

# *Beliefs and Social Practices of the Baha'i Community of Ethiopia*

*The Case of the Baha'i Communities of  
Zone 3 and Zone 4 Addis Ababa*

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**BELIEFS & SOCIAL PRACTICES OF THE BAHAI' I  
COMMUNITY OF ETHIOPIA**

**THE CASE OF THE BAHAI' I COMMUNITIES OF  
ZONE 3 AND ZONE 4 ADDIS ABABA**

**BY**

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Dear Sir or Madam:

This is to confirm that Dagmawit Eshetu has thoroughly corrected the spellings and grammatical errors in her thesis entitled "Beliefs and Social Practices of the Baha'i Community of Ethiopia: The Case of the Baha'i Communities in Zone 3 and Zone 4 Addis Ababa"; she has particularly widened Chapter Five. Dagmawit has also incorporated the suggested reference materials and advices in the thesis.

Sincerely,

Getachew Kassa (Dr.)  
Associate Director IES



## **Abstract**

The Baha'i Faith arrived in Ethiopia in the late 1932 and is over seventy years. Its membership, which in 1934, consisted of about nine persons, mostly of foreigners has grown to almost ten thousands representing about nine ethnic groups. Initially, located in Addis Ababa, capital city of Ethiopia, today Baha'is can be found in one hundred and twenty four towns, cities and villages with background of Christianity (of different branches), Islam and Traditional beliefs.

However, The Baha'i community of Ethiopia is one of the least studied religious minorities in the country. Very little has been written about the introduction of the religion, the composition of its members, its development projects and social and religious practices. Therefore, this paper is mainly concerned about conducting an ethnographic and historical study about the Baha'i community of Ethiopia by taking as cases two zones of Region 14, Addis Ababa, namely Zone 3 and Zone 4 where some 300 Baha'is reside.

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A very special thanks goes to my husband Zelalem Bimrew, who advised to continue my research on the Baha'i community of Ethiopia and who have tirelessly and patiently supported me morally and materially during my stay at the University. These very special thanks also go to our sons Rahim Zelalem and Ahdieh Zelalem, who though very young understood and sacrificed their time of my being there with them, while I was studying and doing my research.

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It is a privilege to thank all my informants, committees and offices for taking the thesis seriously and for sparing their valuable time to be interviewed and questioned for the thesis. Last but certainly not the least, I owe much of my academic carrier to Dr. Getachew Kassa who remained to be my advisor throughout my stay at the University and for providing me with all the support to enable me achieve this goal.

## INTRODUCTION

In December 1932, a message from the Baha'i spiritual Assembly of Haifa was sent to the Baha'is in the world through their spiritual assemblies. The message, among others, include a letter written by an Ethiopian whose name was Mohammad Derwish Taha, inspector of Education of all Muslim schools in Ethiopia, to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith. The content of the letter was that of Mohammed Derwish Taha's interest in the faith and his intention to become a Baha'i. This was the beginning of the Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia, a country in which the predominant religions are Coptic Orthodox Christianity, Islam and traditional religious beliefs.

The Baha'i community of Ethiopia is one of the least studied religious communities in Ethiopia. Available studies are very insignificant and our knowledge about the community, that is, the introduction of the religion, the composition of its members, its development projects and social and religious practices are not well recorded and not known. Hence, this paper is mainly concerned about conducting an ethnographic and historical study about the Baha'i community of Ethiopia by taking as cases two zones of Region 14, Addis Ababa, namely Zone 3 and Zone 4 where some 300 Baha'is reside.

The first chapter of the paper deals with an attempt to place the Baha'i community of Ethiopia in broader theoretical framework of anthropological religion. In the same chapter, are the statement of the problem, general and specific objectives of the study,

methodology employed in the process of ethnographic data gathering, the significance of the research and an overview of the study area.

Chapter two presents the origin and history of the Baha'i Faith; the basic teachings and principles; the internal working system and its world view and the Baha'i International Community. Thus it highlights the general background of the Baha'i Faith.

The third chapter is mainly concerned with the introduction of the Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia. It includes the first communication between Ethiopians and the Baha'i world; the coming of Sabri Elias; other early pioneers; the development of the Baha'i community in those formative days; its institutional growth; acquisition of Baha'i properties; oppositions it has faced and its role in development of the country.

The fourth chapter deals with the ethnographic study of the Baha'i community of Ethiopia by taking as cases Zone 3 and Zone 4 of Addis Ababa. It includes the Local Spiritual Assemblies, Committees under them; activities such as devotional meeting, study circles, youth and women activities, Nineteen Day Feasts, holy days and fast; obligatory prayers and pilgrimage; wedding, divorce and family life; funerals; and its relationship with other religious communities, governmental and non-governmental institutions.

The last chapter consists of a detailed analysis of data presented in the framework of the relevant theoretical literature viewed and the impact of the Baha'i Community in Ethiopia. The thesis will end with a conclusion and some important appendices.

This dissertation is by no mean complete. It needs further research and investigations. But I believe that, it can serve as an introductory material and as a launching pad for further research on the history and development of the Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia.

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.1. Theoretical Literature Review

Religion is universal. It has been found in all societies studied by anthropologists and is one of the hallmarks of human creativity as well as a tribute to humankind's nearly infinite resourcefulness and adaptability in coping with problems of daily experience.<sup>1</sup>

S. D. Glazier

Almost as old as the field of anthropology itself are anthropological attempts to analyze what has been thought to be culturally universal: religion. Historically depending on whom one reads, the anthropological study of religion begins in either early 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany or France. Morris (1987), for example, holds that to understand later theorists such as Tylor, Durkheim, or Malinowski one must begin with the intellectual tradition started by Hegel, who, among his tasks, attempted in the 1790's to **“explore and integrate the irrational into an expanded reason”** and thus argued for tolerance of all religious traditions.<sup>2</sup>

On the other side, early anthropologists of religion might claim as their founder the French writer Montesquieu. He initiated what Evans-Pritchard calls a **“pragmatic”**<sup>3</sup> way of regarding religion by writing in 1750 that even though a religion may be thought to be false it can serve a useful social function as long as it conforms to the type of government with which it is associated. Another influence on later theorists such as Durkheim and Spencer was Fustel de Coulanges, a French historian who insisted in his 1864 work *The Ancient City* that religious ideas were not only the cause of social changes but the essence of all phenomena.<sup>4</sup>

Moving to England, we first encounter Tylor (1832-1917), who was the first *real* anthropologist and father of Anthropology of religion to write about religion and society. He applied evolutionary theory to the study of religion, assuming that stages of material “advancement” corresponded with those of spiritual nature. In his famous work, he formulated a theory of animism as the earliest, “primitive” stage of religion. Tylor was joined, in both England and France, by a host of fellow travelers, including James Frazer (1854-1941), whose comparative mythologies were so inspiring to later study and Marett (1866-1943), who proposed a preanimistic stage of religion.<sup>5</sup>

However, up to the present time, there is no clear definition of religion. Anthropologists tried and are still trying to define religion. They talk about religion in two different ways, either generically or specifically. In a generic way, religion is seen as a universal human manifestation, an aspect of humanity (for example, ‘religion as part of culture’ or a ‘cultural system’). In this case it is conceived of as a way of being human, although a specific way of being –distinct form, but of course related to, being economic or political.<sup>6</sup>

The great ‘theories of religion’ from writers such as Durkheim, Marx, Freud and Weber attempt to deal with religion at this level, by explaining its universality of religion, why or how it seems to be that all humans ‘have religion’. It would be wise to spend few lines and discuss their view points of religion at some length.<sup>7</sup>

Durkheim (1858-1917) viewed religious experiences as “social facts” which bypass empirical truth. He then made a distinction between the sacred and the profane. He said that religion is ‘a unified belief system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things.’<sup>8</sup> Marx (1818-1883) was concerned more with the economic alienation arising from socioeconomic deprivation and with the masking of economic inequality by religious activity. Freud (1856-1939), however, articulated a full and intellectually inspiring reduction of religious experience to biological and social drives.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Weber (1864-1920) rejecting Marx’s evolutionary law of class society, or Durkheim’s sustained law of moral society, he founded the methodology of the ideal type and the elective affinity of causal relationships. The goal of Weber’s approach to religion is to understand religious action from the subjective meaning of the actor rationally and also emphatically; it is not to establish the laws of religion and society, or to extract the essence of religious action. Or the goal is not even to formulate and evaluate the social function of religion as Marx did that religion was the opium of the masses or, as Durkheim did, that religion was what made moral society hold together. He, therefore, emphasized the common links between the social and the economic spheres of human activity. I shall use his theory when analyzing the Baha’i Community in Ethiopia.<sup>10</sup>

Religion is also defined in specific ways as either ‘traditional religions’ or ‘world religions’. According to Malory Nye of the University of Stirling, ‘traditional religions’ are those religions found in specific places and within specific cultures. Ndembu.

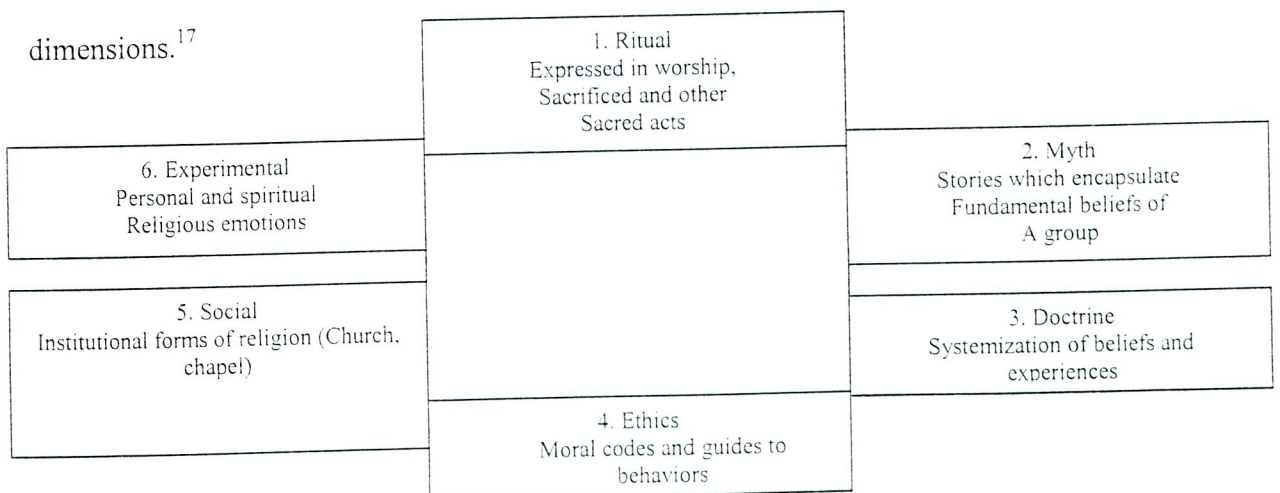
Kiriwinan, Navajo, and Aranta religions are considered traditional religions.<sup>11</sup> One famous anthropologist, who has written on such specific religions, was Victor Turner (1920-1983). Turner did his ethnographic work among the Ndebele between 1950 and 1954, from which he later developed one of the most useful of all categorizations of ritual processes.<sup>12</sup>

Another specific way of defining religion is in terms of “world religions”. The term usually is used to set out an area of religious studies which (i) covers ‘religions’ in a variety of cross-cultural manifestations (both within and outside Europe), (ii) is not strictly limited to Christian traditions, and (iii) relates to families of religious manifestations which are spread over fairly geographical areas. A list of religions which are classified as ‘world religions’ includes Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Baha’i Faith. In some cases Jainism, Shintoism and Daoism are considered as ‘world religions’.<sup>13</sup>

The Baha’i Faith is one of the ‘world religions’. Three reasons can be given why the Baha’i Faith is a ‘world religion’. First, the Baha’i Faith is not a sect, denomination or branch of any other religion. It has been long recognized by the United Nations, the Vatican, the World Parliament and other institutions as an independent religion, in the same sense that Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism are taken to be independent world religions.<sup>14</sup>

Second, according to the 1995 Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook, the Baha'i Faith has well established communities in 210 countries and territories, more than any other independent religion except Christianity, which stretches over 260 countries. The background of the Baha'is is from Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, traditional religions and from those who have no religions at all. The Baha'i Faith is scattered throughout the world and more than 2,100 ethnic groups and tribes are represented in the Faith. Its literature has been translated into over 800 languages. According to the World Christian Encyclopedia, it is reported that the Baha'i Faith is the fastest growing independent world religion. Third, the belief in the unity of mankind is the major principle of the Baha'i Faith.<sup>15</sup> Baha'u'llah, founder of the Baha'i Faith said, ***“Let your vision be world embracing, rather than confined to your own selves”***.<sup>16</sup> We will discuss in detail about the Baha'i Faith in the next chapter.

However, religions where they are defined in terms of either generic or specific ways share a number of core features, which operate within certain cultural contexts that can be examined and explained. The theologian Ninian Smart suggested that religions have six dimensions.<sup>17</sup>



In general, according to M. Taylor and B. Morris, in the study of religion of the nineteenth century, religion was considered an outdated mode of thought and action standing behind the modern progress of science, law, politics and education.<sup>18</sup>

When we come to the twentieth century, we find the functionalist Malinowski (1884-1942), who advocated tight, description ethnography, and attempted to record and establish the character of the native mentality of an island people. He drew on Frazer for his general categorization of magic, science, and religion and viewed those in the religious vein as being without application. The other is Radcliffe-Browne (1881-1955) who is also associated with the structural functionalist school for his work establishing the cosmological functions of myths in maintaining natural order.<sup>19</sup>

Evans Pritchard (1902-1973) in his work on *Theories of Primitive Religion* criticized many of the assumptions about religion and religious categorizations found in Tylor and others. He, like Boas and other predecessors, tried to break up the classic anthropological dichotomies of primitive/modern, monogamy/promiscuity, white/brown, animist/monotheist that seemed to dominate so much of ethnography.<sup>20</sup>

As in past generations, most of the leading anthropologists of the present day – Geertz, Levi-Strauss, La Barre, Clifford, Crapanzano, Fernandez, Douglas, Ortner, Boon, Rappaport, Price, Saler, Spiro, and Tedlock – continue to devote more than passing attention to religion. Criticism of different theories on anthropological studies of religion

continues till present and this is the characteristic of contemporary anthropological studies of religion.<sup>21</sup>

More importantly, in the twentieth century, religion is understood in its own terms, as Asad pointed out, as “...*a distinctive space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other.*”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, underlining the importance of studying religious phenomena in the 1990’s, Reynolds and Tanner boldly proclaim: “*Against expectation, religion has... become a topic of every day conversation and concern*”<sup>23</sup> and therefore studying religious experiences is very important.

The other thing to mention at this juncture is that, in the past, like twenty years ago, the majority of anthropological works especially ethnographic works on religions dealt with ‘traditional religions’ in Africa, Asia, and Oceania.<sup>24</sup> However, Glazier writes that as of in the 1990s a major shift has taken place in the subject matter of the anthropology of religion. Glazier, quoting Fernandez, and writes that it is more about finding the “*strange in the familiar*” than about the “*familiar in the strange.*” The reason behind this according to Glazier:

...is that...in tribal settings anthropologists increasingly find themselves in competition with other social scientists. In many cases, the groups studied by anthropologists are no different from the groups that have traditionally studied by political scientists, economists, sociologists and others; and participant observation – once seen as unique to the anthropological enterprise – is no longer exclusively the domain of anthropologists.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the main interest in this thesis is to give an idea about finding the “*strange in the familiar*”, that is, the Baha’i community of Ethiopia in which the

predominant religions are Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Christianity, Islam and traditional beliefs.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

Ethiopia is a multi ethnic, multi cultural and multi religious country in which the predominant religions are Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Christianity, Islam and traditional religious beliefs. For quite some time other religions, such as the Baha'i Faith, have been introduced to the country.

However, one can definitely say that the Baha'i Community of Ethiopia is one of the least studied religious communities in Ethiopia. Very little has been written about the history of the Baha'i community in Ethiopia. Available studies are very insignificant: the history of the Baha'i community, the introduction of the religion, and the compositions of its members, that is, membership structure, ethnic composition of the members, religious and social structure, social, economic, educational, and development projects and practices are not well recorded and not known.

Moreover, little is known about the various activities in which the followers of the Baha'i Faith, their development organization and its contribution in the development activities of the country in such fields as education and health.

Furthermore, little is known of members' social roles, activities in relation to their ethnic, educational, and economic background, and employment, age and gender statutes. In addition the interaction between the Baha'is themselves, the Baha'is with their administration, and of their development activities, the relationship of the Baha'i community with other religious communities, with governmental and non governmental organizations, with the state of Ethiopia, and with the international donor communities are not studied and thus not well known.

### **1.3. Objectives of the study**

#### **1.3.1. General Objective**

The general objective of this study is to conduct an ethnographic-historical study of the religion and social practices of the Baha'i community in Ethiopia taking as case two zones of Region 14, Addis Ababa, namely, Zone 3 and 4 where some 300 Baha'is reside. The study aims to come up with a comprehensive document for further research on the Baha'i communities in Ethiopia.

#### **1.3.2. Specific objectives**

The specific objectives of my research include:

1. To describe the history of the introduction of the faith to Ethiopia;
2. To assess membership structures and religious practices as observed by different category of members;

3. To investigate some of the social practices by Baha'is that are related to such as marriage, funeral, socialization practices;
4. To explore the social division of work between community members along gender, age, economic statuses;
5. To investigate to communities' social and economic, health and educational and other welfare activities;
6. To examine relations of this community with adherents of other religious government and NGO organizations

#### 1.4. Methodology

In June 1998, I graduated from Kotebe College of Teacher Education majoring history. In partial-fulfillment of the B.Ed in history I did my senior essay on **"The History of the Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia"**. After graduation, I vouched myself that if I continue my second degree I have to further my research on the Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia.

Now that I'm pursuing for my second degree, though in different field (social anthropology), the writing of a thesis as previously is very important. This gives me a chance to further my research on the religion. Therefore, this time I focused on the **"Beliefs and Social Practices of the Baha'i Community of Ethiopia"**. Since in the study of anthropology fieldwork is a paramount activity and doing fieldwork throughout the country is impossible, I chose two zones in Addis Ababa, namely Zone 3 and Zone 4 as my research areas.

In order to attain the above mentioned objectives both primary and secondary data were gathered and analyzed. Primary and secondary data about the Baha'i community were collected through or by employing both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Therefore, secondary data were gathered from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia, National Baha'i Library, Sabri Development Institute, United Religious Forum, World Faiths Development Dialogue, Baha'i National External Affairs Office, Baha'i International Community, Journals from Newspapers in the country and also from individuals. One important secondary data is statistics about the Baha'i community. Statistics which include number of Baha'is, their age, gender, educational background, professions, position at work, type of household, wedding and funerals were gathered from the two local governing councils and from individual interviews. However, since I found crude statistical data, I was obliged to fill the gap by making interviews with secretaries of the two local spiritual assemblies.

Concerning participant observation, I have tried to observe, their devotional meeting, activities such as youth, women, and adult classes, wedding, holy days, administrative meetings such as committee meetings and so forth. Activities such as fasting, election of administrative bodies and funeral were not observed because they are conducted outside the duration of fieldwork which was from October –December, 2002. But my informants filled the gap by answering questions regarding those activities. Moreover, I am a member of the community for a long time and I have the chance to participate in those activities.

Interviews were conducted with key informants consisting of administrative and religious officials, with active members, with members of different social service providing bodies of the community. Accordingly, interviews were held with, five elected members from each local governing council, two of the national governing council, two auxiliary members, one counselor for Ethiopia, and office holders of the education and health service units.

Focused group discussions were held with the National Teaching Committee, Regional Teaching Committee of Addis Ababa Metropolitan and with the Sabri Development Institute. The above groups or committees were selected based on their direct involvement in the activities concerning the Baha'i community of Addis Ababa and Ethiopia as a whole.

Besides, informal interviews were also conducted with four youth -two girls and two boys, four women, four children and four men informants belonging to different wealth, employment and social and ethnic and educational backgrounds to understand their view about their faith and its social practices.

Furthermore, I tried to interview other religious group of their viewpoint about the Baha'i community in Ethiopia. Therefore, ten Christians from different branches of Christianity two Muslims, and one traditional believer were interviewed. The method I used to interview these members of other religious groups was by contacting the Baha'is who have relatives or friends from these religious groups.

Finally, all the data collected through interviews, questionnaires and secondary sources were analyzed and interpreted using an inductive approach. Meaning, the data I have collected were sorted or sifted using different approaches. I have then asked what theories best explain the patterns present in a culture and connect the data to the explanation.

### **1.5. Significance of the research**

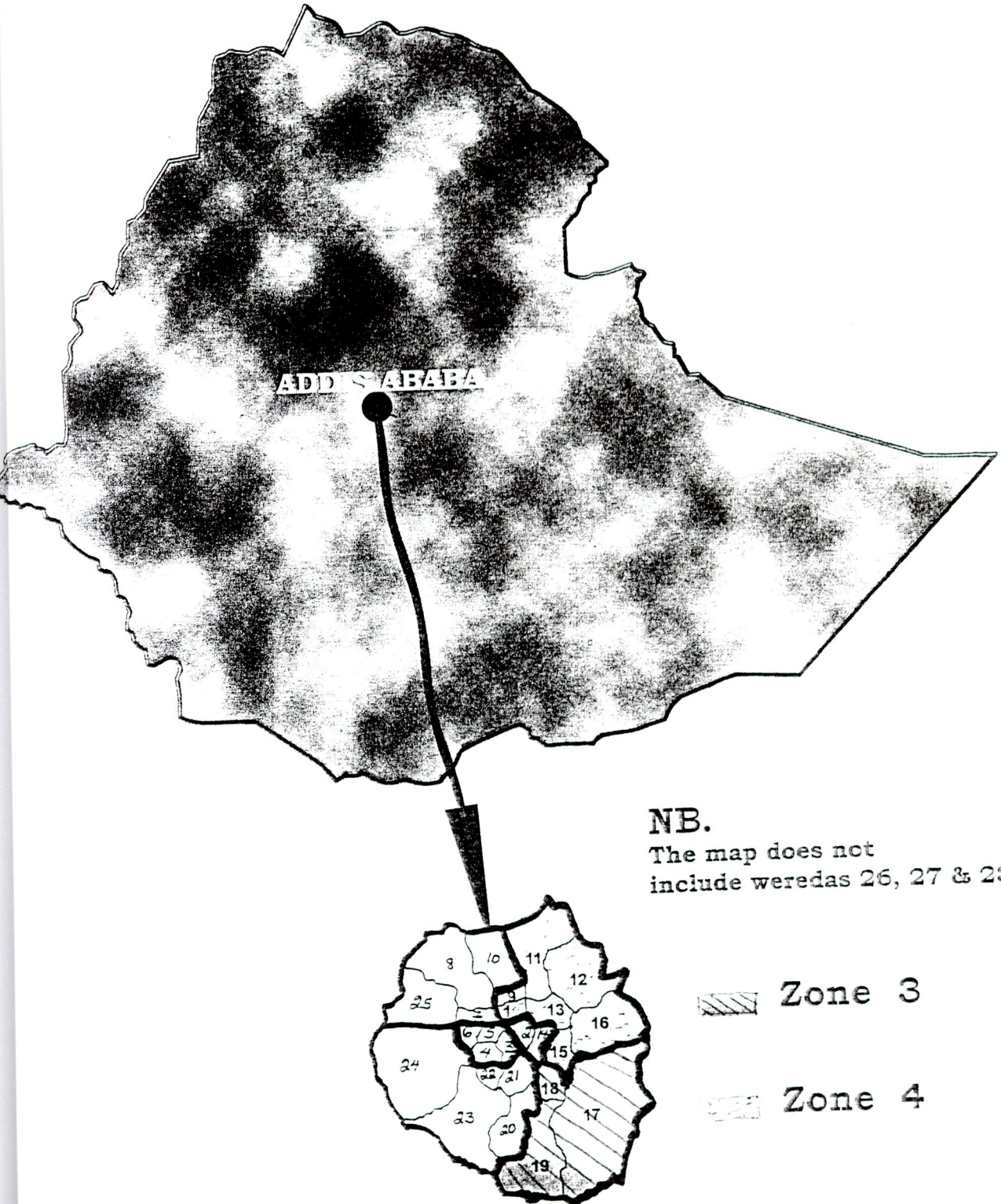
Given the absence of any comprehensive anthropological study about the history, the religious and social organizations and practices of the Ethiopian Baha'i community, this calls for an ethnographic study of this minority religious community and documentation of this community's history. The study of this community will be added to the anthropological and religious studies in Ethiopia.

