

mild compared to other similar groups. Much of the criticism grew from its advocacy of celibacy for its more committed full-time members.

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*See also* Avatar Adi Da Samraj's Birthday; Bhumanandaiji Paramahansa, Birthday of Swami Guru; Muktananda, Birthday of Swami Paramahansa.

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## Bahá'í Calendar and Rhythms of Worship

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The Bahá'í calendar charts physical time, as do all calendrical systems, yet is additionally designed to inspire spiritual progress by associating time with the cultivation of human nobility. The precise name for the Bahá'í calendar is the Badí' (“Unique” or “Wondrous”) calendar. It originated with Sayyid 'Alí-Muḥammad of Shiraz (1819–1850), entitled the Báb (“the Gate”), who founded the Bábí religion, soon superseded by the Bahá'í Faith, established by Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí Núrí (1817–1892), known as Bahá'u'lláh (a spiritual title meaning the “Splendor [or “Glory”] of God”). By adopting and modifying the Badí' calendar for use by the Bahá'í community, Bahá'u'lláh gave it formal sanction.

Time is invested with spiritual significance by the naming of weekdays, days of the month, months, years, and cycles of years after godly perfections that can be translated into goodly virtues, such as “Beauty” (Jamál) “Knowledge” ('Ilm), “Honor” (Sharaf), and “Grandeur” ('Aẓamat), which are names of 4 of the 19 Bahá'í months. These dynamic “names of God” each highlight a distinctive quality of sterling character and human nobility, in a process of transformation that may, to coin the present author's term, be called *theophoric metamorphosis*. Literally, the term “theophoric,” as its Greek root indicates, means “God-bearing.” Here, the “names” of God may be conceived of as “qualities” or, better still, as “powers” of God that can be potentially manifested by man (and, to a lesser degree, by each created thing when it reaches its potential state of perfection).

In the Báb's *Kitáb al-Asmá'* (“Book of [Divine] Names”), which exceeds 3,000 pages and is said to be “the largest revealed book in sacred history,” the Báb treats human beings as reflections of divine names and attributes (Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 36). To the extent that a person is a “bearer” of one of the “names” (i.e., qualities or powers) of God, that individual is empowered to express that quality in human action. Through the progressive spiritualization of all persons—and, indeed, of all things—the Báb wished to transform all of reality into “mirrors” reflecting the perfections represented by these divine names.

Like other religious calendars, special holy days (such as the “Birth of the Báb” on October 20 and the “Birth of Bahá’u’lláh” on November 12) commemorate significant events in the history of the Bahá’í religion. These twin functions of meditation and commemoration combine to produce a means of reckoning and consecrating time in what is offered as a world calendar for future society, should all countries wish to adopt it.

The Báb established the Badí‘ calendar in several passages, particularly in the *Persian Bayán* 5:3, a volume he “revealed” (i.e., authored by divine revelation) around 1847, in which he stated:

The Lord of the universe hath fashioned all types of years by His behest, and hath ordained that . . . each year should equal the numerical value of the words “all things” (*kullu shay’*) [ $19 \times 19 = 361$ ], to consist of nineteen months, where each month equalleth nineteen days, that from the moment of the rising of the sun in the vernal equinox—corresponding to the first sign of the Zodiac, the sign of Aries—till the end of its voyage at the end of winter—corresponding to the last sign of the Zodiac, the sign of Pisces—all beings may traverse through all the nineteen stages of the Letters of Unity.

The first month . . . resembleth the sun, while all other months resemble mirrors which reflect the radiant lights of that supreme month, in such wise that naught is seen in them but that month. God hath called that month the month of Bahá (Splendour, Glory), meaning that therein lieth the splendour and glory of all months, and He hath singled it out for Him Whom God shall make manifest. (Provisional translation by Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 327–28)

Here, “all things” (*kullu shay’*) “signifies the new spiritual community which comes into being out of the unity of the Báb and His Letters of the Living [first 18 disciples]” (Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 283).

Because the Báb’s style of discourse tends to be philosophically rarified and thus difficult to understand without the benefit of some explanation, a brief comment on the significance of the first month of the Badí‘ calendar will elucidate the position and preeminence of the name, “Bahá’.” The Báb singled out the word *váhid* (unity) as a symbol for the oneness of God. In Arabic reckoning (*abjad*), the numerical value of “*váhid*” (Arabic: *wāhid*) is 19. Thus, the number 19 is a Bábí and Bahá’í symbol for the unity of God. Using the number 19 as the basis of the Badí‘ calendar, the Báb drew the names of the 19 months from the *Du‘á al-Sahar*, an Arabic invocatory prayer attributed to Imam Mḥammad al-Báqir (d. 732 CE), the fifth of the Twelver Shi‘i Imams, recited at dawn by Shi‘i Muslims during the Fast of Ramaḍan. Both the sixth Shi‘i Imam, Ja‘far al-Šádiq (d. 765 CE) and the eighth Shi‘i Imam, Riḍá’ (d. 818 CE), who transmitted this prayer, are said to have claimed that this dawn prayer contained the “Greatest Name” of God (*al-ism al-a‘ẓam*).

