

true reality. The need for salvation may also be perceived simply as a result of disobedience to divine law. In the larger collective view, the immoral condition of society would result from a disregard for spiritual values, a failure to observe genuine ethical conduct.

A belief in salvation affirms, however, that man is able to be saved, rescued or liberated from this fallen condition or deluded state of mind. This liberation may be effected either through repentance and obedience to divine law, or through the transcendent power or saving grace of a saviour figure, or through a psychological adjustment of the mind, or through the observance of ethical prescriptions. These means will bring both the solitary individual and all humanity into a state of felicity by the operation of a transforming power that results in a holistic condition of well-being, of being and feeling free, and of harmony with oneself. When society observes the norms of ethical conduct it will experience prosperity.

In the Abrahamic faiths, salvation applies ultimately to the next life more than it does to this one, for it is there that true felicity or misery will be experienced. As has been pointed out, the proper question to ask would not be "Are you saved?" but rather "Will you be saved?" ("Soteriology" Encyclopedia of Religion 419) Salvation would mean the winning, so to speak, of this afterlife.

The process of winning salvation is outlined variously in the world religions. The Abrahamic faiths, (Judaism, Christianity, Islám and the Bahá'í Faith) as well as the Bakhti school of Yoga Vedanta, and Mahayana Buddhism all look to faith in a divine being or saviour figure, whether that be the intermediary of God alone as in Judaism, or through the atonement of Christ, Muhammad, Krishna, Rama, Amida Buddha or Bahá'u'lláh as the instrument of salvation. The divine saviour also acts as the divine physician, who alone is able to diagnose the malady of the patient, and to prescribe the efficacious remedy. These saviours are also looked upon as mysterious but potent sources of divine grace. In Theravada Buddhism liberation occurs through individual insight and rigorous spiritual discipline through membership in the Sangha, the monastic order, while in Hinduism the supreme goal is Moksha, the liberation from the body and endless round of future reincarnations that results from union with Brahman.

(2) Bahá'u'lláh as the Harbinger of Universal Salvation

The Bahá'í Faith can on good grounds be identified as a religion of salvation, and its Founder, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), be considered, in Max Weber's word, as a Heilbringer (Bearer of salvation). (Sociology of Religion 46). Bahá'u'lláh has asserted His claim to be the harbinger of universal salvation and the fulfillment of the age-old messianic promises of a universal peace, when "the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law" (Tennyson "Locksley Hall") and the earth "...be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9) It is through this eschatological language of the fulfillment of the times that we sense most strongly the salvific claims of Bahá'u'lláh to be the Promised One of all ages:

The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose

and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men. The advent of such a Revelation hath been heralded in all the sacred scriptures. (Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 156)

Shoghi Effendi states that to adequately present all of Bahá'u'lláh's weighty eschatological claims "a whole volume would be required to be written in order to compile the most outstanding among them." (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh 103). This passage, however, serves as another illustration:

...Lo, the Desire of the world is made manifest in His transcendent glory! The Father hath come. That which ye were promised in the Kingdom of God is fulfilled. This is the Word which the Son veiled when He said to those around Him that at that time they could not bear it...Verily the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you unto all truth...(Bahá'u'lláh in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh 104)

Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be the bearer of salvation to the peoples of the world is based on His own apocalyptic certitude that He is the universal Manifestation of God (Mazhar-i-Iláhí) or Prophet (Nabí, Rasúl) of what Bahá'ís call the "Adamic cycle", the prophetic cycle extending from the time of Adam to the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh has substantiated His claim especially by His voluminous divinely inspired writings, the pattern of a life of purity, suffering and renunciation that is consistent with the lives of the higher prophets of old, as well as the other gifts of prophetic office. Eye witnesses such as the eminent orientalist of Cambridge, Edward Granville Brown, who met Bahá'u'lláh in 1890 two years before His passing bore witness of "a wonderous and venerable figure". "Power and authority", Browne attested, "sat on that ample brow"...."Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul"... "No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!" (J.E. Esslemont Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era 39)

Further, Bahá'u'lláh's life stands as the fulfillment of the prophecies of old (God Passes By 92-103) and He as the eschatological figure of promise in the world religions: the tenth reincarnation of Krishna, Buddha Maitreya, "the Buddha of universal fellowship", the second coming of Jesus Christ, the Shah Bahrá'm to the followers of Zoroaster, the Lord of Hosts to the Jews, the Qá'ím to Shi'i Islam, the Mahdi to the Sunnis, and "He Whom God shall make manifest" to the followers of the Báb.

