

= Bahá 'í Faith =

The Bahá 'í Faith (Persian : ?????? Bahá 'iyyat , Arabic : ?????? Bahá 'iyya / b??ha? /) is a monotheistic religion which emphasizes the spiritual unity of all humankind . Three core principles establish a basis for Bahá 'í teachings and doctrine : the unity of God , that there is only one God who is the source of all creation ; the unity of religion , that all major religions have the same spiritual source and come from the same God ; and the unity of humanity , that all humans have been created equal , coupled with the unity in diversity , that diversity of race and culture are seen as worthy of appreciation and acceptance . According to the Bahá 'í Faith 's teachings , the human purpose is to learn to know and to love God through such methods as prayer , reflection and being of service to humanity .

The Bahá 'í Faith was founded by Bahá 'u'lláh in 19th @-@ century Persia . Bahá 'u'lláh was exiled for his teachings from Persia to the Ottoman Empire and died while officially still a prisoner . After Bahá 'u'lláh 's death , under the leadership of his son , `Abdu 'l @-@ Bahá , the religion spread from its Persian and Ottoman roots , and gained a footing in Europe and America , and was consolidated in Iran , where it suffers intense persecution . After the death of `Abdu 'l @-@ Bahá , the leadership of the Bahá 'í community entered a new phase , evolving from a single individual to an administrative order with both elected bodies and appointed individuals . There are probably more than 5 million Bahá 'ís around the world in more than 200 countries and territories .

In the Bahá 'í Faith , religious history is seen to have unfolded through a series of divine messengers , each of whom established a religion that was suited to the needs of the time and to the capacity of the people . These messengers have included Abrahamic figures ? Moses , Jesus , Muhammad , as well as figures from Indian religions like Krishna , Buddha , and others . For Bahá 'ís , the most recent messengers are the Báb and Bahá 'u'lláh . In Bahá 'í belief , each consecutive messenger prophesied of messengers to follow , and Bahá 'u'lláh 's life and teachings fulfilled the end @-@ time promises of previous scriptures . Humanity is understood to be in a process of collective evolution , and the need of the present time is for the gradual establishment of peace , justice and unity on a global scale .

= = Etymology = =

The word Bahá 'í is used either as an adjective to refer to the Bahá 'í Faith or as a term for a follower of Bahá 'u'lláh . The word is not a noun meaning the religion as a whole . It is derived from the Arabic Bahá ' (????) , meaning " glory " or " splendor " . The term " Baháism " (or " Baha 'ism ") is still used , mainly in a pejorative sense .

= = Beliefs = =

Three core principles establish a basis for Bahá 'í teachings and doctrine : the unity of God , the unity of religion , and the unity of humanity . From these postulates stems the belief that God periodically reveals his will through divine messengers , whose purpose is to transform the character of humankind and to develop , within those who respond , moral and spiritual qualities . Religion is thus seen as orderly , unified , and progressive from age to age .

= = = God = = =

The Bahá 'í writings describe a single , personal , inaccessible , omniscient , omnipresent , imperishable , and almighty God who is the creator of all things in the universe . The existence of God and the universe is thought to be eternal , without a beginning or end . Though inaccessible directly , God is nevertheless seen as conscious of creation , with a will and purpose that is expressed through messengers termed Manifestations of God .

Bahá 'í teachings state that God is too great for humans to fully comprehend , or to create a complete and accurate image of , by themselves . Therefore , human understanding of God is

achieved through his revelations via his Manifestations . In the Bahá 'í religion , God is often referred to by titles and attributes (for example , the All @-@ Powerful , or the All @-@ Loving) , and there is a substantial emphasis on monotheism ; such doctrines as the Trinity are seen as compromising , if not contradicting , the Bahá 'í view that God is single and has no equal . The Bahá 'í teachings state that the attributes which are applied to God are used to translate Godliness into human terms and also to help individuals concentrate on their own attributes in worshipping God to develop their potentialities on their spiritual path . According to the Bahá 'í teachings the human purpose is to learn to know and love God through such methods as prayer , reflection , and being of service to others .

