

Relationship of the Faith to Preceding Religions

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

One of the basic features of this Faith that attracts so many souls to its life-giving spirit is the unity, the connectedness and the harmony it seeks with all its sister religions. The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh affirm the progressive nature of God's Revelation to the peoples of the earth, tie us through the ages with the great religions of the past, and currently bond us heart to heart with all our sister religionists. A true understanding of our intimate connection with other faiths blesses the Bahá'ís with the ability to overcome the fanaticism and bigotry that formerly separated religions.

One God, communicating to one humankind, through progressive stages of one eternal Religion — this is the “*Ancient Faith of God*” to which we, and believers of other faiths, ultimately belong. This study explores the bonds that tie this Faith to the other major religions of the world.



Fountain in the Ridván garden near `Akká where Bahá'u'lláh liked to visit.

“The fountains are many, but the fountainhead is one.” — Bahá'u'lláh

OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon...*

Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the relationship of the Bahá'í Faith with the preceding religious Dispensations.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*

To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:

- A. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...
 - B. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
- A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about the relationship of the Bahá'í Faith with the preceding religious Dispensations.

QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

1. ...the Revelation identified with Bahá'u'lláh abrogates unconditionally all the Dispensations gone before it, upholds uncompromisingly the eternal verities they enshrine, recognizes firmly and absolutely the Divine origin of their Authors, preserves inviolate the sanctity of their authentic Scriptures, disclaims any intention of lowering the status of their Founders or of abating the spiritual ideals they inculcate, clarifies and correlates their functions, reaffirms their common, their unchangeable and fundamental purpose, reconciles their seemingly divergent claims and doctrines, readily and gratefully recognizes their respective contributions to the gradual unfoldment of one Divine Revelation, unhesitatingly acknowledges itself to be but one link in the chain of continually progressive Revelations, supplements their teachings with such laws and ordinances as conform to the imperative needs, and are dictated by the growing receptivity, of a fast evolving and constantly changing society, and proclaims its readiness and ability to fuse and incorporate the contending sects and factions into which they have fallen into a universal Fellowship, functioning within the framework, and in accordance with the precepts, of a divinely conceived, a world-unifying, a world-redeeming Order.

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 100)

abating: decreasing the value of
abrogates: ends their observance by authority
absolutely: certain without exception
accordance: agreement or conformity
acknowledges: recognizes the status of
authentic: substantiated as fact by tradition or authority
Authors: Ones who initiated them
claims: asserted beliefs
common: shared together
conceived: created idea
conform: respond harmoniously
contending: striving in opposition
contributions: significant gifts and additions
correlates: establishes a mutual or reciprocal relationship between
dictated: directed and commanded
disclaims: clearly denies
Dispensations: religious Systems
divergent: different from each other [in their]
Divine: God inspired; holy; sacred

doctrines: truths and principles taught
enshrine: hold as sacred; cherish
eternal: valid or existing through all time
evolving: developing by gradual changes
factions: inside conflicting groups
Fellowship: unified people with mutual interests and intentions
firmly: with sureness and not subject to change
Founders: Ones who bring them into being and organizes them [the Manifestations of God]
framework: basic structure and system
functioning: actively operating
functions: reasons for which they exist and operate
fundamental: basic and essential
fuse: blend thoroughly
gratefully: while feeling and showing thanks for that received
ideals: noble goals, principles, and standards of perfection and moral excellence
identified: intimately connected
imperative: commanding; mandatory

incorporate: unite into the existing whole
inculcate: teach with repetition and persistence
intention: aim or plan
inviolate: without mistreating or showing improper respect [for]
Order: system for organizing and uniting the people
ordinances: established or prescribed practices and regulations
origin: source
precepts: commandments or principles intended as rules of action or conduct
preserves: saves intact
proclaims: formally and publicly declares
progressive: advancing gradually through steps
purpose: intention for existing
readily: eagerly without hesitation
readiness: eagerness without hesitation
reaffirms: positively expresses again
receptivity: capacity to receive ideas
recognizes: formally accepts and acknowledges
reconciles: brings together and harmonizes
redeeming: rescuing and delivering from distress, harm, and sin

