

Features

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How often have you heard that all the world's major religions are really the same?

It may be too simplistic to say Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Moslems and Christians believe in precisely the same things, but certain similarities in their faiths cannot be denied.

They all seem to emphasize love, humility, honesty, and the need to forgive. The golden rule that you should act towards other the way you would want them to act towards you, is another common feature. All these groups accept the concept of a loving God, and believe that man has an immortal soul.

If you are one of those people

religion is called Baha'i (Ba-high) and its believers are called Baha'is.

The Baha'is may not be a very well known group, but because of the Islamic revolution in Iran they have been in the news. The faith has its origins in Iran and today there are 450,000 adherents in that country, a fact that the Moslem majority has never been comfortable with.

As a result of this discomfort the Baha'is have been persecuted at different times in Iranian history. It now appears to be one of those times.

During the past two years members have been arrested and executed, property has been confiscated and religious centres

"concerned about the imprisonment—and in some cases execution—of members of religious minorities in Iran, including Baha'is..."

It added that, "the whereabouts are still unknown of nine members of the Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly in Iran who were taken into custody on 21, August 1980."

Although there are more Baha'is than there are members of all other religious minorities in Iran, combined, Baha'is, unlike Christians, Jews, and Zoroasters, do not have the nominal protection of the new Islamic constitution.

In an interview he gave before he took power, the Ayatollah Khomeini said an Islamic

the *Bayan*, in which he forbade polygamy, concubinage and altered orthodox Moslem divorce laws which favoured men. The Baha'is have since extended these reforms toward complete equality between men and women, and as a result have been accused by Iran's conservative Mullahs of encouraging prostitution.

Renaming himself Bab ed-Din or Gate of the Faith, Ali Mohammed founded a group of eighteen disciples who spread his teachings throughout Persia. This irritated the orthodox Moslem clergy who encouraged Shah Nasr-ed-Din to violently persecute the Babists. The persecution culminated in 1850, with the execution of Bab ed-Din in the city of Tobriz.

Thirteen years after Bab-ed-Din's death, one of his followers, another Persian prince named Husayn Ali, claimed to be the messenger of Bab ed-Din had predicted.

Baha'is believe that Husayn Ali, who assumed the title Glory of God or Baha'ullah, is the latest of the Manifestations of God who have founded the world's great religions.

According to Baha'ullah, all these men founded a version of "God's Religion", based on the same eternal spiritual laws. However, the social laws they formulated were different because they were adapted to the needs of people in widely varying situations. In a book about Baha'i (*The Baha'i Faith, An Introduction*) Gloria Faizi writes, "It would be impossible to think of a loving Creator Who could withhold His guidance from any section of the human race."

It is the belief in the basic similarities of the world's religions that attracted Janet Sidwell, chairman of the York Baha'i club, to the faith. The second year law student took a course in world religions and according to Sidwell, "What struck me was not the differences, but the similarities." When a friend introduced her to

Baha'i, she found an explanation for "one of the things that had always bothered me."

Unlike Sidwell, Gita Badiyan, a third year student and one of the five to ten per cent of Canadian Baha'is who are of Persian origin, has parents who are Baha'is. However, Badiyan points out that being a Baha'i is her own decision. She says children of Baha'i parents "are given freedom to choose at age fifteen." Faced with the choice of entering the Faith, "I would say they usually do."

The process of becoming a Baha'i, as with most aspects of the religion, is informal. In her book Faizi writes, "When a person believes in Baha'ullah as the messenger of God for his age, he is a Baha'i. He does not need to change his name or go through any kind of ceremony. For administrative records and practical reasons, he is expected to declare his faith to the local assembly of the place in which he lives."

Baha'is deliberately downplay ritual, because they believe when there is too much of it, people tend to be more involved with the ceremonies than with the beliefs behind them. The religion also shuns ascetism, but does put an accent on moderate fasting, prayer and community get-togethers.

Because ritual is almost non-existent and because Baha'i encourages spiritual and practical education among its members, there is no clergy. Baha'is in any given community elect by secret ballot a nine member board called a Local Assembly. The Local Assemblies are responsible to the nine elected members who form the National Assembly of their country. National Assemblies are in turn responsible to a Universal House of Justice, which was first elected in 1963. Baha'is believe in a coming world order in which everyone will respect the authority of this body. The Baha'i World Centre, established early in the twentieth century, is located in Haifa, Israel, where the Baha'ullah died.

Baha'i Faith

Persia's persecuted religion of love

who thinks mankind's religions are based on the same principles, you are not alone. In fact, there are a large number of people who not only believe this but who follow a religion based on this belief. The

have been desecrated. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Robert Runcie has addressed Iranian officials on the Baha'is' behalf and in February Amnesty International announced it was

government would not grant Baha'is religious or political freedom because "They are a political faction, they are harmful..."

