

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

A summary of its
Aims, Teachings and History

by

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Third Guardian

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Originally developed in 1972 by the National Teaching Institute of the Orthodox Baha'i Faith in the United States, this new version has been produced in 1993 by the Mother Baha'i Council of the United States, Box 1169, Roswell, NM, 88202-1169.

“The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.”

“The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me.”

“My love is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe and secure.” “Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner.”

“Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent.”

“I have made death a messenger of joy to thee; wherefore dost thou grieve?”

“Make mention of Me on My earth that in My heaven I may remember thee.”

“O rich ones on earth! The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust.”

“The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His glory.”

*Words of Baha'u'llah,
Author of the Baha'i Revelation*

The Baha'i Faith:

‘Recognizes the unity of God and His prophets,

‘Upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth,

‘Condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice,

‘Teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony

‘States that religion must go hand-in-hand with science, and that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, and ordered and progressive society,

‘Inculcates the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges of both sexes,

‘Advocates compulsory education, ‘abolishes extremes of poverty and wealth,

‘Recommends the adoption of an auxiliary international language, and

‘Provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace.

Shoghi Effendi, First Guardian of the Baha'i Faith

The Baha'i Faith teaches that world unity is the inevitable stage towards which society has been moving in an age-long process of development from infancy to maturity; and that to guide mankind in this evolutionary process the Creator has revealed His Word and His Laws from age to age through a chosen Intermediary, a Prophet or a Manifestation of God. For the Baha'is these divine Intermediaries have been mouthpieces voicing the one Word of God, adapted in each age to the particular needs of humanity at the time. The ennobling influence of this Word over the hearts and minds of men has been the true civilizer of mankind and the cause of its progress.

All of the Manifestations have prophesied the coming of the "Day of God," a Day when mankind would be united in one Fold with one Shepherd under the Fatherhood of the one God, a Day in which God's Kingdom would be established on earth as it is in Heaven. The Baha'i Faith proclaims that God has fulfilled His ancient promise and that this great Day dawned with the coming of Baha'u'llah, the Promised one of all ages.

Baha'is recognize Baha'u'llah as the mouthpiece of the Laws of God for this Day and the Revealer of Precepts which they believe will recreate and unite mankind spiritually and establish God's long-promised Kingdom on earth—a world civilization, representing the culminating stage and most glorious age of mankind's ordered life on this planet.

The Baha'i Faith was born in Persia in the middle of the last century. Its early beginnings are marked by events reminiscent of the noblest exploits of the great religious heroes and martyrs of the past. Its early believers manifested an unsurpassed devotion and dedication, a dauntless heroism and courage and an all-consuming divine love which enabled them to sacrifice every worldly attachment and lay down their lives willingly and even eagerly in servitude to their Leader. Some 20,000 of them, men, women, and children alike, ultimately became martyrs to their Faith.

On May 23, 1844, a young man, surnamed the Bab (the Gate), proclaimed the advent of a new Era and announced that He was the "Forerunner" of the Promised One, the One Who had been the "sole Object of all previous Revelations."

In spite of the overwhelming forces of opposition within His native land, the Bab succeeded during His six year ministry in winning to His Cause the adherence of several thousand believers, including some of the ranking divines and scholars of Persia. His turbulent ministry ended with His martyrdom at the hands of a military firing squad in the public square of Tabriz in 1850. Although the widespread persecution and martyrdom of His

Followers had reduced their ranks to a remnant, the spiritual flame which the Bab had ignited in Persia could not be extinguished. This flame was destined to burn with renewed intensity with the appearance of the One foretold and heralded by the Bab.

