

**PART FOUR: OTHER LIVING RELIGIONS** (*Students take either part three or part four*)  
**THE BAHA’I FAITH, CHINESE RELIGION, SIKH RELIGION,  
 AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

Syllabus Objectives	<p><i>Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have a knowledge of one other living tradition</li> <li>• have a knowledge of the origins, and distribution of the tradition, and the lifestyle of believers.</li> </ul> <p><i>Understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand that religious belief is ancient, diverse and dynamic.</li> </ul> <p><i>Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise evidence of religious belief in contemporary culture</li> <li>• recognise similar motifs and characteristics in other religious traditions in the syllabus.</li> </ul> <p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tolerance of and respect for the religious beliefs of other individuals and other cultures.</li> </ul>
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**Topic: 4.1 A living tradition & 4.2 Traditions in Dialogue\*** (*\*Higher level only*)

*Procedure*

*Description of content: In the case of one living religion from the list*

- *the distribution of the religion/traditions*
- *the lifestyle of believers today*
- *the origins of the tradition(s)*
- *persecution/conflict associated with the tradition.*

- \* the relationship between the living religion and one major world religion*
- *in origin*
  - *in development*
  - *in the contemporary context.*

- Project work:* Pick one of the living religions from the list and read the relevant work card. Research the chosen living religion and produce an information sheet in it using the following headings:
- Distribution
  - Lifestyle of believers today
  - Origins
  - Persecution / conflict

*Work Cards*

*Chinese Religion*

Two important religions to come from China are Taoism and Confucianism. They both developed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE and although China is a communist country, where religion is not encouraged, each religion has about five million followers.

Taoism (pronounced ‘*dowism*’) is based on the teachings of the Tao Te Ching. This book is believed to have been written by Lao-tzu but some scholars claim that it had several authors. The Tao is often translated as ‘the Way’. In order to live life in accordance with the Tao, followers need to avoid worldly distractions and live spontaneously.

Confucianism is a system of moral, social, political, and religious teachings established by *Confucius*, a sixth century Chinese philosopher. The writings of Confucius were originally intended as a guide for the rulers of China and emphasised the importance of correct conduct in society. They have since been developed by his followers and absorbed aspects of Taoism and Buddhism.

Confucianism puts more emphasis on becoming a good citizen rather than on spirituality but rituals play an important role in this tradition.

<i>The Bahá'í Faith</i>	<i>Sikhism</i>
<p>The Bahá'í faith began in the nineteenth century in Iran and presently has over five million followers worldwide. It takes its name from a man known as Baha'u'llah, which means 'Glory of God'. Bahá'ís believe that Baha'u'llah is the most recent in the long line of prophets, which include Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Muhammad.</p>	<p>Guru Nanak founded Sikhism approximately five hundred years ago in India. It is a</p>
<p>The most important principle for a Bahá'í is the oneness of humanity. There is only one race, the human race and it is our responsibility to strive for a new order of peace, justice and an end to religious and racial prejudice.</p>	<p>distinctive monotheistic faith envisioning one Supreme Creator God.</p>
<p>The five main Bahá'í beliefs are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Everyone is equal, regardless of sex or race.</li> <li>2. There should be unity among religions.</li> <li>3. There should be no extremes of poverty or wealth.</li> <li>4. Everyone should be educated.</li> <li>5. True religion should be in harmony with scientific knowledge.</li> </ol>	<p>Sikhism has its roots in both Islam and Hinduism and is understood to be an attempt to reconcile the differences between them.</p>

Or Read *Student Work* Information sheet: THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