= = = Religion = = =

Bahá 'í notions of progressive religious revelation result in their accepting the validity of the well known religions of the world , whose founders and central figures are seen as Manifestations of God . Religious history is interpreted as a series of dispensations , where each manifestation brings a somewhat broader and more advanced revelation that is rendered as a text of scripture and passed on through history with greater or lesser reliability but at least true in substance , suited for the time and place in which it was expressed . Specific religious social teachings (for example , the direction of prayer , or dietary restrictions) may be revoked by a subsequent manifestation so that a more appropriate requirement for the time and place may be established . Conversely , certain general principles (for example , neighbourliness , or charity) are seen to be universal and consistent . In Bahá 'í belief , this process of progressive revelation will not end ; however , it is believed to be cyclical . Bahá 'ís do not expect a new manifestation of God to appear within 1000 years of Bahá 'u'lláh 's revelation .

Bahá 'í beliefs are sometimes described as syncretic combinations of earlier religious beliefs . Bahá 'ís , however , assert that their religion is a distinct tradition with its own scriptures , teachings , laws , and history . While the religion was initially seen as a sect of Islam , most religious specialists now see it as an independent religion , with its religious background in Shi 'a Islam being seen as analogous to the Jewish context in which Christianity was established . Muslim institutions and clergy , both Sunni and Shia , consider Bahá 'ís to be deserters or apostates from Islam , which has led to Bahá 'ís being persecuted . Bahá 'ís describe their faith as an independent world religion , differing from the other traditions in its relative age and in the appropriateness of Bahá 'u'lláh 's teachings to the modern context . Bahá 'u'lláh is believed to have fulfilled the messianic expectations of these precursor faiths .

= = = Human beings = = =

The Bahá 'í writings state that human beings have a " rational soul " , and that this provides the species with a unique capacity to recognize God 's station and humanity 's relationship with its creator . Every human is seen to have a duty to recognize God through His messengers , and to conform to their teachings . Through recognition and obedience , service to humanity and regular prayer and spiritual practice , the Bahá 'í writings state that the soul becomes closer to God , the spiritual ideal in Bahá 'í belief . When a human dies , the soul passes into the next world , where its spiritual development in the physical world becomes a basis for judgment and advancement in the spiritual world . Heaven and Hell are taught to be spiritual states of nearness or distance from God that describe relationships in this world and the next , and not physical places of reward and punishment achieved after death .

The Bahá 'í writings emphasize the essential equality of human beings , and the abolition of prejudice . Humanity is seen as essentially one , though highly varied ; its diversity of race and culture are seen as worthy of appreciation and acceptance . Doctrines of racism , nationalism , caste , social class , and gender @-@ based hierarchy are seen as artificial impediments to unity . The Bahá 'í teachings state that the unification of humanity is the paramount issue in the religious and political conditions of the present world .

= = Teachings = =

= = = Summary = = =

Shoghi Effendi , the appointed head of the religion from 1921 to 1957 , wrote the following summary of what he considered to be the distinguishing principles of Bahá 'u'lláh 's teachings , which , he said , together with the laws and ordinances of the Kitáb @-@ i @-@ Aqdas constitute the bedrock of the Bahá 'í Faith :

The independent search after truth , unfettered by superstition or tradition ; the oneness of the entire human race , the pivotal principle and fundamental doctrine of the Faith ; the basic unity of all religions ; the condemnation of all forms of prejudice , whether religious , racial , class or national ; the harmony which must exist between religion and science ; the equality of men and women , the two wings on which the bird of human kind is able to soar ; the introduction of compulsory education ; the adoption of a universal auxiliary language ; the abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty ; the institution of a world tribunal for the adjudication of disputes between nations ; the exaltation of work , performed in the spirit of service , to the rank of worship ; the glorification of justice as the ruling principle in human society , and of religion as a bulwark for the protection of all peoples and nations ; and the establishment of a permanent and universal peace as the supreme goal of all mankind ? these stand out as the essential elements [which Bahá 'u'lláh proclaimed] .

= = = Social principles = = =

The following principles are frequently listed as a quick summary of the Bahá 'í teachings . They are derived from transcripts of speeches given by `Abdu 'l @-@ Bahá during his tour of Europe and North America in 1912 . The list is not authoritative and a variety of such lists circulate .

Unity of God

Unity of religion

Unity of humanity

Unity in diversity

Equality between men and women

Elimination of all forms of prejudice

World peace and a New world order

Harmony of religion and science

Independent investigation of truth

Principle of Ever @-@ Advancing Civilization

Universal compulsory education

Universal auxiliary language

Obedience to government and non @-@ involvement in partisan politics unless submission to law amounts to a denial of Faith .

Elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty

Spiritual solutions to economic problems

With specific regard to the pursuit of world peace , Bahá 'u'lláh prescribed a world @-@ embracing collective security arrangement as necessary for the establishment of a lasting peace .

= = = Mystical teachings = = =

Although the Bahá 'í teachings have a strong emphasis on social and ethical issues , there exist a number of foundational texts that have been described as mystical . The Seven Valleys is considered Bahá 'u'lláh 's " greatest mystical composition . " It was written to a follower of Sufism , in the style of `Attar , The Persian Muslim poet , and sets forth the stages of the soul 's journey towards God . It was first translated into English in 1906 , becoming one of the earliest available

books of Bahá 'u'lláh to the West . The Hidden Words is another book written by Bahá 'u'lláh during the same period , containing 153 short passages in which Bahá 'u'lláh claims to have taken the basic essence of certain spiritual truths and written them in brief form .

= = = Covenant = = =

The Bahá 'í teachings speak of both a " Greater Covenant " , being universal and endless , and a " Lesser Covenant " , being unique to each religious dispensation . The Lesser Covenant is viewed as an agreement between a Messenger of God and his followers and includes social practices and the continuation of authority in the religion . At this time Bahá 'ís view Bahá 'u'lláh 's revelation as a binding lesser covenant for his followers ; in the Bahá 'í writings being firm in the covenant is considered a virtue to work toward . The Greater Covenant is viewed as a more enduring agreement between God and humanity , where a Manifestation of God is expected to come to humanity about every thousand years , at times of turmoil and uncertainty . With unity as an essential teaching of the religion , Bahá 'ís follow an administration they believe is divinely ordained , and therefore see attempts to create schisms and divisions as efforts that are contrary to the teachings of Bahá 'u'lláh . Schisms have occurred over the succession of authority , but any Bahá 'í divisions have had relatively little success and have failed to attract a sizeable following . The followers of such divisions are regarded as Covenant @-@ breakers and shunned , essentially excommunicated .

= = Canonical texts = =

The canonical texts are the writings of the Báb , Bahá 'u'lláh , `Abdu 'l @-@ Bahá , Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice , and the authenticated talks of `Abdu 'l @-@ Bahá . The writings of the Báb and Bahá 'u'lláh are considered as divine revelation , the writings and talks of `Abdu 'l @-@ Bahá and the writings of Shoghi Effendi as authoritative interpretation , and those of the Universal House of Justice as authoritative legislation and elucidation . Some measure of divine guidance is assumed for all of these texts . Some of Bahá 'u'lláh 's most important writings include the Kitáb @-@ i @-@ Aqdas , literally the Most Holy Book , which is his book of laws , the Kitáb @-@ i @-@ Íqán , literally the Book of Certitude , which became the foundation of much of Bahá 'í belief , the Gems of Divine Mysteries , which includes further doctrinal foundations , and the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys which are mystical treatises .

= = History = =

Bahá 'í history follows a sequence of leaders , beginning with the Báb 's declaration in Shiraz , Iran on the evening of 22 May 1844 , and ultimately resting on an administrative order established by the central figures of the religion . The Bahá 'í community was mostly confined to the Persian and Ottoman empires until after the death of Bahá 'u'lláh in 1892 , at which time he had followers in 13 countries of Asia and Africa . Under the leadership of his son , `Abdu 'l @-@ Bahá , the religion gained a footing in Europe and America , and was consolidated in Iran , where it still suffers intense persecution . After the death of `Abdu 'l @-@ Bahá in 1921 , the leadership of the Bahá 'í community entered a new phase , evolving from a single individual to an administrative order with both elected bodies and appointed individuals .

= = = The Báb = = =

On the evening of 22 May 1844 , Siyyid `Alí @-@ Muhammad of Shiraz , Iran proclaimed that he was " the Báb " (????? " the Gate ") , referring to his later claim to the station of Mahdi , the Twelfth Imam of Shi`a Islam . His followers were therefore known as Bábís . As the Báb 's teachings spread , which the Islamic clergy saw as a threat , his followers came under increased persecution and torture . The conflicts escalated in several places to military sieges by the Shah 's army . The Báb himself was imprisoned and eventually executed in 1850 .

