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BASICS OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

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BASICS OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

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WINDOWS TO THE PAST

by Dr. Darius Shahrokh and Mrs. Grace Shahrokh

We dedicate this presentation to the memory of hundreds of recent martyrs in Iran. The memory of two of them lingers so vividly in my heart. One was Bahíyyih Khánum Nádirí and the other, Professor Manúchíhr Hakím. She taught me at Bahá'í school and he, at Tehran Medical School. Both, with the rest of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran, were martyred fourteen years ago.

Through this window, we will be able to review the basics of the Bahá'í Faith. The study of the Faith can never be completed even in a lifetime; therefore, this presentation should not be assumed to be all-inclusive. From the moment one states that he believes in Bahá'u'lláh, the spark of faith is enkindled. Unless we feed it by deepening our knowledge of the faith, it will be threatened by the winds of tests. To love Bahá'u'lláh, we have to know Him first. Then our love for Him will enable us to obey Him and become a true believer. 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifies a true believer as one who says it with the tongue, feels it in the heart, and shows it with action. (1)

For an orderly approach, this presentation is divided into nine topics, each covering related subjects. It is hoped that this overview becomes an inspiration for deepening and better understanding of the Bahá'í Faith.

I. BAHÁ'Í HISTORY

One of the unique features of the Bahá'í Faith is the detailed recorded history of its Founder which is unparalleled in any other previous dispensation.

THE BĀB

The Báb means the gate. This title was adopted by the 25-year-old merchant from Shiráz, a southern city in Iran, when on May 23, 1844, He declared His faith to Mullá Husayn, a 31-year-old learned student of theology. He declared Himself to be the gate to a greater Manifestation or Messenger of God soon to appear. This was very much like John the Baptist paving the way for the advent of Jesus. The corrupt government and religious leaders of Iran, fearing for the security of their positions, rose up against Him. Due to the rapid spread of His teachings, He was soon arrested and kept in captivity. Within the short six years of His ministry about 20,000 of His followers, who were called Bábís, were brutally tortured and martyred. The first eighteen apostles, who recognized Him independently of each other, were given the title of The Letters of the Living. One of them was a woman called Tahírih, who tore away the customary veil and proclaimed the arrival of the age of dignity and equality for women. The last one, Quddús, though only twenty-two years old, was ranked second to the Báb. Most of them were martyred. The Báb's martyrdom by a firing squad of 750 men on July 9, 1859, was reported in the Western newspapers. He miraculously escaped the first firing of 750 bullets unharmed.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Although the life and ministry of the Báb were short, His mission was accomplished by preparing His followers for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. The Báb in His book, called the Bayán, stated, "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord." (2) Bahá'u'lláh in 1863 declared Himself to be the Promised One by the Báb and all the Messengers of the past. His history will be reviewed as a separate topic.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

After the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, His will specifically appointed His eldest Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the exclusive authority and interpreter of His words. From His birth on the very night of the Declaration of the Báb to His passing in 1921, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's

life was dedicated to the service of the Cause. Although Bahá'u'lláh had given Him the titles of the Master, the Most Great Branch, and the Mystery of God, after the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, He chose the title of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, meaning the Servant of Bahá. He shared all the exiles and imprisonments of His Father. Additionally, after the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was incarcerated for seven more years. After He was freed, He visited Egypt, Europe, and in 1912, made a seven months' tour of The United States with a side trip to Canada, speaking about the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in places of worship, universities, and homes. He laid the cornerstone of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois. He built the Shrine of the Báb on the spot Bahá'u'lláh had pointed out to Him on Mount Carmel in Israel. The House of Worship in 'Ishqábád, Russian Turkistán, was completed during His ministry. There are twenty-six to twenty-seven thousand letters and a few books written by Him. He is also known as the Center of the Covenant and the Exemplar of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. He passed away in 1921 and was laid to rest in the Shrine of the Báb, in a room adjacent to the room where the Holy Dust of the Báb was laid to rest.

SHOGHI EFFENDI

Bahá'u'lláh's appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant preserved the unity among His followers. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament appointed His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Faith which further assured this unity. He was the last authorized interpreter of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. He was born and raised in the Holy Land. As a youth, he served 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His secretary for His English correspondence. When he was twenty-four years old and studying at Oxford University in England, 'Abdu'l-Bahá passed away. Shoghi Effendi left England to return to Haifa and assume the responsibilities of Guardianship of the Faith. As the expounder of the Faith, he elucidated what Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had stated. During thirty-six years of his ministry until his passing in 1957, he guided the growth of the Faith by series of teaching plans. Like a foreman, he built the administrative order the way Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá envisioned it. He translated writings of Bahá'u'lláh into English, built the superstructure over the Shrine of the Báb, built the International Archives building,

beautified the Bahá'í properties in Haifa and around the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh with extensive gardens. He wrote several books, thousands of letters, and received hundreds of pilgrims. He passed away in London in 1957 at the age of sixty and was laid to rest there. Shoghi Effendi did not appoint a successor because the conditions for this in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will could not be met. His last world-wide teaching plan was completed in 1963 when fifty-six National Spiritual Assemblies elected the Universal House of Justice.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Bahá'u'lláh, in The Most Holy Book or the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, ordained the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. 'Abdul-Bahá, in His Will and Testament, writes "Unto The Most Holy Book every one must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice," and further He writes that the Universal House of Justice is "the source of all good and freed from all error."(3) The nine members of the House of Justice are elected every five years. The last election was in 1993 by 165 National Spiritual Assemblies which indicates the three-fold growth of the administrative order within the past thirty years, and eleven-fold increase in the number of believers from half a million to five and half million.

The Bahá'í Faith, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, has assumed the rank of the most wide-spread world religion, only second to Christianity. These observations are only an indication for what is yet to unfold.

THE BAHÁ'Í ERA

One of the titles of Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets. It indicates that the prophetic cycle, when various Messengers of God prophesied the coming of the Day of God, was ended with Muhammad. With the declaration of the Báb in 1844, the Bahá'í cycle or the cycle of fulfillment began which will last 500,000 years. The first era of this cycle is the Bahá'í Era which will last at least 1,000 years, after which another Manifestation will appear. Here, we realize that according to teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the revelations of God are not final but progressive.

As long as mankind exists, it will need Divine guidance. The Bahá'í Era is divided into three ages - the Heroic, the Formative, and the Golden Age.

THE HEROIC OR APOSTOLIC AGE

This period of time is from the Declaration of the Báb in 1844 to the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921. It was the time of heroic deeds and great sacrifices which also brought great victories. The early believers of this period are called the Dawn-Breakers. The number of martyrs, by the time of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reached up to 30,000 believers. (4) By studying the history of the three Central Figures of the Faith, the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the dramatic and tragic events of this period, we can learn about the roots of our precious Faith and how it was watered with the blood of thousands of martyrs.