The Promised One, the Author of the Baha'i Revelation, was Mirza Husayn Ali, surnamed Baha'u'llah (Glory of God), the son of a Persian nobleman. He had been, since the inception of the Bab's ministry, one of the Bab's staunchest and most fearless supporters. While Baha'u'llah escaped the fate which had struck down most of the Bab's followers, He was, some three years after the Bab's martyrdom, unjustly and arbitrarily stripped of all His property and rights and cruelly imprisoned in a subterranean dungeon in Teheran where He lay for four months with heavy chains about His neck and His feet in stocks. While languishing in this pitch-black and loathsome pit He was transfigured when He received the first divine intimation of His future Mission. Baha'u'llah, in describing this experience stated:

While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning my face, I beheld a maiden - the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord - suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shown with the ornament of the good pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. . . . Pointing with a finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: "By God! This is the Best Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive!"

It was thus that God first revealed to Baha'u'llah that He was the One prophesied by the Bab and by all of the great Manifestations of the past who would come at the 'Time of the End' as the "Lord of Hosts," the "Prince of Peace," and the promised Messiah.

Upon His release from this tragic imprisonment, Baha'u'llah was banished to Baghdad. He dwelt in this city for ten years, interrupted by a two years

sojourn in the mountainous wastes of Kurdistan where He lived completely alone. Upon His return to Baghdad from Kurdistan His fame quickly spread and soon a steady stream of visitors, including many notables and dignitaries, sought His presence. Alarmed by Baha'u'llah's increasing popularity and fame, His enemies contrived to bring about His further banishment to Constantinople and, after a few months in this city, to Adrianople where He remained for five years. There, for the first time, He publicly proclaimed His Faith in numerous Tablets addressed to the Kings of the earth, to Christian and Muslim ecclesiastical leaders and to numerous others. Baha'u'llah, in describing this period of His ministry, stated: "In those days the equivalent of all that hath been sent down aforetime unto the Prophets hath been revealed."

The enemies of the Faith, again fearing Baha'u'llah's growing influence, brought about His further banishment, this time to a remote and desolate place where they felt confident He would no longer be able to influence anyone: the penal colony of Akka, Palestine, where He arrived in 1868.

The initial nine years of this exile were spent in strict confinement and were marked by extreme hardships. However, He was permitted to spend the closing years of His life in relative tranquility in a residence in the vicinity of Akka.

Only one Westerner, a non-Baha'i, held an audience with Baha'u'llah. This was the distinguished orientalist, Professor Edward G. Browne of Cambridge University, who visited Him in 1890. He described this meeting, in part, as follows:

In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure The face on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before One who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!

A mild dignified voice bade me be seated and then continued: "Praise be to God that thou hast attained!.... Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile

We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer-up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment. . . . That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled - what harm is there in this?

... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the Most Great Peace shall come.”

Baha'u'llah passed away in 1892, the majority of mankind, as yet, unaware of His Station, of His Mission and Teachings which Baha'is consider to be the sole prescription and lasting remedy for the spiritual ills now afflicting and dividing humanity.

In Baha'u'llah's Testament He made a lasting Covenant with His followers, unlike any made by the former Prophets. In this Testament Baha'u'llah appointed His eldest son, Abdu'l-Baha (Servant of Baha), the Center of His Covenant and the sole interpreter and Exemplar of His Teachings, thus eliminating the possibility of self-appointed interpreters of His Word causing schisms in the Faith after His passing, such as those which occurred in the religions of the past with permanently divisive results.

Abdu'l-Baha had been particularly close to His Father and had shared in His sufferings from early childhood. Upon assuming the responsibilities of Head of the Faith, following His Father's passing, He labored unremittingly for the promotion of His Cause. At an advanced age, He journeyed to Egypt and the European and North American continents where He lectured extensively in churches, synagogues, universities and before numerous and varied organizations and private gatherings. Everyone who came in contact with Him testified to the exalted character of His life, a life in which He exemplified the ideals and principles of the Baha'i Faith. In Haifa, Palestine, which became His home, His daily visits to the homes of the sick and needy endeared Him to the populace. The assistance which, through His wise foresight, He had been able to render the residents of Haifa during the famine that accompanied the British siege of the Holy Land earned Him not only the gratitude of the people but the appreciation and official recognition of the British Government in the form of a knighthood bestowed upon Him for this service.

