Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time

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Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time

John Walbridge

George Ronald, 1996

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... {pv}

When Joseph was for sale, the market-place

Teemed with Egyptians wild to see his face;

An ancient crone pushed forward--in her hand

She held a few threads twisted strand by strand...

The merchant laughed and said: 'Come on, old girl,

It's not for you to purchase such a pearl...'

'Oh, I knew that before,' the old crone said;

'I knew you wouldn't sell him for my thread--

But it's enough that everyone will say

"She bid for Joseph on that splendid day".'

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Preface

Religion is a part of being human, something found in every human culture and something unique to human beings. So far as we know, we do not share our tendency to religion with any other animal. Xenophanes wrote twenty-five centuries ago that 'if cattle and horses or lions had hands ... horses would draw the forms of gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves'.[1] But horses and cattle do not draw the forms of their gods, nor, to the best of our knowledge, do whales imagine watery gods in the depths of the ocean or eagles winged gods among the clouds. Indeed, Darwin did attempt to establish our kinship with the animals in religion, as in other things:

..... [1. Fr. 15, translated in Kirk and Raven, Presocratic Philosophers, p. 169.]

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..... The feelings of religious devotion is a highly complex one consisting of love, complete submission to an exalted and mysterious superior, a strong sense of dependence, fear, reverence, gratitude, hope for the future, and perhaps other elements... We see some distant approach to this state of mind in the deep love of a dog for his master, associated with complete submission, some fear, and perhaps other feelings... Professor Braubach goes so far as to maintain that a dog looks on his master as on a god.[2]

..... [2. Darwin, Descent of Man, ch. 4.]

[.///]

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Although one might imagine a canine and a human theologian commiserating about the inscrutable ways of their respective masters, the dog lives in the physical presence of his master and does not need to seek an Unseen to give meaning to appearances.

For those, like me, who write about religion, its most conspicuous {pxii} feature is not the devoted love that at its best we share with the dog but the characteristically human habit of using religion to assign meaning and value to the elements of this world--to acts, to places, to times. Human beings divide the world into the sacred and the profane, realms whose boundaries are invisible but which are perfectly real to the believer and even the semi-believer. The Baha'i Faith is no different from other religions in this respect.

The present work is an exploration of several areas of the sacred in the Baha'i Faith. Part One discusses religious law. In its degree of emphasis on religious law the Baha'i Faith falls somewhere between the legalistic religions like Judaism and Islam and the anti-legalist religions like Christianity. Certainly, the legal side of the Baha'i Faith is the aspect of it most alien to the religious experience of most Westerners. I have devoted a chapter to the general question of Baha'i religious law and its background and chapters to religious rites and the Baha'i religious laws relating to wealth. Second, in the Baha'i Faith as in other religions, the line between the sacred and the profane marks off certain places. Part Two deals with the sacred space and the journey of pilgrimage that is its deepest expression. I have treated it on two levels: first, physical space, including chapters on pilgrimage, holy places in general and three emblematic holy places associated with the life of Baha'u'llah; and, second, the space of the imagination and the spirit, in which the mystical journey of the soul takes place. Third, I have discussed sacred time in the Baha'i Faith in the form of the Baha'i religious calendar and the holy days of the Baha'i year.

Most of this book was originally written as articles for an encyclopedia on the Baha'i Faith, which has not yet appeared. However, it seemed to me that certain larger themes and approaches linked together these originally disparate

articles. Chief among these common themes was my belief that Baha'i history and thought needs to be seen in larger contexts. A Baha'i holy day, for example, ought to be understood by reference to the events it commemorates, the Baha'i sacred texts {pxiii} that are associated with it, the practices, whether canonical or customary, that the Baha'is carry out on that day, its Babi and Islamic origins or counterparts, and its parallels in the larger religious history of humankind. Such contextualizing appears in different ways throughout this book but contextualizing of one sort or another is fundamental to all the articles. Another novelty of my approach is that I have attempted to treat Baha'i practices empirically as well as normatively. The Baha'i Faith is a young scriptural religion and Baha'is typically have a strong sense that what is normative is not custom but the content of their extensive sacred scriptures. As a result, most Baha'i writing on topics such as law deals with what Baha'is ought to do, as it can be deduced from scripture, rather than what they actually do. Non-Baha'i scholars have done much the same in their writings on the Baha'i Faith. I have attempted to restore some balance, describing Baha'i practices as they now exist. There are serious limits to my efforts--since there is little scholarship on the subject, I must rely mostly on my own observations, which are largely limited to American, Arab and Iranian Baha'is--but it does mark an innovation, and a useful one, I think.

Another factor motivating the publication of this book is the appearance of the English translation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Baha'u'llah's chief legal work. Despite the undoubted merits of this translation and its thorough notes, it treats the subject of Baha'i law in a rather deductive and ahistorical way. Moreover, there are many aspects of Baha'i law that the translation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas can only touch lightly upon. The present work attempts to put the laws of the Aqdas in a larger context, not only correlating the relevant Baha'i texts but discussing their roots in Babi and Islamic law and comparing aspects of Baha'i religious law to the role of law in other religions. I do not believe that a survey of Baha'i law of this sort exists in a Western language.

My aim has been to give comprehensive, accurate and systematic treatments of specific topics relating to Baha'i {pxiv} religious law considered in appropriate larger contexts. I hope that the work will be of use both to Baha'i readers and to scholars of the Baha'i Faith and of related areas.

Most of the articles incorporated in the present work were written during years I was an employee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, and I wish to gratefully acknowledge its support and commitment to Baha'i scholarship. I also acknowledge the assistance of the Baha'i World Centre, which supplied a number of documents and books consulted for the present work. I wish also to acknowledge the support and friendship of my former colleagues on the Baha'i Encyclopedia Editorial Board, with whom I worked for eleven years, in particular Will van den Hoonaard. Professor Juan R. I. Cole has been a constant friend and source of information and advice over the years. Wendi Momen of George Ronald, Publisher commissioned and edited the book with energy and restraint. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude for the

patience and support of my family, particularly my wife, Linda.

Bloomington, Indiana

January 1996 {p1}

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Part One

Sacred Acts

Babi and Baha'i Law {p2} {p3}

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BAHA'I LAW AND ITS BACKGROUND

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..... But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.[1.1]

---------- Psalms

..... [1.1. Psalms 1:2-3 (King James Version).]

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[.]

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..... Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.[1.2]

..... [1.2. Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 5.]

[.///]

[.]

Baha'i sacred law is based on Baha'u'llah's Kitab-i-Aqdas and contains the specific rules for living a Baha'i religious life. Thus it is primarily thought of as a means for attaining spirituality, not a device for keeping social order. The Islamic word for religious law is Shari'at, literally 'a path to a water hole' and thus 'the Way'. Like Islamic law and Jewish law, Baha'i law treats a wide range of subjects not usually thought of as legal in Christianity or in Western secular law and omits many areas that in another context would be

considered essential to a legal system. It deals mainly with religious obligations and matters of personal status such as marriage and inheritance. It is similar to Islamic law but is in general much simpler and less rigorous.

According to the Baha'i writings, God has absolute authority to impose any laws that He wishes to and each major prophet establishes a new religious law suitable to the conditions of His {p4} time. The laws of Baha'u'llah are, thus, the most appropriate for this era. Obedience to secular law is, however, upheld, as it is a correlate of the Baha'i principle of obedience to government.

Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice have discouraged the development of detailed Baha'i law as premature under current conditions.

This chapter deals primarily with the concept and structure of law in general and with Babi and Baha'i law in particular. For details of the Kitab-i-Aqdas as a text, see Appendix 1.

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The Concept of Law

'Law' in its most general sense includes both the norms of conduct of human society and the regularities found in nature. The nature of law has been closely studied by lawyers, theologians, philosophers and other thinkers for several thousand years. No single theory or definition has been able to account for all the types and social contexts of law.

