

Baha'ism

(part 1 of 2): Origin and History



One of the groups associated with Islam which catches the attention of most Westerners is that known as Bahatism, due to their catchy yet evasive principle of peace and the unity of humanity. In reality, Bahatism is a sect which, according to Islam, is outside its fold due to its various beliefs which oppose the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, as will become clear upon the most basic analysis of its tenets.

Origin

The Bahai movement evolved out of a millenarian sect before it, called the Babis, both in Iran, who emerged in a period of great millenarian expectations, for the year 1844 was to mark the 1000th anniversary of the disappearance of the twelfth Imam famed by the Shi'a. Thus they can be regarded as an offshoot of the Imamiyyah branch of the Shi'a, the majority Shi'a sect found today and also adopted as the state religion of Iran. This sect, or cult, was founded by one Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi (1819-50), who became known as the *Bab*, or "Gate." He earned this label because his followers saw him as the "Gate of the Hidden Imam," although they later regarded him as the "Gate of God", the Hidden Imam (leader) himself,^[1] who was expected to bring an end to Islamic law and usher in a new cycle of prophets and traditions.

Shirazi was arrested in 1845, and then executed in 1850 because of the violent revolts staged by his fanatic followers, and the movement was as violently persecuted by the authorities. Before he died, he prophesied that a messianic figure would soon come and would be called "Him whom God shall make manifest." One of the Shirazi's followers who was exiled during the rounds of persecution was Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri, and in 1864 he proclaimed himself to be the prophet foretold by the Shirazi. Most Babis were either killed, started following Nuri (later known as Bahai's), or simply went to some other religion. Those who remained Babis followed the leader of the time,

Subh-i Azal, and their holy book, the *Bayan* (Declaration). Today there are perhaps only a few hundred Azalis left, scattered around Iran. It was the followers of Mirza Husayn ‘Ali Nuri who would later evolve into the Bahai faith.

History

Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri was converted as a young man to the teachings of the *Bab*. In 1852 he was thrown into Tehran prison during the first wave of persecution against the Babis for their plot to kill the Shah of Iran, Nasiruddin Shah. On his release, in January 1853, he went to Baghdad where he became the de facto head of the Babi community there. In 1863 he proclaimed himself to be the messiah foretold by the Bab. Such was his influence that the Ottoman authorities decided to move him from Baghdad to Istanbul, and from there to Edirne (in Turkey). Those who followed his claim became known as Bahai’s, while those who rejected it remained Babis. In 1868 Nuri and many followers were exiled to Acre in Palestine where he was imprisoned for nine years in the fortress in Acre. Shortly after his release he went to live in Bahji, near Haifa, now in Israel, where he remained until his death in 1892.

On the death of Baha’ullah, the movement came under the leadership of his eldest son ‘Abbas Effendi (1844-1921), who acquired the title ‘Abd al-Baha (“servant of the glory of God”). After a spell in prison under the Ottoman Turks, he undertook three missionary journeys: to Egypt (1910), to Europe (1911), and to the United States and Europe (1912-1913). Lecturing to large audiences, he both consolidated Bahaim in these parts of the world and systematized his father’s teachings. ‘Abbas Effendi was succeeded by his grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), who directed his energies into developing the Bahai communities in Europe and North America. Under his leadership, the Bahai community came to be organized within a system based on local and national assemblies. When he died in 1957, he left no heirs, and the movement’s organization was placed under the jurisdiction of a body known as the Council of the Hands of the Cause. In 1962, the International House of Justice was established in Haifa as their headquarters.. This body is reelected every five years. Today, there are Bahai communities in most countries of the world. It is estimated that there are between 3 and 4 million Bahai’s in the world today. The largest Bahai community is in India with about 1 million members. In Iran, the Bahai’s remain the largest minority group with about 300,000 adherents.

Symbols

Bahai’s believe that God’s greatest name is Baha (glory, splendor). The name is used by Bahai’s when they are addressing one another, and is often found on rings or wall hangings. A second expression, Ya Baha’ul—Abha (O Thou the Glory of the All-Glorious), is represented in the form of calligraphy. The number ‘9’ is regarded as possessing important mystical properties and is

sometimes used as a motif in decoration. The Bahai place of worship is called in Arabic the *mashriq al-adhkar* (which means the “place where the uttering of the name of God arises at dawn”). The *mashriq* is a nine sided building in keeping with the mystical qualities of the number ‘9’.

Footnotes:

[1] (<http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/islam/shia/babi.html>)

(part 2 of 2): Its Doctrine

As mentioned previously, the Baha’i follow the teaching of Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri (1817-1892) whose title is Baha’ullah (‘The Splendor of God’). As opposed to Muslims who believe Prophet Muhammad to be God’s last prophet to humanity, Baha’ullah believed himself to be the prophet foretold by Sayid Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the founder of the Babi movement. Baha’ullah contradicted the Muslim belief that Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were prophets and not divine. He taught, instead, that God had become manifest in many different forms such as Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, the Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the ‘Bab’ and Baha’ullah himself. Baha’ullah is not, however, the final and definitive manifestation of God. Other prophets will come, but not for at least 1000 years.

