāh’s writings that he was a manifestation of God (*mazhar-e elāhī*) bearing a new revelation, rejecting Azal’s form of Babism. Although the Bahais date the inception of their religion from Bahā’-Allāh’s 1863 private declaration in Baghdad, the Bahai community only gradually came into being in the late 1860s, and most Babis did not become Bahais in earnest until after 1867, though many may have been partisans of Bahā’-Allāh earlier (Bahā’-Allāh, “Sūrat damm,” *Āṭār-e qalam-e a’lā* IV, Tehran, 125 *Badī’*/1968, pp. 1-15; “Lawḥ-e Naşīr,” *Majmū’a-ye maṭbū’a-ye alwāḥ*, Cairo, 1920, pp. 166-202; Salmānī, *Kāṭerāt*, tr. pp. 42-48, 93-105).

In 1868 Bahā’-Allāh and some close followers were exiled to ‘Akkā, in Palestine, by the Ottomans, and Azal and his partisans were sent to Cyprus. The vast majority of Babis lived in Iran, and Bahā’-Allāh found ways to continue to send epistles and tablets (sing. *lawḥ*) to them. In 1873, while under house arrest in the old city of ‘Akkā, Bahā’-Allāh, in response to requests by the Bahai community in Iran for a new book of laws to accompany his new revelation, set down the *Aqdas* (*al-Ketāb al-aqdas*, *Ketāb-e aqdas* “Most holy Book” [q.v.]), meant to supersede the Qur’ān and the Bāb’s book of laws, the *Bayān*.

One of the problems facing the Babis in the 1850s and 1860s was that of religious authority. With the execution of the Bāb and the massacre of many prominent Babi disciples, the original leadership of the religion was mown down. Regional sects developed within Babism, with local claimants to high station competing for allegiance. Azal, who followed a policy of keeping himself incognito, provided little effective leadership. Bahā’-Allāh won out partially because he solved these problems of legitimacy and organization. The *Aqdas* prescribes that in every locality a Bahai steering committee (termed *bayt al-‘adl* “house of justice”) should be set up to administer the affairs of the



religion. In addition, Bahā'-Allāh provided active leadership through his letters from exile, and through his close companions (called *moballeḡīn* "teachers") who were sent back to Iran to implement his policies (*al-Ketāb al-aqdas*, Bombay, n.d., pp. 30-31; 'Abd-al-Bahā', *Taḍkerat al-wafā'*, Haifa, 1924; Kāẓem Samandarī, *Tārīk-eSamandar wa molḥaqāt*, Tehran, 131 *Badī'*/1974; Mīrzā Ḥaydar-'Alī Eṣfahānī, *Bahjat al-ṣodūr*, Bombay, 1913).

After 1873 the Bahais in Iran began to organize themselves in accordance with the *Aqdas* and gradually began to follow its laws. For example, because of that book's emphasis on the education of children of both sexes, informal Bahai schools were set up. The Christian missionary Bruce noted in 1874 in Isfahan the rapid increase in Bahais (letter of Reverend Bruce, 19 November 1874, in M. Momen, ed., *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford, 1981, p. 244). J. D. Rees of the Indian civil service found in 1885 evidence of substantial Bahai followings among the merchant class in Qazvīn, and among townsmen in Hamadān, Ābāda, and Mašhad (J. Rees, "The Bab and Babism," *Nineteenth Century* 40, 1896, pp. 56-66, quoted in Momen, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, p. 245). The government and the Shi'ite 'olamā' carried out periodic persecution of the new religion, as in Isfahan in 1874 and 1880, in Tehran in 1882-83, and Yazd in 1891 (see missionary and consular reports in Momen, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 251-305). Bahatism spread in this period, not only among Iranian Shi'ites but also among the Zoroastrians in Yazd and Jews in Kāšān and Hamadān (see the letters to the Zoroastrians by Mīrzā Abu'l-Faẓl Golpāyegānī in his *Rasā'el wa raqā'em*, ed. R. Mehrābḡānī, Tehran, 1978, pp. 463-511). Internationally, Bahatism spread from the late 1860s to 1892 in Iraq, Turkey, Ottoman Syria, Egypt, Sudan, the Caucasus, Turkish Central Asia, India, and Burma.

Bahā'-Allāh appointed his eldest son 'Abbās Effendi 'Abd-al-Bahā' to head up Bahatism after him. 'Abd-al-Bahā' assumed the leadership of the religion in 1892 upon his father's death, and was accepted by almost all Bahais as the perfect exemplar of his father's teachings. Some of his younger half-brothers, led by Moḥammad-'Alī, joined a handful of Bahai "teachers" in opposing 'Abd-al-Bahā's authority, but this small group eventually died out. From 1892 to 1921, under 'Abd-al-Bahā's leadership, Bahatism spread to Tunisia, Arabia, North America, Europe, China, Japan, South Africa, Brazil, and Australia, as well as making further progress in countries where it had earlier been established, such as India. The well-organized Bahai community of the United States was particularly active in spreading the religion, and was encouraged to



