

*Doukhobors*

*and the*

*Bahá'í Faith*

*and*

*Tolstoy and His Appreciation  
of the Bahá'í Faith*



*by Dr. A-M. Ghadirian*

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*Updated from the first edition 1989*

*Approved by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada  
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*Dedicated to  
the hearts and souls of  
all Doukhobors and Bahá'ís  
who are striving for peace and the good of humankind*



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*A-M. Ghadirian, M.D.*



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# Foreword

Recently, during a conversation with a dear friend, I was shown a copy of a publication written by Dr. A-M. Ghadirian, a renowned physician, scholar, promoter of peace, and member of the Canadian Bahá'í community. My friend thought I might be aware of the publication, since I had had the good fortune of meeting Dr. Ghadirian a couple of times.

The first time was in Grand Forks, B.C., in the 1970s, when he visited our Doukhobor community while researching the life and works of the great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy. "Grandfather Tolstoy," as our people called him, had become a friend and benefactor during our persecution by the church and state in Russia, for rejecting orthodox dogma and refusing to serve in the military, which led to our subsequent emigration to Canada.

The second time was in Montreal in 1995, when a Doukhobor a cappella choir and drama ensemble, The Voices for Peace, performed across Canada, at the UN in New York, and in the Russian Federation to mark the centenary of our burning of weapons, as well as the fiftieth anniversaries of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the end of World War II, and the creation of the United Nations Organization.

As noted by our Doukhobor historian and scholar, Eli Popoff, in his preface to the first edition of *Doukhobors and the Bahá'í Faith*, Dr. Ghadirian is indeed a sensitive and insightful student of human history and development. In particular, I admire his use of comparative analysis in order to understand why people believe what they do, not with the intention of judgement, but to become more aware of common ground, and hopefully even more appreciative of different faith traditions.

I have also benefited personally from meeting and working with representatives of the Bahá'í community through programs like Children of War, through joint spiritual meetings and work for peace, justice, and human rights, when Bahá'ís visited our communities in

south-central B.C., and when I visited their shrine in Haifa, Israel, and became aware of their repression in Iran.

From what I know of the Bahá'í Faith, I have been most impressed by their endurance in the face of persecution and their dedication to peace and the unity of humanity. We Doukhobors are known for our pacifism and what has been referred to as our “gospel of love.” I write this foreword during a most trying time as humanity, already fractured by racism, inequality, terrorism, and climate change, begins to emerge from our struggle with the global COVID-19 pandemic, and as we Canadians begin the process of reconciliation and “reconciliation” with our Indigenous peoples. Frequently, I hear people longing to “get back to normal,” and I think, “Is it not that ‘normal’ that got all of us into this predicament in the first place?”

Leo Tolstoy called the Doukhobors “people of the twenty-fifth century” because of our forebears’ understanding of what they referred to as their way of life, rather than their religion. He also came to appreciate the Bahá'í Faith. What a wonderful world it could be if people developed an appreciation of humanity’s unity through our diversity; if the power of love triumphed over the love of power; and if we all dedicated ourselves to service to humanity, like the recently deceased husband of the woman who asked me to write this foreword. For Bahá'ís, and for Doukhobors, and for all people of good will, that time has come. I hope that time has come for you, too.

*John J. Verigin, Jr.  
Executive Director of the Doukhobor organization,  
the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC)  
Grand Forks, B.C., Canada, 2 July 2021*



John J. Verigin, Sr. (left), and Dr. A-M. Ghadirian (right)



# Preface to the 1989 Edition

It is always a plus for humanity when people of one Faith take time and effort to study, understand, and then give cognizance to the positive values of another Faith.

We all have to admit that, geographically, on this planet Earth of ours, we are faster and faster becoming a “Global Village.” Parallel with this, it is becoming more and more essential that we begin to realize that philosophically, or in our life-concepts, we are all in some way or another interrelated.

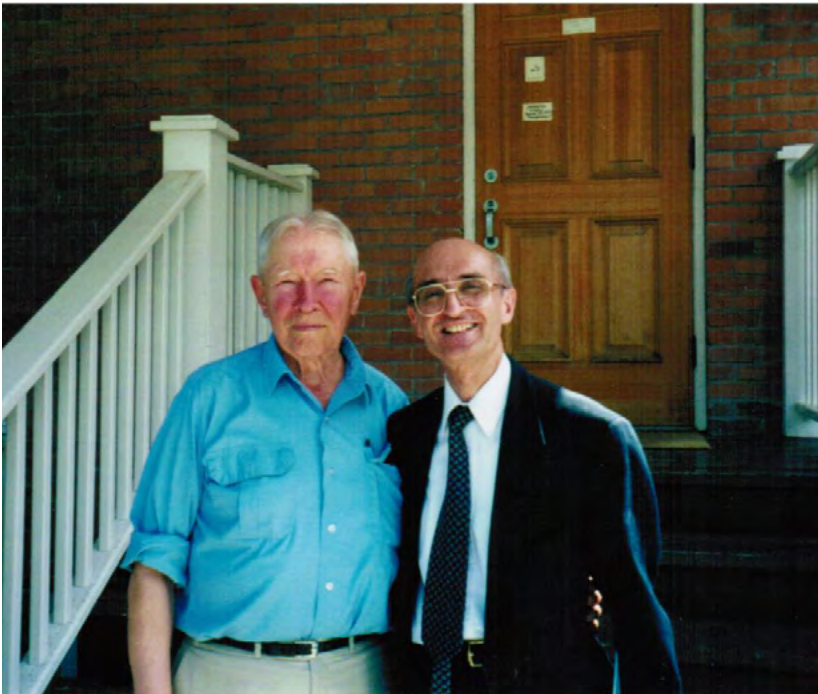
Consequently, the foremost responsibility for all of us in our time, is, first, to come to a proper and objective *recognition* of what the real *central fundamental values* of our particular Faith are; then second, with *tolerance* and *objectivity* in our dealing with people, and especially with those of other Faiths, we must continually rely on and refer to the *positive, compatible* aspects of these fundamental values in the formulation of our day-to-day actions and interrelations with all whom we come into contact.

This, and *only this approach*, will lead towards a broader understanding of each other and towards the achievement of *harmonious relationships* of all the people on our beautiful planet Earth.

Dr. Ghadirian has spent considerable time in studying the Doukhobor Faith and Life-Concept, and in this documented article has pointed out various similarities in the Faith and Life-Concepts of the Bahá'ís and Doukhobors. He is to be commended on his worthy efforts. There are other valuable materials in the world today in the comparative study of religions which should be given more attention by all of humanity. It is the hope of all Doukhobors that mankind *will heed* messages of this nature, and at an ever-increasing pace come

to the realization of the kinship of all races and all Faiths. With this realization, all of mankind can truly start a new age and begin to live as brothers and sisters under the guidance of the one *eternal creative Spirit-Force* which manifests itself within each and every one of us in our *power of love*.

*Eli A. Popoff, Doukhobor Historian  
Grand Forks, B.C., Canada, 14 October 1988*



Eli A. Popoff (left) and Dr. A-M. Ghadirian (right)

# Introduction

My interest in the Doukhobor community began as early as 1969, when I visited a Bahá'í family in Kamsack, Saskatchewan. They introduced me to their Doukhobor friends, who warmly received me. My interest in the Doukhobor community grew through reading about their vision of peace and their heroic and pacifist struggles in the 19th century in Russia, opposing war and bloodshed. Leo Tolstoy's admiration and support of their peace-loving movement further fueled my interest in the history and development of Doukhobor society. As I learned more about Doukhobor people, I decided to visit them in other regions of western Canada, such as British Columbia. Those meetings had an important effect on my understanding and appreciation of the Doukhobor view of life and peace.