Bahá'ís see the Báb as the forerunner of the Bahá'í Faith, because the Báb's writings introduced the concept of "He whom God shall make manifest", a Messianic figure whose coming, according to Bahá'ís, was announced in the scriptures of all of the world's great religions, and whom Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, claimed to be in 1863. The Báb's tomb, located in Haifa, Israel, is an important place of pilgrimage for Bahá'ís. The remains of the Báb were brought secretly from Iran to the Holy Land and eventually interred in the tomb built for them in a spot specifically designated by Bahá'u'lláh. The main written works translated into English of the Báb's are collected in *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* out of the estimated 135 works.

== Bahá'u'lláh ==

Mírzá Husayn `Alí Núrí was one of the early followers of the Báb, and later took the title of Bahá'u'lláh. He was arrested and imprisoned for this involvement in 1852. Bahá'u'lláh relates that in 1853, while incarcerated in the dungeon of the Síyáh @-@ Chál in Tehran, he received the first intimations that he was the one anticipated by the Báb.

Shortly thereafter he was expelled from Tehran to Baghdad, in the Ottoman Empire; then to Constantinople (now Istanbul); and then to Adrianople (now Edirne). In 1863, at the time of his banishment from Baghdad to Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh declared his claim to a divine mission to his family and followers. Tensions then grew between him and Subh @-@ i @-@ Azal, the appointed leader of the Bábís who did not recognize Bahá'u'lláh's claim. Throughout the rest of his life Bahá'u'lláh gained the allegiance of most of the Bábís, who came to be known as Bahá'ís. Beginning in 1866, he began declaring his mission as a Messenger of God in letters to the world's religious and secular rulers, including Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III, and Queen Victoria.

In 1868 Bahá'u'lláh was banished by Sultan Abdülâziz a final time to the Ottoman penal colony of `Akká, in present @-@ day Israel. Towards the end of his life, the strict and harsh confinement was gradually relaxed, and he was allowed to live in a home near `Akká, while still officially a prisoner of that city. He died there in 1892. Bahá'ís regard his resting place at Bahjí as the Qiblih to which they turn in prayer each day.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote many written works taken as scripture in the religion of which only a fraction have been translated into English. There have been 15 @, @ 000 works both small and large noted, the most significant of which are the Most Holy Book, the Book of Certitude, the Hidden Words, and the Seven Valleys. There is also a series of compilation volumes of smaller works the most significant of which is the *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*.

== `Abdu'l @-@ Bahá ==

`Abbás Effendí was Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, known by the title of `Abdu'l @-@ Bahá (Servant of Bahá). His father left a Will that appointed `Abdu'l @-@ Bahá as the leader of the Bahá'í community, and designated him as the "Centre of the Covenant", "Head of the Faith", and the sole authoritative interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. `Abdu'l @-@ Bahá had shared his father's long exile and imprisonment, which continued until `Abdu'l @-@ Bahá's own release as a result of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908. Following his release he led a life of travelling, speaking, teaching, and maintaining correspondence with communities of believers and individuals, expounding the principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

It is estimated that `Abdu'l @-@ Bahá wrote over 27 @, @ 000 works mostly in the form of letters of which only a fraction have been translated into English. Among the more well known are *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, the *Tablet to Auguste @-@ Henri Forel*, and *Some Answered Questions*. Additionally notes taken of a number of his talks were published in various volumes like *Paris Talks* during his journeys to the West.

== Bahá'í administration ==

Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb @-@ i @-@ Aqdas* and *The Will and Testament of `Abdu'l @-@ Bahá* are

foundational documents of the Bahá'í administrative order . Bahá'u'lláh established the elected Universal House of Justice , and `Abdu'l -`Abhá established the appointed hereditary Guardianship and clarified the relationship between the two institutions . In his Will , `Abdu'l -`Abhá appointed his eldest grandson , Shoghi Effendi , as the first Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith , serving as head of the religion until his death , for 36 years .

Shoghi Effendi throughout his lifetime translated Bahá'í texts ; developed global plans for the expansion of the Bahá'í community ; developed the Bahá'í World Centre ; carried on a voluminous correspondence with communities and individuals around the world ; and built the administrative structure of the religion , preparing the community for the election of the Universal House of Justice . He died in 1957 under conditions that did not allow for a successor to be appointed .

