

fragrance. Its wine-offering is one fourth of a *hin*. Bread, parched grain or tender grain you shall not eat until this very day, until you bring the offering of your G-d; it is an everlasting statute for all your generations in all your dwelling places.

You shall count for yourselves, from the day after the day of rest (Pesach) from the day on which you will bring the *omer* wave-offering, seven complete weeks they shall be, until the day after the seventh week, you shall count fifty days, and you shall bring a new meal-offering to Ad-noy.

In years past, prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, on the day after Passover, an omer of grain would be brought to the temple as an offering. Today, beginning the second night of Passover, the observant Jews will recite a blessing prayer and state the count on the days since Passover. The period of the counting is also considered a time of partial mourning, in memory of a large number of the students of Rabbi Akiba Ben Josef (c. 50–c. 135 CE) who died in a plague. The observant will refrain from planning marriages, parties, and haircuts during this time. On Lag b'Omer, the 33rd day of the count, there is a minor break in the observance to remember the achievements of one of Rabbi Akiba's students, and the mourning rules are lifted for that day.

The counting of Omer begins on the Sunday evening of the day after Passover (remembering that in the Hebrew calendar, the new day began at sundown).

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See also Passover; Shavuot.

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Covenant, Day of the (November 26)

The Day of the Covenant is a Bahá'í holy day honoring the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and, in particular, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921) as the "Centre of the Covenant." This festival is observed alongside the nine Bahá'í holy days on which work is to be suspended.

The Day of the Covenant pays tribute to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, a matter of signal importance to Bahá'ís, in that it is the key to the integrity of the Bahá'í religion. By preserving and perpetuating its indivisibility, the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh protects the Bahá'í religion from schism. In anticipation of his eventual passing, Bahá'u'lláh called on all Bahá'ís to turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá

(Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son) as *successor* (inerrant leader of the Bahá'í community), *interpreter* (authorized exponent of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings), and *exemplar* (perfect embodiment of Bahá'í virtues and morality). This triple function has been as powerful in its influence on the future course and fortunes of the Bahá'í community as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station is conceptually and functionally distinctive, and remains so.

Beyond 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself, the Bahá'í Covenant extends to Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), Guardian of the Faith from 1921 until his passing in 1957, and subsequently to the Universal House of Justice, the Bahá'í international council, elected every five years by national representatives of Bahá'í communities worldwide since its establishment in April 1963. Despite efforts by individuals who sought to aggrandize themselves by claiming authority, the Bahá'í community is an organically unified faith-community, free of schisms or factions.

Historically, the Day of the Covenant was established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in order to discontinue the practice of early believers who, on their own initiative, used to celebrate his birthday. In a number of locales, the Bahá'ís, beyond celebrating his birthday, also observed the day on which 'Abdu'l-Bahá acceded to the leadership of the Bahá'í community as the designated successor to Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), who passed away on May 29, 1892. Honoring 'Abdu'l-Bahá's birthday was problematic particularly because of this remarkable historical coincidence: 'Abdu'l-Bahá was born on May 22, 1844, which, in fact, was the very same night that the Báb declared his prophetic mission. So, in order not to divert focus from the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb, which was a sacred event, 'Abdu'l-Bahá chose November 26 for commemorating the inauguration of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. According to Bahá'í historian Hasan M. Balyuzi:

'Abdu'l-Bahá told the Bahá'ís that this day [May 22] was not, under any circumstances, to be celebrated as His day of birth. It was the day of the Declaration of the Báb, exclusively associated with Him. But as the Bahá'ís begged for a day to be celebrated as His, He gave them November 26th, to be observed as the day of the appointment of the Centre of the Covenant. It was known as *Jashn-i A'zam* (The Greatest Festival), because He was *Ghusn-i A'zam*—the Greatest Branch. In the West it is known as the Day of the Covenant. (Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, 523; brackets added)

The “Most Mighty Branch” is the spiritual title given to 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Bahá'u'lláh in the latter's Will and Testament—known as the “Book of the Covenant” (*Kitáb-i 'Ahd*). Of this historic document, Shoghi Effendi wrote: “Written entirely in His own hand . . . this unique and epoch-making Document, designated by Bahá'u'lláh as His ‘Most Great Tablet,’ and alluded to by Him as the ‘Crimson Book’ in His ‘Epistle to the Son of the Wolf,’ can find no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous Dispensation” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 238).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá purposely selected a date that is six months (i.e., 180 days) on the Common Era calendar away from the commemoration of Bahá’u’lláh’s Ascension, which temporal distancing entirely removed any formal association between those two observances. In the East, the Day of the Covenant also became known as the “Day of Accession” (*Yawm-i Julús*). In the West, this occasion was first celebrated in 1910, when it was first known as the “Fete-Day of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” or “the Master’s Day,” before it eventually came to be called the “Day of the Covenant.” (Walbridge, *Sacred Acts*, 244–45.)

There are no required observances for this occasion. Typically, the believers (and their invited friends) gather together for a devotional service of prayers and readings from the sacred Bahá’í writings, often interspersed with musical interludes, and usually followed by fellowship and refreshments. The Day of the Covenant, therefore, commemorates the unique Bahá’í Covenant. Shoghi Effendi claimed that “nowhere in the books pertaining to any of the world’s religious systems . . . do we find any single document establishing a Covenant endowed with an authority comparable to the Covenant which Bahá’u’lláh had Himself instituted” (Effendi, *God Passes By*, 238).

On the Day of the Covenant, Bahá’ís honor ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the “Perfect Exemplar” of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings and as the “Centre of the Covenant” of Bahá’u’lláh, paying tribute to that sacred Covenant, which historically safeguarded and will continue to preserve the unity of the Bahá’í faith-community for centuries to come.

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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, Ascension of; Bahá’u’lláh, Festival of the Birth of; Naw-Rúz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Bahá’í); Race Unity Day; Ridyán, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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