Since the publication of the first edition of this book, my interest and friendship with the Doukhobor community and its esteemed and respected leaders has increased. I had the delightful opportunity, especially during the 1990s and early years of this century, to be in touch with the late Mr. John J. Verigin, Sr., the former Honorary Chairman of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, and his son Mr. J.J. Verigin, Jr., as well as with the Doukhobor historian Mr. Eli A. Popoff, and I cherished and still cherish their friendship. I remember the historic and inspiring centenary of the commemoration of the Doukhobor movement in Canada in 1995, entitled "Creative Global Harmony through Toil and Peaceful Life," one event of which was held in Montreal, when the Doukhobor Choir sang in celebration of the victory of peace over the destruction of war.

During the past thirty years the world's citizens have been striving to build a peaceful and harmonious society. There has been spectacular and unprecedented progress, including discoveries in science and technology that have created greater prosperity. For example, scientific knowledge has enabled us to take great strides forward in sending astronauts to other planets. But on our own planet, Earth, more effort is needed to achieve peace and harmony.

Indeed, through that same science and technology, governments have invented and amassed arsenals of mass destruction to kill their enemies, the potency of which could obliterate everything on the Earth. Even a superficial review of the history of humanity reveals that lasting peace requires more than the absence of war and strife. Unless there is harmony between the material and spiritual dimensions of life, a durable peace cannot be attained.

Nevertheless, I believe that world peace is not only possible; it is inevitable. But it will not come easily. There are many barriers to break down before universal peace becomes a reality. Among these barriers are issues such as racial, social, religious, and political prejudices. Other obstacles are nationalism, materialism, and power struggles for superiority of one group or nation over another. Most important of all is the barrier of injustice and preferential treatment of men over women. Equality of men and women is the basis of social justice, and justice is the cornerstone of unity. There will not be any peace if there is no unity and fellowship among the peoples of the world.

Among those who laboured for peace was the renowned Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, a brief account of whose life and vision is included in this book. Tolstoy had a fondness for Doukhobors and was very touched by their plight and persecution in Russia. He shared the concept of peace for which they struggled. Through royalties from the sale of his book, *Resurrection*, he helped them to migrate to Canada. Tolstoy was also very interested in the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith, especially its views on peace, unity, and a violence-free civilization. He was aware, as well, of the suffering and persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran and their struggle to bring about social justice and peace, and to unite humankind as one family.

# Chapter 1: The Doukhobors

The Doukhobors are a group of Russian pacifists who emigrated to Canada at the turn of the 20th century.

The origin of the Doukhobor movement can be traced back to the 18th century, when its first members refused to worship icons. Because of this refusal, they were branded as heretics and referred to as *Ikonobortsi*, which literally means “icon wrestlers.” In 1785 Ambrosius, an archbishop of the Russian Orthodox Church, derisively labeled them *Dukhobortsi* or “spirit wrestlers,”<sup>1,2</sup> implying that they were fighting against the Holy Spirit. They were dissident peasants who rejected the prevailing Orthodox doctrine that the spirit of God abided in inanimate objects such as icons. The dissidents therefore gracefully accepted the name *Dukhobortsi* with a positive interpretation and declared that they would indeed “struggle against all other evils inherent in churches, in society and in man himself.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, they acknowledged that they would wrestle the soul of man to achieve a greater spiritual nobility.

## *Origins of the Doukhobor Movement*

Although the Doukhobors have been known by this name since the 18th century, historical events leading to the formation of their society and their social philosophy are not clear, nor do we know the exact date when this society came into being. It has been suggested that the concept of Doukhoborism in Russia was influenced by the Quaker movement in England; however, there is no authentic evidence to support this assumption.<sup>4</sup>

In a book entitled *The Doukhobors*, George Woodcock and his associate Ivan Avakumovic explored extensively the historical roots of Doukhobor society and suggested that probably the followers of Danilo Filippov (Daniel Filipovitch) were the first teachers of the Doukhobor people.<sup>5</sup> According to these authors, Filippov was an army deserter in the 17th century who established himself as a hermit in a cave and apparently lived on the shore of the Volga River. After exhaustive study of the Bible and the Orthodox liturgy, he decided to

abandon these writings by putting them in a sack and throwing them into the Volga. He declared that the truth should instead be found in “the gold book, the living book ... the Holy Spirit.”<sup>6</sup> In his opinion, this Spirit, which he held to be God, dwells within every man. He further thought that Christ was born as other men were, that on the cross He died in the flesh but rose in the spirit, and that this spirit was incessantly resurrected. Danilo Filippov in fact regarded himself as one of the resurrections, a living Christ, and his disciple and successor, Ivan Suslov, who died in 1716, appointed 12 apostles and was worshiped by his followers in a deserted church in a village beside the Volga. The heresy of Danilo Filippov gave birth in the direct line of his apostolate to some of the most curious of all Russian sects, including the *Khlysty*, a company of dancing flagellants, and the *Skoptsy*, who castrated themselves “to the greater glory of God.”<sup>7</sup>

Another historical investigation which might shed some light on the origin of the Doukhobors comes from Professor Platonov who, in his book of Russian history published in 1945, explored an incident which could be related to the origin of Doukhobor society.<sup>8</sup> According to this author, “in 1471 in the city of Novgorod a heresy was exposed that professed openly that its adherents did not believe in the divine trinity, did not believe in a supernatural birth of Christ and refused to bow down and worship ikons. An official church edict of 1504 strongly condemned this, what they called heretical trend and many of its followers were burned at the stake and otherwise liquidated.”<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that none of these movements is known to have been clearly linked to the Doukhobors; however, one cannot rule out such a possibility as there are some similarities between the Doukhobor philosophies and the precepts of some of the sects.

Doukhobors consider themselves to be the spiritual descendants of Abel, the peaceful son of Adam who was killed by his brother Cain. This identification with Abel is in line with the Doukhobor philosophy of striving for peace and avoiding violence. Doukhobors are also considered wanderers constantly moving from the “land of oppression” toward the promised land of enlightenment and truth.<sup>10</sup>

## *Concept and Philosophy*

There is a mystical flavour in the Doukhobor philosophy of life and the universe. Peace, as opposed to violence, is the hallmark of the followers' belief. There is a spiritual battle in which the words of God are the weapon. To some extent, like the mystics, they believe they can be in direct contact with God and be inspired and guided directly by divine grace; thus, the need for a priest as a divine mediator is unnecessary. Doukhobors believe that they can feel the divine reality in each person, and, indeed, the Kingdom of God is established in peoples' hearts. Further, "since the direction of their behaviour must come from within, they naturally deny the right of the state or other external authority to dictate their actions. And, since all men are vessels for the divine essence, they regard it as sinful to kill other men, even in war; hence springs the pacifism that is the most durable and widespread of Doukhobor attitudes."<sup>11</sup>

George Woodcock, considered by the Doukhobors<sup>12</sup> as an acknowledged authority on the study of Doukhoborism, with his associate Ivan Avakumovic, sums up the essential precepts of Doukhobor philosophy as follows:

[Doukhobors believe in] the complete rejection of the idea of a mediatory priesthood, and, in this and other respects, the Doukhobors stand on the extreme left of the theological spectrum. From the traditional churches they differ in having no liturgy and no ikons, no fasts and no festivals, no churches and no priests. They acknowledge no sacraments, and in denying the importance of baptism they are more radical than the Anabaptists. From the Quakers they differ in rejecting the doctrine of redemption. They believe heaven and hell to be states of the mind, and for this reason, they bury their dead without elaborate ceremonial; they regard marriages as free unions between individuals, not contracts bound by laws of church and state. Finally, they are marked off among modern Christians from all but a few similarly exclusive millenarian sects by their rejection of the Bible as the ultimate source of inspiration. The only visible symbols

of their faith are the loaf of bread, the cellar of salt, and the jug of water that stand on the table in the middle of their meeting houses, symbolizing the basic elements of existence.... It is the belief in the immanence of God, in the presence within each man of the Christ spirit, which not merely renders priesthood unnecessary, since each man is his own priest in direct contact with the divine, but also makes the Bible obsolete, since every man can be guided, if only he will listen to it, by the voice within. The only real ceremonial act among Doukhobors is the deep bow by which on entering the meeting hall each man recognizes the divine spark within his neighbors.<sup>13</sup>

See Table 1 (p. 19) for a further delineation of differences between Doukhorism and beliefs of other Christian denominations.

Dreams and prophecies have special importance in the Doukhobors' philosophy. There is a mystical quality in their thoughts and their gatherings. They believe that through the cleansing power of repentance and spiritual enlightenment, a person will attain union with God. In some respects, this view is similar to that held by mystics who, in the final state of their spiritual journey, reach the station of "true poverty and absolute nothingness." "This station is that of dying to the self and living in God, of being poor in self and rich in the Desired One."<sup>14</sup>

Woodcock, elaborating on the Doukhobors' belief in God as it pertains to their meetings, notes, "It is assumed that as the same God is in every heart, the desired unanimity depends upon each person's giving up his own individuality so that the God within him may merge with the God in others, and in this corporate union is found the consensus of the meeting."<sup>15</sup> This characteristic may reflect the *sobranie* of Doukhor gathering. *Sobranie* is also described as "an immersion of self into the group."<sup>16</sup> The concept of the existence of God within each person has probably strengthened Doukhor belief in non-violence against humankind. In this context, life is perceived as a spark of divine reality, and the human temple is believed to encompass this light enkindled within it. Indeed, the Doukhobors represent, in their words and actions, these words of their first leader

Sylvan Kolesnikoff: “Let us bow to the God in one another, for we are the image of God on earth.”<sup>17</sup>

As God dwells within each person, any attack to kill and annihilate another person is considered as violence against God and His creation and is strongly forbidden. Hence, Doukhobors condemn any kind of war and strife aimed at the destruction of human life and reject, at any cost, militarism and serving in the army. As a result of their unwavering stand on this issue, they suffered seriously in their confrontation with the Tsarist government of their Russian homeland, and they pursued their struggle abroad as they came to Canada.

Music plays an important role in the life of the Doukhobors. “It is choral, bringing together all members of a community, men, women and children; it is entirely vocal (musical instruments are considered sinful) and thus can be interpreted as out flowing from the divinely inspired spirit within each of the singers.”<sup>18</sup> Their collection of psalms and hymns is called “the Living Book,” a name chosen because the contents have changed according to the experiences of the Doukhobors in different stages of their evolution. In contrast, the Bible is considered by Doukhobors as “the frozen wisdom of a past age.”<sup>19</sup>

*Let us honour peace, and freedom's triumph,  
Over strife and age-old hate aflame;  
World wide brotherhood is now the answer;  
Love, forgiveness, let us all proclaim.  
Tears and sorrow, terror, agitation,  
Let them stay forever in the past.  
Chains, oppression, hate and exploitation;  
Shall deface the earth no more at last.  
We'll assemble as one human family,  
And create a brotherhood of man.  
Toil and Peace shall be our foremost emblem;  
Love shall reign, supreme, in all the land.  
From one far horizon to another,  
Let our universal slogan be:  
"Brothers all, in love, we stand united  
And attain man's highest dignity."  
Let us honour peace, and freedom's triumph,  
Over strife's and war's immortal sin;  
We'll forget past sorrows and misfortunes—  
And to Love our thankful praises sing.*

*G.M. Dergousoff (1930)*

*Translated from Russian by Eli A. Popoff*

According to Doukhobor philosophy, "All men have a spark of the divine within them, but in some the spark is magnified so that they become manifestations of deity. According to Doukhobor thought, the historical Christ was one of a progression; there are always Christs on earth, and among them are the Doukhobor leaders."<sup>20</sup> Thus, their leaders are not considered as priests but prophets who, through their visions and intuition and various spiritual perceptions, guide their people.

## Chapter 2: The Bahá'í Faith and Doukhobor Beliefs—Some Conceptual and Historical Parallels

There are some similarities and differences between the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and the tenets held by Doukhobors. As an example, in both, an important goal for humanity is universal peace. To achieve this, the development of divine qualities in each individual is essential for both Bahá'ís and Doukhobors. The Bahá'í Faith adds to this that until the collective spiritual life of humanity advances hand in hand with its material progress, peace is not possible. Speaking to an audience in North America in the early 20th century, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Son of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, said:

...among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that although material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind, yet until it becomes combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained. Consider! These battleships that reduce a city to ruins within the space of an hour are the result of material civilization; likewise the Krupp guns, the Mauser rifles, dynamite, submarines, torpedo boats, armed aircraft and bombers—all these weapons of war are the malignant fruits of material civilization. Had material civilization been combined with Divine civilization, these fiery weapons would never have been invented. Nay, rather, human energy would have been wholly devoted to useful inventions and would have been concentrated on praiseworthy discoveries.<sup>21</sup>

The role of the institutions of society in achieving peace is also highlighted in the Bahá'í teachings. Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, in a work written at the end of the 19th century, when the world was still ruled predominantly by royalty, wrote:

It is incumbent upon the Sovereigns of the world—may God assist them—unitedly to hold fast unto this Peace, which is the chief instrument for the protection of all mankind. It is Our hope that they will arise to achieve what will be conducive to the well-being of man. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries.<sup>22</sup>

Other aspects of similarities between Doukhobor beliefs and the Bahá'í Faith are highlighted in Table 2 (p. 20).

Bahá'ís believe that their faith is divine in origin and independent in character and that its founder, Bahá'u'lláh, fulfilled the prophecies of the religions of the past. Its goal, in addition to establishing universal peace, is to unite humanity. They further believe that the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are the blueprint of the future pattern of human society, as they respond clearly to the needs and aspirations of the modern world. According to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, the essence of God is unknowable, and to understand His attributes and His universal dominion is possible only through the intermediation of the prophets. A human being, no matter how spiritual or saintly, can never attain the station of prophethood. Moreover, in this religion, obedience to the government and avoidance of all kinds of partisan politics, war, and violence, are among the moral principles to be followed by the believers. Some other important precepts<sup>23</sup> are outlined in Table 3 (p. 21).

### ***Historical Parallels***

In the history of Doukhoborism, the 1830s and 1840s were particularly repressive years.