do so by ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ in such of his writings as the *Alwāḥ-e tabliḡī-e Amrīkā* (in ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, *Makātīb* III, Cairo, 1921; tr., *Unveiling the Divine Plan*, New York, 1919). In Iran Bahais continued to be active, and to spread their religion. They faced several waves of major persecutions. The 1896 assassination of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah by Mīrzā Rezā Kermānī (q.v.), a follower of Sayyed [Jamāl-al-Dīn “Afḡānī”](#), was widely blamed on Babis or Bahais at first. Pogroms against Bahais were undertaken in 1903 in Rašt, Isfahan, and especially Yazd (Moḥammad-Ṭāher Malmīrī, *Tārīḡ-e šohadā’-e Yazd*, Cairo, 1926; diplomatic correspondence in Momen, *Bábī and Bahá’í Religions*, pp. 373-404). They were caught in the middle of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11. Despite the support for constitutionalism in Bahā’-Allāh’s writings, Bahai leaders were careful not to take sides too openly, primarily, it seems, in order to avoid provoking their opponents in the opposing camps thus endangering their vulnerable community, but probably also out of concern that their very identification with the cause might undermine it in Iran. Nevertheless, ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ around 1906 urged Bahais to attempt to elect two *ayādī-e amr Allāh* “Hands of the cause of God” to parliament (copies of ms. letters in the author’s possession). He later became disillusioned with the Majles and urged Bahais to dissociate themselves from politics (‘Abd-al-Bahā’, *Resāla-ye sāsīya*, Tehran, 1913), a policy which gradually became frozen into a Bahai principle. Anti-Bahai attacks increased again at times of political unrest, and the early 1920s prelude to Rezā Khan’s coup also saw numerous pogroms (diplomatic correspondence in Momen, *Bábī and Bahá’í Religions*, pp. 405-52).

‘Abd-al-Bahā’ further refined the Bahai administrative apparatus, calling for elections of local Houses of Justice or Spiritual Assemblies (*maḥfel-e rūḡhānī-e maḥallī*) by majority vote, and preparing for the election of national Spiritual Assemblies (*maḥfel-e mellī*) and of an international House of Justice (*bayt al-‘adl-e bayn al-melalī*). Also in his will and testament (*Alwāḥ-e waṣāyā*, in ‘Abd-al-Ḥamīd Ešrāq Kāvarī, ed., *Resāla-ye ayyām-e tes‘a*, Tehran, 103 *Badī’*/1947, repr. 129 *Badī’*/1973, pp. 456-84; tr. Shoghi Effendi, *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*, New York, 1925) he appointed his grandson [Shoghi \(Šawqī\) Effendi Rabbānī](#) leader of Bahaism after him as *walī-e amr Allāh* (Guardian of the cause of god). He stipulated that Shoghi Effendi should appoint the next guardian from among his children or close cousins. Some Bahais, like Ruth White, refused to accept Shoghi Effendi, others, like Aḡmad Sohrāb thought him too authoritarian. Only a miniscule number of Bahais, however, followed them, and Shoghi Effendi’s vigorous leadership and administrative abilities led to a great expansion in the number of Bahais world-wide. In his first decade of



leadership he presided over the election of Bahai national Spiritual Assemblies in the British Isles (1923), Germany (1923), India (1923), Egypt (1924), the United States of America (1925), and Iraq (1931) (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, Ill., 1944, 1970, pp. 323-401; Ruḥiyyih [Mary Maxwell] Rabbānī, *The Priceless Pearl*, London, 1969).

After 1925 many Iranian Bahais began refusing to be identified by their family's ancestral religion on their passports and other official papers, and Bahai institutions began issuing marriage certificates in accordance with the laws of the *Aqdas*. In 1927 Bahais convened their first national conference of delegates from the nine provinces of Iran, and planned to begin annual national conventions like those held in the United States. Bahais organized for the establishment of primary schools, the improvement of the status of women, and the propagation of their religion. The secularism of the Reżā Shah government in the late 1920s at first helped the Bahais, who built a Bahai center (*ḥazīrat al-qods*) in Tehran, and began holding public meetings. There, eighty-four of the ninety-five delegates to the national convention gathered to elect the first national Spiritual Assembly in 1934 in accordance with the by-laws translated from those of the national Spiritual Assembly of the United States. Walī-Allāh Khan Warqā was elected chairman, 'Alī-Akbar Forūtan became secretary. National committees were set up for children's education, women's progress, and the establishment of a Bahai house of worship (*mašreq al-adkār*) on a tract of land near Tehran ("Report Prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of Iran," *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record* 6, Wilmette, Ill., 1937, repr. 1980, pp. 94-108; "Bahā'ī Administrative Divisions in Iran," *Bahá'í World* 7, Wilmette, Ill., 1939, pp. 571-75).

From 1934, however, the Reżā Shah period was not a particularly happy one for the Iranian Bahai community, though violence against them occurred much less frequently because of better security and less influence over affairs by the Shi'ite *'olamā'*. Reżā Shah's autocratic rule meant he brooked no independence and uncontrolled activity from any social or religious institutions, including Bahatism. The rise of the Bahai administrative order was perceived as a challenge to this central policy, and therefore all schools belonging to the Bahai community were closed (see [bahai schools](#)) throughout Iran. Moreover, his government refused to recognize the validity of Bahai marriage certificates, banned the printing and circulation of Bahai literature, closed some local Bahai centers, confiscated Bahai ballot boxes at district



conventions in some localities, forbade Bahais to communicate with their coreligionists outside Iran, dismissed some Bahai government employees, and demoted some Bahais in the military. Elections of the national Spiritual Assembly had to be held by mail (Knatchbull-Hugessen to Simon, no. 554, 15 December 1934, FO 371/17917, quoted in Momen, *Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 477-78, see also pp. 462-81; National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Iran, "Annual Report," *Bahá'í World* 7, Wilmette, Ill., 1939, pp. 133-45).

The installation of Moḥammad Rezá Pahlavī as shah in the 1940s signaled no change in the legal status of Bahaism. Looser government authority in that decade allowed an increase in major mob attacks on Bahais, such as those at Ābāda in May of 1944, and at Šāhrūd in July-August of 1944. In 1946-50 the national Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Iran adopted a six-point plan for spreading Bahaism and for improving the status of women. For the first time, women were elected to Bahai assemblies in Iran (they had served on them in the West much before), and women's adult education and literacy classes were set up (*Shiraz Diary*, no. 91, 15-31 May 1944, FO 371/40162 in Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 479-80; "Report from Persia," ed. and tr. M. Gail, *Bahá'í World* 10, Wilmette, Ill., 1949, pp. 35-48; Horace Holley, "International Survey of Current Bahá'í Activities," *Bahá'í World* 11, Wilmette, Ill., 1951, pp. 34-36).

