THE DIVINE CURRICULUM
VOLUME 1: DIVINE DESIGN

How God’s Plan Is Revealed in the World’s Great Religions.

EDWARD PRICE

Wisdom Editions
Minneapolis, Minnesota
To the Lord and to all of the Divine Educators.
To Glenford Mitchell, who told me to do this.
To my wife, my daughter, and my mother.
Contents

PART ONE:
OVERVIEW

Chapter 1: Welcome to the Divine Curriculum! .................3
  All of Creation is a Classroom .................................. 3
    The premise ..................................................... 3
    The Teachers .................................................... 4
    The program ...................................................... 5
    The students ..................................................... 5
    The goal .......................................................... 6
  The plan for this series of books ................................... 7
  The plan for this volume ........................................ 10
  Focusing on the Divine side ..................................... 12
  Capitalization of certain pronouns ............................... 13
  Gender pronouns and God ....................................... 14
  Translating “Allah” properly .................................... 14

Chapter 2: Abraham ............................................17
  Introduction ....................................................... 17
  Mission and teachings .......................................... 18
  After Abraham .................................................... 21
  The stature of Abraham .......................................... 21

Chapter 3: Moses .............................................22
  Introduction ....................................................... 22
  Mission and teachings .......................................... 23
  After Moses ....................................................... 26
  The stature of Moses ............................................ 26

Chapter 4: Jesus ...............................................28
  Introduction ....................................................... 28
  Mission and teachings .......................................... 30
  After Jesus ....................................................... 33
  The stature of Jesus ............................................ 34

Chapter 5: Muhammad .........................................35
  Separating the Faith of Muhammad from the ideology of extremists.... 35
  Understanding the militant jihadi extremists ...................... 36
  Introduction ....................................................... 41
  Mission and teachings .......................................... 44
PART ONE: 
God, Prophethood, and the Qur'án ........................................... 44
Pillars of Islam ..................................................................... 46
Jihad = Struggle ................................................................. 46
After Muhammad ............................................................... 47
The stature of Muhammad ................................................... 48

Chapter 6: The Báb .............................................................. 50
Introduction ........................................................................ 50
Mission and teachings ....................................................... 55
After the Báb .................................................................... 58
The stature of the Báb ........................................................ 59

Chapter 7: Bahá'u'lláh .......................................................... 61
Introduction ........................................................................ 61
Mission and teachings ....................................................... 65
After Bahá'u'lláh ................................................................. 71
The stature of Bahá'u'lláh .................................................... 72

PART TWO: 
THE DIVINE CURRICULUM

Chapter 8: The Concept of Curriculum .................................. 77

Chapter 9: God, the Great Curriculum Designer ..................... 80
The infinity of God ............................................................. 80
Creation is the learning environment .................................. 81
The Divine curriculum advances towards a goal ................. 81
The curriculum advances gradually through stages .......... 84
The curriculum tests the students ...................................... 84
The curriculum is Teacher-based ...................................... 86
Features of Divine curriculum ......................................... 87

PART THREE: 
DIVINE REALITY–ONE GOD

Chapter 10: The One God ..................................................... 91

Chapter 11: Does Everyone Have The Same God? ............... 96
The human side of the controversy .................................... 97
Voices against the commonality of God .......................... 97
Voices for the commonality of God .................................. 99
Confusion governs the controversy .................................. 100
The Divine side of the controversy .................................. 101
Moses confirmed Abraham .............................................. 102
Jesus confirmed Abraham and Moses ............................. 102
Muhammad confirmed Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus 103
From the Bible. .................................................... 183
From the Qur’an .................................................. 183
From Bahá’í Writings .......................................... 183
Evidently, creation was more than a big bang. ................ 186
Reflections on the purpose underlying creation. ............... 188

Chapter 19: What the Creator Creates ................. 191
  What kind of creature? ........................................ 191
  Definition of the human being .......................... 192
  The creation vs. evolution debate ....................... 194
  The soul ...................................................... 202
    The soul is a challenging entity ....................... 202
    The soul is truly mysterious ......................... 204
    The soul is immaterial ................................ 206
    Other attributes of the soul ......................... 213
  Knowing God ................................................ 217
  Loving God ................................................... 219
  Free will ...................................................... 221
  Choose what? ................................................ 223
  The arena for free will is not unlimited ............... 226
  An ever-advancing civilization .......................... 229
    Material civilization .................................. 229
    Divine civilization ..................................... 231
  Reflections on what the Creator creates ............... 242

PART FIVE:
DIVINE EDUCATORS

Chapter 20: Introducing the Divine Educators ........ 245
  Members of a short list .................................. 245
  The need for an educator ............................... 249
  Grace meets need ....................................... 251
  The Eternal Covenant .................................. 260

Chapter 21: The Mighty Stature of the Divine Educators 269
  What are these exalted Beings? ........................ 269
  The meaning of manifestation .......................... 275
    No bodily incarnation ................................ 275
    Attributes can be incarnated ....................... 276
    Knowledge of God is through the Manifestation of the attributes of God. ................ 276
    The Representative of God, like a perfect mirror ... 277
    Difficulty comprehending past statements ........ 277
    Understanding God’s attributes .................... 279
    The sun and the mirror .............................. 281
    The assertion of Divinity .......................... 282
The mirror analogy and the Trinity ........................................283
“We make no distinction between any of His messengers...” ........290
They are “endowed with constancy” ........................................290
They are given supreme authority ...........................................297
They are sinless .................................................................299
They manifest “the Most Great Infallibility” ............................302