Bahá’u’lláh, in the Persian “Tablet of the Greatest Name,” cites the beginning of this dawn prayer, and observes that Muslims, despite the fact that certain Imams

indicated that the prayer contains the “Greatest Name” of God, remained oblivious to the positional preeminence of the word “Bahá’,” and thereby failed to divine this open secret. Instead of recognizing that Bahá’u’lláh was presaged in this prayer, several Shi’i clerics pronounced a death sentence on Bahá’u’lláh (which was never implemented).

The Báb specifically dedicates Naw-Rúz to “Him Whom God shall make manifest” (the promised messianic figure foretold by the Báb) and that, by naming the first day of each month of the Badí‘ calendar, “Bahá’,” and by naming the first month of each Badí‘ year, “Bahá’” (dedicated to “Him Whom God shall make manifest”), the Báb seems to imply that “Bahá’ ” (or Bahá’u’lláh) is this Promised One.

While the Báb’s theophoric naming conventions and system of aggregating years (i.e., tracking the spiritual names of weekdays, days of the month, months, and years within cycles of 19 and 361 years) remain intact in the Bahá’í Faith, the current practice is generally to simply number the years consecutively as the “Bahá’í Era” (“B.E.”) progresses. In Gregorian terms, the Bahá’í Era began on March 21, 1844. The Bahá’í epochal year of 1844 marks the year that the Báb founded the Bábí religion. Thus, 2010 is part of two consecutive Bahá’í years, in which the year 166 B.E. ended on March 20, 2010, and the new year, 167 B.E., commenced on March 21, 2010 (or, technically, on March 20, 2010, after sunset, since each new Bahá’í day begins after sunset).

The Badí‘ calendar is symmetrically composed of 19 months of 19 days, contemplatively named after divine attributes, with four (or, in a leap year, five) intercalary days, after the 18th month (in Bahá’u’lláh’s revision of the calendar) to round out the solar year. This calendrical symmetry is extended: not only are there 19 days per month and 19 months per year, but 19 years per cycle, and 19 cycles per major cycle, while conserving the traditional seven-day week (signaling a willingness to accommodate the calendrical needs of the older religions in a religiously plural society), where Friday is evidently designated as a day of rest, although this is not yet officially practiced in the Bahá’í religion.

The Bahá’í calendar is solar and, in terms of its yearly renewal, seasonal. The Bahá’í New Year is synchronized with the first day of spring (i.e., the vernal equinox) and, not surprisingly, is called “Naw-Rúz,” a Persian expression that literally means “New Day.” The day of Naw-Rúz is the first of nine Bahá’í holy days in which work is to be suspended.

Naw-Rúz is astronomically fixed. Bahá’u’lláh directed that this feast day be celebrated on whichever day the sun passes into the constellation of Aries, even if this occurs one minute before sunset. Due to the “equinox wobble” of 3.2 days, astronomically, Naw-Rúz could fall on March 19, 20, 21, or 22, depending on the time of the equinox. It is anticipated that the timing of Naw-Rúz will require the choice of a fixed location on earth, which will serve as the standard for the precise determination of the spring equinox. As with a number of other issues affecting the Bahá’í calendar, this matter will be resolved in due course by the Universal House of Justice, the elected international Bahá’í governing council. For now, the

Bahá'í New Year is celebrated on March 21 in the Occident, whereas in the Orient, including Iran and the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa/Akká, the day of Naw-Rúz is determined on the basis of the true astronomical vernal equinox.

Besides its special designation as the “New Day,” March 21, 2010, for instance, in the ennobling naming conventions of the Badí‘ calendar, may be “read” in the following manner: This is the weekday of “Beauty” (*Jamál*, i.e., Sunday), the (first) day “Splendor” (*Bahá'*) in the (first) month of “Splendor” (*Bahá'*; names of days and months follow the same progression) in the (15th) year of “Affection” (*Vidád*), in the cycle (*Váhíd*) of the first Grand Cycle (Arabic: *Kullu Shay'*, Persian: *Kull-i-Shay'*).