He passed away in Haifa in 1921. His funeral was unique in the Holy Land's history, for members of every class, religion, and race, and representatives of the government united in paying homage to Him and eulogizing His exemplary life and service to His fellow man.

Abdu'l-Baha's greatest legacy to future Baha'i generations was His Will and Testament. The Baha'i Administrative Order which this Will established is unique in the annals of the world's religious systems, for its Institutions have been delineated by Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'u'llah's appointed Successor and Center of His Covenant, Who, in penning His immortal Handiwork, was inspired by the Manifestation of God Himself. For this reason, Baha'is believe that their Administrative System is divinely conceived, in contrast to the man-made administrative systems which were perforce developed by the followers of the great religions of the past in the absence of guidance on such matters from their respective Founders.

Abdu'l-Baha's Will established the Institution of Guardianship as the supreme spiritual Office of the Faith and invested its successive incumbents with the exclusive right to interpret Baha'i Holy Writ, the right Baha'u'llah had conferred upon Abdu'l-Baha in His Testament. This Will conferred solely upon the Guardian of the Administrative Order the authority to serve as permanent Head of the highest legislative Council of the Faith - the Universal House of Justice. His Will assured uninterrupted continuity of the Guardianship for the duration of the Baha'i Dispensation by making it incumbent upon each Guardian to appoint his successor during his lifetime. This appointment is considered infallible and therefore unchallengeable by all Baha'is faithful to the Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Baha; and, thus, through these provisions, it is freed from man-made interpretations of the Holy Word and protected from legislation by its highest legislative Body of subsidiary laws contrary to the spirit or letter of Baha'u'llah's revealed Laws. Although Abdu'l-Baha's Will conferred upon the Guardians the same right to interpret the Holy Word which Baha'u'llah's Testament had conferred upon Abdu'l-Baha, the Guardians, the chosen ministers of the Covenant, do not occupy the same station as Abdu'l-Baha, the Center of the Covenant. The Guardians are able to perform this function, yet remain completely human, infinitely inferior in rank to, and different in nature from, Abdu'l-Baha, much less Baha'u'llah.

The Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Baha named His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, first Guardian of the Baha'i Faith.

During the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, the Faith was carried to more than 250 countries and territories of the world and both local and national Baha'i administrative councils multiplied. In 1951, Shoghi Effendi considered

that the time had come to organize the first international Baha'i Institution, the Universal House of Justice, in embryonic form (initially designated as the International Baha'i Council), with its seat at the Baha'i World Administrative Center in Haifa, Israel. Shoghi Effendi was induced to make this decision at that time as a result of the birth, after 2000 years, of an independent nation in the Holy Land and the maturity of nine Baha'i National Administrative Councils.

As the Head of this embryonic Universal House of Justice, Shoghi Effendi appointed Charles Mason Remey. In this manner Shoghi Effendi conferred upon Mason Remey the highest position of authority in the Faith next to himself and thus appointed his heir-apparent to the Guardianship.

In 1957 Shoghi Effendi passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. The Baha'is anticipated finding Shoghi Effendi's successor named in a conventional testamentary document, although the Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Baha did not specify that the Guardians should name their successors in this manner. When such a document was not found, there was general consternation within the Faith, for the Baha'is failed to perceive that Shoghi Effendi provided for his successor some seven years earlier when he appointed Mason Remey the President of the embryonic Universal House of Justice: the International Baha'i Council.¹ Failing to recognize Mason Remey's accession to the Guardianship of the Faith by virtue of this appointment, many Baha'is lost the faith which they had professed in the indestructibility of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah and in the immortality of the provisions of Abdu'l-Baha's Will and concluded that the Institution of Guardianship had come to an end. This situation continued for more than two years, during which time Mason Remey remained silent, hoping that the Baha'is would, of their own accord, discover the manner in which Shoghi Effendi had provided for the continuity of the Guardianship and, as a result, recognize the authority with which he had been invested by Shoghi Effendi. As this did not happen and as the Sans-Guardian doctrine promulgated by those who had lost faith in the Covenant was influencing an increasing number of Baha'is, Mason Remey was forced to break his silence. He issued a Proclamation in 1960, setting forth in clear and indisputable terms the basis for his accession to the Guardianship of the Faith automatically upon the death of Shoghi Effendi. Due to the effect of the Sans-Guardian doctrine throughout the Baha'i world, Mason Remey found himself opposed by a majority of the Baha'i national administrative bodies throughout the world. They, in turn, influenced the believers in their respective countries to reject his Guardianship. A remnant of Baha'is, however, who had remained steadfast in their faith in the Covenant and were convinced of the essentiality of the Guardianship to the continued life and protection of the Faith, welcomed the Proclamation of Mason Remey and joyfully embraced him as the second Guardian.