Chapter 22: Unity and Distinction of the Divine Educators ............305
Their stations of unity and distinction ........................................305
Abrogation and affirmation ..................................................309
The two aspects of every revelation .......................................312
Some changes are not by Divine design ..................................313
A clarifying and energizing Force ..........................................314
Why revelation must be progressive .....................................315
Advancement is not linear even with progressive revelation ........320
They prepare their followers for the future ..............................322
Investigating reality vs. the smorgasbord approach to religion ......330
How we got to the smorgasbord view of religion .......................335

PART SIX:
CONCLUSION

Chapter 23: Conclusion .....................................................345
Staying current with the Divine curriculum ..............................345
School analogy .................................................................346
In what grade should you be? ...............................................346
Exclusivity claims .............................................................347
The straight path of continuity ..............................................350
Yearning for truth, investigating reality ..................................353
Achieving the spiritual objective ............................................354

Bibliography .................................................................357
Sacred Writings ...............................................................359
The Bible .................................................................359
The Qur’an .................................................................359
Bahá’í Writings .............................................................359
Bahá’í Compilations .......................................................361
Other resources ..............................................................362

Endnotes .................................................................371
PART ONE:
OVERVIEW
Chapter 1:
Welcome to the Divine Curriculum!

All of Creation is a Classroom

Imagine the existence of a single, all-encompassing, ancient process that is leading all of creation toward an ultimate, meaningful purpose. If it existed, what would that process and that purpose be?

Imagine the existence of a vast, all-embracing, Divinely-conceived plan that is binding together the major religions of the world, advancing civilization, unfolding over time according to rational principles and guiding the human race. If it existed, towards what goal would that plan be striving?

Imagine trying to prove the existence of such a plan. What evidence would you seek? And if you found evidence, how would you go about exploring it?

The premise

The premise of this book series is that:

- All of creation is a classroom.
- The classroom is part of the universal school of God, which encompasses both the observable universe and the spiritual realms beyond.
- The Creator/Owner/Director of the school is Almighty God Himself.
- The Teachers in the school are the Divine Educators.

A complete telling of the story of humanity’s Divine education would go back to the beginning—to the Big Bang, to the formation of our world, to the emergence of life on this planet and to the evolution of our species.

Divine education probably began no later than the first emergence of a soulful bipedal, tool-using hominid species more than a hundred millennia ago.

It probably progressed through the full emergence of humanity from the
animal kingdom, the expansion of the brain, through the dawning of human consciousness, through long ages of trans-continental migrations and through the establishment of settled human habitations over the surface of the planet.

It probably continued with the rise of the first civilizations, with the making of tools, the discovery of fire, the birth of culture, the discovery of individuality, the transition to agriculture and the invention of the wheel and writing.

It probably flourished with the awakening of humanity’s awareness to the existence of overwhelming and ultimate forces—such as earth, air, fire and water—which seemingly implied the existence of a spiritual reality beyond ordinary earthly existence.

It probably became more urgent with the realization, as distinct from animals, of the inevitability of death and the first concepts of an afterlife. Divine education may well be hinted at by ancient cave drawings, which seem to depict the dealings of men with divine entities. It is certainly exemplified by the founding of local shrines that evoked the presence of the Divine for worshippers.

No one knows when, countless ages ago, the defining characteristic of humanity—the soul, that unique spiritual reality at the core of human existence—first emerged. But it is reasonable to think that since then, so long as the soul of man has existed, God in His ways has provided education to humanity.

Without a doubt, the story of humanity’s Divine education is very long.

**The Teachers**

This is a series of books which picks up the story of the Divine curriculum from the “moment” when monotheism was permanently established. That significant turning point occurred with the mission of Abraham about 4,000 years ago and was further developed by later Divine Educators.

The Divine Educators in the lineage of Abraham—Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh and Abraham Himself—are the focus of this series.
The Divine Educators pursue Their work in mutual respect as members of a single Divine faculty. They acknowledge one another, praise each other, build on the work of previous lessons, honor Their suffering and sacrifices and strive as a team to achieve the mission of the school’s Creator.

**The program**

The unfolding educational program taught by these Educators is a Divine curriculum authorized by God Himself. The textbooks of the Divine curriculum are the Holy Scriptures of the Faiths of the world.

Each Divine Educator is authorized to teach a portion of the Divine curriculum during His time of service; that portion is given through Divine revelation. Each successive revelation may be considered as a grade in the school of God. The Divine Educator adapts the revelation, the curriculum, to the needs of mankind for the age in which He appears. The curriculum itself is never-ending because the knowledge of God and His gracious giving to humanity cannot be exhausted. Progress towards the goals of the Divine curriculum is grade-by-grade, as progressively revealed by one Divine Educator after another. The Divine curriculum benefits both individuals and society, in this world and the next.

As in a secular school, the purpose of each Grade is to prepare humanity to advance grade-by-grade in the school of God. Success occurs when students choose to advance; failure occurs when they don’t.