At local , regional , and national levels , Bahá'ís elect members to nine @-@ person Spiritual Assemblies , which run the affairs of the religion . There are also appointed individuals working at various levels , including locally and internationally , which perform the function of propagating the teachings and protecting the community . The latter do not serve as clergy , which the Bahá'í Faith does not have . The Universal House of Justice , first elected in 1963 , remains the successor and supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith , and its 9 members are elected every five years by the members of all National Spiritual Assemblies . Any male Bahá'í , 21 years or older , is eligible to be elected to the Universal House of Justice ; all other positions are open to male and female Bahá'ís .

= = = International plans = = =

In 1937 , Shoghi Effendi launched a seven @-@ year plan for the Bahá'ís of North America , followed by another in 1946 . In 1953 , he launched the first international plan , the Ten Year World Crusade . This plan included extremely ambitious goals for the expansion of Bahá'í communities and institutions , the translation of Bahá'í texts into several new languages , and the sending of Bahá'í pioneers into previously unreached nations . He announced in letters during the Ten Year Crusade that it would be followed by other plans under the direction of the Universal House of Justice , which was elected in 1963 at the culmination of the Crusade . The House of Justice then launched a nine @-@ year plan in 1964 , and a series of subsequent multi @-@ year plans of varying length and goals followed , guiding the direction of the international Bahá'í community .

Annually , on 21 April , the Universal House of Justice sends a ? Ridván ? message to the worldwide Bahá'í community , which generally gives an update on the progress made concerning the current plan , and provides further guidance for the year to come . The Bahá'ís around the world are currently being encouraged to focus on capacity building through children 's classes , youth groups , devotional gatherings , and a systematic study of the religion known as study circles . Further focuses are involvement in social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society . The years from 2001 until 2021 represent four successive five @-@ year plans , culminating in the centennial anniversary of the passing of `Abdu'l -`Abhá .

= = Demographics = =

A Bahá'í published document reported 4 @. 74 million Bahá'ís in 1986 growing at a rate of 4 @. 4 % . Bahá'í sources since 1991 usually estimate the worldwide Bahá'í population to be above 5 million . The World Christian Encyclopedia estimated 7 @. 1 million Bahá'ís in the world in 2000 , representing 218 countries , and 7 @. 3 million in 2010 with the same source . They further state : " The Baha 'i Faith is the only religion to have grown faster in every United Nations region over the past 100 years than the general population ; Baha ? i was thus the fastest @-@ growing religion between 1910 and 2010 , growing at least twice as fast as the population of almost every UN region . " This source 's only systematic flaw was to consistently have a higher estimate of Christians than other cross @-@ national data sets .

From its origins in the Persian and Ottoman Empires , by the early 20th century there were a number of converts in South and South East Asia , Europe , and North America . During the 1950s

and 1960s , vast travel teaching efforts brought the religion to almost every country and territory of the world . By the 1990s , Bahá 'ís were developing programs for systematic consolidation on a large scale , and the early 21st century saw large influxes of new adherents around the world . The Bahá 'í Faith is currently the largest religious minority in Iran , Panama , and Belize ; the second largest international religion in Bolivia , Zambia , and Papua New Guinea ; and the third largest international religion in Chad and Kenya .

According to The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2004 :

The majority of Bahá 'ís live in Asia (3 @. @ 6 million) , Africa (1 @. @ 8 million) , and Latin America (900 @, @ 000) . According to some estimates , the largest Bahá 'í community in the world is in India , with 2 @. @ 2 million Bahá 'ís , next is Iran , with 350 @, @ 000 , the US , with 150 @, @ 000 , and Brazil , with 60 @, @ 000 . Aside from these countries , numbers vary greatly . Currently , no country has a Bahá 'í majority .

The Bahá 'í Faith is a medium @-@ sized religion and was listed in The Britannica Book of the Year (1992 ? present) as the second most widespread of the world 's independent religions in terms of the number of countries represented . According to Britannica , the Bahá 'í Faith (as of 2002) is established in 247 countries and territories ; represents over 2 @, @ 100 ethnic , racial , and tribal groups ; has scriptures translated into over 800 languages ; and has an estimated seven million adherents worldwide . Additionally , Bahá 'ís have self @-@ organized in most of the nations of the world .

The Bahá 'í religion was ranked by the Foreign Policy magazine as the world 's second fastest growing religion by percentage (1 @. @ 7 %) in 2007 .

= = Social practices = =

= = = Laws = = =

The laws of the Bahá 'í Faith primarily come from the Kitáb @-@ i @-@ Aqdas , written by Bahá 'u'lláh . The following are a few examples of basic laws and religious observances .

