THE BAHÁ’ÍS: A profile of the Bahá’í Faith and its worldwide community
"The earth is but one country..."

Bahá’ís understand that the dramatic changes and transformations in global human society over the last century — changes which have not yet run their full course — have been initiated by the coming of a new Messenger of God. It is the breaking light of a new Revelation that illuminates the divine pattern for future society.

In recent years, perhaps the most significant phenomenon on the international scene has been the process of "globalization" — the progressive "shrinking" of the world and an ever greater mixing of its people, cultures, and economies.

In countless books, news articles, and political speeches, the processes of globalization have been analyzed and reanalyzed. Some say it is a good thing; others say it is bad.

Those who defend globalization say it is bringing material prosperity to untold millions around the world, breaking down national, economic, and cultural barriers and helping to speed the process of peace-building.

Critics say that the chaotic manner in which market forces have scaled up to the global level has unleashed a destructive whirlwind that exploits workers, impoverishes the poor at the expense of the rich, wrecks environmental destruction, and drives the most disaffected to acts of terrorism. They say that globalization’s side effects are equally horrific, ranging from the spread of AIDS and drug abuse to the creation of a world monoculture that destroys local traditions and squelches diversity.

Either way, it is impossible to ignore the vast social, cultural, and political changes that stem from this process. Youth everywhere now seem to imbibe the same soft drinks, wear the same styles of clothing, and listen to the same type of music. Former global enemies now participate in joint peacekeeping missions. New patterns of emigration mean there are suddenly many more foreign faces and accents in every town and city.

For better or worse, human society is being dynamically reshaped in every land. And the ultimate trend is clear: we are witnessing nothing less than the emergence of a new civilization that is global in nature.

More than 100 years ago, Bahá’u’lláh articulated this new reality when He said: “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.”

The critical question facing humanity today is what sort of global civilization shall we have? Will it be dominated by a shallow materialism, in which people’s highest aspirations seem simply to be surounded by products bearing fashionable corporate trademarks while billions live in abject poverty? Will it be one in which the losers of the game must surrender their culture, their jobs, and the natural beauty of their environment so that others elsewhere may prosper?

Or is it possible for humanity to collectively seize control of its own destiny and to ensure that all that is best in human civilization is not lost? Is it possible to create a world in which material and scientific development is governed by ethical
and spiritual principles that promote the prosperity of all people everywhere?

Bahá’ís believe the dramatic changes and transformations in global human society in the last century — changes that have not yet run their full course — were initiated by the coming of a new Messenger of God. And it is the breaking light of a new revelation that illuminates the best pattern for future society.

In other words, religion is the motive force in human history — and will continue to set its direction and design. The progressive revelation of God’s will to humanity through His Messengers has been responsible for the increasing integration of human society and its advancing civilization. The circle of human unity has widened successively from the tribe, to the city-state, to the nation-state.

Today, this process of integration is culminating in the development of a global civilization. Indeed, when viewed through the lens of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation, the history of the twentieth century has been little more than a steady process of evolution — albeit a painful one at times — towards a new pattern for future society.

The collapse of the great nineteenth century colonial empires, the failed experiments with totalitarianism, fascism, and communism, and the increasing rejection of previously glorified concepts of racial superiority, masculine authority, and religious conceit have all cleared the ground for the changes that must come.

At the same time, scientific discoveries and new social insights during the last century have spurred many progressive social, economic, and cultural transformations, opening the door to the possibility of a future in which no one’s material needs are unmet.

In the first years of this new century, the ongoing processes of globalization will undoubtedly continue to break down traditional barriers posed by outmoded and false concepts of race, class, or national superiority. And scientific and cultural changes that promise prosperity for all will surely continue to accelerate.

Moreover, Bahá’u’lláh warned that the dynamics of fusing the peoples of the world into one race and establishing a new civilization would be potentially cataclysmic. “The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing Order appeareth to be lamentably defective,” He wrote. “Soon will the present-day order be rolled up and a new one spread out in its stead.”

In other words, the negative effects of this ongoing global revolution can be likened to the demolition of an old building in preparation for the erection of a new structure. Bahá’ís believe, however, that humanity’s future will inevitably be a peaceful and prosperous one — and that that day can be hastened if we begin to live in accord with the new spiritual laws and principles that govern our age.

These principles start with the recognition of our fundamental oneness in all spheres, which requires the end of all prejudices grounded in race, class, or nationality, and it mandates full equality between women and men. It also includes taking strong and meaningful steps to erase great disparities of wealth and poverty. In the recognition that all the world’s religions are one, religious strife and intolerance will forever be put to rest.

At the personal level, the pattern for future society outlined by Bahá’u’lláh invokes the highest moral standards. People will be guided in all their interactions by the principles of trustworthiness, honesty, and courtesy. Selfless service to others will be the rule, and a general striving for excellence in all things will give new meaning to the concept of personal fulfillment. Widespread chastity and sobriety will help to end the spread of many diseases and much human suffering.

At the community level, Bahá’u’lláh calls for a reordering of priorities such that no one ever goes hungry, no family finds itself without shelter, and no child is

“Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and present him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation.”

