

BAHA'I

Iran, the birthplace of Baha'i had been a great world power at many points in history. However, by the 18th and 19th century she was in a condition in which the government was corrupt and her rulers and others were weak.

Iran is mostly shi'ah, 12ers, but there are many minorities, including Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews all professing to worship one God, yet antagonistic to each other. They each considered all the others "unclean". Western science and art were looked on as contrary to religion.

THE BAB (gate) - Mirza 'Ali Muhammad, called the forerunner, was born in southern Iran in 1819. He was a Siyyid, ie a descendent of the prophet Mohammed. His father was a well known merchant of Shiraz. He was raised by an uncle and educated.

At 25 he believed he had received a divine command to declare himself the "Bab" or gateway, ie, that he was the channel of grace for someone who would come after him and who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfections.

At this time belief in the imminent appearance of a Divine Messenger was especially prevalent among a sect known as the Shaykhis and it was to a member of this group he announced his mission. This he did on May 22nd, 1844.

After some days of anxious investigation, the sect was convinced that the Bab was legitimate and his fame began to spread. He sent disciples to different parts of Iran and Turkistan to spread the news.

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After a trip to Mecca, he returned and announced publically his Babhood. This produced alarm and enmity among the orthodox Muslims. He was denounced by the Shi'ah doctors, and the governaor began suppression of the new heresy.

This began a long series of imprisonments, deportations, examinations before tribunals, scourgings and indignities ending with his martyrdom in 1850.

This came about after he proclaimed himself the Madhi and also took the sacred title of "Primal point" a title appled to Mohammed himself by his followers. In doing this the Bab claimed to rank, like Mohammed, in the series of great Founders of religion, so the Shi'ah doctors were incensed.

After his death, his remains and that of a devoted companion who died with him, were rescued, concealed for years in Iran and ultimately brought to the Holy Land and buried on Mount Carmel near where Baha'ullah, the one to come, was also buried.

After the Bab's death, the persecution took on a renewed vigor in 1852 with an attempt on the life of Nasir al-Din Shah by two Babis enraged by the persecution. This led to more massacres and to the exile from Iran of the leading surviving Babi figures, among them Baha'Ullah and his half brother, Mirza Yahya.

the Bab has been compared to John the Baptist but the Bab himself was seen as a manifestation of God. Baha'is believe that the Bab and Baha'u'llah were co-founders of their faith.

TEACHINGS OF THE BAB--Very important to the Bab's teaching was the explanation of terms like Resurrection, Day of Judgement, Paradise and Hell.

by Resurrection is meant the appearance of a new Manifestation of the Sun of Truth. The raising of the dead means the spiritual awakening of those who are asleep in graves of ignorance, heedlessness and lust.

the Day of Judgement is the kDay of the new Manifestation, by acceptance or rejection of whose Revelation the sheep are separated from the goats.

Paradise is the joy of knowing and loving God as revealed thru His manifestation and thus attaining to the utmost perfection one is capable of and, after death, obtaining entrance to life everlasting.

Hell is simply deprivation of that knowledge of God with consequent failure to attain divine perfection, and loss of Eternal favor.

He said these terms have no real meaning apart from this and that the prevalent ideas regarding the material understanding of them are mere figments of the imagination. Humans have a life after death, and that in the after-life, progress towards perfection is limitless.

social ethics he said useful arts and crafts must be cultivated. Elementary education should be general and women were to have fuller freedom, including equality of education. The guiding motive of the true BABI must be pure love w/o hope of reward or fear of punishment.

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BAHA'ULLAH

often called "The blessed Perfection" by his followers, he was the son of a nobleman and minister at the court of the Qajar Dynasty. He was born in Tehran in November, 1817.

He had no formal education but showed an early inclination toward religion. He was one of the earliest disciples of the Bab, tho he never met him personally. He suffered all the hardships to which the Babis were subjected.

Baha'ulla was imprisoned in 1852 as part of the fierce persecution that ensued after the attempt on the Shah's life. While in prison, he had a mystical experience in which he detected the first indication of his prophetic mission.

He went into exile in Iraq in 1853 where, ten years later, in 1863 in a garden on the outskirts of Baghdad called the Garden of Ridwan, he declared to a small group of followers that he was "He Whom God Shall Manifest." The figure predicted by the Bab.