<i>African Traditional Religion</i>
<p>This term covers the religious beliefs and practices of a number of different groups and tribes. Each group has different gods and spirits to whom prayer and make sacrifices. African Traditional Religions believe that the world is a sacred place containing God, divinities and spirits; even nature is alive with spiritual power. The universe is considered to be in two interlocking parts: the visible and the invisible. Human beings live on the visible level, while God and spiritual beings exist on the invisible level. There is a link between the two worlds. Divinities and spirits inhabit the sacred space between human beings and God. Most divinities are understood as being created by God, though some are seen as personifications of natural phenomena and objects such as mountains, lakes, rivers, earthquakes, or thunder. The spirits are lesser powers. The heavenly spirits are those associated with objects like the sun, the stars, comets, rain and storms. The earthly ones are those associated with earthly phenomena and objects, and those that are spirits of the dead. People sacrifice and make offerings to God and speak to God personally or communally through prayer, invocation, ritual, dance or singing. God is seen as communicating through dreams, visions and nature.</p> <p>The line between the natural and the supernatural is difficult to draw in African religion. There is a deeply rooted belief in a mystical power or force in the universe that derives from God. People take for granted the continuation of life after physical death and individuals such as diviners, traditional doctors and witches are seen as knowing how to contact the spirits.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Adapted from World Religions – P. Barnes Veritas</p>

When students have completed the project have them present their information sheet to the rest of the class.

- Discuss:
- What do these living religions have in common?
  - How do these living religions differ?
  - \*What does the chosen living religion have in common with a major world religion?
  - \*How does the chosen living religion differ from a major world religion?

*Outcomes:*

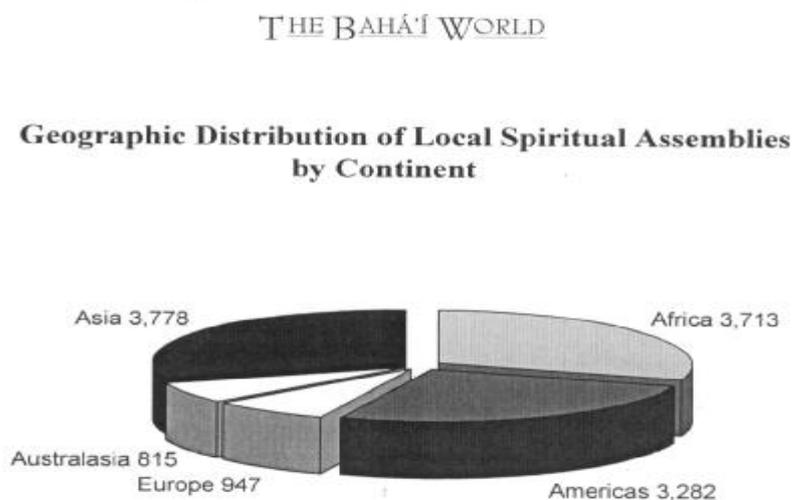
- Research and present an introduction to and overview of one living tradition from list, including distribution graph/map; description of lifestyle; origins; persecution/conflict.

- \*Compare and contrast the living religion chosen and one major world religion under the following headings: origin, development and contemporary context.

*Resources which teachers have suggested include:*

- Baha'i Faith, National Assembly of Ireland, 24, Burlington Road, Dublin 4. 01-6683150 & <http://www.bahai.ie/> & <http://www.bahai.org/>
- Taoism - <http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~acmuller/contao/laotzu.htm> & <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/taoism/intros.htm> & <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Taichi/books.html#taoism>
- Sikhism - 78, Serpentine Avenue, Merrion Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4 & <http://www.sikhs.org/summary.htm> & <http://punjabgovt.nic.in/Culture/culture.htm>
- African traditional religions - <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/>
- Confucianism - <http://religion-cults.com/Eastern/Confucianism/confuci.htm>

## DISTRIBUTION



The Bahá'í faith is estimated to have over five million followers worldwide and is established in 190 countries. There are 2,112 tribes, races and ethnic groups represented in the Bahá'í community. Elected councils (Spiritual Assemblies) administer the affairs of the Baha'i Faith. In every country with a large Bahá'í community, a National Spiritual Assembly is elected each year. There are over 182 National Spiritual Assemblies in the world. In every local community where there are nine Bahá'ís or more, a Local Spiritual Assembly is elected and there are more than 12,000 around the world.

Every five years members of the National Spiritual Assemblies travel to the world centre of the Bahá'í Faith in Haifa, Israel, to elect the members of the international governing body of the Bahá'í community, the Universal House of Justice. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the Baha'i Faith is the second most widespread religion, with more than 120,000 centres worldwide. Bahá'í literature has been translated into over 800 languages including Irish. There have been Bahá'ís in Ireland since the 1920's. The first National Spiritual Assembly was elected here in 1972.

