

in which they appeared. Thus to Bahá'ís the original forms of all the major religions of the world are in essential harmony: they teach the same principles, have the same aims and purposes, and differ only in their social doctrines.

Subsequent additions to or interpretations of the teachings of each messenger have clouded this essential harmony. Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh is the Messenger of God for this age.

The World Today

The problems which plague and divide the world today were foreseen by Bahá'u'lláh over a century ago, and Bahá'ís believe that if mankind adopts and practices Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, the entire human race can live together in peace and prosperity. Bahá'u'lláh condemned all forms of prejudice, whether religious, racial, class-based or nationalistic. The Bahá'í Faith advocates the equality of the sexes, universal compulsory education, and the principles of justice in human affairs, and believes that religion must go hand-in-hand with science. As Bahá'ís feel that they must put their principles into practice, they sponsor and encourage projects which advance these principles.

Distribution of Bahá'ís

There are Bahá'ís in nearly all of the 489 districts of the United Kingdom and in around 200 of these there are elected administrative bodies (Local Spiritual Assemblies). There have been Bahá'ís in this country for nearly a century and in 1923 the election took place of the first U.K. National Spiritual Assembly. The Bahá'í Faith is established in virtually every country of the world and its writings are translated into more than 750 languages and dialects.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Worship

Bahá'ís meet for community worship once every nineteen days and on certain Holy Days commemorate significant events in their Faith. On nine of these Holy Days, Bahá'ís are encouraged to refrain from work, and some parents may ask to withdraw their children from school as may be permitted in England and Wales under the Education Reform Act 1988 and in Scotland (subject to LEA permission) under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

In practice, less than half of these days will, in any one year, fall on school days. The Bahá'í Holy Days are as follows:

21 March

Naw Ruz (New Year)

21 April First day of

Ridvan

29 April Ninth day of

Ridvan

2 May

Twelfth day of Ridvan

23 May Declaration of the

Bab

29th May

Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

9 July

Martyrdom of the Bab

20 October Birth of the

Bab

12 November Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

Prayer

Bahá'ís are urged to pray daily. In

addition to their own private prayers Bahá'ís use a variety of prayers revealed

by Bahá'u'lláh. There are also daily prayers which are obligatory from the age

of 15. Prayers should not prove disruptive to school life, since they may be said before or after school.

Fasting

From the age of fifteen, Bahá'ís take

part in a nineteen day fast from Sunrise to Sunset (2 March to 20 March). This involves complete abstinence from food and drink. The fast is a period of increased meditation and prayer and its significance and purposes are, therefore, fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is seen as symbolic and

a reminder of abstinence from selfish and physical desires. The fast is not binding on the weak, the sick or the old, nor on women during menstruation or pregnancy.

Diet

Bahá'ís have no specific dietary

restrictions, although the use of alcohol or of habit-forming drugs is forbidden. Smoking is strongly discouraged.

ATTITUDES TO EDUCATION

View of Education

Bahá'u'lláh taught that education should be compulsory for all children. The curriculum should be similar for boys and girls, and should include basic literacy and numeracy, science, arts and crafts. Great emphasis should also be laid upon the development of values, with stress being laid on honesty and the breaking down of prejudices. Since Bahá'ís are committed to the oneness of humanity, parents will be strongly supportive of multicultural education and of world studies.

View of Religious Education

Bahá'ís are committed to a religious content in school education. By "religious" is implied not only corporate worship, but spiritual and ethical education by contact with the world's faiths. Bahá'ís would prefer their children to have contact with a variety of world faiths, in the spirit of "light is good in whatsoever lamp it shines".

However, Bahá'ís would not object to a syllabus that was predominantly Christian, so long as, in accordance with the Education Reform Act 1988, it also takes account of the teaching and practices of other principal religions. To a Bahá'í, Jesus Christ was a manifestation of God, a mirror showing forth the attributes of God and a lesson from God as to how human beings should live. Parents will therefore be completely supportive of solely Christian RE provided that the teacher does not denigrate other religions and does not expect the child to view the entire Bible, in any version, as the literal and authenticated Word of God Himself. While supportive of religious drama, some parents would be worried by actors portraying a Manifestation of God.

Bahá'ís are discouraged from drawing representations of the Manifestations but would be happy to consider alternative approaches if required in RE and art.

Education and Gender

Since the Bahá'í Faith upholds that men and women should enjoy equality of opportunity and rights, Bahá'ís favour a common curriculum for both boys and girls. Parenting and technology, for instance, will, in the future, be requirements for both men and women. In view of the special responsibility for early childhood education which is usually accorded to women, the education of girls is regarded as even more important than the education of boys. Most Bahá'í parents would be supportive of

responsible sex education, which places sex within the context of family life and the upbringing of children.

Discipline

Bahá'ís recognise the authority of the teacher "in loco parentis". It would be hoped that Bahá'í children would not cause discipline problems but if complaints did arise parents would welcome the opportunity to consult with teachers or others in order to correct the behaviour. The "twin pillars" for the training of children are reward and non-corporal punishment.

FURTHER INFORMATION

A good account of Bahá'í teachings and ideas may be found in the Shap/CRE booklet, World Religions - a handbook for teachers.

Staff requiring further information on the Bahá'í Faith should contact The Bahá'í Information Office, 27 Rutland Gate, London, SW7 1PD.

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