THE FORMATIVE OR TRANSITIONAL AGE

This period of time began with the guardianship of Shoghi Effendi in 1921 after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. During this period, the institutions of the administrative order of the Faith were established and will continue to grow and mature until the arrival of the Golden Age. In this critical period, the old world order will be replaced by the New World Order. Great turmoil and calamities will bring mankind to its knees. The tests and challenges for the believers are numerous. In this age, by rhythmic action of crises and victories, expansion and consolidation, the foundation will be laid for the Golden Age when the Kingdom of God on earth will be established.

Our duty is to rise and serve and be confident about the invincibility of the Cause and its triumph. However, it is crucial that we first teach ourselves and let Bahá'u'lláh's words transform our lives. Then and only then our lives will become magnetized with His love and our words will attract. To coordinate the activities of the believers, there have been a number of teaching plans by Shoghi Effendi and the House of Justice. These plans, which are usually identified by their terms such as Three Year Plan or Seven Year Plan, shall continue until the eventual spiritual conquest of the planet. The direction for all these plans comes

from fourteen tablets written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1916 and 1917, called The Tablets of the Divine Plan, addressed to the believers in the United States and Canada.

THE GOLDEN AGE

Shoghi Effendi divided the Bahá'í history into three ages. The last age, or the Golden Age, is the time of the Most Great Peace, when the human race attains maturity. In that age the world will be ruled under the laws of The Most Holy Book or the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The earth will be one country and mankind its citizens. Prejudices of all kinds will be eliminated as well as the extremes of wealth and poverty. There will be a world language and script. Time does not permit further elaboration. All that can be said is that the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era has been the vision of every prophet of the past who prophesied it in various terms.

II. HISTORY OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

He was born on November 12, 1817, in Tehran, Iran to a wealthy and noble family. His given name was Ḥusayn-Álī. From childhood, He showed His innate knowledge and wisdom. Though unusual for a son of nobility, He showed deep love and concern for people, particularly the poor and the sick. He soon became known as the "Father of the Poor." At the age of eighteen, He married Ásíyih Khánúm, also from a prominent and wealthy family. When twenty-two years old, His father died, leaving his position in the king's court open. The position was offered to Bahá'u'lláh, but to the surprise of the prime minister, He refused it.

When He was twenty-seven, the first disciple of the Báb, Mullá Ḥusayn, a few months after the Báb's declaration, brought a message from the Báb which was given to Bahá'u'lláh through a third person. Upon reading it, He accepted the Cause of the Báb and became one of the prominent promoters of that Cause. Four years later when the Báb was in prison, Bahá'u'lláh arranged for a gathering of the believers in the resort village of Badasht. Also present in that conference were Quddús and Ṭáhirih. During that conference with eighty-one followers, Bahá'u'lláh gave each one a new name, such as Quddús and Ṭáhirih. For Himself, He chose

the title of Bahá, which means Glory. At this conference a clear break was made with the old laws and traditions, and the beginning of a new age was announced. It shocked a few who thought the Báb's Faith was another sect of Islám. In Badasht only Quddús and Ṭáhirih recognized Bahá'u'lláh. Mullá Ḥusayn was not able to be at that conference, but he also knew who Bahá'u'lláh really was. Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb did not physically meet.

In the process of promoting the Faith of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned three times and bastinadoed once. Bastinado is the humiliating and painful punishment of lashing the soles of the feet. As thousands became followers of the Báb, persecutions and killing became the response of the government and the clergy. About 20,000 followers were martyred, and finally the Báb was executed by a firing squad in 1850.

Two years later three crazy and revengeful Bábí youth tried to kill the king, but failed. All the prominent Bábí leaders, including Bahá'u'lláh, were arrested. Bahá'u'lláh with thirty other followers were cast into an underground dungeon called the Siyáh-Chál or the Black Pit. That stench-filled dungeon had only one opening to the outside and that was its entrance. There were no sanitary facilities and many of the one hundred-fifty worst criminals had no clothes. It was in that dark and gloomy environment where Bahá'u'lláh received His mission or intimation in the form of visions and dreams. A general massacre of the Bábís followed. Every day one of the Bábís in the dungeon was called by the executioner to be butchered in a most brutal way. Bahá'u'lláh providentially was protected and freed from charges of plotting the attempt on the life of the king.

He spent four months in the Siyáh-Chál and was freed in December, 1852, pending His immediate exile to Baghdad, which belonged to the neighboring Turkish Empire. He was ill with deadly typhoid fever and leach wounds on His legs. Upon the family's request, the government consented to a delay of one month. Partly recovered, He and His family started that very difficult journey in January, inadequately prepared. They had to cross the snow-bound mountain passes of western Iran on foot or mules.

One year after their arrival in Baghdád, because of the disunity His jealous half-brother Mírzá Yahyá was causing, He went into seclusion in the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih. He took very little provisions and spent two years there. Upon the discovery of His whereabouts, He consented to the request of the family and returned to Baghdád. His total stay in Baghdád, including those two years, was ten years. He was the object of the opposition of the Persian consul and the local clergy. Both had plans to kill Him, but did not succeed.

Then the decree was issued for His exile to the capital of the Turkish Empire, Constantinople, now known as Istanbul. In April, 1863, in preparation for His departure, He went to a garden outside the city gates which was known as the Garden of Ridván, meaning paradise. There He declared to be the One promised by the Báb and all the prophets of the past, in other words, the Supreme Manifestation. In about four months, after arrival in Istanbul, another decree was issued for His exile to Adrianople, which is in the most eastern corner of the European continent. These exiles were particularly instigated by the Persian ambassador.

One year after His arrival in Adrianople, He was almost fatally poisoned by His treacherous half-brother, but recovered and was left with shaking hands for the rest of His life.

During the five years of His stay in Adrianople, He proclaimed His Cause world-wide by addressing the kings and ecclesiastics. These rulers had absolute power over their subjects. He warned them that if they rejected His message, their power would be taken away from them. And this exactly happened to all of them, except Queen Victoria of England, who said, "If this is of God, it will endure; if not, it can do no harm."

His final exile was planned for the total extinction of Him and His Cause. It was to the disease-ridden penal colony of 'Akká which was the Bastille of the Turkish Empire. It took place in 1868. He spent the last twenty-four years of His ministry in 'Akká, and the largest volume of His writings was revealed during those years. At the beginning, the restrictions were severe and He was placed in a solitary cell behind bars. As gradually the restrictions eased up, He moved to small houses. It was in one

of these houses where The Most Holy Book, or the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, was revealed in the summer of 1873. Slowly, Bahá'u'lláh's enemies' attitudes changed and He was allowed to leave the walled city of 'Akká. He spent the last twelve years of His earthly life in the Mansion of Bahjí, which means delight. This mansion, which was built by an oasis, had been abandoned by the owner due to outbreak of cholera. His followers had easy access to Him and thousands of them established His faith in Iran and the neighboring countries.