Prayer in the Bahá 'í Faith consists of obligatory prayer and devotional (general) prayer . Bahá 'ís over the age of 15 must individually recite an obligatory prayer each day , using fixed words and form . In addition to the daily obligatory prayer , believers are directed to daily offer devotional prayer and to meditate and study sacred scripture . There is no set form for devotions and meditations , though the devotional prayers written by the central figures of the Bahá 'í Faith and collected in prayer books are held in high esteem . Reading aloud of prayers from prayer books is a typical feature of Bahá 'í gatherings .

Backbiting and gossip are prohibited and denounced .

Adult Bahá 'ís in good health should observe a nineteen @-@ day sunrise @-@ to @-@ sunset fast each year from 2 March through 20 March .

Bahá 'ís are forbidden to drink alcohol or to take drugs , unless prescribed by doctors .

Sexual intercourse is only permitted between a husband and wife , and thus premarital , extramarital , and homosexual intercourse are forbidden . (See also Homosexuality and the Bahá 'í Faith)

Gambling is forbidden .

Fanaticism is forbidden .

Adherence to ritual is discouraged , with the notable exception of the obligatory prayers .

Abstaining from partisan politics is required .

While some of the laws from the Kitáb @-@ i @-@ Aqdas are applicable at the present time and may be enforced to a degree by the administrative institutions , Bahá 'u'lláh has provided for the progressive application of other laws that are dependent upon the existence of a predominantly Bahá 'í society . The laws , when not in direct conflict with the civil laws of the country of residence , are binding on every Bahá 'í , and the observance of personal laws , such as prayer or fasting , is the sole responsibility of the individual .

== Marriage ==

The purpose of marriage in the Bahá'í faith is mainly to foster spiritual harmony , fellowship and unity between a man and a woman and to provide a stable and loving environment for the rearing of children . The Bahá 'í teachings on marriage call it a fortress for well @-@ being and salvation and place marriage and the family as the foundation of the structure of human society . Bahá 'u'lláh highly praised marriage , discouraged divorce and homosexuality , and required chastity outside of marriage ; Bahá 'u'lláh taught that a husband and wife should strive to improve the spiritual life of each other . Interracial marriage is also highly praised throughout Bahá 'í scripture .

Bahá 'ís intending to marry are asked to obtain a thorough understanding of the other 's character before deciding to marry . Although parents should not choose partners for their children , once two individuals decide to marry , they must receive the consent of all living biological parents , whether they are Bahá 'í or not . The Bahá 'í marriage ceremony is simple ; the only compulsory part of the wedding is the reading of the wedding vows prescribed by Bahá 'u'lláh which both the groom and the bride read , in the presence of two witnesses . The vows are " We will all , verily , abide by the Will of God . "

== Work ==

Monasticism is forbidden , and Bahá 'ís attempt to ground their spirituality in ordinary daily life . Performing useful work , for example , is not only required but considered a form of worship . Bahá 'u'lláh prohibited a mendicant and ascetic lifestyle . The importance of self @-@ exertion and service to humanity in one 's spiritual life is emphasised further in Bahá 'u'lláh 's writings , where he states that work done in the spirit of service to humanity enjoys a rank equal to that of prayer and worship in the sight of God .

== Places of worship ==

Most Bahá 'í meetings occur in individuals ' homes , local Bahá 'í centers , or rented facilities . Worldwide , there are currently seven Bahá 'í Houses of Worship , with an eighth near completion in Chile , and a further seven planned as of April 2012 . Bahá 'í writings refer to an institution called a " Mashriqu 'l @-@ Adhkár " (Dawning @-@ place of the Mention of God) , which is to form the center of a complex of institutions including a hospital , university , and so on . The first ever Mashriqu 'l @-@ Adhkár in `Ishqábád , Turkmenistan , has been the most complete House of Worship .

== Calendar ==

The Bahá 'í calendar is based upon the calendar established by the Báb . The year consists of 19 months , each having 19 days , with four or five intercalary days , to make a full solar year . The Bahá 'í New Year corresponds to the traditional Persian New Year , called Naw Rúz , and occurs on the vernal equinox , near 21 March , at the end of the month of fasting . Bahá 'í communities gather at the beginning of each month at a meeting called a Feast for worship , consultation and socializing .