Moreover, such study of a minority religious community will widen our scope of knowledge for further research in the community as well as similar religious communities in Ethiopia.

### **1.6. An overview of the Study Area**

Both Zone 3 and Zone 4, are found in Addis Ababa, Region 14 Administration. Addis Ababa is the third permanent capital in the history of Ethiopia, after Axum and Gondar. It is located at 9° 30' North and 38° 43 East extends for 20 km East-West and 25 km North-South and covers an area of 400 Sq. Km. It is encircled by the Entoto hills to the north,

# Zones & Weredas of Addis Ababa City



Mount Wechecha, Repi and Furi hills to the west and south west. The several streams and rivers like Kebena and Tinishu Akaki have formed numerous gorges. Being located on an average altitude of 2400 meters above sea level, with an average temperature of 20°C and an average rainfall of 1179 mm, the city has a hospitable climate.<sup>26</sup>

According to the 1994 Statistical report published in June 1998, Zone 3 has a population of 380,174 (M=181,222, F=198,952) and Zone 4 has a population 461,313 (M=219,807, F=241,506). Zone 3 comprises Woredas 17, 18, 19 and 28 where as Zone 4 comprises of Woredas 01, 09, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 16 Addis Ababa metropolitan. Geographically, Zone 3 is found on south-eastern part of Addis Ababa, while Zone 4 is at the north-eastern part of Addis.<sup>27</sup>

The Central Statistical Authority gave a report for Addis Ababa in general and it is very difficult to know the specific work of the people in the two Zones. However, from my previous knowledge and understanding the people are engaged in all walks of life from farming to Doctors, Philosophers, etc. I find interesting that in Zone 3 in particular about 17,630 rural people are engaged in farming.<sup>28</sup>

In general in Addis Ababa 82 percent of the population are Orthodox Christians. The average population density is 4,706.3/sq.km and growth of the population is 3.8 percent per year. 83 percent of the population is literates and average number of persons per housing unit is 5 persons.<sup>29</sup>

Especially, the two zones have significant roles in political, social and economic development of the country. They are the center of government, non-government and international administration, culture and industry of the country.

Zone 3 is known for its industrial places in its Nifasilk area, and many NGOs and Embassies are found in Bole area. Its Bole area is also renowned for its beautiful houses and gardens. In its both Kotebe and Bole areas we find a number farmers farming for a living. On the other hand, Zone 4 is known for its administrative and higher educational center. The FRDE parliament, the national palace and the grand place are found there. A lot of ministries including the Ministry of Education are found there. Moreover, the Addis Ababa University with its campuses of Faculty of Natural Science, Faculty of Social Science, and Technology Faculty are found there. Furthermore, for the last three decades it has been the seat of international organizations such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU),<sup>30</sup>

The reasons behind the selection of these two zones for my research on the Beliefs and Social Practices of The Baha'i Community of Ethiopia are four:

- I believe the two zones can represent the whole Baha'i community of Ethiopia, in a way that members in the two zones come from different ethnic, religious background, age and social status.
- In addition, most of the administrative members of the national governing council, national committees, national task forces, national as well as regional

coordinators, national boards, counselor, auxiliary board members and their assistants come from these two zones;

- Due to time constraint, that is very short time to conduct and finish the study throughout the country and the limitations of resources to conduct a comprehensive study that includes other communities of the religion in the country; and
- Besides, the choice is based on my previous study acquaintance with these communities and I am also member of the Baha'i community of Zone 3.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.1. General background to the Baha'i Faith

The Baha'i Faith emerged in Iran as an offshoot of Islam in the middle of the nineteenth century, that is, in 1844. It has since developed as an independent religion, much the same as Christianity developed out of Judaism.

#### 2.1.1. History

The forerunner of the Baha'i Faith was Siyyid Ali Mohammed (1819-1850) known as the Bab\*, who on May 23, 1844 proclaimed himself to be the promised one of Islam, the Qaim<sup>†</sup>.<sup>1</sup> His mission was to prepare people to the forthcoming advent of another prophet "Him Whom God shall Make Manifest". The Bab first declared himself to Mulla Hussein-i- Bushiri, one of the Shaykhi disciples<sup>‡</sup>.<sup>2</sup>

Later seventeen individuals joined Mulla Hussein in accepting the new religion. The eighteen individuals were given the title of "Letters of the Living".<sup>3</sup> The Bab then sent these individuals to all parts of Iran and Iraq and quite a number of people of different background converted into the new faith. His activities, however, inevitably aroused

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\*The Bab is an Arabic words which means the "gate"

† Qaim is an Arabic word which means the return of the hidden Imam Mehdi

‡ The Shaykhi disciples were the followers of a movement called the Shaykhis, after their founder Shaykh Ahmed al -Ahsai (1753-1826). Like the Shi'ih sect of Islam, the Saykhis awaited a messianic figure, the Qaim (the return of the hidden Imam Mehdi).

anger among the majority of the ulama\* , and the Bab spent much of his ministry (1844-1850) in prison or confinement.<sup>4</sup>

The Babis, followers of the Bab, were also subjected to persecution by the Shiih fanatical clergy, along with the forces of the Persian government throughout the country. On 9 July 1850, the Bab himself was executed by firing squad in the barrack of Tabriz, northwest Iran, along with a young follower. Their remains were hidden by his followers and in 1899 transferred to Israel where in 1909 Abdul-Baha, (eldest son and designated successor of Baha'u'llah founder of the Baha'i Faith), himself interred in the resting place on Mount Carmel in Haifa, known as the Shrine of the Bab.<sup>5</sup>

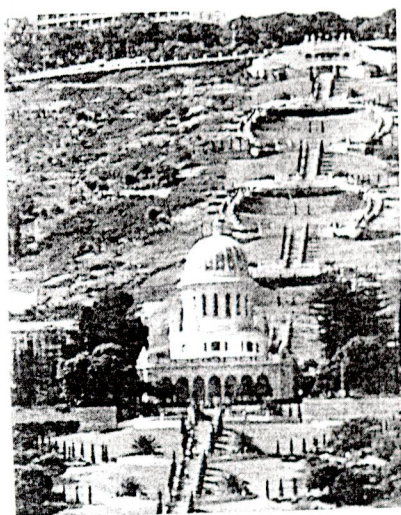


Fig. 1 The Shrine of the Bab

Among the most important of the Bab's writings are the *Qayyulum -Asma* the Bab's commentary of the Surih of Joseph, the Persian and Arabic *Bayan* the major doctrinal work of the Bab, *Dalail-I-Sabi-ih* (the Seven Proofs), and the *Kitabi-Asma* (the Book of Names).<sup>6</sup>

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\*Ulama- an Arabic word meaning Muslim priests

Baha'is considers the Bab as herald of Baha'u'llah, at the same time, as a 'manifestation of God' in his own right, considering his writings to be holy books. The declaration of the Bab on 23 May 1844, his birth date on 20 October 1819, and the day of his martyrdom on 9 July 1850 are celebrated as Baha'i holydays on which work is suspended; and the beginning of the Baha'i Faith is dated from the day of his declaration in 1844 as year first.<sup>7</sup>

In 1863, Baha'u'llah, "*declared himself to be 'Him whom God will make manifest'*".<sup>8</sup> Named Mirza Hussein Ali Nuri at his birth in Tehran on 12 November 1817, Baha'u'llah is considered by Baha'is as the founder of the Baha'i Faith. He was a member of a noble family of Iran, whose family held higher governmental offices in the country.<sup>9</sup>

At the age of twenty seven in 1844, Baha'u'llah became a follower of the Bab and taught the faith to his fellow men. Baha'u'llah suffered from the persecution waged against the Babis at the time and was made to suffer imprisonment and bastinado\*.<sup>10</sup>

After the assassination attempt on the life of the Shah of Iran by two according to Baha'i "misguided" Babis, in 1853, Baha'u'llah was imprisoned for four months in an underground prison known as the Siyah-Chal the Black Pit, in Tehran. It was there that he was said to have received a revelation. Baha'u'llah in his book "**Epistle to the son of the wolf**", wrote:

...One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: Verily, We shall make Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve then not for that

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\*Bastinado is a Persian word which means punishment or torture by beating with a wooden rod on the soles of the feet.

which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid –for Thou art in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth –men who will aid Thee through Thy self and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath received the hearts of such as have recognized Him.<sup>11</sup>

Following his release, he and his family were banished to Baghdad, and then to Istanbul in Turkey in 1863. On the eve of his departure for Istanbul, in April 1863, in the garden of Ridvan\*, Baha'u'llah declared to his followers that he was the promised one foretold by the Bab. There after he was known as Baha'u'llah (the Glory of God). Most Babis accepted his teachings and called themselves as Baha'is. The Ridvan Festival\* is celebrated as the holiest and most significance of Baha'i holy days.<sup>12</sup>

Baha'u'llah then transferred from Istanbul to Edrine in Turkey where he publicly proclaimed his mission addressing the kings and rulers of the time and calling on them to establish world peace, justice and unity.<sup>13</sup> Again he was exiled by the Turkish authorities to the prison city of Acre in Israel where he passed away on 29 May 1892 following a short illness.<sup>14</sup>

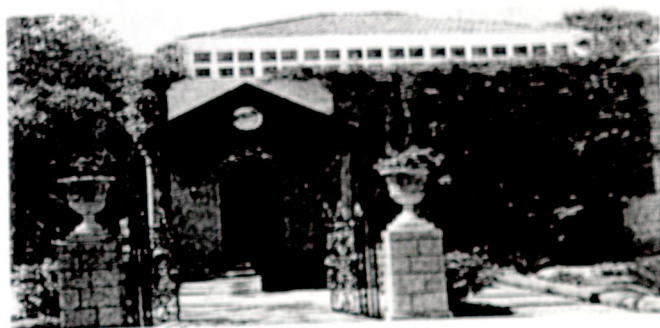


Fig. 2 The Shrine of Baha'u'llah

\*The garden of Ridvan was situated on the out skirt of Baghdad, across the River Tigris from the house of Baha'u'llah

\*The Ridvan Festival is a twelve days celebration of which the first, ninth and the twelfth days are celebrated by suspending work)

Baha'u'llah's writings are considered by Baha'is as revelations from God, and some 15,000 of his tablets (letters) have been collected. His major works include: the Kitabi-Aqdas "The Most Holy Book", Hidden Words, the Kitabi-Iqan "The Book of Certitude", The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys, Tablet of Carmel, and Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.<sup>15</sup> His birth date on 12 November, 1817, his declaration dates between 21 April – 2 May 1863 and his ascension date on 29 May 1892 are celebrated as Baha'i holidays on which work is suspended.<sup>16</sup>

In his will, the Kitabi-Ahd (the Book of Covenant), Baha'u'llah named his eldest son, Abbas Effendi, as his successor and authorized interpreter of his teachings.<sup>17</sup> Born as Abbas Effendi in Tehran, Iran on 23 May, 1844, he adopted the name Abdul-Baha (meaning "Servant of Baha") after the death of his father and became the sole interpreter of his father's teachings.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 3 Abdul-Baha (1844-1921)

Released from imprisonment by the Ottomans Turks only 1908, Abdul-Baha spent the next few years visiting the Baha'i communities in Egypt (1910), Europe (1911 and 1913) and the United States (1912). Known outside the Baha'i community for his humanitarian work, Abdul-Baha was knighted in 1920 by the British government, for his effort for the relief of hunger in Israel during World War I. Abdul Baha passed away in Haifa on 28 November 1921.<sup>19</sup>

Among the achievements of Abdul-Baha were the spread of the religion to the West and Australia; the building of the first Baha'i temple in Ishqabad (southern Russia) and the beginning of the Baha'i temple called the Mother Temple of the West in Wilmette, Illinois, U.S.A; and the establishment of the first institutions of the Baha'i governing system – the Baha'i Administrative Order. Abdul-Baha wrote many books and tablets, interpreting and clarifying the writings of Baha'u'llah. Among his books translated and published in English include: the Secret of Divine Civilization, Memorials of the Faithful, a Traveler's Narrative, Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Promulgation of Universal Peace, Some Answered Questions and Paris Talks.<sup>20</sup>

In his Will and Testament, Abdul-Baha named his grandson Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), to succeed him as Guardian of the Baha'i Faith. Though work is not suspended, the Day of the Covenant on 26 November 1892 and Ascension of Abdul-Baha on 28 November 1921 are observed as Baha'i holy days.<sup>21</sup>

The period of Shoghi Effendi (1921-1957) also witnessed: the establishment of Administrative Order of the Baha'i Faith; the spread of the faith to all parts of the globe in series of organized plans of the faith and the guidance of the Baha'i world through writing of numerous letters; the translation of the many passages from the writings of Baha'u'llah; the acquisition of land and the planning and supervision of the laying out of the Baha'i gardens in the Haifa-Acre area; and the supervision of the building of the construction of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Bab and the International Baha'i Archives building. Shoghi Effendi passed away on 4 November, 1957 while in London and was buried in the New Southgate Cemetery.<sup>22</sup>

Already during the time of Shoghi Effendi, the Baha'i Faith established the necessary base lines for national and local governing bodies, thus permitting the election of the Universal House of Justice – the international governing body and the supreme institution of the faith envisioned by Baha'u'llah. The Universal House of Justice was established on 21 April 1963 with nine elected members. Elected every five year, the Universal House of Justice, takes on directing the growth and development of the worldwide Baha'i communities.<sup>23</sup>

## **2.1.2. Spiritual beliefs and social teaching of the Baha'i Faith**

### **2.1.2.1. Spiritual beliefs**

According to Baha'i writings, God or Allah or in whatever name people call Him, is infinite Being and Unknown to man, except in so far as His attributes are revealed to man

through a series of divine messengers, such as Buddha, Zoroaster, Hindu, Moses, Christ, Mohammed, the Bab and Baha'u'llah. As a result, the purpose of the divine messengers is to guide humanity towards spiritual and social advancement, and their succession being equated to successive teachers of a child, and their messages to successive chapters of a book. Thus the stations of Buddha, Zoroaster, Hindu, Moses, Christ, and Mohammed are fully recognized and the authority and sanctity of their Holy Books are recognized in the Baha'i Faith. Therefore, according to Baha'is the fundamental aims and purpose of these world religions are one.<sup>24</sup>

Another important spiritual belief is the oneness of Mankind. Just as a tree has several branches and fruits in it, Baha'is say, in some way, the fact that we are men is our oneness. From this tree of man various races, peoples, and individuals spring forth and issue fruit.

Baha'is believe that the soul of man is immortal; it survives physical death. Therefore, according to them, the goal of the individual during his/her life should be to develop those spiritual qualities and attributes which will develop the soul in its eternal journey. Heaven is thus interpreted as the state of possessing those qualities and hell as being away from them.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, according to the Baha'is the primary purpose of life is to know and worship God and to contribute to an ever-advancing global civilization. Baha'is seek to fulfill this purpose in a variety of personal, family and community activities. As in other religions,

prayers, meditation and fasting are primary tools for spiritual development. Baha'u'llah himself wrote hundreds of prayers from which Baha'is could pray. He asked his followers to choose one of the three obligatory prayers\*, for recitation each day. Baha'u'llah also asked his followers to refrain from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset for nineteen consecutive days each year, from 2 -21 March (the nineteenth month of the Baha'i Faith). This period, known simply as the Fast, is considered as a time for deep reflection on one's spiritual progress. Those who are exempted for fasting are the ill, pregnant, nursing women, people under 15 or over 70 years old, travelers, and those who are engaged in hard physical labor. At the end of the fast Baha'is celebrate their new year – the Festival of Naw-Ruz which is every 21<sup>st</sup> of March.<sup>26</sup>

The Baha'i Faith has its own calendar starting from 1844 as year one, in which each year is divided into 19 months of 19 days each, with four or five intercalary days (the Ayyam-i-ha) which precede the nineteenth month. At the beginning of every Baha'i month, Baha'is celebrate the Nineteen Day Feast. Nineteen Day Feast is the principal gathering of Baha'is of a particular locality, and it brings together the members of the Baha'i community for worship, consultation and fellowship.<sup>27</sup>

Other spiritual teaching is the independent investigation of truth. In “**Promulgation of Universal Peace**”, Abdul-Baha explained this as follows:

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\*Obligatory prayers- the short, the medium and long obligatory prayers- are all revealed by Baha'u'llah and are binding on Baha'is from the age of maturity which is 15 years. The believers are free to choose one of these prayers to be said daily and privately.

Furthermore, know ye that God has created in man the power of reason, whereby man is enabled to investigate reality. God has not intended man to imitate blindly his fathers and ancestors. He has endowed him with mind, the faculty of reasoning by exercising of which he is to investigate and discover the truth and that which he finds real and true he must accept. He must not be an imitator or blind follower of any soul. He must not rely implicitly upon the opinion of any man without investigation; may each soul must see intelligently and independently arriving at real conclusion and bound only by that reality.<sup>28</sup>

Baha'is believe that harmony between religion and science is the most powerful instruments for mankind's progress.<sup>29</sup> Science and religion, when they go hand in hand, they

...provide the fundamental organizing principles by which individuals, communities, and institutions function and evolve...Utilizing the methods of science allows people to become more objective and systematic in their approach to problem solving and in their understanding of social processes, while drawing on the spiritual inclinations of individuals provides the motivational impetuses that begets and sustain positive action.<sup>30</sup>

#### 2.1.2.2. Social teachings

One of the social teachings of the Baha'i Faith is the support for universal education. Abdul-Baha said that in order to further advance the unity of mankind and for mutual understanding, education is very important. Therefore, it is the duty of every father to educate his children according to his possibilities.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, *"the education of women is more necessary and important than that of man, for woman is the trainer of the child from its infancy"*.<sup>32</sup> Baha'is promote the equality of men and women.

The other social teaching is advocacy for the world language. According to the Baha'is, in addition to the mothers tongue, each individual must learn an international language that would enable him to communicate with all the peoples of the world.<sup>33</sup> Baha'is also

advocate the need of economic readjustment based on justice and oppose the uneven distribution of wealth.<sup>34</sup>

According to the Baha'is, all forms of prejudices – prejudice of religion, of race, color, nations, classes etc., must be eliminated. Abdul-Baha condemned prejudices of all sorts as major cause of war “...*all these prejudices strike at the very root of human life; one and all they beget bloodshed, and the ruination of the world. So long as these prejudices survive, there will be continuous and fearsome wars*”.<sup>35</sup>

One of the means of resolving these differences and prejudices is the peaceful consultation. Abdul-Baha said “...*The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. If after discussion, a decision be carried unanimously well and good, but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise a majority of voices must prevail*”.<sup>36</sup> The other is the world peace supported and protected by the nations of the world must be established and in order to achieve this, the necessary political measures must be taken. Baha'u'llah wrote:

**...should any king, take arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world no longer require any armament, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realm and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation.**<sup>37</sup>

Baha'u'llah's teaching stressed the importance of obeying one's country government. Though that is the case, Baha'is are asked not to engaged in any partisan political activity including the discussion of individual candidates or parties. However, they are free to vote according to their conscience.<sup>38</sup>

Baha'is share the teachings of Baha'u'llah with anyone who expresses an interest. In Baha'i terminology sharing Baha'u'llah's teaching is known as "teaching". Someone who wants to know more about the faith is invited to a "fireside". Firesides are informal gatherings in the homes of Baha'is. Short talks on Baha'i principles are presented and discussions follow, Baha'is also spread their faith by moving in to areas where there are no or few Baha'is. This is known as "pioneering". Generally pioneers are expected to be self-supporting. They become participants in the communities. Baha'i communities sometimes also hold large public meetings, buy advertising, or use media coverage in order to share more widely the teaching of Baha'u'llah.<sup>39</sup>

### **2.1.3. Administrative bodies of the Faith**

According to the recent statistics, the worldwide Baha'i population is more than five million, who reside in 190 countries and 46 territories. There are also as many as 2,112 tribes, races, and ethnic groups represented in the Baha'i community. The Baha'i writings have been translated into 802 languages.<sup>40</sup>

In the Baha'i Faith there is no priest but the "Administrative Order"- a governing system. The "Administrative Order" was conceived by Baha'u'llah but established by Abdul-Baha and more expanded by Shoghi Effendi. Moreover, the system is founded on a common set of electoral, appointed and decision-making principles. That means it has the elected and appointed institutions.

One important thing to note here is that, Baha'i institutions whether elected or appointed, are supported by funds raised from Baha'is only. Baha'u'llah forbids accepting funds from outside sources (non- Baha'is) in any form. Therefore, funds are raised only from the registered membership of the Baha'i Faith and Baha'is are encouraged to give the funds on regular basis. However, all individual contributions are strictly voluntary and confidential.<sup>41</sup>

### **2.1.3.1. Elected Institutions**

In the Baha'i Faith, the elected institutions are organized around a set of freely elected administrative councils, which operate at the local, national and international levels. In the Baha'i terminology, the local and national administrative councils are called the local and national spiritual assemblies respectively.

The local and national spiritual assemblies are elected every April. Like for the Universal House of Justice, nine members are elected for each local and national spiritual assembly. All members of a given locality elect the local spiritual assembly, whereas the national spiritual assembly of a given country is elected by delegation. Each unit, comprising of Local Spiritual Assemblies and Baha'i groups, sends delegate\* (s) according to its numbers<sup>+</sup> to the national convention and elected nine members for the national assembly from all adult believers (21 years and above) of the country. All elections at the

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\* A delegate is elected by all members of a locality

<sup>+</sup>the quota for the number of delegates from each locality is decided by the national spiritual assembly of a given country.

international, at the national, local or for delegates are done by secret ballots. There are no nominations and campaigning is forbidden. The nine persons who receive highest votes are elected. Recent statistics tell us that there are about 11,740 local spiritual assemblies and 182 national spiritual assemblies throughout the world.<sup>42</sup>

At the international level there is the Universal House of Justice elected every five year by members of all national spiritual assemblies. According to Baha'is the Universal House of Justice is an infallible body and its decision-making on spiritual matters is unerringly guided by God. As to its station, the Universal House of Justice has the authority to legislate on all matters which Baha'u'llah Himself did not address.<sup>43</sup>

According to the Baha'is, each member of the national or local spiritual assemblies as well as the Universal House of Justice has no power or authority of his/her own. Only members are gathered together, meeting officially as national or local spiritual assemblies or the Universal House of Justice, are they considered to be divinely inspired –that is why that there is no priest in the Baha'i Faith.<sup>44</sup>

### **2.1.3.2. Appointed Institutions**

There are however, several groups of individuals who according to the Baha'is are recognized for their spiritual capacities and experience. Their role is to inspire and to advise the Baha'i communities. They have no decision-making power, but their ideas and

insights are often sought by the elected administrative institutions. They are called the “Hands of the Cause of God”. This title has been given to some 47 individual Baha’is in the history of the faith. Moreover, they were appointed only by Baha’u’llah or Shoghi Effendi and referred to by Abdul-Baha as “Hands of the Cause of God”. Only two are alive now and no more appointment.<sup>45</sup>

For this reason, the Universal House of Justice, in 1968, began to designate a number of spiritually mature and experienced individuals as “Continental Counselors” so as to extend in to the future the functions of the Hands of the Cause of God. The counselors are appointed for a five year term and coordinate their activities through the Continental boards. These boards in different continents in turn are coordinated by a body known as the International Teaching Center. Situated in Haifa, Israel, the International Teaching Center, therefore, includes a number of counselors and all living Hands of the Cause of God. The counselors in their turn appoint auxiliaries and their assistants who are charged with specific activities that can inspire the believers and advise Baha’i communities at regional and local levels.<sup>46</sup> At present there are about 81 continental counselors and 990 auxiliary board members serving throughout the world.<sup>47</sup>

#### **2.1.4. Worldview of the Baha’i Faith and the Baha’i International Community**

The Universal House of Justice in its October 1985 message addressed to the peoples of the world stated *“Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first prerequisite for the reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of*

*humankind*". Therefore, the ultimate aim of the Baha'i Faith, its worldview is the establishment of unity of mankind on an international scale. That is why the Baha'i community has been active at the United Nations since that organization's inception.<sup>48</sup>

According to the recent statement of the Baha'i International Community (BIC), the Baha'i International Community is a non-governmental organization that both encompasses and represents the worldwide members and communities of the Baha'i Faith. In regard to its relations to the United Nations, it is viewed as an association of all national spiritual assemblies around the world.<sup>49</sup>

In relation to its history, the Baha'i International Community has a long history of involvement with international organizations. An international Baha'i Bureau was established in 1926 at the headquarters of the League of the Nations in Geneva Switzerland and serving as base for Baha'is participating in League's activities. When in 1945 the UN Charter was signed in San Francisco, Baha'i representatives were present.<sup>51</sup>

However, it established a solid ground when in 1948 it was registered with the UN as an international non-governmental organization (NGO). This is followed by in 1970 to be granted consultative statuses (now called "special" consultative status) with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in 1976 with the United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF). Working relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) were also established in 1989. Over the years, this international Community has also worked closely with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).<sup>52</sup>

The main activity the Baha'i International Community circulates around the collaboration with national spiritual assemblies around the world in the areas of mainly: the fostering of grass-root participation in sustainable development initiatives, the advancement of the status of women, educating children, preventing drug abuse, eliminating racism and promoting human rights education.<sup>53</sup>

Over 1600 projects are currently operated by the Baha'i communities around the world, including approximately 300 schools owned and operated by Baha'is and at least 400 village tutorial schools.<sup>54</sup>

In order to coordinate its efforts at the international office, the Community has office at the United Nations in New York and Geneva and representations to the UN regional commissions and other offices in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Nairobi, Rome, Santiago, and Vienna. The United Nations Office also includes Office of the Environment and Office of the Advancement of Women. Moreover, its national and international representatives took active role in the major world summits and NGO forums sponsored by the UN. For example, the community participated in the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the 1994 Global Conference on Small Islands States in Barbados, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the 1995 World

Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa.<sup>55</sup>

The Office of Public Information, based at Baha'i World Center in Haifa, Israel and with its branch in Paris disseminates information about the Baha'i Faith around the world, which covers social and economic development projects, relations with the UN system and global issues of interest to decision makers.<sup>56</sup>

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.1. The Introduction of the Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia

In December 1932, a message from the Baha'ispiritual Assembly in Haifa was sent to the Baha'is throughout the world through their spiritual assemblies. The message, among others, include a letter written by Mohammad Derwish Taha, inspector of Education of all Muslim schools in Ethiopia, to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith. The content of the letter was that of Mohammed Derwish Taha's interest in the faith and his intention to become one of the Baha'is.<sup>1</sup> As a result this was the first stirring of the Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia.