Bahá'u'lláh ascended on May 29, 1892, after a brief illness. He was laid to rest the same day in a room adjacent to the Mansion which is called the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. It is the Point of Adoration, or the Qiblih, for the Bahá'is of the world and one of the sites for pilgrimage.

His writings, either in His own handwriting or by His amanuensis, which means secretary, total 15,000. Some are the size of a book such as the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Kitáb-i-Íqán, and His last book, the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, and some in form of tablets and letters. The original of these are all preserved at the Bahá'í International Archives in Haifa, Israel.

To name a few of His writings: He wrote The Hidden Words, Seven Valleys, Four Valleys, and The Book of Certitude, or the Kitáb-i-Íqán while in Baghdád. Towards the end of His stay in Adrianople and then in 'Akká, He addressed the kings, emperors and the ecclesiastics. His major tablets, which were revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and constitute a supplement to The Most Holy Book, are 'Ishráqát (Splendors), Bishárát (Glad Tidings), Tajalliyát (Effulgences), Tarázát (Ornaments), Kalimát-i-Ferdawsiyyih (Words of Paradise), Lawḥ-i-Hikmat (Tablet of Wisdom), Lawḥ-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Tablet, also known as The Tablet to the Christians), Lawḥ-i-Maqsūd (The Tablet of Maqsūd), and Lawḥ-i-Dunyā (The Tablet of the World). The Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are selections translated and compiled by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian.

Bahá'u'lláh's writings, as rich and beautiful as they are, were revealed with unusual speed without a single word ever changed. His revelation was written either in His own handwriting or by a scribe. After a few days, Bahá'u'lláh would summon His scribe

and repeat what had been dictated so the scribe could check for any errors the scribe might have made. In addition to revealing in the highest Persian style of prose, He also revealed in flawless Arabic, a most difficult language which He never studied, thus showing His innate knowledge. His will was called Kitáb-i-'Ahd, or The Book of Covenant, which was read nine days after His ascension and clearly appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His successor.

III. SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS

Before we discuss various subjects under this topic, it is essential that we bear in mind the statement of the Guardian that religious truth is not absolute, but relative. (5) In other words, Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, though profound, are revealed only to our limited capacity.

THE NATURE OF GOD

Throughout ages, all peoples have believed in a higher power. This has been called God, Khudá, Jehovah, Ahúrá-Mazdá, and Alláh, all of which are the names of the same creator. The essence of God is unknowable even by the Messengers, but they, like a perfect mirror, reflect God's attributes. Through His Messengers, or Manifestations, we recognize God as just, merciful, loving, forgiving, and His many other attributes. All the Messengers have taught that man is created in the image of God. That means man has the potential to reflect the attributes of God. While it is difficult to learn about God, Bahá'u'lláh states that God is closer to man than his life-vein.

STATION OF THE MANIFESTATION

The Manifestations of God are part of the covenant of God with man that He would never leave us unguided. If we think of God as the sun, humanity is like mirrors that can reflect the light of the sun to a greater or lesser degree depending on the amount of dust or imperfections in them. The Manifestations are like a perfectly clear and polished mirror than can reflect the full radiance of the sun. Again, we are not talking about the unknowable essence of God, but what is revealed of Him. The soul of a person begins at the time of conception, but the souls of the

Manifestations are pre-existent. In their nature as man, they are servants to God and have physical limitations, but as the mouthpiece of God, speak with authority of God. They are all equal and reflect the same spirit but the intensity of their revelation varies according to the capacity of mankind at the time. Because of preexistence of their soul, they have all knowledge of the past and future.

ONENESS OF RELIGION

In the past, the concept of people was that all religions other than their own were false. Bahá'u'lláh explains that the religion of God is one but has been taught by many Manifestations. Why many? During and shortly after the time when a Manifestation appears, people have the pure teachings of God. With the passage of time, this pure mirror becomes covered with the dust of man's imaginings. Then comes the need for a new Manifestation. Each Manifestation brings two types of teachings. One is the eternal spiritual teachings such as brotherly love which will never change. The other is the social teachings which vary according to the changing needs and capacity of people. The Manifestations do not teach all they know, but teach only that which people can, in that particular stage, understand.

TWIN DUTIES OF MAN

In the opening paragraph of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states that man's first duty is to recognize Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God, and the second duty is to obey Him. Neither of these duties are accepted without the other. This is so different from the past concepts which claim that just accepting a Manifestation is sufficient for salvation. Of course, there are those of the other extreme, who claim that doing good deeds is enough without needing to believe in a Messenger of God.

Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of God for this age. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas He states, "Observe My commandments for the love of My beauty." His laws, instead of binding man with limitations, will bring true liberty which comes only by submission to the will of God. When studying the Bahá'í Writings, should you come across a matter which is not agreeable to you, please do not balk.

Be aware of limitations of our understanding. How often with deeper study, the meaning becomes obvious. In other words, trust the wisdom of the Divine Author.

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

In the past, people believed in something because their family, friends or religious leaders told them to. Therefore, it was often blind and unquestioning. Bahá'u'lláh teaches and stresses that each person must investigate truth for himself and come to his own conclusion without relying on someone else's thinking. Of course, it takes courage, effort and detachment. Detachment means to free one's self from all barriers such as love, or hate, as well as one's social status and knowledge.

The blind following in the past also has been the cause of division and disunity. When man-made differences are put aside, one easily can see that truth is truth; whatever the source and wherever it is taught.

SACRIFICE

Sacrifice is a sign of love. The Manifestations of God have sacrificed their lives and comfort because of their love for humanity. First, we have to know Bahá'u'lláh better. The better we recognize Him, the more we wish to obey Him, and in this righteous cycle our love increases for Him. The word sacrifice not always means giving one's life. We have many opportunities to show our love by sacrificing our selfish desires, time, energy and material goods. In other words, living a Bahá'í life, teaching and serving the Faith should become our way of demonstrating our love for Bahá'u'lláh. May we be protected from the vicious cycle of neglect and drifting away.

RECITATION, PRAYER AND STUDY

It is a law of Bahá'u'lláh to recite His writings twice daily in the morning and evening. This should be done when we can concentrate and meditate without getting tired. The obligatory prayer will be discussed later. Reading or chanting the prayers revealed by the Central Figures have special creative power.

All prayers are when we talk to God to praise Him or to supplicate, but the recitation is for the Words of Bahá'u'lláh to talk to us. Study of the Writings is for our deepening and nurturing our faith. Bahá'u'lláh instructs us in these words, "Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depth." (6) Whether prayer, recitation or study, they all must be followed by action. In the process of studying and discussing, we are aware that we could make personal interpretation of the Writings provided it is not contrary to the authorized interpretation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, as well as elucidations of the Universal House of Justice; however, we must never impose our thought on others or engage in dissension. The practice of past religions, which gave ascendancy to the best debaters and caused divisions, is eliminated by Bahá'u'lláh. First, the authorized interpreters were appointed by Him, and additionally, He has explicitly forbidden contention and conflict on any subject.