1. In 1839, a resolution was passed indicating that if the Doukhobors did not return to the Orthodox Church, they would be exiled to the remote and barren region of the Caucasus. This stern warning preceded a forced migration from the Doukhobor homeland of Tavria in Russia to the Caucasus region in the years 1840–45.<sup>24</sup> Parallel with these persecutions and exile, some thousands of miles away in southern Asia in the year 1844, an historical event which eventually encompassed all nations of the world was shaping up in the city of Shiráz, in close proximity to the ancient city of Persepolis in southern Iran. A young merchant of Shiráz declared himself to be the Báb (Gate) whose mission was to prepare mankind for the coming of the Promised One of all ages, Bahá'u'lláh. This event led to the birth of the Bahá'í Faith, the fulfillment of the prophecies of the past.
2. In 1863, after years of exile and persecution, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, publicly proclaimed his mission in the city of Baghdád. By that time thousands of believers had been and were being persecuted, exiled, or martyred. On the other hand, north of Baghdád, in Russia, in the following year (1864) Lukeria Kalmakova,<sup>25</sup> one of the luminous women in Doukhobor history, was proclaimed the leader of that persecuted community. The followers of the Bahá'í Faith, in Iran, and the Doukhobors, not too distant from them in the Caucasus region, suffered severe persecution, injustice, and hardship toward the end of the 19th century.
3. In the Most Great Prison in 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed the fundamental principles of a New World Order and universal peace. He called for elimination of all kinds of prejudice, wars, and violence as he addressed the rulers and kings of the world. He warned the nations of the world that “The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.”<sup>26</sup> The impact of his messages and teachings were so profound that the renowned Russian writer and novelist, Count Leo Tolstoy, himself a great defender of peace, later commented, “We spend our lives trying

to unlock the mystery of the universe, but there was a Turkish prisoner, Bahá'u'lláh, in 'Akká, Palestine, who had the key."<sup>27</sup> The creative vibration of the message of Bahá'u'lláh began to manifest itself everywhere in spite of persecutions.

4. In 1895, Peter Verigin, the leader of the Doukhobors, while in exile in Siberia, instructed his followers to lay down their arms. Then followed the historic 29 June 1895 event when the Doukhobors formally renounced participation in war and violence by collecting and burning their firearms in a ceremony. This was probably the first act of disarmament ever recorded and appraised in modern history. By contrast, it was followed by severe atrocity, mass arrests, torture, and the exile of thousands of the Doukhobors. Many lost their lives in this tribulation.<sup>28</sup>

As the Doukhobors struggled for their freedom and for peace, an appeal was made on their behalf by the Society of Friends (Quakers) to Queen Victoria in Great Britain to grant them a refuge in one of her domains. Reportedly, out of compassion, she agreed that they immigrate to and settle in Canada, assured them of their right to practice their religious beliefs, and exempted them from military service. The Canadian government, under Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, accepted these peace-loving rural dwellers to this land and arranged for their settlement in Canada.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Queen Victoria was also the only reigning monarch of the 19th century who gave a sympathetic response to the letter of Bahá'u'lláh addressed and delivered to the kings and rulers of the world.

Count Leo Tolstoy was another distinguished figure who was deeply moved by the suffering of Doukhobors. He rose to their support by appealing to influential personalities and writing to the Society of Friends in England to provide the means for their immigration to Canada. He further assisted them with the royalties from his novel, *Resurrection*.<sup>30</sup>

The years 1899–1900 are marked with tragic drama in the history of the Doukhobors, as it was during this time that

they forsook their homeland for freedom and emigrated partly to Cyprus and then en masse to Canada. About 150 of their brethren who were still in exile in Siberia joined them in 1905, following a special imperial amnesty.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, in the heart of Russia, another drama was about to take place. Isabella Grinevskaya, renowned Russian poetess and member of bibliographical, philosophical, and Oriental societies in St. Petersburg, after her travel to the Orient and visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, in 'Akká, wrote a fascinating book entitled *The Báb*, published in 1903.<sup>32</sup> Her book consisted of a play about the historical mission of the Báb, the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith. The play captured the imagination of many and continued to be performed even after the Russian revolution. There are indications, yet to be explored, that Peter P. Verigin became acquainted with the Bahá'í Faith through some Tolstoyan friends of his time. The Tolstoyans had a high regard for many Bahá'í principles. Verigin agreed with them and admitted that the Bahá'ís were people endowed with high ethics and morals.<sup>33</sup>

As a youth, Peter Verigin attended a trade school in Alexandropol (now Gyumri) near the Turkish border, with Kemal Pasha, who later occupied an important position in the Turkish government. When Peter Verigin learned that a leader of the Bahá'í Faith was imprisoned in Turkey (after the turn of the century, date not clearly known), he wrote a personal letter to his old friend, Kemal Pasha, asking for clemency. Kemal Pasha paid heed and released the Bahá'í leader.<sup>34</sup> This reflects the spiritual affection and respect of Peter Verigin toward the Bahá'í community.

5. Among the prophecies of Lukeria Kalmakova which remain with the Doukhobors for posterity, a very important one is described by Eli A. Popoff in his remarkable work, "Historical Exposition on Doukhobor Beliefs," as follows:

...they eventually would become prosperous and build for themselves houses, virtually of “glass.” But she said, the Doukhobors are destined to come back to Russia. It may be that many shall become too attached to their “glass” houses and remain in the new land, but a basic group shall return. She foretold that the Doukhobors would split up into various groups in the new land and that among the various groups there would be diverse trends of thought and many would attempt leadership of the various groups.<sup>35</sup>

She then described some of the characteristics of the future Verigins. She predicted that there will come “a Verigin whose era will be a period of ‘Extermination.’ Multitudes shall perish from the ravages of war, hunger and pestilence. All forms of false worship and false social systems shall be uprooted and Heaven itself shall then give inspiration for a new plan of living.”<sup>36</sup>

These prophecies correspond closely with the following emphatic and prophetic vision of Bahá'u'lláh, who indicated that “The hour is approaching, when the most great convulsion will have appeared.”<sup>37</sup> Further, it is written in the Bahá'í Writings:

A tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course, catastrophic in its immediate effects, unimaginably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is at present sweeping the face of the earth. Its driving power is remorselessly gaining in range and momentum. Its cleansing force, however much undetected, is increasing with every passing day. Humanity, gripped in the clutches of its devastating power, is smitten by the evidences of its resistless fury. It can neither perceive its origin, nor probe its significance, nor discern its outcome. Bewildered, agonized and helpless, it watches this great and mighty wind of God invading the remotest and fairest regions of the earth, rocking its

foundations, deranging its equilibrium, sundering its nations, disrupting the homes of its peoples, wasting its cities, driving into exile its kings, pulling down its bulwarks, uprooting its institutions, dimming its light, and harrowing up the souls of its inhabitants.<sup>38</sup>

According to the Bahá'í teachings, the Promised Day has come when the old systems and order will crumble and a new World Order will spread out in its place. A new pattern of living will become the hallmark of the life of society which will lead humanity to a universal peace and the unity of mankind. Those teachings maintain:

The human family is one. This is a truth that has been embraced by multitudes around the world. Its profound implications for our collective behavior must now give rise to a coordinated movement toward higher levels of social and political unity. As Bahá'u'lláh declared over a century ago, "True peace and tranquility will only be realized when every soul will have become the well-wisher of all mankind." The perils of a global community divided against itself are too great to countenance.<sup>39</sup>

## *Actions of the Righteous\* by Bahá'u'lláh*

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility.<sup>40</sup>

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\* A passage from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh that appears under this title in *Bahá'í World Faith* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 136.