Shortly thereafter, Baha'Ulla was exiled again, this time to Istanbul and then to Adrianople, where he remained for five years and began to publically proclaim his mission.

This period is marked by a series of letters which Baha'Ulla sent to various world rulers, including the US president *in column @ a United Nations*. However, it is also marked by the appearance of factionalism in the emigrant Babi community.

There was a split caused by Baha'Ulla's brother, Subh-i Azal (whose name means "the dawn of eternity"). In this split, the majority accepted Baha'Ulla's claims and a minority who did not and followed his half brother.

This led to friction and violence and provided the grounds for the banishment of one faction to Acre (Baha'Ulla's) and one to Cyprus.

The fundamental cause of the division was Baha'Ulla's conviction that he represented an entirely new divine dispensation, a univeresal religion, that went beyond the narrowly Shi'ite associations of Babism.

The latter part of Baha'Ulla's life was lived in Acre, Palistine and vicinity as a more or less strictly guarded prisonor. The most important of his many works were composed there and the organization and propaganda of the community were slowly nurtured.

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ABDUL-BAHA (The servent of Baha)

Upon Baha'Ullah's death, after some controversy, leadership of the community passed to one of his two sons who had been designated in his father's will as the "Center of the Covenant," the "Model of Baha'i life,F" and his successor.

The spread of Baha'i beyond the Middle East was largely the work of Abdul-Baha, who had shared in Baha'Ullah's trials and tribulations.

He, too, was imprisoned by the Turks at Acre but was released in 1908. He set out on a sereies of missionary journies which took him to Egypt, Europe and America where he established branches of the Baha'i community in each.

The Baha'i faith had actually begun in America in 1892 thru the efforts of Ibrahim George Khayrullah, a Lebanese convert and

immigrant. From 1898 onward there were Baha'i pilgrims to Acre from the United States. Today, the US is the principle stronghold of the faith outside Iran, tho there are Baha'i communities in more than two hundred countries worldwide.

Abdul-Baha also interpreted the teachings of his father to the community, and he is chiefly responsible for the elaboration of Baha'i doctrine as it is known in the Western World.

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After the death of Abdul-Baha in 1920 the leadership was assumed by his grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, who had been designated in the will of his predecessor as "Guardian of the Cause of God."

Much of the work of consolidating the worldwide community, of creating its characteristic institutions, of establishing the central administrative headquarters in Haifa, and of translating the works of Baha'Ullah was done by Shoghi Effendi or under his direction. Throughout most of his career as leader Shoghi lived in Haifa, where he died in 1957.

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ORGANIZATION - Today Baha'i is organized into a multi-tiered administrative system with local spiritual councils and national spiritual assemblies, chosen by election, and culminating in a universal spiritual assembly known as the Universal House of Justice.

This body has administrative, judicial and legislative functions and has the right to frame new rules for situations not provided for in the teachings of the founder.

Instructions and interpretation of doctrine for the community are provided by the "Guardian of the Cause of God," a hereditary post in the line of descent of Baha'Ullah. The Guardian is assisted by a group of "Hands of the Cause of God" whom he appoints.

The administrative structure of the Baha'i community serves as the model for the world order toward which Baha'i ultimately aims. There are no priests, tho the community builds temples in various places, one of the most important being in Wilmette, Illinois, beside Lake Michigan.

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BELIEFS OF BAHAI

The Baha'i faith is largely practical in its orientation, giving much greater attention to ethical and social teachings than to theological speculation or metaphysics. It differs in this way from Babism.

There is also a distinct difference between Baha'i in Iran, where it retains more of its original flavor, and Baha'i in the Western world, where the social and ethical emphasis is stronger.

GOD'S NATURE. There are, however, certain doctrines common to all Baha'is. God in himself is a completely unknowable essence who, however, manifests himself in a number of ways.

One of the principle ways is in the creation of the world itself, which, together with traditional Islamic Philosophers, the Baha'i think of as an eternal process, since it has always been and always will be the nature of God to manifest himself.