1. *According to the Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Baha, the Guardian of the Faith is the "sacred head" of the Universal House of Justice. Therefore, Presidency of the Universal House of Justice and Guardianship are synonymous terms.*

In spite of the fierce opposition which the Proclamation engendered and the machinations of this new generation of violators of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, the true Faith under the hereditary Guardianship slowly began to grow and win adherence to its ranks in the four corners of the earth. The high water mark in this progress was reached with the historic announcement made by the second Guardian on 21 September 1964 of the creation of the second International Baha'i Council [and naming as its President Joel B. Marangella]. Through the means of this historic announcement, the second Guardian, similarly to the first Guardian, publicly announced to the believers the one whom he had chosen as his potential successor to Guardianship (i.e., by appointing the President of the Council). But he had gone a step further than Shoghi Effendi to reinforce this appointment and to avoid any future doubt by placing in the hands of his successor-to-be well in advance of this public announcement a document written in his own hand naming him as his successor.²

2. *In 1965 Mason Remey activated the second International Baha'i Council and turned direction of the affairs of the Faith over to Joel Marangella. In a proclamatory letter of November 12, 1969, addressed to the faithful supporters of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah throughout the world, "Joel Marangella explained the manner of his appointment to the Guardianship.*

Since the majority of the supporters of the third Guardian were in the United States, Joel Marangella established a National Baha'i Bureau in New York City to administer the affairs of the Faith on a provisional and limited basis. The Bureau was subsequently moved to New Mexico in 1972.