## ORIGINS

The Bahá'í faith began in the mid-19th century in Iran. It is based on the belief that the man born as Mirza Husayn Ali in 1817 was the most recent in the long line of prophets sent by God. He is now known as Bahá'u'lláh, which means 'Glory of God'. In 1844 a young Shi'a Muslim, Siyyid Ali-Muhammad, announced that he was a Báb - according to Shi'a tradition a 'gate' through whom God communicates with humanity. This brought fierce opposition, though he gained many followers who believed a new era of revelation was occurring. The Báb was executed in 1850 and terrible persecution of his disciples followed. Before he died, the Báb predicted that a new prophet would arise: "He Whom God Will Make Manifest". Bahá'ís believe that this new prophet is Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh was born into a wealthy Persian Muslim family. A prominent follower of the Báb, he was arrested after the Báb's execution and thrown into jail. Here he had a mystical experience revealing him as "He Whom God Will Make Manifest". On his release from prison in 1853 he was exiled to the neighbouring Ottoman Empire, and here a group of Báb's followers gathered around him. He had told no one of his belief that he was the new prophet, and not all Báb's followers accepted his claims to be the successor to the Báb, so he withdrew for two years into solitary retreat. In 1863 Bahá'u'lláh declared to his closest followers that he was the new prophet. The Ottoman rulers, kept him under house arrest until 1868, when he and his family were exiled to the remote city of Acre, in present-day Israel. From here the Bahá'í faith began to spread. Bahá'u'lláh died in 1892, having appointed his son, Abdul Baha, as the only authority capable of interpreting his revelations. The writings of Abdul Baha, who died in 1921, are also considered revelation and together with those of Bahá'u'lláh form the main body of Bahá'í sacred literature. During Abdul Baha's time the Bahá'ís became an international faith. Leadership of the faith passed to Abdul Baha's grandson, Shoghi Effendi, who established a democratic structure which took over when he died in 1957. His interpretation and translation into English of the Bahá'í sacred texts is considered definitive. Bahá'ís believe that the written revelations of Bahá'u'lláh and Abdul Baha supersede but do not contradict the earlier revelations of the Torah, the New Testament or the Qur'an. Bahá'ís believe in One God, creator of all, and thus follow the Abrahamic faiths. They also share the Abrahamic view that humanity is a distinct and special creation of God. They believe that humanity is essentially good and that if we follow the true teachings of the prophets down through history we will be able to live good lives. The five main Bahá'í beliefs are:

1. Everyone is equal, regardless of sex or race
2. There should be unity among religions
3. There should be no extremes of poverty or wealth
4. Everyone should be educated
5. True religion should be in harmony with scientific knowledge

## LIFESTYLE OF BELIEVERS TODAY

The communal life of Bahá'ís is dictated by a nineteen-month calendar, of nineteen days each month, making a total of 361 days. The 'left over' four days are described as intercalary days and are a time for giving gifts, hospitality and celebration. The Bahá'í celebrate the following holy days by gathering for prayers and devotional readings. They may share a meal or go on a picnic, and New Year's Day (21<sup>st</sup> March) is often marked by large festive gatherings:

- | New Year's Day - March 21st
- | The Ridván Festival - April 21<sup>st</sup>, 29th & May 2nd (Bahá'ís celebrate the period associated with the declaration by Bahá'u'lláh of his mission. He made his announcement in a garden called Ridván in 1863.
- | The Declaration of the Bab - May 23rd (The Báb was the forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh and made his declaration in 1844.
- | The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh - May 29th (The day in 1892 when Bahá'u'lláh passed away in the Holy Land)
- | The Martyrdom of the Báb - July 9th (The Báb was killed (1850) in the city of Tabriz in Iran)
- | The Birth of the Báb - October 20th (The Báb was born in 1819)
- | The Birth of Bahá'u'lláh - November 12th (Bahá'u'lláh was born in 1817)

Each first day of the month is also celebrated as a feast and Bahá'ís gather together for this. The Bahá'ís often meet in private homes for the nineteen-day feast and for other times of prayer and teaching. The feast has three parts. First there are devotional readings and meditations, some taken from scriptures other than Bahá'í. Secondly, an administrative meeting where all present discuss decisions and vote on action to be taken. The third aspect of the feast is social: food, games and entertainment. Bahá'ís have started to build in towns centres of administration and worship called Mashriqul Adhkar - Houses of Worship. These Houses of Worship have nine entrances, symbolizing the nine major faiths, which Bahá'ís believe, have been revealed through humanity's history. Bahá'ís see these houses of worship as places where people will gather when the Bahá'í faith has become the majority faith worldwide.