respective: particular and separate
Revelation(s): Communication(s) of God and His Will to man
sanctity: sacredness; holiness
Scriptures: Writings considered holy and/or authoritative
sects: separate religious creeds of each religion
seemingly: what appears to be, but really isn't
spiritual: higher, divine, or heavenly oriented
status: rank or position
supplements: provides for the deficiencies of
teachings: specific beliefs, concepts, perceptions, principles, standards, morals, ideals and truths taught
uncompromisingly: without making concessions; inflexibly
unconditionally: absolutely, without condition or limits
unfoldment: process of successive disclosures
unhesitatingly: without delay or indecision
universal: present everywhere and including all without exception
upholds: agrees with and supports
verities: real truths

2. The number nine, which in itself is the number of perfection, is considered by the Bahá'ís as sacred because it is symbolic of the perfection of the Bahá'í Revelation, which constitutes the ninth in the line of existing religions, the latest and fullest Revelation which mankind has ever known. The eighth is the Religion of the Báb, and the remaining seven are: Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the religion of the Sabaeans. These religions are not the only true religions that have appeared in the world, but are the only ones which are still existing. There have always been divine prophets and messengers, to many of whom the Qur'án refers. But the only ones existing are those mentioned above.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by The Universal House of Justice 1963-1990, Vol. I, pp. 19-20, ¶54)

Báb: Prophet of the Bábí Religion
Buddhism: the Buddhist Religion Whose Prophet was Buddha
Christianity: the Christian religion Whose Prophet was Jesus Christ
existing: continuing to be
Hinduism: the Hindu religion Whose Prophet was Krishna
Islám: the Islámic Religion Whose Prophet was Muhammad
Judaism: the Jewish Religion Whose Prophet ⇧

was Moses
perfection: the greatest degree of excellence
Qur'án: Holy Book of the religion of Islám
Sabaeans: (sa·bē'án) ancient people and kingdom near Marib, Yemen in southwestern Arabia [the Biblical Sheba], Whose Prophet's name is unrecorded (*The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 20)
true: conforming to essential reality
Zoroastrianism: the Zoroastrian Religion Whose Prophet was Zoroaster

3. *The Tongue of Grandeur saith: By Myself that speaketh the truth! In this most mighty Revelation all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest and final consummation.*

(*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 244)

attained: succeeded in reaching
consummation: goal and ultimate perfection
Dispensations: religious Systems

Revelation: Communication of God and His Will to man [by Bahá'u'lláh]
Tongue of Grandeur: Word of God

4. That all the Messengers of God should be regarded as “*abiding in the same Tabernacle, soaring in the same Heaven, seated upon the same Throne, uttering the same Speech, and proclaiming the same Faith*” must, however much we may extol the measure of Divine Revelation vouchsafed to mankind at this crowning stage of its evolution, remain the unalterable foundation and central tenet of Bahá’í belief. Any variations in the splendor which each of these Manifestations of the Light of God has shed upon the world should be ascribed not to any inherent superiority involved in the essential character of any one of them, but rather to the progressive capacity, the ever-increasing spiritual receptiveness, which mankind, in its progress towards maturity, has invariably manifested.

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 166)

abiding: firmly residing
ascribed: considered as caused
capacity: receptive power and potential
central: basic or main
character: distinguishing traits, qualities, or nature
crowning: height of honor [in the]
Divine: God inspired; holy; sacred
essential: basic or inherent
evolution: process of progressive development
extol: highly praise
foundation: basic and essential principle
Heaven: “*By ‘heaven’ is meant the heaven of divine Revelation...*” (Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 44)
inherent: inborn right [of]
invariably: without change
involved: included as a closely related part
Light: emanating spiritual knowledge and goodness
Manifestations: great Prophets Who reveal the Words, and exhibit the signs and qualities
manifested: clearly shown

