

Religion

Hamed Eshraghian

February 16, 2016

As religious persecutions continue to claim lives and force multitudes out of their homelands, I am reminded of two Mountain View residents, a Baha'i couple whom I first met in 2014. The man owned his own business in Iran and had to escape after the 1979 Islamic revolution. His wife, an artist stayed behind to care for her elderly mother. After 6.5 years she escaped to Europe. When she finally saw her husband and son in America it was for the first time in 8 long years.

Billions of people around the globe take pride in being religious, strictly observing the teachings of their faith in their daily lives. And yet, great numbers have been displaced, jailed or killed by the followers of other religions or other sects of the same religion. How can the cause of the upliftment of one group be the cause of the agony of another? What is our view of religion, which leads to such cruel acts?

The perspective offered in the 19th century by the prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith is that the appearance of the Prophets of God, the founders of the major religions, on this planet over the centuries should not be viewed as a series of unrelated and random events, but as one endless process by which an all-loving Creator educates His creation, causing it to advance. He explained that this process is not repetitive, but progressive, that like the rays of the rising Sun, God's Will has been gradually and progressively revealed by these Prophets to humanity in proportion to its increasing spiritual capacity.

Krishna's words beautifully express this process: "Whenever there is a decline in righteousness, O Bharata, and the rise of irreligion, it is then that I send forth My spirit. For the salvation of the good, the destruction of the wicked, and for firmly establishing true religion (Dharma), I manifest myself from age to age."

He further explained that religious teachings consist of two types. First, the eternal teachings, which exhort us to acquire divine virtues such as mercy and compassion. With the coming of each Prophet, these have been restated because at first people cling to the Truth, but after a time they disfigure it. Second, the transitory teachings, which are applicable for only a finite period of time, and deal with the affairs of this world. As humanity has collectively matured, with the coming of each Prophet, transitory laws such as "an eye for an eye" and "holy war" have been replaced with new teachings in order to meet the needs of the age.

Unfortunately, heinous acts are perpetrated, when people, unaware of the common foundation of all religions, regard their faith superior to others', and while ignoring the eternal teachings, cling to the transitory teachings that were appropriate for centuries ago and have long since accomplished their purpose.

Surely, the time has come for all human beings to see the earth as but one country, and themselves as its citizens, where religion is no longer the cause of hatred and division, but of love and unity.