WORK AS WORSHIP

In this age, Bahá'u'lláh has raised work done in the spirit of service to the rank of worship. No longer is one's job separated from his religious life. Having some type of occupation is a command of God. To the question of unsalaried work such as homemaking, the House of Justice states, "Homemaking is a highly honorable and responsible work of fundamental importance for mankind." (7) Everyone who is physically able must work. At any job, one should do it to the best of one's ability since as worship one has to give only one's best to God. What a wonderful world it will be when every one will do their best.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

When the body dies, the soul is untouched. Man's body is like a mirror and the soul is connected with it the same way as the rays of the sun are reflected in a mirror. When the mirror shatters, the light is still existing. During this life, our body is a host or custodian to our soul to nurture it with perfections in preparation for rebirth into the next world. As the womb of the mother is a temporary residence for the baby to develop its limbs and organs, so is our body in relation to the soul.

The baby, while developing in the womb, has no awareness of this world. However, through the bounty of God, the Manifestations of God continue to give us guidance in preparation for the next life. After death, the soul will progress in the worlds of God unhindered by physical limitation of the body; therefore, the soul will not reincarnate in another physical form. Prayer and charitable acts in memory of the departed will help the progress of their souls.

IV. SOCIAL TEACHINGS

The world is now beginning to understand and feel the need for many of the social teachings of the Bahá'í Faith which were revealed by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago.

THE ONENESS OF MANKIND

Bahá'u'lláh, appearing at the age of maturity of mankind, has placed oneness of mankind as a pivot to all of His social teachings. It is a broad term with several aspects. One is that we are all members of the human family created by the same God who loves us all. Also it means each person has a soul capable of reflecting the attributes of God. The third aspect is the realization of how our Creator wishes us to be. Therefore, we work hard and strive to bring about true unity among the citizens of earth so hunger, poverty, and wars end, and the Kingdom of God on earth shall become established.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY

These days people have different ideas about the importance and purpose of family. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the family is the most basic unit and the building block of society. If the families are not healthy, loving, unified and spiritual, the society will not be healthy. Bahá'í family life begins with the marriage of a man and women with these vows, "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God." (8) A central purpose of marriage is to raise children. Bahá'u'lláh states, "Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants." (9) Spiritual and academic education of children is a serious obligation of the parents. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that those who neglect this "shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord." (10)

ELIMINATION OF PREJUDICE

Prejudice is when one makes up his mind before knowing all the facts. Also it is when a person refuses to change his opinion when the facts show that his opinion is wrong. These two are the roots of common prejudices about sex, color, nationality, religion, wealth and poverty. Prejudice is often the result of fear and ignorance. Because of these two factors, people create walls of prejudice to protect themselves. Unfortunately, these walls cause injustice and oppression. Racial and religious prejudice have caused and will continue to be the cause of bloodshed and destruction until mankind heeds Bahá'u'lláh's teaching, "Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other," (11) and in another passage, "Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship." (12) Bahá'í gatherings are examples of unity in diversity.

THE AGREEMENT OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

The two most powerful forces in human life are religion and science. Both are channels to truth and necessary for the progress of mankind. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that true religion and true science are in complete harmony. Since the truth is one, they cannot disagree. If they seem to disagree, it is because man does not yet understand something properly or all the facts are not yet known. Bahá'u'lláh warns that if religion denies science and the proven facts, it is superstition, and if the application of scientific knowledge is not guided by spiritual and moral values, it can cause destruction. At times, one may not understand the wisdom of a certain Bahá'í law. In such times, one should trust divine wisdom. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states, "Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men."

WORLD PEACE

Bahá'u'lláh, in fulfillment of all prophecies of the past, has brought God's plan for building a peaceful world. He stated that world peace will be achieved in two stages. First will be the

period of the Lesser Peace when wars end, and all nations will be united politically. In this stage, the world will be like a functioning body but without spirit. When the Bahá'ís breathe the spirit of life, or the love of Bahá'u'lláh, into this body, then it wakes up and the stage of the Most Great Peace or the Golden Age begins. In other words, the world will be politically, economically, and spiritually united. By living a Bahá'í life in every aspect, each believer will be doing his share to promote the coming of the Most Great Peace.

UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

Education and the ability to read and write is a key factor for independent investigation of truth, eliminating the need for depending on someone else to decide for you. This does not mean that people should not consult and study together. Spiritual education should go parallel with academic education since it is an essential guide for the betterment of the individual and society. Parents are responsible for the education of their children, but when they cannot afford or fail to do so, the community must. Bahá'u'lláh states, "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom." (13)

THE EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN

The past trend of keeping women uneducated and oppressed was reversed by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago. He teaches that men and women are equal in the sight of God. The Universal House of Justice states, "Equality between men and women does not, indeed physiologically it cannot, mean identity of functions." (14) The Bahá'í Faith gives preference to women as far as education is concerned because they raise the next generation. In regard to membership on the Universal House of Justice, the Guardian explains, "There is a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He definitely states that the membership of the Universal House of Justice is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be fully revealed and appreciated in the future. In the local, as well as the national House of Justice, however, women have the full right of membership. It is, therefore, only to the International House that they cannot be elected. The Bahá'ís should accept this statement

of the Master in a spirit of deep faith, confident that there is a divine guidance and wisdom behind it which will be gradually unfolded to the eyes of the world." (14)

SPIRITUAL SOLUTION TO THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM

The present imbalance between extremes of wealth and poverty is unjust. As Bahá'u'lláh warns, "The best-beloved of all things in My sight is justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me." (15) The simple formula for solving the economic problem is the change and transformation of hearts by the power of Bahá'u'lláh's words. With change of heart for equity and justice and when workers consider their work as worship, strife and strikes will be eliminated. Both workers and management should consult in the spirit of cooperation. Bahá'u'lláh says that workers must receive a share of the profits of the business. Absolute economic equality is not possible but extremes must be eliminated. In the global system, greed and self-interest must be replaced by cooperation and sharing of natural resources by all nations.

UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

This teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, more than a century old, is one of the greatest means for bringing about unity and understanding. According to Bahá'u'lláh, one language must be invented or chosen from the existing languages and taught in all schools of the world. The application of universal language, which implies written as well as spoken, has two stages. First is an auxiliary language being taught in addition to the native languages. The second stage is in the distant future when there will be only one language worldwide. (16) This category of teaching also includes uniform and universal currency, weights, and measures.

V. BAHÁ'Í LAWS

Some of the Bahá'í laws are found in the other great religions of the past and some are new. As social conditions change and mankind matures, new laws will be needed. Bahá'u'lláh has authorized the Universal House of Justice to legislate on whatever He has not revealed, and as conditions require, may change only its own laws. Bahá'í laws are of two kinds. Laws such as obligatory

prayer depend on one's maturity and love for Bahá'u'lláh and will not be enforced by any authority. Other laws, such as those concerning marriage and divorce, are enforced by the institutions. Disregard for such laws might cause forfeiting one's administrative rights, which means one cannot participate in the Nineteen-Day Feast meetings, administration, elections, nor contribute to the Bahá'í funds. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which is a must to have in every Bahá'í home, became available in English in 1993. Although many laws are binding on the believers in Iran, not all are applicable in the West. According to the maturity of the believers in the West and at the discretion of the Universal House of Justice, more laws will become applicable. Because of time limitations in this presentation, only some of the laws will be discussed.

