

How do we attain to the Most Great Peace?

Baha'u'llah stated that there is one remedy for the ills of the world:

“That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician. This, verily, is the truth, and all else naught but error.” (Tablet to Queen Victoria, in Suriy-i-Haykal)

“We have enjoined upon all mankind to establish the Most Great Peace—the surest of all means for the protection of humanity. The sovereigns of the world should, with one accord, hold fast thereunto, for this is the supreme instrument that can ensure the security and welfare of all peoples and nations. They, verily, are the manifestations of the power of God and the daysprings of His authority. We beseech the Almighty that He may graciously assist them in that which is conducive to the well-being of their subjects.” (Second Ishraq, in Ishraqat)

Baha'u'llah wrote to the sovereigns and religious leaders of the Middle East and the West, and they unitedly rejected the Most Great Peace, the unity of humankind in “one universal Cause, one common Faith”:

“Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.

“O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the All-Knowing, the Faithful.

“Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice. Thus did We exhort you in the Tablet sent down aforetime,² and We admonish you once again to follow that which hath been revealed by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. Should anyone seek refuge with you, extend unto him your protection and betray him not. Thus doth the Pen of the Most High counsel you, as bidden by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.”

(Tablet to Queen Victoria, in Suriy-i-Haykal)

Baha'u'llah was writing in the 19th century, from the 1860s to 1880s. About 650 CE, some twelve hundred years earlier, a kingdom known to history as the Khazars became a mighty commercial empire in what is now European Russia, southern Ukraine and western Kazakhstan. For three centuries this kingdom flourished. According to historical records, the inhabitants of this empire were Turkic-speaking, and pagans, Christians, Muslims...and Jews. In 740 CE, King Bulan, the ruler of the Khazars converted to rabbinical Judaism (assuming the name Sabriel), and in the 9th century King Ovadiah built synagogues and schools and encouraged the study of Torah. The Khazar leadership continued to be Jewish until they were overthrown in 965 CE. We know very little about the religious practices and beliefs of the Khazari Jews. However, about a century after the Khazaris came to an end, one of the greatest Jewish writers of the medieval period, Yehudah Ha-Levi (1075-1141 CE), living in Spain, wrote a book about the Khazari in Arabic (entitled Al-Kuzari), which, translated into Hebrew, is accounted as the greatest work of Jewish apologetics. He described the way in which the Khazars came to embrace Judaism, and you will soon understand how this is related to Baha'u'llah and His call for the Most Great Peace and the Lesser Peace.

As Baha'is are generally familiar with the many statements of Baha'u'llah to the effect that a severe calamity would precede the conversion of humanity to His Faith, there is no need for me to cite them here. However, there is no Tablet or other writing or statement of Baha'u'llah that has been discovered in which He gives a date for the occurrence of the calamity that will precede the establishment of His World Order. However, there is the answer He gave to a Persian Baha'i named Mirza 'Ali Muhammad, known as Varqa (1856-1896), a Baha'i traveling teacher in Adhirbayjan who made his home and raised four sons in Tabriz. Around 1891 Varqa, accompanied by his two elder sons, 'Aziz'ullah and Rúhu'lláh, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was probably during this pilgrimage that the following conversation occurred: (<https://bahaipedia.org/Varq%C3%A1>)

Varqá inquired of the Blessed Beauty by what means the cause of God would become universal. He responded: **'The riches of the earth** **دول عالم** **will increase** **در ازدیاد** **until they become the instruments of hellish fire** **آلات ناریه**, **to the extent they become like a venomous serpent** **ثعبان**. **They will attack each other and shed much blood. The leaders of thought among the nations** **عقلای ملل جمع** **will then gather to investigate the reason for this and realize the source** **علت خونریزی** **is prejudice** **تعصبات است**, **the worst kind being 'religious'** **است همه تعصب دینی است** **above all others. They will attempt to do away with religion all together** **تا دین سعی میکنند**, **as prejudice is intrinsically connected** **[فرع] to religion** **تعصب هم که فرع دین است**. **They will then realize that man cannot truly live without religion** **که بشر بدون دین نمیتواند**. **For this reason, they will compile and collect all** **ادیان** **of the teachings/principles** **از زندگی کند لهذا تعالیم** **of the current religions** **را جمع مطالعه** **in order to determine which one of the religions is compatible with the exigencies of the age.** **میکند تا ببینند کدامیک از ادیان منطبق با مقتضیات زمان است**. **At that time, the cause of God will become universal.** **آنگاه امرالله عالمگیر میشود.**

