

reciting the word of God twice daily in order to connect the believer to the revelation.

The horizontal dimension of the devotional life has various aspects. Bahá'u'lláh says Bahá'ís should be “anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements” (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, selection CVI). Bahá'ís are thus encouraged, individually and collectively, to improve the world around them.

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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 Fast; Bahá'u'l-láh, 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; World Religion Day.

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Bahá'í Fast (March 2–20)

Most world religions include the practice of fasting, and many include times of community-wide fasting. The Bahá'í Faith has such a period of communal fasting that occurs each March 2–20. The Fast follows Ayyám-i-Há, the Bahá'í Intercalary Days, and is itself followed by the Festival of Naw-Rúz.

The Fast was ordained by Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, and elaborated on by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), the eldest son, and the successor and interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh. During the 19-day fast, the believer abstains from food and drink from sunrise to sunset, and remains mindful of God

and of the divine purpose for human existence. Both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá extolled the virtue of the Fast:

All praise be unto God, Who hath revealed the law of obligatory prayer as a reminder to His servants, and enjoined on them the Fast that those possessed of means may become apprised of the woes and sufferings of the destitute. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, II)

Verily, I say, fasting is the supreme remedy and the most great healing for the disease of self and passion. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, XVII)

This Fast leadeth to the cleansing of the soul from all selfish desires, the acquisition of spiritual attributes, attraction to the breezes of the All-Merciful, and enkindlement with the fire of divine love. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, XXVI)

Fasting is binding on men and women from the age of spiritual maturity (15 years). Those exempt from the requirement of fasting include, *inter alia*: (1) travelers, if the journey exceeds nine hours; (2) those traveling on foot, if the journey is over two hours; (3) those who are ill; (4) those over 70; (5) women who are pregnant; (6) nursing mothers; (7) women in their menses; (8) those engaged in heavy labor.

Foregoing earthly appetites helps one acquire godly attributes. There are benefits for the Bahá'í community as well, in that collective participation in the fast deepens solidarity.

Special prayers have been revealed for the fast. Some are quite poetic and laden with metaphors of devotion and transformation. One example is this excerpt from a prayer by Bahá'u'lláh:

I beseech Thee, O my God, by that Letter which, as soon as it proceeded out of the mouth of Thy will, hath caused the oceans to surge, and the winds to blow, and the fruits to be revealed, and the trees to spring forth, and all past traces to vanish, and all veils to be rent asunder, and them who are devoted to Thee to hasten unto the light of the countenance of their Lord, the Unconstrained, to make known unto me what lay hid in the treasuries of Thy knowledge and concealed within the repositories of Thy wisdom. Thou seest me, O my God, holding to Thy Name, the Most Holy, the Most Luminous, the Most Mighty, the Most Great, the Most Exalted, the Most Glorious, and clinging to the hem of the robe to which have clung all in this world and in the world to come. (*Bahá'í Prayers*, 242–43)

Fasting from food is a point of departure for spiritual development, where one progresses, for example, to a state where one fasts from even the desire for food,

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'lláh, 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