

# Reform Bahai Faith Forum



## Hello Jenabe Fazel

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### News:

Reform Bahai Faith Forum created for Bahais of all persuasions on August 21, 2011.

"The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions."  
—Abdul-Baha

"The conscience of man is sacred and to be respected."  
—Abdul-Baha

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**Topic: Introduction and Questions (Read 3079 times)**

**punkrainbow85**

Guest



**Introduction and Questions**

« on: October 25, 2011, 02:28:42 PM »

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Dear Friends,

First of all thank you for allowing me to join you on the Reform Baha'i. I hope I find it an enlivening resource. Perhaps I should give a bit of background. I am a member of the Society of Friends (Quakers) and worship at my local Meeting House. Recently we had an open day in which a number of faith groups were present including to the local Baha'i group. They were incredibly friendly and their basic theology of many manifestations of God certainly chimed with me. I began to read some Baha'i texts and found a lot of inspiration and 'divine light' in them. What I've found difficult however is to reconcile the 'spiritual sense' of these texts with some of the injunctions of the 'Haifa-based' organisation; little flexibility regarding ethical and theological positions and lack of sensitivity issues of conscience. As part of my reflection on these issues I found the Reform Baha'i website and it seems to express more closely the kind of ideas which I have found in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

I'm not sure where this interest will take me. On one level as a Quaker and Universalist I don't feel an overwhelming desire to 'jump ship' as it were but something is pulling me towards Reform Baha'i. So I have a few questions, the answers to which would help me clarify things. How does one become a 'reform' Baha'i in your view? Does one join the 'Haifa-based' organisation and then cultivate the spirit of your tradition from within? Do reform Baha'is feel that one has to give one's previous spiritual affiliations to be part of the community? What would an average Reform Baha'i feel about a Quaker trying to follow Bahá'u'lláh?

Warm wishes to all,

Ben



Report to moderator 92.22.199.105 (?)

## Jenabe Fazel

Administrator  
Jr. Member



Posts: 76



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« **Reply #1 on:** October 25, 2011,  
09:20:03 PM »

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Hello Ben, and welcome.

I'm afraid your experience is one that many people say they've had, Bahais and non-Bahais, which isn't to diminish your personal experience in any way. Many people who leave the Baha'i Faith of the denomination in Haifa, Israel, often do so after similar experiences. It's quite unfortunate, to my mind, because, as you suggest, the Bahai writings are very inspiring and spiritual in outlook.

I've been a Bahai since 1976 and I myself was quite baffled by the disjunction for years. Eventually, I came to realize the problem runs very deep into the history of what Abdul-Baha called the Bahai Movement, right back to its earliest days while he was still alive, dying in 1921. For Reform Bahais, from then on, the Faith was really taken in the wrong direction by Shoghi Effendi under a purported will and testament that has never been probated or authenticated. Basically, Abdul-Baha's simple and open 1912 covenant and interpretation of Baha'u'llah's teachings was put aside in favor of a highly organized and increasingly oppressive system. Much of the details can be found on the Reform Bahai website.

Speaking in England, Abdul-Bahai had said, "You can be a Bahai-Christian, a Bahai-Freemason, a Bahai-Jew, a Bahai-Muhammadan." So it's really something for the individual to decide and negotiate according to his or her own conscience. Abdul-Baha emphasized that religion is really "an attitude to life," not an organization. Indeed, he repeatedly said, paradoxically, that the Bahai Movement could not be organized, which, to my mind, again, is trying to indicate that what religion is about is individual, moral, and spiritual change and growth, not social power and control. Similarly, Christ had denounced the "whited sepulchres" of the Phrisees, or was it the Saducees? Same thing! Luther felt the same way after his time in Rome. As an aside, all the granite and marble in Haifa, Israel, doesn't change the fact that it's setting on the foundation of a fraudulent will and testament.

Let me say it all in other words. We are accustomed to "boxes" called religion but true religion takes place in the heart and soul of the believer, in worship and communion with the Divine Being, the Inner Light, which is universal, the same in all traditions and faiths. It was in this sense, that Abdul-Baha said there were Bahais in every city and people who were Bahais without knowing it. Being a Bahai is not contingent on the word; it's the reality that counts.

Abdul-Baha's actually interpretation of his father's teachings for the modern world really conceives of "religion" in such challenging though simple terms that his own family and many other early Bahais couldn't even understand it and probably in some cases honestly thought they were doing the right thing by trying to recreate the Catholic Church and the Caliphate. Time has proven how

wrong they were...

