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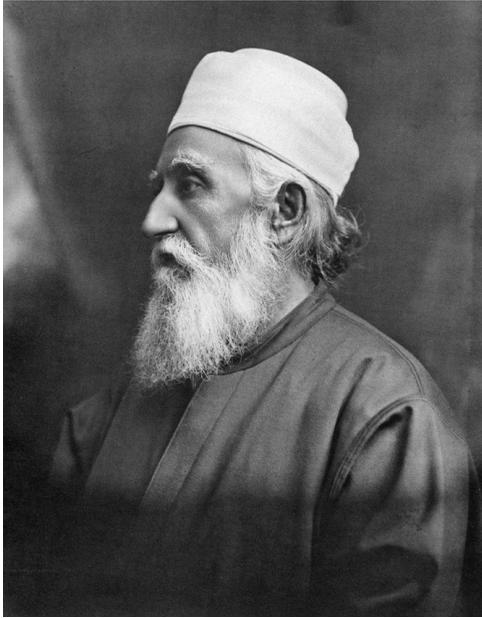
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ascension of (November 28)

The Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, like the Day of the Covenant (November 26), is a Bahá’í holy day honoring ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), who succeeded Bahá’u’lláh (1819–1892), prophet-founder of the Bahá’í Faith, and led the Bahá’í community from 1892 to 1921. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá fulfilled a triple role, in that he was not only Bahá’u’lláh’s designated successor, but was authorized by Bahá’u’lláh as the inerrant interpreter of the latter’s teachings and was also regarded as the paragon, or perfect exemplar, of Bahá’í ethics, virtues, and wisdom.

The Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commemorates the death—and, retrospectively, the life—of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who passed away quietly in his home on November 28, 1921, in Haifa, Palestine (now Israel), at the age of 77. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was well known in Palestine and abroad. One instance of this will illustrate the point: Immediately upon learning of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s death, Winston Churchill, then British secretary of state for the colonies, telegraphed to the High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, who was the highest-ranking official in the country, instructing him to “convey to the Bahai Community, on behalf of His Majesty’s Government, their sympathy and condolence on the death of Sir ‘Abdu’l Bahá ‘Abbas.” Here, reference to the title “Sir” refers to the knighthood of the British Empire that was conferred on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at a ceremony in the garden of the military governor of Haifa on April 17, 1920, for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s humanitarian work in Palestine during World War I.

Arrangements for the funeral were made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sister, Bahíyyih Khánúm. The funeral procession for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took place on November 29, 1921. An estimated 10,000 townspeople joined together in the procession, acclaimed as the largest and most memorable funeral event the city of Haifa had seen. The casket was carried from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house, at the foot of Mount Carmel, to a garden facing the Shrine of the Báb, approximately midway up the northern slope of Mount Carmel. The procession itself took two hours for the casket to be carried a distance of just under a mile. Describing the procession, Shoghi Effendi (1898–1957), grandson of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith (1921–1957), wrote, in part:

The coffin containing the remains of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was borne to its last resting-place on the shoulders of His loved ones. The cortège which preceded it was led by the City Constabulary Force, acting as a Guard of Honor,



‘Abdu’l-Bahá. (National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States)

behind which followed in order the Boy Scouts of the Muslim and Christian communities holding aloft their banners, a company of Muslim choristers chanting their verses from the Qur’án, the chiefs of the Muslim community headed by the Muftí, and a number of Christian priests, Latin, Greek and Anglican. Behind the coffin walked the members of His family, the British High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, the Governor of Jerusalem, Sir Ronald Storrs, the Governor of Phoenicia, Sir Stewart Symes, officials of the government, consuls of various countries resident in Haifa, notables of Palestine, Muslim, Jewish, Christian and

Druze, Egyptians, Greeks, Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Europeans and Americans, men, women and children. The long train of mourners, amid the sobs and moans of many a grief-stricken heart, wended its slow way up the slopes of Mt. Carmel to the Mausoleum of the Báb (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 313).

At the funeral ceremony itself, nine eulogies, eloquent and moving, were given by dignitaries representing the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities. The Mufti of Haifa, Shaykh Muḥammad Murád, lamented the loss of Haifa’s great benefactor: “Abdul-Baha was great in all the stages of his life. He was genius itself, high in character and had the best reputation. . . . To whom shall the poor now look? Who shall care for the hungry? and the desolate, the widow and the orphan?” (See Bagdadi, *Star of the West* [1922]; and Balyuzi, ‘*Abdu’l-Bahá*, 466–72.) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had great compassion for the poor and ministered to their needs practically every afternoon of his life in Haifa, even on his wedding day.