(Original text: file:///C:/Users/Owner/Videos/sulaymani_masabih-i-hidayat_vol_1-2nd-edition.pdf (Afnan Library) Mas.aabeeh-i-Hedaayat, Volume 1, page 263; provisional translation by Nima Rafiei, edited by Peter Terry)

Before we return to the Khazaris, we will cite a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha in which He addresses the contemporary abasement of Persia and its future glory. It was translated by Shoghi Effendi and included in a letter addressed by the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, dated January 12, 1923. Here follows an extract from the Guardian's letter:

"Only the other day, in the course of my study of various Baha'i documents[,] I came, as if by mere chance, across a very important message from our beloved 'Abdu'l-Baha, bearing no date, and revealing no sign as to exactly where, how and to whom it was given, written in the Master's own handwriting upon a leaflet that seemed ordinary and ill- preserved in appearance but which on close study proved of the profoundest interest to all believers in the East as well as in the West.

"As to the authenticity of these remarkable words, so clearly and forcibly written, there is no doubt whatsoever, and the measure of assurance it shall inspire the loved ones of Persia and the spirit of hopeful encouragement it shall breathe in the friends of the West, have urged me to communicate it to you, that, subject to your consideration and consent, it may be published amongst the friends and redouble their confidence in the very remarkable share the West is destined to contribute to the immediate spread of the Movement throughout the world. Recently, I have rendered it myself into English and enclosed is a copy of the full translation."

Now for the Tablet of Abdu'l-Baha cited in Shoghi Effendi's letter to the NSA of the United States, dated 12 January 1923:

"A thousand years must elapse before Persia can, by the aid of material power, rise to the height of the peoples and governments of Europe. Baha'u'llah, however, has illuminated that land and will surely raise her high in the eyes of all the world. That country shall so advance and develop as to excite the envy and admiration of the East and the West.

"The land of Hedjaz, though deserted and sterile in its soil and its tribes ignorant and barbarous, yet the power of the Cause of God has made of such a spot a Point of Adoration and the Focal-Centre of world devotion. How foolish are the people of the East to have incarcerated for well-nigh fifty years the like of this glorious personage! But for His chains and prison, Baha'u'llah by this time would have gained absolute ascendancy over the minds and thoughts of the peoples of Europe, would have made of Persia the Garden of Paradise, would have raised its sons in the esteem of

mankind, nay He would have made it such that all peoples and governments would seek enlightenment from its people.

"Consider and reflect upon the result of my few days stay in London and the profound effect it has had here and in the surrounding regions. Ponder then in your heart, what the coming of Baha'u'llah would have achieved! Had He appeared in Europe, its people would have seized their opportunity, and His Cause, by virtue of the freedom of thought, would by this time have encompassed the earth. But alas! This Cause, though it first appeared in Persia, yet eventually it shall be seen how the peoples of Europe have wrestled it from its hands! Take note of this and remember it in future. Ultimately you shall see how it has come to pass. And yet behold! how the Baha'is are still persecuted by the people of Persia!"

[Adib Masumian:] The original Persian text of this Tablet has been published in Kháṭirát-i-Habíb, vol. 1 (Bahá'í-Verlag, 1998), pp. 301-02: <https://bahai-library.com/bahailib/354.pdf#page=332>

We will now recall that Baha'u'llah stated the following, in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, about one thousand years:

"Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor. We pray God that He may graciously assist him to retract and repudiate such claim. Should he repent, God will, no doubt, forgive him. If, however, he persisteth in his error, God will, assuredly, send down one who will deal mercilessly with him. Terrible, indeed, is God in punishing! Whosoever interpreteth this verse otherwise than its obvious meaning is deprived of the Spirit of God and of His mercy which encompasseth all created things. Fear God, and follow not your idle fancies. Nay, rather, follow the bidding of your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Wise. Erelong shall clamorous voices be raised in most lands. Shun them, O My people, and follow not the iniquitous and evilhearted. This is that of which We gave you forewarning when We were dwelling in 'Iráq, then later while in the Land of Mystery, and now from this Resplendent Spot." (#37)

We must not jump to conclusions...Baha'u'llah did not state that "a Revelation direct from God" would occur "ere the expiration of a full thousand years". He stated that it would not occur before the passage of this period of time. And, as we read earlier, 'Abdu'l-Baha stated that Persia would not "rise to the height of the peoples and governments of Europe".

