

laws and principles. In revealing his new code of laws (called the Bayán), the Báb pursued three major goals: (1) paving the way for the advent of the Promised One; (2) provoking the clerical establishment and shattering the foundations of their often-abused institutionalized authority; and (3) proving the independence of his own religion as distinct from Islam.

Soon after the Báb publicly proclaimed his prophetic mission beginning on the evening of May 22, 1844, the Islamic government then in power in Persia began to suppress the movement and violence ensued. The Báb was arrested and executed by a firing squad of 750 musketeers on July 9, 1850, in Tabríz, Persia. Subsequent to an unauthorized and ill-fated attempt on the life of the shah of Persia in 1852, the shah ordered the most brutal tortures and deaths of a great number of Bábís, with estimates ranging from around 5,000 to 20,000 martyrs.

In the fall of 1852, in the wake of the Báb's execution, Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the notorious Siyáh-Chál (Black Pit), during which time he experienced a series of visions that awakened him to his prophetic destiny. He was released, but banished—exiled successively to Baghdad (1853–1863), Constantinople/Istanbul (1863), Adrianople/Edirne (1863–1868), and finally to the prison-city of 'Akká, considered the vilest penal colony of the Ottoman Empire. In 1892, Bahá'u'lláh passed away in Bahjí, near 'Akká in Palestine (now Israel).

In his article on “Bábism” published that same year, Professor Browne wrote: “I say nothing of the mighty influence which, as I believe, the Bábí faith will exert in the future, nor of the new life it may perchance breathe into a dead people; for, whether it succeed or fail, the splendid heroism of the Bábí martyrs is a thing eternal and indestructible.” The “Bábí faith” that Browne spoke of evolved into the Baha'i Faith, which has since spread worldwide to become the most widely diffused world religion next to Christianity, according to the 2001 *World Christian Encyclopedia*.

Today, Baha'is accept the Báb as a John the Baptist figure, whose words and actions heralded the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh. However, unlike John the Baptist, the Báb revealed much in substance, both in terms of doctrine and religious laws, that was subsequently revoiced and reenacted, with certain revisions, by Bahá'u'lláh.

The Báb did not instruct his followers to formally observe the day of his birth; however, for that occasion, Bahá'u'lláh had revealed the *Lawh-i Mawlúd*, which awaits an authorized translation. Today, Baha'is worldwide annually celebrate the birth of the Báb on October 20 as a holy day, with work and school suspended for the day. There being no required observances, Baha'is are free to creatively organize commemorative activities which, although attended mostly by Baha'is, are open to people of all faiths and persuasions.

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See also: Baha'i Faith; Bahá'u'lláh; Birth/Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh; Temples—Baha'i Faith.

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Birth/Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

The Baha'i Faith was founded by Mírzá Husayn-'Alí Núrí, known by his spiritual title, Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), and by Sayyid 'Alí-Muhammad of Shíráz (1819–1850), better known as the Báb (the “Gate”),

who claimed to be the Qá'im (Ariser/Resurrector), the messianic figure expected in Shia Islam, the majority faith in Iran. Throughout his six-year ministry, the Báb heralded "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest," whose advent was imminent. Most of the Bábís (followers of the Báb) came to accept Bahá'u'lláh as that messianic figure. Most current Baha'i laws, in fact, were originally instituted by the Báb and were subsequently selectively ratified and revised by Bahá'u'lláh and set forth in the preeminent Baha'i scripture, *The Most Holy Book* (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*). The birth of Bahá'u'lláh and the birth of the Báb are therefore closely linked.

Bahá'u'lláh was born on November 12, 1817, in Tehran, Persia (now Iran). As a young nobleman, he became a prominent figure in the Bábí religion. In 1852, while in prison during the unrest that followed the Báb's execution in 1850, Bahá'u'lláh experienced a series of visions and accepted his role as the Promised One foretold by the Báb and in the messianic texts of all religions.

By imperial decree, Bahá'u'lláh was subsequently exiled to Baghdad (1853–1863), to Istanbul (1863), to Adrianople (1863–1868), then to 'Akká (Acre) in Palestine (1868–1892), where he would spend the rest of his life in custody, although the last years were in relative comfort under house arrest. Bahá'u'lláh died on May 29, 1892, in Bahjí, Palestine. Today, members of the global Baha'i Faith commemorate both Bahá'u'lláh's birth and ascension.

As the co-founders of the Baha'i Faith, Bahá'u'lláh and his predecessor, the Báb, are often referred to as the "Twin Manifestations," and the occasions of their respective births are similarly called the "Twin Birthdays."

In the *Most Holy Book* (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*), Bahá'u'lláh established four great festivals of the Baha'i year: "All Feasts have attained their consummation in the two Most Great Festivals, and in the two other Festivals that fall on the twin days." The "two Most Great Festivals" are the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh (known as the Festival of Ridván [Paradise]) from April 21 to May 2 (commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's initial proclamation of his prophetic mission in Baghdad, April 21–May 2, 1863), and the Declaration of the Báb, which occurred

on the evening of May 22, 1844 (but is dated May 23 since, in the Baha'i calendar, the new day begins at sunset the previous day).

