

possibly be much more recognizably Hindu, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist, Chinese, and native religionist than what we today call the Bahá'í Faith--in the same way that the Bahá'í Faith in Iran is recognizably close to Shi`i Islam in ethos, when compared with the Bahá'í Faith in America.

Every culture and religion sees the spiritual world in different ways and has its differing emphases on the path to spiritual progress. If, as I have argued in "Relativism: a basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics" (SBBR 5), these are all merely different viewpoints on "the Truth", then the Bahá'í Faith should embrace them all.

What I see the Bahá'í Faith doing is taking the religious traditions of the world and developing these along their own traditional paths of spirituality. What then is the role of the Bahá'í Faith? If each religious tradition is going to carry on its own path, is there any point in the advent of the Bahá'í Faith? The answer to these questions I would see as being three-fold.

There is the matter of eliminating religious conflict and prejudices, and the unity of humanity under the umbrella of the Covenant. Also, although each tradition will in a sense be developing along its own lines, they will be bound in by ties of loyalty to the Centre of the Covenant, the Universal House of Justice.

The Bahá'í teaching will act as guidelines to keep the development of these different spiritual paths along the "correct" lines. What I mean by this is that there are certain principles in the Bahá'í teachings, such the abolition of priests and other religious professionals, the equal spiritual station of all humanity, the spiritual equality of men and women, etc. These Bahá'ís principles would act as constraints on the ways in which any particular group could develop. No group would be permitted (by its own members awareness of these Bahá'í principles, if nothing else) to develop in ways that contravened these principles.

The world-wide Bahá'í community would act as a medium in which these different spiritual pathways would become globally available. But much more than this, there would be a cross-fertilization of religious ideas and practices such that, for example, Bahá'í mystics from Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and other backgrounds would meet and discuss their experiences and learn from each other. This cross-fertilization of religious experience will be the basis for the further spiritual evolution of humanity. Needless to say that we are at present completely unable even to hazard a guess as to what form this might take.

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