

God, the Lord of Creation, Preservation and Dissolution, through one or more of God's many personal forms or aspects (as Vishnu, Shiva, or the Goddess Devi, for example).

Many of Hinduism's sacred writings attest to the unity of God and to the inability of human perception or language to fully comprehend or describe God. "The Spirit Supreme is immeasurable, inapprehensible, beyond conception, never-born, beyond reasoning, beyond thought.

His vastness is the vastness of space" (Maitri Upanishad 6.17). Similarly, the Bahá'í Faith teaches that the divine Ultimate Reality, the Creator, is both singular and unknowable in essence. "Exalted, immeasurably exalted, art Thou above the strivings of mortal man to unravel Thy mystery, to describe Thy Glory, or even to hint at the nature of Thine Essence".

At the same time, Hinduism has taught that knowledge of God (or Brahman) may come through knowledge of the inner reality of man (the atman, self or soul). Likewise, the Bahá'í writings say:

"Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting."

The Soul

Both Hindus and Bahá'ís believe that our true identity is a spiritual one and that the soul (atman or jiva) is the source and expression of that spiritual reality. This soul is imperishable and persists after the death of the body. Bahá'ís, however, do not believe that the soul reincarnates in another physical form, but rather that it continues on its spiritual journey in a non-material form. Bahá'ís believe that the soul comes into existence at conception. Our purpose in life is to develop spiritual attributes - love, compassion, justice and so forth - to the best of our abilities, so that we may know true joy in this life and after death. This journey of self-knowledge and spiritual practice is best accomplished by knowing the will of God for this day.

Progressive Revelation

The most direct way in which humanity has had knowledge of the will of God is through God's Messengers or Manifestations. These great souls have been appointed by God throughout history, Bahá'ís believe, to both reaffirm spiritual truth and to reveal new teachings appropriate to the

conditions of the time. "Every Prophet Whom the almighty and Peerless Creator hath purposed to send to the peoples of the earth hath been entrusted with a Message, and charged to act in a manner that would best meet the requirements of the age in which He appeared."

The Hindu concept of avatar or the "descent" of God in human form, articulated most elaborately in Vaishnavite theology, expresses the idea of divine intervention in human history, an intervention whose purpose is to restore order, truth and righteous behaviour (dharma). As Krishna, the manifestation of Vishnu, says in the text, the Bhagavad Gita (4.7-8): "Whenever there is a decline of dharma (righteousness or religion) and a rise of adharma (unrighteousness), O Bharata, then I send forth Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for

the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age." Hindu literature looks towards the return of an avatar of God called Kalki. Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh is that return, come to humanity to restore dharma and to unify humankind as one family.

Social Teachings and Community Life

Each Manifestation of God, while reaffirming the fundamental ethical principles which should guide personal conduct and social interaction, brings a new pattern of community life and new laws to regulate that life. Bahá'u'lláh has directed humanity to abandon its age-old distinctions, hierarchies and prejudices based on race, class, gender and creed. The Hindu scriptures themselves acknowledge the changing nature of the application of the laws of dharma. The Laws of Manu, for example, speak of the different sets of duties applicable to man in each of the different yugas (periods of history or world ages): "One set of duties (is prescribed) for men in the Krta Yuga; a different one in the Treta Yuga, and in the Dvapara, and another yet in the Kali Yuga" (Manusmriti 1.185).

Bahá'u'lláh has brought a new dharma, a new set of duties, for this age. The hallmark of this dharma is the recognition of the unity of humankind. "O Children of Men!"

Bahá'u'lláh wrote,
"Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest.
Such is my counsel to you, O concourse of light! ”

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh cover all aspects of personal, community and institutional development and organisation. They are designed to bring together the peoples of the world in unity, and to create a civilisation based on peace, justice and prosperity.

In each Bahá'í temple or House of Worship, people of all faiths are free to enter to pray or meditate. The lotus-shaped Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, India, is a visible symbol of Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation that we are all "the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch" created by the one God.

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