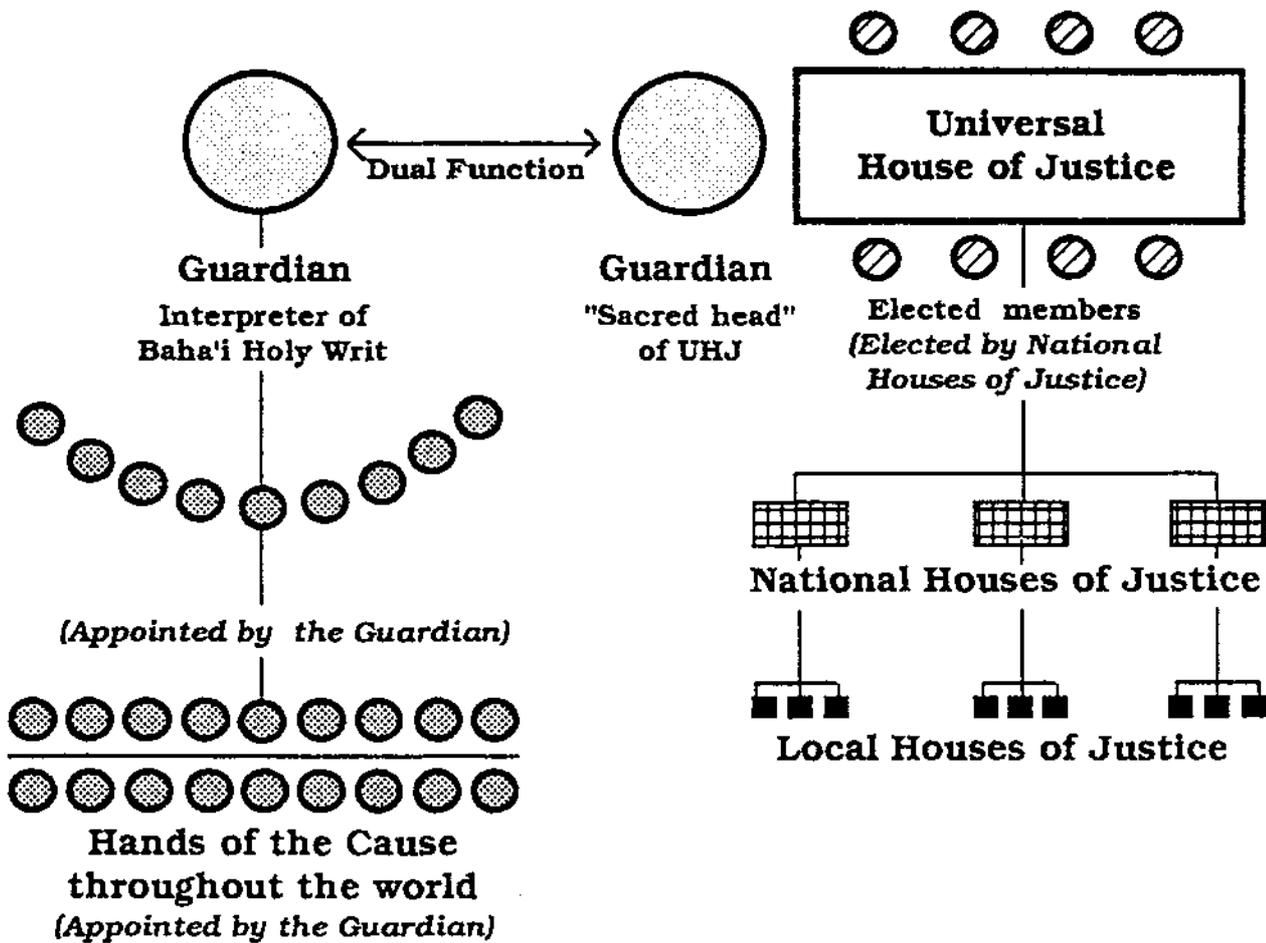
In 1978 the Bureau's functions were assumed and expanded by the local Baha'i Council of Roswell, New Mexico, a body of nine believers which was designated by the third Guardian as the Mother Baha'i Council of the Orthodox Baha'is of the United States. The Council was assigned national Baha'i administrative jurisdiction pending the formation of a National Baha'i Council when the Faith in the United States is sufficiently expanded.

The Mother Baha'i Council, in addition to propagating the Faith through newspapers and magazines, has inserted open letters and appeals made by the Guardian in newspapers in the United States and abroad to convince the other Baha'is that Shoghi Effendi provided for the continuity of the Guardianship in complete accordance with the Will and Testament of Abdul-Baha.

(Footnote added by the Mother Baha'i Council of the United States.)

Although the ranks of the faithful Baha'is are decimated by this present-day violation of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, they have no doubts as to the eventual outcome. They vividly recall the repeated ordeals and trials and the recurrent internal crises besetting this infant Cause of God since its inception, from which it invariably emerged triumphant, purified, and ultimately strengthened. They, therefore, remain supremely confident of the complete victory of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah over this violation and the onward march of the true Faith of Baha'u'llah to its promised glorious destiny.

Illustration of the Institutions of the Baha'i Administrative Order Delineated by 'Abdu'l – Baha in His Will and Testament



"The *twin pillars* that support this mighty administrative structure - the institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice."

"The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, which together with the Kitab-i-Aqdas [the Most Holy Book]...are inseparable parts of one complete unit."

(Above quotations are from the writings of Shoghi Effendi - first Guardian of the Baha'i Faith.)