## *Be Devout\*—a Fundamental Doukhobor Psalm*

Be devout, trust in God. Love Him with all your heart. Be zealous towards His holy church. All His commandments sacredly revere and observe. Follow the path of virtue; shun all vice. Be prudent. Having in mind the end, always maintain the right perception of your means. Do not idly let go by an occasion for worthy deeds. Do not embark on any venture without careful deliberation, and in your reasoning, do not hurry. Be not tardy, except only under special circumstances and occasions. Do not believe everything you hear. Do not desire everything you see. Do not proceed to do everything you are able to. Do not proclaim everything you know, but only that which should be proclaimed. That which you do not know, do not affirm, nor deny; best of all—enquire; then wilt thou be discreet. Be temperate. Do not partake of food without hunger. Without thirst do not drink, and that only in small quantities when required. Avoid drunkenness as you would Hades. Intemperance begets sickness, sickness brings death. The abstemious live healthily and in continuous well-being.

Be meek, not arrogant—keeping more to silence than to talkativeness. When someone is speaking—keep quiet. When someone is addressing you pay attention. When someone is relaying orders to you—fulfill them, and do not boast. Do not be obstinate, quarrelsome, or vain. To all be affable, to none be a flatterer. Be thou, also, righteous. Do not desire anything belonging to others; do not steal, but in whatsoever you may have need seek it through your labour. In poverty ask for help; when it is given, accept it and be thankful. Whatsoever you may have borrowed—return; whatsoever you have promised—fulfill.

Be courageous, always willing to labour. Leave off all idleness and laziness. If you wish to start some project, measure well your strength in advance, then proceed without letting up. In adversity, do not lose hope; in prosperity, do not morally deteriorate. Hold thriftiness in esteem. Keep careful observation of the different occurrences in life of inconstancy, misfortune, and sorrow. Over that which the patient

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\* Composed by Doukhobor leader Larion Pobirokin; translated from Russian by Eli A. Popoff.

forbear, the fainthearted sigh, lament and wail. Be benevolent and gracious. Give to him that asketh of thee, if thou hast; help the poor, if thou canst. If anyone has hurt thee—forgive him; if thou hast hurt anyone—reconcile thyself with him. It is very commendable to refrain from holding grudges. Forgive the sinner; accede to the reconciler. If you yourself will love your fellow-man, you shall in turn be loved by all people. Be thou also obedient to elders, companionable to equals, and courteous to subordinates. Greet those whom you meet; return the greeting of those who greet you. To the enquirer, give answer; to the ignorant, give advice, to the sorrowing, give comfort. Do not envy anyone. Wish well to all.

Serve each and all, as much as you are able to. With your good deeds, you shall please all people. Your friends shall love you, and your enemies will not be able to hate you. Always speak the truth; never lie. Observe all this, and good fortune shall always be your lot.

Glory to God

**Table 1**  
***Characteristics Distinguishing Doukhobor Beliefs***  
***From Other Christian Denominations (Catholicism)***

<b><i>DOUKHOBORS</i></b>	<b><i>OTHER CHRISTIANS</i></b> <b><i>(Catholicism)</i></b>
1. Rejection of church and priesthood	1. Traditional church and priesthood are preserved
2. Elimination of liturgy, worship of icons and symbols	2. These practices are maintained
3. Fasts are not observed	3. Fasts are observed
4. Baptism is not practiced	4. Baptism is essential
5. Marriage is not bound by laws of church and state	5. Marriage is bound by the law of the Church
6. Rejection of the Bible as the ultimate source of inspiration	6. The Bible is regarded as the source of spiritual inspiration
7. Redemption of mankind through individual's spiritual inspiration	7. Redemption of the world through the suffering of Christ
8. Rejection of the literal concept of resurrection of Christ	8. Belief in the physical resurrection of Christ
9. Heaven and hell are states of mind and states of the affairs of mankind on earth	9. Heaven and hell exist in literal terms
10. Man is guided by the light of Divine Presence in each person	10. Man is guided by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures

**Table 2**  
***Similarities Between Doukhobor and Bahá'í Beliefs***

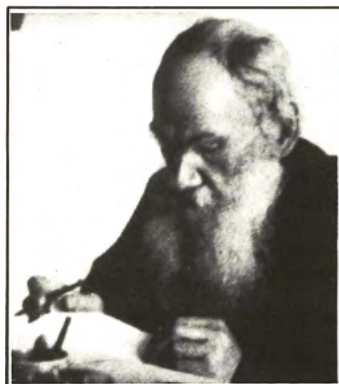
<i>DOUKHOBORS</i>	<i>BAHÁ'Í</i>
1. No priest or priesthood	1. The same
2. No church or liturgy	2. The same
3. Worship of icons or any symbol is forbidden	3. The same
4. Baptism is not practiced	4. The same
5. Rejection of the literal interpretation of the resurrection	5. The same
6. Heaven and hell are states of mind	6. The same
7. Rejection of the literal interpretation of the Trinity	7. The same
8. Abstinence from alcohol	8. The same
9. Belief in the goodness of man as the spark of Divine reality	9. Belief in the nobility of man and rejection of original sin
10. Rejection of prejudices	10. The same
11. Non-involvement in partisan politics	11. The same
12. Rejection of war and violence	12. The same
13. Refusal to serve in the army even by force	13. Request for military exemption
14. Peace and unity of mankind as the ultimate goal	14. The same
15. Work in the spirit of service is worship	15. The same
16. Prayer is important for spiritual guidance and for spiritual growth	16. The same
17. The believers suffered persecution, exile, and martyrdom	17. The same
18. Originated in the East and moved to the West	18. Originated in the East and spread all over the world

**Table 3**  
***Bahá'í Principles for a Universal Peace and  
Unity of Humankind***

1. Oneness of God
2. Oneness of religion
3. Oneness of humankind
4. Elimination of prejudice of all kinds
5. Individual search after truth
6. Universal auxiliary language
7. Harmony of science and religion
8. Equality of men and women
9. Universal education
10. Elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty
11. World government
12. Protection of cultural diversity



## Chapter 3: Tolstoy and His Appreciation of the Bahá'í Faith\*



“We spend our lives trying to unlock the mystery of the universe, but there was a Turkish prisoner, Bahá'u'lláh, in ‘Akká, Palestine, who had the key.”<sup>41</sup>

Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828–1910) was pre-eminent among the great Russian writers of the nineteenth century. In an era when novelists such as Dostoevsky and Turgenev were widely read outside Russia, Tolstoy not only had “taken first place among all our contemporary writers,” as Turgenev himself put it,<sup>42</sup> but many Western literati would agree with Sackville-West that “Tolstoy stands among novelists as Shakespeare stands among poets.”<sup>43</sup> Tolstoy’s great stature arises primarily from his two celebrated novels, *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1877), but he is also noted for his short stories, diaries, and essays. The scope of his literary powers extended from his compelling descriptions of the battles and events surrounding the Napoleonic wars in *War and Peace*, to his intimate

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\* This chapter is an expanded version of the original article by Dr. A-M. Ghadirian published in *Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 5, January 1979: “Count Leo Tolstoy and His Appreciation of the Bahá'í Faith”.

portrayal of the ravages of an individual's despair in *The Death of Ivan Ilytch*.