Scientists customarily refer to the regularities and patterns of causes in nature as laws. Such physical laws differ from human law in that they involve neither obedience nor morality. Similar laws governing the workings of human society may be said to be the subject of the social sciences--the law of supply and demand in economics, for example. Such scientific law does not play an important part in Baha'i legal thought, with the exception of the concept of 'spiritual law--the natural laws governing the spiritual realm--discussed below.

Human law is the set of rules by which a society governs conduct. Law is found in all human societies, though in simpler societies it may not be formalized and thus will be virtually identical with custom. In more complex societies the question must be asked: what is the source from which law acquires its legitimacy? For our purposes there are three answers: nature, God and the sovereign.

The doctrine of natural law is based on the belief that {p5} human beings have a certain nature or purpose and that human reason is capable of discovering this nature and deducing form it the norms according to which human beings ought to live. Human law is thus a part of physical law: the laws by which people live differ form the laws governing rabbits only in that human beings are capable of disobeying their law. The theory of natural law thus avoided the extreme position first advocated by the Greek Sophists: that justice is what

the laws decree and that to say a law is unjust is absurd. The theory of natural law was especially important to medieval Christian thinkers who believed that the will of God could be discovered both in revelation and in nature. The limitation of the natural law theory was the difficulty of deducing detailed law that could still apply to widely different conditions. Further, with time and broader knowledge of other cultures came the suspicion that 'natural law' was nothing more than custom very deeply ingrained.

In the past most nations believed their laws to have been divine in origin. Jews and Muslims believe that their legal codes were given by their prophets, while Christians trace the legislative authority of their churches to the authority given by Christ to the Apostles. Even Americans, whose fundamental laws were written by politicians met in committee in the full light of history, sometimes attribute the excellence of their constitution to the inspiration of God. Codes of religious law are generally concerned with matters of ritual and worship, as well as with crime, contracts and other matters dealt with by secular law.

Kings, states and peoples have always made law, even in societies where law-making was in theory a prerogative of God alone. Such man-made law is called 'positive law'. Since Christianity consciously broke with the Jewish idea of law as the central fact of religious life, there is relatively little Christian law. Perhaps as a result of this, most law in Christian Europe was secular, evolving either form the custom of the people or the decrees of king or state and specifically distinct {p6} from the laws of the Church. Most modern states have now adopted civil law codes based on one of the main types of European secular law: English common law, European code law or socialist law. Modern legal theory holds that real legality presumes both the legitimacy of the authority making the law and some recognition that official acts can be questioned and judged according to legal norms. Some contemporary legal critics are inclined to see state law as little more than the codification of the power relations existing in society.

Law is not the only factor governing human conduct: moral norms, custom and notions of justice and social good also exercise influence--sometimes greater than that of formal law. In the case of religious law, obedience to the law may itself be purely a moral and voluntary matter. For example, a Muslim is obliged only by his conscience to obey most parts of the sacred law; only the law of the state and matters such as criminal and contract law are actually enforced by the authorities.

Law is not just a self-subsistent set of ideas. It has concrete social expression in the legal system. At its simplest a legal system is undifferentiated: legal norms are not carried out by any specialized institutions or classes. Law may also be subordinate to some other institution in society, as in socialist systems where law is subordinate to the state and governing political party. The Jewish and Islamic legal systems are autonomous in that legal practitioners are independent of the state and other institutions of society. Western legal systems are partially independent: law is made by the

state but lawyers and courts have a procedural independence and act to limit the power of the state.

Another issue in the sociology of law is the extent to which law is shaped by other forces in society--the needs of the ruling classes, for example. Another theory of law argues that the purpose of law is to improve society, whether by making citizens virtuous or by advancing the common good. Still another theory argues that law primarily exists in the norms and practices of society, not in courts and law books. {p7}

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RELIGIOUS LAW IN VARIOUS RELIGIONS

Sacred law is commonly an element of religion, although different religions put different degrees of emphasis on the role of law in religious life. Two extreme attitudes towards law may be distinguished.

First, certain religions place sacred law at the centre of religious life, making the observance of detailed regulations the primary way in which the individual may seek to please God. The two greatest examples of this are Judaism and Islam. In both faiths the revelation of the law to the believers marks the founding of the religion. In religions such as Hinduism attitudes towards law are much the same but the law is based on ancient custom rather than on historical revelation.

Second, a religion may reject the concept of sacred law as leading towards a superficiality and hypocrisy and emphasize instead the quality of character and spiritual life. The prime example of this is Christianity.

Naturally, no religion has an unmixed attitude towards law. Catholics developed an elaborate system of religious law while even the Old Testament itself contains criticisms of Jewish law. Generally, the Babi religion may be seen as a legalistic faith whereas the Baha'i Faith is, on the whole, non-legalist in its founding principles.

Even in the simplest societies well-defined if unwritten norms govern the behaviour of individuals. Much of this law is religious in the sense that infractions are believed to be offences against the gods, who are liable to bring down divine retribution. To the extent that a justification is clearly formulated, the gods are the authority for the community's laws. Many of the great law codes of antiquity are ascribed to divine revelation: Hammurabi received his code from the sun god, while the founders of Rome received their sacred law from the gods who protected the city.

Judaism is the most legalistic of the great religions and the study of the sacred law has been central to Jewish life since {p8} earliest times. The details of the origins of Jewish law are not known, since even the Pentateuch includes laws of several periods, the latest being perhaps the seventh century BC. There are certainly parallels between the laws of the Pentateuch and the older legal codes of the Middle East. The development of Jewish law consisted

of periods of debate followed by syntheses--each more intricate than the last and each embodied in a written legal corpus. These are the Pentateuch itself (c. 6th century BC), the Mishnah (c. 200 AD), the Talmud (c. 55p AD), and the Rabbinic codes (9th to 16th centuries).

Rabbinic Jewish law is very complex. Notable features include an extreme concern with ritual purity, especially of food, and a pattern of 'hedging about the commandment'--making observance of the rule more rigorous so as to avoid any doubt about whether it has been correctly carried out. There are numerous commandments to follow, each of which may comprise a whole complex of practices.

Many modern Jews no longer follow all the traditional rules although a vigorous minority cling tenaciously to the old law.

Christian attitudes towards law began with the reaction against the legalism of Judaism. Jesus Himself is said to have set the pattern by subordinating such laws as the prohibition of work on the Sabbath to higher demands of kindness and mercy. The early church debated heatedly whether Christians were obliged to follow Jewish law. Though Christians in Palestine continued to follow the Law for some time, the issue was soon settled by the presence of large numbers of gentile converts reluctant to face circumcision and the daily burdens of Jewish law. Only a few laws are attributed to Christ Himself: ritual obligations such as baptism and the Lord's supper, and the prohibition of divorce.

Later attitudes towards law varied and remain unsettled to this day. The Catholic and Orthodox churches built up elaborate structures of law--the Canon Law--to govern their own affairs. Nonetheless, law never became central to Catholic or Orthodox life, and secular law always governed most areas of {p9} life, especially for laymen. Liturgy was always far more important than religious law.

Protestants held different attitudes, variously accepting the legitimacy of the state in secular life and using law to enforce morality, challenging secular law on the basis of the higher moral values of Christianity, or drawing on the Old Testament for legal guidance.

Hindu law resembles Jewish and Muslim law in its concern with ritual matters. Apart from some secular legal matters--such as the obligation of the king to suppress banditry--the Hindu law codes are concerned with the ritual obligations of the castes, especially of the Brahmins. They are based on long established tradition, presumed to be of divine origin, rather than on a historical revelation. The legal is not, in fact, a distinct category but rather part of the dharma, the natural and moral order of the universe, which no righteous person would wish to disturb.

Buddhism does not really have a religious law, but law in Buddhist lands has been profoundly influenced by Buddhist ethics as well as by Hindu law. Buddhist religious communities do have codes governing their members, although these are more in the nature of by-laws than law. In Sri Lanka, 'Buddhist law', as

administered by the British, was in fact the customs of the Buddhist groups living there. The situation in other Buddhist countries is similar.