However, for religious purposes the special manifestation ~~or theophany of God~~ in the prophets is of more importance. There has been a series of these theophanies beginning with Adam, the first prophet, and continuing thru the life of Jewish prophets, Jesus, Mohammed, who in turn has been succeeded and superseded by Baha'Ullah.

For the Baha'is, the Bab was only a forerunner, whose importance disappeared with the advent of "He Whom God Shall Manifest (i.e. Baha'ullah), and they give correspondingly little attention to his writings and teachings.

Each prophet in the series foretold the coming of his successor, and each new manifestation was invariably scorned and rejected by most followers of his predecessor.

There is also a place for other great religious, though nonprophetic, figures such as the Buddha or Jesus. Each prophet or founder represents a divine dispensation appropriate for the time in which he appeared; thus the history of religions shows a progressive evolution toward an ever higher realization of the divine truth.

While all religions have taught the same truth, Baha'i is held superior because it is the latest dispensation, ~~the~~ ~~Abrogator of preceding dispensations~~, the initiator of a new cycle of prophecy to replace what came to an end with the Bab. It is also the religion most suitable for this scientific age.

Thus, Baha'i belief also includes the possibility of other prophets still to come in the distant future. Indeed, there can

be no end to this process, no final revelation, and no last prophet.

The very heart of Baha'i piety is devotion to the person of Baha'Ullah, who is looked upon as himself divine in the sense that he reflects the divine nature and attributes in himself ~~as a~~ ~~theophany~~.

AS far as heaven, hell and resurrection and go, they reflect the Bab's teaching that it is symbolic. Immortality is spiritual in nature and they give little attention to details.

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SOCIAL TEACHINGS

Baha'i teachings have as thier goal the improvement of the condition of human life. The most fundamental is the belief in the unity of the hunan race. Thus, Baha'i rejects all racial, political or other prejudice and insists upon equal right for the sexes.

It is especially insistant on the elimination of religious prejudice because of its teaching that all religions constitute a vast unity, progressively unfolding a single truth.

It is strongly pacifest and envisages world peace as one of its ~~goals~~ and urges its followers not to do military service.

There is much conceren for the state of the poor and the oppressed; both poverty and great wealth should be eliminated and resources shared among all.

The ultimate social goal is a kind of world government in which the principles of equality and justice will prevail. To

this end, Baha'i advocates the use of an international language and the establishment of an international tribunal (this before the League of Nations, or the UN).

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SCRIPTURES

The Baha'i look upon all writings of the founder and his successors as revelations and, therefore, scriptures. Most are in Persian, tho there are writings in Arabic and some in English (from Shoghi Effendi) as well.

The most important of this considerable body of material are the "Most Holy Book" which gives the fullest account of the laws and ordinances instituted by Baha'ullah, "the Book of Certitude", "The Seven Valleys" and "The Hidden Words". The great Persian writings of the Bab have been superseded by the revelations of Baha'Ullah, tho much of his ideas are found in Baha'Ullah's writings.

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LATTER DAY SAINTS (MORMONS)

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints was founded by Joseph Smith shortly after he published the book of Mormon in 1830. Joseph Smith (1805-1844) was known as a treasure hunter and was even brought before the courts for his activities.

From 1823-1827 Smith claimed the Angel Moroni had revealed to him the existence of a record engraved on gold plates which was hidden in a hill not far from his home. This was the book of Mormon. Using magic spectacles supplied by the angel, he transcribed the work.

THE BOOK OF MORMON - basically told how the lost tribes of Israel had migrated to America centuries before Christ. There was constant warfare between the Nephites, the Israelite descendants, and the Lamanites, red skinned renegades. This was interrupted only when Christ appeared to the Nephites after his resurrection.

Finally the Nephites were overwhelmed but Moroni hid the book written by his father, Mormon. The descendants of the Lamanites were the American Indians and Smith sought to explain the mounds and forts found in NY and elsewhere.

Much is borrowed from the King James Old testament and many loosely paraphrased verses and whole chapters are closely paraphrased. The Return of Christ to Earth is recurrent but they were not indulging in advental excitement as Miller had done.

PERSECUTION - was frequent, first in Kirtland, Ohio then again in Missouri where many mormons property was burned and women and

children killed. The governor of Missouri, in 1838, threatened to exterminate them and they fled to Illinois.

