



# Bahá'í Faith

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## History and Region

The Bahá'í Faith originated in Persia over 170 years ago and is the youngest of the world's independent religions. Its founder was Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892). Bahá'u'lláh means “the Glory of God”, and a Bahá'í is a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in a peaceful global society.

The Bahá'í community today numbers over five million members, resident in over 180 countries. It embraces people from most of the planet's races, creeds and cultures. In terms of geographical spread, it is second only to Christianity.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings promote social and religious reform and, today, the Bahá'í community is active in interreligious dialogue and the promotion of grassroots social and economic development programs. At the international level, the Bahá'í International Community holds consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and UNICEF, and is an active participant in United Nations forums and activities.

## Sacred Texts

Among Bahá'u'lláh's many works, some of the most important are:

*The Most Holy Book (Kitab-i-Addas)* - The book of the laws and institutions that Bahá'u'lláh prescribed for a future world civilisation.

*The Book of Certitude (Kitab-i-Iqan)* - Bahá'u'lláh's principal doctrinal work, which explains the concept of the oneness of religion, the symbolic use of language in the sacred books, and Divine purpose in human history.

*The Hidden Words* - A collection of spiritual maxims.

*Prayers and Meditations* - A compilation of prayers and texts for meditation.

## Teachings and Beliefs

God is transcendent and unknowable. However, Manifestations of God are individuals who appear through the ages and reveal God's purpose for humankind. They stretch back beyond recorded time, and include Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Muhammad. Their teachings come from the same divine source and are in essence successive chapters of one religion from God.

Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed that He was the latest of these Messengers, bringing new teachings for our time. These include the equality of women and men, the complementary nature of science and religion, and the need for the independent investigation of truth by each individual. The Bahá'í Writings emphasise the value of education as the key to material and spiritual progress.

Bahá'í teachings provide guidance for both the eternal spiritual quest of the individual and for the flourishing and progress of humankind as a whole.

## Rituals and Practices

Religious practice requires individual acts of devotion including daily prayer and meditative reflection on the Holy Writings. Work performed in the spirit of service to others is regarded as a devotional act.

Marriage is monogamous and conditional upon the consent of both individuals and parents. Divorce is discouraged but allowed after a year's waiting period during which time efforts must be made for reconciliation. Stable family life is much emphasized.

Funeral rites are simple. The dead must be buried within an hour's journey of the place of death, and a special prayer for the dead is recited during the funeral. Bahá'ís should be buried and not cremated.

Prohibitions include narcotics, gambling, and the non-medical use of alcohol.

Bahá'ís are obliged to avoid involvement in partisan politics and to be loyal to their government.

There is no clergy and administration rests in the hands of elected bodies, at local, national and international levels.

A communal gathering known as a Feast is held at the beginning of every month which consists of nineteen days according to the Bahá'í calendar. As well, a one month (nineteen-day) fast is kept each year.

There are regular meetings such as study groups and devotional gatherings, as well as classes for the education of children and programs for the empowerment of youth.

## Holy Days and Festivals

There are nine Holy Days on which work is suspended:

*Naw-Ruz:* Naw-Ruz is the Bahá'í New Year which coincides with the Spring equinox in the northern hemisphere, falling on March 20 or 21. For Bahá'ís it marks the end of the annual nineteen-day Fast.

*Festival of Ridván:* Celebration of the twelve-day period (April 20 or 21 – May 1 or 2) when Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í Faith, publicly proclaimed His mission as God's messenger for this age in 1863. The first, ninth and twelfth days are celebrated as holy days.

*Declaration of the Báb:* Marks the day in 1844, when the Báb, forerunner of the Bahá'í Faith, announced in Shiraz, Persia (now Iran), that he was the herald of a new messenger of God. It is celebrated on May 23 or 24.

*Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh:* The anniversary of the passing in exile of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892, outside Akko in what is now northern Israel. It is commemorated on May 28 or 29.

*Martyrdom of the Báb:* The anniversary of the execution of the Báb, herald of the Bahá'í Faith, by firing squad in 1850, in Tabriz, Persia (now Iran). It is commemorated on July 9 or 10.

*Birth of the Báb:* The anniversary of the birth in 1819, in Shiraz, Persia (now Iran), of Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad, who later took the title of "the Báb," meaning "the Gate." It is celebrated in the period October-November.

*Birth of Bahá'u'lláh:* The anniversary of the birth in 1817, in Tehran, Persia (now Iran), of Bahá'u'lláh (born Mírzá Husayn-'Alí), founder of the Bahá'í Faith. It is celebrated in the period October-November.

Approved by the Bahá'í Community of Victoria