There is continuity in the Divine curriculum. The combined effect of advancing through these Divine grades, which have been progressively revealed over thousands of years, is cumulative and purpose-driven. Earlier lessons are not discarded when more advanced lessons are revealed. Instead, earlier lessons become the foundation for more advanced learning, just as mastering arithmetic makes possible the acquisition of algebra, trigonometry and eventually calculus. The wise mathematician does not look back on his childhood arithmetic lessons disdainfully, rather he appreciates the usefulness in his current endeavors of what he learned. So it is with the Divine curriculum; the truly wise believer is thankful and respectful of the lessons learned from earlier Divine Educators.

**The students**

Every human being who has ever lived is a student in this universal school of God. Other sentient beings throughout the cosmos, if they exist, may also be students in God’s classroom. Of all creatures on earth, as far as we know, humans are the only beings who have evolved on this planet:

- With conscious self-awareness, active moral judgment and formidable intellectual abilities, such as:
• Communicating through language and being aware of the happiness, sadness, viewpoints and perspectives of one’s own and other minds.
• Virtues such as love, truth, beauty, humility, forgiveness, justice, unity and peace.
• Intellectually forming a theory, deducing from evidence, solving a problem, imagining distant places, thinking about the future, conceiving numbers, discovering nature’s laws, striving toward goals and measuring success or failure.
• Ours is the species which has been endowed with a living soul.
• We are the living souls who are consciously aware of ourselves, of one another and of our Creator.
• We are the children of the Creator who have been gifted with the significant emotional capacity to love God, to receive truth and to make a free will choice of good over evil.
• It is our species, so greatly blessed, that has been singled out by God to receive the soul-saving, society-building and civilization-advancing benefits of the Divine curriculum.

The goal

Creation—indeed, reality itself—is spiritual, unified, intentional, instructional and always surprising. God’s revealed Words, the records of human history and the achievements of science all bring to light different but connected aspects of the inspiring education offered by God.

All creation serves as a classroom. With all of its magnificent scale and complexity, the entirety of heaven and earth is designed to be educational for complex conscious beings such as ourselves. In this series, we will attempt to absorb the lessons of this never-ending curriculum and seek a glimpse of the ultimate objective, the universal purpose towards which this curriculum is aimed.
The plan for this series of books

As mentioned, the essential premise explored in this book series is that all of creation is a classroom and that God has been educating humanity by sending Divine Educators into the world since the first humans began to walk upon the earth.

This is a six-volume series of books. It will take you on a 4,000-year journey through humanity’s long process of Divine education.

- This first volume, *Divine Design*, explores the foundational and working concepts of the Divine curriculum.
- The subsequent five volumes will cover the journey itself, namely, the history and the teachings of the Divine Educators.

The journey focuses on the lessons taught by humanity’s great religious Teachers, the six Divine Educators who have been Founders of Faith in the 4,000-year Abrahamic lineage up to the present era. Their Names are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Approximate date of ministry</th>
<th>Associated with this world religion</th>
<th>Current estimated world membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vol. 1</td>
<td>Divine Design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol. 2</td>
<td>Abraham and Moses</td>
<td>1900 BC and 1300 BC</td>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>About 13.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol. 3</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>30 - 33 AD</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>About 2.2 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol. 4</td>
<td>Muhammad</td>
<td>610 - 632 AD</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>About 1.6 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol. 5</td>
<td>The Báb</td>
<td>1844 – 1850 AD</td>
<td>The Bábí Faith</td>
<td>Negligible (since nearly all Bábís became Bahá’í)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vol. 6</td>
<td>Bahá’u’lláh</td>
<td>1852 – 1892 AD</td>
<td>The Bahá’í Faith</td>
<td>About 5 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 The volumes in this series, with information about the Divine Educators

Given the importance of current events, Volume 4, in addition to its focus on Muhammad and given the relevance of current events, will include a candid discussion of extremism and terrorism in connection with present-day Islam. Also, at the end of the series, Volume 6 includes concluding thoughts and lessons learned from the entire 4,000-year historical and spiritual journey of humankind.
This book series picks up the story of the Divine curriculum with Abraham because that was the “moment” when the knowledge of one God—monotheism—was decisively established on the stage of recorded human history. That historic realization, which occurred about 4,000 years ago, marked a crucial turning point in the history of the human race and provided the impetus for humanity’s subsequent rapid spiritual and social development in the millennia which followed.

Several other Divine Educators were historically very significant in the annals of human religious history:

- Krishna, about 3100 BC, Hinduism
- Zoroaster, about 1000 BC, Zoroastrianism
- Buddha, about 580 BC, Buddhism

But they are not covered in this series. Why?

I have concentrated on the Abrahamic Divine Educators in my studies of religion and have not studied these other Figures as much as I would have liked. Consequently, I do not have sufficient expertise to include them in this book series. This work is imperfect for that reason, but I hope that my focus on the Abrahamic lineage will suffice to provide a meaningful, uplifting and surprising journey.

