

Bahá'í Faith-An Introduction

On October 22, 2017, over 6 million Bahá'ís in some 100,000 localities worldwide which include over 2 million Indian Bahá'ís in over 10,000 localities, will celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh - the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. His vision of humanity as one people and of the earth as a common homeland, inspires a dual process of individual and collective transformation through selfless acts of service to society.

The hallmark of this approaching age of maturity is the unification of the human race. While unity *“of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established”* world-encompassing unity is *“the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving.”*

The conviction that we belong to one human family is at the heart of the Bahá'í Faith. The principle of the oneness of humankind is *“the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve”*.

Bahá'u'lláh compared the world of humanity to the human body. Within this organism, millions of cells, diverse in form and function, play their part in maintaining a healthy system. The principle that governs the functioning of the body is cooperation. Its various parts do not compete for resources; rather, each cell, from its inception, is linked to a continuous process of giving and receiving.

Bahá'ís believe the crucial need facing humanity is to find a unifying vision of the future of society and of the nature and purpose of life. Such a vision unfolds in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Building the global civilization envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh cannot be accomplished through the scattered efforts of individuals, no matter how devoted and well-meaning they may be. A community, unified in thought and action, has to come into being, grow, and move from strength to strength.

“The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh...is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society...”
- Bahá'í Writings

Bahá'ís believe religion is the driving force of the civilizing process and the primary agent of human development. It has the power both to nurture moral character and profoundly influence social relationships. Bahá'u'lláh says, *“the fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interest and promote the unity of the human race and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men.”* Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh said, *“any religion which is not a cause of love and unity is no religion.”*

Some of the basic teachings of the Bahá'í Faith are:

- Oneness of Mankind, Religion and God
- Independent Investigation of Truth
- Equality of Women and Men
- Harmony of Science and Religion
- Elimination of Prejudice of all kinds
- Universal compulsory Education
- Abolition of the Extremes of Wealth and Poverty
- Establishment of a world commonwealth of nations

Closely related are the efforts of Bahá'ís to contribute to the public welfare at the level of thought through participation in the discourses of society. Among the individual members of the Bahá'í community, this typically entails sharing ideas inspired by the Bahá'í teachings in a variety of social spaces.

The Bahá'ís of India are engaged with the government agencies and organizations of civil society in a series of social discourses on themes that include the equality of women and men, empowerment of youth, the role of religion in building an inclusive society and communal harmony. In collaboration with the like-minded organizations, the Bahá'ís are learning to address the grave challenges facing present day society such as the prevalence of caste and class prejudice, gender inequality, illiteracy, lack of education, violence against women and children, extremes of wealth and poverty, corruption and moral degradation.

India has been associated with the Bahá'í Faith right from its inception in 1844. The Indian Bahá'í Community reflects the full diversity of Bahá'ís who come from all walks of life, and from different social, religious and economic backgrounds mirroring the fundamental principle of the Bahá'í Faith – oneness of mankind.

The Bahá'ís of India are actively engaged in seeking the betterment of society through the processes of individual and social transformation. Along with men, women, children and youth from every walk of life, they are engaged in a collective learning enterprise. The guidance and resources for all these activities are channelled through Bahá'í governing councils at the local, regional and national levels.

Members of the Bahá'í Faith, along with an ever growing circle of friends, are learning how to effect a dual process of individual and societal transformation through acts of service and collective worship. The concept of service and worship occupies a central place in the pattern of Bahá'í life, both individual and collective. It is characterized by selfless acts undertaken by an individual for the spiritual and material betterment of his fellow human beings and the progress of society.

In the Bahá'í Writings any work done in a spirit of service is also seen as an act of worship. Bahá'u'lláh says, it is a form of prayer, a means of worshiping God. For work to become equivalent to worship it cannot be reduced to mere means of satisfying wants and needs. It must find constant expression in service to humanity.

Bahá'ís carry out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with each other in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its inherent spiritual nature. The Bahá'í House of Worship - Lotus Temple, in New Delhi and its influence in its surrounding neighbourhoods is a living testimony. It is a pivotal concept of Bahá'í community life, giving concrete expression to the unity of devotion and service. It stands as another testimony to the efforts of the Bahá'ís of India towards the promotion of unity in diversity.

"We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions".
- Bahá'í Writings

"So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth." - Bahá'u'lláh

"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." - Bahá'í Writings

"The Bahá'í Faith is a solace to humankind" - Mahatma Gandhi

"We spend our lives trying to unlock the mystery of the universe, but there was a Turkish Prisoner, Bahá'u'lláh, in 'Akka, Palestine, who had the key!" - Count Leo Tolstoy