Three other systems of religious law may be mentioned. Mesopotamian law is well known, thanks to the ancient Mesopotamian habit of writing in clay. Several law codes survive, in whole or in part. They have obvious affinities with the Jewish law of the Old Testament.

Zoroastrianism has a religious code drawing on a long Indo-Iranian religious tradition. Its most striking feature is the command to keep the element pure, particularly fire. As a result, an elaborate purity code developed. The influence of Zoroastrian law on the later Jewish and Muslim law is obvious but has not been very well explored by scholars. {p10}

Chinese law is a continuous tradition going back more than four thousand years. It is thoroughly state-centred and is closely linked to the effort to develop public morals. The important influence on it are the cult of the emperor, Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism.

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Islamic Law

Law--shari'ah ('the path', referring to the law as a whole) or fiqh (lit. 'knowledge', referring to legal knowledge and scholarship[1.3])--is central to Muslim religious life. It is of paramount importance to the understanding of Baha'i law and of Baha'i thought and history in general.

..... [1.3. Terms used for specific provisions include adkam and hudud, literally judgements and boundaries respectively.]

During His ministry Muhammad deliberately began to set up an Islamic legal system. Starting with the customary law of the Arabs and Arab paganism and supplemented by Jewish practices, Muhammad gradually imposed distinctive Muslim laws. While still in Mecca, for example, He established the salat, the five-times-daily obligatory prayer. Not long after He arrived in Medina, a Qur'anic instruction changed the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca.

Some pre-Islamic practices were specifically retained, such as the pilgrimage to the Ka'bah in Mecca. Other laws reformed social practices such as inheritance and marriage. Moreover, Muhammad was often asked to give judgement on individual disputes and problems of all kinds as they arose.

After the Prophet's death His companions continued to make rulings based on what they remembered of His practices or their own judgements. Thus in the decades after Muhammad's death Muslim legal practice consisted of the collective habits of the community, as established during the lifetime of the Prophet, supplemented as needed by the rulings of old and prominent Muslims. In time certain learned Muslims became recognized authorities on law. The circles that grew up around these men became loose schools of law in the second and third Muslim centuries. {p11}

A feature of these legal schools was their unofficial character. The Umayyad dynasty (661-750) was openly irreligious and made little effort to govern according to Islamic law. Succeeding dynasties paid lip-service to the authority of the sacred law but actually rules according to their own lights. As a result, Islamic law remained a largely private enterprise. There were Islamic courts but these only controlled areas of the law in which the state was not vitally interested, such as family and contract law. Thus Islamic law never had the close association with government that characterized law in Europe and China.

Four Sunni legal schools have survived--Hanbali, Shafi'i, Hanafi and Maliki--in addition to the legal traditions of the various minority sects. Their teachings rarely differ other than in the minutest aspects of ritual. A Sunni Muslim is expected to follow one of the four schools, each of which tends to be predominant in certain areas of the Islamic world. In a characteristically Islamic compromise, all four schools are recognized as having equal validity.

Legal scholarship is the most prestigious aspect of Islamic thought and has remained so from the seventh century AD up to the present. The clergy in Islam are the scholars of religious law, just as in Judaism, and have no sacramental authority. Generally, Muslims throughout history have been quite tolerant of differences about doctrine, demanding only that the provisions of the law be carried out faithfully. Even in the present century the replacement of Islamic law by civil law codes is bitterly resented by pious Muslims. Efforts to modernize Islamic law have not been successful because of the prestige of the medieval formulations.

Observance of Islamic law has always been erratic. A Muslim who fails to observe it remains a Muslim and even non-observant Muslims rarely deny the validity and importance of the law.

Traditionally, Islamic jurisprudence (usulu'l-fiqh, 'the principles of law') recognized four bases of law. The first, the {p12} Qur'an, is the most authoritative but has relatively little legal importance in practice because it does not contain much systematic law.

The most important source of law is the practice of the early community, the sunnah or 'way'. This is crystallized in the hadith literature--collections of reports of the sayings and actions of Muhammad and His companions. There are thousands of such reports, which generations of Muslims carefully collected and sifted for reliability.

The third basis of law is the consensus of the community, particularly of the legal scholars. In theory, if there was universal agreement about an issue among the scholars of one generation, the issue was settled for all time.

The final basis--about which there has been much controversy--is analogy, settling issues on the basis of principles deducted form comparable cases.

Islamic law is traditionally divided into two areas: ritual and transactions. The first is concerned with matters such as prayer and fasting; the second with

social matters such as contracts, commercial law and criminal law. Islamic law recognizes five classes of actions: obligatory, desirable, permissible, undesirable and prohibited. Islamic jurists are in general agreement about ritual matters but often disagree about social issues, especially in modern times.

The two most important officials in settling cases are the qadi and the mufti. A qadi is an Islamic judge, usually appointed by the state. A mufti is an adviser on matters of law. The participants in the case will ask muftis for rulings, called fatvas. These are not binding, however, and may not be accepted by the judge or other jurists. Any sufficiently learned authority on Islamic law can issue fatvas. These occasionally have political significance: direct challenges by the clergy to the state or to other clergy often take the form of fatvas.

In classical Islamic law, non-Muslims are normally governed by their own courts and are subject to Islamic law only in their relations with Muslims or the state. {p13}

The Shi'i legal tradition is historically distinct, but in fact Shi'i law differs only slightly from the law of other Muslim groups. Shi'is accept the authority of traditions attributed to the Imams and reject traditions transmitted by non-Shi'is.

While Sunis deny that a modern jurist can make individual judgements on matters for which there is no clear evidence--a practice called ijtihad, 'individual effort'--Shi'is believe this is permissible for jurists with sufficient learning. Such scholars are called mujtahids and have, at least in theory, a degree of discretion that their Sunni counterparts lack. Everyone else is obliged to follow the example of a mujtahid in legal matters, a process called taqlid, 'imitation'. Since the Shi'i legal scholars have also claimed the right to represent the Hidden Imam in certain respects, they enjoy very great prestige among the Shi'is. A minority school of Shi'i law, the Akhbari, denies the legitimacy of ijtihad and of many of the prerogatives claimed by modern Shi'i clergy.

Novel features of Shi'i law include certain additions to the obligatory prayer, a religious tax called the khums paid to the clergy, the practice of visiting the tombs of the Imams, temporary marriage, the dissimulation of religious beliefs in time of danger, and certain features of divorce and inheritance.

Shi'i law is sometimes referred to as 'the Ja'fari school' after the Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, who played the largest role in establishing Shi'i law. From time to time the proposal is made to reunite Islam by recognizing Shi'i law as a fifth Sunni legal school.

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Babi Law

The Bab and His followers, like the Muslims themselves, saw Islamic law as the

essential core of Islam and understood that changes to that law represented a revolutionary challenge to Islam itself. Like many Muslim reformers of the last two centuries, the Bab harshly criticized the state of Islamic law in His {p14} time. His criticism had three aspects. First, the purpose of the sacred law is to enable the believers to recognize the new Prophet; the failure of the Muslims, especially the Shi'i clergy, to accept Him was an indication of their failure to understand the underlying purpose of the law. Second, the clergy had devoted excessive attention to minor matters of ritual and used legal technicalities to excuse immoral practices. Third, despite their constant attention to the law, the clergy displayed appalling morals, being greedy, ambitious and corrupt. These criticisms of Islamic law and the clergy who were its chief exponents are a conspicuous feature of Babi and Baha'i thought and literature.