Daily prayer is obligatory, as Bahá'ís believe that humans have certain spiritual duties before God. Bahá'ís worship daily, following a set series of prayers, and pray in the direction of Acre and Haifa. Bahá'u'lláh asked his followers to choose one of three "obligatory" prayers to recite each day. Bahá'u'lláh also urged his followers to spend some time each day in meditation. Specifically, he encouraged followers to reflect at the end of each day on their deeds and their worth. He did not specify a particular format for meditation; rather individuals are free to choose their own form of meditation.

For Bahá'ís, the purpose of life is to know and love God, and to progress spiritually. While prayer and meditation are primary tools for spiritual development Bahá'u'lláh also called on Bahá'ís to refrain from eating or drinking from sunrise to sunset for nineteen consecutive days each year from March 2nd to March 20th. This period, known simply as "the Fast", is considered a time for followers to engage in deep reflection on their spiritual progress and detach themselves from material desires. Bahá'ís rise before dawn to eat breakfast and to pray. Some Bahá'ís are exempt from fasting for health reasons, as the Fast is not meant as a physical endurance test. The more important aspect is seen as the inward effort to utilize this period for reflection and spiritual preparation for the year ahead.

Bahá'ís have a strict code of conduct based upon the Kitáb I Aqdas, or Book of Laws, given by Bahá'u'lláh. There are no special dietary restrictions binding on the Bahá'ís, though the use of alcohol and substance abuse is forbidden. The smoking of tobacco is not forbidden but is strongly discouraged. Bahá'u'lláh also forbade gossip and backbiting. Marriage is very highly valued. Partners are free to choose each other but must then receive the permission of both sets of parents. Engaging in sexual relationships outside of marriage is contrary to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. Bahá'ís may vote but not take any active part in party politics. The vision of one world is seen to be of greater importance than the temporary state of national and even regional politics. Bahá'ís believe that human beings now stand on the threshold of becoming adult in behaviour, and thus capable of forming one world rather than diverse nations, races and religions. The object of life to a Bahá'í is to promote the oneness of mankind. The whole object of life is seen as bound up with the lives of all human beings. It is not a personal salvation that is sought but a universal one. Bahá'ís aim to produce a world civilization, which will in turn react on the character of the individual. Among the principles which the Bahá'í Faith promotes as vital to the achievement of this goal are:

- | The abandonment of all forms of prejudice
- | Assurance to women of full equality of opportunity with men
- | Recognition of the unity and relativity of religious truth
- | The elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth
- | The realization of universal education
- | The responsibility of each person to independently search for truth
- | The establishment of a world federation
- | Recognition that true religion is in harmony with reason and the pursuit of scientific knowledge

## **PERSECUTION / CONFLICT**

The claim that the Bahá'í sacred texts are the successor to the Qur'an has led to persecutions of Bahá'ís in many Muslim lands. In Iran, the homeland of the Bahá'í faith, Bahá'ís have been heavily persecuted and restricted. The Bahá'í World 1998-99 an international record states that "With approximately three hundred thousand members, the Bahá'í faith, Iran's largest religious minority, is not recognised as a religion by the Iranian Constitution. The Islamic regime refers to it as a heresy and a conspiracy and designates its followers "unprotected infidels," who have no legal rights..." (page 279) The document then goes on to report incidents of executions, death sentences and imprisonment; denial of the right to employment, pensions, access to education; confiscation of properties belonging to Bahá'ís and destruction of community properties etc.

Adapted from Religions of the World - E. Breuilly et al  
& Information Pamphlet – National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Republic of Ireland  
& The Bahá'í World 1998-99 - Bahá'í World Centre Haifa ©2000