

Bahá'í

WHO IS GOD?

There is one God, who is omnipotent and omniscient. He is the creator of all things. The Bahá'í faith believes that all religions worship the same God, but conceive of God in different ways (Allah, Yahweh, Brahma, Waheguru, Buddha, etc. are all just different names for the same God). God is too great and subtle to be fully understood by the minds of finite humans, but humans can experience and understand many things about God. Humans are able to know that God loves, and humans are able to experience that love, but can not fully understand or experience all of God's love, because it is so great.

WHERE DID WE COME FROM?

We are all created by God. All humans and all of creation are his handiwork and reflect his attributes. According to Bahá'u'lláh, the universe is of great age, and creation has always existed, and has always had something equivalent to humanity. Bahá'u'lláh's son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, taught that the biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is meant to be taken metaphorically, instead of literally.

WHY ARE WE HERE?

We are here to know and worship God, and to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The oneness of humanity is the central teaching of the Bahá'í Faith. It stresses the equality of all people regardless of their racial background or sex and the need to build international structures to abolish war, strengthen justice and international law, ameliorate poverty, spread universal education, and resolve environmental problems.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb are considered sacred, as is the Qu'rán. Bahá'u'lláh is a Manifestation of God (Divine Messenger), and as such, has the capacity to receive divine revelation and to transmit it infallibly to humans. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are considered a later (and more complete) revelation than the Qu'rán. Bahá'u'lláh, as a follower of the Báb, was familiar with both the Qu'rán, and Bayán, the major work by the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh's books include Kitáb-i-Iqán, or the Book of Certitude, The Hidden Words, The Seven Valleys, and Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO?

There are no ceremonies in the Bahá'í tradition, nor are there any sacraments or rituals. There are no

Bahá'í clergy, although there are elected and appointed leaders who administer the Bahá'í Faith around the world. All Bahá'ís must pray daily. They are also called to abstain from all narcotics and alcohol (any substance which can alter the mind). They are called to monogamy, and those getting married must seek parental approval. When possible, attendance at the Nineteen Day Feast is required. This feast happens at the beginning of each month. The Bahá'í year consists of 19 months, each with 19 days, so the feast takes place every nineteen days. In each year, there are four intercalary days (five in leap years). Bahá'ís are also called to fast from sunrise to sunset during the nineteen days of the Bahá'í Fast, which takes place March 2-20. Since Bahá'ís are committed to the betterment and unity of humanity, they call for the abandonment of all forms of prejudice, along with assurance to women of full equality of opportunity with men. In addition, they strive to establish a global commonwealth of nations. They seek the recognition of the unity and relativity of religious truth, and work toward the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth. Universal education is highly valued as a means to enable each person to independently search for truth. Out of this comes the recognition that true religion is in harmony with reason and the pursuit of knowledge. A major goal of Bahá'ís is to redefine human relationships in the light of humanity's knowledge of God's will and purpose, and to free the human consciousness from traditional patterns.

WHAT'S GOING ON TODAY?

The Bahá'í Faith has over five million adherents across the world. It is administered by the Universal House of Justice. Rulings from the Universal House of Justice have the same authority as the sacred writings. There are Bahá'í houses of worship on every continent in the world except for Antarctica.

HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE IT?

A simple nine-pointed star is generally used by Bahá'ís as a symbol of their Faith. The number nine has significance in the Bahá'í revelation. Nine years after the announcement of the Báb in Shiraz, Bahá'u'lláh received the intimation of His mission in the dungeon in Tehran. Nine, as the highest single-digit number, symbolizes completeness. Since the Bahá'í Faith claims to be the fulfillment of the expectations of all prior religions, this symbol reflects that sense of fulfillment and completeness.

The 411 on the founding of Bahá'í

Who: The Bahá'í Faith was founded by Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri, or Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), considered to be the most recent in a line of Divine Messengers, or Messengers of God. He was succeeded by his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), who was followed by Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957).

What: A Bahá'í is a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'ís believe that humanity is a single race that must unify in a global society, and that God, through history, is breaking down the barriers of race, class, creed and nation. Bahá'u'lláh called himself a Divine Messenger, and taught that the founders of all the major world religions, including Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad, were also Divine Messengers. Each brought a successive revelation of the same God, with the purpose of unifying humanity into a peaceful, global society.

When: The Bahá'í Faith was founded in 1844. Its history began with Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad, or the Báb, a mystical Muslim merchant who lived from 1819-1850. The Báb claimed to be a divine messenger, and later to be the prophesied Hidden Imam. Imams were the spiritual leaders of the

Shi'ite Muslims in Iran and Iraq. Prophecies arose about the return of the Hidden Imam after the final Imam went into hiding in the 10th century CE. The Báb's claim to be that Hidden Imam, and his growing popularity, caused conflict with the Shiah leaders and clerics of the time. He was eventually assassinated in Azerbaijan in 1850, an event which came to be known as the Martyrdom of the Báb. Before his death, the Báb prophesied about a coming deliverer, "Him Whom God Will Make Manifest". Several years after the Martyrdom of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be that deliverer.

Where: The Bahá'í Faith began in Persia (Iran), but now has adherents across the world. It has Houses of Worship in the United States, Panama, Uganda, Germany, India, Australia, and Samoa. The largest Bahá'í communities are located in India, Iran, the United States, Malaysia, Brazil, Kenya, Zaire/Congo, Uganda, and Bolivia. The Universal House of Justice, the ruling body of the Bahá'í faith worldwide, is located in Israel.

WHAT IF I WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information about Bahá'í, check out these sites:

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www.bahai.org

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www.us.bahai.org

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www.bahai-faith.org

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www.onecountry.org

Books:

The Bahai Faith: A Short Introduction, by Moojan Momen.

Logos & Civilization: Spirit, History and Order in the Writings of Bahau'llah, by Nader Saiedi.

The Elements of the Bahá'í Faith, by Joseph Sheppherd.

Sources:

The Bahai World (<http://www.bahai.org>)

Britannica Online -- Bahai section (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=1545&tocid=0>)

Stockman, Robert. The Bahá'í Faith: A Portrait. In Beversluis, Joel (Ed.). (1995). A Sourcebook for Earth's Community of Religions. Ada: CoNexus Press.

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