In Illinois, they had a few years of peace but Internal dissension occurred over Smith's money raising schemes. Also, some Mormons were practicing plural marriage which Smith sanctioned. However, he was imprisoned by the Governor of Ill. and was murdered by a mob in Carthage Jail in June, 1844.

There were several breaks at this point but the main body of Mormon's followed Brigham Young in 1846 and reached the Great Salt Lake in 1847. The RLDS formed in 1860 under Emma Smith, Joseph's first wife, and never accepted polygamy. This group still exists with headquarters in Independence, Mo.

In Utah, Young announced the previously secret teaching of polygamy in 1852 and leading Mormon's took several wives. In 1890, under pressure from the US, a later church president issued a manifesto discontinuing the practice, although some Mormons continue to live polygamously (and now disowned by the church, are periodically persecuted.)

THEOLOGY

Smith's ideas have been summarized by Mormon theologians in the phrase: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become." God had evolved, and a stage of his evolution was as a man: he was one among many gods, and godhood was a prospect for every faithful Male Mormon who obeyed the ordinances of the church.

Mormonism is polytheistic. The God of this planet happens to be Adam, who is the Father of Jesus, and the only deity that

we have to worry about here. However, he said, "you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests, the same as all gods before you."

Women only have a place in this theophany if they are married and are sealed to their husbands so in the future they will be the "Spirit Wives" of these gods.

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD, ET AL - Of particular importance in attaining this complete salvation, to occur after the second resurrection at the end of the millennium, is baptism. Smith declared that even the dead who had had no knowledge of the truth might, thru the meritorious intercession of their descendanats, attain eternal life. This is why the Mormon's keep such thorough genealogical records.

Baptism of the dead is undertaken by proxy in a secret temple ceremony; The millennium will be a period in which temple rituals of this kind will be extensively undertaken.

Other important rituals are endowment and sealing, which may also be performed for the dead. Sealing is the establishment of a marriage bond for "time and eternity" and was especially important in the days of plural marriages.

Endowment is a ceremony of bathing and annointing with oil in which all parts of the body are treated (this has produced rumors). The individual is given temple garments, and good Mormons continue to wear this underwear all their lives as a special protection against evil.

Mormon ritual shows many similarities to that of the Freemasons and was instituted at very much the time when Joseph Smith was inducted into Masonry.

He explained the similarity by declaring that Masonic ritual was a corrupt form of original Hebrew ritual which was now properly restored in Mormonism. It is a paradox that the Book of Mormon contains a thinly veiled condemnation of secret fraternities of which (today) Masonry is the prototype.

Mormonism carries little of the concern for sin that characterized much of fundamentalist Christianity of that period.

He himself was optimistic and he saw humans as inherently good with immense potential (especially if they could become gods.) This has probably been a lot of the appeal worldwide as it downplays hell and sin and emphasises the upbeat.

PRIESTHOOD - the priesthood has 2 levels, (for males only, of course). All good male mormons can become priests. Boys enter the Aaronic priesthood at 12 and thru a series of stages qualify for the office of priest before they reach full manhood.

The Melchizedek (greater) priesthood is reached when they become elders. This element of democracy does not prevent the church from being governed by full time officials. A president, 12 apostles, a presiding bishop, councillors and a patriarch.

There are several levels of organization presided over by a bishop. Through these units (stakes and wards) regulatory and welfare activities of the church are organized, as well as the system of tithing (required of all Mormons).

PROSELYTIZING

As we all know, the Mormons are vigorous proselytizers and young men are required to spend 2 years on the mission field at their own expense. They are, to Mormons, priests, although they are unlikely to become full time ministers in the church.

In the early years, Mormon converts were encouraged to go to Utah but later the policy changed and the Mormon's began building temples (essential for the indispensable rituals necessary for full salvation) in other parts of the world.

Most of the world now has Mormon temples within their national boundries. Non Mormons cannot enter these (after they are built, there is a period of time people can visit, then they are closed to outsiders). Mormon chapels which act as religious meeting houses are open to non-mormons.

Today, The Latter Day Saints are one of the fastest growing sects in the world. They number around 6 million (maybe more by now) and continue to grow all over the world.

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