Another letter of Mohammed Derwish Taha also appeared in the May 1933 message of the spiritual assembly of Haifa to the Baha'is of the world. In this letter Mohammed stated that he has resigned from his post as inspector and has risen to spread the faith. He also stated that he has found a Baha'i club in his house where a number of non-Baha'is were invited and discussions on the Baha'i Faith took place. He wrote that with the books sent to him by Shoghi Effendi he has started a Baha'i library and he has the desire to open a Baha'ischool in the country and that he has the readiness to translate Baha'i books into Amharic. Moreover, he wrote that he wanted to communicate with other Baha'is around the world.<sup>2</sup>

In response to the letters, in early 1933, Shoghi Effendi called upon the Baha'i community of Egypt, to send a pioneer to Ethiopia with a dual mission. The first was to

evaluate the claim of this individual and the second was in case that the claim was groundless, to open the country to the Baha'i Faith.

### 3.1.1. Sabri Elias

The National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt, tried to interest Baha'is, preferably from Christian background to respond to the call of Shoghi Effendi. Then a twenty-seven year old youth named Sabri Elias, who was a former member of Coptic Church, volunteered for the mission.

With limited financial means and having no knowledge of Ethiopia's language(s), or his settlement possibilities, Sabri Elias came to Ethiopia to fulfill the mission. In January 1934, he arrived in Addis Ababa. He then tried to find Mohammed Derwish Taha and others who claimed to be Baha'is. His search resulted in finding them and their intention, which was financial assistance.

As a result, he had to proceed with the second mission, that is, to open Ethiopia to the Baha'i Faith. After almost one year, Mr. Sabri Elias succeeded in establishing the first Local Spiritual Assembly on 25 November 1934. The Assembly then formulated its constitution and bylaws and sent a copy to the National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt, the Assembly responsible for the introduction of the Faith in Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup> Of the nine members elected to this first local assembly, the following acted as officers of the assembly:

Azmatch Seyoum Gebriel\*(the first Ethiopian Baha'i)- chairman, Ato Hila - vice-chairman, Sabri Elias - secretary, Edward Jubran - assistant secretary, and Habib Effendi Butros – treasurer. As to the background of the members: four were Ethiopians; two were Egyptians; one was Sudanese; and two were Yemenis.<sup>4</sup>

Referring to this achievement, the Spiritual Assembly of Haifa stated the following:

**We are happy to report to our friends throughout the world encouraging news of the progress of Baha'u'llah's Faith in Ethiopia – the only independent kingdom in Africa...Its fate seems uncertain and thus it is more significant that this time of agitation and unrest, the Baha'i Faith should started to permeate that historical land.**<sup>5</sup>

Another achievement of Sabri Elias was to be instrumental in the translation as well as publication of Dr. J.E. Esslemont book “Baha'u'llah and the New Era” – an introductory book about the Baha'i Faith – into the Amharic language in 1934. Sabri Elias then sent some copies of this translated materials to few of the then established National Spiritual Assemblies and few libraries. In fact, one of these copies was presented to the late Emperor Haile Silassie I of Ethiopia, at Jerusalem later in 1936 by a Baha'i from Montreal, Canada, Mrs. Lorol Schopfloch.<sup>6</sup>

Pamphlet, on Baha'i Faith were also published in Amharic and distributed among the public. But this aroused opposition and accusations were made that Baha'i meetings have political element. The Baha'is were obliged to explain the Baha'i cause to the then government officials.<sup>7</sup>

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\*Azmatch Seyoum Gebriel later settled in Asmara, Eritrea and became member of the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Asmara in 1955. His son Teamrat Seyoum was the first person to accept the Faith in Asmara.

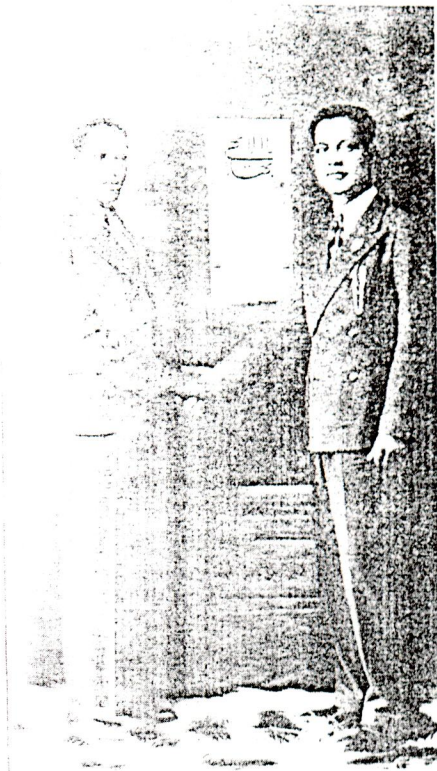


Fig. 4 Mr. Sabri Elias with the Ethiopian translator of "Baha'u'llah and the New Era"

The teaching success of Mr. Sabri Elias, however, seemed to have been curtailed by the Italian fascist invasion in 1935. Sabri Elias was therefore forced to return to Egypt due to the political situation and instability, and following the advice of Shoghi Effendi.<sup>8</sup> Sabri Elias then went back to his country, got married in February 1941 to Fahima Yakut, an Egyptian Baha'i, and gave birth two sons Hussien and Safa.<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 5 The First Baha'i group in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

After making pilgrimage, Mr. Sabri Elias now with his wife and two sons -Hussien two years and Safa nine month old respectively- returned to Ethiopia in March 1944.<sup>10</sup>

The country had been swept by the Italo-Ethiopian war during the absence of Mr. Sabri Elias. Therefore, the resulting disruption meant that he could only locate two of the early believers, Siyyid Mansour, a migrant from Yemen and Ato Araya who was an Eritrean. Both became members of the second Local Spiritual Assembly of Addis Ababa in 1947. However, Mr. Siyyid soon left the Faith and Ato Araya died soon because of an illness.<sup>11</sup>

One thing to mention here is that Mr. Sabri took charge of the tailoring shop in one of the hotels in Addis Ababa. He eventually resigned from the hotel due to personal reasons and opened a private tailoring shop in Piazza area. It was there that Mr. and Mrs. Sabri first met Kegnazmatch Gila Michael Bahta\* and taught him the Baha'i Faith. A few months before his passing (1995), Mr. Sabri Elias gave the following brief account how Kegnazmatch Gila became a Baha'i:

At a time when I was tailoring a suit for Ato Gila, his father died in Asmara...Upon his return to Addis, he came to receive the suit, which he liked very much. Our friendship became closer and we started to visit each other's homes, especially because we were neighbors he would call on us each time he passed by and we would spend the time discussing the Baha'i Faith. When we explained to him the teachings of Baha'u'llah, he said they were very much like his father's ideals...After he embraced the Faith, he did not show a single instance of non-conformity to its teachings.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, Kegnazmatch Gila is considered by Mr. and Mrs. Sabri to be the first Baha'i in Ethiopia in the second phase of Mr. Sabri Elias' pioneering time. It was in 1945 that Kegn. Gila became a Baha'i. He then married to an Egyptian Baha'i Neihmat Gila and gave birth to four children.<sup>13</sup>

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\* Kegnazmatch Gila Michael Bahta was the first Ethiopian counselor appointed in 1983

Afterward, other people followed to become Baha'is. The Sabris would invite them to their house and talk to them about the Faith. In fact, these developments took place in the course of a few months. Eventually they became nine or more in number. Many of them submitted petitions to Shoghi Effendi, and each of them received, in return a tawqi<sup>7</sup>.

After that in 1947, they established the Local Spiritual Assembly of Addis Ababa. Members of this Assembly include: Mr. and Mrs. Sabri Elias, Kegn Gila, Ato Alfred Shafi, Ato Araya Anton, Ato Tesfa Tsion, Mr. Siyyid Mansour, Mr. Robert Bensilian (an Armenian) and Ato Alazar Woldemichael.<sup>14</sup>

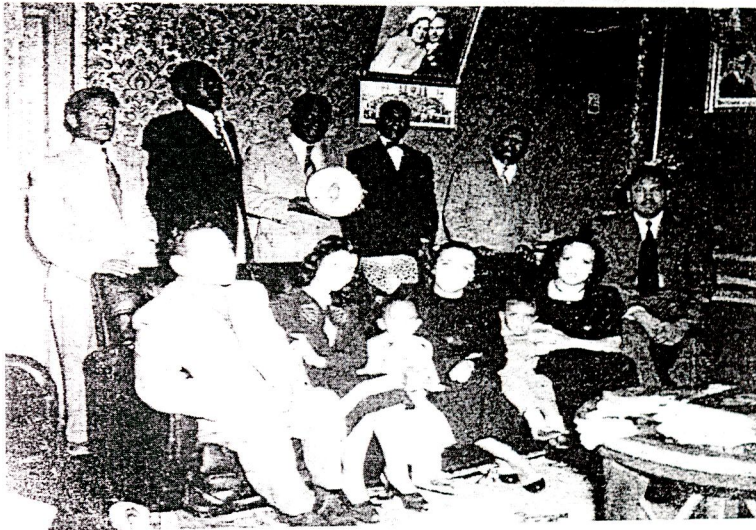


Fig. 6 Baha'is in Addis Ababa in 1952.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, while the Sabris were on their pilgrimage gave them nine ring stones engraved with the Greatest Name. He then said to them: *“Two ring for the two of you. An Assembly will be established in Addis Ababa. The remaining seven ring stones are for the seven members in Addis Ababa, who will join in the future”*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Tawqi is the Arabic word for a letter bearing a post-script in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi

Here it is important to say something about the Greatest Name. In Islam there is a tradition that among the various names of God, one is the greatest. However, the identity of this Greatest Name is hidden. Baha'is believe that the Greatest Name of God is Baha, which means 'glory, splendor or light. Baha, or any of its derivations, such as Abha, as well as phrases such as Allah'u' Abha, Ya Baha'u'Abha, are all referred to as the Greatest Name. Ya Baha'u' Abha is an invocation which can be translated either as 'Glory of Glories' or O Glory of the All Glorious'. This invocation calligraphically designed by Mishkin -Qalam (one of the distinguished early Baha'is of the Faith) is used by Baha'is in their homes as a dignified wall hanging. The ring stone symbol is another representation of the Greatest Name. It was designed by Abdul'Baha and used on Baha'i rings. Baha'is are not obliged to wear a ring carrying this emblem, as there is no specific law of Baha'u'llah's requiring it. However, Abdul'Baha told the Baha'is in the West, that the ring should be placed on the right-hand, which is a perpetuation of an Islamic law.<sup>16</sup>

As times went by a number of individuals especially foreigners became Baha'is. To mention some of them: Dr. Talbot (a black American expatriate) and Dr. Wright, who was from Eastern Europe (Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia).<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 7 A Baha'i group on the occasion of the visit of some of the Baha'is who attended the Kampala Conference.

The time came in 1952 when the first African Baha'i Conference held in Kampala, Uganda. This conference as well as the other three conferences held in Willamette, U.S.A.; Sweden and New Delhi, India were organized by Shoghi Effendi and participated by many Baha'is from different countries. After the conference in Kampala, many distinguished Bahá'í visitors came to Addis Ababa. Among them were Hands of the Cause of God Mr. Musa Banani, Mr. Dhikrullah Khadim, Mr. Jalal Khazeh (prior to his elevation to the Hand of the Cause), and others.<sup>18</sup>

### **3.1.2. The "Ten Year Crusade"**

In 1953, the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, launched the "Ten Year World Crusade" (1953 - 63) with the tasks assigned to each of the then twelve national spiritual assemblies in existence. This plan had four objectives: development of the institutions at the Bahá'í World Center, Israel; consolidation or strengthening of the then twelve national spiritual assemblies; consolidation of the territories already opened to the Faith; and the opening of more territories already identified by the Guardian in different parts of the world. But Shoghi Effendi passed away in 1957, before the mid point of the plan; nevertheless, the Hands of the Cause directed the national spiritual assemblies to the completion of the plan in 1963 successfully and supervised the election of the Universal House of Justice, the highest Baha'i administrative body after the Guardian, in that year.<sup>19</sup>

In 1953, in response to the call of Shoghi Effendi, many Bahá'ís from the twelve national spiritual assemblies, started to pioneer to territories already opened to the Faith and to

new territories, which were not opened to the Faith. Those who opened these new territories to the Faith were given the title Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.

Beginning in 1953 Bahá'ís from Iran, Egypt and the United States, came as pioneers to assist the development of the Faith in Ethiopia. Those pioneers include: from Iran- Mr. Jamshid Monajem and his family, who was teaching English at Technical School: Mr. Foad Ashraf and his family. Both Mr. Monajem and Mr. Ashraf were teaching at the Technical School, which was at that time an Engineering College. From Egypt Mr. Gamal Rushdy and his family came as pioneers. Mr. Rushdy was the chief financial officer with the High Way Authority. Another pioneer from Egypt was Dr. and Mrs. Abbas Afnan who settled in Gondar as a physician. From the U.S.A. there came Mr. Charles Hasan who was then a bachelor and taught at the Technical School and Miss Mavis Cox who came again in the late 1960's and stayed in Addis Ababa for one year.<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 8 Some of the pioneers; From left to right: Dr. Afnan, Kegn. Gila Michael, Mr. Munajem and Mr. Rushdy; sitting Mrs. Afnan, Mrs. Munajem, Mrs. Gila and Mr. Rushdy

However, the first of all these pioneers who came to Ethiopia at the time was a young American named Frederick Schecter. He was a pioneer to Djibouti for few months in 1953 - for that he became a Knight of Baha'ullah. Moreover, after spending sometime

there, he could not endure the heat and suffered from serious health problems. On the other hand, he could not find a job; he was a librarian by profession. Eventually, he moved and settled in Ethiopia and his pioneering post of Djibouti became vacant. For this reason, Shoghi Effendi called upon the Local Spiritual Assembly of Addis Ababa to fill the vacant position in Djibouti. The Assembly presented the request to the Bahá'í community of Addis Ababa. At last, the Sabris volunteered to pioneer in Djibouti. On May 6, 1954, the Sabris left for Djibouti with their two daughters age 4 and 2 respectively who were born in Ethiopia and leaving their two sons in Ethiopia. For this reason, they became Knights of Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>21</sup>

The background of those pioneers, it is said that they have been, in their countries of origin, managers of big firms and have come from wealthy families but accepted to be teachers in order to become pioneers in Ethiopia. For example, Mr. Ashraf was a manager of the National Oil Company of Iran before coming to Ethiopia. Many pioneers were also residing in Asmara, Eritrea whose names are Dr. Hishmand Farhumand and his family\* (who later on came to Ethiopia in the 1960's to assist the Bahá'ís in Addis Ababa), Dr. H. Ahdieh and his family, Dr. Amin Mesbah and his family, Mr. Shayani, and Mr. Haghani.<sup>22</sup>

The teaching activities at the time were conducted at the homes of the pioneers and sometimes at Kegn Gila's residence. Most of the Ethiopian believers at that time were

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\*Dr. Hishmand Farhumand and his family later settled in Ethiopia in the 1960's and assisted the Bahá'ís in Addis Ababa

either fresh graduates or students of the Civil Aviation School. It was normal that in those days for Aviation students to go out from school during breaks to town for dancing and for other recreations. During those occasions they used to meet the Baha'i pioneers (pioneers used to give them a free ride to town) and discussed about the Baha'i Faith. It was also common in those days to talk freely about the Faith during lunch, breaks, and evening and they used to go to the houses of the pioneers. By 1963, the number of Baha'is from Civil Aviation reached 25.<sup>23</sup>

Most of these students are still living and are active Bahá'ís serving as members of National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia and as members of Continental Counselors' Board for Africa. Some even pioneer to other countries and become members of other national spiritual assemblies. Few became inactive and left the Faith. There were also other new Baha'is from the University and high schools.

The pioneers were also actively engaged in teaching outside Addis Ababa. They were accompanied by the new believers during their trips to Jimma, Debre Zeit, Ambo Sebeta, Holeta, Wolisso, Awassa, Modjo, Nazareth etc. They did this mainly on the weekends.

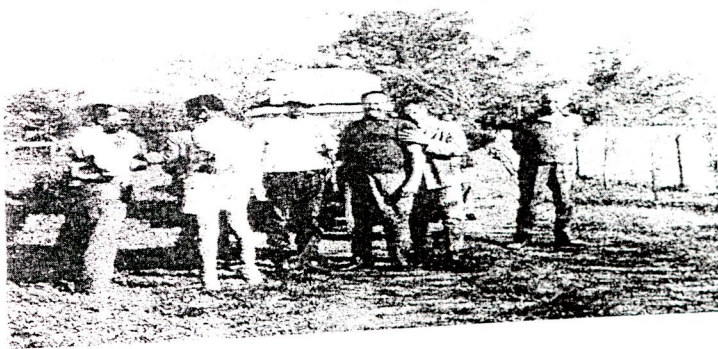


Fig. 9 The Baha'is in one of their teaching trips outside Addis Ababa

During the working days, one of the pioneers, Mr. Munajem, run Biblical class three times a week in his home and another pioneer Mr. Ashraf gave history of the Faith and its teachings three times a week for all those who finished the Biblical class. These classes were consistent and were like a classroom. One complemented the other and the setting of the classrooms was formal type by having a teacher and students relationship. The Rushdy's on the other hand were very active in giving children classes.

Nineteen-day feasts were celebrated at the homes of the pioneers and at Kegn Gila's. The same was true for Bahá'í Holy Days. Moreover, these Holy Days were most of the time followed by picnics at outskirts of Addis Ababa. Few months later (ca. 1960), they had a Bahá'í center in Addis and all festivities were held there.

In the meantime, the community of Addis Ababa has increased in number. Bahá'ís youth from Asmara had been coming to Addis Ababa to pursue their education at Addis Ababa University. The bachelors got married in a Bahá'í ceremony and Bahá'í families increased. Local spiritual assemblies were also established in other towns and gradually their number increased. The early pioneers left Ethiopia at different times, and others started to come from different countries to assist the community of Ethiopia.

The majority of the Bahá'ís in the years prior to 1968 were, for most part, youthful students living in the urban areas whose religious background was most frequently Christian or more rarely Muslim. After 1969 and especially in the years between 1973-

1976, the majority who accepted the Faith were of rural populations and many came from a background of traditional religious belief.

The late 1960's also became very determining moment for the development of the Faith in the history of Ethiopia. It was at this time that practically all of the pioneers left and the greater share of responsibilities in teaching, financial commitment and administration was done by Ethiopian believers. Many of the youth who became Bahá'ís during the "Ten Year Crusade" or the years previous to, occupied administrative posts and engaged in steering activities and meeting the needs of a rapidly growing community comprising by 1976, 120 local spiritual assemblies and 250 localities with only groups of Bahá'ís.<sup>24</sup>

In 1970's, we could see the translation and publication of Bahá'í literatures. The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh has been translated and published in Amharic and Tigrigna languages. Some Bahá'í prayers and Writings including Epistle to the Son of the Wolf were translated into Amharic. Some translations were also made in Sidamigna language. There was also the publication of "Yemitseat Dewel" (literally - the Bell of Resurrection), an account of the early history of the Bahá'í Faith in the world. This book, written by one of the Ethiopian Bahá'í - Ato Gizaw Atle- is the first Bahá'í publication by a local believer to have been written in Amharic language.<sup>25</sup>

At this time the national Bahá'í community of Ethiopia benefited from the continued visit by the Hands of the Cause of God which include Tarazullah Samandari, Musa Banani.

John Robarts, William Sears, Enoch Olinga, Ali Akhbar Furutan, Collis Featherstone, Rahmatullah Muhajir and Amatu'l - Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum.

A very memorable and extensive travel-teaching trip was made for about one month by the late Hand of the Cause and widow of Shoghi Effendi - Amatu'l - Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum, in 1969. She traveled to the then newly opened mass conversion areas, in Sidamo, in the south and to the north towns of Assab, Asmara, Eritrea and Gondar.<sup>26</sup> And also during that time she succeeded in meeting the late emperor, Haile Sillassie I, his son the Crown Prince Asfaw Wossen, Princess Tenagne Worq, Prince Asrate Kassa and numerous governors and high officials of the time. During her sojourn there was much media coverage resulting in many articles and interviews about the Bahá'í teachings and her visits. This resulted in many hearing about the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>27</sup>

### **3.1.3. Institutional growth and major Baha'i communities**

#### **3.1.3.1. Institutional growth**

Up to 1956, the Ethiopian Bahá'í community was administered under the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Egypt and the Sudan. During that time, there were only two local spiritual assemblies in Ethiopia - the Local Spiritual Assembly of Addis Ababa and that of Asmara. The Local Spiritual Assembly of Addis Ababa succeeded to be officially registered in 1955 by the Ministry of Justice, which makes it the first local spiritual assembly to be officially registered in Africa. The Local Spiritual Assembly of

Asmara was incorporated in 1958. In those days, most of the members of the assemblies were the pioneers.<sup>28</sup>

In 1956, under the instruction of Shoghi Effendi, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Egypt and the Sudan was renamed the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of North-East Africa. This National Assembly comprised: Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Libya, the Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti and its seat was in Cairo, Egypt. However, in 1960 the Bahá'í Faith and its institutions were officially banned in Egypt and in 1961 the seat of the Assembly was transferred to Addis Ababa. This newly formed Assembly was officially registered at the High Court of Addis Ababa on July 10, 1961.<sup>29</sup>

Gradually, some of the countries which were under the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of North-East Africa, started to form their own national assemblies - Sudan in 1971 and Somalia in 1973.<sup>30</sup>

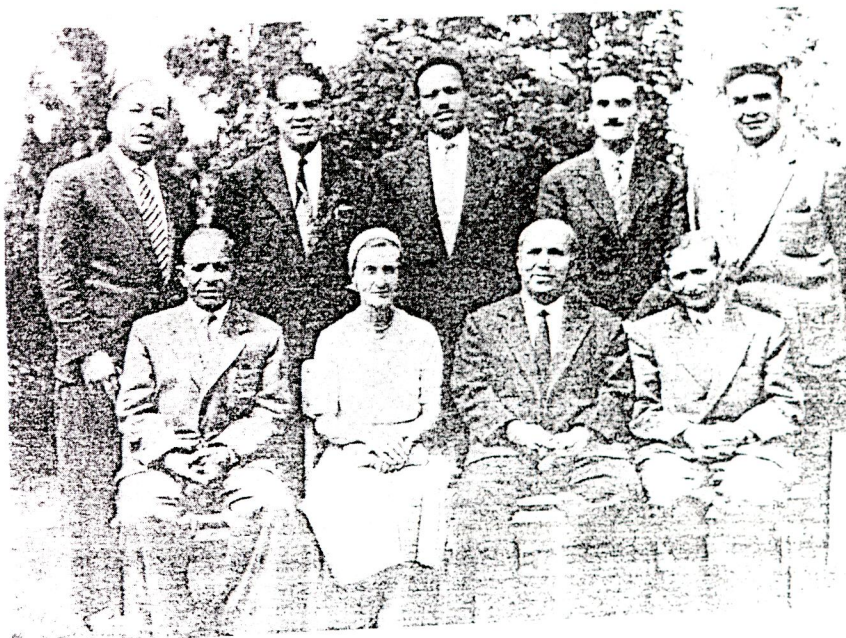


Fig. 10 National Spiritual Assembly of North-East Africa, 1962-1963.

