

The Baha'i Concept of Unity and the Fusion of Shinto and Buddhism

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As seen in the principles of unity of humankind and unity of religions, “unity” is the most fundamental concept of the Baha'i teachings. On the other hand, one of its Japanese translations *togo* sometimes has a negative connotation such as amalgamation of companies, conquering and dominating minorities to assimilate them into the majority. The first aristocrat to truly promote Buddhism was Prince Shotoku, who emphasized the principle of *wa* (unity), including the harmony and fusion of the indigenous Japanese folk belief Shinto and Buddhism. When Buddhism and Shinto were fused, they used the term *shugo* (fusion) rather than *togo* (unification). This idea of Prince Shotoku has been handed down to succeeding generations and is expressed outwardly in various Buddhist and Shinto architecture. Although it was a somewhat Buddhist-dominated view of the “fusion”—as seen in the notion that *kami* (Shinto gods) is the manifestation or incarnation of the Buddha—it was nevertheless an attempt to unify the two seemingly different systems of religious belief. As promoted by the Baha'i teachings, such an attempt to fuse and harmonize differences into a constructive idea is important. It should not be confused with the idea which is disguised as “unity” which in fact it to conquer and dominate others for assimilation.

The Five Saints Who Changed the Face of Japanese Buddhism

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Japanese Buddhism has undergone changes over the centuries according to changes in times and environment. There are five saints who are said to have contributed to the development of Japanese Buddhism. (1) Prince Shotoku: He is the first aristocrat who protected and promoted Buddhism systematically. He emphasized the concept of unity in his 17 Articles of the Constitution, in which he also enjoined respect for the Three Jewels of Buddhism (the Buddha, His Law and His community). (2) Emperor Shomu: He enjoined building *kokubunji* temples (state-established provincial temples) throughout Japan to outwardly express the fusion of Shinto and Buddhism, contributing to the establishment of Buddhism as a state religion. (3) Kukai (Kobo Daishi): He developed the theory that Dainichi Buddha is the incarnation of Amaterasu Omikami (the Sun Goddess of Shinto) and contributed to a new form of Buddhism in the manorial system. (4) Shinran: He transformed Buddhism into a monotheistic form, promoting only the worship of Amitabha. His movement of prayer chanting Buddhism was mainly spread among farmers and common folks. The cohesive power of these commoners was often a threat to the military class. (5) Nichiren: He protested against exclusive reliance on prayers but rather transformed the wishful attitude of people that they might go to Paradise in the next life, into a force for constructing a realistic world in this life. He withstood resistance and persecution in cities, promoting the worship of the Lotus Buddha (another form of monotheism).