Undoubtedly, much of Tolstoy's power as a portrayer of men and events stemmed from a passionate and lifelong search for truth, a search which transformed him from a carefree young litterateur and man-about-town into a social reformer of heroic proportions and finally into a spiritual leader whose breadth of view transcended Russian, and indeed, Western traditions. Tolstoy's spiritual search attracted him to a wide range of reformist and religious movements, but his association, at the close of his life, with followers of the then little-known Bahá'í Faith makes an intriguing chapter in, and possibly capstone to, this great man's life.

### *Early Years*

Born on 9 September 1828 into a noble family in the village of Yasnaya Polyana, south of Moscow, Tolstoy was orphaned as a young child, received a private education, and studied oriental languages and law at the University of Kazan. After his graduation in 1844, he withdrew to study on his own and to manage the estate he had inherited. Failing at both, he turned to the easy life of Moscow social circles and then to a commission in the army. His brilliant, realistic *Sebastopol Stories* (1855) emerged from his experiences in the Crimean War, but his rise to pre-eminence in Russian literature really started in 1863, when *War and Peace* began to appear serially in a Russian newspaper.

### *Spiritual Crises*

After turning his back on the profligate and careless life of his youth, Tolstoy married happily, learned to manage his estate with great success, and began the great creative period of his middle life. About the time of the completion of *Anna Karenina*, however, he entered a deep-seated spiritual and emotional crisis. In that novel, Levin's laborious search for spiritual values is often taken to be a reflection of Tolstoy's own quest.<sup>44</sup> Confronted with doubts about his own moral worth and his reason for existence, Tolstoy turned unsuccessfully to contemporary scientific, philosophical and religious

knowledge, always attempting to answer his spiritual questioning through reason. As a biographer, E.J. Simmons, points out: “Instead of sinning his way to God, like Dostoevsky, he [Tolstoy] had to reason his way to Him.”<sup>45</sup> Yet Tolstoy’s belief in God had weakened, and his self-destructive impulses frightened him.

This struggle to find meaning in life is clearly depicted in his *Confession* which was completed in 1879. His basic dilemma lay in his attempt to balance faith and reason; he felt that the path of knowledge led only to a denial of the value of life, while the path of faith led to a denial of reason.<sup>46</sup> He attempted to analyze and simplify the teachings of Jesus, and in so doing, rejected the dogmas of the Church, state officialdom, and the concept of private property. Consequently, his physical freedom was restricted and his religious works (such as *Confession*) censored. Nevertheless, in characteristic Russian fashion, they were circulated among the people—a testimony to Russian reverence for his genius.

His search for basic and enduring values then led Tolstoy to study the lives and attitudes of peasants, who appeared to be unencumbered by the knowledge and doubts that plagued him. Here Tolstoy found a class of men whose animating purpose in life and morality he perceived as devotion and service to God. The effect of this new perspective toward social consciousness and ethical views can be seen in the changed content and style of Tolstoy’s writings in the last thirty years of his life. Ethical discourses, attacks on orthodoxy, support for religious dissidents and simple tales of peasant morality were the successors to his earlier novels. Throughout this change, however, he did not lose the master’s touch; some of the fiction of this period, such as *The Death of Ivan Ilytch*, *The Devil*, and *Kreutzer Sonata*, while making the author’s moral point, are classics of characterization and narration.

### *Tolstoy’s Vision of Religion*

According to Tolstoy, human activities are governed by three motives: feeling, reason, and suggestion. In relation to religious activity, Tolstoy states that “feeling evokes the need to establish a man’s relationship to God; reason defines that relationship; and suggestion

impels man to the activity flowing from that relationship.” But he stresses that this is so only as long as religion remains “unperverted.”<sup>47</sup> When religious perversion and degeneration commence, suggestion grows out of proportion, overshadows, and finally weakens feeling and reason. Thus, religious man succumbs to superstitions, some of which may be expressed in rituals, idolatry, and dramatic processions, as the history of religions bears witness.

In his writings, particularly in those of his later life, Tolstoy frequently remarked upon the necessity of a true religion based on reason, and accessible to the entire human race rather than to a certain class. He believed that adherence to such a religion should be a moral obligation upon all and that the principal cause of wars and conflicts was ignorance of true religion.<sup>48</sup> In this vein he subscribed to some of the century-old Doukhobor doctrines, particularly the condemnation both of violence and the taking of life.<sup>49</sup> The Doukhobor commitment to such religious values earned Tolstoy’s respect, and during the period 1895–1898, most of his public life was focused on attempts to reduce the persecution of the Doukhobors. Although the Russian authorities had given them permission to emigrate and the Canadian authorities had provided land for their settlement in western Canada, the Doukhobors had no funds for their passage. To assist them, Tolstoy quickly finished *Resurrection*, and the royalties from that novel and *Father Sergey* provided a substantial amount of the money needed.<sup>50</sup>

This effort, combined with his excommunication, for heretical writing, from the Russian Orthodox Church, left Tolstoy exhausted. The reflection that accompanied his recuperation prompted him to write his important essay, “What is Religion and Wherein Lies Its Essence?” In this penetrating essay, Tolstoy envisions the purpose of religion and describes how, in the course of time, religion has deviated from its original destiny in human society and has eventually “petrified into fixed forms” and declined in its influence on people’s lives. As a result, men of science and learning have ceased to believe in such religious teachings. He then challenges the orthodoxy of established religious institutions as well as the scientific arrogance of learned men who dismiss religion as obsolete. “True religion,” Tolstoy pronounces,

“is a relationship accordant with reason and knowledge, which man establishes with the infinite life surrounding him.”<sup>51</sup> Tolstoy asserts that religions differ only in their peripheral structures and share a unique similarity in their fundamental principles. Likewise, in man he sees a spark of divine origin common to all.

Tolstoy’s notion of faith is profound: to him, faith is the same as religion except that religion is something observed outside ourselves, while faith is something that we experience within. He states that our faith is a conscious relationship with the infinite universe and the direction of our activity flows from this relationship.<sup>52</sup> To him, a true faith, like a religion, is never irrational nor incompatible with contemporary knowledge.

### *Tolstoy’s Knowledge of the Bahá’í Faith*

By the end of the nineteenth century, Tolstoy had already heard and read about the Bábí movement in Iran and acknowledged having read the “Bible of Bábísm.”<sup>53</sup> It is uncertain what understanding he had about the relationship of the Bábí Faith to the Bahá’í Faith. At times it would seem that he was not readily given to distinguish between “Bábísm” and “Bahá’ísm,” and the two words were used somewhat interchangeably; at other times a preferential use of one term over the other was apparent. This confusion between the Bábí Faith and the Bahá’í Faith probably contributed to his ambivalence toward the Bahá’í Faith. As he had already rejected religion that was corrupted, he was in search of “true religion,” free from conflict and violence. He supported Doukhobors and their ideals in their struggle for a peaceful society.