The last Baha'i pilgrims to the Holy Land prior to the untimely death of the Guardian were William and Thelma Allison, in 1957. In his notes of the pilgrimage, William Allison recorded the Guardian saying the following:

“The Most Great Peace will not come until the most Great Justice is established. A long time...Near the end of the formative period the nations will unite of their own volition and with the non-committant [sic] expansion of the Cause become merged into the fabric of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. There will be another Manifestation before this will happen.” (https://bahai-library.com/allison_pilgrims_notes)

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s statement about Persia and the Guardian’s statement that “the nations will unite of their own volition and...become merged into the fabric of the World Order of Baha’u’llah” and “There will be another Manifestation before this will happen” indicates that this will not occur until after the expiration of one thousand years.

Now, to return to the Khazars...according to Yehudah Ha-Levi, the King of the Khazars invited the leaders of the religious communities in his realm – the pagans, the Christians, the Muslims and the Jews – to present their best arguments for the adoption of those religions by the monarchy, and hence for the governance of their realms. He then debated the Jewish rabbis, having found Judaism to be the best suited and wishing to be fully convinced before making a decision. Ultimately he was convinced by the rabbis and converted to Judaism.

Baha’u’llah predicted that a similar process will take place in the future, perhaps, as indicated by ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, after another Manifestation of God appears, that is, after the passage of at least one thousand years:

The leaders of thought among the nations عقلاى ملل جمع will then gather to investigate the reason for this and realize the source علت خونريزى is prejudice تعصبات است, the worst kind being ‘religious’ دىنى است است above all others. They will attempt to do away with religion all together تا دين سعى ميکنند, as prejudice is intrinsically connected [فرع] to religion فرع دين است. They will then realize that man cannot truly live without religion كه بشر بدون دين نمیتواند. For this reason, they will compile and collect all را جمع مطالعه of the teachings/principles of the current religions اديان موجوده in order to determine which one of the religions is compatible with the exigencies of the age. ميکنند تا ببينند کداميك از اديان منطبق با مقتضيات زمان. آنگاه امرالله عالمگیر ميشود. At that time, the cause of God will become universal. است

This is a startling preview of history, if the pieces of this puzzle actually fit together. It indicates that the establishment of the Baha’i Faith will not come about through the conversion of a majority of the world’s population, “not by the force of numbers” as the Guardian stated (24 September 1924, in Baha’i Administration), and not in the near future or even for several centuries, as indicated by the above-cited timelines. It also implies that Baha’is will be compelled for a long period of time to “subordinate” their principles and laws to those of the nations which they inhabit, as directed by the Guardian (21 March 1932, in The World Order of Baha’u’llah). It may also suggest, as the Guardian predicted in The Advent of Divine Justice,

written nearly a full century ago (December 29, 1938), that the Faith of Baha'u'llah will conquer the world not by adapting to the peoples of the world, but by adhering faithfully to the teachings of its Founder. It is the distinctive characteristics of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, and the dedicated devotion of its adherents to those characteristics that will ultimately win over the minds and hearts of humanity...not when we want it to happen but when they are ready.

This should not come as a surprise to the Baha'is, considering that Baha'u'llah and His interpreters plainly stated that the Baha'i Cycle, also called the Cycle of Fulfillment, will last for at least 500,000 years, that is, five hundred times the duration of the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah in the event that His prophetic successor appears one thousand years after His declaration.

To be quite frank, most of us are inclined to worry a great deal about the times in which we live, and to fear that if humanity makes too many mistakes we will end up on the ash heap of history, or having destroyed our planet and ourselves with it. Baha'u'llah does not seem to share our terror, to fear for our annihilation.

We would do well to recall these words of Baha'u'llah to Salman, who carried Tablets from the Holy Land to Baha'is in Persia, apparently by foot and with a diet of dry bread and raw onions:

“Warn, O Salmán, the beloved of the one true God, not to view with too critical an eye the sayings and writings of men. Let them rather approach such sayings and writings in a spirit of open-mindedness and loving sympathy...” (Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah: CLIV)

We may well have centuries to prepare ourselves for the enquiries we will receive when the representatives of humanity are ready to listen...but we should also remember that pagans, Christians, Muslims and Jews will also have those centuries, and they have been well prepared for comparative religious dialogue. Baha'u'llah assured us that His Faith will be selected ultimately by the wise men and women of the world, but He is counting on us, His followers to do our part, every one of us, for as long as it takes.