The Bab did not at first make an open claim of independent prophethood. Thus His early works did not abrogate Islamic law but instead prescribed various supererogatory observances--additional prayers, the prohibition of smoking and the like. Certain rules--notably an addition to the call to prayer--were decidedly heretical in Muslim eyes. Nevertheless, at first the Babis obeyed Islamic law, with the addition of the distinctive Babi practices. In this they resembled the Shaykhis, who had also been distinguished for their zeal in the practice of the law and certain practices of their own. Many of the Bab's early works such as the Qayyumu'l-Asma', the Sahifatu'l-Haramayn and others contain legal material, mostly relating to ritual. The Khasa'il-i-Sab'ih contains a well-known list of seven Babi observances: to read a particular Tablet of visitation for all the Imams on certain occasions, to perform the prayer at the tomb of the Imam Husayn in a specified way, to add a reference to the Bab to the prayer call, to wear a Babi talisman around one's neck, to wear a Babi ring, to drink tea delicately and not to smoke.

By 1848 the Bab had openly claimed the station of independent prophethood, one sign of which was the abrogation of Islamic law. During His stay in Maku in 1847-8, He had written the Arabic and Persian Bayans, which contained a distinctive Babi legal system superseding that of Islam and of His {p15} own early works. Though there are many relationships to Islamic law, the law of the Bayan is a separate and independent system of religious law, differing from its precursor in detail and spirit.

The Bayan in incomplete and unsystematic, and so is the legal system it contains. Nonetheless, the general patterns are clear. The law of the Bayan is highly ritualized and symbolic. A Babi following Babi law would live a religious life rather like that of an orthodox Jew, with a daily routine full of small rituals, most of which were intended to remind him of the coming of the next prophet--Him Whom God shall make manifest. In many ways the law of the Bayan is intended to be less burdensome than Islamic law: the rituals, while numerous, are not particularly difficult. The position of women is improved. Commerce is encouraged by allowing the taking of interest on money. Capital punishment is abolished. A great deal of emphasis is laid on refinement and

courtesy towards others. Certain laws are harsh, such as the expulsion of non-believers from central Iran (though this is the Babi counterpart to the Muslim prohibition of non-Muslims in Mecca and Medina.) Other laws are intended to make a sharp break with the past, such as the orders to destroy the shrines and books of past religions.

The most obvious feature of the law of the Bayan is the central place occupied by Him Whom God shall make manifest. The Bayan could be read not as a code of law but as an ecstatic rhapsody to this apocalyptic figure. Thus, fro example, the beating of children is prohibited lest the believer inadvertently strike Him Whom God shall make manifest. The believer is not to travel lest the news of His appearance arrive while he is away. There are dozens of such laws in the Bayan explained completely or partly by reference to Him. The whole legal system of the Bayan thus takes on a millenarian character.

How far the various injunctions found in the early books of the Bab were put into practice is open to question, although it {p16} was widely known that the Babis refused to smoke. Histories contain occasional reference to early Babi legal and ritual practice[1.4] but there could hardly have been any systematic implementation of the Bab's early laws. The Persian Bayan mentions that the Babis of that time followed the law of the Qur'an but were not believers in it.[1.5]

..... [1.4. I'tidadu's-Saltanih, Fitniy-i-Bab, p. 61, mentions that 'Allah Akbar' was used as a Babi greeting in Zanjan. Mirza Husayn Zanjani, Tarikh-i-Vaqayi'-i-Zanjan, mentions a number of practices, notably the prohibition of tobacco and the institution of the Friday prayer under Hujjat's leadership, along with a general policy of following the ordinances and prohibitions of the Bab.

..... [1.5. The Bab, Persian Bayan, 4:16.]

If the Babis knew the early laws of the Bab only imperfectly, they knew scarcely anything of the Bayan. Only a few copies were in circulation by 1849-50. There is evidence that one of the prayers commanded in the Bayan was used in Zanjan during the fighting in 1850 [1.6] but there is little evidence of detailed knowledge of the laws of the Bayan. It was difficult to know exactly what the Babi law was: no one knew, for example, how the Babi obligatory prayer was to be said. In any case, by this time it would have been extremely dangerous to do anything that might identify one as a Babi.

..... [1.6. See Nabil, Dawn-Breakers, pp. 552-3; cf. Tarikh-i-Jadid, pp. 144-6, 157; Mirza Husayn Zanjani, Tarikh-i-Vaqayi'-i-Zanjan. Perhaps these chants are to be identified with 'the abuse of the Twelver 'ulama" shouted from the barricades at night that the court historian Sipihr mentions: Nasikhu'l-Tavarikh, 3:93.]

The Bayan was the religious law of both the early Babis and the Azalis. While a small community of Azali Babis still exists, it is not known to what extent they ever practised the Bab's laws.

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Baha'i Law

The original source of Baha'i law was the Bayan; the early writings of Baha'u'llah contain many exhortations to obey the Bayan. Until the declaration of His mission in 1863 Baha'u'llah did not claim the authority to change the laws of the Bab. The earliest legal instructions of Baha'u'llah were contained in a Persian work written in Edirne (1863-8). This was not released to the Baha'is for fear that it would cause difficulty with Muslims. It is probably now lost.

Baha'u'llah's chief work on laws is the Kitab-i-Aqdas, also known, for this reason, as 'the Book of Laws'. Although there is some evidence to suggest that it was begun a few years earlier,[1.7] it was completed by the middle of 1873. Baha'u'llah {p17} released it at that time but cautioned against lack of wisdom in putting its laws into effect. Many of Baha'u'llah's Tablets written after the Kitab-i-Aqdas contain information on Baha'i law, often in answer to questions. The most important such text is Questions and Answers, containing the answers to questions about the application of Baha'i law put to Him by the learned Baha'i mujtahid Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin.

..... [1.7. See Kamran Ekbal, 'The Kitab-i-Aqdas: Redating its Beginning', unpublished paper. Ekbal suggests that the Kitab-i-Aqdas may have been started as early as 1868.]

Baha'u'llah made two provisions for legislative authority after His death. His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, was made the authoritative interpreter of His writings and the administrative leader of the Baha'i community. He also provided for the eventual election of the Universal House of Justice, an elected body that was to have authority to legislate in matters not specifically settled in Baha'u'llah's own writings.

'Abdu'l-Baha, though careful not to contradict Baha'u'llah's explicit law, exercised a broad authority in their application and in the administration of the affairs of the community. His interpretations of Baha'i law are considered to be authoritative permanently. Many of His rulings on administrative matters--such as Baha'i elections and review of Baha'i literature--are still in effect, and many may well be a permanent part of the Baha'i administrative and legal system. 'Abdu'l-Baha is also considered the perfect exemplar of the Baha'i life, and thus His conduct has legal implications.

In His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Baha appointed His grandson Shoghi Effendi as the first Guardian of the Baha'i Faith and as such the authorized interpreter of the Baha'i writings and the president of the Universal House of Justice. In the absence of the House of Justice he also served as the administrative head of the Faith. Shoghi Effendi defined his own authority as being more narrow than that of 'Abdu'l-Baha. He would answer questions about the meaning of Baha'i law but he often stated that particular issues would have to be resolved by the Universal House of Justice. His primary contribution to the building of

Baha'i law--as opposed to explaining it--was in the establishment of the Baha'i administrative {p18} system. He strongly discouraged excessive attention to matters such as ritual law.

During the ministries of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi Baha'i law began to be practiced in the Baha'i community. In Iran and other Muslim countries, Baha'is followed most of the laws relating to worship and personal status. Muslim prayers and laws of fasting, marriage and burial were replaced by corresponding Baha'i practices, a fact that Shoghi Effendi noted with pride. Most of these laws were also followed by Baha'is in communities elsewhere, although many of the details were not known. Certain laws not easily applied or acceptable in the West were not promulgated, notably the marriage dowry and the Huququ'llah, a religious tax which became applicable to all Baha'is only in 1992. A notable development occurred after an Egyptian court declared Baha'is to be non-Muslims. The Egyptian Baha'is, with Shoghi Effendi's approval, prepared a short codification of Baha'i law to accompany their application to the government for status as a recognized minority religion.[1.8]

..... [1.8. See Baha'i World, vol. 6, pp. 363-79, and vol. 8, pp. 493-9.]