The Bahá'í Faith explains the door to salvation in terms of dispensational religion; that is, in line with the maxim 'once to every age its prophet'. A dispensation refers to a historical period, stated roughly to be a period of five hundred or one thousand years, in which a major prophetic figure arises, reveals a new scripture and gives new laws, often abrogating the laws of the previous dispensation. Bahá'u'lláh brings salvation to His believers, those whom He calls "the people of Bahá'", or "the inmates of the Crimson Ark"- a

significant poetic metaphor harking back to the Noahic covenant-both through the operation of what has been called "grace" in the Christian dispensation and by the observance of the teachings and precepts that He has laid down for His followers.

Despite Bahá'u'lláh's strong claims to be the eschatological figure of fulfillment, it has to be noted that the Bahá'í Faith takes no elitist "one way" view of itself vis-à-vis the other world faiths. Bahá'u'lláh present to us a unique vision of the unity of the one prophetic brotherhood. All of the Divine Manifestations and Prophets, Bahá'u'lláh proclaims, are "...abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith..." (Gleanings 52) The differing degrees of wisdom, power and glory that the Divine Manifestations of God reveal in this world is a function of the varying degrees of the receptivity of humanity, and should not lead believers to make a hierarchical ranking of them. Bahá'u'lláh affirms further: "That a certain attribute of God hath not been outwardly manifested by these Essences of Detachment doth in no wise imply that they Who are the Day-Springs of God's attributes and the Treasuries of His holy names did not actually possess it." (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh 115) Thus, while the Bahá'í Faith stresses the supreme importance of recognizing the Manifestation of God who is the Lord of the current dispensation, it also stresses the collegiality of the one prophetic brotherhood.

(3) Individual Salvation in the Bahá'í Faith

The discussion of salvation could be initiated at two familiar poles, that of the individual soul and the world, or individual and universal salvation respectively. It is in some ways artificial to divide individual salvation from universal salvation, since much of what is said about the one can be applied to the other. When Bahá'í scripture speaks of individual or universal salvation, it speaks the covenantal language inherited from the prophets of the past, an urgent language of proclamation that speaks of eschatological fulfillment, warning and judgement, redemption and second birth, the kingdom and eternal life. The very familiarity of these age-old phrases may tend to blunt us to their presence. Whatever the present or past associations of these words, however, they are conspicuously present in the Bahá'í writings.

The basic meaning of individual salvation for a Bahá'í would be when the individual soul has faith ("conscious knowledge") in Bahá'u'lláh. This conscious knowledge includes the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh's station as the Divine Manifestation of God for our age, as well the practice of goodly deeds, deeds which are based on the observance of His teachings and laws in a spirit of love and sincerity for God, His Manifestation, and humankind. The knowledge of God is fundamental in the Bahá'í view to the process of salvation for `Abdu'l-Bahá states: "...that which is the cause of everlasting life, eternal honour, universal enlightenment, real salvation and prosperity is, first of all, the knowledge of God." (Some Answered Questions 300)

Salvation for a Bahá'í also means that the destiny of the individual human soul, both in this life and in the life beyond is secure and felicitous. The individual believer need never fear his own extinction, for the corollary of salvation is everlasting life. Bahá'u'lláh affirms the existence of paradise, (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh 189) a condition that is promised to the faithful and righteous soul. Bahá'u'lláh describes paradise in a beautiful language that is both highly metaphorical and poetic, but He also affirms that the limitations imposed upon humanity's consciousness do not allow us to anticipate in any way what exactly that felicitous existence after death might be: "The movement of My Pen is stilled when it attempteth to befittingly describe the loftiness and glory of so exalted a station." (Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 156). The nature of the soul after death must also per force be veiled from us for inscrutable reasons, for He also says "...nor is it meet and permissible to reveal its whole character to the eyes of men." (Gleanings 156).

The Bahá'í Faith affirms further that man is not able, through his own unaided efforts, either individually or collectively, to attain to the means of his own salvation. He is in need of tutelage. In the Bahá'í perspective, this tutelage is offered to a superlative degree in the lives and writings of the Prophets. Thus, the Bahá'í Faith would not share the perspective of Theravada Buddhism, for example, that there is no God or Saviour Figure outside of man himself who is capable of bringing knowledge of the spiritual state to humanity, or the perspective of any spiritual philosophy or self-realisation technique which do not bring into account the dimensions of a personal faith in God, divine love, transcendence, prophetic teaching, or the like. For it is above all the love and the knowledge of God that are the cause of salvation.