maturity: full development
Messengers: great Prophets or chosen Manifestations
proclaiming: formally and publicly declaring
progressive: advancing and improving
receptiveness: capacity to receive ideas
regarded: considered or thought of
Revelation: Communication of God and His Will to man
soaring: rising majestically
splendor: great brightness and brilliant luster
superiority: higher position or rank
Tabernacle: holy dwelling place
tenet: principle, belief, and doctrine held to be true
Throne: supreme position of heavenly power and dignity
unalterable: not capable of being changed [in its]
uttering: expressing orally or in writing
variations: differences by partial change
vouchsafed: given or bestowed out of graciousness

5. ...view all the Prophets and Messengers of God as one soul and one body, as one light and one spirit, in such wise that the first among them would be last and the last would be first. For they have all arisen to proclaim His Cause and have established the laws of divine wisdom. They are, one and all, the Manifestations of His Self, the Repositories of His might, the Treasuries of His Revelation, the Dawning-Places of His splendour, and the Daysprings of His light. ... And since in their inmost Beings they are the same Luminaries and the self-same Mysteries, thou shouldst view their outward conditions in the same light, that thou mayest recognize them all as one Being, nay, find them united in their words, speech, and utterance.

(Bahá’u’lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, verse 44, pp. 33-34)

arisen: come forth actively
Cause: eternal religious Faith
condition: set of circumstances
Dawning-Places: Ones where first appear the light
Daysprings of: Ones that begin anew
first: one having the highest or most prominent role
last: one having the lowest rank or standing
light: illumination of spiritual knowledge and goodness; point of view
Luminaries: Ones of prominence and brilliance

Manifestations: great Prophets Who reveal the Words, and exhibit the signs and qualities
Mysteries: incomprehensible and supernatural Ones
proclaim: declare publicly and formally
Repositories of: Ones confided or entrusted with
Revelation: Communication to man of His Will
splendour: brilliance, magnificence, and glory
such wise: such a way
Treasuries of: Ones confided or entrusted with
united: joined in harmony

SHARING EXERCISE: *A breath from the spirit of inspiration...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

It made me feel _____

Explain _____

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. "...the Revelation identified with Bahá'u'lláh abrogates unconditionally all the Dispensations gone before it..." What does abrogate mean? _____
2. Give an example of a religious observance from a past Dispensation that Bahá'ís do not observe or perform. _____

3. Give an example of an eternal truth from a past religion that Bahá'ís "uncompromisingly uphold." _____

4. What is the Bahá'í attitude towards the authentic sacred Scriptures of the major religions of the past? _____

5. What must "remain the unalterable foundation and central tenet of Bahá'í belief"? _____

6. Which of the following are true? (there are five true answers)
 - a. All of the Messengers of God proclaim the same Faith.
 - b. Some Divine Messengers were superior to others.
 - c. The Bahá'í Faith is considered a link in the chain of an ongoing Divine Revelation.
 - d. The Bahá'í Faith is considered the fulfillment of the Dispensations of the past.
 - e. Even though Religions are one, Bahá'ís do not observe the ordinances of past religions.
 - f. Even though Religions are one, Bahá'ís do not believe in any of the spiritual ideals of the past religions.
 - g. The holy book of Muhammad is the Qur'án.

Continued on next page...

7. The relationship of the Bahá'í Faith to the Great Religions of the past is one that...
- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> reaffirms | a. their seemingly divergent claims and doctrines. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> preserves | b. the Divine origin of their Authors. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> upholds | c. their common, their unchangeable and fundamental purpose. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> proclaims | d. the eternal verities they enshrine. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> recognizes | e. any intention of lowering the status of their Founders. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> readily & gratefully | f. their teachings with laws and ordinances. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> disclaims | g. abating the spiritual ideals they inculcate. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> disclaims | h. itself to be one link in the chain of continually progressive Revelations. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> reconciles | i. their functions. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> clarifies/correlates | j. the sanctity of their authentic Scriptures. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> supplements | k. its readiness and ability to fuse and incorporate the sects and factions. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> acknowledges | l. recognizes their respective contributions to the gradual unfoldment of one Divine Revelation. |
8. Name seven known Manifestations of God Whose Dispensations existed before the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. _____
9. Any difference in the perceived "light" of any of the Manifestations of God is not because of the difference in their quality, but rather _____

APPLICATION: Showing forth divine light...