OBLIGATORY PRAYER

Obligatory prayer is one of the major Bahá'í laws. It is a private act and must be done with all its rites; namely, ablution, meaning washing hands and face, then standing towards the Qiblih, or the point of adoration, which is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. ~~In the United States, one should face the East.~~ One must recite one of the three obligatory prayers daily. The short one may be recited between noon and sunset. The medium is to be repeated three times a day; sunrise to noon, noon to sunset, and sunset to two hours after sunset. The long obligatory prayer could be recited at any time within twenty-four hours. The obligatory prayer is a spiritual law binding between the ages of fifteen and seventy. For exemptions, please refer to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

FASTING

‘Abdu'l-Bahá states that prayer and fasting are the causes of awakening and mindfulness and are conducive to protection and preservation from tests. (17) The spirit in which one approaches the Fast is very important. The period of fasting is a time when abstaining from food and drink reminds us that we are spiritual as well as physical beings. It is the time for cleansing from selfish desires, lust, prejudices, and other impurities. It is a time to meditate on how to further enrich one's spiritual life. The Bahá'í Fast lasts nineteen days from March 2nd through

March 20th. During this time, one abstains from eating, drinking, and smoking from sunrise to sunset. It is a spiritual obligation for believers between ages fifteen and seventy. Exemptions are for those traveling, sick, pregnant, nursing a child; and for other exemptions and details, please refer to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

HUQÚQU'LLÁH

It means the Right of God. This law is very much different from the voluntary contributions to the Funds. It is the material aspect of a spiritual obligation not enforced by any institution. However, Bahá'u'lláh warns us, "O people! Deal not faithlessly with the Right of God." (18) He assures us that the giver will be the beneficiary. It is like a tree which gets its sustenance from the earth. Every year it gives some of its wealth back to the earth by shedding its leaves. These leaves kill the weeds and eventually act as fertilizer, benefitting the tree itself. To the earth, it does not matter if the tree sheds or not. Whenever a believer's pure assessable wealth reaches the value equal to nineteen mithqáls of gold one must pay nineteen per cent of it as the Right of God to the trustee of Huqúqu'lláh which is forwarded to the Universal House of Justice. Mithqál is a Persian unit of weight and nineteen mithqáls is about 2.2 troy ounces. For details of this law, read the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, as well as booklets on the subject.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Marriage is a serious commitment between a man and woman, and must be based on both spiritual and physical bonds. It should be based on love, unity, friendship and respect. If it is a spiritual union, it will have an everlasting effect. Bahá'í marriage does not require exchange of rings, but definitely requires the consents of all the living parents, even when a partner is not a Bahá'í. In the presence of two witnesses acceptable to a Spiritual Assembly, the bride and groom each repeat the verse, "We will, all, verily abide by the Will of God." Bahá'u'lláh condemns divorce in strong terms. However, if aversion develops, divorce is permitted after one year of living apart, called the year of patience or year of waiting. During this year, the couple should try to reconcile their differences, and are not to get involved in courting a new partner.

PROHIBITIONS

Bahá'u'lláh's laws are for a new social order and will lead to liberty for the individual and society.

- Alcohol and mind-altering drugs are forbidden unless prescribed by a physician.
- Gambling, backbiting and gossip are forbidden.
- Sex outside marriage, as well as homosexual acts, are forbidden.
- Bahá'ís are not permitted to be members of churches or other non-Bahá'í religious institutions.
- Bahá'u'lláh forbids confession of sins to another person for absolution.
- Criminal acts such as murder, arson, and stealing are forbidden and provisions for punishments are given in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

WILL AND BURIAL

Every Bahá'í must leave a will. Without a will, the estate will be divided according to the provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, wherever it is legally possible.

Bodies should not be cremated, but should be buried, and the burial site must be within one hour's journey from the place of death, whether the journey is by air, land, or sea. Regarding embalming, the Guardian states, "Under Bahá'í teachings, it seems clear that the body is not to be embalmed." (19) Before burial, the only congregational prayer in the Faith should be read. With everyone standing, one person recites the prayer. For details about the burial ring and preparation of the body, see the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

LOYALTY TO GOVERNMENT

Bahá'ís recognize that governments are for keeping order in the society. The believers must obey all of the laws of their respective governments, except for any law requiring them to recant their faith. Bahá'ís cannot belong to political parties since it would bring disunity among the believers. Our task is not to tear down or repair the old system, but rather to build the new order of Bahá'u'lláh and offer it to the world when everything else has failed.

VI. BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION

THE COVENANT OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Bahá'u'lláh promised that His followers would not be left without guidance. In the past, man's interpretations of scriptures caused great divisions within religions, each sect claiming to be the only true link to God. He said that the Covenant is like a cord that connects man to God. According to Bahá'u'lláh's Will, called the Book of the Covenant, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became the Center of the Covenant. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in turn, appointed Shoghi Effendi, His grandson, as the Guardian of the Cause, who guided the establishment of the Administrative Order outlined by Bahá'u'lláh. Six years after the passing of Shoghi Effendi when his Ten Year Plan was completed in 1963, the Universal House of Justice was elected by the fifty-six National Spiritual Assemblies existing then. Bahá'u'lláh has promised that His spirit would guide the Universal House of Justice; therefore, its decisions are divinely inspired and it is freed from all error. (20) Obedience to the Universal House of Justice is obedience to God.

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Bahá'u'lláh gave the world the blueprint of the Administrative Order. In the past, men had to devise their own systems which were prone to corruption and abuse of power. Bahá'u'lláh, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, ordained the Universal and local Houses of Justice in 1873. One of the most important responsibilities of the Universal House of Justice is to make laws. It cannot change laws given by Bahá'u'lláh. It answers difficult questions and settles disputes, so vital for the preservation of unity among the believers. It also supervises National Spiritual Assemblies, the translation of Bahá'í writings and development of the World Center. The work of the Universal House of Justice is assisted by the International Teaching Center and the Research Department, whose members are appointed by the Universal House of Justice.

THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

'Abdu'l-Bahá established the National Spiritual Assemblies, which elect the nine members of the Universal House of Justice every five years. National Spiritual Assembly members are elected once a year by delegates from every part of a country. Generally, Bahá'í elections take place during Ridván, which is the anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh. However, the delegates are elected usually in October at district conventions. In some areas, instead of National, it is called Regional Spiritual Assembly where it oversees the local assemblies of a few countries together. All issues affecting the Faith in a country or region are its responsibility. The National Fund, publications, membership and properties are under its direction.

THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

It is the institution Bahá'ís are in closest contact with. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, it is designated as local House of Justice, but for the time being, it is known as local Spiritual Assembly. Since there are no priests or clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, the local Assemblies carry out the duties that in former times would be the responsibility of clergy. The nine members are directly elected by the adult believers in a specified locality.

'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "From them, the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They indeed are the potent sources of the progress of man at all times and under all conditions." (21) Promoting the spiritual health of the community is their responsibility which includes teaching the Faith, children's and adult education, marriage, divorce, burial, the Nineteen-Day Feast and Holy Day observances. Shoghi Effendi advised the believers to go to their local Spiritual Assembly as a child goes to its parents. (22)

OBEDIENCE TO ELECTED INSTITUTIONS

No believer should feel above the Spiritual Assembly and there is no excuse for disobeying its decisions. One may ask questions and ask for reconsideration. If not satisfied, one may ask the National Spiritual Assembly or even appeal to the Universal House

of Justice, but meanwhile, must carry out instructions of the local Assembly. Bahá'ís are promised that if they are obedient to the Spiritual Assembly, "God will right any wrong done." (23) Just because a believer is elected to an Institution of Rulers or holds an office such as chairman or secretary, he or she does not have any special authority as an individual over other believers. It is the whole elected body arriving at decisions through consultaion which rules and holds authority given to it by Bahá'u'lláh. This is very much unlike man-made administrations with inherent authority of their officers and members.

ELECTIONS

All Bahá'ís age twenty-one and over, whose rights are in good standing, should participate in Bahá'í elections and should willingly serve when elected to any administrative body, which collectively are known as the Institution of the Rulers. Bahá'í elections are free from nomination and campaigning, even to the point of not privately discussing the merits of one person over another. The qualifications for members to be elected are loyalty to the Cause, unselfish devotion, a well-trained mind, ability and mature experience. Wealth, race, schooling, and friendship must not influence the voters.

CONSULTATION

Consultation, which is the basis for any decision-making, must, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, be a "spiritual conference." (24) The proper steps for a fruitful consultation are, first, to find all the relevant facts; next, to see which spiritual or administrative teachings of the Faith apply; and then do a full and frank discussion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions." (25) Following these steps, a decision is made by voting, if it is not unanimous. Every one must obey the majority vote, even those who opposed it. The community at large is not informed who voted for or against an issue.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE LEARNED

In past religions, the most learned followers usually became the rulers who often became corrupted with ego and abuse of power. Bahá'u'lláh has protected the Faith by giving authority and power only to the elected bodies which are called the Institution of the Rulers. However, the dedicated, learned, and wise believers may be appointed to the Institution of the Learned so they can deepen and inspire other believers. This institution includes the Hands of the Cause of God, the Continental Boards of Counselors, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants. Bahá'u'lláh created the institution of the Hands of the Cause. He, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi appointed a number of believers to serve as the Hands of the Cause for protection and propagation of the Faith. In 1968, the House of Justice created the institution of the Continental Board of Counselors to be responsible for the same duties as the Hands of the Cause, except their term being five years and they may be reappointed. The Counselors are assisted in their work by the Auxiliary Board members. The Board members are either for protection or propagation and are helped by assistants for the same duty. All of the above-mentioned are part of the Institution of the Learned. The believers should learn who are the Board members and their assistants in their area and feel free to consult with them on any matter.

THE NINETEEN-DAY FEAST

The Nineteen-Day Feast was founded by the Báb to be a meeting for unity. It should preferably be held on the first day of each Bahá'í month. Attending the Feast should be a priority for every believer. The Feast program has three parts. The devotional when the writings of the three Central Figures are read; the administrative part when communications are read, activities of the community are reported and consultation and recommendations are made. The last part is the social time when refreshments are served. With love and unity everyone gets refreshed.

THE BAHÁ'Í FUNDS

Three things are needed to build the new World Order - guidance, effort, and resources. Bahá'ís alone are given the privilege of

contributing to the Bahá'í Funds. Only by universal participation in efforts and resources can the teaching work go forward. Regular contributions, preferably at each Feast, should become the habit of every believer. The amount is left to the believer. Shoghi Effendi states that it is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful believer to contribute freely and generously to the Fund. (26) No contribution is too small. Drops of rain form the mighty river. These funds are the Bahá'í International Fund for the Universal House of Justice, the Continental Fund for the expenses of the Counselors who are consultants and advisors to National Spiritual Assemblies, and local and National Bahá'í funds.

PIONEERING

The honor of promotion of the Faith is given to the believers, unlike the past religions in which it was given to the clergy. Pioneers are believers who sacrifice the comfort of their homes and move to distant places, sometimes permanently, to establish the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. One may go pioneering to the closest town to help form an Assembly or group which is called home-front pioneering, but the ones who leave their country are praised most by Bahá'u'lláh. Since we are all encouraged to go pioneering but some can't, one could financially support pioneers through a deputization fund.

VII. BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY LIFE

It is quite rewarding to live in a community with other Bahá'ís. However, it can be challenging as well, as all of us have room for improvement and no one can claim to be a true Bahá'í. One has to be careful not to be judgmental of others and not judge the Faith by the imperfections of those who are trying. We are like fish and the Bahá'í community is like water. At times, the water might not be as clear as we would like it to be, but jumping out of the water means death.

LIVING THE LIFE

Bahá'í teachings are revealed for every one of us to transform our lives. Of course, it takes effort and full vigilance to live our daily lives in accordance with the teachings but after a while it will become our second nature. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the Exemplar of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Some of the many good qualities we could strive for are courtesy, truthfulness, reverence for God, His Messengers and the Holy Writings, obedience to laws of God, cleanliness, justice, mercy and compassion to friends and strangers, patience, love, and fellowship. One attribute which God does not possess is humility and servitude. His is the opposite, which is sovereignty and lordship. Of all of the mentioned attributes, servitude and humility are the most pleasing in the sight of God, like the opposite poles of a magnet attracting each other.

By gradually acquiring these attributes, not only will we nurture our souls, but also will attract others to the Faith. People everywhere are looking for a force that can make the world a better place to live. Each one of us could become the example of the transforming power of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.

UNIVERSAL PARTICIPATION

The work of building God's Kingdom on earth will go much faster if each one does his part. The Bahá'í community is like a body. Each part has a job to do. Muscle and bone have different characteristics and functions, but they work in cooperation. If a part becomes nonfunctional, the whole body may continue to live but is definitely affected. Our capacities and functions are different. The only thing that all can do is to pray and strive to live the life of a true Bahá'í. All other things we do according to our capacities.

It is essential that women, particularly where repressed, should be encouraged to participate equally and contribute to the progress of society. This will be in fulfillment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision where He stated, "Humanity is like a bird with its two wings-the one is male, the other female. Unless both wings are strong, the bird cannot fly heavenwards." (27)

NINETEEN-DAY FEAST

This was just mentioned under Bahá'í Administration, but it should be seen as more than an administrative duty. The Feast is the heart of Bahá'í community life. It is a time when the Spiritual Assembly reports to and consults with the community and hears recommendations. Since community affairs are freely discussed, only Bahá'ís in good standing may attend. Every Bahá'í should attend the Feast meeting regularly unless ill or out of town.