Tolstoy once referred to many of the practices of the Russian Orthodox Church as "sorcery," meaning outer hocus-pocus, rites and rituals, but not inner worship and transformative experience. Creeds are all about that kind of thing, and controlling followers, which the Haifans instituted with their bogus document. In a sense, becoming a "reform Bahai" or whatever, is a box, really, as much as any other box, though Abdul-Baha tried to emphasize it's not about the box! Yes, God is in every box, but he's also outside the box! And according to Christ, doesn't care about boxes... but the Shema and the Golden Rule, which all "religions" already have in one form or another.

So Abdul-Baha taught that the Bahai Movement was not a new "religion," but religion renewed. The precise sense is difficult to convey but I hope you can catch the scent...

Sorry this got so long.



« Last Edit: October 26, 2011, 07:44:37 AM by Jenabe Fazel »

Report to moderator  76.112.30.51 (?)

"To be a Bahai simply means to love all the world; to love humanity and try to serve it; to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood." —Abdul-Baha

The Reform Bahai Faith, <http://reformbahai.org/>

### punkrainbow85

Guest



#### Re: Introduction and Questions

« Reply #2 on: October 26, 2011, 09:13:03 PM »

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Thanks Jenabe for that very illuminating reply. Your remark about the way we 'box-in' our spiritual experience really resonates with me. I recall the Quaker William Penn puts it in a lovely way in his *Fruits of Solitude*; 'The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear here makes them strangers.'



Report to moderator  92.22.199.105 (?)

### Jenabe Fazel

Administrator  
Jr. Member



Posts: 76



#### Re: Introduction and Questions

« Reply #3 on: January 04, 2012, 10:14:10 PM »

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Lovely quotation from Penn...



"To be a Bahai simply means to love all the world; to love humanity and try to serve it; to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood." —Abdul-Baha

The Reform Bahai Faith, <http://reformbahai.org/>

## pathfinder

Newbie



Posts: 15



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« **Reply #4 on:** January 22, 2012,  
02:11:49 PM »

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I went back and re-read this thread and found it very helpful. I tend to be a Unitarian type of believer, meaning that I believe God is one and that there aren't all these manifestations, the trinity and so forth. I guess in a way, more monotheistic? I believe there were many messengers, and that God speaks though to all who want to listen, or even those who don't realize they're being spoken to, as I envision God speaking to all, since we are all equal. I am guilty of wanting to put my religion in a "box", that is, to want to be able to "label" myself as a "this" or "that", like "Catholic" "Lutheran", "UU", and so on. I have explored some of the Eastern religions too. I could perhaps see myself as a Reform Bahai, even if that is a label itself. But it is on the basis of a faith that stands for just about everything I believe. I just don't like the shift in the last century where the whole UHJ thing got set up and the whole faith became political, and then there is the shunning and all of that. This is why something like the Reform Bahai faith (if you will) appeals more to me. A Reform Bahai is still a Bahai. Even in Judaism, there are at least three type, including Reform, Orthodox, and Conservative. (I know there are others too, like Hasidic). The amusing thing is that when I take that "belief o matic religion quiz thing" I tend to end up as Reform Judaism, Liberal Quaker, mostly. I used to always score as UU like 100%, but as I've refined my thinking, Bahai itself shows up anywhere between 75-88% congruent with whatever algorithm the "religion quiz" shows. When I was first exploring the Bahai faith, it was way down on the list, not all the way down, as it appeared on there, but down much farther. I certainly don't stake my life on the quiz, as I find it most amusing that it currently tags me as beliefs aligned with Reform Judaism. While no expert and while too dry of a read, I have read some of the Old Testament, and I find aspects of it quite barbaric, so no thanks. I know the Torah is the first 5 books, but I assume the rest of the OT is considered the "Hebrew Bible", and between the two, I find many of it downright awful. I have no quarrel with Moses being a prophet. But rules and rituals that persist to this day-forget it. But like the OP here who is Quaker, I found it interesting that I consistently come up with Liberal Quaker in the top 3 in the algorithmn as my thoughts on religion change. I couldn't quite see myself a "Quaker", although it does not seem to have a preoccupation with rituals, so again-these quizzes are no iron-clad determination, but I guess more a general food for thought for someone who is just trying to get a bearing. But I do find it interesting that Bahai has moved up for me, although I know it will never make 100% due to my beliefs about homosexuality and that people who truly are gay can't be converted, and I think it's unfair to expect celibacy when they can be in just as committed a relationship as heterosexuals, and in some US states can be legally married. I think it's way too biased and an insult to the unity that the Bahai faith embraces-not some patronizing "we accept you but you can't have a relationship and basically can be a eunuch".