Each Divine Educator has been associated with the birth of a major world religion. The Divine Educators have many titles: Prophet-Founder, Apostle of God, Divine Messenger, Manifestation of God, Savior, Deliverer, Warner, Messiah, Friend of God, Son of God, Son of Man, Dayspring of Divine Revelation, Incarnation, Avatar and many more. Like different facets of a diamond, each of these titles illuminates the greater Reality embodied by the Divine Educators. Throughout this series, all of these terms are used. The aim is to facilitate a more comprehensive appreciation of the truly exalted status and function of the Divine Educators.

In addition to the title of Divine Educator, another useful analogy is to think of Them as a spiritual Sunrise. Since each day on earth is inaugurated by the rising of the sun, the Divine Educators are also referred to as The Sun of Truth. Each spiritual Sunrise above the horizon of human history brings a new Day of God, in full continuity with the Days of God which come before and after.

Viewed on a timeline, history’s Divine Educators have appeared approximately 500 to 1,000 years apart. Graphically, a timeline portrayal looks something like this:
Some readers may not be familiar with all of these Names. Each reader brings to these pages his or her own religious experience. Followers of the older religions are often less familiar with and sometimes even hostile to, the Founders of later religions and vice versa. It may be necessary for some readers to examine their thinking and emotional reactions in order to discover unintentional prejudices, misleading images, false stereotypes, or unexamined emotional attachments which have been imparted to them from religious institutions, the mass media or other sources.

In today’s society, for example, there are many false perceptions of Muhammad, the Founder of Islam. Likewise, though there are presently more than five million Bahá’ís in the world, the twin Founders of the Bahá’í Faith—known as the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh—are still relatively unknown today. For that reason alone it may seem surprising to place Figures such as the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh on a par with Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. All I can ask of you is that you explore this series with an open mind, consider dispassionately the information presented here and come to your own conclusions.

I think you will find that the content in Volume 1 is crucial to understanding all the other volumes. Naturally, I hope you will find the entire 4,000-year spiritual journey of humanity to be so interesting that you will want to read all six volumes.

My own religious affiliation is the Bahá’í Faith, which was founded in the 19th century by two Divine Educators, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. That said, I personally believe in each and every One of the Divine Educators covered in this series. I benefit from Their teachings in my own personal life and I look upon Them with the utmost reverence and respect. Once the reader understands the true extent of the transcendent monotheism presented in this series, he or she will not find it surprising to know that I look upon each of Them, individually and together, as the pathway to salvation, in this world and in the next.
I realize this will be positive information to some readers and disconcerting or perplexing to others. This is understandable given that each reader will bring to this book series his or her own background and preconceptions concerning truth.

Regardless of your own views, you can benefit from this perspective in one very specific way. As you will discover, my approach is not sectarian in nature. Taking an uncommon stance, each of the Divine Educators in this series, each of these towering historical Figures, will be studied with equal enthusiasm, respect, admiration and even devotion. To the utmost of my ability, and with humility, there will be no favoritism shown, no partisanship of any kind. I have made every effort to find unbiased, reliable sources of information and have tried my best to document everything. I’ve tried to cut through the prejudices and misunderstandings which have occurred all too often in humanity’s discourse about religion. The teachings of the Divine Educators, that is, Their curriculum, will be viewed in their accurate historical context, within the events of Their own lifetimes, in Their continuity with one another and in light of Their overall contribution to the advancement of human civilization.

Needless to say, apart from quotations from the Scriptures of the world religions, the ideas presented here are my best understanding of the subject matter. Any shortcomings in the presentation are strictly my own.

There is a wonderful passage in the New Testament that captures the ethos of the investigation I would like to offer.

Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip. (John 1:45-46)

What could be simpler and more life-affirming than this when seeking the lessons of the never-ending Divine curriculum and the purpose underlying all creation?

Friend, come and see. I hope you will find the knowledge we uncover as uplifting, joyful and surprising as I have. We have much to learn together.

The plan for this volume

This first volume, Divine Design, provides you with the working concepts of the Divine curriculum. The presentation will be wide-ranging, covering many topics, but the logic of it all is really quite simple.

In this chapter I have given you a fast summary of the overall perspective and premise of this book, all based on the idea that all of creation is a classroom.
Every classroom has its teachers, so in chapters 2 through 7 the Faculty of the school of God will briefly be introduced. In those chapters, I will briefly mention the historical context of each Divine Educator, the main thrust of His mission and teachings and His stature in human history. These chapters will give you a fast overview of the entire 4,000-year journey of the Divine curriculum.

In part two (chapters 8 and 9), the core concepts of curriculum will be explained and, of course, a tentative effort will be made to describe God’s role as the Great Curriculum Designer.

In part three (chapters 10 through 16), the most important part of the argument of this volume will be presented—attaining an understanding of Divine Reality, God. In an effort to get to know God better we will examine certain of His qualities: that He is both one and infinite, that He is the common God of all mankind, that God is personally concerned with the well-being of every person, that God is prayer-hearing and prayer-answering, that God is the Lord of history and that He is the Creator of infinite worlds, both in the physical universe and in the life beyond. Chapter 16, the final chapter in this part, will address certain common misconceptions about God (as viewed from the perspective of a monotheist).

If part three answered the question, what is God?, part four (chapters 17 through 19) will go on to explore why God bothered to create anything in the first place, the wondrous purposes for which He creates, and then, finally, with that knowledge in mind, what the Creator creates to achieve His purposes. Based on Scriptures, these chapters will provide substance to the idea that there really is a Divine design. In addition, they will offer a unique view of the very idea of our common “humanity”.