Each of the 19 months is given a name which is an attribute of God ; some examples include Bahá ? (Splendour) , ? Ilm (Knowledge) , and Jamál (Beauty) . The Bahá 'í week is familiar in that it consists of seven days , with each day of the week also named after an attribute of God . Bahá 'ís observe 11 Holy Days throughout the year , with work suspended on 9 of these . These days commemorate important anniversaries in the history of the religion .

== Symbols ==

The symbols of the religion are derived from the Arabic word Bahá' ("splendor" or "glory"), with a numerical value of 9, which is why the most common symbol is the nine-pointed star. The ringstone symbol and calligraphy of the Greatest Name are also often encountered. The former consists of two five-pointed stars interspersed with a stylized Bahá' whose shape is meant to recall the three onenesses, while the latter is a calligraphic rendering of the phrase Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá ("O Glory of the Most Glorious!").

The five-pointed star is the symbol of the Bahá'í Faith. In the Bahá'í Faith, the star is known as the Haykal (Arabic: "temple"), and it was initiated and established by the Báb. The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh wrote various works in the form of a pentagram.

== Socio-economic development ==

Since its inception the Bahá'í Faith has had involvement in socio-economic development beginning by giving greater freedom to women, promulgating the promotion of female education as a priority concern, and that involvement was given practical expression by creating schools, agricultural coops, and clinics.

The religion entered a new phase of activity when a message of the Universal House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 was released. Bahá'ís were urged to seek out ways, compatible with the Bahá'í teachings, in which they could become involved in the social and economic development of the communities in which they lived. Worldwide in 1979 there were 129 officially recognized Bahá'í socio-economic development projects. By 1987, the number of officially recognized development projects had increased to 1482.

== United Nations ==

Bahá'u'lláh wrote of the need for world government in this age of humanity's collective life. Because of this emphasis the international Bahá'í community has chosen to support efforts of improving international relations through organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, with some reservations about the present structure and constitution of the UN. The Bahá'í International Community is an agency under the direction of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, and has consultative status with the following organizations:

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

World Health Organization (WHO)

The Bahá'í International Community has offices at the United Nations in New York and Geneva and representations to United Nations regional commissions and other offices in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Nairobi, Rome, Santiago, and Vienna. In recent years an Office of the Environment and an Office for the Advancement of Women were established as part of its United Nations Office. The Bahá'í Faith has also undertaken joint development programs with various other United Nations agencies. In the 2000 Millennium Forum of the United Nations a Bahá'í was invited as the only non-governmental speaker during the summit.

== Persecution ==

Bahá'ís continue to be persecuted in Islamic countries, as Islamic leaders do not recognize the Bahá'í Faith as an independent religion, but rather as apostasy from Islam. The most severe persecutions have occurred in Iran, where over 200 Bahá'ís were executed between 1978 and 1998, and in Egypt. The rights of Bahá'ís have been restricted to greater or lesser extents in numerous other countries, including Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Morocco, and several countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

= = = Iran = = =

The marginalization of the Iranian Bahá'ís by current governments is rooted in historical efforts by Muslim clergy to persecute the religious minority . When the Báb started attracting a large following , the clergy hoped to stop the movement from spreading by stating that its followers were enemies of God . These clerical directives led to mob attacks and public executions . Starting in the twentieth century , in addition to repression that impacted individual Bahá'ís , centrally directed campaigns that targeted the entire Bahá'í community and its institutions were initiated . In one case in Yazd in 1903 more than 100 Bahá'ís were killed . Bahá'í schools , such as the Tarbiyat boys ' and girls ' schools in Tehran , were closed in the 1930s and 1940s , Bahá'í marriages were not recognized and Bahá'í texts were censored .

During the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi , to divert attention from economic difficulties in Iran and from a growing nationalist movement , a campaign of persecution against the Bahá'ís was instituted . An approved and coordinated anti @-@ Bahá'í campaign (to incite public passion against the Bahá'ís) started in 1955 and it included the spreading of anti @-@ Bahá'í propaganda on national radio stations and in official newspapers . In the late 1970s the Shah 's regime consistently lost legitimacy due to criticism that it was pro @-@ Western . As the anti @-@ Shah movement gained ground and support , revolutionary propaganda was spread which alleged that some of the Shah 's advisors were Bahá'ís . Bahá'ís were portrayed as economic threats , and as supporters of Israel and the West , and societal hostility against the Bahá'ís increased .