The faith of Bahá'u'lláh would, however, share the outlook of St. Thomas Aquinas that man stands in need of an intermediary to bring him into relationship with God. Aquinas wrote: "Strictly speaking, a mediator is one who joins together and unites those between whom he mediates; for extremes are united in the mean." (Summa Theologica, 111, question 26, a.1, c in An Aquinas Reader, 468) `Abdu'l-Bahá's teaching of the mediator is strikingly similar to Aquinas's notion of the mean as bringing extremes into relationship: "An intermediary is needed to bring two extremes into relation with each other...without an intermediary power there could be no relation between these pairs of opposites". (The Reality of Man 45). The mediator in the Bahá'í view is the prophetic figure who is the means of teaching to humankind the road to salvation.

The Judeo-Christian tradition speaks of salvation in terms of the theme of bondage and liberation, whether this theme depicted the historical enslavement and emancipation of the Hebrew people, or the burdened soul who turned to God or Christ for release. Bahá'u'lláh, too, speaks this same language of bondage and liberation when He, in turn, proclaims His empowerment to release the captive soul: "He is indeed a captive who hath not recognized the Supreme Redeemer, but hath suffered his soul to be bound, distressed and helpless, in the fetters of his desires." (Gleanings 169) His grand redemptive role is

further stated in these verses: "We, verily, have come for your sakes, and have borne the misfortunes of the world for your salvation." ("Lawh-i-Aqdas" in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh 10) Unlike Protestant Christianity, however, there is no one mystical, characteristic, conversion experience in the Bahá'í Faith that is encouraged as the norm for "being saved".

While a Bahá'í may be confident in the salvation of his soul, the Bahá'í Faith warns against self-righteousness. There is nothing automatic in the process of salvation, even for the one who has lived righteously. All our acts, the Bahá'í Faith affirms, are conditioned upon the good-pleasure of God. Believers can and do change. The most ardent believer can sometimes grow cold. On the other hand, the non-believer who was once most contemptuous of God, can become steadfast in faith.

In His preeminent doctrinal work Bahá'u'lláh states that it sometimes happens that the "devout believer, at the hour of his soul's ascension, has been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire." (Kitáb-i-Iqán 194-195) Why the devout believer should lose faith and fall into the fires of doubt and unbelief and turn away from God at the hour of death is a proper and sobering mystery. Yet Bahá'u'lláh gives us a clue in the same passage by affirming that we should count all else but God, who is the true object of our devotion, as "utter nothingness." (ibid) He also states in the same passage that the sinner at the hour of death has often drunk the cup of faith, and "hath taken his flight unto the celestial Concourse." (ibid 194) His weighty statement would seem to suggest that the believer practice at all times total reliance on God.

Neither would it be consistent with the spirit of the Bahá'í Faith to affirm that salvation is reserved exclusively only for those who believe in Bahá'u'lláh. Such an affirmation would be belied not only by the spirit but by the very words of the Bahá'í Faith which state for example that death, the ultimate bestower of salvation, offers to "every confident believer the cup that is life indeed. It bestoweth joy, and is the bearer of gladness. It conferreth the gift of everlasting life." (Gleanings 345) From this and other passages in the Bahá'í writings, it is only too obvious that such promises are not made to Bahá'ís alone: "Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness." (Gleanings 15)

(4) Universal Salvation in the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'u'lláh's stated aim is not the salvation of an elitist group but that of the entire world whereby every soul on the planet will experience the bounty of knowing God's revelation: "I confess that Thou hast no desire except the regeneration of the whole world, and the establishment of the unity of its peoples, and the salvation of all them that dwell therein." (Gleanings 243) It is also worth mentioning in this context that the Bahá'í Faith eschews the dichotomous saved/damned, chosen/rejected, people of truth /people of the lie mentality that we find in some religions. On the contrary "...all human beings are the sheep of God and He is the kind Shepherd. This Shepherd is kind to all

the sheep, because He created them all..." (Selections From the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá 298).

