

on the head as a mark of cleansing and to mark the start of a new life in the church. For much of Christian history, baptism was performed as soon after the birth as possible, in case the baby died, in the belief that the act rids the baby of original sin and ensures entry into heaven. However, many Protestant traditions (Mennonites, Baptists, Adventists) practice adult or “believer’s” baptism. In these traditions, an adult must decide to be baptized and baptism by full water immersion is more likely to be practiced. Undergoing adult baptism is considered part of the experience of being “born again” into the Christian faith. For infants, these churches are likely to offer prayers for the baby’s safe arrival and future health; a service of dedication might be held in which the baby is brought to church a few weeks after birth to be welcomed into the community.

Some Hindu families welcome the baby into the world by writing OM/AUM on the baby’s tongue with honey or ghee, or by placing some honey in the baby’s mouth while whispering the name of God in the baby’s ear. This may be performed immediately after birth or on the day of the naming ceremony, *namakarna*, traditionally held on the 11th day of the baby’s life. In some communities, a celebration is held on the sixth day after the birth, when the women of the community gather to congratulate the mother, pray, give thanks, and bring presents for the baby.

Sikh parents might welcome their baby in a similar manner to Hindu parents by placing honey in the baby’s mouth and whispering the *mool mantar* (the main chant or root verse) in the baby’s ear. Some Sikh families also hold a ceremony on the 13th day after birth at which prayers are said and the baby is blessed. Another ceremony might be held when the baby is about 40 days old and is taken to the *gurdwara* for the first time. The baby’s name is often chosen during this ceremony: the *granthi* opens the *Guru Granth Sahib* at random and recites a passage, the parents then choose a name beginning with the first letter of the passage, which is then announced to the congregation and *karah parshad*, a sweet dish, is distributed in celebration and thanksgiving.

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*See also:* Church of Scientology; Roman Catholic Church; Sikh Dharma; Yoga.

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## Birth of the Báb

Sayyid ‘Alí-Muhammad, known by his spiritual title as the “Báb” (the “Gate”), was born on October 20, 1819, in Shíráz, Persia (now Iran). The Báb was the founder of a 19th-century new religious movement generally known as Bábism. The Báb declared himself to be the long-awaited Qá’im (Ariser/Resurrector), the expected eschatological deliverer (known in both Shia and Sunni Islam as the Mahdi), who, according to Islamic tradition, would come to revive Islam when it was at its lowest ebb. While proclaiming himself to be an independent “Manifestation of God,” the Báb also spoke of the imminent advent of the Promised One, or “Him whom God shall make manifest.” One of the Báb’s followers, Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892), would later receive revelations confirming that he was that Promised One heralded by the Báb.

Armin Eschraghi has argued that the new faith proclaimed by the Báb fulfilled all the criteria of an independent religion: a new founder, newly revealed scriptures, a new set of metaphysical and theological teachings distinct from those of Islam, new religious

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”),