After the death of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 there was a gap of six years in which there was no absolute Baha'i authority in matters of law. With the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963, new Baha'i law became possible for the first time since the death of Baha'u'llah in 1892. However, the House of Justice has been reluctant to legislate, except on matters of current administration, preferring, perhaps, to delay the development of a Baha'i jurisprudence and legal system to a more opportune time. The main contributions of the Universal House of Justice to Baha'i law so far have been in making existing legal material available through the publication of A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas in 1973, the preparation of numerous compilations on particular aspects of Baha'i law, the circulation of letters discussing particular topics and the publication of an annotated translation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas in 1992.

The following is a brief summary of the content of current {p19} Baha'i law. Detailed discussions of specific subjects such as prayer and marriage will be found in the following chapters.

Baha'i law may fairly be said to be a modification of Babi law. The Bab had said in the Bayan that His laws were a gift to Him Whom God shall make manifest, for Him to accept, reject or modify as He chose.[1.9] In many cases, as Baha'u'llah Himself writes, the laws of the Kitab-i-Aqdas are derived with modifications from the Bayan--for example, the modification of the Bab's system for the division of inheritances. Baha'u'llah was anxious that His laws should not be onerous. Thus, Baha'i laws on a given subject are almost always less burdensome than the corresponding Babi and Muslim laws.

..... [1.9. The Bab, Persian Bayan 2:19.]

By comparison with Babi or Islamic law, there are relatively few Baha'i laws.

Much of the content of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, which is not a large book in any case, consists of general addresses and exhortations, and the abrogation of many of the laws found in Islam or the Bayan. There is also a pronounced tendency to promulgate general principles--courtesy and cleanliness, for example--rather than elaborate rules covering every possible circumstance.

Most of the additions to Baha'i law made since the time of Baha'u'llah consist of rulings on Baha'i administration. These are not usually considered to be Baha'i law, although they serve the same purpose.

Baha'u'llah writes in a number of places that the fundamental religious obligations of man are to accept the Manifestation of God and to obey His laws strictly.[1.10] Similarly, the Baha'i writings often refer to the upholding of the Laws of God as one of the duties of the believer.[1.11]

..... [1.10. See, for example, Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 1.]

..... [1.11. See, for example, Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 289.]

The major areas of Baha'i law relating to religious worship and ritual are the laws of obligatory prayer, fasting and burial. The regulations for these are spelled out in some detail. Other ritual obligation include pilgrimage and the observance of feasts and holy days.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas regulates marriage and gives quite detailed rules for divorce. There is also an elaborate system for {p20} the division of estates of those who die intestate, though this is made largely moot by the requirement to write a will.

The Aqdas contains passages abrogating many Islamic and Babi laws, everything from Islamic sumptuary and purity laws to the Babi commandment to destroy non-Babi books. There are also criticisms of various offensive practices, such as confession, unpleasant table manners and the use of unsanitary public baths.

The Aqdas contains other laws as well: criminal laws providing punishment for murder, arson, assault and adultery; laws requiring the education of children, the practice of a trade, and obedience to government; the duties and revenues of the House of Justice; the prohibition of alcohol, intoxicating drugs, cruelty to animals, carrying arms unnecessarily and homosexuality; and so on. In contrast to Islamic law, the testimony of a non-believer carries equal weight to that of a believer.

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Baha'i Jurisprudence

There is as yet not Baha'i science of legal inference comparable, for example, to the Islamic science of the principles of law (usulu'l-fiqh), mainly because Baha'is have been discouraged from excessive attention to legal matters. However, the bases of a Baha'i jurisprudence are found in the Baha'i writings. Founded on these principles, an embryonic jurisprudence implicitly guides contemporary application of Baha'i law.

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The revealed text

The chief source of Baha'i law is the corpus of Baha'u'llah's writings. Baha'u'llah Himself specified that the sacred text--i.e. His own writings--is the ultimate authority and cannot be overruled until the coming of the next prophet after a thousand or more years. Thus laws ordained by Baha'u'llah are {p21} valid and unchangeable throughout His dispensation. Contrary to Islamic practice, His unwritten words and His actions are not authoritative.

One limitation on this is wisdom (hikmat), a term used technically by Baha'u'llah to mean the obligation not to act in such a way as to invite religious persecution. Baha'u'llah Himself instructed that His laws were not to be put into practice unless it was safe to do so.[1.12] 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi also applied this principle to new Baha'is and new Baha'i communities: laws should not be imposed if they will be a test to new believers.[1.13] The Shi'i practice of religious dissimulation and denial of faith (taqiyah) is however forbidden.

..... [1.12. See, for example, Synopsis and Codification, pp. 4-5.]

..... [1.13. 'The process of educating people of different customs and backgrounds must be done with the greatest patience and understanding, and rules and regulations not imposed upon them, except where a rock-bottom essential is in question.' From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa, 9 July 1957, Lights, p. 78, no. 275.]

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The interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi

The interpretations of Baha'i law given in writing by 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi are also permanently binding. The interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Baha, in particular, sometimes are very close to being legislative in themselves--for example, His prohibition of bigamy, which the Kitab-i-Aqdas permits--but He was careful to specify that He had no authority to change matters that were part of the sacred text.[1.14] The interpretations of Shoghi Effendi have a great practical importance in contemporary Baha'i law since he had occasion to rule on many matters that remain relevant.

..... [1.14. Amr va-Khalq, 4:173-9.]

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The legislation of the Universal House of Justice

In addition to its administrative authority, the Universal House of Justice has the authority to make new Baha'i law and to change the laws that it itself has made, limited only by Baha'u'llah's writings and the interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. To date it has rarely done so. {p22}

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Other sources of law

Though they are not authoritative and act indirectly, there are several other sources that tend to shape Baha'i law. These are:

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ISLAMIC LAW: The Kitab-i-Aqdas and other Baha'i legal texts cannot be understood apart from the background of Islamic law. In exceptional cases, such as tithing, Baha'i law is explicitly based on Islamic law.

BABI LAW: Knowledge of the law of the Bayan is also necessary for understanding Baha'i law. Shoghi Effendi indicated that a main purpose of Babi law was to undermine Shi'i orthodoxy and that it was never intended to be enforced.[1.15]

..... [1.15. Shoghi Effendi, Dwn of a New Day, p. 76.]

THE IRANIAN BAHA'I SCHOLARLY TRADITION: It would be almost impossible to understand the legal texts of Baha'u'llah without the commentaries, compilations and teaching of Baha'i scholars such as Israq-Khavari and Fadil-i-Mazandarani.

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Precedent, it should be noted, is not binding as a source of Baha'i law nor are abstract human rights.

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Contemporary Baha'i legal inference

Authoritative interpretation of the sacred text being outside its scope, the Universal House of Justice has, thus far, generally dealt with legal questions by preparing compilations on specific topics, letting the texts speak for themselves rather than trying to legislate comprehensive codes. Because of the strong emphasis placed on the authority of the sacred text and because of the very large body of authoritative texts available from Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the House of Justice, Baha'is at every level usually settle legal questions by finding specific texts to demonstrate their point {p23} rather than by trying to deduce general legal principles.

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Law and Baha'i principles

One of the most obvious distinctions between Baha'i and Islamic law is that Baha'i law does not try to cover all possible questions. Instead, Baha'u'llah laid more emphasis on general principles such as unity, courtesy, justice and the like. Shoghi Effendi several times referred to laws and principles as the warp and woof of Baha'u'llah's world order.[1.16] More generally, Baha'u'llah tended to emphasize general moral principles rather than specific rules of conduct.

..... [1.16. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 223.]

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Law and administration

Baha'i administrative policy includes much that is in essence law and so in some ways it exercises more influence over Baha'i individual and community life than does Baha'i law in the narrow sense. In effect, national and local spiritual assemblies legislate for their own jurisdictions, though within limits set by the House of Justice and the Baha'i writings.

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Application of Baha'i Law

Baha'i laws are divided into those that are spiritual obligations, such as prayer and fasting, and those that can be enforced by Baha'i administrative institutions, notably laws governing marriage and divorce and the use of alcohol and drugs.

