

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

(“Ariser”/“Resurrector”), the messianic figure expected in Shi‘i 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. Many current Bahá’í 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 Bahá’í scripture, *The Most Holy Book (Kitáb-i-Aqdas)*. The Birth of Bahá’u’lláh and the Birth of the Báb are therefore closely linked for several reasons.

Bahá’u’lláh was born at dawn on November 12, 1817, in Tehran, the capital of Persia (now Iran), in the district known as the Darvázih Shimrán, which was at the edge of the city. His father was Mírzá Buzurg, Vazír of Núr (a province in Persia). Bahá’u’lláh’s mother was Khadíjih Khánum, Mírzá Buzurg’s second wife. As a child, the young Mírzá Husayn-‘Alí is said to have never cried, nor showed restlessness. He would spend summers in Takúr, the ancestral home of his father, Mírzá Buzurg, in the province of Núr. Bahá’u’lláh recounts one memorable event that took place on the last of seven days of festivities of the marriage of one of his older brothers:

When I was still a child and had not yet attained the age of maturity, . . . it was announced that the play “Sháh Sultán Salím” would be presented. . . . After this the king held audience with his court, during which intelligence was received that a rebellion had broken out on a certain frontier. . . . A few moments later cannons were heard booming from behind the tent, and it was announced that a battle had been engaged. This Youth regarded the scene with great amazement. When the royal audience was ended, the curtain was drawn, and, after some twenty minutes, a man emerged from behind the tent carrying a box under his arm. “What is this box,” I asked him, “and what was the nature of this display?” “All this lavish display and these elaborate devices,” he replied, “the king, the princes, and the ministers, their pomp and glory, their might and power, everything you saw, are now contained within this box.” . . . Ever since that day, all the trappings of the world have seemed in the eyes of this Youth akin to that same spectacle. (Bahá’u’lláh, “Lawḥ-i-Ra’ís.” *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, 165–67)

As a young nobleman, Bahá’u’lláh manifested great sagacity and mastery of argument, and was known as the “Father of the Poor” for his beneficence in Tákur and its vicinity. He later became a prominent figure in the Bábí religion. In 1852, while in prison during the unrest that followed the Báb’s execution under religious decree and by a government firing squad of 750 men on July 9, 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), Adrianople (1863–1868), then to ‘Akká (Acre) in

Palestine (1868–1892), where he would spend the rest of his life in custody in Palestine, although the last years were in relative comfort under house arrest. Bahá'u'lláh died on May 29, 1892, in Bahji, Palestine.

In the Most Holy Book (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*), Bahá'u'lláh established the five festivals of the Bahá'í year, having ratified the observance of Naw-Rúz, which the Báb had previously designated as a religious festival (the only holy day instituted in the *Persian Bayán*): “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 dated May 23 since, in the Bahá'í calendar, the new day begins at sunset the previous day). The other two Bahá'í festivals are the Birth of the Báb and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

As the cofounders of the Bahá'í 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.” The birthdays of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh fall on two consecutive days in the Muslim 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 Muḥarram, 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 Muḥarram 1235 AH (October 20, 1819), while the birth of Bahá'u'lláh took place on the second day of Muḥarram 1233 AH (November 12, 1817).

While the Bahá'í calendar (of 19 months of 19 days, plus intercalary days) is solar, Bahá'ís in parts of the Middle East observe these two Bahá'í holy days according to the lunar calendar (which is how they were observed by Bahá'u'lláh himself), while Bahá'ís of the West and elsewhere (such as among the Bahá'ís in Syria and Lebanon) celebrate these occasions by their corresponding dates on the Common Era calendar. In the future, the Universal House of Justice will determine whether these “Twin Days” will be celebrated on a solar or lunar basis.

In observing the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'ís normally refrain from working and/or attending school. Whether celebrated jointly as one occasion or independently, these are joyous events for Bahá'ís, who rejoice together to increase the unity of the community through collective worship and fellowship, often through devotional meetings or musical programs. There is no prescribed ceremony or service for celebrating the event, and all who would like to attend are welcomed.

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Baisakhi. See **Wesak/Vesak**

Balarama, Appearance Day of Lord

Balarama is the elder brother of the deity Krishna. In contrast to Krishna, usually pictured as having dark skin, Balarama is pictured as of fair skin. He is depicted as being of light color. One story tells of Balarama being born of a light hair of Vishnu. As Vaishnava Hindu thought developed, Balarama has attained status as another *avatara* (incarnation) of Vishnu, as an incarnation not of Adishesha, the divine serpent upon which Vishnu rests, or an extension of the incarnation of Krishna so that both are seen as "parts" of one whole. In the scriptures, however, Balarama appears primarily as an additional character in the stories of Krishna, and almost never by himself apart from him.

From his conception, Balarama's life was threatened. The king in whose service his father was employed had been told that his mother Devaki would bear the person who would eventually kill him. Thus, he had each child born to Devaki and her husband Vasudeva killed, six in all. Balarama was as an unborn embryo miraculously removed from Devaki's womb to that of Vasudeva's second wife Rohini, who eventually bore Balarama. Balarama's younger brother was also attended by miracles at his birth. The guards who would have slain him fell asleep, and he was carried away to be raised by Yashoda, a woman of a humble cow-herding family.

Balarama is usually also present in temples dedicated to Krishna. During the Indian month of Shravana (July–August on the Common Era calendar), Vaishnavas celebrate the pastimes of Krishna as a youth among the Gopis (the young women who tended