Bahíyyih Khánúm opened ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament to see if it contained any instructions for the burial. Since no specific instructions were given, she decided to inter him in a place of enduring honor. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s casket, after mourners had paid their respects, was interred in the Shrine of the Báb, in a vault beneath the floor of the north central room, next to the very room where the Báb’s remains are entombed.

The governor of Jerusalem, Sir Ronald Storrs, commented: “I have never known a more united expression of regret and respect than was called forth by

the utter simplicity of the ceremony.” Sir Herbert Samuel wrote: “A great throng had gathered together, sorrowing for his death, but rejoicing also for his life” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 312).

For several days after, some 50 to 100 of the poor were fed each day at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house, culminating, on the seventh day, in a mass distribution of grain. On the 40th day after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, a memorial feast was held in accordance with Muslim customs, and additional eulogies were given.

Obituaries were published in major newspapers in the Middle East, Europe, the United States, and India, such as: *Times* (London), November 30, 1921 (“ ‘Abdul Baha was a man of great spiritual power and commanding presence and his name was held in reverence throughout the Middle East and elsewhere”); *New York World*, December 1, 1921; *Daily Mirror*, December 2, 1921; *Le Temps*, the leading French paper, December 19, 1921; *Times of India*, January 1922; and others. Locally, the Haifa newspaper, *Annafir* (December 6, 1921), published an obituary that carried the headline: “The Most Great Calamity—The Departure of the Personification of Humanitarianism, Abdul-Baha Abbas” (Bagdadi, *Star of the West*, 259–67).

The term “Ascension,” of Christian origin, is a reverential term, implying that the person referred to, by virtue of a high spiritual station, “ascended” to heaven and dwells in Paradise. For Bahá'ís, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, although not a prophet, occupied a unique and pivotal station.

At such commemorations, Bahá'ís typically gather together in an assembly hall or private home (depending on the size of the local Bahá'í community) and, in a dignified atmosphere, respectfully recite or chant prayers and passages from the sacred Bahá'í Writings. A special “Prayer revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and now recited by his loved ones at his hallowed shrine” was translated by Shoghi Effendi in January 1922. This “Tablet of Visitation” for 'Abdu'l-Bahá captures the quintessence of his character, expressed in this supplication: “Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me, and in its ocean immerse me.” For Bahá'ís, this prayer is especially significant by virtue of this promise preceding the prayer: “Whoso reciteth this prayer with lowliness and fervor will bring gladness and joy to the heart of this Servant; it will be even as meeting Him face to face” (*Bahá'í Prayers*, 234).

Christopher Buck

See also 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; 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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Abhidhamma Day

Abhidhamma Day is a Theravada Buddhist celebration observed primarily in Myanmar (Burma) that has grown out of a tradition concerning the origins of the Abhidhamma, a major segment of the Pali Canon, the holy texts of Theravada Buddhism. The Abhidhamma literature is a collection of commentaries on the sutras, the books generally believed to be the discourses of the Buddha. One tradition suggests that the Abhidhamma developed when the Buddha visited his deceased mother in Tusita heaven and taught her about the Dharma, during the Rainy Season Retreat (Vassa Retreat) seven years after his enlightenment. He did this each night, and during the next day, he repeated the same teachings to Sariputra. Sariputra memorized and recited the entire comments to his disciple, who in turn passed them down generation by generation until they were recited at the Third Council of Buddhism, held at Pataliputra in 251 BCE. At that time, all seven books were recited accurately by Revata, and then later put in written form.

According to this tradition, following his enlightenment, the Buddha was filled with compassion for the various deities (*devas*) and brahmas were believed to dwell there. By this time, his mother, who had passed away shortly after his birth, had been reborn in the Tusita heaven, one of the heavenly realms in Buddhist cosmology. There she was now known as Santusita Deva. He thus went to the celestial abode and preached the Abhidhamma to both his mother and the assembly of the heaven’s divine and semi-divine beings. The preaching activity continued for three months.

When the Buddha completed his work in heaven, he asked permission of the king of the celestial realm to return to his work in the human realm. On hearing this, the king made available three stairways, one made of silver, one of gold, and one of ruby.