Baha'i law has only slowly been put into effect, and the extent to which it is binding varies from country to country. Virtually all Baha'i law is binding on Baha'is of Middle Eastern origin, apart from categories such as criminal law that presume a Baha'i government. In more developed Baha'i {p24} communities elsewhere most Baha'i law applies, with the main exceptions of the dowry and the period of engagement prior to marriage. Prior to the publication of A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas some details of prayer and fasting had not been known in the West and thus were not practised. Violations of laws governing marriage, conduct and intoxicants are enforced, in extreme cases, by the penalty of removal of administrative rights, in whole or in part. In young Baha'i communities the same laws apply but are not necessarily enforced by sanctions.

The practice of Baha'i law also plays a part in the search for recognition of the Baha'i Faith as an independent religion through the attempt to obtain official sanction for Baha'i law on the same basis as other religious communities, for example through the legal recognition of the Baha'i marriage ceremony.

At present, the Baha'i Faith does not have a developed system for the administration of law. Baha'u'llah's abolition of the clergy puts the responsibility for enforcing Baha'i laws on administrative institutions. Under present conditions there is no separation of the judicial from the executive and legislative functions. There are no separate courts, legal officers or other specialists, although some national spiritual assemblies employ lawyers and others to advise them and to take responsibility for handling legal and administrative problems referred by local communities.

Where disputes between Baha'is involving contracts, property and the like cannot be settled by reference to the appropriate Baha'i institution, they are generally decided by arbitration according to civil law.

Shoghi Effendi set goals of establishing independent, officially recognized Baha'i courts in Palestine and six leading cities of the Islamic world,[1.17] with the International Baha'i Council to evolve into an international Baha'i court and eventually into the Universal House of Justice.[1.18] These were to govern matters of personal status such as marriage and inheritance, areas which Islamic law left to the jurisdiction of the {p25} religious courts of each minority group. It is not clear whether these courts were intended as the basis for a system of Baha'i courts separate from local and national spiritual assemblies or simply as a way of obtaining official recognition of the Baha'i Faith under Islamic law, comparable to incorporation of spiritual assemblies under civil law.

..... [1.17. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, Dawn of a New Day, pp. 169, 212.]

..... [1.18. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Baha'i World, pp. 7-8, 42, 149, 152; and Shoghi Effendi, Citadel, pp. 94-5.]

A number of issues of Baha'i jurisprudence are as yet unresolved. No doubt these will be dealt with as the scope of the administration of Baha'i law increases.

The permanency of the decisions of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi regarding Baha'i administrative practices needs to be determined. In the absence of the Universal House of Justice, both were required to act as administrative leaders of the Baha'i Faith as well as interpreters of its sacred writings. The extent to which these decisions will remain in force and how they are to be distinguished from authoritative interpretations will have to be considered.

It is not clear at what points, and to what extent, Baha'i administrative institutions can be engaged with domestic and international law and which takes precedence for a Baha'i, where there is conflict between them. That Baha'is must obey the laws of their countries is axiomatic but it is unclear whether a Baha'i assembly is bound by a contract or other agreement made with an individual Baha'i should that assembly believe that carrying out the agreement is not in the best interests of the Faith. More generally, it is not clear what actions open a Baha'i institution to legal challenge from within the Baha'i legal system and what procedural safeguards an individual is entitled to in dealing with a Baha'i institution.

Rules of evidence, procedure and the like will, no doubt, have eventually to be developed; the Universal House of Justice has stated that assemblies are obliged to provide due process.

It may be that a class of Baha'i lawyers and judges will emerge. Should this occur, their education, role and status will have to be determined. {p26}

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Law and the Future Baha'i World Order

In Shoghi Effendi's portrait of the future Baha'i world order, law plays a

major role.[1.19] It is not clear whether the international law referred to is identical with Baha'i law or a further development of secular international law. In any case, law is to be in accordance with Baha'i laws and principles and is to be the basis of international relations.

..... [1.19. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, World Order, pp. 41, 203-4.]

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Non-Baha'i Law and the Baha'i Faith

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Religious law

Criticism of the corruption of religious law, especially of Islamic law, is a major theme in the Baha'i writings.[1.20] Baha'i thought holds that religious systems, including their laws, eventually become obsolete and corrupt. Thus Shoghi Effendi viewed the replacement of Islamic law with modern civil codes in Turkey and Iran as evidence of the regeneration of these nations.[1.21] It should be stressed, however, that Baha'is accept the validity of other systems of religious law. Baha'u'llah, for example, urged the Sultan of Turkey to 'enforce the law of god',[1.22] meaning Islamic law.

..... [1.20. See, for example, Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 16.]

..... [1.21. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 170; and Shoghi Effendi, Promised Day is Come, pp. 93-4.]

..... [1.22. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 234.]

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Civil law

Baha'i legal and political thought is theocratic, so that the goal of the Baha'i Faith is ultimately to build a state based on Baha'i law. However, secular law is not considered evil. The Baha'i writings praise the efficient government, including the legal order, of the European states.[1.23] Baha'is may have recourse to the civil legal systems of their countries, though disputes between Baha'is are to be settled by Baha'i institutions.

..... [1.23. See, for example, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 10.] {p27}

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Obedience to non-Baha'i law

According to the Kitab-i-Aqdas itself, Baha'is are obliged to obey the laws of their respective governments.[1.24] 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi specified that this applies even where such laws contradict Baha'i laws, unless obedience to them is tantamount to recantation.[1.25] Thus, for example, Baha'is accept military conscription.

..... [1.24. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, paras. 64, 95.]

..... [1.25. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration, p. 162; Shoghi Effendi, Directives, pp. 2-3; Shoghi Effendi, Unfolding Destiny, p. 346.]

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Legal disabilities and persecution

In many cases opposition to the Baha'i Faith has taken the form of the imposition of various legal disabilities or the outright removal of the protection of law. Baha'i policy has long been to demand for Baha'is and Baha'i institutions the same rights enjoyed by the members and institutions of other religions in each country.

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Baha'i Teachings of the Philosophy of Law

The Baha'i writings, in addition to specific legislation, have much to say on the general concept of law and its purposes and bases.

For Baha'is, the will of God is the only independent, legitimate source of law. Baha'u'llah stresses in innumerable places that there are no restrictions on God's will and that He is free to impose whatever laws He wishes.[1.26] This teaching is in large part addressed to Muslims, many of whom deny that there can be a Prophet after Muhammad or that it is possible for Islamic law to be modified.

..... [1.26. See, for example, Baha'u'llah, Tablets, p. 109.]

The obligation to obey law is, for Baha'is, based on the concept of the Covenant:

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..... A Covenant in the religious sense is a binding agreement {p28} between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behaviour in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way.[1.27]

..... [1.27. The Universal House of Justice, cited in Compilation, vol. 1, p. 111.]

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Thus, Baha'i legal thought has a certain resemblance to social contract theories.

The Baha'i Faith does not accept as such the philosophical doctrine of natural

law, which is based on the belief that human beings have a certain nature or purpose and that human reason is capable of discovering this nature and deducing from it the norms according to which human beings ought to live. However, Baha'u'llah explains that the purpose of divine law is human happiness and that divine law represents the best way to attain this under the conditions of the time. Sacred law is thus not simply an arbitrary exercise of God's will. Baha'u'llah states: 'Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures.[1.28]

..... [1.28. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 3; Gleanings p. 332.]

Baha'is believe that certain laws, such as prayer and marriage, are eternal but that the details of their application are changed by succeeding Prophets in accordance with the needs of the time. The common formulation of this principle is that each Prophet brings spiritual and social teachings. The former are eternal. A new Prophet may bring deeper knowledge of them but will not change the teachings of past Prophets. The social laws of religion change in accordance with the practical needs of the age.

