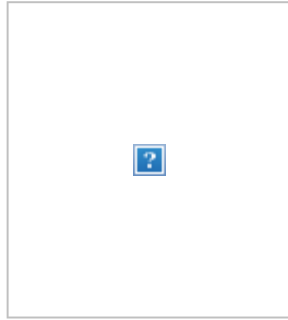


How I became a Bahá'í

by David R. Grant



David R. Grant and his family travelled around the world in a horse-drawn caravan. You can read about his adventures in his account of the journey "The Seven Year Hitch", published by Simon and Schuster.

I did not go to Mongolia to become a Bahá'í. In fact I had no intention of becoming a Bahá'í, there or anywhere else. No intention of becoming anything in fact.

My parents were Scots Presbyterians and as a child I did the Sunday School bit, trekking out of church before the adult sermon to go and colour in those bible pictures – and whatever else we did. Later on, attendance at my school Sunday service was compulsory but after I left it was weddings, funerals, Remembrance Day and the Christmas carol service like everybody else.

I made a couple of serious attempts to return to the fold, but while the message was OK, the practitioners would've made Holy Willie* look like one of the good guys, mostly. That killed my interest in organised religion. I had had a look at Islam, Buddhism, and a couple of others before but was not attracted. So I formed a personal spiritual bubble within which I was content to live.

During a short spell of employment in Lancaster in 1985, I lived in digs. This meant eating out and I found this cool restaurant with a balcony, an open-plan kitchen and dishes on the menu I could afford. I ate alone. The proprietor noticed this and came to talk. He was not British, nor Indian or Pakistani and I thought not Arab. Being curious I asked his nationality and he said,

"Iranian."

"So why...?"

"Because I am a Bahá'í ..." ...and he explained.

He also lent me Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era. As an alumnus of Aberdeen University, I had walked past Esslemont & Mackintosh's store in Union Street every day for years, so the author's name intrigued me and indeed he was from the same family. I read the book, found it fascinating but did not become a Bahá'í.

In 1990 I set off with my family to circumnavigate the Earth in a horse-drawn caravan. We arrived in Mongolia in July 1994 and in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, three-and-a-half months later. During our journey we had several awkward moments but, as though someone was looking after us, they were never disastrous.

In the middle of the Hungarian puszta (grass plain) a woman offered to find us winter accommodation; running out of horse-food, a lorry would drive up out of the blue and give us a bag of barley; faced with traversing 20 kilometres of sand, a man procured a 6-wheel drive truck to tow us through; and so on. Too many difficulties were resolved for it to be coincidence.

The day after we reached Ulaanbaatar, I met Lois Lambert. She asked us all to lunch. Her flat had pictures of some weird but beautiful buildings and of a man with a better beard than mine. "Oh, that's 'Abdu'l-Bahá and those are Bahá'í Houses of Worship. David and I are Bahá'ís," she said.

An invitation to a Unity Feast followed and I went to a lot of meetings after that. Those Bahá'ís were so nice and came from so many different places – on one occasion I was in a room with people of eleven different nationalities including three American Indian tribes, Scots, English, a New Guinean, a Persian,

a Malaysian and of course Mongolians. The warmth and fellowship were marvellous, but I was still not sure I wanted to abjure my dram or occasional bottle of wine. More seriously, I was not going to commit to something so momentous as a new Faith unless I was sure I would stick with it.

I was told about fasting, but not about obligatory prayer, daily reading of Writings and a few other things. Maybe it would have been too much for an initiate to take, and I should have fled from such an

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apparently onerous Faith. But I'm extremely glad didn't.

A week before we left Mongolia, I declared. I have no doubt that was exactly what God had intended me to do all along.

I have often wondered, since returning to the UK, who the Lancastrian restaurant owner was. Should he read this, or if anyone else knows how I can contact him, please let me know.

* For those unfamiliar with this allusion, see: Burns, Robert: "Holy Willie's Prayer"