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## Baha'u'llah

Baha'u'llah, which means "Glory of God" in Arabic, founded the Baha'i faith in Persia (modern-day Iran) in the mid-19th century. He is considered by his followers to have ushered in an era of human unity and world peace. Bahau'llah believed he was a prophet of God and endured a life of imprisonment and exile while attempting to propagate his religious conviction.

Baha'u'llah, originally named Mirza Husayn Ali, was born on November 12, 1817, in Persia. Typical of the affluent class into which he was born, Baha'u'llah received very little formal education while he was growing up but learned horsemanship, poetry, calligraphy, and religion. Although he was not given strict instruction in Islam, Baha'u'llah was interested in spirituality and turned down a prestigious government position to study mysticism and religion.

Baha'u'llah had heard of a Persian named Sayyid Ali Muhammed, also known as the Bab, who proclaimed to be the long-awaited imam and successor to Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Baha'u'llah accepted the religion of the Bab at the age of 27 and began to convert others to the new faith. Within a few years, he was recognized as such a devout follower that, although they had never met, the Bab began corresponding with Baha'u'llah and sent him his pens and several important documents shortly before his death. When the Bab was executed in 1850, a number of people came forth and claimed they were his chosen successors, including Baha'u'llah, who became the group's new leader.

Two years after the Bab's death, Baha'u'llah was imprisoned in Tehran and accused of taking part in an assassination attempt on the shah of Persia. While he was in an underground dungeon, he purportedly received a revelation from a spirit of God that he had been chosen to be God's messenger. After his release from prison, Baha'u'llah was exiled from Persia and spent the remainder of his life teaching the Bab's religion and forming the first Baha'i communities. He lived in Baghdad for a number of years, where he wrote several texts that have become the scriptures of the Baha'i faith. Then, in 1863, Baha'u'llah was banished from Baghdad. He retreated to a garden that he named Ridvan (Paradise). There, he formally announced to his disciples that he was the prophet of God and that another prophet would not follow for 1,000 years. Today, the Baha'i celebrate the Feast of Ridvan every year from April 21 to May 2 to commemorate his announcement.

Following the declaration at Ridvan, Baha'u'llah spread his message to Istanbul and Adrianople (today called Edirne) and was finally exiled to Akka in 1868 (in present-day Israel), where he lived the remainder of his life. Baha'u'llah presented hundreds of revelations through books, tablets, and letters. Some of his writings were inspired by the Bab's teachings and the Sufi mystics he met while in exile; others, he claimed, came from direct revelation from God. The Baha'i scriptures teach that such historical religious figures as Abraham, Zoroaster, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad were all prophets of God who delivered essentially the same message but moderated their messages to fit the era in which they lived. Baha'u'llah urged his followers to worship one God, lead a morally righteous life, and promote social equality and unity. In 1873, he wrote his most famous text, the *Kitab-i-Aqda* (*Most Holy Book*), in which he outlined the principles to be observed by his

followers. In the book, he concluded that a universal religion and language are the keys to world unification.

Baha'u'llah died of a fever in Bahji on May 29, 1892, after having appointed his eldest son, Abdul Baha, his successor. Within the next several years, Abdul Baha established groups of Baha'i followers in North Africa, Asia, Australia, and the United States. The Baha'i faith thrives today with nearly 6 million followers, and Baha'u'llah's life mission—"to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood"—has spread throughout the world.

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### Further Reading

Esslemont, J. E. *Baha'u'llah and the New Era: An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith*. Wilmette, IL: Bahai Publishing, 2006; Hofman, David. *Baha'u'llah, the Prince of Peace: A Portrait*. Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 1991.

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