The birthdays of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh fall on two consecutive days in the Islamic lunar calendar. "The Birth of the Abhá Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh]," Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "was at the hour of dawn on the second day of the month of Muharram, the first day of which marketh the Birth of His Herald [the Báb]. These two days are accounted as one in the sight of God." The explanation for this statement is that, in the Muslim lunar calendar, the birth of the Báb was on the first day of the month of Muharram 1235 AH (October 20, 1819), while the birth of Bahá'u'lláh took place on the second day of Muharram 1233 AH (November 12, 1817).

While the present Baha'i calendar (of 19 months of 19 days, plus intercalary days) is solar and roughly conforms to the Common Era calendar), Baha'is in many countries of the Middle East observe these two Baha'i Holy Days according to the country's Islamic lunar calendar (which is incidentally how they were observed by Bahá'u'lláh himself), while Baha'is of the West and elsewhere (such as among the Baha'is in Syria and Lebanon) celebrate these occasions by their corresponding Common Era calendar dates. In the future, the Universal House of Justice (the institution that guides the Baha'i community internationally) will determine whether these "Twin Days" will be celebrated on a solar or lunar basis.

There is no prescribed ceremony or service for celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh. But it is common for Baha'is to meet together for collective worship and fellowship, often through devotional meetings or musical programs. These programs are open to all to would like to attend.

The birth and ascension of Bahá'u'lláh are considered major holy days, during which work is suspended as well as school activities.

Bahá'u'lláh passed away at 3:00 a.m. on May 29, 1892, in Bahjí, near 'Akká, in Palestine (now Israel). A telegram bearing the news, "The Sun of Bahá' has set," was immediately dispatched to Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamíd II (r. 1876–1909), with a request for permission to bury Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, which was granted. After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, his eldest

son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), was appointed, pursuant to Bahá’u’lláh’s will and testament and to provisions of the Most Holy Book, as the appointed “Centre of the Covenant” (successor to Bahá’u’lláh), as the perfect exemplar of Baha’i ethics and virtues, and as the infallible expounder of his father’s teachings.

Local Baha’i communities worldwide will therefore gather at that time (3:00 a.m.) to commemorate their founder with Baha’i prayers and scriptures, usually culminating in the chanting in Arabic, or recitation in translation, of what is known as the “Tablet of Visitation,” a special prayer reserved for the commemoration of the Báb as well as Bahá’u’lláh. Some Baha’is arrange, through the Office of Pilgrimage at the Baha’i World Centre in Haifa, Israel, to schedule their pilgrimages around the time of the birth or ascension of Bahá’u’lláh.

During their pilgrimage, Baha’is visit the shrine of the Báb in Haifa, and the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh in Bahjí, near Acre, where Bahá’u’lláh lived the last years of his life. (On July 8, 2008, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] World Heritage Committee designated the shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, and the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, located near Old Acre on Israel’s northern coast as World Heritage sites—the first modern religious edifices to be added to the UNESCO List.) A large gathering was held there in 1992 on the centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s passing, following which the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the global Baha’i community, declared the period from April 1992 to April 1993 as the second “Baha’i Holy Year” to mark both the centenary itself and the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh in November 1892.

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See also: Baha’i Faith; Bahá’u’lláh; Birth of the Báb; Pilgrimage; Temples—Baha’i Faith.

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Blavatsky, Helena P.

1831–1891

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, usually called simply Madam Blavatsky or her initials, H.P.B., was the primary theoretician of the Theosophical Society, co-founded by herself, Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), and William Quan Judge (1851–1896) in New York City in 1875. The Theosophical Society went on to become one of the most influential Western Esoteric organizations of the 20th century. It facilitated the movement of Eastern religions to the West and gave birth to numerous additional Esoteric groups.

Blavatsky was born Helena Hahn, July 30, 1832, in Ekaterinoslav (now Dnepropetrovsk), Ukraine. She grew up in an affluent Russian family and came of age as Spiritualism was spreading through segments of Russian society. As a teenager, she was involved in various spiritual experiences, including automatic writing. Her teen years were spent with her grandfather who provided a home following her mother’s death in 1843. She was but 16 when she married a much older man, General N. V. Blavatsky. The marriage proved an unhappy experience for the young woman, and abandoning her husband, she moved to Constantinople. She stayed in Turkey only a relatively short time. She preferred travel and took the opportunity to roam through Asia and Europe. She traveled around the world twice during the 1850s, and in 1856, while in India, made a clandestine attempt to get into Tibet, then forbidden territory to outsiders. Whether she succeeded in her quest remains a debatable topic. In any case, investigating paranormal phenomena during her travels occupied much of her time. She became a medium and in 1871, in Cairo, she founded a Spiritualist society. The