Once one knows the “why”, “what for” and “what” of creation, then, in part five (chapters 20 through 22), it will be much easier to understand the role of the Divine Educators and the expectations placed upon the human students in the Divine classroom, which is all of creation. And if you know what the Divine Educators are sent here (to earth) to do, then all the activities of the Divine Educators that follow in the subsequent volumes will make far more sense.

In part six (chapter 23), we will reflect on the importance of investigating reality and staying current with the Divine curriculum. We will ponder what keeping current with the Divine curriculum looks like. And we will consider the ultimate spiritual objective towards which all individuals and societies must strive.

This volume is called Divine Design because it describes the overall purposes and plan of God, as depicted by the Scriptures of the world religions, as well as our unique role as human beings in that plan. My hope is that with
this information in hand, we will be able to trace the common thread of the continuity of Divine revelation from the beginning to the end of this series.

**Focusing on the Divine side**

Some crucial assumptions about method have been made.

There are, broadly speaking, two “sides” to the study of religion, the _Divine side_ and the _human side_. The Divine side refers to the perspective of God in His role as Revealer of truth. Humans cannot know fully the Divine Side, but we can seek for it. The Divine side (of the study of religion), therefore, is a human effort to understand reality from God’s perspective and this is attained mainly through the primary sources of the world’s religious Scriptures.

Seeking the Divine side of religion, in contrast with the human side, is encouraged. For example, speaking of the spiritual seeker, Bahá’u’lláh says:

> With the ear of God he heareth, with the eye of God he beholdeth the mysteries of divine creation.—Bahá’u’lláh

The human side refers to the human perspective of religion, and it is widely discussed by scholars and lay people alike. Most books on religion focus on the human side of religion, presenting their themes from the perspectives of the followers. They attempt to answer questions such as these: What are the dogmas and doctrines developed by the rabbis, priests and jurists of Judaism, Christianity and Islam? How do religious practices—prayer, sacraments, fasting and pilgrimage, to mention a few—develop over time? What do the everyday people think about God? Such questions are worthy of study, but they focus on the human side of religion.

My aim is to penetrate, to the extent possible, the Divine side of religion.

Consider this: In a school classroom you can pay attention to what the students are learning or what the teacher is teaching, you can read the classroom notes of the students, or you can read the teacher’s textbook. In the classroom, there are many students while there is but one teacher and one curriculum. The students’ notes are riddled with gaps, mistakes and contradictions. Focusing only on what the students have learned would usually provide an incomplete, distorted, or even misleading picture of the teacher’s actual lesson. Similarly, interpreting the Divine curriculum based on the contentious views of the theologians and followers is like trying to understand the Divine Educators’ lessons by reading the students’ notes. Whatever the merits of the human side of religion, it will _not_ enable us to discover the underlying continuity of 4,000 years of Divine revelation or to discern where the never-ending Divine curriculum is taking the human race.

Unlike many other investigations of the world’s religions, I will not be emphasizing what the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Bahá’í people believe. I
will not rely upon the contradictory assertions of theologians who seem to be constantly claiming superiority over the followers of other Faiths. Instead, we will explore the teachings of the Divine Educators of the Abrahamic lineage. We will appreciate Their deeds and value Their accomplishments. While being ever conscious of our own limitations and our own fallibility, our primary information Sources will be the Founders of Faith Themselves. The Divine curriculum was taught to the human race by way of the sacred Scriptures—the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Qur’án and the Bahá’í Writings—therefore, these constitute the Teachers’ Textbooks upon which we must rely. We will not enter the academic disputes about the historical accuracy of this or that Text, simply because, whatever their shortcomings, these are the Scriptures through which the peoples of the world received their Divine curriculum.

We cannot entirely side-step the religious leaders because their works influence contemporary understandings of what the great Educators taught. Thus, while the human side should not be ignored, a dominant focus on the Divine side is the only safe path to discerning the continuity of Divine revelation, to grasping the Divine curriculum, to glimpsing the underlying purpose of creation and of detecting a hint of the universal Divine plan. This is the only way to discover the ancient and eternal thread of truth binding all of the Divine Educators together.

Therefore, focusing on the Divine side is my chosen method.

**Capitalization of certain pronouns**

It is customary in Western secular society to refer to God’s Messengers with lower case letters. Thus, when a writer speaks of figures like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Buddha, and Muhammad, usually the writer writes, “he taught…” or “they said…” Lower case pronouns are used. However, I am a Bahá’í, and the Bahá’í Writings encourage showing respect and reverence to all of God’s Messengers by referring to Them with capital letters. For reasons that will become clear in Volume 6 of this series, the Son of Bahá’u’lláh, who was known by the title ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is also treated with this distinction. The following rules for capitalization will be applied throughout this series:

- Any direct references to God or His Manifestations are capitalized. Pronouns such as, He, Him, They, Their, and so on are capitalized.
- The adjective “Divine” is capitalized as a reference to God or His Manifestations. Any noun following the adjective “Divine” is normally lower case. Thus, the usage employed is “Divine plan”, “Divine teaching”, “Divine curriculum”, etc.
• Significant terms that are not preceded by the word “Divine” are lower case. For example, the words “mission” and “cause” in the phrases “the mission of Jesus” and “the cause of Bahá’u’lláh” are lower case.

