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birth and ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

The Baha'i Faith was founded by Mírzá Husayn-'Alí Núrí, known by his spiritual title, Bahá'u'lláh, and by Sayyid 'Alí-Muhammad of Shíráz, better known as The Bab (the "Gate"), who claimed to be the Qá'im (Ariser/Resurrector), the messianic figure expected in Shia Islam, the majority faith in Iran. Throughout his six-year ministry, The Bab heralded "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest," whose advent was imminent. Most of the Bábís (followers of The Bab) came to accept Bahá'u'lláh as that messianic figure. Most current Baha'i laws, in fact, were originally instituted by The Bab and were subsequently selectively ratified and revised by Bahá'u'lláh and set forth in the preeminent Baha'i scripture, The Most Holy Book (Kitáb-i-Aqdas). The birth of Bahá'u'lláh and the birth of The Bab are therefore closely linked.

Bahá'u'lláh was born on November 12, 1817, in Tehran, Persia (now Iran). As a young nobleman, he became a prominent figure in the Bábí religion. In 1852, while in prison during the unrest that followed The Bab's execution in 1850, Bahá'u'lláh experienced a series of visions and accepted his role as the Promised One foretold by The Bab and in the messianic texts of all religions.

By imperial decree, Bahá'u'lláh was subsequently exiled to Baghdad (1853–1863), to Istanbul (1863), to Adrianople (1863–1868), then to 'Akká (Acre) in Palestine (1868–1892), where he would spend the rest of his life in custody, although the last years were in relative comfort under house arrest. Bahá'u'lláh died on May 29, 1892, in Bahji, Palestine. Today, members of the global Baha'i Faith commemorate both Bahá'u'lláh's birth and ascension.

As the co-founders of the Baha'i Faith, Bahá'u'lláh and his predecessor, The Bab, are often referred to as the "Twin Manifestations," and the occasions of their respective births are similarly called the "Twin Birthdays."

In the Most Holy Book (Kitáb-i-Aqdas), Bahá'u'lláh established four great festivals of the Baha'i year: "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 Bab, which occurred on the evening of May 22, 1844 (but is dated May 23 since, in the Baha'i calendar, the new day begins at sunset the previous day).

The birthdays of The Bab and Bahá'u'lláh fall on two consecutive days in the Islamic 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 Muharram, the first day of which marketh the Birth of His Herald [The Bab]. 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 Bab was on the first day of the month of Muharram 1235 AH (October 20, 1819), while the birth of Bahá'u'lláh took place on the second day of Muharram 1233 AH (November 12, 1817).

While the present Baha'i calendar (of 19 months of 19 days, plus intercalary days) is solar and roughly conforms

to the Common Era calendar, Baha'is in many countries of the Middle East observe these two Baha'i Holy Days according to the country's Islamic lunar calendar (which is incidentally how they were observed by Bahá'u'lláh himself), while Baha'is of the West and elsewhere (such as among the Baha'is in Syria and Lebanon) celebrate these occasions by their corresponding Common Era calendar dates. In the future, the Universal House of Justice (the institution that guides the Baha'i community internationally) will determine whether these "Twin Days" will be celebrated on a solar or lunar basis.

There is no prescribed ceremony or service for celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh. But it is common for Baha'is to meet together for collective worship and fellowship, often through devotional meetings or musical programs. These programs are open to all who would like to attend.

The birth and ascension of Bahá'u'lláh are considered major holy days, during which work is suspended as well as school activities.

Bahá'u'lláh passed away at 3:00 a.m. on May 29, 1892, in Bahjí, near 'Akká, in Palestine (now Israel). A telegram bearing the news, "The Sun of Bahá' has set," was immediately dispatched to Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamíd II, with a request for permission to bury Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, which was granted. After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, his eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was appointed, pursuant to Bahá'u'lláh's will and testament and to provisions of the Most Holy Book, as the appointed "Centre of the Covenant" (successor to Bahá'u'lláh), as the perfect exemplar of Baha'i ethics and virtues, and as the infallible expounder of his father's teachings.

Local Baha'i communities worldwide will therefore gather at that time (3:00 a.m.) to commemorate their founder with Baha'i prayers and scriptures, usually culminating in the chanting in Arabic, or recitation in translation, of what is known as the "Tablet of Visitation," a special prayer reserved for the commemoration of The Bab as well as Bahá'u'lláh. Some Baha'is arrange, through the Office of Pilgrimage at the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel, to schedule their pilgrimages around the time of the birth or ascension of Bahá'u'lláh.

During their pilgrimage, Baha'is visit the shrine of The Bab in Haifa, and the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahjí, near Acre, where Bahá'u'lláh lived the last years of his life. (On July 8, 2008, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] World Heritage Committee designated the shrine of The Bab on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, and the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, located near Old Acre on Israel's northern coast as World Heritage sites—the first modern religious edifices to be added to the UNESCO list.) A large gathering was held there in 1992 on the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's passing, following which the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the global Baha'i community, declared the period from April 1992 to April 1993 as the second "Baha'i Holy Year" to mark both the centenary itself and the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh in November 1892.

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Further Reading

Keil, Gerald. *Time and the Baha'i Era: A Study of the Badí' Calendar*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2008; Momen, Moojan. *Bahá'u'lláh: A Short Biography*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007; Walbridge, John. "The Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh." In *Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996; Walbridge, John.

"The Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh." In *Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996.

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