

whose appearance impressed me more. . . . One more eloquent of speech, more ready of argumentation, more apt of illustration, more intimately acquainted with the sacred books of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muhammadans, could, I should think, scarcely be found."

When Abdul-Baha took over the leadership of the Baha'i faith in 1892, it was still a movement confined to the Middle East and India that consisted almost exclusively of Iranians. During his ministry, he expanded the reach of the religion to North and South America, Europe, East Asia, and Australasia. Through his two visits to Europe and North America (in 1911 and 1912–1913), he strengthened these nascent communities, spoke at numerous prestigious venues, and met many prominent persons, including religious leaders, philosophers, and statesmen. The newspapers of the time frequently referred to him as "the Persian prophet." Wherever there was a sufficiently large Baha'i community, he initiated the establishment of Baha'i administrative institutions.

The writings of Abdul-Baha and the texts of the talks he gave during his journeys to the West have an important place in Baha'i literature. He kept up a voluminous correspondence with people, both Baha'is and others, from all parts of the world and wrote on philosophical, mystical, historical, social, and political themes. Still, Abdul-Baha suffered greatly during his life. It was not until he was 64 years old, in 1908, that the restrictions he had been under since going into exile in 1852 were finally lifted. On several occasions, his life was in great danger. He died in Haifa in modern-day Israel on November 28, 1921, and is buried in the Shrine of the Bab on Mount Carmel in Haifa.

All accounts agree that Abdul-Baha had a charismatic personal presence that radiated a serene, majestic, and authoritative air. He was always very kind in his personal dealings and generous to the point that his own family

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members complained that they were left with nothing. He had a keen sense of humor and frequently used amusing anecdotes to make his point understood. His personal life was very simple and the furnishings of his

rooms spartan. He ate and slept little and spent some hours every day in prayer and meditation. He was greatly venerated by the Baha'is and sometimes restrained them from making exaggerated claims about him. He always insisted that his highest station and greatest honor was to be Abdul-Baha ("the servant of Baha'u'llah").

Moojan Momen

Further Reading

'Abdu'l-Baha. Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978; Balyuzi, Hasan

M.'Abdu'l-Baha: The Centre of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah. 2d ed. Oxford: George Ronald, 1987.

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— Abdul-Baha (Used by permission of the curator)