### rabryant

Newbie



Posts: 4



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« Reply #5 on: February 09, 2012,

12:58:04 AM »

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Pathfinder - I too am guilty of wanting to "label" myself. I guess it's the idea of community that leads me in this direction. But, part of me just wants to hold on to my heritage. I am a 6th generation member of the Community of Christ (formerly called the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints...WOW...that's a mouthful, right?). My whole family has left the church and I feel that it is my job to hold on to the church, my late grandfather, my heritage. I still love the stories, many of the teachings, and the community (they're expert community builders). But, I find so many other teachings, including those of Baha'u'llah and Abdul-baha, illuminating. I want to love them all, practice them all. That's where I find myself. Other than pluralist, or freelance monotheist, I don't know what to label myself. Maybe you wonderful Baha'is can help me with this.



Report to moderator 76.217.143.243 (?)

### pathfinder

Newbie



Posts: 15



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« Reply #6 on: February 10, 2012,

04:44:43 PM »

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rabryant-yeah, even though I wasn't firmly raised a thing, I was born a Roman Catholic, returned to it in my teens of my own volition, and then just couldn't deal with it, and was a Protestant liberal Christian for years until I realized I didn't even know what the heck I even thought, and felt nobody there did either and were just doing what they thought they "should" do but not giving it any thought. So I've been quite unaffiliated and not interested in attending ANY body of worship structure, period, and trying to find my way. I came across Bahai, then saw this forum and after seeing that the Haifan Baha'i faith has its sets of rules one must abide by/believe, I knew it wasn't for me. I like Baha'u'llah's writings much like I like the Bhagavad Gita and \*some\* of the Bible. I do still find myself gravitating toward the Jesus figure and I'm just guessing that is still some sort of being a Westerner type deal, so like you in a slight way, it's like I'm still trying to hold on to something, but in my case, I don't know what, as I don't believe in a God that would send people to some lake of fire for not believing Jesus is savior, etc. Yet, I like the man Jesus, and I do wonder, could he have been God down in human form to be with the people? I'm monotheistic for sure, although then I have been almost to a point of being agnostic at times. I do know I WANT to believe, and to some degree I do believe in God.



Report to moderator 71.225.44.91 (?)

### rabryant

Newbie



Posts: 4



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« Reply #7 on: February 13, 2012,

10:07:23 AM »

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Pathfinder - I think you're right about the Jesus figure, and your gravitation towards that figure, being a product of your western culture. I am the same way. Marcus Borg is an interesting writer who talks about being a Christian as "a means" of getting closer to God. It is not "the means". It's like going home from work. There are many ways to go, including the long way, the short way, the scenic way, the way that drops by the grocery store, etc. The key, I think, is to choose the path that you are comfortable with. I am still a member of my church and I am comfortable, for the most part, with that; however, I feel spiritually uplifted in a multitude of spiritual situations (i.e. reading Baha'i writings, talking to my students about their purpose in life, attending worship services of various religious faiths).

I also don't buy into the whole "lake of fire" and "eternal punishment" concepts. I personally feel that they should be viewed in a metaphorical light. I don't feel that God works that way. If he/she does, then I really don't see him/her as being worthy of my worship.



Report to moderator 147.26.217.175 (?)

## Jenabe Fazel

Administrator  
Jr. Member



Posts: 76



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« **Reply #8 on:** February 23, 2012,  
05:02:28 PM »

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<http://reformbahai.org/blog/2012/02/17/troy-interfaith-group-march-5-2012-intro-to-reform-bahai-faith/>

Rabryant,

If you or anyone else is near the Detroit area, there's an Introduction to Reform Bahai Faith, Monday, March 5, 2012, at the Troy Interfaith Group. It be great to see you there!