However, in Egypt and Libya the Bahá'í Faith was officially banned by their governments. In 1975, the Universal House of Justice changed the name of the National Spiritual Assembly of North-East Africa to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia with Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti under its jurisdiction.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, in 1995, Eritrea formed its own National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Eritrea.<sup>32</sup>

After 1975, owing to the 1974 Revolution in Ethiopia and of the civil war, which ended only recently, the Bahá'í pioneers completely left the country and all members of the national assembly were/ are Ethiopians. In 1979 there were 1,000 Bahá'ís and some 480 localities of which 260 had local assemblies. There have been both qualitative and quantitative changes in the Bahá'í membership such as greater participation of women and the enrichment of Bahá'í literature, both in Amharic and in the languages of the mass teaching areas. The first Ethiopian woman to be elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia was W/ro Zebenay Mulugeta, in 1976.<sup>33</sup>

The National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia like other national spiritual assemblies was assigned by the Universal House of Justice, with tasks to organize teaching plans. These teaching plans were called: Nine Year Plan (1964- 1973), the Five Year Plan (1974-1979), the Seven Year Plan (1979- 1986), the Six Year Plan (1986 -1992), the Three Year Plan (1993-1996) the Four Year Plan (1996 -2000), the Twelve Month Plan (2000-2001) and now the Five Year Plan (2001-2006). Each of these has resulted in the expansion of the Bahá'í Faith, in to many translation of more literature, the development of the Bahá'í

World Center in Israel, the inauguration of various social and economic development projects and an increase in the number of Bahá'ís.<sup>34</sup>

Especially in the Five Year Plan (2001-2006) although the general objective is the same, that is entry by troops, new concept like systematic growth appears in their plan. Meaning two processes go hand in hand. The first is the cluster process. In the cluster process the three core activities - devotional meetings, study circles and children classes should be multiplied. Quoting the Universal House of Justice, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia defined a cluster as *“group of villages and towns with similar culture, language, patterns of transport, infrastructure, and social and economic life.”*<sup>35</sup> Then each of the cluster was categorized according to the level of development of the faith as Category A, B, C, and D. Category D is defined as cluster which is not open to the faith at present 455 clusters are identified as Category D. Category C is a cluster opened to the faith and contains few isolated localities and groups.<sup>36</sup> Here different Baha'i activities with frantic, no coherence and system appear.

As a result

*They lack consistency and have no clearly identified goals/projects. Collaboration among institutions of the faith in the area is non existence or it is at a very low degree. Tutors of study circles exist but no well established and sustained activities of study circles. Trained children class teachers exist but no systematic class for children. In some of the communities under this category Nineteen-Day Feast and holydays may not be celebrated appropriately.*<sup>37</sup>

At present 50 clusters are considered as Category C. On the other hand, Category B is defined as is has all the activities in Category C but in more developed way. It is a category where there is an established Baha'i communities characterized by **“vigorous institute process”** (we shall discuss it later). Since there is a strong institute process, we

can find organized teaching and community development activities. This category will set a foundation for social and economic development activities. At this time three clusters, that is, Zone 3, Zone 4 of Addis Ababa metropolitan and Adama are regarded as Category B.

The last category is Category A, where all activities in Category B appear but in a more developed way. This is a category with strong Baha'i communities "*where a large number of deepened believers will be in a position to take on the challenges of system and accelerated expansion and consolidation*".<sup>38</sup> At present there is no cluster considered as Category A. However the National Spiritual Assembly anticipated that by the end of the Five Year Plan in 2006, five clusters among them Zone 3 and Zone 4 will reach Category A.

The second process of the Five-Year Plan is the Institute Process. In the Baha'i writings we find the following two quotations regarding education. "*Regard man as mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.*",<sup>39</sup> and "*Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone.*"<sup>40</sup> Therefore, education is seen "*as the means for all people to achieve their potential, and... that knowledge should be used in service to humanity*".<sup>41</sup>

As a result, the Baha'i communities throughout the world, for the past seven years, have been engaged and stilling engaging in "*the development of an action-oriented distance*

*education system that aims to train individuals, institution and communities around the world to become more effective agents of social transformation* This according to the Baha'is, "*culture of learning and growth is known as the institute process*".<sup>42</sup>

In order to facilitate and to develop large number of participants to express Baha'i teachings training institutes have been set up. A sequence of courses, one building on the previous were/are offered. Though a number of different materials were/are produced, many Baha'i communities including Ethiopia are using courses developed through 20 years of experience at Rudi Institute of Colombia. The courses are sequential and at the present books from Ruhi I to Ruhi IX are developed. The courses among others include the development of spiritual qualities, prayer, the soul, after life, carrying out acts of service, training of teachers to promote the spiritual education of children, understanding events in historical perspective, and teaching the faith.<sup>43</sup>

Some courses are given in central locations, while in many countries including in Ethiopia, courses are delivered by decentralization at the grassroots level. Delivering courses at the grassroots level is accomplished through extension courses, institute campaigns and study circles. At present, the most effective, the most flexible and low-cost delivery method is the study circle, which provides the institute courses in each locality. Study circles are successful in setting ranging from isolated villages to large urban centers and have involved people from many educational backgrounds. In addition to meeting regularly to study together, circle participants engage in service and other extracurricular activities that promote unity and fellowship. Non-Baha'is are encouraged

to participate in the study circles. The statistics of April 2001 on the Institute process shows that 120,000 Baha'i had completed at least one institute course.<sup>44</sup>

The Universal House of Justice in its message to the Continental Board of Counselors on 9 January 2001, preparing national communities to launch the new Five-Year plan, emphasized giving the institute process importance as the clustering process by writing *"The continued development of training institutes in the diverse countries and territories of the world...must be central of the new Plan [the Five Year Plan]"*.<sup>45</sup> At the country level the training institute is coordinated by the Sabri Development Institute, and there are about 30 study circles at the national level. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ethiopia was officially incorporated in 1992.<sup>46</sup>

Regarding the other wing of the administrative order, that is, the appointed institution, in 1954, Shoghi Effendi, instructed the then 15 Hands of the Cause in the world, to appoint five auxiliary boards. In Africa, there were nine members appointed by these Hands of the Cause to the auxiliary board of Africa. The three-fold duties of these members of the auxiliary boards, as mentioned by Shoghi Effendi, were to be deputies, assistants and advisers to the Hands of the Cause. The first Ethiopian auxiliary member was Ato Belete Worku\*, who was appointed in 1963 and the first Ethiopian women to be appointed was Sister Asnaketch Legesse in 1992. At present nine auxiliary board members are appointed in Ethiopia by the Continental Board of Counselors for Africa.<sup>47</sup>

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\*Ato Belete Worku now lives in Namibia

As mentioned earlier, in 1968, Continental Board of Counselors was created. The first Counselors appointed from Central and East Africa were Mr. Aziz Yazdi (Kenya), Mrs. Isobel Sabri (Uganda), Dr. Mehdi Samandri (Somalia), Mr. Kolonario Oule (Uganda), and Mr. Oloro Epyeru (Uganda).<sup>48</sup> In 1973 two additional Counselors were appointed - Dr. Hushang Ahdieh (Ethiopia) and Mr. Peter Vuyiya (Kenya).<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the first Ethiopian to be appointed as Counselor was Kegn. Gila Michael Bahta in 1983.<sup>50</sup> This was then followed by the appointments of Engineer Abaineh Merhatsion in 1995 and at present Ato Asfaw Tessema in 2000.

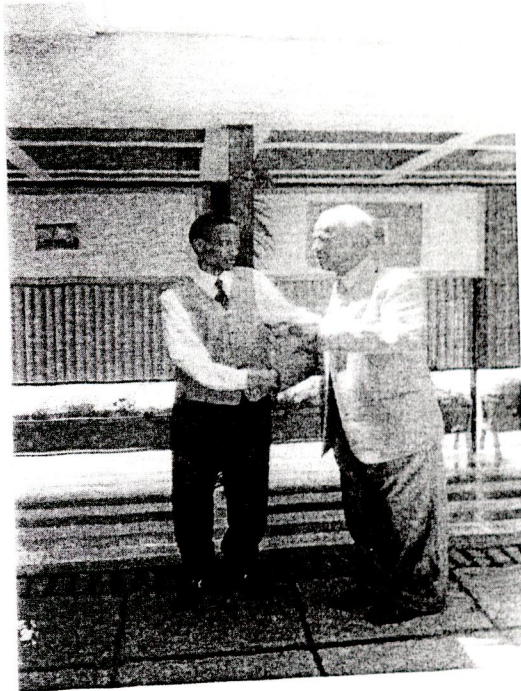


Fig. 11 Counselor Asfaw Tessema chatting with one of the Baha'i Youth

The first Ethiopian Bahá'í news publication was issued in 1960. This news publication helps the Bahá'í community in Ethiopia to know what is happening in Ethiopia and the

world in general.<sup>51</sup> In 1959 the first Bahá'í Summer School<sup>†</sup> was held in Addis Ababa. This summer school was held from May 2 to 8, 1959.<sup>52</sup>



Fig. 12 The first Baha'isummer School held in Addis Ababa, May 2-8 1959.

Ethiopia did not only remain hosting pioneers from abroad. But as the Faith started to grow, it has produced starting from 1960's, international pioneers. To mention some Ato Angosom Araya and Ato Melake Meharezghi to Monrovia, Liberia and Ato Girmay Techie to Zambia. At present we have two Ethiopian and Eritrea families pioneered from Ethiopia to Zambia and Uganda. Other significant contribution by Ethiopian Bahá'ís to

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<sup>†</sup>Bahá'í Summer School are instructional sessions during which Bahá'ís learn more about their Faith

the Baha'i world was that Mr. Eduardo Durante Vierra who later became the first African to be persecuted because of his Faith, was first introduced to the Bahá'í Faith in Portugal by an Ethiopian Bahá'í, named Ato Girma Beshah.<sup>53</sup>

### **3.1.3.2. The major Bahá'í communities**

#### **3.1.3.2.1. The Bahá'í community of Addis Ababa**

As mentioned above the Local Spiritual Assembly of Addis Ababa was officially registered in 1955. In those days the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa was very small - some pioneers and few native believers. Yet, this community with a handful of its followers felt the need and had to shoulder the entire Bahá'í affairs in the country. For this reason, that the Bahá'ís from Addis Ababa used to go out to teach, on a weekend bases, to nearby towns such as Nazareth, Awassa, Sebeta, Ambo, etc and encourage the Bahá'í communities there. This encouragement and visit continue to the present time. It must be mentioned that the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly is in Addis Ababa and this gives the Bahá'í community in Addis Ababa, the privilege of hosting the delegates at the National Convention\*.

Starting from 1955 up to 1990, the Bahá'í community of Addis Ababa has one local spiritual assembly. But in 1990, Addis Ababa was divided into 10 districts. For this reason, there were ten local spiritual assemblies. It is important to note that the jurisdiction of a local spiritual assembly is defined in line with the administrative

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\*The National Convention is an annual convention for the election of the members to the National Spiritual

Assembly boundaries established by the government. Then starting from 1996 Addis Ababa was reduced to six Zones. Accordingly, there are six local assemblies. After the fieldwork as I have mentioned earlier, now Addis Ababa is divided into ten sub-regions. As I have said I will concentrate on the then Zone 3 and Zone 4 of Addis Ababa.

The local spiritual assemblies of Addis Ababa are the strongest and carry a lot of teaching activities in and out Addis Ababa. As I have said earlier, Zone 3 and Zone 4 belong to Category B and the rest of the zones are in Category C. They hold different proclamations either by buying advertising or using mass media. About 1000 Bahá'ís believed to live in Addis Ababa.

#### **3.1.3.2.2. The Mass Conversion Area in Sidamo and other parts of Ethiopia**

The mass conversion, which means accepting the Faith in large number at a time, was started in May 1968 by a young American Bahá'í named Mr. Sam Lynch, who after attending the International Convention for the election of members of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa and passed through Ethiopia. He went on a weekend teaching trip on a car with five Ethiopian Baha'is. It happened that their car had a flat tire and while some were engaged in changing the tire, Mr. Lynch started teaching the people around him and ended up with 27 to accept the Faith. This phenomenon was a great achievement that it was accepted and welcomed by the National Spiritual Assembly.<sup>54</sup>

Sidamo, proclaimed a mass conversion area. More Bahá'ís from Addis Ababa continued, the same trend of openly teaching a group of people in market places, on farm plots resulted in the acceptance of the Faith by a large number of people. Most of these people, before being a Bahá'í were believers of traditional religious beliefs of the area. Thereafter some Bahá'í youth from Addis Ababa and Asmara went to Awassa, as pioneers and strengthen or consolidated the new believers. It was during these weekend trips that certain villagers near Bullbula had accepted the Faith.<sup>55</sup>

In 1973, there were 56 local spiritual assemblies and in the late 1970's over 250 local spiritual assemblies in the mass conversion area alone. Then the mass conversion areas grew from Sidamo region to the then Southern Shoa, where 100 villagers accepted the Faith. Shishinda, in Southern Shoa, was the place where the first Bahá'í teaching Institute -Banani Teaching Institute in memory of the Hand of the Cause Musa Banani - was built and where the first home front pioneer, Ato Gebremadihin Asgedom, settled in 1971.<sup>56</sup>

But those mass conversion areas did not continue to grow or even to remain intact. This was due to a number of reasons. First, the derg regime (1974 - 1991) did not allow people to move from place to place for religious activities and convert people and in this the Bahá'ís were not exception.\* Second, there was wrong statistics. Some people on those areas were registered as being Baha'is, but in reality they were not. Finally, some of them expected material gains from the faith. As a result, now there are less than 10 local spiritual assemblies in the then mass conversion areas of Sidamo.<sup>57</sup>

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\*the Bahá'ís in those areas needed to be consolidated because they know little about their Faith

Lately however, there is an area in Oromia Region called Woyisso, some 150 km. away from the capital, in which a large number of people accepted the Faith. There are about more than 500 people accepted the Faith and about 8 local spiritual assemblies.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.1.4. Acquisition of Bahá'í properties and opposition

#### 3.1.4.1.1. Acquisition of Bahá'í properties

For the first time in 1962, the Bahá'í community managed to purchase a property for its local Bahá'í center around Piazza area. Unfortunately, it had legal litigation, which took several years to clear it in the name of Bahá'ís. The reason for this was that at the time the Faith was not legally incorporated to own property. Then it was somehow managed with trustee of individuals, however, it was nationalized by the previous regime (1974 - 1991). Then the first temple land to build a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar\* was purchase on a mountain called Furi Mountain around 1966 - 1968. The land was maintained by planting eucalyptus trees. Unfortunately, this too was confiscated by the previous regime and is not yet retrieved.<sup>59</sup>

A two-million square meters (200 hectares) of teaching institute - Banani Teaching Institute - was donated by Kegn Gila Michael Bahta. But this too like, the previous ones, was confiscated by the previous regime. Two endowments of 2750 square meters of land in Debreziet were donated by Captain Eshetu Gebre and his wife Renee Abalaine for the

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\* Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is an Arabic word which means a Dawning-place of the praises or remembrances or mention of God. Generally, the Baha'i House of Worship or Temple and dependencies clustered around it. The building has particular architectural requirements –a nine-sided surmounted by a dome. Only human voice is used to sing, chant, or read the Word of God.

National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia. The first Regional Bahá'í Center in Awassa, which is 2,000 square meters, was donated by Dr. and Mrs. Farhoumand also to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia. In the meantime, the first national Bahá'í Center was dedicated on November 12, 1972. The land has an area of 1,164 square meters, and also donated by Dr. and Mrs. Farhoumand. In recent years, a land was donated by Ato Dessie Bejane, in Woyisso for the building of the second Regional Bahá'í Center.<sup>60</sup>

#### **3.1.4.1.2. Resistance to the introduction of Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia**

In relation to opposition or resistance, quite early in the 1960's, a number of Baha'is (pioneers and native Baha'is) were arrested and questioned in nearby Jimma and their Bahá'í Books were confiscated by the police of the local government. After several sessions of negotiations held between the National Spiritual Assembly the Bahá'ís and the police, their books were turned to them. Baha'is also experienced lots of resistances in various places under different circumstances. But the major area of resistance to the Bahá'í institution was that of Gondar. In the early 1969, the Bahá'ís in Gondar endured the tribulation inflicted upon them by the populace of Gondar town, which was instigated by Memre Belay, the chief of Gondar region Orthodox Church. Many Bahá'ís were beaten and imprisoned. There were over 70 Baha'is at the time dispersed skillfully by the authorities. The Baha'is were charged with spreading of erroneous ideas about religion. Then the National Spiritual Assembly then sent two Bahá'ís from Addis to protest the mishaps by protesting that Baha'is were not there to make division among the people. Finally the problem was solved and the Bahá'ís were allowed to teach freely.<sup>61</sup>

In Gambela, in the late 1970's, Baha'is were arrested for teaching their faith. It took a tremendous effort to have them released. The National Spiritual Assembly appealed for their released. However, it took a couple of months for them to be released.<sup>62</sup>

The National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia reported in its annual report of 1996- 1997, that the Assembly was experiencing indications of opposition incited by leaders of various churches and mosques, who pressure members to denounce their children should they embraced another religion that of their parents.<sup>63</sup>

### **3.1.5. The Role of Baha'i Community in Development: Sabri Development Institute**

The Baha'i community of Ethiopia has been involved in the process social and economic development since it was established some 70 years ago. But these activities were *"largely fragmentary, had little complexity and insufficient capacity to sustain them."* However, starting April 1993, the Baha'i community in the world launched the Three Year Plan (1993-1996) and the Baha'i community of Ethiopia was no exception in launching the same plan. One of the major objectives of this plan was of the implementation of socio-economic developments taking into account the spiritual dimension of man. The challenges and achievement of those three years provided the lesson that contributed to the establishment of a development institute in Ethiopia in 1996 which was later named the Sabri Development Institute.<sup>64</sup>

The Sabri Development Institute is, therefore, an educational institute *“dedicated to the development of human response for the positive spiritual, social, economic and cultural transformation of the peoples of Ethiopia.”*<sup>65</sup> A Board of Directors appointed and guided by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Ethiopia supervises its activities. Although its head office is in Addis Ababa, its area of influence is to all corners of the country.<sup>66</sup>

According to the institute, its conceptual framework is motivated by the understanding of the teachings of the Baha’i faith, by lessons derived from a global experience of the Baha’i communities in applying the Baha’i teachings to the spiritual and material progress and the effort of institutions outside the Baha’i Faith that are involved in the education for development. Moreover, the institute adopts the Baha’i belief that man is a product of the relationship between the spiritual and physical entity generally referred to as soul and body respectively.<sup>67</sup> **“...His earthly life becomes meaningful and fulfilling to the extent he realizes the spiritual qualities he inheritedly possesses and contributes positively to the advancement of spiritual as well as material civilization on earth.”**<sup>68</sup> Therefore, development initiative become effective if they are devised towards helping the human soul use its ‘inherent potential’ so that it may become **“active participant of its own development through proper education -spiritual as well as physical education.”**<sup>69</sup>

The Institute recognizes the promotion of participation of and active ownership of its programs by its receiver not only as a means to sustainability in development but also as

an end in itself. The institute also recognizes the fact that paces of individual and social change differs among individuals, groups and communities. Moreover, it acknowledge the anthropological saying that cultural elements and institutions in a society are interwoven and that change in one element brings about or necessitates a possible and corresponding change in others.<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, in order to realize its objectives through education, Sabri Development Institute follows the following as lines of action or its challenges; developing sequence of courses, development of teachers, delivery of sequence of courses, and development of institutional capacity.<sup>71</sup>

Currently the Institute runs three programs namely Moral Education Program, Literacy Program and Health Program. The moral education program, based on the Ruhi material and studies in study circles, is delivered to both the Baha'is and non-Baha'is throughout the country. However, the literacy and health programs are relatively later introductions into the activities of the institute. Both programs begun as pilot projects in Woyesso-Kenchera Kebele in Adamitulu Woreda (district) of the Oromia regional government. Nevertheless, other areas will also be given to the opportunity to benefit from these programs once enough lessons are learnt and sufficient institutional capacity is developed.<sup>72</sup>

According to the Institute, the literacy is a means of helping its beneficiaries transform themselves and their surrounding spiritually and materially while they are learning to

read and write. This transformation is achieved when their capacity to consult and act, to be creative, to think and decided is stimulated. On the other hand the health program was more of the preventive health program. Therefore, it adopt “facts of Life” – a material prepared by UNESCO, UNICEF, and WHO and for tutors training and students reading materials it adopted materials from Varqa Foundation, a sister institution in Guyana.<sup>73</sup>

In order to exchange experiences, the Institute has collaborative relationship with about 350 sister Baha’i institutions in the world through a medium of the Baha’i World Center, Socio-Economic Department in Haifa, Israel. Moreover, the Institute has already collaborated with governmental and non-governmental organization working in the field of development in Ethiopia, particularly in areas of literacy, primary health care.<sup>74</sup>

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1. The Baha'i communities of Zone 3 and Zone 4

#### 4.1.1. The Baha'i community of Zone 3

The cluster of the Baha'i community of Zone 3 is under the Local Spiritual Assembly of Zone 3 and is in Category B. Its population size is one hundred seventy seven. Of this 177 (M=102, F=48) Baha'is 143 are adults, 7 youth (15-21 years) and 27 children (3-14 years). Since their statistical information is rather crude, more than ten ethnic groups are represented in the community (Amraha –the majority, Oromo, Argoba, Guragie, Kembata, Sidama, Somalie, Tigraway, Wolayita and Harari).

Concerning their education background, hundred percent are literate, eighty percent of the Baha'is are above high schools and the rest twenty percent are either in elementary or high schools. Like the rest of the people of Addis Ababa, the Baha'is are engaged in different activities to support themselves and we find few unemployed among themselves.

Concerning the Baha'is in Baha'i institutions, the majority of the National Spiritual Assembly of Ethiopia (six of them) are in this zone; the only counselor in Ethiopia lives there and also three Auxiliary board members live in this zone.

#### 4.1.1.1. **The Local Spiritual Assembly of Zone 3**

The Local Spiritual Assembly is elected every year April. On April 21, 2002 the current Assembly was elected. The members comprise of 7 male and 2 female. However, upon one member resigned and left the country upon pioneering, the community bi-elect one female to the membership; and therefore the assembly has six male and three female as its members.