This belief opposes the most fundamental aspect of Islam, which is the distinction made between the creation and the Creator. Islam firmly believes that God is separate and distinct from His creation, and that He never did or will become human. The prophets He sent were fully human, but chosen to deliver His message to humanity. Worship is to be rendered to God only, and not to any created being. Next in importance to this belief is the belief is that Muhammad was the last and final prophet sent to all of humanity, and the message of Islam is the final message of God, and none other will come until the Day of Judgment. These two principles form the basis and most fundamental principle of Islamic faith, the first pillar of Islam, one clearly contradicted in Baha’i faith.

There are no initiation rites, priesthood or sacraments in the Baha’i religion. However, Baha’is do have certain duties, and are obliged to pray every day (although their prayer is different from that practiced by Muslims); they are also obliged to meet on the first day of each Baha’i month for celebration; to fast from dawn to sunset during the month of ‘Ala (while Muslims fast in Ramadan); to avoid drugs or alcohol; to avoid membership of political parties; and to observe particular holy days such as the birth of Baha’ullah and the martyrdom of the ‘Bab’. Emphasis is placed in their propagation on the unity

of humanity and the absolute equality of men and women, and the Baha'is see themselves as working towards the establishment of a world government which will eradicate extremes of wealth and poverty.

The only sacred text in Islam is the Quran, but the Baha'is treat the writings of Baha'ullah as sacred as well. The most important of these writings are: The Most Holy Book, The Book of Certitude, The Hidden Words, The Seven Valleys, and Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.

Claims of Baha'ullah

Baha'ullah claimed to be God. The following are some of his statements:

“There is no God but Me, the Honored, the Wise.”^[1]

“Take what the Ancient Hand gives you.”^[2]

“There is no God but Me, the securer, the regulator. Certainly We have sent the prophets and revealed the books.”^[3]

“The God of eternity is in the prison.”^[4]

“Everything other than Me is created by My command.”^[5]

“I am the Greatest Branch (Abdul-Baha) without any partners.”^[6]

“We Baha'is are certain of the eternal beauty.”^[7]

“Surely I am God. There is no God but me, the Lord of all things. Everything other than Me is My creation, then O My creation you worship Me.”^[8]

The Twelve Principles

The Baha'i pride themselves on the Twelve Principles or twelve teachings, which they promulgate. Baha'i speakers focus heavily on these principles considering that these are the best that can be found in any religion. Seven out of the twelve Principles revolve around Unity. They are:

- Unity in the political realm.
- Unity in the worldly matters.
- Unity in freedom.
- Unity in religion.
- Unity in the nation.
- Unity in the tongue.
- Unity in genealogy.

Nevertheless, Baha'i history and doctrine contravene these principles. The Baha'is killed Mohammad Ibrahim by throwing him into the river Tigris for not believing in Baha'ullah's call.^[9] They attempted to assassinate Nasiruddin Shah, the king of Iran. Baha'ullah killed one hundred and thirty people in one night and plundered their belongings.^[10] Baha'ullah ill treated his brother Subhe Azal and Abdul-Baha did worse to his brother Mohammad Ali. Ironically, among the Baha'is themselves there are at least two major divisions at loggerheads with each other - the 3rd generation Baha'i and the Orthodox Baha'i. Lastly, the Baha'is have yet to officially announce the alphabet of the new language they have invented for every person in the world.

Intolerant Teachings

There are various intolerant ideas preached by the Baha'is found in the Babi cult before them which have no basis in Islam:

“Babis! God has made war obligatory upon you. Capture cities and people for Babism.”^[11]

“Do not let those who do not believe in the Bayan remain on the earth.”^[12]

“Snatch the wealth of those who do not believe in the Bayan.”^[13]

“Rejecters of Bab! Even if you take a bath 1000 times in a day, you shall remain unclean.”^[14]

“Whatever belongings of the non-Babis come into possession of the Babis they become clean.”^[15]

In summary, the Baha'is differ from Muslims in the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and practices. Their leaders have made extraordinary claims to divinity similar to other religious cults. Although they seem to preach peace and unity, their history has been marred by violence. Their history and original teachings also contradict their averred concept of world peace and gender equality.

Footnotes:

^[1] Kitabe Aqdas, page 42

^[2] Kitabe Aqdas, page 96

^[3] Kitabe Aqdas, page 58

^[4] Iqtedarat page 36

^[5] Kitabe Mobeen

^[6] Behjatus Sudoor

- [7] Behjatus Sudoor page 217
- [8] Tajalliyate Baha, Tajalli 4
- [9] The Book of Haji Maftoon, p. 23
- [10] Nuktatul Qaf, p. 161
- [11] Bayan chapter 1
- [12] Bayan chapter 1
- [13] Bayan Arabic chapter 5
- [14] Bayan chapter 2
- [15] Bayan chapter 4