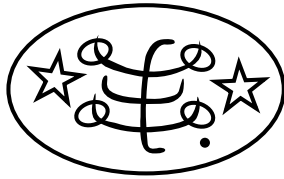


# BAHÀ'Ì: A PRIMER



Three horizontal lines linked by a vertical line represent God, His Messengers, humanity, and the Message linking all three. Two stars represent God's Twin Messengers for this day: the *Bàb* and Bahà'u'llàh.



## ORIGINS

The Bahà'ì Faith began in 1844 in Shiraz, Persia (now Iran), when a young merchant named Sayyid 'Alī Muhammad, also known as the *Bàb* (the Gate of God), proclaimed himself to be the Promised One of Islam, the *Qa'im*, and said that the mission of his dispensation was to alert the people that another prophet would soon come to unite the world and bring universal peace to all. The *Bàb* endured a series of exiles and imprisonments, and finally was banished to the prison city of Acre, Palestine. He died in 1892, while still under house arrest.

- Bahà'u'llàh's eldest son, 'Abbàs Effendi—'Abdu'l Bahà (Servant of Bahà)—followed him as the perfect exemplar and infallible interpreter of his teachings.
- Shoghi Effendi Rabbàni, was appointed by 'Abdu'l Bahà (his grandfather) to be the Guardian of the Bahà'ì Faith. As designated by Bahà'u'llàh, he established the Bahà'ì administrative order and supervised the spread of the Faith to all parts of the globe.
- In 1963, the Universal House of Justice was first elected as the supreme administrative body of the Bahà'ì Faith. The clearly defined principles of succession and administration have protected the unity of the Bahà'ì Faith from schism.



## BELIEFS

- The Bahà'ì Faith stresses unity. It teaches the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of humankind. This means that all the world's great religions are successive stages in God's revelation. Theirs is the fulfillment of all prior religions, and provides the divine guidance necessary for this Age.
- The Bahà'ì Faith believes that—because all humans have a common origin—all people deserve to be treated equally. Its purpose, then, is to foster love, unity, and peace. Due to the progress and current needs of civilization, social laws change with each new revelation. Thus the Bahà'ì Faith champions racial unity, elimination of all prejudice, promotion of gender equality, economic justice, universal compulsory education, global patriotism, and ecological sensitivity.
- The Bahà'ì Faith encourages interreligious dialogue and marriage across racial, ethnic, or reli-



"love  
your  
neighbor  
as  
yourself"



gious lines. Thus its membership represents every culture and ethnic group—promoting unity while preserving cultural diversity.

- The Bahà'ì Faith calls for the establishment of a universal auxiliary language to facilitate global communication, and a world federal system through which all nations may work for the good of the whole.

- Bahà'ì principles include the essential harmony of science and religion, and independent investigation of truth.

- Bahà'ìs believe the number nine has special significance. As the highest single digit, it symbolizes completeness.

- Bahà'ìs have faith in the covenant made by Bahà'u'llàh, that a Promised One will appear after one thousand years.

- In addition, Bahà'ìs acknowledge the sacredness of — and make use of — the scriptures of the world's other religions.



## PRACTICE

- The Bahà'ì calendar divides the year into nineteen months of nineteen days. Four days (five in leap year) are added between the eighteenth and nineteenth months to keep it synchronized with the solar calendar. 1998 is Bahà'ì year 155.

- Bahà'ìs are urged to pray, meditate, and read from the Bahà'ì writings daily.

- Bahà'ìs are obligated to practice chastity and monogamy; marriage requires consent from both parties and their parents.

### Bahà'ì Faith & World Religions

- All world religions have the same source.
- The sacred writings of all world religions teach the same spiritual truth.
- God sent the prophets and key figures of all the world religions to further the continuing advancement of civilization.

- The Bahà'ì faith observes a fast between sunrise and sundown during the last month of their calendar (March 2-20). Bahà'ìs are expected to participate once they reach the age of fifteen.

- Fasting is an important Bahà'ì discipline, but there is no place in the faith for the monastic practices of mendicancy and asceticism. Use of alcohol and drugs is prohibited, except when prescribed by a physician.

- Bahà'ìs meet regularly in someone's home, or at a Bahà'ì community center. Informal home gatherings called "firesides" feature a brief presentation of Bahà'ì principles, discussion, and refreshments. (These are appropriate meetings to which to invite someone who expresses interest in learning more about the faith.)

- At the start of a new Bahà'ì month, Bahà'ìs conduct a Nineteenth-Day Feast. (While food



## WRITINGS

- Bahà'ìs consider the writings of Bahà'u'llàh — over 100 volumes of Arabic and Persian text in many literary styles — to be revelation from God. These works are the backbone for the scriptures of the Bahà'ì faith. Some of the major texts include:

- The Hidden Words: his ethical teachings.