Frederick Glaysher, a member of the Reform Bahai Faith in Rochester, Michigan, will be the featured speaker on the Reform Bahai Faith at the Troy Interfaith Group on March 5, 2012, 7:00 to 8:30 PM, held at

Northminster Presbyterian Church (second church just east of Adams Road, on the south side.)  
3633 W. Big Beaver Road  
Troy Michigan 48084  
<http://www.troyinterfaithgroup.org/>

Mr. Glaysher has been a member of the Reform Bahai Faith since 1976 and is the editor of The Universal Principles of the Reform Bahai Faith, available through the Reform Bahai Press  
[http://reformbahai.org/Reform\\_Bahai\\_Press.html](http://reformbahai.org/Reform_Bahai_Press.html) and other online book sellers. He holds two degrees from the University of Michigan, with course work in religious studies and has taught world religions at the college level. His personal website and info may be found at <http://fglaysher.com/about.html>



Report to moderator 76.112.30.51 (?)

"To be a Bahai simply means to love all the world; to love humanity and try to serve it; to

work for universal peace and universal brotherhood." —Abdul-Baha

The Reform Bahai Faith, <http://reformbahai.org/>

## Joel61436

Newbie



Posts: 2



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« Reply #9 on: July 19, 2012, 03:30:12

PM »

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To be a Reform Bahai, in my view, is to share Baha'u'llah's vision. That, I'd say, is more essential than the Faith being a "religious organization." We have roots in the insights of Julie Chanler and Ahmad Sohrab and they felt that "organizing" the Bahai faith detracted from its basic spirit. In its early years, the Faith involved people of all beliefs and many belonged to churches in addition to being Bahais. That I recall, Shoghi Effendi stopped this because in Iran a person could not be Bahai and Muslim. So, when you "declared" the faith, you left your church (of course, you could go with your family to maintain family unity, though you wouldn't hold membership). Many people have had trouble with the Haifa organization and while it is sociologically the major Bahai organization, it does not, in my view, have a monopoly on the Faith itself. If you are in harmony with the Faith and its principles, you are a Bahai. No signed card is necessary. There are a number of Bahai organizations--Haifa, at least two groups of Orthodox Bahais, Bahais Under the Provision of the Covenant, Unitarian Bahais, and Reform Bahais (and others), yet the question is, what does the Faith mean to you? How can you apply it? That, really, is what being a Bahai is about. Joel



[Report to moderator](#)



198.70.154.63 (?)

## Jenabe Fazel

Administrator

Jr. Member



Posts: 76



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« Reply #10 on: July 23, 2012,

07:26:10 PM »

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Joel,

I certainly agree that "organization" really isn't religion at all. It was actually Abdul-Baha who originally taught organization was not religion, not Julie Chanler and Ahmad Sohrab. For instance, Abdul-Baha conceived of the House of Worship as a place where people of all faiths could meet and worship. So Shoghi Effendi's distortions are irrelevant, since everything he did and wrote was based on a fraudulent will and testament, trying to justify his organizational take-over and control of the resources of the Bahai Movement.

I wouldn't say it's entirely a matter of "what does the Faith mean to you?" Abdul-Baha was the appointed Interpreter of Baha'u'llah's teachings. His Interpretation of his father's teachings is essential to an understanding of the Reform Bahai Faith. The individual can misinterpret and misunderstand. That being said, there is obviously an emphasis on *\*applying\** the Bahai teachings, living the life, and so on, in the Writings and by Abdul-Baha.

All of which is why the fraudulent will and testament of 1921 has been such a tragedy for Bahais, taking the faith very much in the wrong direction for decades.

I think many Bahais have increasingly come to realize much of this and are

groping for a way forward out of the morass... I believe the renewal of Abdul-Baha's vision of universality and example of loving brotherhood can help Bahais of all persuasions heal and recover.



Report to moderator 76.112.30.51 (?)

"To be a Bahai simply means to love all the world; to love humanity and try to serve it; to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood." —Abdul-Baha

The Reform Bahai Faith, <http://reformbahai.org/>

### Jenabe Fazel

Administrator  
Jr. Member



Posts: 76



#### Re: Introduction and Questions

« **Reply #11 on:** July 23, 2012,  
09:26:57 PM »

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Incidentally, there's an interesting article online about the decline of membership among the Episcopalians and other Christian denominations, which I would argue has happened for good reasons. I would say that the Bahai Teachings clearly state that the way to "restore" Christianity is to recognize its most universal tenets, those which are held in common by all the great religions. That's the logical and spiritual destiny of all of the religions, including Christianity, and is essentially what Baha'u'llah and Abdul-Baha taught.

