

The Bahá'í Faith

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

The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in one global society. God, Bahá'u'lláh said, has set in motion historical forces that are breaking down traditional barriers of race, class, creed, and nation and that will, in time, give birth to a universal civilization. The principal challenge facing the peoples of the earth is to accept the fact of their oneness and to assist the processes of unification.

One of the purposes of the Bahá'í Faith is to help make this possible. A worldwide community of some five million Bahá'ís, representative of most of the nations, races and cultures on earth, is working to give Bahá'u'lláh's teachings practical effect. Their experience will be a source of encouragement to all who share their vision of humanity as one global family and the earth as one homeland.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings

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

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

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

A way of life

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

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

great importance to the institution of the family as the foundation of human society. The sanctity of marriage, recognition of the equality of the husband and wife, and the use of [consultation](#) are especially emphasized.

A worldwide community

The Bahá'í community today numbers some five million members resident in 189 independent countries and 46 territories. Its rich diversity embraces people from most of the planet's races, creeds and cultures, including over 2,100 different ethnic groupings.

There is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith. Because the human race has entered upon the age of its maturity, each individual is able to explore the revelation of God and to decide on the issues of life through prayer, reflection, and consultation with others. To make this possible, the Bahá'í scriptures have so far been translated into some 800 different languages.

The same principle applies to the community's collective life. Elected councils, designated as Spiritual Assemblies, administer the affairs of the Faith at both local and national levels. All adult believers are equally eligible and election is by secret ballot and plurality vote.

The work of the Faith is entirely supported by voluntary contributions from the members. Giving to the Bahá'í fund is regarded as one of the privileges of membership; the Faith does not accept outside contributions.

Socio economic development

From the point of view of social and economic development, the most interesting feature of Bahá'í community life is its unique consultative system. [Bahá'u'lláh](#) taught a pattern of group decision-making based on a striving for consensus. It would be accurate to say that most members of the Bahá'í Faith are, to one degree or another, students of the [consultative process](#).

Today, development projects proliferate, especially throughout Asia, Latin America, and Africa. They include tutorial schools, local clinics, classes in health care, agricultural projects, reforestation, alcoholism counselling, and children's hostels. The community service programming of Bahá'í radio stations embraces not only such practical concerns but also the recognition of native culture.

Arising out of the assessment of local needs by locally elected Spiritual Assemblies, Bahá'í development projects are essentially grassroots undertakings. It is no doubt that this fact accounts for the self-sustaining character of so much of the work.

Bahai's and the United Nations

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that true religion promotes unity, and that unity is the fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of global peace. *"The well-being of mankind,"* [Bahá'u'lláh](#) said, *"its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."*

Among the measures which the Bahá'í community advocates as contributions to world unity are a federation of nations, an international auxiliary language, the coordination of the world's economy, a universal system of education, a code of human rights for all peoples, an integrated mechanism for global communication, and a universal system of currency, weights and measures.

Believing that the United Nations represents a major effort in the unification of the planet, Bahá'ís have supported its work in every way possible. The Bahá'í International Community is accredited with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Community's offices in New York and Geneva and Bahá'ís in many lands regularly participate in conferences, congresses and seminars concerned with the socio-economic life of our planet.

The sufferings which their own fellow believers have experienced as victims of religious persecution have particularly sensitized Bahá'ís to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on human rights. The Bahá'í International Community participates actively in United Nations consultations dealing with minority rights, the status of women, crime prevention, the control of narcotic drugs, the welfare of children and the family, and the movement toward disarmament.

Worship

Bahá'ís; come together to worship every 19 days at a meeting called a feast. This has a 3 part structure:

- devotional: open to Bahá'ís; and visitors alike, readings from the holy writings of Bahá'ís; Faith and other religions, and reflective time, often with music
- consultation: for only Bahá'ís; belonging to that community, this is usually carried out to a short agenda, dealing with the day-to-day affairs
- social: again open to all, Bahá'ís; will eat, drink and socialise together

Beyond this, it is up to the Bahá'ís; to format a feast as they wish, and as is appropriate to their own culture.

Places of Worship

Where there is a Bahá'í; temple (only one on each continent at present), or a Bahá'í Centre (for example, Newcastle upon Tyne has one: on Victoria Terrace, [ADDRESS](#)), worship and functions take place there. Otherwise, they often take place in the private homes of the Bahá'ís.

Temples vary in appearance from place to place but all temples have 9 sides (an auspicious number for Bahá'ís; our symbol is the 9 pointed star) and all services are open to all. There are no requirements for behaviour (other than general respectfulness, obviously, and no alcoholic beverages etc), for dress or segregation, and no clergy.

Special Books and Scriptures

Special books and scriptures may include all the writings of [Bahá'u'lláh](#), which have been meticulously gathered together as a collection of authoritative texts, and which total more than a hundred volumes, translated from the original Persian and Arabic. The most central of these is the "Kitab-i-Aqdas" (Most Holy Book), which outlines the laws and ordinances of this age.