In 1955, in a move which seems to have done as much for the appeasement of 'ulamā' as to divert the attention of the general populace from unpopular policies, including the forging of a US-British-sponsored military alliance (the [Baghdad Pact](#)), the shah's military destroyed the dome of the Bahai center in Tehran, [Ayatollah Behbahānī](#) (a pro-court clergyman) sent congratulatory telegrams to the shah and to Ayatollah Borūjerdī the chief Shi'ite clergyman in Qom. The 'ulamā' and pro-clerical deputies in the docile parliament took the opportunity to voice support for the complete outlawing of the Bahai faith, the jailing of all avowed Bahais, and the sequestration of all Bahai property. During this campaign some Bahai shops and farms were damaged by mob attacks, and a number of Bahais were assaulted. The government ultimately gave up the move, but the campaign did strengthen the hand of the 'ulamā' with the government until the late 1950s (S. Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*, Albany, N.Y., 1980, pp. 76-87).

In the 1950s Shoghi Effendi appointed a large number of Hands of the Cause, and constituted some of them as an International Bahai Council, in preparation for the election of the Universal House of Justice. In 1953 he



launched a global campaign of peaceful proselytizing for Baháism, the “Ten-year World Crusade (*jehād*),” which sought with some success to spread the religion even to remote areas and islands. Shoghi Effendi did not live to see the end of the project, dying in London in 1957. Because he died childless, and the actions of his eligible relatives had forced him to excommunicate them, he had found it impossible to appoint a Guardian to succeed him. In 1963 the International Bahai Council convened in London a global congress and the first Universal House of Justice was elected. It included five American members, two from Britain, and two Iranians. Almost all Bahais accepted its authority, though a small number followed Hand of the Cause Mason Remey, who declared himself the Guardian despite ‘Abd-al-Bahā’s stipulation of descent from Bahā’-Allāh. The Remey movement remained tiny. The Universal House of Justice was thereafter elected every five years by members of the world’s national Spiritual Assemblies. Its seat, like that of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ and Shoghi Effendi Rabbānī, is in Haifa, now Israel, near the shrines of the Bāb and Bahā’-Allāh. After 1957 Baháism became a mass movement in some parts of the Third World, in Africa, South Asia, and South America. Some of the first mass conversions occurred in Uganda, India, and Bolivia (P. Haney, “The Institution of the Hands of the Cause;” letters issued by the Hands of the Cause 1957-63; and M. Hofman, “International Survey of Current Bahā’ī Activities,” in *Bahá’í World* 13, Haifa, 1970, pp. 245-309, 333-94; B. Ashton, “The Most Great Jubilee” and “The Universal House of Justice,” *Bahá’í World* 14, Haifa, 1974, pp. 57-80, 425-43; Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, Wilmette, Ill., 1969; V. Johnson, “An Historical Analysis of Critical Transformations in the Evolution of the Bahā’ī World Faith,” Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 1974, pp. 330-90).

In the 1960s and early 1970s the lot of Bahais in Iran improved somewhat, though they still continued to labor under many legal and latent social disabilities. In 1964 Iran had 530 local Spiritual Assemblies. In 1975 Bahais feared for their safety when Moḥammad-Rezā Shah insisted that all Iranians join his *Rastākīz* party. The national Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Iran informed the shah that although Bahais were law-abiding citizens, they could not join his party, given the non-political nature of Baháism. In the 1970s Bahais were often watched and harassed by the shah’s security apparatus, SAVAK, and the Bahai Publishing Trust in Tehran was forced to offset rather than print books and to limit the number of books it circulated in order to avoid sanctions.



A number of Bahais, such as Ḥabīb Ṭābet, Hožabr Yazdānī, and ‘Abd-al-Karīm Ayādī, grew extremely rich and powerful under the Pahlavīs, and helped form a general public impression of Bahais as a bourgeois group supportive of the unpopular policies of the regime and close to the shah or the royal family. This rekindled dormant prejudices and provoked anger and resentment towards the Bahai community as a whole but the Babi and Bahai religions were mass movements, encompassing villagers and peasants, artisans and tradesman, and working class people in the large cities, who formed the vast majority of the country’s three to four hundred thousand Bahais (P. Smith, “A Note on Bābī and Bahā’ī Numbers in Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 15, 2-3, 1984, pp. 295-301) and who had no desire for or interest in siding with unpopular policies and alienating the majority. That these ordinary Bahais were forbidden by their national Spiritual Assembly from joining any political party, and even from voting (unlike their coreligionists in the West, who may vote if they can do so without joining a party) made their political preferences a private matter which, in normal circumstances, should have been viewed as irrelevant to the political process.

Since its inception in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has, despite denials and explanations, demonstrated every intention of destroying the Bahai community altogether. It has gradually and systematically confiscated all Bahai properties and investment companies, fired Bahai civil servants, dissolved all Bahai national and local Spiritual Assemblies, and executed nearly two hundred of the country’s most active and prominent Bahais. It has harassed, detained, and persecuted many others on various pretexts, ranging from violation of Islamic laws, to conspiracy with and spying for international Zionism and imperialism. Since the Islamic Republic considers the performance of Bahai marriage ceremonies heretical and illegitimate, local Spiritual Assembly members who performed them have been tried on charges of promoting prostitution. Bahais who went on visitation to shrines in Israel or sent monetary contributions to the Bahai world center in Haifa came under suspicion of supporting Zionism or spying for it, even though the establishment of ‘Akkā and Haifa as Bahai centers dated from the nineteenth century, long before the founding of Israel. Hundreds of recantations have appeared in newspapers, the circumstances of their procurement being highly suspicious. The parliament has made it illegal for parents to pass Bahaism on to their children, has refused admittance of Bahai children to schools, and denies Bahais ration cards. The government’s confiscation of membership records at the National Bahai Center in Tehran allows it to identify Bahais



throughout the country (Human Rights Commission of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Switzerland, “Declaration on the State of Religious Minorities in Iran,” *World Order* 13, no. 4, 1979, pp. 15-20; Amnesty International U.S.A., “Under Penalty of Death: In Iran a Campaign of Terror against Bahā’is,” *Matchbox*, October, 1983, p. 11).