To the extent that any one of them have clung to nostalgia and antiquated doctrine, they have and will inevitably continue to decline... The author observes, "Americans have lost confidence in all forms of institutional religion." Of course! Religion is not an organization! But as Abdul-Baha said, an "attitude to life."

<http://sojo.net/blogs/2012/07/16/can-christianity-be-saved-response-ross-douthat>



Report to moderator 76.112.30.51 (?)

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### Jenabe Fazel

Administrator  
Jr. Member



Posts: 76



#### Re: Introduction and Questions

« **Reply #12 on:** October 12, 2012,  
10:38:08 AM »

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Forgive my English. There have been members of the Reform Bahai Faith in Germany, but we have lost touch with them. Of course, Abdul-Baha taught that there are Bahais in every city, so we still believe they and other Bahais are, indeed, in Germany! Perhaps you're one of them! We invite you to join us in reviving Abdul-Baha's interpretation of his father's teachings, which has been suppressed, if not lost to a degree, since the 1921 fraudulent will of Shoghi Effendi and his family.

For details, see



About the Reform Bahai Faith  
<http://www.reformbahai.org/about.html>

Abdu'l-Baha's 1912 Authentic Covenant  
<http://www.reformbahai.org/Covenant.html>

An Analysis of Abdul-Baha's 1912 Authentic Covenant  
[http://www.reformbahai.org/Covenant\\_comments.html](http://www.reformbahai.org/Covenant_comments.html)



Report to moderator 76.112.30.51 (?)

"To be a Bahai simply means to love all the world; to love humanity and try to serve it; to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood." —Abdul-Baha

The Reform Bahai Faith, <http://reformbahai.org/>

### dsaly1969

Newbie



Posts: 3



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« Reply #13 on: December 10, 2012,

06:57:51 PM »

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You're right. Some of the best Baha'is I have ever met were not members of mainstream "Local Spiritual Assemblies", but instead were attending Unity churches, Swedenborgian churches, Vedanta Societies, Centers for Spiritual Living, Unitarian Universalist congregations, progressive Christian churches, etc.

I note that someone posted above - "That I recall, Shoghi Effendi stopped this because in Iran a person could not be Bahai and Muslim."

I'm seem to recall reading that Abdu'l-Baha also attended a local masjid (mosque) and did salat there until the end of his life. This speaks of the difference in the emphasis between Shoghi Effendi and Abdu'l-Baha to me.

It seems to me that Western society is just now getting to the point where the Bahai Movement was leading - to a point beyond sectarian religion. People in the West are now far less interested in "changing religions" which is the old paradigm that has been embraced by the Haifa organization. Instead people are opting out of old organizational, denominational and sectarian boxes. It may not be the specifics of Baha'i Law that are the real fruit of what Baha'u'llah brought, but it may be more of the inclusive spirit behind them.



« Last Edit: December 10, 2012, 07:13:58 PM by dsaly1969 »

Report to moderator 159.83.168.254 (?)

### Jenabe Fazel

Administrator  
Jr. Member



Posts: 76



### Re: Introduction and Questions

« Reply #14 on: December 12, 2012,

09:05:39 AM »

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And of course all that openness to other progressive and spiritually seeking religious people was entirely characteristic of everything Abdul-Baha did when he was in the West, both Europe and the USA.

As the writings so clearly make evident, when religion is only about power, wealth, and control, it's corrupt and decadent. Nothing could be truer than to realize that fact about the Haifan Baha'is. Baha'u'llah wrote, "Refuse to set up once again a sect similar to that of the Shi'ihis," yet that is exactly what took place under the self-appointed imamate of Shoghi Effendi.

I entirely concur with your evaluation of social change and evolution of Western society, that is, the elements that are not seeking to "return" to some fantasy vision of the past, of which there are some, even too many. So the transition may not be easy, given human behavior and history, but, I trust, in the long run, God's Will shall be done. And, really, this too is why the Haifan heresy is actually a fortunate development. Thinking people can so easily see its danger and fanaticism, once apprised of the facts.

Abdul-Baha never emphasized the letter of the law but its spirit. The contrast with the Haifans could not be starker. They have fallen to such reprehensible tactics, for decades harassing and suing other Bahai denominations, trying to destroy them, etc., sending in brainwashed fanatics into the meetings of other Bahais to drive away seekers, and so forth, and then claiming only THEY exist! The Will of God! Oh, please... save us, oh Lord, from such pathetic liars and fanatics among your people. Human folly knows no bounds.



Report to moderator  76.112.30.51 (?)

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