• Exceptions are the terms “Divine Reality” and “Divine Educator” because the former refers directly to the Essence of God and the latter refers to His Manifestations.

• Special titles and concepts, such as “Son of God”, “Seal of the Prophets”, “Glory of God”, “the Resurrection”, “the Day of Judgement”, etc. are capitalized.

• Any references to the Holy Books of the world’s major religions are capitalized, and also the general term “Scriptures”.

All other persons, whether living or dead, whether legendary or known historical persons, and regardless of their otherwise high rank or station, are treated in the normal (lower case) way. Quotations from other sources that use a different approach, however, will be cited as they were published.

**Gender pronouns and God**

The use of the male pronoun for God (“He” or “Him”) is merely an artifact of the English language. No gender bias is intended. Referring to God with the gender neutral pronoun “It” seems disrespectful and, given centuries of custom, saying “She” or “Her” would seem odd to many readers. Taking the path of least resistance in this case, and without intending to make a statement, I hope readers will accept my decision to refer to God with the male pronoun. Theologically, God is beyond gender.

**Translating “Allah” properly**

We need to address a misunderstanding about the word “Allah”, the Arabic word for God. It is often translated improperly, which leads to many points of confusion.

Allah simply means “the God” in Arabic. Allah however is not a name. Any native Arabic speaker, whether Jewish, Christian or Arab, refers to God simply as Allah because, in Arabic, Allah means God. The word used for God in the Qur’án, the Holy Scripture of Islam, which was revealed originally in Arabic, is Allah.

Less well known, the word for God in an Arabic translation of the Bible is also Allah. Thus, for example, when Genesis 1:1 says “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...”, the Arabic version of the Bible uses the word Allah where the word God appears in the English version. This is for the same reason, because in Arabic the word for God is Allah.

Moreover, when Muhammad, the Founder of Islam, wrote of God in the Qur’án, He explicitly stated that He was teaching the Arabs about the same God
that Abraham, Moses, and Jesus had believed in. Today, a Jewish or Christian native Arabic speaker, living in Egypt or Saudi Arabia says “Allah” in his personal prayers to God, or in any speaking or writing about God in his native tongue.

Consider the following graphic which displays side-by-side the first ten verses of the Book of Genesis, in both English and Arabic. One side of the graphic shows the familiar King James Version. You can see the word God is used eleven times. On the other side, the Arabic translation uses the word Allah in the exact places where the English uses the word God, exactly eleven times. The graphic places a circle around the word Allah so the reader can see the exact correspondence to the word God in the English text. The exact equivalence between the word God in English and the word Allah in Arabic is thus proven beyond any doubt.

Figure 4 Comparing the English Bible with the Arabic Bible, regarding Allah = God
Accordingly, when translating from Arabic to English, the word Allah should be translated into its English equivalent, God, whenever an Arabic writer is talking about God. Unfortunately, many English translations of the Qur’án do not translate the word Allah at all, instead leaving the word Allah in place. This is highly misleading. It can give the reader the unfortunate impression that Allah is a different entity, some other God, not the God of the Bible, not the God Who is the Creator.

To avoid this error, in this book series, whenever a Qur’án verse using the word Allah is cited, the word Allah will always be translated to God, even when the translator used the word Allah in his translation. This is my preferred way of respecting the original intent of the message of the Qur’án and the only way I know of that avoids causing misunderstandings.

There are other significant problems with the English translations of the Qur’án. For an in-depth discussion of this problem see Volume 4 of this series. There are also meaningful discussions of the problems with the various translations in the professional scholarly literature (see endnote #5).
Chapter 2: Abraham

Introduction

Among the great Prophets was Abraham, Who, being an iconoclast and a Herald of the oneness of God, was banished from His native land. He founded a family upon which the blessing of God descended, and it was owing to this religious basis and ordination that the Abrahamic house progressed and advanced. Through the divine benediction noteworthy and luminous prophets issued from His lineage…. All this was due to the religion of God which this blessed lineage established and upheld. It is evident that throughout the history of Abraham and His posterity this was the source of their honor, advancement and civilization.—‘Abdu’l-Bahá[6]

Abraham lived approximately 4,000 years ago. The Founders of four world religions—Moses (Judaism), Jesus (Christianity), Muhammad (Islam), the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh (the Bahá’í Faith)—were all descended from His lineage. Each one of those subsequent Founders said the God of Abraham was the Source of Their revelations as well.

Abraham was an iconoclast, the greatest man of His age, Who battled against the polytheistic and idolatrous norms of His society. He established the oneness and goodness of God, and entered into an everlasting Covenant of faith with God. God promised Him that the land of Canaan would be given to Him and His posterity. God offered even greater promises:

…I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore… And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed… (Genesis 22:17-18)

Abraham succeeded in establishing monotheism because He did not impose His teachings by force; rather He embedded His God-given Covenant in a living and growing community of followers. He achieved this by demonstrating enduring faith and loyalty to God and by educating His family in a deeply-held ethical monotheism,[7] which is defined as a monotheism which regards the one...
God as the ultimate Source of all goodness. According to the ethical monotheism established by Abraham, God alone possesses the final authority to define the distinctions between true and false and good and evil. Ethical monotheism was in sharp contrast to the norms of His Day. By turning away from the norms of idolatry, polytheism and the brutal child sacrifice prevalent in His Day, Abraham’s view of God also promoted the ethic that human life is sacred.