Facilitator

Read through #1 together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action in #2. (these are not shared) When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

1. IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES: Visions of radiant lights...

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action...." Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: "**One could**...." Suggest as many ideas as you want.

2. DECIDING ACTION: Mirroring forth a beam of light...

From your experience in this study class on the Relationship of the Faith to Preceding Religions, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. **I will make conscious efforts to...** _____

My next step will be... _____

This study guide and many others are available as free downloads at www.bahaessentials.com

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

The Relationship of the Faith to Preceding Religions by Shoghi Effendi.

Let none, however, mistake my purpose, or misrepresent this cardinal truth which is of the essence of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. The divine origin of all the Prophets of God — including Jesus Christ and the Apostle of God [Muhammad], the two greatest Manifestations preceding the Revelation of the Báb — is unreservedly and unshakably upheld by each and every follower of the Bahá'í religion. The fundamental unity of these Messengers of God is clearly recognized, the continuity of their Revelations is affirmed, the God-given authority and correlative character of their Books is admitted, the singleness of their aims and purposes is proclaimed, the uniqueness of their influence emphasized, the ultimate reconciliation of their teachings and followers taught and anticipated. *“They all,”* according to Bahá'u'lláh's testimony, *“abide in the same tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech, and proclaim the same Faith.”*

The Faith standing identified with the name of Bahá'u'lláh disclaims any intention to belittle any of the Prophets gone before Him, to whittle down any of their teachings, to obscure, however slightly, the radiance of their Revelations, to oust them from the hearts of their followers, to abrogate the fundamentals of their doctrines, to discard any of their revealed Books, or to suppress the legitimate aspirations of their adherents. Repudiating the claim of any religion to be the final revelation of God to man, disclaiming finality for His own Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh inculcates the basic principle of the relativity of religious truth, the continuity of Divine Revelation, the progressiveness of religious experience. His aim is to widen the basis of all revealed religions and to unravel the mysteries of their scriptures. He insists on the unqualified recognition of the unity of their purpose, restates the eternal verities they enshrine, coordinates their functions, distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the nonessential and spurious in their teachings, separates the God-given truths from the priest-prompted superstitions, and on this as a basis proclaims the possibility, and even prophecies the inevitability of their unification, and the consummation of their highest hopes.

As to Muhammad, the Apostle of God, let none among His followers who read these pages, think for a moment that either Islám, or its Prophet, or His Book, or His appointed Successors [called Imáms], or any of His authentic teachings, have been, or are to be in any way, or to however slight a degree, disparaged. The lineage of the Báb, the descendant of the Imám Husayn; the diverse and striking evidences, in Nabíl's Narrative, of the attitude of the Herald of our Faith towards the Founder, the Imáms, and the Book of Islám; the glowing tributes paid by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán to Muhammad and His lawful Successors, and particularly to the *“peerless and incomparable”* Imám Husayn; the arguments adduced, forcibly, fearlessly, and publicly by `Abdu'l-Bahá, in churches and synagogues, to demonstrate the validity of the Message of the Arabian Prophet...