Arranged in historical order, the nine Bahá'í holy days recapitulate the origins and history of the Bahá'í religion. With the exception of Naw-Rúz (which metaphorically represents springtime renewal, both in its physical and its metaphysical sense), the Bahá'í Holy Days are annual commemorations of significant milestones in the formative era of Bábí and Bahá'í history:

1. Birth of Bahá'u'lláh (November 12, 1817).
2. Birth of the Báb (October 20, 1819).
3. Naw-Rúz (March 21, 1844).
4. Declaration of the Báb (May 23, 1844).
5. Martyrdom of the Báb (July 9, 1850).
6. First Day of Riḍván (April 21, 1863).
7. Ninth Day of Riḍván (April 29, 1863).
8. Twelfth Day of Riḍván (May 2, 1863).
9. Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh (May 29, 1892).

Taken together, the Birth of the Báb and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh are referred to as the “Twin Holy Birthdays” since, in the Hegira (Muslim) lunar calendar, these fall on consecutive days: The birth of the Báb was on the first day of the month of Muḥarram 1235 AH (October 20, 1819), while the prior birth of Bahá'u'lláh fell on the second day of Muḥarram 1233 AH (November 12, 1817). Whether the Twin Holy Birthdays are to be celebrated on a solar or lunar basis will later be determined by the Universal House of Justice. For now, they are observed on a solar basis in most Bahá'í communities worldwide.

There is a religiously “seasonal” aspect as well, since the Bahá'í calendar sets apart 19 days, from March 2 to 20, for fasting from sunrise to sunset. The Badí‘ calendar further regulates the rhythm of Bahá'í community life in establishing the dates for the Nineteen-Day Feast, in which each local Bahá'í community gathers for the purpose of worship, consultation, and fellowship. Given its spiritual, administrative, and social functions, the Bahá'í “Nineteen-Day Feast” is the heart of Bahá'í communal worship and community building in each Bahá'í locality.

Each Bahá'í “Feast” (from the Latin *festus*, or “joyous”; the Arabic term is *díyáfat*, which derives from a root word for “hospitality”) typically takes place on the first day of the Bahá'í month. Here, the theophoric calendrical names take on their greatest significance, as reflected in the names of the 19 Bahá'í feasts, which are named after the Bahá'í months in which they respectively fall. These are:

### Bahá'í Calendar Table

1.	Bahá'	Splendor	March 21
2.	Jalál	Glory	April 9
3.	Jamál	Beauty	April 28
4.	'Azamat	Grandeur	May 17
5.	Núr	Light	June 5
6.	Rahmat	Mercy	June 24
7.	Kalimát	Words	July 13
8.	Kamál	Perfection	August 1
9.	Asmá'	Names	August 20
10.	'Izzat	Might	September 8
11.	Mashíyyat	Will	September 27
12.	'Ilm	Knowledge	October 16
13.	Qudrat	Power	November 4
14.	Qawl	Speech	November 23
15.	Masá'il	Questions	December 12
16.	Sharaf	Honor	December 31
17.	Sultán	Sovereignty	January 19
18.	Mulk	Dominion	February 7
	Ayyám-i-Há'	Intercalary Days	February 26
19.	'Alá'	Loftiness	March 2 (Bahá'í Fast)

These “names of God” may not only be invoked, but they may be evoked. According to Bahá'u'lláh, these “names” of God may be reflected as human perfections (to the degree humanly possible), like a polished mirror:

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation. . . . Upon the reality of man, . . . He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 65)

Reflecting divine attributes, however, requires divine assistance, for not until “the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory” (Ibid., 66) This divine assistance is brought by the wisdom and inspiration of the “Manifestations of God” (Prophets or Messengers of God), as Bahá'u'lláh further explains:

Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They [Manifestations of God] are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations. Then, and only then, will the Trust of God, latent in the reality of man, emerge, as resplendent as the rising Orb of Divine Revelation, from behind the veil of concealment, and implant the ensign of its revealed glory upon the summits of men's hearts. (Ibid., 67)

The mere fact that the name of a given Bahá'í month is a godly quality that can be acquired as a human virtue does not, alone, accomplish that result. No burst of insight will emanate from the simple recitation of, say, "Grandeur." Meditating on a virtue and then manifesting it is part and parcel of Bahá'í self-transformation. In many Bahá'í feasts, the devotional prayers and readings are often focused on the name of the Bahá'í month as a "theme," although there is certainly no requirement to do so.

