

# *One Common Faith*

## — GLOSSARY —

### **A**

#### **Abraham**

Jewish, Christian and Muslim believers regard Abraham as a founding patriarch of their peoples. Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice his son Isaac as a test faith. As Abraham was fulfilling the order, God revoked the command and rewarded Abraham for his faith. God forged a covenant with Abraham and stated that through his offspring, all the nations of the world would come to be blessed. Bahá'ís regard Abraham as a Manifestation of God.

#### **abyss**

Something that is immeasurably deep or bottomless; a situation of apparently unending awfulness.

#### **anachronistic**

Belonging to another time; out-of-date or inappropriate to the time in question.

#### **anthropological**

Relating to the study of humankind, especially the study of cultures.

#### **arrogating**

Taking or claiming something for yourself without the right to do so.

#### **autocracy**

A government in which a single ruler holds unlimited power.

#### **Avatars**

Derives from the Sanskrit term Avatāra, meaning “incarnation” and refers to the descent of a divine being into the mortal realm. The term is used primarily in Hindu texts. For example, Krishna is considered an Avatar of Vishnu, whom many Hindus worship as God.

### **B**

#### **the Báb**

Arabic for “the Gate”. One of the two Figures regarded by Bahá'ís as independent Manifestations of God, and joint Founders of the Bahá'í Faith. The Báb's brief ministry (1844-1850) prepared the way for the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

#### **Bahá'u'lláh**

The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'ís consider Bahá'u'lláh to be the universal Manifestation of God anticipated in the scriptures of all the major religions.

#### **Bhagavad-Gita**

From the Sanskrit meaning “Song of God”. The Bhagavad-Gita is revered by the majority of Hindu traditions as sacred scripture. The text takes the form of a conversation between Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield before the climactic war, and serves as a concise guide to Hindu philosophy. During the discourse Krishna reveals his identity as the Supreme Being.

**buttressed**

Being supported or reinforced.

**C****carnal**

Relating to physical needs or appetites, especially as contrasted with spiritual or intellectual qualities.

**castigated**

Criticized, rebuked, or severely punished.

**catechisms**

The basic principles of a religion, generally presented using questions and answers.

**Cause**

A term used in the Bahá'í writings to refer to the Bahá'í Faith, one which places emphasis on the religion's social, institutional and eschatological dimensions.

**certitude**

A sense of absolute conviction about something, especially of religious belief. The Bahá'í writings describe certitude as a state beyond faith, and the goal of all spiritual search.

**charismatic exaltation**

A state of ecstasy attributed by practitioners to the belief that they are recipients of a form of divine grace.

**commonweal**

The common welfare; the public good.

**condign**

Well-deserved; fitting.

**conversion**

The adoption of new beliefs, specifically a new religion.

**corollary**

Something that is a natural consequence of something else.

**corporeal**

Relating to or involving the physical body rather than the mind or spirit.

**creed**

A formal summary of the principles of a religion.

**D****demoralize**

To erode or destroy the courage or hope of someone.

**dictates**

Rules or principles that governs how something must behave.

**dislocation**

The displacement of something from its usual or proper position.

**dispensation**

A divinely ordained religious system; the time during which a religious doctrine or practice is believed to be in force.

**doctrine**

A body of ideas, particularly in religion, taught to people as truthful or correct.

**dogma**

An authoritative principle, belief, or statement proclaimed as absolutely true without proof.

**draconian**

Rigorous; unusually severe or harsh.

**E****effulgence**

Brightness or a brilliant light radiating from something.

**efficacy**

Ability to produce the necessary or desired results.

**ephemeral**

Lasting for only a short period of time; the opposite of permanent.

**epic**

A long story or series of events, characterized by adventures or struggle; impressive by virtue of greatness of size, scope, or heroism.

**eschatological**

Concerned with the ultimate destiny of humanity.

**euphemisms**

Words that are vague or indirect used to replace others that are considered to be too harsh, unpleasant or offensive.

