

he became his father's aide and protector against the threats of detractors and the demands of visitors and pilgrims. After the sect's forced removal to Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey), the boy's support of the family left the father free to develop a comprehensive teaching based on social and moral ethics. Tall, erect, and blessed with a sharp profile, piercing eyes, and shoulder-length black hair, Abdul-Baha dressed simply in robe and white turban, yet made a memorable impression on others. According to Edward Granville Browne, an English physician and orientalist from Gloucestershire: "One more eloquent of speech, more ready of argument, more apt of illustration, more intimately acquainted with the sacred books of the Jews, the Christians, the Muhammadans, could, I should think, scarcely be found."

Began a Holy Life

At the age of 22, Abdul-Baha formally proclaimed himself the third religious leader of the Bahá'ís as well as the slave of Baha, interpreter of divine revelation, and the promised successor described in the Bab's covenant. To demonstrate the correct lifestyle of his sect, Abdul-Baha limited his diet to two meals per day and shared his food and belongings with the needy. In 1867, political shifts forced him and other Bahá'ís out of the Middle East. He left Constantinople and traveled northwest to Adrianople (modern Edirne, Turkey). As modern Europe destabilized power bases along the eastern Mediterranean, the Ottoman Turks imprisoned Abdul-Baha and his holy band at Acca (now Akko, Israel) in Ottoman Syria on the northern horn of the Bay of Haifa. To curtail the expansion of Bahá'ísm, his captors restricted inmate communication with the outside world and spied on them in fear of the movement's political intent. The prisoners—men, women, and children—suffered malaria, typhoid and dysentery. Lacking medicines, Abdul-Baha nursed the sick with broth before he too fell ill with dysentery, which kept him from comforting his followers for a month.

Spokesman for Bahá'í

Abdul-Baha expanded his ministry from one-on-one teaching and counseling to administering religious affairs and formulating the sect's philosophy. In 1886, he compiled the first history of the Bahá'í movement, later published with his collected papers. After the Bahá'u'lláh's death in May 1892, just as the Bab planned, the succession passed to Abdul-Baha. As characterized by his biographer, Isabel Fraser Chamberlain, author of *Abdul Baha on Bahá'í Philosophy*, he continued the work of Bahá'ís first two patriarchs by reviving his father's teachings, exemplifying divine law, and establishing a new kingdom on earth. A half-brother, Mirza Mohammad Ali, and other kin stirred a revolt against Abdul-Baha. To justify his ouster, they accused him of overreaching the Bab's covenant and Bahá'u'lláh's intent for him.

Prison and Release

In 1904 and 1907, as power struggles shook the established order in the eastern Mediterranean, government commissioners grew suspicious of organized groups and inquired into the source and nature of Abdul-Baha's influence. Hostile agents

jailed him at a Turkish prison, where he continued to receive representatives of all faiths and races. During his imprisonment, he married Munirih Khanum, mother of their four daughters. Fluent in Persian, Arabic, and Turkish, he carried on an enormous correspondence of some 27,000 letters to philosophers, religious leaders, and pilgrims from all parts of the globe. Despite his personal plight and the danger to his family, he spread faith, cheer, and hope to the hopeless.

Risking execution by the sultan, Abdul-Baha refused to plead his innocence before a corrupt investigating committee or to attempt escape by an Italian ship that his sympathizers arranged for him in the harbor. In September 1908, the Turkish revolution resulted in the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire and the freeing of political and religious prisoners. Immediately, Abdul-Baha left his cell and made a formal gesture to the demoralized Bahá'ís. He finished building the shrine of the Bab above Haifa on Mount Carmel and buried the remains of the founder in hallowed ground.

A Mission to the World

At the newly established Bahá'í headquarters in Acre, Palestine, Abdul-Baha continued composing sacred writings, now collected in two compendia, Bahá'í Scriptures and Bahá'í World Faith. When his daughters matured, they interpreted and transcribed his writings to free him for more important community missions to the oppressed, sick, and poor. As sect leader, he promoted the unity of world religions and the universalism of Bahá'í. He summarized ten principles of the faith: (1) the independent search for truth; (2) the unity of all people; (3) the harmony of religion and science; (4) the equality of female and male; (5) the compulsory education for all; (6) the establishment of one global language; (7) the creation of a world court; (8) harmonious relations of all people in work and love; (9) the condemnation of prejudice; and (10) the abolition of poverty and extreme wealth.

Resettled in Alexandria, Egypt, Abdul-Baha received all comers to his center and, in August 1911, visited France and England. He dispatched reformers to the United States, which he toured in April 1912. In Wilmette, Illinois, he dedicated the site of a Bahá'í temple, the first such structure in the Western Hemisphere. He next championed peace, women's rights, racial equality, and social justice in Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria, and Hungary.

A Life Dedicated to Peace

In the last years of his service to Bahá'í, Abdul-Baha returned to Palestine and resumed control of his headquarters at Haifa. During World War I, he nurtured the sick and helped to avert famine by stockpiling adequate stores of wheat. Because travel was hampered by warships in sea lanes, he remained at his office to outline future goals for the Bahá'í community in Tablets of the Divine Plan Revealed by Abdul-Baha to the North American Bahá'ís. After the British army liberated Palestine, in April 1920, an agent of the King of England knighted him for promoting peace in the Middle East.

Still visiting the aged and struggling underclass to the last, Abdul-Baha died peacefully in his sleep on November 28, 1921. Amid a throng of mourners, his

body was interred in the northern rooms of the Bab's tomb on Mount Carmel. The mission begun by the Bab and the Bahá'u'lláh passed from Abdul-Baha to his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, the next guardian of the Bahá'í faith. By 1995, with five million members in 232 countries, Bahá'í had become the world's second most widely spread religion.

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