

or even the thought of food, and focuses instead on nearness to God, expressed through prayer and meditation, and service to others. The ultimate fasting is abstaining from passions of the self to become more compassionate toward others. The nineteen-day Bahá'í Fast, therefore, is an ideal preparation for the Bahá'í New Year (Naw-Rúz, lit. “New Day”) that immediately follows the Fast, when the vernal equinox heralds a new springtime of personal and social renewal, both physical and spiritual.

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See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá'í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá'í Faith; Bahá'u'l-láh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Fast of Gedaliah; Fast of the First Born; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of (May 29)

The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, is a solemn occasion commemorated by Bahá'ís worldwide at 3:00 a.m. on May 29 annually. It is one of the nine major Bahá'í holy days, on which work is to be suspended. Shortly before dawn, Bahá'u'lláh passed away at 3:00 a.m. on May 29, 1892 in the Mansion of Bahjí (Arabic, “delight”), near ‘Akká in Palestine (now Israel). Local Bahá'í communities worldwide therefore gather at that time (3:00 a.m.) to commemorate their founder with Bahá'í 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 Bahá'u'lláh, as well as the Báb.

A telegram bearing the news, “The Sun of Bahá’ has set,” was immediately dispatched by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son and successor), to Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd, with a request for permission to bury Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, which was granted. Bahá'u'lláh was interred shortly after sunset, on the very day of his ascension.

Where the sacred remains of Bahá'u'lláh are interred is now known as the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh—a building that, in 2008, was designated a UNESCO World

Heritage Site along with the Shrine of the Báb, making these two Bahá'í sacred sites the first modern religious edifices to be so distinguished. By virtue of their outstanding value to humanity, World Heritage Sites belong to all the peoples of the world.

Of far greater moment, however, is Bahá'u'lláh's contribution to a future world heritage of global unity and world peace, culminating in a golden age envisioned and promised by Bahá'u'lláh himself. One example of this promise appears in Cambridge scholar Edward Granville Browne's historic meeting with Bahá'u'lláh, in 1890:

Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile. . . . We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations. . . . That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? . . . Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come. . . . These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind. (Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, xl)

After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, his eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá became the appointed “Centre of the Covenant” (successor to Bahá'u'lláh), pursuant to provisions of Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book and the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd* (“Book of the Covenant”), which is Bahá'u'lláh's last will and testament, written entirely in his own hand. Nine days after Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, this singularly important document was shown to the local Bahá'ís and read in their presence. The passage conferring successorship upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá is as follows:

The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghsán, the Afnán and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: “When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” The object of this sacred Verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch ['Abdu'l-Bahá]. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 221)

Significantly, the text of this document was made available to the scholarly community by Russian orientalist Aleksandr Toumansky (1861–1920), who published the original Persian text, along with a Russian translation. At the same time, Toumansky also published a poem, “Lament,” by the acclaimed Bahá'í poet, Mírzá 'Alí-Ashraf Láhijání, known as “‘Andalib” (the “Nightingale”) who writes, in part:

Today the cupbearer, by God's design,
 poured bile into the cup of life, not wine. . . .
 Through Him the Day of Resurrection dawned:
 Now earth quakes at the setting of His Sun. . . .
 We'll never hear His voice again, but there
 the Nightingale of Paradise flies free. (Translated by Ahang Rabbani and
 Anthony Lee, in Momen, *Bahá'u'llah: A Short Biography*, 154–55)

Throughout the world's religious history, the death of the founder has typically precipitated a crisis over succession. The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, however, was immediately followed by the succession of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as leader of the Bahá'í community, as authorized "Interpreter" of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, and as the "Perfect Exemplar" of Bahá'í virtues. This clear transition, ordained in Bahá'u'lláh's written testament, preserved the integrity of the Bahá'í community and protected it from the perils of schism.

The Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the global Bahá'í community, declared the period from April 1992 to April 1993 as the second "Bahá'í Holy Year" to mark both the centenary itself and the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh in November 1892. On May 29, 1992, the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's passing, several thousand Bahá'ís from more than 200 countries gathered to pay homage to Bahá'u'lláh at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, which is adjacent to the Mansion of Bahjí, located near Old Acre on Israel's northern coast.

Some Bahá'ís arrange, through the Office of Pilgrimage at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, to schedule their pilgrimages around the time of the Birth or Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. During their pilgrimage, Bahá'ís visit the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. In commemorating the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'ís worldwide transport themselves, in mind and heart, to the resting place of Bahá'u'lláh, in what may be thought of as a virtual pilgrimage by the estimated 5.5 million adherents of the Bahá'í Faith in the world today.

Bahá'ís may individually or collectively commemorate the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh with prayers and readings as befit the occasion, often followed by refreshments and fellowship in a dignified manner. Among the Bahá'í readings, of special relevance to this occasion include: Nabíl's account of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh; the Tablet of Visitation of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh; the "Book of the Covenant" (Bahá'u'lláh's last will and testament, appointing 'Abdu'l-Bahá as successor); passages in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* relating to the succession of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; the "Tablet of the Branch"; and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's first message to the Bahá'ís, announcing Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, advising Bahá'ís not to be disconsolate, and to remain steadfast.

The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh is of special moment, commemorating the life and contributions of a great religious figure in modern history, whose shrine has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and whose universal principles

of world unity may, in the course of time, be recognized as an enduring contribution to the world's heritage.

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See also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of; Ayyám-i-Há (Bahá’í Intercalary Days); Báb, Festival of the Birth of the; Báb, Festival of the Declaration of the; Báb, Martyrdom of the; Bahá’í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Bahá’í Faith; Bahá’í Fast; Bahá’u’lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá’í); Race Unity Day; Riḍván, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Bahá’u’lláh, Festival of the Birth of (November 12)

The Festival of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh is one of five Bahá’í festivals, and one of the nine Bahá’í holy days on which work is to be suspended. It is a joyous occasion, for it celebrates the historic birth of the prophet-founder of the Bahá’í Faith, whose prophetic role as the “World-Reformer” and “World-Unifier” is at the core of Bahá’í belief regarding the person and work of Bahá’u’lláh.

In “founded” religions, the birth of the founder is accorded historic and religious importance. Beyond their intrinsic and honorific significance, the birth and childhood of Bahá’u’lláh relate to the birth of the Bahá’í Faith, in that certain childhood experiences are said to have had a formative influence. What is singular about the birth of Bahá’u’lláh is that it is part of a double religious holy day, called “the Festival of the Twin Birthdays.”

The Bahá’í Faith was founded by Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí, known by his spiritual title, Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892), and by Sayyid ‘Alí-Muḥammad of Shiraz (1819–1850), better known as the Báb (“the Gate”), who claimed to be the Qá’im