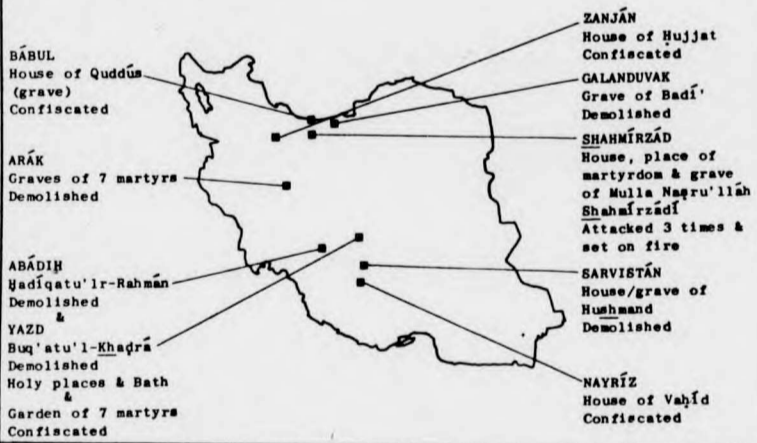
Ironically, Khomeini's opinion that the Baha'is are a political rather than a religious group may be based on the Baha'is refusal to participate in politics. *Times of London* correspondent Michael Coleman suggested that through the recent persecutions the Baha'is are "paying the penalty" because, "They stuck to their convictions and refused to vote in the national referendum on the forming of an Islamic republic."

"Paying the price" is also part of the early history of the Baha'is. The religion traces its origins back to the teachings of a Persian prince, Ali Mohammed, who in 1844 announced he has been chosen to prepare the way for a great "Messenger of God" who would appear in nineteen years.

As part of the preparation, Ali Mohammed wrote a book entitled

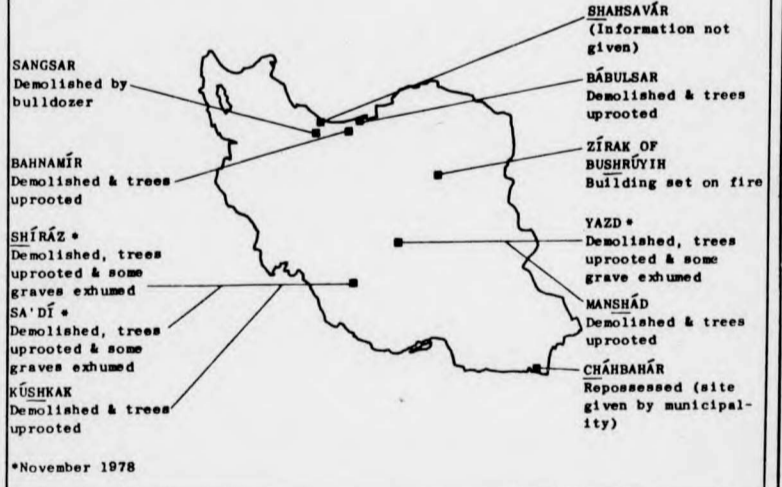
Historical sites confiscated or destroyed

APRIL - MAY 1979



Cemeteries destroyed

APRIL - MAY 1979



North American entries cut no ice

Elliott Lefko

This past winter has been a disaster for American and Canadian feature films. After viewing certain efforts, I found that I had had more fun watching paint dry.

Spring is now at hand, and with the break in weather comes a bunch of new films that could keep the filmgoing public indoors.

Atlantic City U.S.A., is a charmer that features a first-class script (John Guare), strong direction (Louis Malle), and great acting from a mostly Canadian cast, interfused with Burt Lancaster and Susan Sarandon who shine in some untypical roles.

The backdrop is an Atlantic City

reborn, as Bob Goulet sings at one point in the film, because of the influx of government-sanctioned Howard Johnson-owned gambling casinos.

As in previous Malle efforts, style simply gushes through every pore of every frame. Through his suggestive eye the dreamy magic of Atlantic City's past, fights with the technological plastic of the present day.

O.K., what would happen if all those little alligators that people flushed down the toilet in the aftermath of a certain 'baby alligator' craze, grew up to be big alligators, alive and extremely well below the city streets? and what

happens if they attack St. Louis, Missouri?

If *Alligator* sounds incredible, it's only because it is. John Sayles wrote it for some quick greenstuff, but he's actually a talented author actually a talented author (*Union Dues*), and filmmaker (*Return Of The Secacus Seven*), who began writing for 'B-flick king' Roger Corman, who is producing *Alligator*.

Knightriders is George Romero's new film and it is quite a change from *The Night Of The Living Dead*, *Dawn Of The Dead*, or *Martin*, his best known works. The subject this time is a group of

crazy bikers and artisans who move as a travelling road show caught up in a medieval dream that

has them jousting on their bikes, with the winners becoming the new leader.