The Bahá'í Faith views societal reconstruction as a consequence of personal salvation. The process of salvation works in what may be described as a two-way circular process: the regenerated individual reacts on the world. As the world changes, it creates a more favourable spiritual environment to react on the individual, and so on. Bahá'u'lláh is viewed by Bahá'ís as the Chief Architect of universal salvation. The world-wide community is to be rescued from its sorry state through the laws and administration designed by Bahá'u'lláh, a wondrous system called the new world order of Bahá'u'lláh which is moreover the concrete embodiment of all of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and His unique form of community government on the local, national and international levels.

The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, (1897-1957) writes that the foundation principle of the Bahá'í Faith, the oneness of mankind, concerns primarily the relationships that bind states together as members of one human family. (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh 43). The demilitarized, cooperative and united world that the Bahá'í Faith envisions, must be a world in which the salvation of ultimately all of its members is secure, both in the temporal secular sense of the planet being freed from warfare and rescued from certain destruction, and in the eschatological sense of securing the felicitous destiny of the individual human souls that make up that world.

In view of the morbid condition of the world today, Bahá'ís maintain that that humanity is in need of a Saviour, and that it cannot "through its unaided efforts, extricate itself from the slough into which it is steadily sinking." (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh 190) Or, in some other poignant and eloquent words of Shoghi Effendi: "Who, contemplating the helplessness, the fears and miseries of humanity in this day, can any longer question the necessity for a fresh revelation of the quickening power of God's redemptive love and guidance?" (ibid 60)

Bahá'u'lláh's new world order not only provides new structures for the peaceful and progressive reordering of government in the world community, but it also provides a comprehensive peace program outlined by the Universal House of Justice in its statement on peace, "The Promise of World Peace" (1985). Bahá'u'lláh's vision of the new world order is based, moreover, primarily on a fundamental shift in human values and a new world vision, one that recognizes the wholeness and oneness of the human race as the creation of one God. The Universal House of Justice writes: "World order can be founded only on an unshakeable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm." (The Promise of World Peace 9)

The Bahá'í Faith also advocates that moral regeneration which is fundamental to the whole process of world regeneration and without which it cannot be achieved. The world-wide Bahá'í community, although it cannot now claim to function in an ideal way, offers itself as the model of the community of

salvation for the whole world, a diversified but united world-wide community, grounded in a universal faith. The "Grand Redemptive Scheme of God" is, moreover, outlined in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh's preeminent doctrinal work, the Kitáb-i-Iqán (Book of Certitude), teachings which are empowered, among other things, to sweep away "the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world..." (God Passes By 139)

(5) Salvation in the Abrahamic Faiths and the Religions of South Asia

The concept of salvation in the Abrahamic faiths has its counterpart in the religions of South Asia as liberation or release. Salvation in English is translated from the biblical Hebrew terms Yesha', yeshuah, or teshu'ah, terms that signify either 'help' or deliverance from distress or peril. The Jewish understanding of salvation grew out of the historical circumstances of the pattern of captivity and bondage experienced by the Hebrew people at the hands of their oppressors. It was their conviction that God was able to deliver them from their enemies, to rescue them from death and render them victorious. ("Salvation" The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible 171)

The Christian understanding of salvation which focuses exclusively on a belief in Christ as Saviour (Gk. Soter), is based on the Jewish pattern of salvation, except that salvation in Christian terms becomes mediated solely through Jesus while in the Jewish experience salvation was wrought by God alone through repentance and obedience to Torah. Also, in Christian teaching, the focus of salvation shifted away from deliverance from an outward oppressor, to deliverance from the power of Satan and Satan's son, sin, a condition which Christ proclaimed it was within His power to forgive. (Mat. 9:6) This claim shocked the Jews who felt that Christ was assuming powers reserved for God alone. (John 10:33)

Bahá'u'lláh has confirmed, however, the belief in the sacrificial death of Jesus to save the world from its sins (Gleanings 76), except that in the Bahá'í understanding the atoning death of Christ was not wrought to satisfy a blood-debt on the human race to pacify the wrath of a vengeful God, or to atone for "original sin" a notion that was promoted by St. Paul (Rom. 5: 12, 17) but is rejected by `Abdu'l-Bahá as "...a misunderstanding of the meanings of the Bible." (Reality of Man 49).