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 Iranian Bahá'ís have regularly had their homes ransacked or have been banned from attending university or from holding government jobs , and several hundred have received prison sentences for their religious beliefs , most recently for participating in study circles . Bahá'í cemeteries have been desecrated and property has been seized and occasionally demolished , including the House of Mírzá Buzurg , Bahá'u'lláh 's father . The House of the Báb in Shiraz , one of three sites to which Bahá'ís perform pilgrimage , has been destroyed twice .

According to a US panel , attacks on Bahá'ís in Iran increased under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad 's presidency . The United Nations Commission on Human Rights revealed an October 2005 confidential letter from Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces of Iran ordering its members to identify Bahá'ís and to monitor their activities . Due to these actions , the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights stated on 20 March 2006 , that she " also expresses concern that the information gained as a result of such monitoring will be used as a basis for the increased persecution of , and discrimination against , members of the Bahá'í faith , in violation of international standards . The Special Rapporteur is concerned that this latest development indicates that the situation with regard to religious minorities in Iran is , in fact , deteriorating .

On 14 May 2008 , members of an informal body known as the " Friends " that oversaw the needs of the Bahá'í community in Iran were arrested and taken to Evin prison . The Friends court case has been postponed several times , but was finally underway on 12 January 2010 . Other observers were not allowed in the court . Even the defence lawyers , who for two years have had minimal access to the defendants , had difficulty entering the courtroom . The chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said that it seems that the government has already predetermined the outcome of the case and is violating international human rights law . Further sessions were held on 7 February 2010 , 12 April 2010 and 12 June 2010 . On 11 August 2010 it became known that the court sentence was 20 years imprisonment for each of the seven prisoners which was later reduced to ten years . After the sentence , they were transferred to Gohardasht prison . In March 2011 the sentences were reinstated to the original 20 years . On 3 January 2010 , Iranian authorities detained ten more members of the Baha'i minority , reportedly including Leva Khanjani , granddaughter of Jamaloddin Khanjani , one of seven Baha'i leaders jailed since 2008 and in February , they arrested his son , Niki Khanjani .

The Iranian government claims that the Bahá'í Faith is not a religion , but is instead a political organization , and hence refuses to recognize it as a minority religion . However , the government has never produced convincing evidence supporting its characterization of the Bahá'í community . Also , the government 's statements that Bahá'ís who recanted their religion would have their rights

restored , attest to the fact that Bahá 'ís are persecuted solely for their religious affiliation . The Iranian government also accuses the Bahá 'í Faith of being associated with Zionism because the Bahá 'í World Centre is located in Haifa , Israel . These accusations against the Bahá 'ís have no basis in historical fact , and the accusations are used by the Iranian government to use the Bahá 'ís as " scapegoats " . In fact it was the Iranian leader Naser al @-@ Din Shah Qajar who banished Bahá 'u'lláh from Persia to the Ottoman Empire and Bahá 'u'lláh was later exiled by the Ottoman Sultan , at the behest of the Persian Shah , to territories further away from Iran and finally to Acre in Syria , which only a century later was incorporated into the state of Israel .

= = = Egypt = = =

Bahá 'í institutions and community activities have been illegal under Egyptian law since 1960 . All Bahá 'í community properties , including Bahá 'í centers , libraries , and cemeteries , have been confiscated by the government and fatwas have been issued charging Bahá 'ís with apostasy .

The Egyptian identification card controversy began in the 1990s when the government modernized the electronic processing of identity documents , which introduced a de facto requirement that documents must list the person 's religion as Muslim , Christian , or Jewish (the only three religions officially recognized by the government) . Consequently , Bahá 'ís were unable to obtain government identification documents (such as national identification cards , birth certificates , death certificates , marriage or divorce certificates , or passports) necessary to exercise their rights in their country unless they lied about their religion , which conflicts with Bahá 'í religious principle . Without documents , they could not be employed , educated , treated in hospitals , travel outside of the country , or vote , among other hardships . Following a protracted legal process culminating in a court ruling favorable to the Bahá 'ís , the interior minister of Egypt released a decree on 14 April 2009 , amending the law to allow Egyptians who are not Muslim , Christian , or Jewish to obtain identification documents that list a dash in place of one of the three recognized religions . The first identification cards were issued to two Bahá 'ís under the new decree on 8 August 2009 .