The Assembly meets every week on Saturdays, but it also might have extra and urgent meetings as requested by the members or the Assembly itself. Extraordinary meetings are held when the local assembly did not finish its agendas on its ordinary meeting and the agendas might need immediate decision and there is no time for the next ordinary meeting. On the other hand, urgent meetings are mostly meetings called when an individual Baha'i requested an immediate decision on personal cases from the assembly and if it can not wait until the next ordinary meeting of the assembly like some one passed away etc. Its meeting is usually held in one of the member's house.

The Assembly usually starts its meetings with a prayer followed by reading and approving or giving amendments of previous minutes. The Assembly as its agenda will look at individual cases (divorce, marriage, or individuals requested for guidance in their business or educational pursuit etc) even say prayer if individual requested for it.

The Assembly also looks at quarter action plan, committees' reports, and the organizations of Holydays and devotional meeting. In order to facilitate its work the Assembly appoints committees, task forces and a board. Committees' members are appointed every three months. But this varies a lot and some members of committees work for more than three months. Task forces are appointed upon immediate activities which might need to be done in groups. For example the Local Assembly appointed a task force to upgrade its statistics.

On the other hand since the cluster is in Category B they have to start some social-economic development activities. Therefore, a board was appointed to manage a tutorial school of the Assembly. There is no clear definition how often the board is appointed. Otherwise, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Zone 3 is the strongest local assembly in the country.

#### **4.1.1.2. Committees**

The committees with their members appointed every three months include: Community, Women, and Youth Affairs Committee; Children Education committee; Fund Awareness Committee; and Study Circle Coordination Committee.

### **(a) Community, Women, and Youth Affairs Committee**

The committee meets every week on Sundays at in the National Baha'i Center. It has five members - four female and one male. As to its job description the committee was expected to do the following activities:

- To organize one deepening program for youth on youth related issues like role of the youth, marriage, unity, Baha'i institutions, etc;
- To coordinate equal wings & hand maiden training<sup>\*</sup>,
- To organize one love & unity day at community level,
- To coordinate holy day celebration at zonal level and Nineteen Day Feasts
- To encourage and assist new enrolled believers to become members of study circles, attend Nineteen Day Feasts, and
- To encourage the community to pass through Ruhi 4 (Twin Manifestations) and Ruhi 6 ( Teaching)for promoting activities successful

### **(b) Children Education committee**

It is a committee of five members – three female and two male members. Members are mostly mothers and youth. The committee is expected to:

- Run classes for three age groups (3-6, 7-10 and 10-14) that include non-Baha'is
- Encourage and program ahead so that children can present drama, songs, poetry

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<sup>\*</sup>Equal Wings and Hand Maiden training are training based on the concept of the equality of men and women

- and paintings on Baha'i holidays and Nineteen Day Feasts
- Coordinate workshop for community to create common awareness and vision regarding children

At the beginning members used to meet every Tuesdays starting at 3:00 p.m. However, since the youth are going to school, the meeting date changed into every Thursdays same time. Still it is difficult to meet regularly.

One thing to mention here is that the committee with the help of an individual Baha'i who has a kindergarten, made it possible to hold two children classes for age group 3-6 and 7-10. The classes study "My Baha'i Book" prepared in Kenya and they include art program in which children will learn songs, drawing, crafts making and games using different attributes of God. For example to be patient is one attribute of God. First, the children will study from Baha'i writings about patience. Then they will learn about how to be patient through stories, drawing, and games. Usually the classes are from 9:00 - 12:00. They will have tea break in between then they will be served with tea and bread or cookies. There are about eight from age group 3-6 and ten from age group 7-10 children attending the classes. Of these eighteen children nine of them are non-Baha'is. Non-Baha'i children come to these classes through their Baha'i friends and by contacting their parents and if only their parents are willing to bring them.

In collaboration with this committee, an individual Baha'i voluntarily also opened two children classes at her home. What is interesting here is that, all the nine children are

Baha'is -three female and six male- ranging from age 4-11(two of them are in age group 3-6 and seven of them are in age group 7-10). The study material she is using is Ruhi III material which is all about children class. Like "My Baha'i Book" the lessons in the materials focus on attributes of God, history of the Faith and arts activities. The classes are run every Saturdays from 9:00 -12:00 in the morning.

The class for age group 10-14, the junior youth class, on the other hand is run at the National Baha'i Center every Sundays morning. About eight children, all Baha'is (two female and six male) are attending the class. The class study a material called "Garden of Baha'u'llah" which is about more about the history of the Faith in detail than the other materials. The group also studies some lessons from Ruhi III material. The group also voluntarily study Ruhi Book I "Reflection on the Writings" on its own. This group also prepares songs and by memorizing it will say prayers, and readings at devotional and social parts of Nineteen Day Feasts.

### **(c) Fund Awareness Committee**

The committee was appointed in order to prepare inspiring and interesting deepening programs and stories on the important of the fund. Based on this job description the committee, a committee of five members (one American female and four male) meets every fortnight on Wednesdays and prepare stories on fund to be reported for Nineteen Day Feast. The committee also assists the treasurer of the local assembly when he reports during Nineteen Day Feasts by arranging audiovisual aids and graphs about the fund

report. The committee is a strong committee in that ever since this committee was appointed the participants of the fund as well as the amount of fund itself increases considerably.

#### **(d) Study Circle Coordination Committee**

A committee of three members (one female and two male), it was appointed basically to encourage Baha'is to participate in study circles and during devotional meetings. Therefore, the committee organizes study circle festivals in which all study circles about eleven of them share their experiences, their activities in their study circles. While at the time of the field work the committee organized on festival. The festival was held on one Saturday afternoon and about 80 Baha'is attended the festival. Each study circle presented its plan of action and there were entertainments and Baha'isongs. At last refreshment sponsored by all study circles was served.

The other activity of the committee is to encourage believers open devotional meetings at family level, at community level and by study circles. In these devotional meetings, the committee encourages believers to invite their non Baha'i friends. At present there are nine devotional meetings either organized at family level or by study circles.

#### **4.1.2. The Baha'i community of Zone 4**

Like in Zone 3 the cluster of the Baha'i community of Zone 4 is under the Local Spiritual Assembly of Zone 4 and is in Category B. About 72 Baha'is that is 50 male and 22

female live in the area. Three Baha'i youth (age 15-21) and 8 Baha'i children also live in the area. More than eight ethnic groups are represented in the community (Amraha –the majority, Oromo, Argoba, Guragie, Kembata, Sidama, Somalie and Tigraway).

In relation to their education background, like in Zone 3, 100% are literate, 80% of the Baha'is are above high schools and the rest 20% are either in elementary or high schools. Like the rest of the people of Addis Ababa, the Baha'is are engaged in different activities to support them selves and we find few unemployed among themselves.

The community is known for its youth activity. Eagle Study Circle is the name given to the youth group. They are so active in the community that the majority of them are engaged in so many of the activities of the communities- fund raising, children education, servicing the community with refreshment, assisting women in holding Bazaars, etc. The majorities of them are also either in Colleges and Universities or finished their University degrees. They have a song edited and published by them, which is found in most Baha'is homes.

#### **4.1.2.1. The Local Spiritual Assembly of Zone 4**

The Local Spiritual Assembly of Zone 4 has member of four female and five male believers. The Assembly meets every week on Friday starting at 6:00 p.m. In order to encourage devotional meetings in the community, the Assembly decided to organize devotional meeting every fortnight. Therefore, one week is for the meeting and the other

week is for devotional meeting. Like the Assembly of Zone 3 the Assembly of Zone 4 meets in one of the member's house. Moreover, it has extraordinary as well as urgent meetings.

Like in Zone 3, the Assembly Zone 4 usually starts its meetings with a prayer followed by reading and approving or giving amendments of previous minutes. The Assembly as it agenda will look at individual cases, quarter action plan, committees' reports, and the organizations of Holydays and devotional meetings. In order to facilitate its work the Assembly appoints committees as well as task forces.

At its devotional meeting the Assembly organizes prayers and readings from the Faith on different issues like for peace and contemplate on them.

#### **4.1.2.2. Committees**

Unlike the committee of Zone 3, the committees in Zone 4 are appointed for a year till the next local assembly election. The committees prepare their own annual plan from the annual plan of the Assembly; the Assembly do not give them job descriptions. The following committees were appointed this year:

- Youth Committee consist of five members all of which are male
  - the committee organizes song programs and encourage youth (ranging 15 to 30 years of age) to participate in community activities;
  - The committee usually meet every Saturday afternoon

- Children Education Committee of a committee of three members (two female and one male);
  - it organizes two children classes for age groups 3-6 and 7 -12;
  - About five children in age group 3-6 and about 7 in age group 7-12 attend the classes of these four are non-Baha'i children ;
  - Like in Zone 3 classes are given based on the lessons on "My Baha'i Book" and Ruhi III materials
  - The classes are conducted in one of volunteered believer's house
  - The committee meets every Wednesday starting at 6:00p.m.
- Women Committee is one of the strongest committee in the Zone.
  - It has a membership of five individuals all of which are female;
  - It activities among other include organizing of Bazaars, fund raising events, and women deepening programs
  - It usually meets every Wednesday at 6:00 p.m.
- Social Affairs Committee
  - This is a committee of five individuals –two female and three male
  - It organize activities which could strengthen community life
  - Therefore, it organize picnics, deepening programs on Mondays and Fireside on Wednesdays
- Library Committee
  - It is a committee of three members all of which are males.
  - It systematizes the Assembly's mini library at the individual's place so that believers in the community could make use it properly.

- The committee has no regular meeting

Since the Community has no local center, all committees are obliged to meet in individuals' houses.

#### 4.2. Obligatory Prayers and Pilgrimage

In the Kitabi-Aqdas Baha'u'llah sets out the law of prayer: "*We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity [15 years of age]; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.*"<sup>1</sup> Baha'is are also commanded by Baha'ullah to pray to pray every morning and evening: "*Recite ye the verses of God every morning and evening. Whoso reciteth them not hath truly failed to fulfill his pledge to the Covenant of God...*"<sup>2</sup> However, Baha'u'llah states that one should not pray to excess:

*Take heed lest excessive reading and too many acts of piety in the daytime and in the nightseason make you vainglorious. Should a person recite but a single verse for the Holy Writings in a spirit of joy and radiance, this would be better for him than reciting wearily all the Scriptures of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Recite ye the verses of God in such measure that ye be not overtaken with fatigue or boredom. Burden not your souls so as to cause them exhaustion and weigh them down, but rather endeavor to lighten them, that they may soar on the wings of revealed Verse unto the dawning-place of His signs. This is conducive to nearer access unto God, were ye to comprehend.*<sup>3</sup>

Baha'i prayers are usually said in private or with one's family, although there are occasions when community worship is appropriate, such as in the devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast (I shall discuss it later) or at the observances of Baha'i holy days. Special gathering for prayers such as the devotional meeting may also be held but are not obligatory. Moreover, it is a common practice among Baha'is to begin and ending

meetings such as committee meetings, Local Spiritual Assembly meeting, women, youth and children activities with prayers, but this is not also obligatory. Except for obligatory prayers, there are no special gestures or positions one must take up for prayers.<sup>4</sup>

Prayer can be read, recited, chanted\* or sung. There is no congregational prayer, except for the prayer for the dead, when the prayer is recited by one person while all others present stand. Baha'is do not generally recite prayers in unison, although the singing of short prayers by the community is not forbidden. Baha'is can pray directly to God, or through Baha'u'llah. They can also pray to other departed souls to intercede on their behalf.<sup>5</sup>

Baha'u'llah, the Bab and Abdul-Baha revealed many prayers which Baha'is are encouraged to use. Baha'is can also use their own words in private prayer. In addition to these personal prayers, Baha'u'llah has commanded that Baha'is should recite one of three obligatory prayer every day, namely the Short Obligatory Prayer, the Medium Obligatory Prayer and the Long Obligatory Prayer.<sup>6</sup>

The Short Obligatory Prayer is to be said once a day at noon (between noon and sunset), the Medium Obligatory Prayer three times daily, and the Long Obligatory Prayer once in twenty-four hours. A believer is free to choose one of these prayers to be said privately.<sup>7</sup>

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\* Chant means the unaccompanied musical rendering of the Holy Scriptures in any language. Generally, however, Baha'is use this term to refer to forms of devotional song, adapted from traditional Islamic practices using the original Persian and Arabic texts of the sacred writings, the prayers of Shoghi Effendi, and other devotional poems and songs.

### Short Obligatory Prayer

I bear witness. O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

- Bahá'u'lláh

In the *Kitabi-Aqdas* Baha'ullah states specific requirements and exception related to the obligatory prayers. He says that these prayers are binding on Baha'is from the age of fifteen. Those exempted from saying the prayers are those who are ill and those who are over the age of 70 years. Women who are in their course (menstruation period) are not also allowed to say the obligatory. Instead, they are asked to say or repeat ninety-five times between noon and the next day the verse, "*Glorified be God, the Lord of Splendor and Beauty*"<sup>8</sup>

Before reciting any of these obligatory prayers, ablution must be performed. Ablution, as in the Muslim case, is the washing of the face and hands before the reciting of obligatory prayer. If there is no water or if the water is harmful to the face or hands, the repetition of five times the verses "*In the Name of God the Most Pure, the most Pure*" is important.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Baha'i Pilgrimage is a privilege and an obligation for those who can afford it. It is enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*: "*The Lord hath ordained that those of you who are able shall make pilgrimage to the sacred House...*"<sup>10</sup>

There are three places to which pilgrimage is binding. The first of these is the former residence of the Báb in Shiraz, Iran. The Báb's residence was demolished during the

Islamic Revolution in Iran (1978-1980) and has not yet been rebuilt. The second place of pilgrimage is the former residence of Bahá'u'lláh during his banishment and exile in Baghdad. Pilgrimages to Shiraz and Baghdad have been suspended due to conditions unfavorable to Bahá'ís in those lands. The third place of obligatory pilgrimage is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Accre, Israel.<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of pilgrimage to the Holy Land in Israel is to pray at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and, to a lesser extent, the Shrine of the Báb. At present, pilgrimages last nine days. On the first day the pilgrims visit the Shrine of the Báb. From the second day onwards, the pilgrims visit the sites roughly in a descending order of spiritual significance, starting with the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Although there is no ritual associated with Bahá'í pilgrimages, there are some practices which are quite common amongst the Bahá'ís. Circumambulation of the shrines and recitation of the Tablet of Visitation of Baha'u'llah (see appendix) are two such practices.

Bahá'í pilgrimages began during the period of Bahá'u'lláh's banishment in Edrine in Turkey. The only person to have performed completely to all designated places was Nabil-i-Azam, one of the early well-known Baha'is. Bahá'u'lláh instructed Nabil to recite on his behalf the two newly revealed Tablets of the Pilgrimage, and to perform, in his stead, the rites prescribed in them.<sup>12</sup>

Much change has taken place since the first pilgrims visited Bahá'u'lláh in prison in 1868. Pilgrimage then was a dangerous experience. Today, Bahá'í pilgrimages can be arranged

by contacting the Pilgrimage Office at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel. Pilgrims converge in the Holy Land from all parts of the world. In one pilgrimage group about 150 Baha'is from different countries perform their pilgrimage. Since the number of Baha'is applying for pilgrimage is quite big and in order to accommodate all, you have to wait a minimum of five years to go for pilgrimage. Moreover, if you want to apply again, you will have to wait five years from your days of your pilgrimage. But some Baha'is request to have a three-day visit to the Shrine of Baha'u'llah and most of the time they are granted to go there.

Special arrangements are made at the Bahá'í World Centre to provide local transportation to the Bahá'í properties and to ensure that the pilgrims receive guidance and explanations about the histories of the various sites. Every effort is made to enrich to the utmost these especially spiritual days in the lives of the Bahá'í pilgrims. For example, during the days they visit the holy places, but in the evening special arrangement would be made in that every evening either a member of the Universal House of Justice or a member of the International Teaching Center would give a talk on different subjects regarding the Faith. Moreover, Pilgrims are allowed to visit other religious holy places in Israel.

However, may be because it is expensive only few Ethiopian Baha'is could perform pilgrimage. But when they come from their pilgrimage most of the time they would be given time during the Sunday deepening class at the National Center or at Nineteen Day Feasts to say some words about their pilgrimage experience. They then would distribute

dried rose flowers which they brought from the Shrine of Baha'u'llah so that every one could have one.

#### **4.3.Devotional Meeting and study circles**

Devotional meetings are meeting of prayers and meditation organized usually by study circles or the Local Assembly. According to the Baha'is these meetings are also opened to the non-Baha'is. Moreover, during those meetings Baha'is give time to widen their understandings on the Baha'i writings by reading and meditate upon them. There is an understanding that if a Baha'i finishes Ruhi Book One –Reflection on the Baha'i Writing, she/he is expected to open a devotional meeting. However from experience and from observation only nine in Zone 3 and five in Zone 4 devotional meetings are held in the past nine months. According to the five year plan devotional meeting is one of the core activities of the plan the others being the multiplications of study circles and the education of children.

About study circles, since we have discussed the matter earlier here we will look at the number of the study circles and their activities. My recent statistical figure shows that there are 11 study circles in Zone 3. In each study circle, 4 to 12 Baha'is participate in study circles. All in all a total of 86 Baha'is are included in the study circles. Of the 150 Baha'is 82 passed through Ruhi I, 60 passed through Ruhi II, 24 passed through Ruhi III, approximately 40 are in Ruhi IV and 8 Baha'is reached Ruhi VIII the highest level of the Ruhi books.

In Zone 4 of the 72 Baha'is in the community 41 passed Ruhi I, about 10 passed through Ruhi II, 2 passed through Ruhi III, about 9 are passing through Ruhi IV and 9 Baha'is reached Ruhi VII.

#### 4.4. Wedding, divorce and family life

According to the Kitab-i-Aqdas, marriage is **“highly recommended but not obligatory.”**<sup>13</sup> The purpose of marriage in the Baha'i Faith is *“that from you may appear he who will remember Me amongst My servants, this is one of My commandments unto you...”*<sup>14</sup>

In the Baha'i Faith, pluralities of wives or husbands are forbidden, and only monogamy is encouraged. In order to get married both partners must be at least fifteen years of year. Marriage is acceptable only when both partners as well as their parents give consent to the marriage.<sup>15</sup>

The Baha'isystem of courtship and dating has not yet fully been established. This does not mean that there are no guidelines and necessary directives. Its means that Baha'is, in this respect, generally tend to follow closely the norms of their respective cultures.<sup>16</sup>

Baha'is belief that marriage should be based on mutual attraction in three general domains: spiritual, intellectual, and physical. Therefore, courtship usually takes place largely in social settings such as in committee meetings, the Nineteen Day Feasts,

summer schools, conferences and so on. This does not mean that the couple may never be alone together. Certainly they can and should spend some time "alone". They may go to the theater, a restaurant, or a pastry. This will allow them to have opportunity to evaluate each other's spiritual and intellectual competence. In the Baha'i writings, physical compatibility should not be investigated before marriage.<sup>17</sup>

The Baha'i Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expressions, such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. Baha'is do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, chastity before marriage and faithfulness after marriage is the vital and sacred rule.<sup>19</sup>

Baha'i must be married in a Baha'is ceremony, witnessed by two representative of the spiritual assembly. The only requirement for the Baha'i marriage ceremony is the saying of by the bride and grooms of verse in the Baha'i marriage vow: **"We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God."**<sup>20</sup> Once consent is brought an engagement period begins which must not exceed ninety-five days. Consent should be given in written by both parents with their signatures on it. This will solve the doubt of the assembly whether the consent is correct or not.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding, dowry, the Kitab-i-Aqdas specifies the payment of the dowry to be given by the man to the woman. If the husband is from a city he should pay 19 mithqals ( $\approx$  96.192 grams) of pure gold to his wife and if the husband is from a village he should pay 19

mithqals of pure silver for his wife. It is permitted to pay upto 95 mithqals ( $\approx 345.958$  grams) of either gold or silver. But if the couple does not want to marry after the payment of the dowry, the taking back of dowry is not permitted.<sup>22</sup> However, if the husband discovers that the wife is not virgin, the refund of the dowry and of the expenses incurred may be claimed.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless at present the provision of the law relating to the engagement period and dowry are only applied to the Iranians.<sup>24</sup>

A Baha'i can marry a non-Baha'i on the condition that this does not require him/her a declaration of faith in another religion and on the condition that both ceremonies occur in the same twenty-four hour period.<sup>25</sup>

Usually in Ethiopia, wedding ceremony by Baha'is follows the same custom as other communities in the country. Therefore, I have observed that when the couple decided to get married, they will ask consents from their living parents. The groom will send about three to five "elders" from either the Baha'i community or the friends or relatives his parents to bride's parents and asked permission to marry their daughter. If the would be bride's parents agree with the marriage, then the "elders" will be given appointed date to further discuss about wedding plans. Usually the bride's parents and relatives organize lunch and the husband's will arrange cocktail and/or dinner.

On the wedding day, the Baha'i wedding ceremony, which is the witness of two representative of the spiritual assembly and the saying of by the bride and grooms of verse in the Baha'i marriage vow, will be performed in the morning before lunch or in the

afternoon between lunch and the cocktail. During this ceremony the Marriage Tablet (see Appendix) and one of the prayers for marriage will be said.

Glory by unto Thee, O my God! Verily, this Thy servant and this Thy maidservant have gathered under the shadow of Thy mercy and they are united through Thy favor and generosity. O Lord! Assist them in this Thy world and Thy kingdom and destine for them every good through Thy bounty and grace. O Lord! Confirm them in Thy servitude and assist them in Thy service. Suffer them to become the signs of Thy Name in Thy world and protect them through Thy bestowals which are inexhaustible in this world and the world to come. O Lord! They are supplicating the kingdom of Thy mercifulness and invoking the realm of Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time. Verily, Though art the Omnipotent, the Omnipresent and the Almighty!

Abdul-Baha<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, there will be dinner parties (“Melsse”) two to one week after the wedding in the house of the parents of the bride and this is followed by a reunion dinner (kilkil) at the home of the bride and the groom.



Fig. 13 Ato Shewangizaw's Wedding at the National Center, Addis Ababa

Ato Sheangizaw Kifle is a Baha'i of Zone 3, who got married to a Non-Baha'i. This is his story:

Before my wedding and after I and my fiancé decided to get married, as a custom in the country, I sent four elder (all Baha'is) to her parents to asked permission to get married to their daughter. The parent agreed to give consent and after some month and after some preparation came the wedding day. Lunch was organized by her parents. After lunch we went to the National Baha'i Center. The Baha'i marriage ceremony was conducted with some prayers and the Baha'i wedding vows there. Then refreshment was served there. Then we went to a picnic for photograph. A week after the wedding my wife's parents prepared melsse at their home. This was followed by kilkil organized by me, my wife and my relatives. This is how my wedding was organized.

In general such kind of marriage ceremony is usually followed by those couples where one of them is a non-Baha'i. However this practice is also followed by those couples, where both of whom are Baha'is.

Nonetheless, when both partners are Baha'is, we can observe them only follow Baha'i wedding ceremony, that is, the witness by two representative of the spiritual assembly and a saying of by the bride and grooms of verse in the Baha'i marriage vow and no more festivities like lunch or dinner. They sometimes organize refreshments at the National Center and invite few friends to their wedding. The number of marriage happened while I was in the field work was three in Zone 3 and one in Zone 4.

Divorce is highly condemned yet permitted under certain circumstances. It is allowed only in the case of extreme hostility and aversion on the part of either of spouse. The local assembly in consultation with auxiliary board member will try its best to avert the situation. When there is no hope the assembly will call on both partners and declare a

year of separation, called the year of waiting (or year of patience) and after this period divorce will be effective.<sup>27</sup>

During this 'year of patience' both partners can live in the same roof. However, the partners are not allowed to make sexual intercourse. Nevertheless, if they want to continue their lives together and don't want the divorce they can do so after consultation with the local assembly; then the 'year of patience' can be discontinued. Otherwise, when this 'year of patience' is completed they will approach their local assembly and after consultation they will divide their belongings and divorce will be final.<sup>28</sup> About two divorces finalized in Zone 3. But there was none in Zone 4.

Concerning family, the average number of people in a Baha'i family is five. Baha'is have nuclear family type consisting of parents and their children. However, families can be categorized in three different forms. The first categorization is a family where the whole family is Baha'i. In this type of family the children may be third or second generation Baha'is, and parents/grandparents have background from Orthodox Christian, Catholic, or Muslim.