**evolutionary**

Pertaining to a gradual process in which something changes into a more complex form.

**exacerbate**

To make an already bad or problematic situation worse.

**exhortation**

Something said or written in order to urge somebody strongly to do something.

**F****facets**

Any one of the several parts of something.

**focal centre**

The place at which many things meet or come together.

**G****Guardian**

A title referring to Shoghi Effendi, who was appointed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to interpret the scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith. The Guardian guided the Bahá'í community from 1921 to 1957. Among his principle achievements were the facilitation of the spread of the Bahá'í Faith to all parts of the globe, the establishment of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and the translation of many Bahá'í texts into English.

**H****hedged**

The scope or applicability of something significantly limited or restricted by means of something else.

**hegemony**

Control or dominating influence by one person or group over others.

**heterogeneous**

Individual parts that are unrelated or unlike each other.

**homage**

A show of reverence or respect toward somebody.

**I****ideological**

Pertaining to a closely organized set of beliefs, values and opinions that shapes the way an individual or group understands the world.

**idolatrous**

Given to the worshiping of idols or false gods.

**idolatry**

The worshiping of idols or false gods.

**immemorial**

So old that it seems always to have existed.

**immutable**

Not changing, or not able to be changed.

**imperishable**

Not able to be spoiled, weakened, or damaged through time; not forgotten or ignored over time.

**indefeasible**

Not able to become undone, annulled, or made void.

**inducements**

Anything that gives somebody a reason to do something, especially things offered as an incentive.

**inimical**

Adverse in effect; unfavorable; unfriendly.

**injunctions**

Commands or orders, especially from somebody in a position of authority.

**interfaith**

Involving or occurring between people of different religious faiths.

**intimations**

Subtle hints or signs of something.

**irreconcilable**

Not capable of being made to agree with something else.

**Isaac**

The son of Abraham who was offered by his father as a sacrifice upon the order of God. God intervened and spared Isaac, and rewarded Abraham for his faith by creating a covenant with him, declaring that through Abraham's offspring, all the nations of the world would come to be blessed.

**Ismā'īl**

A son of Abraham. Revered in Islam as the traditional ancestor of Muhammad and of the Arab peoples.

**J****Jacob**

A son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. His twelve sons became the founders of the twelve tribes of ancient Israel.

**L****latent**

Present or existing, but in an underdeveloped or unexpressed form.

**lesser prophets**

In the Bahá'í Writings, those figures who expanded and developed the work of the "primary Authors" of an independent religious dispensation. A figure such as Isaiah in the Old Testament is considered a "lesser prophet".

**literalistic**

Following the literal meaning of a word or phrase, without further elaboration or interpretation, or an awareness of the imaginative power of something.

**litmus test**

A test in which a single factor determines the outcome.

**M****manifested**

Revealed or made evident by showing or demonstrating something clearly.

**Master**

A title given by Bahá'u'lláh exclusively to his son 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Master was appointed by Bahá'u'lláh as His successor, and is the Perfect Exemplar of the Bahá'í teachings. He produced a vast body of literature interpreting and further elucidating Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. In 1911 he began his historic trips to Europe and North America in order to spread the Bahá'í Faith to the West.

**materialism**

The theory that physical matter is the only reality; devotion to material wealth and possessions at the expense of spiritual or intellectual values.

**materialistic**

Focused on physical or material concerns at the expense of spiritual and intellectual values.

**matrix**

A network or complex grouping of elements.

**mediate**

To act as a medium that transfers something from one place to another.

**mendicancy**

The practice of begging.

**metamorphoses**

Changes or transformations from one state to another.

**metaphorical**

Not meant to be taken literally, but rather used to illustrate something or make a comparison.

**N****negation**

The opposite of something regarded as positive, or the absence of such a thing.

**nihilistic**

A belief that life is pointless and human values are worthless.

**O****occult**

Relating to, or involving, the supernatural, magic, or witchcraft.

**opiate**

Something that has a sleep-inducing, pacifying or dulling effect.

