



A Catholic, a Muslim and a Baha'i on the Oneness of Religion



In the small town where I live in British Columbia, I feel very blessed to still be in touch with my former students. They come from all walks of life, and most now have children of their own.

A few of them work as lifeguards at the pool I go to regularly, where a couple of them swim with me and keep me company in the sauna. One of them, Derek, has the purest heart. He regularly visited me in my office during his school years, and we kept in touch after my retirement.

Derek has been to my house helping me with my gardening, and I have cooked food for him. In response, he told me that he wanted to cook for me and bring the food to my home. I said that would be wonderful and asked what he was planning to cook. He said, "butter chicken." I was surprised since butter chicken is an East Indian dish, and he is not East Indian. For my part, I told him that I would cook rice and make the salad.

On the appointed date, Derek called to say that his father had arrived to visit him from another town, and asked if he could come too. I said that he was very welcome.

It so happened that on that same day, I had promised an Iranian Muslim lady that she could come to my house to pick some fruit. She is new to town, and her work has brought her here. When she found out that I had some Iranian fruit trees such as persimmons and medlars, she was eager to come and get some of them that I had put away for her. She had not eaten them since she left Iran, so I invited her, too.

After eating the food, we started to talk about the sad situation of the world and all of humanity's various crises. Both the Muslim lady and Derek's father, who is Catholic, are staunch in their beliefs.

The Iranian lady told us she felt furious at the situation in Iran, and how the mullahs had lied to people and misled the public. She believed they had done things that had damaged Islam.

Derek's father wasn't happy about the role of the clergy, either, and told us that the situation had made him leave the church. He felt the same as the Iranian lady, saying that he was disappointed with what had happened in the name of Christianity.

They both agreed about the negative role of the clergy, who they called "God's middlemen," in creating hatred and divisions. As they talked about this subject, I thought of this quotation from Baha'u'llah's *Book of Certitude*:

Leaders of religion, in every age, have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation, inasmuch as they held the reins of authority in their mighty grasp. Some for the lust of leadership, others through want of knowledge and understanding, have been the cause of the deprivation of the people.

As we talked, I mentioned to my new friends that there is no clergy in the Baha'i Faith, and the Baha'is believe that all religions are fundamentally one and differ only in their social laws. I used the metaphor that religions are like pure healing water streaming down the mountain, but that clergies sometimes use it improperly or for their own ends.

At the end of our two-hour discussion and sharing our feelings and ideas, we agreed that the only solution for solving the world's problems is for all nations to become united in their efforts and find a religion that combines all the religions in one.

After they left and I did the dishes, I realized what an amazing thing had happened in my home. A Muslim, a Baha'i and Christians of different ages agreed on the need for a universal and all-inclusive faith. It felt like a miracle – that three different people with solid religious beliefs who did not previously know each other expressed their views respectfully and lovingly, with harmony and friendliness in the air.

What made all of us, with different age groups and views, experience this? It seemed as if a mysterious force took over the discussion and led us to that conclusion, as though the spirit of the

age we live in took over. As a Baha'i, I could not reach any other conclusion except that the spirit of unity and oneness released by Baha'u'llah's revelation is at work with full force. All we can do is try to add to its strength, and if not possible, do not be an obstacle in its path. The unity of humankind is not an ideal or slogan. It is the only way out left for the survival of a wayward humanity.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, clarified this further:

Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind — the pivot round which all the teachings of Baha'u'llah revolve — is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced ... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world — a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.

Maybe now is the time for humanity to take the path of reaching maturity by accepting that oneness and unity are the next logical and necessary stage for its advancement.

I am so happy that I am left with the memory of that beautiful night, when we relished our oneness as well as the delicious food – butter chicken for the body and the soul.