The term 'spiritual law' in modern Baha'i thought bridges the two concepts of law as natural order and law as social norm. In this sense a spiritual law is a fact of spiritual life embodied in a particular religious law. Thus to neglect prayer breaks a divine commandment and in the natural order of spiritual life leads to adverse spiritual consequences. Similarly, failure to live according the Baha'i law leads to unspirituality {p29} and unhappiness just as failure to observe the principles of healthy living leads inevitably to sickness.

Baha'i law is not a proper subject for criticism or disobedience in the name of a higher law. Law is to be obeyed for love of God: 'Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty.'[1.29]

..... [1.29. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 4.]

Baha'u'llah does not deny the legitimacy of human law and accepts the legitimacy of human government. However, Baha'u'llah's writings on law, justice and government make clear that law from whatever source must take account of the conditions of the time, further human happiness and be administered with justice.

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Symbolism of Law

In some instances the concept of law is used symbolically in the Baha'i writings. Its most important usage is as a symbol for a religion. For example, Baha'u'llah sometimes alludes to His own law and religion as the 'Most Great Law'.[1.30] In His interpretations of prophecy, the sun, moon and stars which fall or are darkened at the last judgement are described by Baha'u'llah as the laws and teachings of the previous dispensation.[1.31] One of 'Abdu'l-Baha's titles is 'the Limb of the Law of God'.[1.32]

..... [1.30. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 211.]

..... [1.31. See, for example, Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 41.]

..... [1.32. Baha'u'llah, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, World Order, p. 135.]
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RITES OF LIFE AND DEATH

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Prayer and Worship

For Baha'u'llah, prayer and fasting are the fundamental religious observances. Baha'is must individually perform obligatory prayers daily[2.1] and are encouraged to offer other prayers regularly, as well as to recite or read from the Baha'i scripture twice daily.[2.2] In the main, Baha'is use the prayers of Baha'u'llah, the Bab and 'Abdu'l-Baha; they are free to make up their own prayers if they wish but generally do so only for private use. The prayers of Baha'u'llah, the Bab and 'Abdu'l-Baha are addressed to God but Baha'is may also direct their prayers to Baha'u'llah or other Prophets.[2.3]

..... [2.1. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 12, questions 63 and 65.]

..... [2.2. ibid. para. 149.]

..... [2.3. See Lights, nos. 1486, 1488-91.]

Baha'i collective worship usually consists of individuals successively reading, singing or chanting prayers and selections from scripture while the others present listen silently. Music is sometimes used as a background or between readings. The main occasions for Baha'i collective worship are dawn prayers (mashriqu'l-adhkar), nineteen day feasts and observances of holy days, although Baha'is may gather at any time to pray.[*]

..... [* The institute process, spoken of in the Ridvan 153 letter of the Universal House of Justice, started as an assist to believers; however, it was soon realized that the core activities of the institute process--study circles, devotional meetings and children's classes--were attracting many seekers. These three core activities have grown throughout the world, all of which are open to the public, and now devotional meetings are held regularly throughout the world. People of all faiths and religious persuasions are welcomed.]

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Prayer as a religious phenomenon

It is difficult to define prayer precisely because it overflows into so many other areas of religious life. To define it narrowly as reverent speech addressed to God excludes both the wordless prayer of the mystic and such practices as the pious recitation {p31} of scripture. It also omits the

gestures, postures and other ritual elements that are often an intimate part of prayer. On the other hand, some speech addressed to God or other supernatural beings is not prayer: magic spells, for example. Moreover, although prayer in some form is probably found in every religious tradition, its meaning varies greatly depending on the beliefs, traditions and history of the group. Thus prayer must always be understood in its full religious, ritual and social contexts. In this chapter I will discuss prayer in a broad sense, including other related observances.

It is a nearly universal belief that spiritual powers may be influenced by the pleas of human beings. In the most primitive conceptions, prayer is close to magic. Prayer, however, seeks to persuade and magic to compel, so in sophisticated religions the two are distinguished.

Most prayers in every tradition consist of words, spoken aloud or silently. The language is usually formulaic and dignified and is often archaic, sometimes in a dead or sacred language or dialect. The prayer may be read, recited, sung or chanted. The worshipper may be required to bring himself to some state of ritual purity before praying. A special place may e set aside for prayer. Prayer is almost always offered in some ritual context. At its simplest, the worshipper arranges himself in some reverent posture--sitting with head bowed, kneeling or standing with arms outstretched, for example. At its most elaborate, the prayer may be set in a liturgical cycle taking a year or years to complete and requiring priests and elaborate temple facilities. Often the ritual setting of prayer is modelled on the etiquette of the royal court.

Prayers are offered for various reasons:

--- petition: the request for some material boon: for 'our daily bread', triumph over an enemy, or deliverance from some difficulty. The prayer of complaint is perhaps a variant of this. Such prayers often ask for spiritual as well as moral benefits. {p32}

--- thanksgiving: an expression of gratitude for some blessing.

--- intercession: asking something on behalf of another person, living or dead.

--- atonement: asking forgiveness for sin.

--- praise: glorifying God in love, awe or fear.

--- dedication: sanctifying some action or endeavour, such as the start of a journey or construction of a building.

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The answers to the questions of whether, or what extent and under what conditions prayer is useful depend on the doctrines of the particular religious tradition. The monotheistic religions of Judeo-Christian tradition generally accept that sincere prayer will be answered in some way, possibly through the granting of what is asked and certainly through an increase of spiritual merit and grace. God's will, however, is not bound by the prayer. God's grace may be

expressed in a way other than the worshipper expects.

Another view is found in certain forms of Buddhism that do not have a concept of God as is found in the theistic religions. Here prayer is efficacious and legitimate only to the extent that it strengthens the individual's resolve to follow Buddhist teaching. For Jains, who believe that misfortune is the punishment of sin in an earlier lifetime, to pray for a material benefit is sinful.

Certain objections have been made to the whole notion of prayer on both theological and scientific grounds. First, we may suppose that God knows us and our needs better than we {p33} do ourselves. What then is the point of asking specific things from Him? Modern scientific thought has given rise to another set of objections. Would not an answered prayer involve a violation of universal natural law? Moreover, given the scale of the universe, how plausible is it that God has any interest in the requests of individual human beings? Finally, what empirical evidence is there that prayers are answered?

The theistic answer to these objections has generally been that both our prayers and their answers are part of the structure of the universe as God has conceived it form its beginning.

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Prayer in specific traditions

If prayer in 'primitive' religions differs in any fundamental way from prayer in 'higher' religions, it is in the relative emphasis on practical boons and in the lack of a sharp distinction between magic and prayer. Primitive prayer is directed towards those supernatural powers with whom some sort of personal relationship can exist. There is relatively less emphasis on prayer for spiritual qualities. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that there is no sharp distinction between 'primitive' prayer and prayer in the higher religions.

Prayer reached a very high level in the great pagan religions of the ancient Near East and Mediterranean. Many prayers to various gods survive, some of them of great artistic and spiritual quality. These often have close literary and historical relationships to the prayers of early Judaism and Christianity.

The Hebrew Bible is full of prayers, reflecting the Israelite conception of God as ever-present. The historical books of the Hebrew Bible place prayers in the mouths of most major characters. The most influential prayers of the Bible are the Psalms--hymns of praise, thanksgiving and supplication evidently written for use in the services of the Jerusalem temple. {p34} To this day these beautiful songs to an omnipresent personal God occupy a central place in both Jewish and Christian worship.

Later Jewish prayer was shaped by the needs of the synagogue and the home. With the dispersal of the Jewish people and the destruction of the Temple, the synagogue became the chief focus of Jewish community life in Roman times. Originally intended as a place for teaching the Torah, the synagogue evolved

into a place of worship, where, however, the Torah remained central to worship and instruction. Prayers were offered three times a day, with a fourth prayer added on Sabbaths and holidays.

The home was the second focus of prayer, for prayer was part of many of the rituals needed to keep the household in conformity with Jewish law. In addition, several important liturgical rites were to be conducted at home, notably liturgies for Passover and the Sabbath.