*Administrative apparatus.* Bahai administration evolved gradually, but this overview will discuss current practice. Bahaism possesses no clergy formally trained to administer rituals. Rather, the administration both of religious observances and of community affairs rests with elected officials. At the level of villages, towns, cities, or counties, these officials constitute the local Spiritual Assembly, consisting of nine members elected annually on the eve of April 21 by universal adult suffrage and by secret ballot. Women as well as men serve on the local and national Spiritual Assemblies (*Aqdas*, pp. 30-31; ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ in ‘A. Ešrāq Kāvārī, ed., *Ganjīna-ye ḥodūd wa aḥkām*, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 57-67; Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, Wilmette, Ill., 1986, pp. 20-24; “The Local Spiritual Assembly,” *Bahá’í World* 14, pp. 511-30).

In addition to their own, usually closed administrative meetings, every nineteen days local Spiritual Assemblies sponsor the Bahai feast (*zīāfat*) for the entire community, consisting of three parts. In the first part local lay believers read from Bahai writings first, and then often from scriptures of other religions, as well. In the second part community affairs are discussed. Committees of the local Spiritual Assembly and its officers give reports on their activities. Suggestions may be made from the floor for the local Spiritual Assembly to consider at its next meeting. The third part consists of friendly conversation over refreshments. Because the feast partially has the character of a community business meeting, only registered members of Bahaism may attend (Bahā’-Allāh, *Aqdas*, pp. 30-31, 61; ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, quoted in Ešrāq Kāvārī, ed., *Ganjīna*, pp. 156-58; National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā’is of the British Isles, comp., *Principles of Bahá’í Administration*, London, 1950, pp. 51-53).

Bahai communities are also apportioned among larger districts for the purpose of electing delegates to an annual national convention. The district conventions, held in the autumn, elect a number of delegates, based on the size of the local Bahai population, and send with them local concerns they want raised at the national convention. The national convention takes place again in April and elects nine members to the national Spiritual Assembly. Campaigning is not allowed at these elections, though discussion of issues is



encouraged (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 65, 79, 89, 91). The national Spiritual Assembly, an institution created by 'Abd-al-Bahá' (Bahá'-Alláh had spoken only of the local Houses of Justice and of the Universal House of Justice), has the responsibility of administering the affairs of the national Bahai community and of propagating the religion in its country (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, passim).

Every five years members of all the Bahai national Spiritual Assemblies in the world send their ballots to or gather at an international convention to elect nine persons to the Universal House of Justice. Of this body Bahá'-Alláh wrote, "It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them" ("Kalemāt-e ferdowsīya," *Majmū'a-ī az alwāḥ ka ba'd az Ketāb-e aqdas nāzel šodand*, Hofheim-Langenhain, 1980, p. 37; tr., p. 68; cf. "Ešrāqāt," *Majmū'a-ī az alwāḥ*, pp. 75-76; tr. pp. 128-29). All these elected institutions make their decisions by majority vote, though unanimity is preferred, after long discussions called consultation (*mašwerat*), in which members are urged not to become attached to their own suggestions, but to consider each motion dispassionately.

This administrative structure is complemented by appointed institutions of the "learned" (*'olamā'fi'l-Bahā'*) (Bahá'-Alláh, *Aqdas*, pp. 170-71). The first body of the learned were the Hands of the Cause of God appointed by Bahá'-Alláh and by Shoghi Effendi. Since only the Guardian could appoint Hands of the Cause, according to 'Abd-al-Bahá', the lapsing of the institution of the guardianship after 1957 meant that the institution of the Hands also lapsed. The Universal House of Justice has attempted to compensate by creating a new institution of counselors (*mošāwerīn*) who are appointed to five-year terms. They have the functions of protecting Baháism from internal threats to its integrity such as schism, and of spreading the religion. The counselors appoint, with the consent of the Universal House of Justice, auxiliary board members with either of the specific functions of protection and propagation. The auxiliary board members appoint assistants, again with approval from their superiors. Members of these appointed institutions of the learned have no executive power, and can only advise the elected institutions ("The Institution of the Hands of the Cause," *Bahá'í World* 14, 459-74; Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*). Since no Bahai seminaries or full-time clerical offices exist, the institutions of the learned are filled by active laymen, often teachers, librarians, or other intellectuals.



*Theology.* Bahai theology posits several metaphysical levels of reality. The highest of these is the divine realm of unicity (*aḥadiyya*), wherein only God's essence and his essential attributes exist. In this station (*maqām*), God's knowledge is his essence and his essence is his knowledge; God is unmanifest and alone, and completely inconceivable. In the second station God manifests himself by his essence to his essence, bringing into existence the Word of God (*kalemat Allāh*) or divine manifestation (*zohūr-e elāhī*). This primal manifestation of God then dawns forth on the world of contingency (*emkān*) with all the names and attributes of God, causing the new creation to come into being. Each being can reflect an attribute of God, but only human beings can spiritually advance to the point where they can reflect all the attributes of God. They can do so only with the help of prophets and messengers, called generally manifestations of God (*mazḥar-e elāhī*), who perfectly show forth the names and attributes of God in the human realm. Unlike similar Sufi schemas, in the Bahai system metaphysical realms are absolutely separate; Bahai thought rejects the Sufi theory of *waḥdat al-wojūd* or existential monism ('Abd-al-Bahā', "Tafsīr-e konto kanzan maḳfīan," *Makāteb-e 'Abd-al-Bahā'* II, Cairo, 1330/1911-12, pp. 2-55; Bahā'-Allāh, *Majmū'a-ye maṭbū'a*, pp. 339, 346).