The second category is of family where either a husband or a wife is a Baha'i but the other is not. In this category, I observe that children have difficulty in where to go especially religion is concerned. However, there is a tendency that when a husband is a Baha'i, children would come to the Baha'i Center but if the wife is a Baha'i there is a

tendency that children would not come to the Baha'i Center. This is not always the case and the vice versa could happen.

The third category is where only the youth or children are Baha'is but not the parents. Therefore, some youth are coming to the Baha'i activities without the knowledge of the parents. Others come to the Baha'i activities by letting know their parents what the Baha'i faith is all about. Because of the religious activities some youth are expelled from their home and live with other Baha'is.

#### **4.5. Youth, and women activities**

The Baha'i dictionary defined the term 'youth' as Baha'is over the age fifteen and under the age set for voting in Baha'i elections, presently twenty-one. Generally, any Baha'i from the early teens to the late twenties may be considered a Baha'i youth.<sup>29</sup>

Baha'i youth are very active members of the Baha'i community. They held annual conferences on different issue such as "Youth Can Move the World" and on the different plans of the community such as "The Four-Year Plan" and "Three Year Plan". They have a gathering called "Make A Friend's Days", where they invite their friends and introduce with each other and tell them about the Baha'i Faith. Moreover, they organize festivals and dance workshop to teach about the Baha'i Faith.

Moreover, they give services by pioneering in different parts of the country and assist the teaching work the Baha'i community. They also give service by assisting women activities and teach children in Baha'i children classes. A large number of youth are also appointed members of national, regional and local committees, task forces, boards etc.



Fig. 14 Baha'i youth singing in one of the Nineteen Day Feasts in Zone 3

The other important wing of the community is women. Like youth, women are also active in a sense they organize bazaars, fund raising festivals and love and unity day. In order to raise their understanding of the concept of 'equality of men and women' they participate in conferences and workshop on equality. Moreover, they participate in training called "Equal Wings", "Hand Maidens" and "The Greatest Holy Leaf" all of which are about the equality of men and women. These courses sometimes can be given to men of the community.

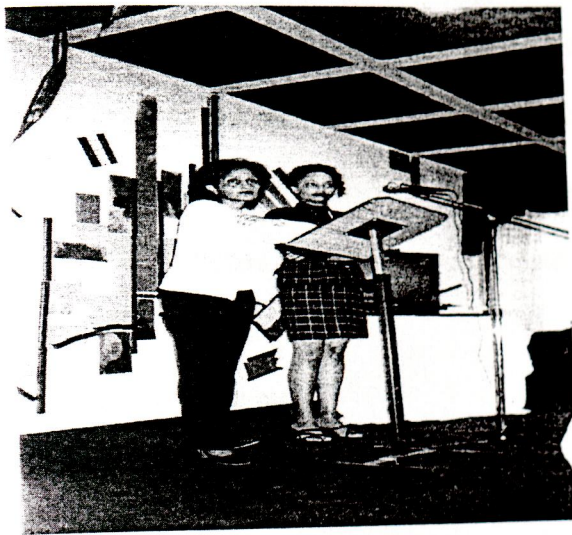


Fig. 15 Baha'i women conducting of one of the workshops on equality of men and women

Most of the times during holy days and some occasions, women with the assistance of the youth organize refreshments to the participants. They also give services by being appointed as members of national, regional and local assemblies, committees, task forces, and boards. Three of the nine auxiliary board members are women.



Fig. 16 Baha'i women after entraining refreshment in one of the holy days

Concerning children activities under children education committees in the two zones, children are given classes based on age groups (Age 3-6, 7-10, and 11-14). They will study prayers, memorize quotations from the Baha'i writings and prayers, draw, art crafting and sing Baha'isong at the classes, at holydays and nineteen day feast.

#### **4.6. Nineteen day feasts, holy days and fast**

The nineteen day feast (d.iyafat-i-navazdah-ruzih) is the monthly Baha'i community meeting for worship, administrative discussion and fellowship. The root meaning of 'feast', d.iyafat, is Arabic which means hospitality, particularly the giving of food to a guest. From this comes its meaning of banquet or feast. It is thus sometimes associated in 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings with 'table' -- the Lord's supper of Jesus, which Qur'an 5:112-15 portrays as a banquet table sent down from heaven from which the disciples were fed. Hospitality in the form of food given to guests has been admired as a virtue throughout history. Tales of the generous man who unwittingly entertains a divine guest are common in mythology. The stories in the book of Genesis of Abraham and Lot entertaining angels are typical. Hospitality as a virtue was especially admired in the Semitic world of the Middle East where the hospitality due to the stranger served to lessen the evils of desert lawlessness. 'Abdu'l-Baha relates one of the tales of Bedouin hospitality in Secret of Divine Civilization.<sup>30</sup>

The Baha'i feast originates in the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. It appears first in the Arabic Bayan as a command to entertain nineteen people every nineteen days, even if one is only able to give them water. Baha'u'llah confirms the commandment in his Kitab-

i-Aqdas, explaining that its purpose is to 'bind hearts together' with material means, although in Questions and Answers He states that the feast is not obligatory.<sup>31</sup>

The feast is held every nineteen days in each Baha'i community, usually on the first day of each Baha'i month. The following are the months of the Baha'i calendar and the first day of each month in which Nineteen Day Feast preferably should be held.

No.	Persian	English	The days for the feasts
1	Baha	Splendor	21 March
2	Jalal	Glory	9 April
3	Jamal	Beauty	28 April
4	Azamat	Grandeur	17 May
5	Nur	Light	5 June
6	Rahmat	Mercy	24 June
7	Kalimat	Words	13 July
8	Kamal	Perfection	1 August
9	Asma	Names	29 August
10	Izzat	Might	8 September
11	Mashiyyat	Will	27 September
12	'Ilm	Knowledge	16 October
13	Qudrat	Power	4 November
14	Qawl	Speech	23 November
15	Masa'il	Questions	12 December
16	Sharaf	Honor	31 December
17	Sultan	Sovereignty	19 January
18	Mulk	Dominion	7 February
19	Ala'	Loftiness	2 March

However, in various places communities held their feasts in a later day of a Baha'i month. They give different reason for this. Since the feasts are usually fall on week days this might be inconvenience for them to gather for the occasion. Therefore, in consultation with the local spiritual assemblies they will set the date for the feasts. Nevertheless, the final decision for the exact date, time and place for the feast will be the responsibility of the local spiritual assembly.<sup>32</sup>

The communities of Zone 3 and Zone 4 are no exceptions. Therefore, since the national center is found in Zone 3 feasts usually celebrated there on the coming Sunday from the first day of a Baha'i month starting at 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon. Zone 4 on the other hand celebrates its feasts at individuals' homes on the coming Sunday from the first day of a Baha'i month but starting at 3:30 p.m.

The feast starts with prayers and reading on different language. The role of the devotional program at the nineteen day feast was first indicated by 'Abdu'l-Baha. Shoghi Effendi stated that the readings should be chosen mainly from the prayers and Tablets of Baha'u'llah and the Bab and to a lesser extent from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha. In a letter to the American Baha'is Shoghi Effendi asked that they should not read his own writings in the devotional portion of the feast. In Iran, however, it was common for his prayers to be read as part of the devotional program. Shoghi Effendi also permitted the use of selections from the scriptures of other religions although he recommended that Baha'i readings should predominate.<sup>33</sup>

The Universal House of Justice has suggested, based on Shoghi Effendi's statements, in which the feast opens with prayers and devotional readings from the writings of Baha'u'llah, the Bab and 'Abdu'l-Baha, followed by readings from other Tablets, the writings of Shoghi Effendi and the scriptures of other religions. Hymns, poems and chants based on the holy writings, as well as instrumental music may also be included. Sometimes, children will say prayers and readings from memorization. Usually the host of the feasts selects prayer and readings from the writings to be read during this part of the feasts<sup>34</sup>

This is followed by the administrative part of the feasts. It was Shoghi Effendi who first envisioned the feast as an administrative occasion. The program of the administrative portion of the feast is well summarized as "general consultation on the affairs of the Cause, at which time the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities to the community, asks for suggestions and consultation, and also delivers messages received from the Guardian and the National Assembly."<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, in both zone Assemblies report through its officers as the secretary report, the treasurer report, and communication from the National Assembly, National committees, international reports, and if any names of new declarants will be read. Then greetings, announcements from national committees, local committees will be done by the individual Baha'is. The feast is thus the most important occasion for communication between Baha'i administrative institutions and the believers.

Then consultation follows. During consultation individuals raise suggestions or request clarification. If the majority wants to continue with the discussion of an issue, the floor will be given for discussion. After some consultation the suggestion and requisition will be forwarded to the Assembly for further discussion and final decision.

Finally, the part of socialization part will begin. The sharing of food is the original core of the feast and derives from the commands of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. 'Abdu'l-Baha particularly emphasizes the duty of hospitality incumbent on the host of the feast. This portion of the feast is intended as a social meeting of the believers. In this session refreshment, usually tea, cookies, diffo dabbo (traditional bread) kollo (fried barley) and cakes, will be served by the host mostly by a Baha'i family. Every year at New Year Baha'is families will volunteer to host feasts.

Shoghi Effendi stated that the feast was intended only for the members of the Baha'i community. Children of Baha'is, whether or not they are registered members of the community, are also allowed to attend. However, if a visitor who is not a Baha'i happens to attend, he should be welcomed. If he is well known to the community, he might be asked to leave the room during the community's administrative part. Otherwise, the administrative part of the feast should be omitted. Feasts are also open to Baha'is from other communities and no believer in good standing may be excluded from a feast.<sup>36</sup>

Meaning a believer whose voting right has been taken, that is the right to vote, to be elected, or to contribute to the Baha'i fund, should not attend the feasts. One such voting

right is taken from an individual when this individual did not marry according to the Baha'i marriage ceremony. The National spiritual assembly, after repeated warning, has the right to remove some or all these administrative rights. Rights may be restored when the individual shows repentance and corrects his /her behavior.<sup>37</sup>

Baha'i Holy days are days for commemorating significant Baha'is anniversaries. These are:

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| ➤ Festival of Nauru<br>(Baha'i New Year)             | 21 March        |
| ➤ Festival of Ridvan<br>(Declaration of Baha'u'llah) | 21 April -2 May |
| ➤ Declaration of the Bab                             | 23 May          |
| ➤ Ascension of Baha'u'llah                           | 29 May          |
| ➤ Martyrdom of the Bab                               | 9 July          |
| ➤ Birth of the Bab                                   | 20 October      |
| ➤ Birth of Baha'ullah                                | 12 November     |
| ➤ Day of the Covenant                                | 26 November     |
| ➤ Ascension of Abdul-Baha                            | 28 November     |

With the exception of the last two anniversaries, in all other holy days work should be suspended and children should not attend school. During the Festival of Ridvan, work should be suspended only on the first, ninth and twelfth days. There are no prescribed ceremonies for commemoration of these holy days, but many Baha'i communities combine devotional programs with fellowship or social activities and refreshments.

Usually Baha'is would say a prayer the "Tablet of Visitation of Baha'u'llah" (see appendix) when they commemorate a holy day related to the Bab or Baha'u'llah by standing and facing north-east towards the Qiblih – Baha'u'llah resting place. Moreover, there are prescribed time/hour on which it is preferable to start holy days. For example it would be preferable the:

- Anniversary of declaration of the Bab to begin at 8:00 p.m. on 22 May\*;
- The first day of anniversary of the Festival of Ridvan at 3:00 p.m. on 21 April;
- The Martyrdom of the Bab at 12:00 at noon on 9<sup>th</sup> July;
- Ascension of Baha'u'llah at 3:00 a.m. on 29 May
- Ascension of Abdul-Baha at 1:00 a.m. on 28 November



Fig. 17 Banner during the celebration of the Birth day of Baha'u'llah

In Addis Ababa, usually, holy days are celebrated at the regional level at the National Baha'i center where socialization among the zones is facilitated. Most of the time prayers

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\*A Baha'i day begins and ends at sunset; therefore, the anniversary of the declaration of the Bab begins on 22 May after sunset and ends on 23 May before sunset. This holds true to all anniversaries, holy days and nineteen day feasts

will be said and then a brief time will be given to narrate about the history and significance of the day. This is followed by songs and poems about the occasion usually performed by youth. Finally, refreshments, dinner or lunch will be served. Most of the time when holy days are celebrated in the evening, there will be potluck dinner where every one bring his/her dinner and share it with others. Bachelors usually donate some amount of money to the organizing committee to buy soft drinks and fruits. Most of the time non-Baha'is friends would join their Baha'i friends in these celebrations

Naw Ruz, the Baha'i New Year, generally observed with a meeting for prayer and celebration –often combined with potluck dinner since sunset of 20 March the last day of fast. The Festival of Naw Ruz two years back was celebrated in a hall outside of the Baha'i Center. This was because after dinner there was a party where every one old, young, men and women would dance to the move with the music and this was not allowed in the Baha'i center. They believe that Naw Ruz is the time of festivities. Since two years ago, because the renting of a hall was becoming too expensive and the Baha'is have the tendency to celebrate their New Year in the Baha'i Center, this changed a lot and the holy day was celebrated with devotional meetings and finally with dinner at the national center.

However, the celebration of Naw Ruz for children in the morning as usual. Meaning, the program for children will start at 9:00 a.m. with prayers and readings by children themselves. Then children will sing the "Naw Ruz Song" and other songs which they learn in their Baha'i children classes.

**Naw Ruz Song**  
**Naw Ruz is the time of the year,**  
**When our Hearts are filled with cheer,**  
**Children from both far and near,**  
**Wish each one a Happy New Year.**  
**So, we all unite and sing,**  
**Song of joy and love we bring,**  
**All together spread the word,**  
**Round the world it shall be heard.**

Afterwards, they will perform dramas, which they practiced during their children classes. Then children of all ages (0-14year) will be given gifts. Finally refreshments will be served by first cutting a cake by the children. Naw Ruz is the only time we can see a large number of Baha'i children coming to attend the holy day. Moreover, it is the time for parents to buy new cloths and shoes for children and themselves.

The fasting period is between 2 March -21 March and from sun rise to sunset. The fast begin early morning after breakfast depending on metrological forecast on average at 6:15 a.m. The type of food for the breakfast depends on the individuals interest from fitfit (Injera) bread with butter and tea to only water. On the other hand Baha'is break their fast again depending on metrological forecast on average at 6:45 p.m. They break usually by saying of one of the prayers for fasting and then they eat soup or drink tea followed by anything available in the house. Most of the time, fasting is a time of socialization where they invite each other, or others non-Baha'is friends and relatives and partake the food together.

## 4.7. Funerals

Just as the Baha'i writings address how a Baha'ist should live his/her life, so do they address how the Baha'is should approach death and the preparation for a Baha'i funeral and burial.

In the Baha'i Faith, death is regarded as the passage of the soul to another plane of existence, which is spiritual rather than physical. *“While the physical body of man decomposes after death, the soul or spirit is indestructible and goes on to another existence where the soul continues on its journey towards God.”*<sup>38</sup>

However, according to the Baha'i Faith the nature of this level of existence cannot be understood, except in the most elementary way as Baha'u'llah states *“The world beyond is as different from this world as this world is different from that of the child while still in the womb of its mother.”*<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless he regarded death as a *“messenger of joy”*<sup>40</sup> for the deceased one and nothing more.

In the Kitabi-Aqdas, Baha'u'llah says that it is “incumbent upon everyone”<sup>41</sup> to write a will. He even indicates some of its contents: A will

- Should be headed with the Greatest Name (Baha'u'llah, Allah'uAbha, or Ya Baha'u'l-Abha are all various forms of the Greatest Name);

- Should mention the believer's belief in the oneness of God as manifested by Baha'u'llah and set forth any good deeds which the deceased wishes to have performed in his/her name.<sup>42</sup>

Abdul-Baha says such good deeds will have an impact upon the soul in the next world and may even, *“be the cause of his pardon and forgiveness, and of his progress in the Divine Kingdom.”*<sup>43</sup>

It would be wise also to indicate in one's will one's wish to be buried according to the Baha'i laws of burial, which are unfamiliar to many. This can be written in the will in detail or a reference can be made to a publication, which can then kept in a safe place along with the will. There is no prohibition against donating one's body, or some organs, for scientific purposes, should one wish to do so, though one might wish to ensure that these be treated with respect and that the provision be observed that the remains not be buried more than one hour's journey from the place of death and that there be no cremation.<sup>44</sup>

From the information I get from the Baha'i institutions, each zone prepares its own format for the writing of will with the inclusion of the above points and then an individual Baha'i should fill two forms one to be preserved at the local spiritual assembly and the other to be preserved at the national spiritual assembly.

In relation to the location of burial place, in Baha'i law, the deceased is to be buried, regardless of the means of transport, no more than one hour's journey from the place of death. If the Baha'i community owns a Baha'i cemetery, this would be course be an ideal location for the burial. However, if Baha'i cemetery is not available, the deceased may be buried in any cemetery.<sup>45</sup> In Addis Ababa there is a Baha'i cemetery in the compound of St. Joseph Church at Nifasiilk. All the zones in Addis Ababa uses the cemetery and the National Property and Cemetery Committee has the responsibility in coordinating and taking care of the cemetery.

In a letter to the Baha'is of Brazil, the Universal House of Justice makes the following observations regarding Baha'i cemeteries:

At present time there are no definite regulations for preparing Baha'i cemeteries. However, in a Tablet of the Master's (Abdul-Baha) He emphasizes the need for the cemetery to have a beautiful outward appearance and states that the graves should not be joined together but that each one should have a flower bed around its four sides. He also indicates that it would be pleasing if a pool were located in the center of the cemetery and beautiful trees were planted around it as well as around the cemetery itself.<sup>46</sup>

Though the Baha'i cemetery in Addis Ababa does not have a pool in the center, it seem that it follows the instruction of the Universal house of Justice in its beauty and its trees around the edges of the cemetery.

Regarding the length of time between death and the burial, there is no specific rules in the Baha'i writings, though Baha'u'llah says that *"the sooner the burial taketh place, the more fitting and preferable."*<sup>47</sup> From the experience in the Baha'i community in Ethiopia, burial takes place within 24 hours of time of death.

The position of the body in the grave should be with its feet pointing toward the Qiblah or toward Acre and Baha'u'llah resting place: from Addis Ababa it is to the north east. In order to show that the deceased was a believer, a nine-pointed star with the word "Baha'i" is enclosed as an emblem on Baha'i gravestones.

Therefore, when a Baha'i dies she/he will be buried in a Baha'i cemetery. Usually, the local assembly in collaboration with the National Property and Cemetery Committee will facilitate the burial ceremony.

According to Baha'i law, there is just one ceremonial requirement at a Baha'i funeral, and that is the recitation of the Prayer for the Dead (see appendix) for any believer over the age of fifteen. This prayer should be recited by one believer only, at the graveside, with those present standing. It is not necessary to face the Qiblah when it is recited. Other prayer may be chosen as well and the service is usually very simple and dignified. Meaning, one of the prayers for departed will be said then a brief history of the deceased will be read, followed by the Prayer for the Dead.<sup>48</sup>

In the Prayer for the Dead, there is a specific provision that allows the changing of the gender in the recitation of the prayer, which is not allowed in other prayers, specifically, for example, if the deceased was a female when the prayer is read it should be "*Thy handmaiden and the daughter of Thy handmaiden*" instead of "*Thy servant and the son of Thy servant*"<sup>49</sup>

After the funeral, it is up to the individual's relative to mourn at their home. But some time memorial ceremony will be organized where the relative and friends of the deceased will be invited and say prayers together.

#### **4.8. The relationship with the other communities and institutions**

##### **4.8.1. Relationship with other religious communities**

Historically there is a strong relationship between the Baha'i community and other religious communities. Most of the Baha'is have come from either a Christian or Muslim background and traditional beliefs.

Although, both Christians and Baha'is believe in God and adhere to a high standard of conduct and morality, they do differ in their understanding of the concepts such as the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Resurrection of Christ, Atonement for Sin, and Heaven and Hell. For example, in Christianity, the central fact is the Resurrection of Christ. Baha'is, however, do not believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ but they believe that Jesus conquered death spiritually.

The same is true, between Muslims and the Baha'is: though both believe in God or Allah as the Muslims called it, on the Prophet Mohammed and on the Holy Koran, they differ in their understanding of concepts such as Mohammed the "Seal of the Prophet". Baha'is believe that it is true that Mohammed is the Last of the Prophets of the "Prophetic Cycle" or "Adamic Cycle" but He is not the last of the messengers of God. Baha'is also believe

that there is a big difference between a "Prophet" and a "Messenger". A Prophet is the one who foretells and predicts future happenings; on the other hand a "Messenger" is the one who brings new teaching for the people from God. For this reason, there was and still there is a considerable difference between the Baha'is and these religious groups and in some cases, there were public confrontation between them.

However, almost all Baha'is have immediate and extended relatives within these religious groups, and therefore it is common to see them together during holy days. Their Christian or Muslim relatives would call them to their holy days and the vice versa. Baha'i youth also participate in gift exchanges during Christmas. What really surprise me most was that seventy five percent of the Baha'i youth are getting married to a non-Baha'i either from Christian or Muslim background.

Few non-Baha'i parents allow their children participate in Baha'i children classes. Though, that is the case some parents do not allow their children or youngsters to go to the Baha'i center for fearing that their children might be converted and their do not want such thing to happen.

As I have said earlier, after 1969 and especially in the years between 1973- 1976, the majority who accepted the Baha'i Faith was of rural populations and many came from a background of traditional religious belief. However, since most of these Baha'is had a very little understanding of the Faith and they needed material assistance which they could not get it in the Baha'i community, most of them left the Faith and returned to their

previous traditional beliefs or converted to be followers of Jehovah Witness or Protestants.

Though that is the case, at present the Baha'i community of Ethiopia is engaged in two important interfaith gatherings. The first one is in the United Religions Initiative (URI). The United Religions Initiatives is a non-governmental organization which was originated in 1993 when the Arch-Bishop of California, Reverend William Swing invited all religions of the world to participate in the Praying Session during 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations in 1995. The initiative went further and discussions were conducted mainly on the role of religion in solving the problems facing the world. At last on 23 June 1996 a charter was signed by most of religious leaders of the world and formally accredited as the United Religions Initiatives.

In Ethiopia, the Initiative began its activities in 1998. At the beginning there were informal meetings by inviting religious communities of the country- the Baha'i community was among one of them. Later it included other local NGOs and associations such as Journalist Associations and Youth Associations. Finally, in 2000 the Initiative was legally incorporated as United Religions Initiative Ethiopia and its activities multiplied. The Initiative is directed by a managing board comprised of delegates from Orthodox Christian, Catholic, Baha'is, Muslims and Protestants. Since 2000 the Initiative conducted seminars and workshop on different issues by dividing its members into youth and adult groups.

The workshops and seminars are held every two or three months. The title for the workshop include: Respecting Diversity, Communication Skills and Peace Building, Cultivating Non-Violence Thinking, the Role of Religion in Reconciliation, Commenting Faith and Action through Cultural Reconciliation Method, and Positive Thinking and Peace Building. Titles for seminars include Inner and Outer Peace, Human Right and Peace Building, Gender and Peace Building, and HIV and Peace Building.