Tolstoy also had some major reservations about the Bahá’í doctrine of the Manifestations of God and the belief that through the Manifestations (Prophets), humanity could have knowledge of God. Moreover, as the Bahá’í Faith was a new religion, he wondered how it would make inroads into the West. Eventually he gained a greater understanding of the Bahá’í Faith and expressed sympathy and appreciation for this new religion. However, it was not unqualified admiration, and he did not embrace the Faith.<sup>54</sup>

Whatever its origin, there is little doubt that Tolstoy's knowledge of the historical roots of the Bahá'í Faith was enriched through reading Isabella Grinevskaya's work *The Báb*, published in 1903. This poetic work was performed in the Literary Artistic Theatre of St. Petersburg and in other principal theatres across Russia. A number of favourable commentaries were published in the Russian and British press. Notable among the critics was the poet Fiedler, who intended to translate the play into German. He wrote, "We receive from the five acts of the poetical drama *The Báb* more information about the Bahá'í movement than from the deep, scientific research of Professor Edward G. Browne, Gobineau and Russian scientists and historians."<sup>55</sup> The reviews had already stimulated the interest of Tolstoy, and he requested a copy of the work from Grinevskaya. In an October 1903 letter of appreciation to Grinevskaya which was published in the Russian press, Tolstoy wrote, "the teachings of the Bábís, inasmuch as they have rejected the old Muhammadan superstitions ... and inasmuch as they keep to the principal fundamental ideas of brotherhood, equality and love, have a great future before them." He then goes on to say, "I therefore sympathize with Bábísm with all my heart inasmuch as it teaches people brotherhood and equality...."<sup>56</sup>

### *Encounters with Bahá'ís*

Tolstoy may have first heard of the Bahá'í teachings through the drama of *The Báb*,<sup>57</sup> or through an interview with an Iranian Bahá'í in September 1902. 'Abdu'l-Bahá admired Tolstoy and was resolved that a qualified Bahá'í meet with Tolstoy and acquaint him with the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>58</sup> 'Aziz u'lláh Jazáb, a Bahá'í from 'Akká, was inspired by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to meet with Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana, during a period when Tolstoy was under house arrest following his excommunication by the Church. During a lengthy conversation Jazáb passed on a personal message from 'Abdu'l-Bahá advising Tolstoy to "...[m]ake an effort to leave a praiseworthy name in the world of religion. Many philosophers have raised a banner of almost five metres, for example, but you have raised a banner of almost ten metres. Immerse yourself in the sea of unity and become everlastingly divinely assisted."<sup>59</sup>

We are fortunate to have some indirect information on Tolstoy's reaction to this interview, as recorded in one of his diaries, which is not generally available to the reading public. In 1922, M. Golpaygani learned from P.I. Biryukov, a former secretary of Tolstoy who was allowed access to the archive, that Tolstoy had written: "Today a Persian Bahá'í came to visit me. We conversed for several hours. Although he did not speak Russian well, we were finished in a few hours. What he told me about the Bahá'í Faith I accept and sign with both hands."<sup>60</sup>

Jazáb reported that Tolstoy emerged from the interview with a feeling of joy and reverence. The Bahá'í concept of one religion kindled Tolstoy's interest, as it confirmed his own concept of religion, and spoke to his own effort to lay the foundation for one religion by bringing together the basic tenets of all. Tolstoy made the following comment: "Actually when you think of it, you are always astonished that such a simple argument does not come to your mind. Take an Orthodox Christian, a Catholic, a Buddhist—all of them believing in what they hold to be the truth. Yet if I cross a certain boundary—I think that the one is a lie, the other the truth. What doubts that arouses; what need to search out the religion which would be common to all!"<sup>61</sup>

### *Correspondence Relating to the Bahá'í Faith*

Although there were many communications between Tolstoy and certain Bahá'ís regarding the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths ('Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged 'Alí-Akbar Nakhjavání, Martha Root, a journalist, and others to communicate with him), there has been very little in the literature that methodically traces Tolstoy's view of the Bahá'í Faith. Collins and Jasion (1991) point to a very thorough work on this subject by Luigi Stendardo, in French, which was revised and published in English in 1985.<sup>62</sup>

In their bibliography of literature about Tolstoy and the Bahá'í Faith, Collins and Jasion note: "A partial study of Tolstoy's attitudes to the Bahá'í Faith is provided by A.M. Ghadirian.<sup>63</sup> Although Ghadirian does not analyze Tolstoy's wavering views on the Bahá'í

religion, his essay was the first to trace in a scholarly manner some of the influences leading to Tolstoi's interest in the Bahá'í teachings.<sup>64</sup>

According to V.F. Bulgakov, his secretary during the latter part of his life, Tolstoy had Bahá'í books in several languages in his library. As noted in one of his letters to a Russian Bahá'í, his intention was to write a book about the Báb and Bahá'ism.<sup>65</sup> Among the Bahá'ís with whom he corresponded towards this end was 'Alí-Akbar Nakhjavání, who was instructed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to translate and send some of the Bahá'í Holy Writings to Tolstoy.<sup>66</sup> Among the Bahá'í literature known to have been received by Tolstoy are *The Traveller's Narrative* and *Summons to the Bahá'ís of the East and the West*. In September, 1909, he received a letter from Mírzá Alekper Mamedkhanov,<sup>67</sup> to whom he responded: "I have received your letter and with it the book entitled *Summons to the Bahá'ís of the East and the West* by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas Effendi. If you have any other books on the subject about which you wrote me, I would be very glad to have them since I am very interested in the teachings of Bahá'ism."<sup>68</sup>

Tolstoy's connection with the new religion appears in other sources from this period. Gabriel de Sassy, a French orientalist and scholar, was the recipient of three "Tablets" or letters from 'Abdu'l-Bahá containing references to Count Tolstoy. In one of the Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá views Tolstoy as a well-wisher of humanity who has not yet been guided to the path leading to the fulfilment of his hopes and expectations; rather he wades in the seas of politics and opinions.<sup>69</sup> In the same Tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá advises de Sassy to send translations of some of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets such as the "Ishráqát" (Splendours), "Tajalliyát" (Effulgences), and "Bishárát" (Glad Tidings) to Tolstoy and to tell him that the source of authority for the people of Bahá (Bahá'ís) is the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book). These, as well as some of the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, were sent to Tolstoy, who later wrote in a return letter to de Sassy that the Bahá'í Faith possesses a great philosophy which the present generation is yet unable to comprehend. He then went on to expound upon the significant future role that the proposed "Universal House of Justice"<sup>70</sup> would have in the protection of this religion and its teachings, in view of the power of that House to decide upon whatever is not established

in the “Book of God” (the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*), thereby avoiding conflict and preventing the use of religion as a means for the promotion of personal interests. Furthermore, he noted that the precepts of the Bahá’í Faith are established according to the spirit of this age. The Bahá’í Faith, though still in its infancy, responds to the real needs of the people and will, perhaps over a century, establish itself in the world and secure the prosperity of humanity through the elimination of prejudices and the promotion of universal peace.<sup>71</sup>

According to a more recent exploration of Tolstoy’s relationship with the Bahá’í Faith, Collins and Jasion (1991) indicated that “Tolstoi is recorded as having received a number of books on the Bahá’í Faith, which he read or sent to his non-Bahá’í correspondents who were interested in the subject. Hippolyte Dreyfus sent him *Kitáb-i-Íqán* in French (Paris). Tolstoi also received *The Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi* by Myron H. Phelps (New York, 1903); *Essai sur le Béháisme* by Dreyfus (Paris, 1909) ... *The Hidden Words* by Bahá’u’lláh; *A Traveller’s Narrative* by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (Cambridge, 1891)....”<sup>72</sup>