Bahai psychology accepts a basically Aristotelian view of the various types of soul or spirit, positing a vegetative spirit with its faculty of spatial growth, the animal spirit with its sensitive and locomotive faculties, and the immortal human spirit or rational soul (*nafs-e nāteqa*), with its faculty of intellectual investigation. But two further spirits are posited. The spirit of faith is a moral and ethical faculty whereby the human soul acquires the perfections of God. Finally, the holy spirit (*rūḥ al-qods*) pertains only to the prophets and messengers, or manifestations of God. Prophets possess all of these spirits, from the bodily ones through the rational soul, and including the holy spirit ('Abd-al-Bahā', *al-Nūr al-abhā fī mofāwazāt 'Abd-al-Bahā': goft-o-gū bar sar-e nāhār*, Leiden, 1908, pp. 108-10, 114-17, 154).

The universal intellect (*'aql-e koll*) or word of God (*kalemat Allāh*), the first, preexistent emanation of God, perceives the universe directly and intuitively. It emanates this knowledge upon the prophets, allowing them to found systems of religious law which are appropriate to the conditions of society. They know the necessary connections that relate all entities in the world, and their laws are aimed at regulating and balancing this world-system. God has been sending manifestations of God, whether prophets or messengers, since the inception of the human race, and will continue to do so in the future.



Bahā'-Allāh's writings recognized all the Judaic prophets, Zoroaster, Jesus Christ, Moḥammad, the Bāb, and Bahā'-Allāh himself as historical manifestations of God, and 'Abd-al-Bahā' recognized such South Asian figures as Krishna and Buddha, as well. The Bahai conception of progressive revelation, which sees successive manifestations of God as having brought increasingly sophisticated religious teachings over time, allows Bahais to incorporate local religious traditions throughout the world into their schema. An essential Bahai teaching is the ultimate unity of all the great prophets and founders of the world religions. Indeed, despite their individuality and differences in station, each manifestation of God can be seen as a "return" (*raj'a*) of his predecessors, not in the sense of reincarnation but in that of the return of spiritual attributes (Bahā'-Allāh, "Jawāher al-asrār," *Ātār-e qalam-e a'lā* III, Tehran, 129 *Badī*/1972-73, pp. 33-37; Bahā'-Allāh, *Ketāb-e īqān*, Cairo, 1900, pp. 127-29, 147-48; 'Abd-al-Bahā', *Mofāwazāt*, pp. 119-20, 123-24, 164-66).

Bahai anthropology sees human beings as burdened with the passions of an animal nature, which can be overcome only through special training and effort. The teacher in this enterprise of spiritual education is the manifestation of God. 'Abd-al-Bahā' spoke of three kinds of education. The first is education for the welfare of the body. The second is education for the welfare of human society, including policy, administration, commerce, industry, sciences, and arts. This is an education for civilization and progress. The third is education for a sound character and the acquisition of divine perfections. The educator is perfect in all respects and by his teachings organizes the world, brings nations and religions together, and delivers man from vices ('Abd-al-Bahā', *Mofāwazāt*, pp. 6-7).

In the Bahai interpretation, human history has been dominated by spiritual cycles (sing. *dawr*) initiated by the periodic advent of a new prophet. Bahā'-Allāh interprets Koranic references to the resurrection day (*qīāma*) and the attainment of the presence of God (*leqā' Allāh*; see Qur'ān 29:33, 18:110, 13:2, 2:46, 2:49) as symbolic allusions to the advent of a new manifestation of God (Bahā'-Allāh, *Ketāb-e īqān*, pp. 115-19). 'Abd-al-Bahā' taught that a great cycle in human religious history is characterized by three periods. The first is a series of manifestations of God which prepare for a universal theophany. The second period starts when the universal manifestation of God arrives and begins his dispensation. The third period within the great cycle is that of manifestations of God that succeed the universal manifestation. Although they can reveal new laws and abrogate his ordinances, they remain under his spiritual shadow.



Adam (whom Bahais do not consider the first man) began the current cycle, in which the first, preparatory period extended from his time until the Bāb. Bahā'-Allāh was the universal manifestation for this cycle. After no less than a thousand years, further manifestations of God may arise, but their spiritual themes will start from Bahā'-Allāh's principles of the political and religious unification of the earth for human welfare ('Abd-al-Bahā', *Mofāwāzāt*, pp. 120-22; Bahā'-Allāh, *Aqdas*, pp. 38-39).

*Social principles.* Bahatism sees itself as primarily preaching the unity of mankind, and criticizes nationalist chauvinism and jingoism as productive of war. Bahā'-Allāh wrote, "The earth is but one country (*waṭan*), and mankind its citizens (*ahl-e ān*)" ("Lawḥ-e maqṣūd," in *Majmū'a-ī az alwāḥ*, p. 101; tr. p. 167). To unite the world Bahais advocate the adoption of a universal language, to be chosen by the leaders of the world ("Bešārāt," no. 3, "Kalemāt-e ferdowsīya," no. 8, *Majmū'a-ī az alwāḥ*, pp. 11, 37-38). Bahā'-Allāh charged the Universal House of Justice with promoting peace among the secular powers to avert exorbitant defense expenditures ("Lawḥ-e donyā" in *Majmū'a-ī az alwāḥ*, p. 50; tr. p. 89). He urged the establishment of a world assembly of rulers to discuss peace and to prevent wars through collective security ("Lawḥ-e maqṣūd," in *Majmū'a-ī az alwāḥ*, p. 99, tr. p. 165). Bahā'-Allāh apparently did not mean this internationalism to detract from loyalty to national governments, since he commanded obedience to government and attempted to make the Babi community less radical ("Bešārāt," nos. 4, 5 in *Majmū'a-ī az alwāḥ*, pp. 11-12). Bahā'-Allāh did not, however, simply approve of the governments in power; despite both Ottoman and Qajar opposition to the principle, he advocated constitutional monarchy on the British model as a means of restraining tyranny ("Bešārāt," no. 15, pp. 13-14).