The word salvation, moreover, in addition to its familiar Biblical perspective, can also be interpreted from a more modern psychological-existential viewpoint. This psychological-existential dimension has been indicated by the great systematic existentialist theologian Paul Tillich. Tillich points to the original meaning of the word "salvus" which not only means "saved" but also "healed". Healing, of course, indicates a state of well-being. Tillich says that the believer is saved when the psyche/soma or mind/body dilemma has been solved; that is, when one comes to feel that he is no longer a divided self, but functions as a sound and harmonious spiritual being who lives at peace with himself and the world. This holistic dimension is one of the keys to the

sacrificial notion of atonement. (at-one-ment)

As Tillich says, the believer is saved when he has been successful in "overcoming the split between God and man, man and his world, man and himself.." (Systematic Theology 11:118 in Modern Christian Thought 369). Tillich applies this existential perspective to Christianity, but it is quite harmonious with Bahá'í thinking which views Bahá'u'lláh as the Divine Physician who has diagnosed the disease of the body-politic and who has prescribed "in His unerring wisdom" the remedy. (Gleanings 213) Viewing them as Divine Physicians, we can draw a close parallel between the missions of Christ and Bahá'u'lláh, the former a healer of the individual soul, the latter a healer, not only of the individual soul, but of the nations as well, missions that are expressed respectively by the phrases, "Fisher of men" and "Quickener of mankind".

In Islám, the word for salvation (Najáh) is rarely used in the Qur'án, although the idea of salvation is clearly implied. In the Sura of "The Cow", for example, the prayer that Adam learned (ii:35) following his banishment from Eden strongly suggests a prayer of repentance, and in the subsequent verse, God promises to those that follow His guidance that "on them shall come no fear, neither shall they be grieved. " (ii:36) (trans. Rodwell) The "straight path" of salvation for a Muslim would consist in the recitation of the Shahada, "La ilaha illa Allah; Muhammad rasul Allah", a declaration of faith in the divine unity and the Prophet, and the observance of "The Five Pillars" of Islam: recital of the Shahada, prayer, alms-giving, fasting and pilgrimage. All of these five duties would be vital for the salvation of a Muslim, but one should mention especially the last of these, the pilgrimage (Hajj). Maurice Gaudet-Demombynes states that "the Muslim knows that he returns from the pilgrimage delivered from sin just as he was on the day of his birth. He has now been prepared for the purest of conduct toward both God and fellowmen." (Mahomet 496 my translation) The Haji is practically guaranteed entrance into paradise on the Great Day of Judgement.

Judgement Day is the final meting out of salvation for the Muslim, that day at the end of the world when the dead shall be resurrected and the fate of each believer will be weighed in the balance in the presence of the angels, and his fate determined. The believer is to be either admitted into paradise or to be thrown headlong into the abyss. On Judgement Day, each one of the great Prophets, Noah, Abraham, Jesus and Muhammad intercedes, not just for individual souls, but for the entire community of the faithful that bears His name (Mahomet 420-422)

In the religions of South Asia the concept of salvation figures in both Hinduism and Buddhism as liberation or release (Moksha). Moreover, this Sanskrit word is a close cognate of the Hebrew verb Hiph'il meaning to deliver or save indicating some commonality in the concept. In Hinduism salvation or Moksha is looked upon as a release from the endless round of future reincarnations (Samsara). In one sense, the Hindu vision of the future is the inverse of the Judaic faiths in which one seeks to win one's paradise and

attain a beatific state after death. In Hinduism, the future life of reincarnation is a certainty. One seeks rather to escape Samsara by becoming liberated while one is still in the body as Jivân mukta, (Soteriology 418). This liberation comes about through union with Brahman: "Moksha is oneness with Brahman, and is eternal". (Vedanta Sûtras, I.i. 13, ii. 12 quoted in "Salvation" 134) Union with Brahman comes through seven possible methods of Yoga (discipline/training) each one being a path to salvation.

The following four are the most well known: (i) Jnana yoga, the way of knowledge or insight, which is based on the philosophical study of the holy scriptures especially the Vedas and Upanishads. (ii) Karma yoga, the way of good works which consists of adhering strictly to rules of caste and observing non-violence or the basic tenor of the "Golden Rule". (iii) Bhakti yoga, the way of love and devotion to a saviour figure. (iv) Raja yoga, the way of meditation and contemplation which includes a psycho-spiritual "layered" philosophy of man, and elaborate spiritual exercises that include bodily postures (asanas) and various states of concentration, ecstasy (samadhi) and liberation (Ringgren and Ström Religions of Mankind 330-331).