By 1908, Tolstoy had reached the conclusion that the teachings of the Báb, developed through the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, offer “the highest and purest form of religious teaching.”<sup>73</sup> This is reflected in Tolstoy’s correspondence with a Persian Prince, Mírzá Rizá Khán, also known as Arfá’u’dullih, who served as the Iranian ambassador to the Peace Conference at the Hague where he read a specially composed ode for peace. He sent a copy of it to Tolstoy, with a request for comments. In his reply, Tolstoy expressed the opinion that it is not governments that will abolish war; rather wars will be abolished by the individuals that suffer from them, and he deplored the Iranian government’s persecution of the Bábís whom he called followers of the true religion.<sup>74</sup>

Martha Root reported that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praised Tolstoy for his knowledge, his work and his moral life and said that there was no greater writer in Europe at that time.<sup>75</sup> Tolstoy’s maturing sympathies for the Bahá’í teachings are perhaps best illustrated by one of the inspirational statements attributed to him:

I believe that at this very hour the great revolution is beginning for which the religious world has been preparing for two thousand years—the revolution which will substitute for corrupted religion, and the system of domination which proceeds therefrom, the true religion; the basis of equality between men, and of the true liberty to which all beings endowed with reason aspire.<sup>76</sup>

*Note: The wording of some of the translated passages has been chosen to conform with textual style.*



## Chapter 4: An Interview with Dr. A-M. Ghadirian\*

*The following is an interview that Linda [Wlasoff] Wilkinson conducted with Dr. Ghadirian when he was visiting the Kootenays on July 23–24, 2001. Dr. Ghadirian is a well-respected psychiatrist, researcher, author and lecturer. He has worked as an Associate Professor of the McGill University Faculty of Medicine and is the former Director of Medical Education for the Montreal World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Mental Health. He has also been a Consultant to the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations and a member of the Canadian International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War. Both professionally, and as a member of the International Bahá'í Community, he has traveled extensively encouraging all he meets in their pursuit of peace, justice and healing.*

*His publications include Doukhobors and the Bahá'í Faith, In Search of Nirvana: A New Perspective on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency, as well as a work on Alzheimer's disease and aging and others.*

**Linda:** Can you explain your interest in Doukhobors?

**Dr. Ghadirian:** My interest in the Doukhorbor community began as early as 1969 when I visited a Bahá'í family in Kamsack, Saskatchewan. They introduced me to their Doukhorbor friends who warmly received me. My interest in the Doukhorbor community grew through reading about their vision of peace and their heroic and pacifist struggles in the 19th century in Russia, opposing war and bloodshed. Leo Tolstoy's admiration and support of their peace-loving movement further fueled my interest in the history

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and development of Doukhobor society. As I learned more about Doukhobor people, I decided to visit them in other regions of western Canada such as British Columbia. My meetings with Mr. Eli Popoff and subsequently, with Mr. John Verigin, Sr., have had an important effect on my understanding and appreciation of the Doukhobor view of life and peace.

*Linda:* As you know, Doukhobors have been working for universal brotherhood and world peace for over 100 years. What are your views on world peace? How can we make this dream and hope a reality?

*Dr. Ghadirian:* I believe that world peace is not only possible; it is inevitable. But it will not come easily. There are many barriers to break down before universal peace becomes a reality. Among these barriers are issues such as racial, social, religious, and political prejudices. Other obstacles are nationalism, materialism, and power struggles for superiority of one group or nation over other ones. Most important of all is the barrier of injustice and preferential treatment of men over women. Unless, and until, women acquire their rightful place as the equal partners of men in all aspects of human society, peace will not be possible. Equality of men and women is the basis of justice, and justice is the cornerstone of unity. There will not be any peace if there is no unity and fellowship among people of the world. Peace is also a fundamentally spiritual process. All political and socio-economic struggles for peace will not bring about a sustainable peace if there is no spiritual vision of our life and its purpose. Peace, therefore, should start from inside of our hearts and souls before we see the results of it out there in society.

*Linda:* In general, societies and families throughout the world seem to be degenerating. How can we fight against selfishness and loss of values?

*Dr. Ghadirian:* This degeneration and decline of moral values is part of a global process which ultimately, through its catastrophic effects, will awaken the conscience of humanity to look for a new pattern of world order based on justice and moral leadership. There are two forces at work in our contemporary human society: one is

the destructive force which exposes the evil side of the degeneration of morality, and traditional human values. The other one is the constructive and positive force which is slow in process but ultimately has profound effects in raising a new civilization based on equality, justice, and harmony among the nations of the world. We live in a period of change and transition and this change is inevitable.

**Linda:** These days many families are concerned about their children and youth. What do you think the role of parents is in the spiritual education of their children?

**Dr. Ghadirian:** No doubt that parents are the prime educators and role models for their children. But in the self-centred, pleasure-seeking, and materialistic society that exists in many parts of the world where many parents are no longer positive role models for their children, what kind of new generation would you expect? I believe that before we educate our children spiritually, we should prepare ourselves spiritually as well as intellectually.

I think that educating children about spirituality and their spiritual destiny is as important as educating them in arts and sciences. Yet hardly any school gives children prizes for being spiritually perceptive and morally outstanding as compared to giving them prizes for excellence in the sciences.

One of the greatest challenges of today's society is to prepare parents well so that they can educate their children in moral leadership and to be able to raise their children to be the future champions of justice and servants to humanity. But if parents don't set the example, their words will not be effective.

**Linda:** What is your opinion on the role of children and youth in building families, communities and a "culture of peace"?

**Dr. Ghadirian:** Building a culture of peace is a wonderful but monumental task. For this we need to create a new state of mind and consciousness in our children about the vital significance of peace, justice, and equality. Today's children mostly see their world as though it was Disney World. They don't experience the reality of life because of too many artificial and deceptive distractions. They are

surrounded by peers who seek pleasure from drugs and drinking, sex and violence, excessive freedom and who refuse to take responsibility. Many of them come from broken homes, shattered families and have suffered abuses. More than anything, they need hope, and they need to realize that they were created noble and have all the potentials to become wonderful parents and to form great families. To fulfill this, they need to be educated in what it means to have a healthy and peaceful family. Mothers, as the first educators of children, are also the architects of building peace in their families where their children will develop concepts of a culture of peace and unity for a global society. I firmly believe that Doukhobors and Bahá'ís who have many moral and spiritual values in common can work together to transform this dream of a culture of peace into the reality of a universal fellowship and brotherhood.

# The Bahá'í Faith: A Summary\*

The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men. The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, “abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith.” His Cause, they have already demonstrated, stands identified with, and revolves around, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution. This final stage in this stupendous evolution, they assert, is not only necessary but inevitable, that it is gradually approaching, and that nothing short of the celestial potency with which a divinely ordained Message can claim to be endowed can succeed in establishing it.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the unity of God and of His Prophets, upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it must go hand-in-hand with science, and that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, an ordered and progressive society. It inculcates the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges for both sexes, advocates compulsory education, abolishes extremes

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\* From a letter of Shoghi Effendi (great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh), who served as head of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to 1957, to the High Commissioner for Palestine, June 1933.

of poverty and wealth, exalts work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship, recommends the adoption of an auxiliary international language, and provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace.

# The Promise of World Peace\*

The Great Peace towards which people of good will throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet—in the words of one great thinker, “the planetization of mankind.”

Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity’s stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. At this critical juncture when the intractable problems confronting nations have been fused into one common concern for the whole world, failure to stem the tide of conflict and disorder would be unconscionably irresponsible.

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