The other important activity in which the Baha'i community takes active role is in World Faith Development Dialogue (WFDD), an action-based dialogue between religious communities and the World Bank on the subject of poverty and development. The dialogue was initiated as a result of Lambeth palace meeting in February 1998 between the World Bank and the nine world religions and between themselves and other donor agencies, on the subject of poverty and development. The nine religions represented were the Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Taoists.<sup>50</sup>

There was agreement among the participants at Lambeth meeting that (a) Faiths have a critical role in Development processes, hitherto driven largely by developmental agencies working with governments, in improving governance, establishing sustainable food and nutrition security, delivering social services, culturally sensitive development, and fostering peace; and (b) the Dialogue should driven to ensure relevance and impact. The Lambeth conference was co-chaired by Mr. James D. Wolfensohn the president of the World Bank and Dr. George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>51</sup>

Ethiopia, Tanzania, India and Bangladesh were the first four countries chosen to initiate pilot activities at a national level; however, the specific issues focused on each country were different. The Dialogue started its activities in Ethiopia in 1999 at a meeting held at CRDA office in Addis Ababa. Its main focus has been on Food and Nutrition Security, though other areas of development were also discussed.<sup>52</sup>

The Dialogue agreed to support a consultant coordinator to facilitate a forum for dialogue among the Faith groups in Ethiopia. Through the coordination of the office, three regional workshops were organized. The main objectives of these workshops were: to open an opportunity to share experience of faith-based agencies in Relief, Rehabilitation and Development; to discuss technical issues concerning food security, HIV/AIDS, social service delivery and other; and to define mechanisms of networking and experience sharing among Faith-Based Organizations.<sup>53</sup>

After these workshops, a national workshop was conducted in July 2000 and the proceedings of this workshop were finalized as a landmark document. Important recommendations were especially in the transformation of World Faiths Development Dialogue/Ethiopia into that of Ethiopia Interfaith Forum for Development Dialogue and Action (EIFDDA). Afterwards a technical committee was elected to develop the establishing document (Vision, Mission Statement and Objective) of EIFDDA. In November 2002 at a meeting held in Ghion Hotel Addis Ababa, the EIFDDA officially formed as a non-governmental organization. The Baha'i community of Ethiopia participated in all these processes.<sup>54</sup>

One important relationship that the Baha'i community of Ethiopia made with other religions in the country was the presentation of a message from the Universal House of Justice in April 2002 to the leaders of these religions.<sup>55</sup> On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2002, the Universal House of Justice wrote a letter to the national spiritual assemblies in the world urging them to present a message called **"Message to the World's Religious Leaders, April 2002"** to religious leaders in their respective countries. The message urges the leaders of all religions to overcome fanaticism, to transcend claims to exclusivity or finality, and to undertake a wider interfaith dialogue (see appendix).<sup>56</sup>

Up on the receipt of the letter, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia presented the message to some eleven major religious leaders among them the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Muslims Office and Bishop of Catholics. Afterwards the national Assembly appointed a task force comprising of five members to see feasibility to disseminate the message at the grassroots level to local religious leaders and Medias. However, the task force did not do the tasks assigned to it.

Examples of the Head of State, government leaders and political representative to receive the message include: the Queen of United Kingdom, the Queen of Denmark, the King of Norway, the Governor-General of Jamaica, the Prime Minister of Norway, the Prime Minister of Mauritius, the Minister of Justice of the Democratic Republic of Congo and all members of the New Zealand Parliament.<sup>57</sup>

#### 4.8.2. Relationship with governmental organizations and the State of Ethiopia

In relation to its relationship with the governmental organizations, although Baha'is are not allowed to participate in any political activities such as partisan politics, that is siding one party and dejecting another, the Baha'i teachings explicitly say: "...*each and every one is required to show obedience, submission and loyalty to his own government...*," and "...*obedient to its laws...*"<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, the Baha'i community of Ethiopia has a good relationship with the governmental organizations and the state of Ethiopia. This relationship goes back to the early history of the Faith where in 1936 a copy of the book entitled "Baha'u'llah and the New Era" was presented to the late Emperor Haile Silassie I of Ethiopia, at Jerusalem by a Baha'i from Montreal, Canada, Mrs. Lorol Schopflocher. Afterwards, in 1969, when the late Hand of the Cause Amatu'l - Baha Ruhyyih Khanum, visited Ethiopia, she was able to meet Haile Sillassie I, his son the Crown Prince Asfaw Wossen, Princess Tenagne Worq, Prince Asrate Kassa and numerous governors and high officials of the time.

In 1986, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia presented a document prepared by the Universal House of Justice "*World Peace*" to the high government officials of the Derg regime (1974-1991).

One other contribution made by the Baha'i community of Ethiopia was the suggestion for the inclusion of more to the draft constitution of Ethiopia (1994). Delegates of the

National Assembly provided, the Constitution Commission, with a compiled document of suggestions, which they felt should be included in the country's constitution. The document contained social, cultural, religious, economic, and political issues which the Baha'is believe were essential, and as such must be given due consideration by the commission before the final draft was made. The document suggested, among others, that the government must narrow the gap between the affluent and the poverty stricken social group, basic education must be considered as the basic right and the importance of ensuring the independence of religions from the government.<sup>59</sup>

In order to facilitate its relations with governmental organizations and the state of Ethiopia the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia opened an External Affairs Office. The purposes of this office broadly are (I) to influence the process toward world peace and (ii) to defend the Baha'i Faith.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it is responsible to execute diplomatic and public information work. The diplomatic work coordinator is responsible for the affairs of the office *"in a nationwide campaign in order to influence the Federal and Regional Governments as well as social groups and local non-governmental organizations in the process towards world peace."*<sup>61</sup> Whereas, the Public Information officer is responsible for *"the public presentation of the Baha'i message, at the national and local levels as a significant global influence promoting the emergence of world peace."*<sup>62</sup>

#### 4.8.3. Relationship with non-governmental and international organizations

In relation to its relations with non-governmental organizations and international organizations, the Baha'i community of Ethiopia has a long history of relationship with these organizations.

Despite today's disputes between countries, religions and political establishments, the Baha'i Faith advocates the emergence of the unity of mankind. Believing that the United Nations represents a major effort in the unification of the world, Baha'is have supported its work in every way possible. Through its participation in conferences, congresses, and seminars of the United Nations, the Baha'i community of Ethiopia, make contributions such as suggestions, to those aims of the United Nations that are similar to the teachings of the Baha'i Faith such as the status of women and particularly their role in the achievement of world peace, racial; equality, religious tolerance, universal education, minority rights, human rights, the welfare of children and the family, the movement towards disarmament and the protection of the environment.<sup>63</sup> Through its External Affairs Office, the Baha'i community of Ethiopia has an office at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

Historically, the Baha'i community of Ethiopia participated in different events prepared by the United Nations. In 1958-1959, the Baha'i community of Ethiopia participated in the first sessions of the Economic Commission for Africa which was called by the United Nations Economic and Social Council for the purpose of consulting upon effective means

of extending economic aid to the countries and territories of Africa.<sup>64</sup> In December 1973, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Baha'i community of Ethiopia participated with the theme "*Human Rights are God-given Rights*".<sup>65</sup>

In 1998, on the occasion of the official opening of the new building of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and the conference that followed the Baha'i International Community was represented by the Baha'i community of Ethiopia and given seat as an observer.

## Chapter Five

### 5.1.Data Analysis

#### 5.1.1. Anthropological approaches to the Baha'i Community of Ethiopia

##### 5.1.1.1.Weber's Approach

According to Max Weber, typological and comparative understanding of religious action depends on the theoretical construction of the ideal type through thinking or empathic experiments. In the case of the Baha'i Faith, the Baha'i writings and related books will give idea about "what should be" of a Baha'i community life.

Objective understanding of religious action, that is the "what is" or the actual fact, on the other hand, involves not just empirical facts such as backgrounds of the subject of the social action, but also the subject meaning of social action. Therefore,

**Social action is not mechanical reaction of the law of material interests, but the dynamic of ideas and interest which give the actor the conscious or unconscious meaning of life and world...Weber holds the importance of religious ideas which cannot be reduced to the component of material interests (Marx) or to the social nexus and function (Durkheim).<sup>1</sup>**

Based on Weber's approach to religion, we can clearly see the Baha'i community of Ethiopia perform the "what is" the Baha'i Faith. The following diagram shows the situation clearly:

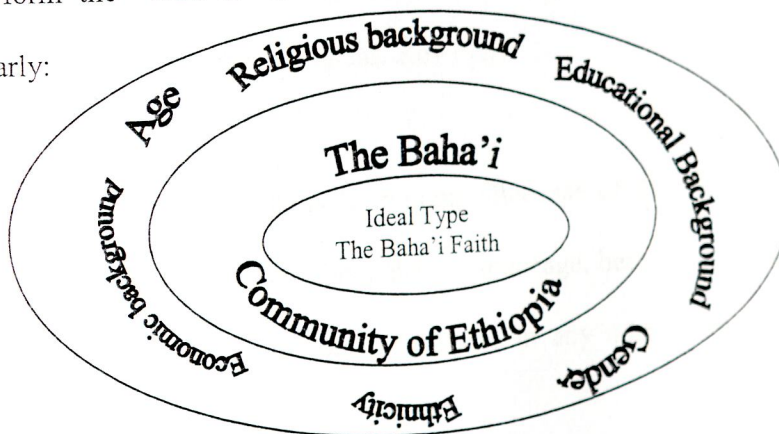


Fig. 18 Diagram to show the position of Baha'i community in Ethiopia

Because the Baha'is have different backgrounds their understandings of the Baha'i Faith and their implementations of its teachings, its principles, and its laws also differs accordingly. For example the Baha'i Faith advocates the equality of men and women. In the actual scene women are still doing most of the housework. Even if both the husband and the wife work in the office, women are obliged to do the housework after the office hours. Moreover, this principle is understood and practiced differently by different backgrounds. Age for instance is one background; usually but not always Baha'i youth and young adult Baha'is are more lineate and as much as possible attempt to practice this equality; on the other hand, adults although they believe on the importance of the equality of men and women, they are still practicing the usual way of dominating women especially at home; and therefore, women are very shy in expressing themselves.

This position of the women can be seen in most of the Baha'i meeting such as in study circles, at Nineteen Day Feasts, Holy Days celebration and on committee meetings. Women for some reason do not contribute ideas and suggestions at Nineteen Day Feasts. Most of the time women are the ones who organize and prepare refreshments, food and drinks during holy days and other occasions. However,

The other background for the Baha'is is ethnicity. Because of their ethnic background some Baha'is are obliged to marry without Baha'i marriage, because of this their voting rights –the right to vote, give fund and participate in any administrative part of the Nineteen Day Feast – were taken.

However, all Baha'is agree that the implementation of the principles, laws and teachings of the Baha'i Faith is just like a process and will take a lifetime. What is important is to be patient with one another and learn from each other how to carry out its principles according to its teachings.

#### **5.1.1.2. Historical and Developmental Approach –Comparative study**

In the mid- nineteenth century, German scholar Friedrich Max Muller, who has been called the father of comparative religion, became the most prominent advocate of historical analysis in the study of religion. Beginning the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the scriptures of many non-Western traditions has been translated and published, offering a view of faiths that previously had been inaccessible. In addition, archaeological excavations had revealed new features – including some scriptural texts – of previously obscure religion, such as those of the ancient Middle East. Presented with this mass of information, Muller undertook a critical, historically based investigation of world religious traditions. Although his approach emphasized the view that all traditions were the product of historical development, Muller believed comparative study would demonstrate that every religion possessed some measure of truth.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, scholars were making religion an object of systematic inquiry. Muller's comparative approach was adopted in many places, and as a result the common features of world religions (such as gods, prayer, priesthood, and creation myths) were the subjects of sustained scholarly investigation. In addition, field

anthropologists had begun to compile firsthand accounts of the religion of peoples who previously had been dismissed as savages. The study of tribal religions contributed a great deal to the general analysis of the role of religion in human societies.<sup>3</sup>

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars had begun to pose questions about the origin and development of religious ideas. Scholars questioned how religion began and the stage of its evolution. Many other important questions about the nature of religion were addressed during this period: Can religion be divided into so-called primitive and higher types? Is religion a product of psychological needs and projections? Is it of political and social control?<sup>4</sup>

More importantly, in the late twentieth century and beginning of the twenty first century, religion is understood in its own terms, as a distinctive space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other but it can be studied comparatively.<sup>5</sup> The reason behind this according to Reynolds and Tanner "*Against expectation, religion has... become a topic of every day conversation and concern*"<sup>6</sup> Therefore, they underline the importance of comparative study of religious phenomena. Based on this present approach let us see the Baha'i community of Ethiopia.

The Baha'i community of Ethiopia in the 1930's – the 1950's comprised mostly of foreigners and few Ethiopians who have a good knowledge of Arabic language. In those days when people wanted to accept the Faith they used to write a petition to Shoghi Effendi and in response Shoghi Effendi would write them letters accepting their wish.

There were no organized deepening classes. Activities and meeting were held at the home of Mr. and Mrs Sabri Elias and there was no Baha'i Center.

This is no exception with other religious groups in the country. During those years (1930s -1950s) the others religious groups in the country especially members of those of the minority group such as Protestants and Adventist groups were mostly foreigners and activities were not that such much organized.

In the Ten Year Crusade (1953-1963) of the Baha'i community, few pioneers from Iran, Egypt and the United States arrived and the activities of the Baha'i community changed. Because of the efforts made by the pioneers a great number of Youth who were students at Civil Aviation School accepted the Faith. I would say this is a landmark for the present Baha'i community of Ethiopia. Most of these students are now very active members of the community. Because of the pioneers' efforts these students had taken deepening classes to deepen themselves about the Faith and went with these pioneers and started teaching of the Faith outside of Addis.

Though that is the case, other contributions were also there for the progress of the Community in those days. According to Donham in his book Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution, he says that in those time people were asking and debating on different world issues and religion was one of the issues which was debated a lot.<sup>7</sup> And that I think contribute a lot for these civil aviation students.

Religion and politics were the 'talk of the town' especially among the learned.

Coming to the Baha'i community of Ethiopia in those years, the community then consisted of the families of pioneers and these bachelor students of Civil Aviation. These students were mostly city dwellers and had the background of Christianity (Orthodox) and rarely Muslims. These students also were mostly from Amhara, Oromo, Tigray, and Gurage background. The children and women were the families of the pioneers with the exception of the children of Kegn Gila. The pioneers mostly did Baha'i administrative activities

However, in the middle of the 1960's, this situation changed a lot in that most of the pioneers left the country and the bachelors got married and families were formed. The Ethiopian started to fully participate administrative duties of the Faith. This period is also significant in that many Baha'i writings were translated and published in Amharic, Uremia, Tigrinya and Sideman languages.

Moreover, the Ethiopian Baha'is conducted a lot of teaching activities, outside of Addis, which resulted in 1969 and particularly in 1973-1976 the mass conversion areas of Sidamo and its surrounding areas.

The significance of the mass conversion areas was that earlier most of the Baha'i were city dwellers, literate, a Christian or Muslim background and their economic status more of middle class group. However the Baha'is in the mass conversion areas were rural

dweller, mostly illiterate, from traditional religious beliefs and their economic status was of low economic group. These people were accepting the Faith in large number at the same time.

This same situation was the fate of the Maale people of southern Ethiopia. These people believed in traditional beliefs. However, when the Evangelical missionaries came to preach them most of them accepted the faith and left their previous beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

However, during the derg regime, the activities in the mass conversion areas were drastically reduced to the extent that most of the activities of the community were in and around Addis Ababa.

After the derg regime, there were teaching campaigns in the Oromia region in and around Woyisso (some 110 km from Addis Ababa) where 300-500 hundred people accepted the Faith.

The same hold true with other minority religious movements in the country. During the Durg regime, activities were very slow. However after the drug regime activities were so much that especially in the southern and Oromiya region a lot of religious preaching resulted in many accepting these new religions.

One important development that I have seen while doing my fieldwork was the makeup of youth. Youth have a great tendency of going away from their families are studying

aboard. I can say that there is no family, who has youth and did not send their children aboard. This may be typical of the life style in Addis Ababa. But in the Baha'i community it is exaggerated. For this reason that I believe that the Ethiopian and Eritrean Baha'is Youth have annual gathering in the United States or Canada every year.



Fig 19 the first Ethio-Eritrean Baha'is conference in 1997 held in Washington D.C. U.S.A

Nowadays, the community is more developed in a way that we can see a number of youth, adults (male and female), and children in a balanced way; more than seven ethnic groups were represented; most are literate; and its administrative institutions and the community as a whole is considered by the Universal House of Justice as one of the strongest community of the Baha'i world.

In relation to its outside relationship with other institutions, the Baha'i community of Ethiopia has a very minimal participation comparing with other religious communities. This might be attributed to its population size and the community gives more attention to its activities within the community than to the outside. It is only recently that well organized initiatives were begun to work with other outside of the community.

### **5.1.2. The impact of the Baha'i community in Ethiopia**

It is always difficult to assess the impact of a particular movement or religion on any society or culture. Ideas may be borrowed from the religion by the society, but sometimes the borrowing goes from society to the religion instead, and sometimes an idea arises almost simultaneously in both.

Though it has steadily grown over the last seventy years, the Ethiopian Baha'i community remains very small, perhaps zero point zero one nine percent ( $\approx 10,000$  Baha'is live in Ethiopia) of the total population in the country. There are few examples of small religious movements having noticeable impact in Ethiopia: Jehovah Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists are good examples. But for a small religion such as the Baha'i Faith to produce a large impact on the Ethiopian scene, three conditions usually must be fulfilled. First, the religion must advocate ideas – usually a few simple ones—that resonate strongly with the exiting trends in the country. Second, the religion must be able to advocate those ideas in a language that is appropriate and effective in the society

outside it. Third, the religion must have articulate spokespersons who are also leading intellectual or literary figures in the country.

The Baha'i community of Ethiopia has rarely been able to fulfill these three requirements for influence. The Baha'i teachings are usually expressed in a Baha'i terminologies e.g. clusters, pioneering, obligatory prayers etc. that are difficult to translate into any Ethiopian languages. Further, the ideas are part of a much larger complex of Baha'i teachings and cannot be separated from them. For example the concept of study circles is very difficult to understand for those who are outside of the Baha'i community. Another example is the application of the principle of interethnic and inter-racial unity to a society is difficult and has been of limited influence, because the tool the others use outside of the Baha'i community is through partisan political activity and the Baha'i writings prohibit Baha'is from such political activity. Furthermore, the Baha'i conceptions of world unity and of inter-religious relations are dominated by the belief that the new world order envisioned by the Baha'i writings can occur only if the world accepts Baha'u'llah as its Lord. Therefore, only few prominent individuals have been attracted to the Baha'i Faith.

In spite of these limitations, the Baha'i Faith has had some impact in Ethiopia. Like other religions, in the country, the Baha'i Faith also inculcates in its followers the highest standards of individual and collective morality, which I think is very relevant if we want to talk about development and progress in the country, individually, at institutional level and at community level.

## CONCLUSION

As a way of concluding, the present work it is an ethnographic as well as historical study of the Baha'i Community of Ethiopia in a country where the dominant religions are Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Christianity, Islam and traditional beliefs. The Baha'i community of Ethiopia, being a stranger in the familiar, is one of the least studied religious communities in the country.

Though the community has a steady growth over the last seventy years, its ups and downs are very similar with other religious movements in the country. Moreover, according to Ioan M. Lewis, who had done a lot of research about holy men, commented that in order a religious community to grow faster with an increase in the number, the community must have holy men or priest-like figures. He says that local saints generally, indeed, become more important as sources of blessing and benediction than one's own lineage ancestors this contributed a lot to increase the number of the community.<sup>9</sup> Since in the Baha'i community, there are no one, who could be considered as holy men (saints) and priest-like figures, the community remains very small and its impact in the country is very minimal.

Moreover, as Weber put it, believing and practicing religious ideas and concepts are two different things; this is what I have observed in the Baha'i community of Ethiopia. Since Baha'is have come from different backgrounds, such as age, ethnic, religious, economic, social and educational background their understanding of the Baha'i Faith and their

implementations of its teachings, its principles, and its laws also differs accordingly. Although that is the case, the interesting thing is that you can observe that they are united and work hand in hand in the accomplishment of certain plans of their Faith.

In spite of these limitations, the Baha'i community of Ethiopia instills in its followers the highest standards of individual and collective morality, one of the relevant instruments for effective development program.

## NOTES

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<sup>4</sup>Morris, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup>Doug Padgett, “Anthropology of Religion”, Internet, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Malory Nye, “Religion is Religioning? Anthropology and the Cultural Study of Religion” in Scottish Journal of Religious Studies 20 (2), (University of Stirling), p 199.

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<sup>11</sup>Nye, p.196.

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<sup>27</sup> Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Office of Population Housing Census Commission Central Statistical Authority, June 1998, The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia Results at Country Level Vol. I (Addis Ababa: Central Statistical Authority), p. 29.

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<sup>29</sup> Woubshet, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Two

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- <sup>2</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid.
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- <sup>5</sup>W. Momen, pp. 30, 40, 63, 133.
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- <sup>8</sup>Watch Tower Bible Society of New York, 1990, Mankind's Search For God, (New York: International Bible Students Association), 304.
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- <sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 44.
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<sup>41</sup>Baha'i International Community, p. 46.

<sup>42</sup>The Baha'i World, 2000-2001, p. 277.

<sup>43</sup>Baha'i International Community, p. 46.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> "A Letter from the Baha'ispiritual Assembly of Haifa, December 1932", p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> "A Letter from the Baha'ispiritual Assembly of Haifa, May 1933", p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> "A Letter from the Baha'ispiritual Assembly of Haifa, December, 1934", p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The Baha'i World, 1934-1936, Vol. VI, 1937, (Illinois: Baha'i Publishing Trust,), p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Ethiopia", an article for Baha'i Encyclopedia, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Dagmawit Eshetu, "The History of the Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia", Senior Essay, Addis Ababa, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 32

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> W. Momen, pp 50 and 90.

- <sup>17</sup>Baha'i News, (ed.), August 1952, A Magazine published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, p. 8.
- <sup>18</sup>Dagmawit, pp. 33-35.
- <sup>19</sup>W. Momen, p. 180.
- <sup>20</sup>Dagmawit, p. 36.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 37.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-38.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 39.
- <sup>24</sup>The Baha'i World, 1973-1976, Vol. XVI, 1970, (Illinois: Baha'i Publishing Trust), p. 144.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup>“Ethiopia”, p. 4.
- <sup>27</sup>Ethiopian Herald, English Daily, 14, 19, 23, 24, and 28 October 1969.
- <sup>28</sup>“Ethiopia”, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>29</sup>The Baha'i World, 1954-1963, Vol. XIII, 1970, (Illinois: Baha'i Publishing Trust), p. 287.
- <sup>30</sup>The Baha'i World, 1973-1976, pp. 187.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup>The Baha'i World, 1995-1996, 1997, (Haifa: Baha'i World Center), pp. 50-51.
- <sup>33</sup>Dagmawit, p. 48.
- <sup>34</sup>W. Momen, p. 181.
- <sup>35</sup>National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia, 2001, “Five Year Plan 2001-2006”, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp. 2-3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 162.

<sup>40</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> The Baha'i World, 2000-2001, p. 191.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pp. 191-192.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> "A Letter of the Universal House of Justice to Continental Board of Counselors", 9 January, 2001, pp. 1-2.

<sup>46</sup> Dagmawit, p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> "Ethiopia", p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> "A Letter of the Continental Board of Counselors for Africa, 1968".

<sup>49</sup> "A Letter of the Continental Board of Counselors for Africa, 1973".

<sup>50</sup> Annual Report- Baha'i Year 140, April 1984, a Report prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> "Ethiopia", p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Baha'i News, October 1959, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> "Ethiopia", p. 3 and "A Time to Remember: 50, Baha'i Faith in Ethiopia, 1033-1983", an Article prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Dagmawit, pp 54-55.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. pp. 55-56.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. pp. 56-57.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 57.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. pp. 57-57.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 59.

<sup>63</sup> Annual Report-Baha'i Year 153, April 1996, p. 16.

<sup>64</sup> "Sabri Development Institute- An Introduction", p.1

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. pp. 2-6.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. pp. 6-10.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>1</sup>Baha'u'llah, The Kitabi-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, 1993, (Australia:

Universal House of Justice), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Baha'u'llah cited in The Importance of Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude, Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Oakham: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980, p. 3

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>W. Momen, pp. 183-184.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 183-184.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>8</sup> Baha'u'llah, The Kitabi Aqdas, pp. 24-25 and 146.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 122 and 147.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>11</sup>W. Momen, p. 179.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Baha'u'llah, The Kitabi Aqdas, p. 149.

<sup>14</sup> Baha'i Prayers, 1973, (Illinois: Baha'i Publishing Trust), p. 187.

<sup>15</sup> W. Momen, p. 145.

<sup>16</sup>Khalil A. Khavari, 1983, "Marriage and the Nuclear Family: A Baha'i Perspective", The Baha'istudies Notebook 3: 1-2, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-70.