The Bahá'í Faith would share the view of Shamkara's Advaita (monist) vedanta school that the seeker of salvation beware of the Maya (illusion) of existence. (Koller "Illusion" Oriental Philosophies 81-88) Bahá'u'lláh also points to the illusory nature of the world as being "like the vapour in a desert, which the thirsty dreameth to be water and striveth after with all his might." (Kitáb-i-Iqán 328) Several Hindu schools also affirm that sin is caused by ignorance (Avidyâ), a belief which the Bahá'í Faith would also share: "The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge." (Selections From the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá 136) Although the Bahá'í Faith recognizes that humanity lives under the domain of sin as well as ignorance when it strays far from God, it does not admit that sin is caused by some capital offence of Adam and Eve.

In Hinduism it is the Bhakti (Sk.=devotion, love) movement with its concept of grace that most closely resembles the salvation of the Judaic faiths. Bhakti is simply salvation through love. As a more popular approach to God, or one of the Hindu gods, it originated as a longing for the experience of God enclosed within the more intimate and vital forms of joy, warmth and ecstasy that seemed elusive and antipathetic to the rigours, sometimes clearly ascetic, of the way of the Raja yoga practiced by the yogi. Bhakti resembles the Judaic faiths with its pointed emphasis on two closely connected spiritual realities: (i) love (ii) grace. In Judaism it is sincere repentance to God and obedience to Torah that saves. In Christianity it is Jesus. In Bhakti Yoga, it is love and devotion to Shiva, Rama, Vishnu, Krishna or other avatars which assures salvation.

In Buddhism, the Theravada school stresses the fact that man must rely on no one but himself. It conceives of the Buddha as simply a moral teacher who was not supernatural or divine and who reached higher consciousness by persistent efforts to train his mind to attain enlightenment (Sk. Bodhi). (Ross, Buddhism

A Way of Life and Thought 86) It begrudges the notion that we call the Buddha a "saviour": "If the Buddha is to be called a `saviour' at all, it is only in the sense that he discovered and showed the Path to Liberation." (What the Buddha Taught 1-2) But even in Theravada Buddhism, man must also be saved, even if the salvation is wrought by man himself, and from himself in order to attain enlightenment or Nirvana. In Theravada Buddhism there is also a more elitist concept of salvation, in that salvation is reserved only for the very few at any time (Soteriology 422) and is particularly reserved for the members of the Sangha, the monastic brotherhood.

In the Mahayana school of Buddhism, the picture is quite otherwise. There, the Buddha is viewed very much as "Saviour" with all the cosmological force of the word. Unlike Theravada Buddhism, in which The Buddha ascends into his own Nirvana at the end of his life, in Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha is replaced by the Bodhisattva (Sk. Sattva=essence, being. Bodhi=enlightened) who because he was moved with great compassion, delays his own eclipse into Nirvana so that he may become the saviour of all those who seek enlightenment. "I will become their Saviour, and deliver them from all their suffering". (Les Religions 85. Source uncited. My translation)

In the White Lotus and Pure Land or Shin sects of China and Japan respectively, the Bodhisattva very much saves by the principle of intercession. In Shin Buddhism in China, the Buddha is viewed exactly as a saviour whose "saving grace" (What Man Believes 159) enables those to enter Nirvana who are unable to achieve it by their own efforts. Also the Japanese Shin Shu or Pure Land sect venerates one Bodhisattva in particular as a saviour, Amida Buddha or Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light or Glory, an esoteric and other-worldly being who will nonetheless reveal His glory by gathering His believers in the western paradise "in which believers from all parts of the world will be gathered as a reward for their faith and good works." (Fozdar "Buddha and Amitabha" 22) Bahá'ís proclaim as having come in the person of their founder, Bahá'u'lláh. The Pure Land school today accounts for about one half of all Buddhists in Japan. Zen Buddhism makes up the other half.

Finally, whether it be the Theravada or Mahayana school of Buddhism, the Bahá'í Faith would concur with the Buddha's "Eightfold Path" as a philosophical path of wisdom and as a mode of exemplary conduct to adopt, except that from a Bahá'í point of view Buddhism's goal that we "extinguish our own egos altogether" (What Man Believes 147) in order to protect ourselves from the pain of sickness and misfortune, while a worthwhile goal to pursue, would imply perfection and perfection "man can never completely attain." (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance 479:175) We must conclude, therefore, that the ego can never be completely extinguished.

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