Take, for example, the attribute of "Generosity," which is the name of one of the years. (*Jád*; idiosyncratic construction of the Arabic *jūd*), for instance, which appears as the eighth year in the cycle of 19 years, called a "Unity" (*Váhid*). In the Persian Hidden Words (no. 49), Bahá'u'lláh states that giving to the poor is a human expression of divine generosity:

O CHILDREN OF DUST! Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, 39)

While not directly related to the calendar, the idea that the divine names have a transformative potential can be seen in this passage from the *Persian Bayán* 5:4:

For the divine Cycle advanceth in stages, until such Revelation when all things will be called by the names of God, such that no name will be assigned to anything unless it resembleth one of the names of God, glorified and exalted is He. . . . This will occur gradually and in stages, until all heaven, earth, and that which lieth between them, will be filled with the names of God. . . . Well is it with the people of that age who call nothing but by a name of God. That age is worthy to be praised as the beginning of the worlds of paradise! (Provisional translation by Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, 334)

Bahá'u'lláh explains that God is sanctified above all attributes and "names." Therefore, any and all references to the "names of God" apply to the "Manifestations of God" (i.e., Messengers of God, or Prophets), as Bahá'u'lláh states in

the *Gems of Divine Mysteries*: “Thus hath He revealed these most excellent names and most exalted words in the Manifestations of His Self and the Mirrors of His Being. It is therefore established that all names and attributes return unto these sublime and sanctified Luminaries” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, 35).

These “stages” of transformation, of which the Báb speaks, involve a process that may be termed *theophoric metamorphosis* (previously defined at the beginning of this article). Beyond the contemplative life, so classically modeled by monks and mendicants in cloistered isolation, the various names of God must be effectively “translated” from the realm of ideals into the arena of social action in order for a transformation to take place. (In fact, Bahá'u'lláh prohibited monasticism in this day and age.) As a result, the individual is transformed to the degree that society is transformed as a result of that act, and vice versa. This may be illustrated as follows:

By contemplating and “translating” the name “Light” (the name of the fifth Bahá'í month) into a personal virtue for the social commonweal, an individual may conceive of a way to enlighten others. By meditating on the name, “Knowledge” (the name of the 12th Bahá'í month) and then manifesting that attribute in action, a person may impart insight or information to others, which will benefit them. In the same vein, by reflecting deeply, then acting on the divine name, “Mercy” (the name of the sixth Bahá'í month), one may elect to perform a singular deed of “mercy” or kindness by ministering to the sick, poor, or otherwise disadvantaged members of society. Here, a godly “name” is effectively expressed as a goodly action. The Bahá'í calendar not only charts the march of time, but addresses the quality of time by synergistically inspiring the progress of soul and society.

There are certain “mystical”—that is, symbolic—aspects to the Badí'/Bahá'í calendar as well, but these more recondite features of the calendar are beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that the Bahá'í calendar, by charting physical time and associating time with divine perfections translatable as human virtues, not only quantitatively measures a given point in time, but qualitatively measures the progress of the soul in relation to the social moment. Thus, the theophoric (“God bearing”) nature of the calendar, in theory, becomes theomorphic (“God manifesting”) in practice, whereby the Bahá'í calendar may prospectively live up to its name, Badí' (“Wondrous”).

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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 Faith; Bahá'í Fast; Bahá'u'lláh, Ascension of; Bahá'u'lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá'í); Nowruz; Race Unity Day; Ridván, Festival of; Spring Equinox (Vernal); World Religion Day.

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## ■ Bahá'í Faith

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The Bahá'í Faith arose from the Bábí Faith, a religion that briefly flourished in Iran in the 1840s. It was established by 'Alí-Muhammad of Shiraz (1819–1850), who in 1844 took on the title of *the Báb* ("the Gate") and who declared himself to be the fulfillment of Islamic prophecies. The Twelver Shi'a Islam that dominates Iran expected the return of the Twelfth Imam (a messianic figure), and the expectation peaked among some Shi'ites in 1844. The Báb initially hinted that he was merely a gate to the Twelfth Imam, but gradually made explicit a claim to be the Twelfth Imam himself. He also penned mystic commentaries on the Qur'an, whose style and content signified a claim to divine revelation.

Among the early converts to the Bábí movement was Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, a nobleman born in northern Iran whose father was a palace official. As the Bábí leadership was executed, one after another, his role in the movement grew in importance. In the summer of 1848, he assembled a gathering of the remaining Bábí leaders at which he gave each a title; he took on the title of Bahá'u'lláh (the glory of God), one subsequently endorsed by the Báb. Before his execution, the Báb recognized Bahá'u'lláh's teenage half-brother Yahyá (1831–1912) as a figure-head leader of the Bábí community, though he gave Yahyá no explicit authority. Considering that Yahyá was completely unknown in the Bábí community and