- Kitàb-i-Iqàn (The Book of Certitude): his doctrinal writings.

- The Seven Valleys: his poetic and mystical writings.

- Kitàb-i-'Aqbas (The Most Holy Book): his details of a new World Order.

- The writings of 'Abdu'l Bahà and Shoghi Effendi (who translated much Baha'ì scripture into English) also have special significance for members of the Bahà'ì faith.

may be served, it need not be extravagant; this is a “spiritual feast.”) Its purpose is to bring the Bahà’i community together for worship, consultation and fellowship. At the Feast, they read from Bahà’i scripture and from sacred writings of other religions. However, there are no prescribed rituals nor ordained clergy.

- The practice of consultation is the principle means of decision-making in the Bahà’i community.

The Oneness of God  
 The Oneness of religion  
 The Oneness of Humanity



## SOCIAL ACTION

- Bahà’is are active in community events, especially those fostering racial unity and religious harmony.
- Globally, Bahà’is are credited with some 1300 educational, environmental, social, and economic development projects.
- Bahà’is do not enroll in political parties, but are encouraged to vote and to be active in community affairs.
- The Bahà’i International



## ORGANIZATION

• Currently, there are over six million Bahà’is worldwide—in over 200 countries and territories. They have established a democratic network in more than 20,000 locations around the world.

• Local Bahà’i communities are supported by the voluntary contributions of their members. Each local community is led by a non-paid, nine-member Local Spiritual Assembly chosen annually by election. Bahà’i elections are conducted without nominating, campaigning, or politicking. Assembly members act as coordinators, teachers, counsellors, and administrators.

• The Local Spiritual Assembly receives guidance from the National Spiritual Assembly—also a nine-member body elected annually.

• The National Spiritual Assembly, in turn, receives guidance from the Universal House of Justice located at the Bahà’i world center in Haifa, Israel. The House of Justice is a nine-member body elected every five years.

• Seven Bahà’i temples have been erected in various parts of the world, with others being planned. Because Bahà’is believe the number nine symbolizes completeness, Bahà’i temples are designed with nine sides, and a door on each side. The North American Bahà’i Temple is located in Wilmette, Illinois (north of Chicago).

Community has non-governmental offices at the United Nations, where it serves in a consultative capacity and supports such organizations as UNICEF and UNESCO.



## HOLIDAYS

• There are nine annual Bahà’i Holy Days on which work is suspended; celebration includes family time, worship, and festive foods:

• The *Rizvàn* Festival = commemorates Bahà’u’llàh’s proclamation that he is the Messenger of God for this day—an event which took place in Baghdad’s Garden of *Rizvàn* (Persian for paradise)—(April 21—May 2, with abstention from work or school on April 21, April 29, and May 2)

• Declaration of the Báb = celebrates the event with which the Bahà’i faith marks its beginning (May 23)

• Ascension of Bahà’u’llàh = the anniversary of Bahà’u’llàh’s passing (May 29)

• Martyrdom of the Báb = marks the Báb’s execution (July 9)

• Birth of the Báb (October 20)

• Birth of Bahà’u’llàh (November 12)

• *Naw Ruz* (Persian for “New Day”) = celebrates the end of the Bahà’i nineteen-day fast and the beginning of the Bahà’i New Year (March 21). Other annual Bahà’i observances do not require abstinence from work or school.



# UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Unity in diversity is a major theme of Bahá'í scriptures, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

• The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.  
—Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 250

• Know ye not why we created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other.  
— Bahá'u'lláh,  
*The Hidden words of Bahá'u'lláh*, 20.

• Consider the flowers of a garden. Though differing in kind, color, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm and addeth unto their beauty. How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruit the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of hue, form and shape enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when diverse shades of thought, temperament and character are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas and convictions of the children of men.

— Abdu'l-Bahá, in  
*World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 42.

• The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. . . . If you meet those of a different race and color from yourself, do not mistrust them, and withdraw your-

self into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness.

— Abdu'l-Bahá, in  
*Advent of Divine Justice*, 32.

• Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him glory in this, that he loves his kind. . . .

— Bahá'u'lláh,  
*The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh to the Kings and Rulers of the World*, v.

• The day is approaching when all the people of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own house.

— Bahá'u'lláh,  
*The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, 20.

• Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. Whatsoever hath led the children of men to shun one another, and hath caused dissensions and divisions amongst them, hath, through the revelation of these words, been nullified and abolished.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 95.



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