Not only is Abraham the Father of a multitude, He is also the Founder and Establisher of ethical monotheism. Literally, countless generations and billions of souls have been the beneficiaries of Abraham’s life and work.

Information about Abraham is found in both Scripture and tradition. Scriptures that narrate episodes of His life or mention Him are the Old Testament (primarily the Book of Genesis), the New Testament, the Qur’án, and the Baha’í Writings. Considerable supplementary material is found in the records of Jewish and Islamic oral tradition.

**Mission and teachings**

From the beginning, Abraham was exceptional. According to Jewish legends, He was born in Ur, a province of the Babylonian empire. Under King Nimrod, religion was a state-owned enterprise based on idolatry and polytheism. Abraham’s father, Terah, worked for Nimrod as a seller of idols.

When soothsayers told Nimrod that a great leader was about to be born who would oppose his religion and challenge his authority, Nimrod ordered the cruel massacre of many babies in the kingdom. Abraham’s mother managed to conceal her pregnancy, however. After Abraham was born, His mother hid Him in a cave to save His life. In the cave, according to legend, the Angel Gabriel cared for Him and, after a long delay, Abraham was eventually reunited with His family.

Jewish tradition tells us that Abraham reasoned His way to the recognition of God. One day he looked at the sun and marveled at its light. Surely this must be God, He thought. Then the sun set below the horizon and He realized that if it could be taken away it couldn’t be God. Next, he saw the moon. In a while, it too was taken away, so He knew it could not be God. Then He noticed the stars, but they were taken away by the morning light, so Abraham again reasoned that the stars could not be God. Abraham thought about the idols he saw everywhere around Him. He knew that, since they were fashioned by men, they could not be God either. Abraham thought, Whoever created all these things—the sun, the moon, the stars—though He cannot be seen, must be God.

This recognition inspired Abraham to campaign vehemently to His fellow citizens that idol worship is wrong and that only the one true God is worthy of
worship. This became His great mission. Abraham’s activities stirred the wrath of Nimrod who, according to legend, had Abraham catapulted into an enormous fire. By a miracle Abraham survived in the midst of the fire. Eventually Nimrod decided to banish Abraham from the kingdom.

Both the Bible and the Qur’án report that God and Abraham spoke to each other on many occasions. Because of these interactions, Abraham came to be known as the Friend of God. This was the first time God spoke to Abraham recorded in the Bible:

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

Acting on faith, Abraham followed these instructions. He convinced His father, Terah, to come along on the journey, and also His nephew Lot, and his family. This was the beginning of the migration of the Hebrew people to their land of promise. Abraham and His group went west, stopping first in the town of Harran, in Upper Mesopotamia (southeastern Turkey today), where they stayed for five years. After Terah passed away, God again told Abraham to continue on to the land of Canaan, known today as Israel.

Abraham was a moral leader and well acquainted with the rulers of His Day. On occasion, Abraham showed brilliant capabilities as a military leader, such as when he rescued Lot after his nephew had been captured by hostile forces. Abraham became very prosperous with the years.

In their conversations, God explained more and more about the Covenant between Them and instituted the practice of circumcision for male members of the covenant family. The most important knowledge that Abraham received was absolute certainty that there is only one God, the Creator of all things, and that this one God is the Source of all goodness. This deeply held ethical monotheism, backed by His condemnation of idolatry, became the focus of Abraham’s message to the people of His day.

All seemed well for Abraham except for one thing. God’s promise that Abraham would be the Father of a multitude seemed increasingly unlikely because Abraham and His wife, Sarah, still had no children. Sarah was elderly and barren. Eventually, Sarah suggested that Abraham take her maidservant, Hagar, as His concubine and conceive a child with her, which He did, naming His first-born son Ishmael. Abraham raised Ishmael to believe in the one Creator God, and Ishmael was circumcised as God had commanded.
At last God told Abraham that the time had come for Sarah to have a child. Sarah laughed at this, but soon Isaac, the long-awaited child of promise, was born. Like his older brother, Isaac was also raised to know and love God.

The Bible records God’s promise that His Covenant would continue with Isaac, but years later God made a startling announcement:

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey...

(Genesis 22:1-3)

The Bible clearly says the child to be sacrificed was Isaac. By contrast, Muslim scholars have stated that the child to be sacrificed was actually Ishmael who was, after all, the first born son and also much loved by Abraham. Despite these differences, the Bible and the Qur’án, and also Jewish traditions, depict the son as a willing (even if not entirely knowing) participant in the drama about to unfold. The Qur’án speaks especially well of this son to be sacrificed. In dialogue with his Father, the Qur’án reports that he offered his Father only words of encouragement and strength:

O my father! do as thou art commanded: thou will find me, if God so wills, one practicing patience and constancy! (Qur’án 37:102-106)

After they arrived at the mountain where the sacrifice was to take place, Abraham and his son prepared the site. Abraham placed His son on an altar, bound him, and then raised a knife. Literally at the last second an angel twice called out to Abraham. Abraham answered, “Here am I!”, and then the angel declared:

Do not lay a hand on the boy... Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son. (Genesis 22:12)

Abraham stopped. A ram was found tangled in nearby bushes and was sacrificed to God in place of Abraham’s son.

