

# SOF Sift

A column in which Network members think out loud about SOF and their own quest.

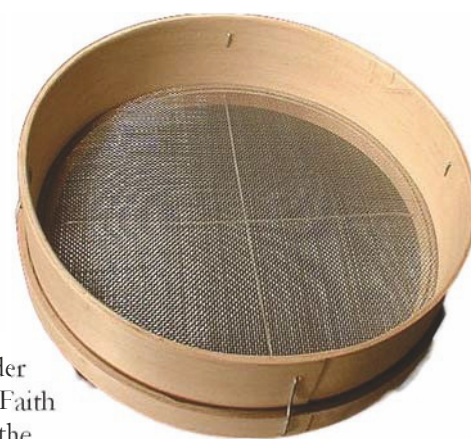
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My parents met on holiday but by coincidence both were from Methodist families in Swindon and Burnley. Thus, I was raised a Methodist and regularly attended chapel and Sunday school. I very much enjoyed my Methodist childhood, feeling at one with my fellow chapel goers of all ages.

My father was a lay preacher and I would sometimes travel with him to read the text. Nothing cements adherence more than participation, especially for the young. At home there were often discussions about events in the news and the rightness and wrongness of what was happening. For example, I remember discussing the Congo crisis when I was about twelve. At fifteen I joined an arts society and after meetings the group would talk about the Bahá'í Faith, recently discovered by two of the members. Intrigued, I began attending discussion evenings and after nine months decided to become a Bahá'í, but not spontaneously. At several meetings I determined to announce that I wished to be a Bahá'í but got cold feet, thinking I was betraying my christian roots. However, in February 1965 I 'declared' as a Bahá'í.

Initially I was attracted to the breadth of its world-embracing vision outlined in the teachings of Baha'u'llah: 'The Earth is but one country and mankind its citizens'. It has no priesthood and all decisions are made by elected bodies. Consequently, every Bahá'í has a voice, a right to be heard and the right to an education enabling each individual to seek out truth independently. The concept of progressive revelation was new to me, whereby the founders of religion are linked by their teachings concerning moral behaviour but different in what each has to say about social living as mankind matures. This was similar to the way primary school teachers are experienced chronologically, each working to the same pedagogy but with different lessons, appropriate to an age and time. It confirmed me in my personal progression from Christianity to the Bahá'í Faith.

In 1970 I married Mina, whose Bahá'í roots go back to the beginning of the Bahá'í Faith. Her great-grandfather was martyred in Iran in the 1880s and her father was the supervisor of Bahá'í children's classes in Shiraz for many decades and the first Bahá'í to live in Burnley.



The founder of the Bahá'í Faith was the Báb, the forerunner of Baha'u'llah, whose teachings form the basis of Bahá'í belief and practice. Baha'u'llah was a prisoner and an exile for forty years until his passing in 1892 and wrote continuously. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Abdu'l-Baha, known as the Centre of the Covenant. On release from restrictions, Abdu'l-Baha undertook two extensive journeys across Europe and North America from 1911 to 1913. His talks and explanations about his father's writings are included in the body of Bahá'í sacred writings, much of which, like those of his father before him, was originally addressed to individual enquirers but later compiled as books.

The Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá all wrote in Persian and Arabic. The main body of their writings have been translated into matchless English by Bahá'u'lláh's great-grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), and translations around the world are generally made from these. From 1921 to 1957 Effendi was also the 'Guardian' of the Bahá'í Faith and its last individual leader, guiding the development of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. In 1963 the first Universal House of Justice was elected, which oversees the Bahá'í faith from its world centre in Haifa, Israel.

The only European to meet and speak with Bahá'u'lláh was Cambridge orientalist, E.G. Browne, and in his memoirs he recalled what Bahá'u'lláh had said to him:

You have come to meet a prisoner and an exile. We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled – what harm is there in this? Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the Most Great Peace shall come... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.'