— Bahá’u’lláh

**Elements of a world commonwealth**

As forecast by Bahá’u’lláh more than 100 years ago, the new world order must be based on the following elements if a lasting world peace is to be established:

- Recognized and secure borders for all nations
- Freedom of movement and thought for all peoples
- A general disarmament
- The establishment of a world federation of nations
- The establishment of a world tribunal for the adjudication of international disputes
- The creation of an international military force capable of enforcing peace through principles of collective security
- A commitment to the protection of cultural diversity
Deprived of an education. The institutions of society, whether at the local, regional, or national level, will put justice and the common good first, and the widespread understanding of humanity's spiritual reality will lead to ever greater levels of cooperation, learning, and discovery.

At the world level, Bahá'u'lláh called for the creation of new institutions capable of managing the coming global civilization. Specifically, the Bahá'í writings indicate, the world will ultimately be governed by a democratically elected world legislature, a world court, and a world executive, all backed by an international force capable of carrying out the collective will of the world's peoples. Committed to the principle of collective security, these global institutions will also work together to end war and poverty, to promote the development of science and technology for the benefit of all humanity, and to coordinate markets and trade in a manner that fosters the well-being of all.

Far from prescribing a monstrous “big brother” at the world level, however, the Bahá'í teachings emphasize the importance of local autonomy and grassroots input. In the Bahá'í administrative order, with its freely elected governing councils and appointed advisors at local, regional, national, and international levels, there is a pattern for a system of governance that addresses problems at the global level without crushing local viewpoints and initiative. As well, the spiritual and social principles of the Bahá'í writings uphold the highest standard of human rights.

At all levels, the new institutions of the global society envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh will set justice as their main goal. “The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice,” Bahá'u'lláh wrote. Bahá'ís are working towards the establishment of a world in which the governors of human society ensure that everyone receives just and equitable treatment; that basic needs for food, shelter, and dignity are met; and that lawbreakers receive swift and fair punishment. The widespread acceptance of Bahá'í principles of consultation and election procedures will bring into public life a new type of moral leader, one who puts the welfare of the whole community ahead the interests of any particular party, ideology, tribe, or corporation — and especially ahead of his or her own self-interest.

The acceptance of all these ideas and their realization in practice by the world’s peoples, Bahá’ís believe, is inevitable and will bring about nothing less than the Promised Day of all religions. It is synonymous with the vision set down by Isaiah in the Bible, of the time when the nations “shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks,... nor shall they learn war any more.” It is what Christians have prayed for throughout the centuries when they recite the Lord’s Prayer, testifying to the coming of God’s Kingdom: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” It will be the fulfillment of the promise in the Qur’án that the light of God’s justice will one day break over the entire earth and “Thou shall see in it no hollows or rising hills.”

Of course, many in society today promote similar principles and ideas. As noted earlier, Bahá'u'lláh's social teachings have in many ways become synonymous with the
modern definition of a progressive society. And the emergence of global institutions like the United Nations offer humanity a starting point for the kind of global coordination needed in this new age.

Yet, if anything, the failed ideological experiments of the last century have shown that attempts to bring about greater coordination must be backed by moral principle and spiritual vision. Without a deep comprehension and recognition of humanity’s spiritual reality, which is the real basis of human nature, the path ahead will surely be very difficult.

The development of society has been carefully guided by the great religious teachers of the past. The moral code of the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule — both of which find their expression in nearly every religious tradition — exemplify those religious teachings and serve both as ethical guidelines and a summons to spiritual achievement. They have permeated human consciousness and restructured cultures everywhere. Even for the nonbeliever, the value of such teachings is evident.

The spiritual world is the source of those human qualities that engender unity and harmony, that lead to insight and understanding, and that make possible cooperative undertakings. Among such qualities are love, courage, vision, self-sacrifice, and humility. Essentially spiritual in nature, these qualities form the invisible yet essential foundation of human society.

In the past, spiritual teachings have been concerned primarily with individual actions — or with the harmony of relatively small groups of people. Moral concern has likewise focused mostly on individual behavior: do not steal; do not lie; love your neighbor.

Today, our understanding of spirituality must embrace not only personal and group life, but also the collective progress of humanity as a whole. This is part of what has been promised in all of the world’s scriptures. Indeed, it is only because the human race has at last entered its age of maturity that age-old prophecies foretelling an era of peace and justice can now be fulfilled.

The essential message of Bahá’u’lláh is the call to unity: its audience, the entire world: “Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own selves.” A century after His passing, this summons has begun to take visible shape in a community that represents a microcosm of the human race itself, a community that has established itself in every corner of the globe, a community that, unlike every other comparable movement, has resisted the perennial impulse to disintegrate into sects and subgroups, a community that is consciously creating a new pattern for a global civilization.

The emergence of the Bahá’í community offers persuasive evidence that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as a single people in a global homeland. It represents, as well, a compelling argument for earnest and dispassionate examination of the claims of the extraordinary Figure whose spirit created and sustains it.
The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá’u’lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds, and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs, and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples.

A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system.

A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve center of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. A world language will either be invented or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in the schools of all the federated nations as an auxiliary to their mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind.

In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop. The press will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples. The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be coordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding, and cooperation. The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely abolished, and the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation — such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.

— Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*