To put it mildly, the meaning of this story has been a source of heartrending discussion and controversy for centuries. A discussion of the various interpretations is presented in Volume 2 of this series.

For the present, let one observation suffice. In the centuries after Abraham, His followers, and the followers of all the monotheistic Faiths in the Abrahamic lineage, abandoned and outlawed the practice of child sacrifice so prevalent in Abraham’s time. Hence, it is no exaggeration to say, that at least by example, Abraham’s deeply held ethical monotheism began with an affirmation of the sacredness of human life.
After Abraham

Curiously, the Bible doesn’t record any promises by Abraham of a future Divine Educator to appear after Him. It does, however, cite the final words of Joseph, the highly distinguished great grandson of Abraham.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. (Genesis 50:24-25)

Thus, according to Joseph’s prophecy, in due time a great Divine Deliverer would come to the Hebrews in Egypt, and He would bring them back to the land promised to them through the Covenant that God had made with their ancestor Abraham. In time, Moses fulfilled this promise.

The stature of Abraham

If ethical monotheism is compared to a tree, Abraham was its planter and first cultivator. He was the first to root it in the soil of human consciousness. He gave His followers the knowledge of one God and identified Him as the Source of all goodness in creation. Abraham succeeded in binding His people to God through an everlasting Covenant, affirmed the sacredness of human life, set forth boundaries of good behavior, and handed down to His ever-expanding lineage a priceless heritage of knowing, loving, and choosing God. He was indeed a wondrous Divine Educator.
Chapter 3: Moses

Introduction

Among the revelators of the law of God was Moses. ...He promulgated the divine teachings and liberated a nation from the lowest condition of degradation and bondage. The people of Israel were ignorant, lowly, debased in morals – a race of slaves under burdensome oppression. Moses led them out of captivity and brought them to the Holy Land. He educated and disciplined them, established among them the foundations of material and divine civilization. Through the education of Moses these ignorant people attained an advanced degree of power and prestige, culminating in the glory of the reign of Solomon... It is evident, therefore, that Moses was an Educator and Teacher...—‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Moses lived approximately 3,300 years ago. He was descended from Abraham through His wife Sarah and their son Isaac. The Pharaoh of Egypt tried to kill Moses when He was a baby, just as Nimrod had attempted to kill Abraham hundreds of years earlier. His revelation, Moses said, was from the “the God of Abraham”. An iconoclast like Abraham, He vehemently forbade His people from the practice of idolatry or polytheism still prevalent in His Day. He affirmed the oneness and goodness of God—that is, ethical monotheism—as Abraham had done.

Following a historic confrontation with Pharaoh in Egypt, He brought His people, the Israelites, out of cruel bondage from that land. When pursued by Pharaoh’s army, and when all seemed lost, God saved the Israelites by miraculously parting the Red Sea and drowning the Egyptian army that was pursuing them. The Israelites celebrated their deliverance after the Egyptians were defeated.

And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses. (Exodus 14:30-31)

According to the Bible, the Israelites were a rebellious and disobedient...
people in desperate need of Divine discipline and education. They wandered in the wilderness for forty years—long enough for a younger and more receptive generation to arise.

Moses brought the Israelites to Mt. Sinai and revealed to them the Ten Commandments and other laws of God. Moses helped the people re-establish their Covenant with God. Although He successfully brought the people to the Promised Land, Moses Himself did not enter. Before dying at age 120, He handed leadership over to Joshua, who led the Israelites into the lands God had given them.

Moses succeeded in embedding the entire construct of Divine law and Covenant into an ever-expanding, living and growing population. The Law infused a new spirit into the Israelites who, with all their shortcomings, became spiritually and socially transformed by its influence. Moses was the Divine Educator Who promoted the oneness and goodness of God, established of the Law of God, and revealed an enduring Covenant between God and His people. Literally, countless generations and billions of souls have been the beneficiaries of Moses’ life and work.

Information about Moses is found in both Scripture and tradition. Scriptures that mention Him are the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Qur’án and the Baha’í Writings. Considerable supplementary material is found in the records of Jewish and Islamic oral tradition.

Mission and teachings

Moses revealed God’s Covenant to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. This Covenant was in no sense between equals. God, the Supreme Monarch, gave the Covenant on His own terms and was free to terminate it at any time if the Israelites didn’t abide by it. God did not need the adoration of the Israelites; His stated objective was the good of the Israelite people and, eventually, the good of all mankind. God promised that if they would obey Him and keep His covenant, they would become a “holy nation”, a unique instrument in His Divine plan (Exodus 19:5).

Moses asked the people to affirm their loyalty to God: And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. (Exodus 19:3-11)

Moses went up to the summit of Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, the core of His Law, which God had written on tablets of stone. (Exodus 20:1-17) While He was on the mountaintop, in the famous incident of the Golden Calf, the people below indulged in an orgy of idolatry and debauchery. After coming down from the mountain Moses displayed an intense anger on behalf of God, smashing the precious stone tablets. Many were punished, a few were