OBSERVANCE OF HOLY DAYS

These Holy Days commemorate events in the lives of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, as well as the New Year's Day. There are nine Holy Days: the Birth, Declaration and Martyrdom of the Báb; Birth of Bahá'u'lláh; first, ninth, and twelfth day of Riḍván for Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh, and His Ascension. The first day of Bahá'í New Year, called Naw-Rúz, is celebrated on the first day of spring, usually March 21. On these Holy Days, work and school should be suspended. Some Holy Days, such as the Martyrdom of the Báb and Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, are solemn occasions and must be observed with reverence and not in festive manner. The intercalary days, also called Ayyám-i-Há, are usually four but five days in leap years. These occur between the eighteenth and nineteenth month and are not holy days. They precede the month of fasting and are for hospitality, charity and giving presents, always remembering those less fortunate.

SPIRITUAL EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

The spiritual education of children develops and increases their spiritual capacity, acquaints them with Bahá'í history and teachings and gives them Bahá'í values and manners. The responsibility of children's education is a duty given by Bahá'u'lláh to parents and the local Assemblies. Children may be registered with the National Spiritual Assembly at birth or any time later. Then by the age of fifteen, they will receive a letter from the National Assembly welcoming them as Bahá'í youth. Since there is no coercion, it should be the decision of the individual to remain as a Bahá'í. Age fifteen is the age of spiritual maturity when the laws of obligatory prayer and fasting become binding.

DEEPENING

The study of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi's explanations will enable us to recognize Bahá'u'lláh's station better and to learn how His teachings will transform individuals and society. Since the Guardian is the Expounder of the Faith, his writings must be studied. By deepening ourselves, we will be able to teach the Cause better, both by personal transformation and our increased knowledge.

VIII. PROGRESSIVE REVELATIONS

Shoghi Effendi, expounding on Bahá'í teachings, states, "Its teachings revolve around the fundamental principal that religious truth is not absolute, but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final." (28)

RELIGION

In the present condition of fear and hatred in every way possible, it appears that there is no end to disunity. As Bahá'ís, we understand what is happening in the world today. As the Guardian stated, it is the death pangs of the old order folding and the birth pangs of the New Order unfolding. While we are in the world of today, yet Bahá'u'lláh has given us the vistas of the future. Today while religion itself seems to be a source of disunity, Bahá'u'lláh has brought a religion that will unite all peoples. He teaches belief in one God, the unity of mankind and unity of religions in one common Faith. The Prophets and Messengers are all part of God's plan to educate man. The Bahá'í writings call this plan progressive revelation. Bahá'u'lláh wrote an entire book about it called the Kitáb-i-Íqán, or The Book of Certitude. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in His travels in Europe and North America, emphasized this issue.

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MAN

Of all the created things, through His love and bounty, God blessed mankind with soul, a soul capable of reflecting the attributes of God. This is what is meant by being "created in the image of

God." The purpose of the Manifestation of God is to guide mankind for a happy life and preparation of their souls to enter the worlds of God wholesome and not handicapped.

GOD AND HIS PROPHETS

God, being the unknowable essence, forever will remain a mystery to His creatures. The Manifestations of God are our only link with God. Because they are such perfect mirrors manifesting God to the degree man can understand, one may think that they are God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that is not true. The Manifestations are called the mouthpieces of God when the revelations come to them. One must not let the love for one Messenger blind him to the light of another. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "Attachment to the lantern is not loving the light." (29) One must love the light, from wherever it comes.

THE UNITY OF GOD'S MANIFESTATIONS

Today the world is filled with lovers of lamps and candles, disagreeing over the shape or color of the lamps or candles. Unfortunately, they are not recognizing the light of unity. Bahá'u'lláh states, "Know thou assuredly that the essence of all prophets of God is one and the same. Their unity is absolute." (30) And then He further states They are "as one soul and the same person." (31)

The sun of today is the same that shone yesterday, but today is a different day. Let us say the sun of summer is the same sun of winter, but its intensity is different. Intensity of the revelations of the Manifestations increases with the capacity of mankind. Bahá'ís believe in the divine station of Adam, Abraham, Noah, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad, Who belong to the Prophetic Cycle. The Báb ushered in the advent of Bahá'u'lláh, Who is the Inaugurator of the Day of God.

THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

As the designation of prophet applies, all the Messengers of the past, because of Their pre-existing soul, had the knowledge of the past and the future. They all could see man's coming of age

and thus they all prophesied the coming of the Lord of the Vineyard. Unfortunately, most men, not having spiritual eyes, have not recognized the Manifestation of God because they could not see beyond their human form. Particularly blind were and are those who are proud of their worldly knowledge and veiled by it. Pharisees were such. Jesus gave an idea of progressive revelation when He said, "I have still many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, however, He will guide you into all truth." (32)

THE CYCLE OF REVELATION

Today science is proving that man has existed for millions of years, and Bahá'u'lláh states that the Manifestations "have been sent down from time immemorial." (33) Each cycle of the Manifestation is like nature's cycles. Every springtime, a surge of growth happens, but when winter arrives the tree of humanity is ready for another teacher to give it another surge.

However, one spring is very special in the life of a tree, and that is when it reaches maturity and gives its blossoms to bear fruit. Now is that special cycle in the life of the tree of humanity when the oneness and unity of all peoples will be its first fruit. As the tree gets older, its fruits become better. Manifestations of the future, the first to appear after 1000 years, will guide mankind so its true nobility shall prevail. Now that the prophetic cycle has ended, we are in a larger cycle called the Cycle of Fulfillment. To better understand the significance of this cycle and the station of Bahá'u'lláh, you are encouraged to read the chapter called "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" in the book The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh by Shoghi Effendi.

IX. ADDITIONAL SUBJECTS

THE GREATEST NAME

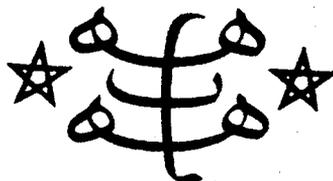
Bahá'u'lláh states that of all the names of God the greatest is Bahá, which is an Arabic word meaning glory, splendor, and light. According to the Guardian, the Greatest Name includes all the following: Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh, Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá, Alláh-u-Abhá, and

the ring symbol. (34) Bahá'u'lláh means the Glory of God. Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá is invoking the name of Bahá'u'lláh as "O Glory of the All Glorious." This is the symbol which is often seen as a wall-hanging in Bahá'í homes. The design of it was by master calligrapher Mishkín Qalam, one of the early believers in the time of Bahá'u'lláh.