As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized, that the reality of the mystery of the Immaculacy of the Virgin Mary is confessed, and the primacy of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, is upheld and defended. The Founder of the Christian Faith is designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the *“Spirit of God,”* is proclaimed as the One Who *“appeared out of the breath of the Holy Ghost,”* and is even extolled as the *“Essence of the Spirit.”* His mother is described as *“that veiled and immortal, that most beautiful, countenance,”* and the station of her Son eulogized as a *“station which hath been exalted above the imaginings of all that dwell on earth,”* whilst Peter is recognized as one whom God has caused *“the mysteries of wisdom and of utterance to flow out of his mouth.”* *“Know thou,”* Bahá'u'lláh has moreover testified, *“that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee. The deepest wisdom which the sages have uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced,*

the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers, are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive and resplendent Spirit. We testify that when He came into the world, He shed the splendor of His glory upon all created things. Through Him the leper recovered from the leprosy of perversity and ignorance. Through Him the unchaste and wayward were healed. Through His power, born of Almighty God, the eyes of the blind were opened and the soul of the sinner sanctified.... He it is Who purified the world. Blessed is the man who, with a face beaming with light, hath turned towards Him."

Indeed, the essential prerequisites of admittance into the Bahá'í fold of Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and the followers of other ancient faiths, as well as of agnostics and even atheists, is the wholehearted and unqualified acceptance by them all of the divine origin of both Islám and Christianity, of the Prophetic functions of both Muhammad and Jesus Christ, of the legitimacy of the institution of the Imamate [the lineage of appointed Successors to Muhammad], and of the primacy of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. Such are the central, the solid, the incontrovertible principles that constitute the bedrock of Bahá'í belief, which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is proud to acknowledge, which its teachers proclaim, which its apologists defend, which its literature disseminates, which its summer schools expound, and which the rank and file of its followers attest by both word and deed.

Nor should it be thought for a moment that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh either seek to degrade or even belittle the rank of the world's religious leaders, whether Christian, Muslim, or of any other denomination, should their conduct conform to their professions, and be worthy of the position they occupy. *"Those divines,"* Bahá'u'lláh has affirmed, *"...who are truly adorned with the ornament of knowledge and of a goodly character are, verily, as a head to the body of the world, and as eyes to the nations. The guidance of men hath, at all times, been and is dependent upon these blessed souls."* And again: *"The divine whose conduct is upright, and the sage who is just, are as the spirit unto the body of the world. Well is it with that divine whose head is attired with the crown of justice, and whose temple is adorned with the ornament of equity."* And yet again: *"The divine who hath seized and quaffed the most holy Wine, in the name of the sovereign Ordainer, is as an eye unto the world. Well is it with them who obey him, and call him to remembrance."* *"Great is the blessedness of that divine,"* He, in another connection, has written, *"that hath not allowed knowledge to become a veil between him and the One Who is the Object of all knowledge, and who, when the Self-Subsisting appeared, hath turned with a beaming face towards Him. He, in truth, is numbered with the learned. The inmates of Paradise seek the blessing of his breath, and his lamp sheddeth its radiance over all who are in heaven and on earth. He, verily, is numbered with the inheritors of the Prophets. He that beholdeth him hath, verily, beheld the True One, and he that turneth towards him hath, verily, turned towards God, the Almighty, the All-Wise."* *"Respect ye the divines amongst you,"* is His exhortation, *"They whose acts conform to the knowledge they possess, who observe the statutes of God, and decree the things God hath decreed in the Book. Know ye that they are the lamps of guidance betwixt earth and heaven. They that have no consideration for the position and merit of the divines amongst them have, verily, altered the bounty of God vouchsafed unto them."*

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, pp. 107-11)

ANSWERS: Affirming treasures...

1. ends their observance by authority
2. all answers are valuable
3. all answers are valuable
4. preserves inviolate the sanctity of their authentic Scriptures, or, saves intact and without mistreating or showing improper respect for their Writings that are considered holy and/or authoritative and substantiated as fact by tradition or authority
5. all the Messengers of God should be regarded as *'abiding in the same Tabernacle, soaring in the same Heaven, seated upon the same Throne, uttering the same Speech, and proclaiming the same Faith'*
6. a, c, d, e, and g
7. c, j, d, k, b, l, (g or e), (g or e), a, i, f, and h
8. among the seven known Manifestations of God are: Moses, Zoroaster, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad and the Báb
9. to the progressive capacity, the ever-increasing spiritual receptiveness, which mankind, in its progress towards maturity, has invariably manifested