'Abd-al-Bahā' in his journeys to Europe and North America 1910-13 often listed the basic principles of Bahatism. A typical listing is (1) the independent investigation of reality (*taharrī-e ḥaqīqat*, the opposite of *taqlīd* or blind imitation), (2) the unity of mankind, (3) religion must be a source of unity and harmony, otherwise a lack of religion would be preferable, (4) religion and science complement one another, (5) religious, racial, political, and nationalist prejudices are destructive of human society, (6) equal rights for all human beings, (7) greater equality of income distribution (*ta'dīl-e ma'īšat*) so that none would be needy, (8) world peace through the foundation of an international court of arbitration that would settle disputes, (9) the separation of religion from politics, (10) education and advancement for women, (11) the inculcation



of spiritual virtues and ethics to complement material civilization ('Abd-al-Bahá', *Ḳeṭābāt ḥaẓrat 'Abd-al-Bahá' fī Awrobbā wa Amrīkā* I, Cairo, 1921, repr. Karachi, 1980, pp. 30-32). Shoghi Effendi elaborated at length on the Bahai conception of world government in his letters of the 1930s, published as *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (2nd, rev. ed., Wilmette, Ill., 1974).

*Laws and ethics.* The basic book of laws in Baháism is the Arabic *al-Ketāb al-aqdas*, though it is supplemented by a number of other works. Laws of ritual pollution are abolished, and peoples of other religions are decreed ritually pure, unlike the case in Twelver Shi'ism (*Aqdas*, pp. 79-81). Believers are commanded to consort with the followers of all religions with amity and concord (p. 144). If someone shows anger to a Bahai and torments him, the Bahai must respond with kindness and lack of opposition (p. 152). Believers are forbidden to carry arms except when necessary (p. 157). The *Aqdas* makes it incumbent on believers to engage in productive work, interdicting begging (pp. 32-33). It insists on meticulous cleanliness and polite manners (*laṭāfa*; pp. 50-51). Slander and backbiting are forbidden (pp. 22). It is mandatory for parents to arrange for the education of both male and female children (pp. 52-53). Repentance for misdeeds is commended, but only in private and not before a clergyman (p. 53; Bahá'-Allāh, "Bešārāt," in *Majmū'a-ī az alwāḥ*, p. 12). Listening to music is allowed, and is recommended as a means of spiritual advance (*Aqdas*, pp. 53-54). Holy war (*jehād*) is forbidden ("Bešārāt," p. 10).

The *Aqdas* forbids the imbibing of intoxicants and use of opium, as well as gambling (pp. 120, 153-54). It prohibits murder and adultery (p. 22). It prescribes banishment and imprisonment for theft, and the tattooing of an identifying mark on the forehead of third-time offenders (pp. 48-49). Wounding or striking another person is punishable by a set of fines, depending on the severity of the injury (p. 60). There is also a fine (*dīa*) to be paid to the victim's family for manslaughter (p. 185). The minimum penalty for arson and first-degree murder is life imprisonment; the maximum for arson is to be burned, the maximum for murder is execution (pp. 64-65). Slavery is forbidden (p. 75). All believers must leave a will (p. 111).

Marriage is enjoined; the *Aqdas* permits two wives, but recommends only one and 'Abd-al-Bahá' later interpreted this verse to allow only one wife. The consent of both individuals and the permission of all four parents is required, as is the payment of a limited dowry by the man (pp. 64-67). It is permitted to marry non-Bahais (Bahá'-Allāh, *Resāla-ye so'al o jawāb*, Iran National Bahai Archives, no. 63, Tehran, n.d., p. 36). Adultery is punishable by a fine which



doubles with each offense, payable to the house of justice (*Aqdas*, p. 53). Divorce is allowed but only after a year of patience is waited out during which no conjugal relations take place. Remarriage is permitted (pp. 70-73). It is forbidden to marry one's father's widow, and homosexuality is prohibited (pp. 110-11).

Believers are to pay a nineteen-percent religious tax on gold and on profits beyond expenses, called the *ḥoqūq Allāh* (the right of God; pp. 100-01). In addition, *zakāt*, another religious tax, is to be paid, in accordance with the laws of the Qur'ān (p. 145).

*Religious rituals and observances.* Like Bahai administration, Bahai religious observances have evolved over time. For the sake of brevity, these will be discussed in terms of twentieth-century practice, and only widely practiced or central rituals will be surveyed. There are four basic sorts of daily ritual. The *Aqdas* prescribes the private recitation by individuals of verses revealed by Bahā'-Allāh every morning and evening (p. 149; *So'āl o jawāb*, p. 30). In addition, believers are to go to a central place of worship (*mašreq al-aḍkār*) between dawn and two hours after sunrise to recite and listen to prayers (*monājāt*; *Aqdas*, p. 116; *So'āl o jawāb*, pp. 7-8). Aside from these supplicatory prayers, believers are to pray an obligatory prayer (*ṣalāt, namāz*) after ablutions (*wozū*). Bahā'-Allāh set down three different obligatory prayers, a long one with prostrations to be said once in twenty-four hours, a middle prayer to be said three times a day, and a short prayer to be said once a day. Believers may choose any one of these to say individually. Congregational *ṣalāt* is forbidden, as are pulpits (sing. *menbar*). The believer must face the *qebla* (point of adoration) while performing the obligatory prayer, which is fixed as Bahā'-Allāh's resting place. It is not necessary to face the *qebla* when saying other sorts of prayer (*Aqdas*, pp. 152-53, *So'āl o jawāb*, pp. 29-30; Ešrāq Kāvarī, ed., *Ganjīna*, pp. 11-33). Finally, once a day believers should seat themselves facing the *qebla* and repeat the greatest name of God, *Allāho abhā*, ninety-five times (*Aqdas*, pp. 21-22). Another important ritual prayer is the *ṣalāt* for the dead, which is the only sort of *ṣalāt* Bahā'-Allāh permitted to be said in congregation; it is almost identical with that set down by the Bāb in the *Bayān* (*wāḥed* 5, *bāb* 11) (Ešrāq Kāvarī, ed., *Ganjīna*, pp. 136-41).