**ostensibly**

Presented as being true or appearing to be true, but hiding a different motive.

**P****panorama**

An unobstructed or all-encompassing view extending in all directions.

**pantheistic prodigies**

Refers to popular belief that Divinity resides in all human beings, or in Nature itself, and to miraculous powers attributed to this supposed endowment.

**pathologies**

Deviations from a healthy or normal condition; processes of a disease.

**patrimony**

The things that a generation has inherited from its ancestors.

**patronage**

The appointments or privileges that a person in power gives to loyal supporters.

**patronized**

The treatment of someone as if he were less intelligent or knowledgeable than yourself.

**peerless**

Something so exceptional that it is without equal.

**periphery**

The area around the edge of something; the state of having only a minor involvement in something.

**pivotal**

Vitally important, especially in determining the outcome or success of something.

**postulate**

A claim or basic principle that is assumed to be true.

**practice**

A way of acting; a habit, custom or usual way of doing something.

**primary Authors**

In the Bahá'í Writings, those Figures who inaugurated a new religious dispensation, such as Moses, Jesus, Buddha and Muhammad.

**primitive**

Relating to or appearing in an earlier stage of development.

**precept**

A rule or principle that guides somebody's actions, especially one that guides moral behaviour.

**promulgated**

Proclaimed or declared in an official or formal manner so that it is widely known.

**proselytism**

Forcefully trying to convert someone to a religious faith.

**Providence**

The wisdom, care and guidance provided by God to humankind.

**Psalms**

A book of the Bible made up of long series of poems and hymns to God, believed to have been written by King David.

**Q****quickened**

To make alive; vitalize.

**S****scientific materialism**

A philosophical body of thought that interpreted all of history and human behavior in a purely materialistic and economic framework; commonly associated with the work of philosophers such as Karl Marx and later embodied in communist regimes such as the Soviet Union.

**sectarian**

Designating phenomena that derive from the division of major religions into different denominations.

**sects**

Denominations or groups within a larger religious group, often with beliefs and practices at variance with those of the established main group.

**secular**

Not concerned with religious or spiritual matters.

**spiritualism**

A religious movement especially strong in Great Britain and the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Spiritualism's core belief is the ability of living beings to contact souls who have progressed to the spiritual world through self-proclaimed "mediums".

**stultify**

To diminish somebody's interest or liveliness of mind by being repetitive, tedious or boring.

**subordinate**

A secondary or supportive role or position.

**surihs**

Individual chapters of the Qur'án.

**T****tabernacle**

A place of worship; often metaphorically a physical body considered as a housing for the soul.

**testimony**

A public profession of belief or commitment.

**theological dogmas**

A set of principles or beliefs created by religious leaders over time, generally based on their own narrow interpretation of Divine teachings.

**theosophy**

Literally "god wisdom". A name chosen for itself by a movement that began in the 1870s, and by the early twentieth century had a following throughout North America, Europe and India. Its central belief was in the development of divine powers in order to ensure reincarnation into successively higher forms of being.

**thickets**

The dense and tangled growth of trees or bushes.

**touchstone**

A standard by which something is judged.

**transcendence**

Existence above and apart from the material world; the quality or state of surpassing something.

**transient**

Lasting for only a short period time and quickly disappearing.

**transitory**

Not permanent or lasting, but existing only for a short time.

**trustee**

Someone given the legal authority or responsibility to manage something on behalf of someone else.

**U****Upanishads**

The last section of the Hindu scriptures, composed between 800 and 400 B.C.; a body of scripture considered sacred to Hindu belief.

**usurpation**

The illegal seizure and occupation of a position of power or authority.

**V****vagaries**

Unpredictable or erratic ideas, desires, or actions.

**vehemence**

Marked by forceful energy; powerful; intensely emotional.

**vindication**

Evidence or an argument used as proof of something.

**virulence**

The quality of being extremely hostile, poisonous or damaging.

**vitiate**

To destroy or drastically reduce the effectiveness of something; to cause something to become defective.

**W****waxed**

To grow or become.