YÁ BAHÁ'U'L-ABHÁ

The ring-stone symbol, which also is seen as a wall-hanging or on jewelry, was designed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It includes three horizontal lines representing the worlds of God, of the Manifestation, and of man. The vertical line crossing the three lines is the world of the Manifestation, joining the world of the Creator to that of His creation. The two stars represent the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. There are four letters like two eyes. These are Arabic H's standing for Bahá'u'lláh and the two lines crossing at the center are Arabic B's standing for the Báb. (35)



RING-STONE SYMBOL

Wearing this symbol is not a law of Bahá'u'lláh. All Greatest Name objects are to be treated with utmost respect and reverence as to where they are placed. None should be used on such things as stationery, food decoration, or grave stone. Matter of fact, all the holy verses printed as wall-hangings should be placed in a respectable place and not treated casually or placed in an improper location.

Alláh-u-Abhá is the greeting word exchanged between Bahá'ís and means "God is the All-Glorious." However, when non-Bahá'ís are present, believers should, as the Guardian wrote, "avoid anything which to outsiders, in a western country, might seem like some strange Oriental password." (36)

NINE AND FIVE-POINTED STARS

Although on many letterheads and other places, the nine-pointed star is used as a Bahá'í symbol, the Guardian clearly stated that the symbol for the Bahá'í Faith is the five-pointed star. (37) Letters in the Arabic alphabet have numerical value; the name "Báb" equals five and "Bahá" equals nine. Since we are talking about the number nine, it is timely to mention that the nine sides of the Bahá'í Houses of Worship are not to be understood as each side representing or having a door for each of the existing religions, but stands for the holiness of the number nine as the number of Bahá. (38) The same goes for the ninth day of Ridván being a holy day is not because Bahá'u'lláh's family joined Him in the garden of Ridván on that day, but because of the holiness of number nine. (39)

BAHÁ'Í CALENDAR

Its beginning is the year of the Declaration of the Báb in 1844. The initials B.E. mean Bahá'í Era. The whole calendar is called the Badí' calendar which means new calendar. The Báb originated the nineteen months of nineteen days each, but Bahá'u'lláh specified that the intercalary days should be between the eighteenth and nineteenth month.

THE WORLD CENTER AND THE ARC

The name "Bahá'í World Center" is applied to the Bahá'í world administrative center located in Haifa, Israel. Review of Bahá'í history explains how the Holy Land became the place for the Bahá'í Shrines. The Tablet of Carmel revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in 1891 is the Charter for the Administrative Institutions of the Faith on Mount Carmel. Bahá'u'lláh states, "Ere long will God sail His ark upon Thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names." (40) After completion of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel, Shoghi Effendi designed a far-flung Arc centering on the monuments of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, mother, brother, and wife. He envisioned five harmonious buildings on this Arc. The first was completed during his lifetime, the Bahá'í International Archives building. The Seat of the Universal House of Justice was completed at the

apex of the Arc in 1982. The three remaining buildings presently under construction are the seat of the International Teaching Center, the Center for the Study of the Sacred Texts, and the International Bahá'í Library. Garden terraces above and below the Shrine of the Báb are being constructed. The completion of the buildings on the Arc is linked to the beginning of the Lesser Peace.

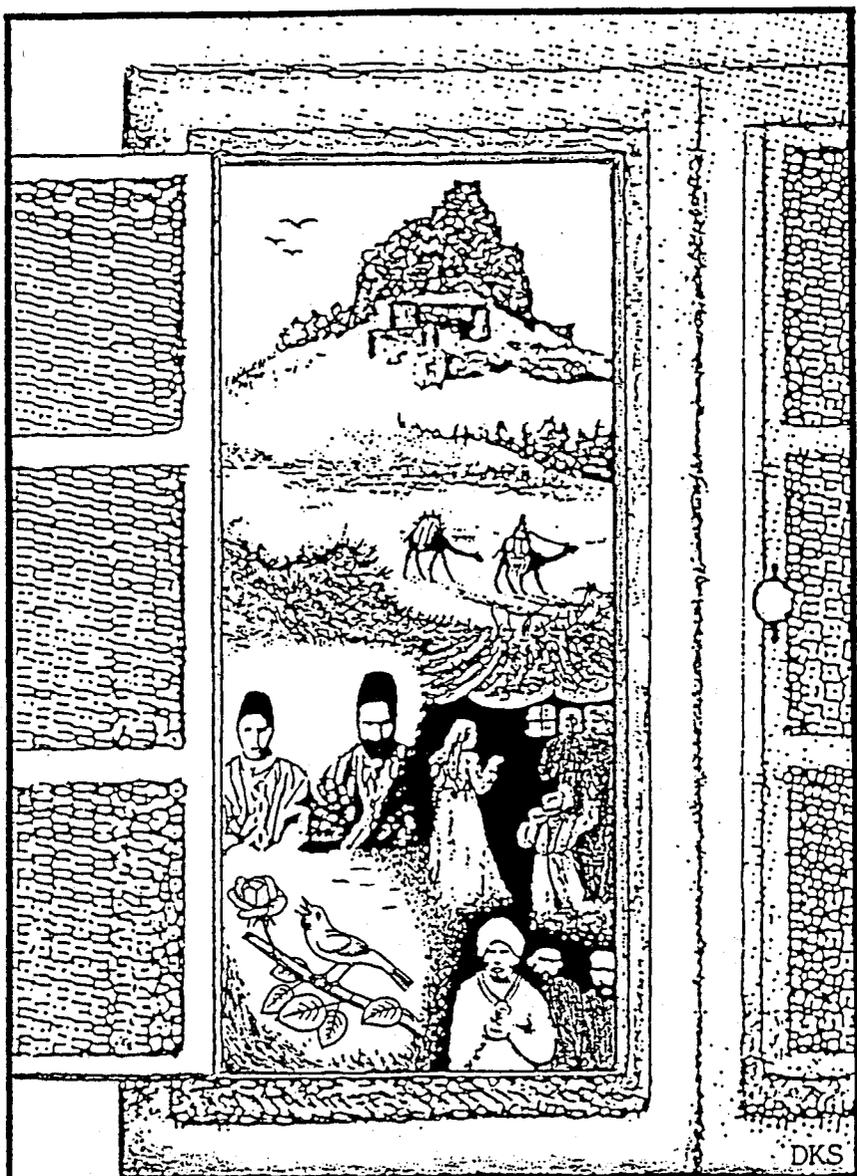
We ask you to overlook the shortcomings of this presentation. The best source of study on any aspect of the Bahá'í Faith is the Sacred Words of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the elucidations from the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice.

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THE COVER

- ★ THE CHIHRÍQ FORTRESS, THE BÁB'S LAST PRISON
- ★ ṬÁHIRIH AT BADASHT, APPEARING WITHOUT A VEIL
- ★ VARGÁ AND SON, RÚHU' LLÁH, BEFORE MARTYRDOM
- ★ BADI', THE PRIDE OF MARTYRS



WINDOWS
TO THE PAST