The Bahai calendar (*Badī'*), originating with the Bāb, consists of nineteen months of nineteen days each, in addition to a short intercalary period. At the beginning of each Bahai month, Bahais are to gather in the nineteen day feast (*zīāfat-e nūzdah rūza*), discussed above under administration, where the only



approximation to a ritual is the reading by lay believers of passages from scripture. The *Aqdas* instructed that the intercalary days be placed just before the last month, the month of fasting (*‘Alā*). Bahais are to fast (*ṣīām*) from the age of maturity (15), from sunrise to sunset for nineteen days. Since the Bahai calendar is a solar one, the fasting month always falls just before the vernal equinox. The intercalary days (*ayyām-e hā*) are set aside as a time of gift giving and feasting. The fast usually ends on 20 March, and the vernal equinox (Nowrūz) starts the new year (pp. 18-21, 126). Nowrūz is one of nine Bahai holy days on which work must be suspended. Bahais hold festive gatherings on these days. They include the anniversaries of the birth of the Bāb and of Bahā’-Allāh (celebrated on 1 and 2 Moḥarram in the Middle East, and on 20 October and 12 November in the rest of the world), and the first, ninth, and twelfth days of Reżwān, the twelve-day (April 21-May 2) festival celebrating Bahā’-Allāh’s declaration of his mission in Baghdad (pp. 112-15; *So’āl o jawāb*, pp. 12). The other holy days are the declaration of the Bāb, the martyrdom of the Bāb, and the “ascension” (*ṣo’ūd*) of Bahā’-Allāh (texts relating to these holy days have been collected by Ešrāq Kāvārī in *Resāla-ye ayyām-e tes’a*).

Pilgrimage (hajj) is required of financially able male believers once in a lifetime either to the house of the Bāb in Shiraz or the house of Bahā’-Allāh in Baghdad (*Aqdas*, p. 32; *So’āl o jawāb*, p. 15; Ešrāq Kāvārī, ed., *Ganjīna*, pp. 67-71). Even before setting down the *Aqdas*, Bahā’-Allāh wrote out tablets containing instructions for the performance of the pilgrimage, and had Moḥammad “Nabīl” Zarandī perform the rites at the house of the Bāb. These include the paring of nails, ablutions, the recitation of special verses, and circumambulation. But problems of security prevented subsequent performance of the rites. At present, the pilgrimage is not undertaken, given the persecution of Bahais in Iraq and the destruction of the house of the Bāb by the revolutionary government in Iran in 1979. Visitation (*zīārat*) often psychologically took its place, many believers simply visiting the house of the Bāb in Shiraz, the house of Bahā’-Allāh in Baghdad, or the Bahai properties in Edirne, Turkey, and Haifa and ‘Akkā (now in Israel). A nine-day visitation to the Bahai shrines in Haifa and ‘Akkā has become common among Bahais who can afford it.

*Bibliography* : Most of the published primary sources for Bahatism are cited in the article. A large number of community histories of Bahais in various parts of Iran are in mss. in Iranian archives and at the International Bahā’i Archives in Haifa. An important biographical dictionary of Iranian Bahais is ‘Azīz-Allāh



Solaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ-e hedāyat*, 8 vols., Tehran, 1964-68?. For the relatives of the Bāb who became Bahais see Moḥammad-‘Alī Fayzī, *Ḳāndān-e afnān*, Tehran, 127 *Badī*/1970. For Bahai doctrines see ‘A. Ešrāq Ḳāvarī, *Mohāzerāt*, Tehran, 120 *Badī*/1963. Much primary material was printed in the English-Persian periodical, *Star of the West*, Chicago and Washington, D.C., 1910-33. Volumes of the official Bahai yearbooks, *The Bahá’í World*, cited above, often contain documents of a primary nature. An important Western travel account of the Bahais in nineteenth-century Iran is E. G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, London, 1893, and other material (mostly hostile) relating to Bahai history is in Browne’s *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, Cambridge, 1918. Diplomatic and missionary documents have been published in Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions*, cited above.

A glossary of Bahai terms is Mīrzā Asad-Allāh Fāzel Māzandarānī, *Asrār al-ātār*, 5 vols., Tehran, 1967-72. Some material for Bahai history is also in the same author’s *Tārīḳ-e zohūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 8, pts. 1 and 2, Tehran, 131-32 *Badī*/1975-76. General histories of the Babi and Bahai movements are Mīrzā Abu’l-Faẓl Golpāyegānī and Mīrzā Mehdī Golpāyegānī, *Kašf al-ḡeṭā’*, Tashkent, 1919?; and ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Avāra, *al-Kawākeb al-dorriya*, 2 vols., Cairo, 1923. See also for expositions of Bahai doctrine Mīrzā Abu’l-Faẓl Golpāyegānī, *Ketāb al-farā’ez*, Cairo, 1898, and *al-Dorar al-bahīya*, Cairo, 1900, tr. J. Cole, *Miracles and Metaphors*, Los Angeles, 1982; idem, *al-Ḥojaj al-bahīya*, Cairo, n.d., tr. ‘Alīqolī Khan, *Bahā’ī Proofs*, Chicago, 1914; Wilmette, Ill., 1984; Golpāyegānī’s letters, cited above, are a primary source.