<sup>20</sup>Baha'u'llah, The Kitabi-Aqdas, p. 105.

<sup>21</sup> W. Momen, p. 145.

<sup>22</sup>Baha'u'llah, The Kitabi-Aqdas, p. 150.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 150-151.

<sup>24</sup>W. Momen, p. 145.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Baha'i Prayers, p. 107.

<sup>27</sup>W. Momen, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>30</sup>“Encyclopedia Article: The Nineteen Day Feast” by John Walbridge, Internet,

p. 1.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>W. Momen, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>39</sup>Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, LXXX.

<sup>40</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, 1954, The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah, (Illinois: Baha'i

Publishing Trust), no. 32.

<sup>41</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, Baha'u'llah, The Kitabi Aqdas, p. 224.

<sup>42</sup>Mary K. Radpour, 1998, "Some Practical Notes on Preparation for Baha'i Funerals and Burials", Internet, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> "Ethiopian Interfaith Forum for Development and Action Program Frame Work and Work Plan" Draft, January 2001, p. 2

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> "Nations Large and Small Receive Unity Message" Planet Baha'i, Internet, p.

1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>58</sup> Abdul-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdul-Baha, p. 319.

<sup>59</sup> The Ethiopian Herald, 5 May 1994, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> "General Policy Guidelines For the Office of External Affairs, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Ethiopia", 3 December 2001, p. 2

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Baha'i News, (April 1959), p. 3

<sup>65</sup> The Ethiopian Herald, 9 December, 1973, p. 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Abukuma, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> "Religion" in Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002, Microsoft Corporation, (Internet) p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Asad, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Reynolds and Tanner, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Donald L. Donham, 1999, Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution, (Berkeley: University of California Press).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ioan M. Lewis, ed. 1966, Saints and Somalis: Popular Islam in a Clan-Based Society, (London: Oxford University Press).

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## Appendix One

### The Marriage Tablet

The bond that unites heart most perfectly is loyalty. True lovers once united must show forth the utmost faithfulness one to another. You must dedicate your knowledge, your talents, your fortunes, your titles, your bodies and your spirits to God, to Baha'u'llah and to each other. Let your hearts be spacious, as spacious as the universe of God!

Allow no trace of jealousy to creep between you, for jealousy, like unto poison, vitiates the very essence of love. Let not the ephemeral incidents and accidents of this changeful life cause a rift between you. When differences present themselves, take counsel together in secret, lest others magnify a speck into a mountain. Harbor not in your hearts any grievance, but rather explain its nature to each other with such frankness and understanding that it will disappear, leaving no remembrance. Choose fellowship and amity and turn away from jealousy and hypocrisy.

Your thoughts must be lofty, your ideals luminous, your minds spiritual, so that your souls may become a dawning-place for the Sun of Reality. Let your hearts be like unto two pure mirrors reflecting the stars of the heaven of love and beauty.

Together make mention of noble aspirations and heavenly concepts. Let there be no secrets one from another. Make your home a haven of rest and peace. Be hospitable, and let the doors of your house be open to the faces of friends and strangers. Welcome every guest with grace and let each feel that it is own home.

No mortal can conceive the union and harmony which God has designed for man and wife. Nourish continuously the tree of your union with love and affection, so that it will remain ever green and verdant throughout all seasons and bring forth luscious fruits for the healing of the nations.

O beloved of God, may your home be a vision of paradise of Abha, so that whosoever enters there may feel essence of purity and harmony, and cry out from the heart: Here is the home of love! Here is the palace of love! Here is the nest of love! Here is the garden of love!

Be like two sweet-singing birds perched upon the highest branches of the tree of life, filing the air with songs of love and rapture.

Lay the foundation of your affection in the very center of your spiritual being, at the very heart of your consciousness, and let it not be shaken by adverse winds.

And, when God gives you sweet and lovely children, consecrate yourselves to their instruction and guidance, so that they may become imperishable flowers of the divine rose-garden, nightingales of the ideal paradise, servants of the world of humanity, and fruit of the tree of your life.

Live in such harmony that others may take your lives for an example and may say one to another: Look how they live like doves in one nest, imperfect love, affinity and union. It is as though God had kneaded the very essence of their beings for the love of one another.

Attain the ideal love that God has destined for you, so that you may become partakers of eternal life forthwith. Quaff deeply from the fountain of truth, and dwell all the days of your life in the paradise of glory, gathering immortal flowers from the garden of divine mysteries.

Be to each other as heavenly lovers and divine beloved ones dwelling in a paradise of love. Build your nest on the leafy branches of the tree of love. Sail upon the shoreless sea of love. Walk in the eternal rose-garden of love. Bathe in the shining rays of the sun of love. Be firm and steadfast in the path of love. Perfume your nostrils with the fragrances from the flowers of love. Attune your ears to the soul-entrancing melodies of love. Let your aims be as generous as the banquet of love, and your words as stirring of white pearls from the ocean of love. Drink deeply of the elixir of love, so that you may live continually in the reality of Divine Love.

## Appendix Two

### Message to the Worlds' Religious Leaders

April 2002

#### TO THE WORLD'S RELIGIOUS LEADERS

The enduring legacy of the twentieth century is that it compelled the peoples of the world to begin seeing themselves as the members of a single human race, and the earth as that race's common homeland. Despite the continuing conflict and violence that darken the horizon, prejudices that once seemed inherent in the nature of the human species are everywhere giving way. Down with them come barriers that long divided the family of man into a Babel of incoherent identities of cultural, ethnic or national origin. That so fundamental a change could occur in so brief a period-virtually overnight in the perspective of historical time, suggests the magnitude of the possibilities for the future.

Tragically, organized religion, whose very reason for being entails service to the cause of brotherhood and peace, behaves all too frequently as one of the most formidable obstacles in the path; to cite a particular painful fact, it has long lent its credibility to fanaticism. We feel a responsibility, as the governing council of one of the world religions, to urge earnest consideration of the challenge this poses for religious leadership. Both the issue and the circumstances to which it gives rise require that we

Speak frankly. We trust that common service to the Divine will ensure that what we say will be received in the same spirit of goodwill as it is put forward.

The issue comes sharply into focus when one considers what has been achieved elsewhere. In the past, apart from isolated exceptions, women were regarded as an inferior breed, their nature hedged about by superstitions, denied the opportunity to express the potentialities of the human spirit and relegated to the role of serving the needs of men. Clearly, there are many societies where such conditions persist and are even fanatically defended. At the level of global discourse, however, the concept of the equality of the sexes has, for all practical purposes, now assumed the force of universally accepted principle. It enjoys similar authority in most of the academic community and information media. So basic has been the revisioning that exponents of male supremacy must look for support on the margins of responsible opinion.

The beleaguered battalions of nationalism face a similar fate. With each passing crisis in world affairs, it becomes easier for the citizen to distinguish between a love of country that enriches one's life, and submission to inflammatory rhetoric designed to provoke hatred and fear of others. Even where it is expedient to participate in the familiar nationalistic rites, public response is as often marked by feelings of awkwardness as it is by the strong convictions and ready enthusiasm of earlier times. The effect has been reinforced by the restructuring steadily taking place in the international order. Whatever the shortcomings of the United Nations system in its present form, and however

handicapped its ability to take collective military action against aggression, no one can mistake the fact that the fetish of absolute national sovereignty is on its way to extinction.

Racial and ethnic prejudices have been subjected to equally summary treatment by historical processes that have little patience left for such pretensions. Here, rejection of the past has been especially decisive. Racism is now tainted by its association with the horrors of the twentieth century to the degree that it has taken on something of the character of a spiritual disease. While surviving as a social attitude in many parts of the world and as a blight on the lives of a significant segment of humankind racial prejudice has become so universally condemned in principle that no body of people can any longer safely allow themselves to be identified with it.

It is not that a dark past has been erased and a new world of light has suddenly been born. Vast numbers of people continue to endure the effects of ingrained prejudices of ethnicity, gender, nation, caste and class. All the evidence indicates that such injustices will long persist as the institutions and standards that humanity is devising only slowly become empowered to construct a new order of relationships and to bring relief to the oppressed. The point, rather, is that a threshold has been crossed from which there is no credible possibility of return. Fundamental principles have been identified, articulated, accorded broad publicity and are becoming progressively incarnated in institutions capable of imposing them on public behaviour. There is no doubt that, however protracted and painful the struggle, the outcome will be to revolutionize relationships among all peoples, at the grassroots level.

As the twentieth century opened, the prejudice that seemed more likely than any other to succumb to the forces of change was that of religion. In the West, scientific advances had already dealt rudely with some of the central pillars of sectarian exclusivity. In the context of the transformation taking place in the human race's conception of itself, the most promising new religious development seemed to be the interfaith movement. In 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition surprised even its ambitious organizers by giving birth to the famed "Parliament of Religions", a vision of spiritual and moral consensus that captured the popular imagination on all continents and managed to eclipse even the scientific, technological and commercial wonders that the Exposition celebrated.

Briefly, it appeared that ancient walls had fallen. For influential thinkers in the field of religion, the gathering stood unique, "unprecedented in the history of the world". The Parliament had, its distinguished principal organizer said, "emancipated the world from bigotry". An imaginative leadership, it was confidently predicted, would seize the opportunity and awaken in the earth's long-divided religious communities a spirit of brotherhood that could provide the needed moral underpinnings for the new world of prosperity and progress. Thus encouraged, interfaith movements of every kind took root and flourished. A vast literature, available in many languages, introduced an ever wider public, believers and non-believers alike, to the teachings of all the major faiths, an interest picked up in due course by radio, television, film and eventually the Internet. Institutions of higher learning launched degree programmes in the study of comparative religion. By the time the century ended, interfaith worship services, unthinkable only a few decades earlier, were becoming commonplace.

Alas, it is clear that these initiatives lack both intellectual coherence and spiritual commitment. In contrast to the processes of unification that are transforming the rest of humanity's social relationships, the suggestion that all of the world's great religions are equally valid in nature and origin is stubbornly resisted by entrenched patterns of sectarian thought. The progress of racial integration is a development that is not merely an expression of sentimentality or strategy but arises from the recognition that the earth's peoples constitute a single species whose many variations do not themselves confer any advantage or impose any handicap on individual members of the race. The emancipation

of women, likewise, has entailed the willingness of both society's institutions and popular opinion to acknowledge that there are no acceptable grounds -biological, social or moral- to justify denying women full equality with men, and girls equal educational opportunities with boys. Nor does appreciation of the contributions that some nations are making to the shaping of an evolving global civilization support the inherited illusion that other nations have little or nothing to bring to the effort.

So fundamental a reorientation religious leadership appears, for the most part, unable to undertake. Other segments of society embrace the implications of the oneness of humankind, not only as the inevitable next step in the advancement of civilization, but as the fulfilment of lesser identities of every kind that our race brings to this critical moment in our collective history. Yet, the greater part of organized religion stands paralyzed at the threshold of the future, gripped in those very dogmas and claims of privileged access to truth that have been responsible for creating some of the most bitter conflicts dividing the earth's inhabitants.

The consequences, in terms of human well-being, have been ruinous. It is surely unnecessary to cite in detail the horrors being visited upon hapless populations today by outbursts of fanaticism that shame the name of religion. Nor is the phenomenon a recent one. To take only one of many examples, Europe's sixteenth century wars of religion cost that continent the lives of some thirty percent of its entire population. One must wonder what has been the longer term harvest of the seeds planted in popular consciousness by the blind forces of sectarian dogmatism that inspired such conflicts.

To this accounting must be added a betrayal of the life of the mind which, more than any other factor, has robbed religion of the capacity it inherently possesses to play a decisive role in the shaping of world affairs. Locked into preoccupation with agendas that disperse and vitiate human energies, religious institutions have too often been the chief

agents in discouraging exploration of reality and the exercise of those intellectual faculties that distinguish humankind. Denunciations of materialism or terrorism are of no real assistance in coping with the contemporary moral crisis if they do not begin by addressing candidly the failure of responsibility that has left believing masses exposed and vulnerable to these influences.

Such reflections, however painful, are less an indictment of organized religion than a reminder of the unique power it represents. Religion, as we are all aware, reaches to the roots of motivation. When it has been faithful to the spirit and example of the transcendent Figures who gave the world its great belief systems, it has awakened in whole populations capacities to love, to forgive, to create, to dare greatly, to overcome prejudice, to sacrifice for the common good and to discipline the impulses of animal instinct. Unquestionably, the seminal force in the civilizing of human nature has been the influence of the succession of these Manifestations of the Divine that extends back to the dawn of recorded history.

This same force, that operated with such effect in ages past, remains an inextinguishable feature of human consciousness. Against all odds, and with little in the way of meaningful encouragement, it continues to sustain the struggle for survival of uncounted millions, and to raise up in all lands heroes and saints whose lives are the most persuasive vindication of the principles contained in the scriptures of their respective faiths. As the course of civilization demonstrates, religion is also capable of profoundly influencing the structure of social relationships. Indeed, it would be difficult to think of any fundamental advance in civilization that did not derive its moral thrust from this perennial source. Is it conceivable, then, that passage to the culminating stage in the millennia-long process of the organization of the planet can be accomplished in a spiritual vacuum? If the perverse ideologies let loose on our world during the century just past contributed nothing else, they demonstrated conclusively that the need cannot be met by alternatives that lie within the power of human invention.

The implications for today are summed up by Bah'u'llah in words written over a century ago and widely disseminated in the intervening decades:

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you. Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you.

Such an appeal does not call for abandonment of faith in the fundamental verities of any of the world's great belief systems. Far otherwise. Faith has its own imperative and is its own justification. What others believe 'or do not believe' cannot be the authority in any individual conscience worthy of the name. What the above words do unequivocally urge is renunciation of all those claims to exclusivity or finality that, in winding their roots around the life of the spirit, have been the greatest single factor in suffocating impulses to unity and in promoting hatred and violence.

It is to this historic challenge that we believe leaders of religion must respond if religious leadership is to have meaning in the global society emerging from the transformative experiences of the twentieth century. It is evident that growing numbers of people are coming to realize that the truth underlying all religions is in its essence one. This recognition arises not through a resolution of theological disputes, but as an intuitive awareness born from the ever widening experience of others and from a dawning acceptance of the oneness of the human family itself. Out of the welter of religious doctrines, rituals and legal codes inherited from vanished worlds, there is emerging a sense that spiritual life, like the oneness manifest in diverse nationalities, races and cultures, constitutes one unbounded reality equally accessible

to everyone. In order for this diffuse and still tentative perception to consolidate itself and contribute effectively to the building of a peaceful world, it must have the wholehearted confirmation of those to whom, even at this late hour, masses of the earth's population look for guidance.

There are certainly wide differences among the world's major religious traditions with respect to social ordinances and forms of worship. Given the thousands of years during which successive revelations of the Divine have addressed the changing needs of a constantly evolving civilization, it could hardly be otherwise. Indeed, an inherent feature of the scriptures of most of the major faiths would appear to be the expression, in some form or other, of the principle of religion's evolutionary nature. What cannot be morally justified is the manipulation of cultural legacies that were intended to enrich spiritual experience, as a means to arouse prejudice and alienation. The primary task of the soul will always be to investigate reality, to live in accordance with the truths of which it becomes persuaded and to accord full respect to the efforts of others to do the same.

It may be objected that, if all the great religions are to be recognized as equally Divine in origin, the effect will be to encourage, or at least to facilitate, the conversion of numbers of people from one religion to another. Whether or not this is true, it is surely of peripheral importance when set against the opportunity that history has at last opened to those who are conscious of a world that transcends this terrestrial one, and against the responsibility that this awareness imposes. Each of the great faiths can adduce impressive and credible testimony to its efficacy in nurturing moral character. Similarly, no one could convincingly argue that doctrines attached to one particular belief system have been either more or less prolific in generating bigotry and superstition than those attached to any other. In an integrating world, it is natural that patterns of response and association will undergo a continuous process of shifting, and the role of institutions, of whatever kind, is surely to consider how these developments can be managed in a way that promotes unity. The guarantee that the outcome will ultimately be sound

“spiritually, morally and socially” lies in the abiding faith of the unconsulted masses of the earth’s inhabitants that the universe is ruled not by human caprice, but by a loving and unfailing Providence.

Together with the crumbling of barriers separating peoples, our age is witnessing the dissolution of the once insuperable wall that the past assumed would forever separate the life of Heaven from the life of Earth. The scriptures of all religions have always taught the believer to see in service to others not only a moral duty, but an avenue for the soul’s own approach to God. Today, the progressive restructuring of society gives this familiar teaching new dimensions of meaning. As the age-old promise of a world animated by principles of justice slowly takes on the character of a realistic goal, meeting the needs of the soul and those of society will increasingly be seen as reciprocal aspects of a mature spiritual life.

If religious leadership is to rise to the challenge that this latter perception represents, such response must begin by acknowledging that religion and science are the two indispensable knowledge systems through which the potentialities of consciousness develop. Far from being in conflict with one another, these fundamental modes of the mind’s exploration of reality are mutually dependent and have been most productive in those rare but happy periods of history when their complementary nature has been recognized and they have been able to work together. The insights and skills generated by scientific advance will have always to look to the guidance of spiritual and moral commitment to ensure their appropriate application; religious convictions, no matter how

cherished they may be, must submit, willingly and gratefully, to impartial testing by scientific methods.

We come finally to an issue that we approach with some diffidence as it touches most directly on conscience. Among the many temptations the world offers, the test that has, not surprisingly, preoccupied religious leaders is that of exercising power in matters of belief. No one who has dedicated long years to earnest meditation and study of the scriptures of one or another of the great religions requires any further reminder of the oft-repeated axiom regarding the potentiality of power to corrupt and to do so increasingly as such power grows. The unheralded inner victories won in this respect by unnumbered clerics all down the ages have no doubt been one of the chief sources of organized religion's creative strength and must rank as one of its highest distinctions. To the same degree, surrender to the lure of worldly power and advantage, on the part of other religious leaders, has cultivated a fertile breeding ground for cynicism, corruption and despair among all who observe it. The implications for the ability of religious leadership to fulfil its social responsibility at this point in history need no elaboration.

Because it is concerned with the ennobling of character and the harmonizing of relationships, religion has served throughout history as the ultimate authority in giving meaning to life. In every age, it has cultivated the good, reprobated the wrong and held up, to the gaze of all those willing to see, a vision of potentialities as yet unrealized. From its counsels the rational soul has derived encouragement in overcoming limits imposed by the world and in fulfilling itself. As the name implies, religion has simultaneously been

the chief force binding diverse peoples together in ever larger and more complex societies through which the individual capacities thus released can find expression. The great advantage of the present age is the perspective that makes it possible for the entire human race to see this civilizing process as a single phenomenon, the ever-recurring encounters of our world with the world of God.

Inspired by this perspective, the Baha'i community has been a vigorous promoter of interfaith activities from the time of their inception. Apart from cherished associations that these activities create, Baha'is see in the struggle of diverse religions to draw closer together a response to the Divine Will for a human race that is entering on its collective maturity. The members of our community will continue to assist in every way we can. We owe it to our partners in this common effort, however, to state clearly our conviction that interfaith discourse, if it is to contribute meaningfully to healing the ills that afflict a desperate humanity, must now address honestly and without further evasion the implications of the over-arching truth that called the movement into being: that God is one and that, beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one.

With every day that passes, danger grows that the rising fires of religious prejudice will ignite a worldwide conflagration the consequences of which are unthinkable. Such a danger civil government, unaided, cannot overcome. Nor should we delude ourselves that appeals for mutual tolerance can alone hope to extinguish animosities that claim to possess Divine sanction. The crisis calls on religious leadership for a break with the past

as decisive as those that opened the way for society to address equally corrosive prejudices of race, gender and nation. Whatever justification exists for exercising influence in matters of conscience lies in serving the well-being of humankind. At this greatest turning point in the history of civilization, the demands of such service could not be more clear. "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable", Baha'u'llah urges. "unless and until its unity is firmly established."

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

## Appendix Three

### Tablets of Visitation of Baha'u'llah

The Praise which hath dawned from Thy most august Self, and the glory which hath shone forth from Thy most effulgent Beauty, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art the Manifestation of Grandeur, and the King of Eternity, and the Lord of all who are in heaven and on earth! I testify that through Thee the sovereignty of God and His dominion, and the majesty of God and His grandeur, were revealed, and the Daystars of ancient splendor have shed their radiance in the heaven of Thine irrevocable decree, and the Beauty of the Unseen hath shone forth above the horizon of creation. I testify, moreover, that with but a movement of Thy Pen Thine injunction "Be Thou" hath been enforced, and God's hidden Secret hath been divulged, and all created things have been called into being, and all the Revelations have been sent down.

I bear witness, moreover, that through Thy beauty the beauty of the Adored One hath been unveiled, and through Thy face the face of the Desired One hath shone forth, and that through a word from Thee Thou hast decided between all created things, causing them who are devoted to Thee to ascend unto the summit of glory, and the infidels to fall into the lowest abyss.

I bear witness that he who hath known Thee hath known God, and he who hath attained unto Thy presence hath attained unto the presence of God. Great, therefore, is the blessedness of him who hath believed in Thee, and in Thy signs, and hath humbled himself before Thy sovereignty, and hath been honored with meeting Thee, and hath

attained the good pleasure of Thy will, and circled around Thee, and stood before Thy throne. Woe betide him that hath transgressed against Thee, and hath denied Thee, and repudiated Thy signs, and gainsaid Thy sovereignty, and risen up against Thee, and waxed proud before Thy face, and hath disputed Thy testimonies, and fled from Thy rule and Thy dominion, and been numbered with the infidels whose names haven been inscribed by the fingers of Thy behest upon Thy holy Tablets.

Waft, then, unto me, O my God and my Beloved, from the right hand of Thy mercy and Thy loving-kindness, the holy breaths of Thy favors, that they may draw me away from myself and from the world unto the courts of Thy nearness and Thy presence. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Thou, truly, hast been supreme over all things.

The remembrance of God and His praise, and the glory of God and His splendor, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art His Beauty! I bear witness that the eye of creation hath never gazed upon one wronged like Thee. Thou wast immersed all the days of Thy life beneath an ocean of tribulations. At one time Thou wast in chains and fetters; at another Thou wast threatened by the sword of Thine enemies. Yet, despite all this, Thou didst enjoin upon all men to observe what had been prescribed unto Thee by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

May my spirit be a sacrifice to the wrongs Thou didst suffer, and my soul be a ransom for the adversaries Thou didst sustain. I beseech God, by Thee and by them whose faces have been illumined with the splendors of the light of Thy countenance, and who, for love of

Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden, to remove the veils that have come in between Thee and Thy creatures, and to supply me with the good of this world and the world to come. Thou art, in truth, the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious and the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Compassionate.

Bless Thou, O Lord my God, the Divine Lote-Tree and its leaves, and its boughs, and its branches, and its stems, and its offshoots, as long as Thy most excellent titles will endure and Thy most august attributes will last. Protect it, then, from the mischief of the aggressor and the hosts of tyranny. Thou art, in truth, the Almighty, the Most Powerful. Bless Thou, also O Lord my God, Thy servants and Thy handmaidens who have attained unto Thee. Though, truly, art the All-Bountiful, Whose grace is infinite. No God is there save Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.

- Baha'u'llah

## Appendix Four

### Prayer for the Dead

O my God! This is Thy servant and the son of Thy servant who has believed in Thee and in Thy signs, and set his face towards Thee, wholly detached from all except Thee. Thou art, verily, of those who show mercy the most merciful.

Deal with him, O Thou Who forgivest the sins of men and concealest their faults as beseemeth the haven of Thy bounty and the ocean of Thy grace. Grant him admission within the precincts of Thy transcendent mercy that was be fore the foundation of earth and heaven. There is no God but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.

Let him, then, repeat six times the greeting "Alla-u-Abha," and then repeat nineteen times each of the following verses:

We all, verily, worship God.

We all, verily, bow down before God.

We all, verily, are devoted unto God.

We all, verily, give praise unto God.

We all, verily, yield thanks unto God.


We all, verily, are patient in God.

Baha'u'llah

## Declaration

This thesis is my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources used for the thesis have been acknowledged.

Signature

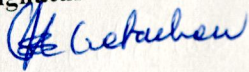


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## Confirmation

I confirm that this thesis can be submitted for defense

Signature

  
Dr. Getachew Kassa M