Academic work on the general history and global growth of Bahaism includes A. Bausani, “Bahā’īs,” in *EI*<sup>2</sup>, and idem, *Persia Religiosa da Zoroaster a Bahā’u’llāh*, Milan, 1959; P. Smith, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions: from Messianic Shī’ism to a World Religion*, Cambridge (forthcoming); P. Berger, “From Sect to Church: A Sociological Interpretation of the Bahai Movement,” Ph.D. dissertation, New School for Social Research, New York, 1954; idem, “Motif messianique et processus social dans le Bahaisme,” *Archives de sociologie des religions* 4, 1957, pp. 93-107; A. Hampson, “The Growth and Spread of the Bahā’í Faith,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1980; V. Johnson, “An Historical Analysis of Critical Transformations” (cited above).

Further academic work on the history of Bahaism includes articles in M. Momen, ed., *Studies in Bábí and Bahá’í History I*, Los Angeles, 1982, and J. Cole and M. Momen, eds., *From Iran East and West: Studies in Bábí and Bahá’í History II*, Los Angeles, 1984, a continuing series of books: For the period



1863-92, see M. Momen, “Early Relations between Christian Missionaries and the Bábí and Bahá’í Communities,” in *Studies I*, pp. 49-84; J. Cole, “Bahādu’llāh and the Naqshbandī Sufis in Iraq, 1854-1856,” *ibid.*, II, pp. 1-30; M. Caton, “Bahā’í Influences on Mīrzā ‘Abdu’llāh, Qajar Court Musician and Master of the *Radīf*,” *ibid.*, II, pp. 31-66; S. Stiles, “Early Zoroastrian Conversions to the Bahā’ī Faith in Yazd, Iran,” *ibid.*, II, pp. 67-134; for the life of Bahā’-Allāh see H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahā’u’llāh*, Oxford, 1980. For ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ see A. Bausani and D. MacEoin, “‘Abd-al-Bahā’,” in *EIr*. I, pp. 103-04; and H. M. Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahā’: The Centre of the Covenant of Buhā’u’llāh*, Oxford, 1971. For Egypt in this period see J. Cole, “Rashid Rida on the Baha’i Faith: A Utilitarian Theory of the Spread of Religions,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 5, 1983, pp. 276-91. Academic work on the American Bahai community includes: W. Collins, “Kenosha 1893-1912: History of an Early Bahā’ī Community in the United States,” in Momen, ed., *Studies SBBH I*, pp. 225-54; R. Hollinger, “Ibrahim George Kheiralla and the Bahā’ī Faith in America,” *ibid.*, II, pp. 95-134; P. Smith, “The American Bahā’ī Community, 1894-1917: A Preliminary Survey,” *ibid.*, I, pp. 85-224; P. Smith, “Reality Magazine: Editorship and Ownership of an American Bahā’ī Periodical,” *ibid.*, II, pp. 95-134; R. Stockman, *The Bahā’ī Faith in America 1892-1900*, Wilmette, Ill., 1985. For the Shoghi Effendi period see L. Bramson-Lerche, “Some Aspects of the Development of the Bahā’ī Administrative Order in America, 1922-1936,” in Momen, ed., *Studies I*, pp. 255-300; and ‘A. Ešrāq Kāvārī, *Rahīq-e maḳtūm*, 2 vols., Tehran, 103 *Badī’/1946*. For comments on Bahais in modern Yazd, Iran, see M. Fischer, “Zoroastrian Iran: Between Myth and Praxis,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973. For Bahais in India see W. Garlington, “The Bahai Faith in Malwa,” in G. A. Oddie, ed., *Religion in South Asia*, Delhi, 1977; *idem*, “Bahā’í Conversions in Malwa, Central India,” in Momen, ed., *Studies II*, pp. 157-88; *idem*, “The Bahā’í Faith in Malwa: The Study of a Contemporary Religious Movement,” Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 1975; and S. Garrigues, “The Bahā’í Faith in Malwa: Identity and Change Among the Urban Bahā’īs of Central India,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Lucknow, 1975. For the Bahai faith in West Africa see Anthony Lee, Ph.D. in progress, Univ. of California, Los Angeles. For Bahai religious observances see D. MacEoin, “Ritual and Semi-Ritual Observances in Bābism and Bahā’ism,” paper presented at the 1980 Lancaster Conference on the Babi and Bahai faiths, Lancaster University, England.

There is a voluminous tertiary literature on Bahaism. Impartial writing about the Bahais in the Middle East is rare. Significant works, though critical, are ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Ḥasanī, *al-Bābīyūn wa’l-Bahā’īyūn fī māzīthem wa hāzerehem*,



Sidon, 1957; and Aḥmad Kasrawī, *Bahā'igarī*, Tehran, 1322 Š./1943. Christian polemics against Bahaism are W. Miller, *The Bahā'ī Faith: Its History and Teachings*, South Pasadena, CA, 1974; J. R. Richards, *The Religion of the Bahā'īs*, London, 1932; and S. G. Wilson, *Bahā'ism and its Claims*, New York, 1915, 1970. Intelligent surveys of Bahaism by Western converts with little training in Middle East studies include J. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, London, 1923; J. Ferraby, *All Things Made New*, London, 1957; and W. Hatcher and D. Martin, *The Bahá'ī Faith: The Emerging Global Religion*, San Francisco, 1984.

*Search terms:*

|              |            |             |   |
|--------------|------------|-------------|---|
| □□□□□ □□□□□□ | bahae,iman | bahae,imaan | □ |
|--------------|------------|-------------|---|