Traditionally, most Jewish prayer is said in Hebrew. Adult males usually take the chief responsibility for prayer. Except for some modern groups, man wear special prayer shawls while praying. The tendency of prayer to become mechanical was apparent to the Jewish doctors, who stressed the importance of heart-felt devotion in prayer.

Christian prayer was shaped by three contrary influences. The first was Jewish practice: the synagogue service, the Jewish liturgical calendar and the Hebrew Bible, especially the Psalms. Christian worship is to this day an obvious variant of Jewish worship. The second influence was Jesus' emphasis on the spirit over the letter of the law. Thus the most important Christian prayer is the very simple Lord's Prayer. The overwhelming tendency in Christianity to consider formal prayer valueless unless it engages the heart. Christian liturgical reforms, especially in Protestantism, have stressed a return to fervent and spontaneous prayer. The third influence on Christian prayer was the notion of sacrament, especially the Lord's Supper Eucharist. Most Christian opinion through {p35} the ages has held that such rites as baptism, Eucharist, marriage and penance must be conducted by priests whose authority derives from the disciples of Christ and that their efficacy is real rather than symbolic. Around these central rites Christians built an elaborate liturgy, in which the life and death of Christ are commemorated in an annual cycle. Various Christian groups view this liturgical tradition differently--as the most sublime expression of Christian piety or as a stultifying deposit of man-made ritual--but few Christian groups entirely escape its influence.

In Buddhism prayer is in one sense impossible. Most forms of Buddhism have no concept of a supreme personal God to whom petitions might be addressed. Moreover, salvation is dependent on the individual's self-perfection. On the other hand, there obviously has been prayer in Buddhism from the earliest times. On the highest level, prayers to the Buddha are to be understood as vows or spiritual exercises intended to commit the worshipper to the practice of a particular aspect of Buddhist teaching. Prayers of this sort are attributed to the Buddha Himself. In other forms of Buddhism, prayer is addressed to various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, gods and saints. The most extreme example is Tibetan Buddhism, where prayer is all-pervasive. For example, the pious Tibetan carries a prayer wheel, a hand-held gadget containing slips of paper with a prayer printed on each. Each time it revolves, each of the prayers inside is credited to the worshipper.

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Islamic prayer and worship

It is the Islamic tradition that provides the most important background for understanding prayer in the Baha'i Faith.

Prayer in Islam has several distinct forms and aspects. It differs somewhat in emphasis from prayer in other religions; the preeminent aspect of Islamic prayer is praise of God and formalized submission to Him, rather than communion or the {p36} seeking of material or spiritual gifts. Thus the term 'mention of God' (dhikru'llah) includes much that would not be considered prayer in the Christian sense--the recitation of scripture (Qur'an), for example. However, even the Qur'an speaks of other aspects of prayer: 'i am near to answer the call of the caller when he calls to Me.'[2.4] Prayer also protects the believer against his own evil inclinations.[2.5] Different groups within Islam have at various times stressed different aspects of prayer.

..... [2.4. Qur'an 2:186.]

..... [2.5. Qur'an 29:45.]

The following sections discuss various types of Islamic 'prayer', beginning with the less personal forms.

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SALAT

Salat, 'obligatory prayer', the prayer offered five times a day, is the most important ritual obligation of a Muslim. Muhammad inaugurated the salat early in His ministry, while He was still in Mecca. The word itself was borrowed in pre-Islamic times from Aramaic or Syriac, the languages of the Christians and Jews of the Near East. It is found many times in the Qur'an. 'Prayer' is not an accurate translation of salat, which is a formalized ritual incorporating prayer, blessings, recitation of the Qur'an and special postures. The salad ritual is very strictly defined and is the same, with only slight variations, for all Muslim groups.

The Qur'an itself urged the practice of salat. The traditions attributed to the Prophet and later Islamic tradition are unanimous itself. Muslims are most likely to judge piety on the basis of fidelity in carrying out the salat.

Although its details are not found in the Qur'an, the salat ritual, as it is practised by modern Muslims, certainly reflects quite closely the practice of Muhammad Himself. There are, of course, many exceptions and points of disagreement, some of which probably reflect inconsistencies in Muhammad's own practice. A simply summary of the salat ritual follows:

Every Muslim who has reached puberty, with the exception of menstruating and postpartum women, is obliged {p37} to perform the salat. Prayers that are missed must be made up later.

A Muslim must be in a state of ritual purity to perform the salat. The required ablutions consist of a ritualized washing of the hands, feet and head. In the

case of major impurity--most commonly sexual relations or the cessation of menstruation--a ritual bath is required. Dress must also be ritually pure and modest--defined as covering from the navel to the knees for men and everything except the hands, feet and face for women.

Prayers may be said in any ritually pure spot. Most commonly, Muslims will pray on a small carpet reserved for this purpose. It is desirable to pray in the company of other Muslims but this is only required in the case of the Friday noon prayer.

Normally, prayers are said at five times:

..... Fajr (morning): from dawn until just before sunrise

..... Zuhr (noon): just after noon until mid-afternoon

..... 'Asr (afternoon): mid-afternoon until just before sunset

..... Maghrib (evening): after sunset until last light

..... 'isha' (Night): darkness until middle of night

Under certain circumstances salat is said in mid-morning and in the middle of the night. It is forbidden at sunrise, noon and sunset, to avoid any accusation or taint of sun-worship. Shortly before each prayer a mosque official goes up the minaret (or turns on the public address system) and chants the adhan, the prayer call: 'God is Most Great. I bear witness that there is no god but God. I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Come to prayer. Come to salvation.' Each phrase is repeated several times. The Shi'i prayer call is slightly different. Virtually the same formula is repeated in the mosque to announce the beginning of the prayers.

Each performance of salat consists of two or more nearly identical cycles. In each cycle the worshipper bows once, a {p38} motion called rak'ah. Thus each prayer is said to consist of a certain number of rak'ahs:

..... Morning ..... 2 rak'ahs

..... Noon ..... 4 rak'ahs

..... Afternoon ..... 4 rak'ahs

..... Evening ..... 3 rak'ahs

..... Night ..... 4 rak'ahs

Extra rak'ahs can be added to each prayer to gain merit. In each rak'ah the worshipper begins by standing and saying 'God is Most Great'. He then recites the first and any other chapter of the Qur'an. He bows, saying 'Praise be to God'. He stands erect, repeats another formula, then prostrates himself with his forehead on the ground. After repeating another short formula, he sits up, saying 'God is Most Great'. This completes the rak'ah. The second rak'ah also includes a statement of faith made at the end while sitting. After the last rak'ah--the second, third or fourth, depending on the time--the worshipper

recites a formal greeting and blessing on the Prophet.

Muslim men are urged and women allowed to pray in company. If this is done, one knowledgeable person acts as the imam, the prayer leader. The worshippers arrange themselves in neat rows behind him, the front row being especially prestigious. Each worshipper follows precisely the movements of the imam, reciting the formulae inaudibly. The congregational prayer on Friday at noon is preceded by a short sermon. Since the Prophet Himself had generally led the prayers, the Friday prayer, the appointment of its imam and its conduct have always been matters of interest to Muslim governments. The appointment of the prayer leader was generally a prerogative of the sovereign and the mention of the ruler in the Friday sermon was an important symbol of public acceptance of the legitimacy of the monarch.

Salat occupies a central place in Muslim thought. Pious Muslims have always been enthusiastic about performing the {p39} salat, although most Muslims in most places have probably been lax in carrying it out regularly. Legal scholars have elaborated the rules governing salat in great detail--the subject occupies about a quarter of a typical Muslim legal manual. Mystics interpreted salat as a duty of the heart as well as of the body. Even philosophers sought to explain its role in the cosmos. Of all Muslim practices corresponding to the term 'prayer', salat is by far the most important.

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QUR'AN RECITATION

'Qur'an', it appears, meant 'recitation', in the sense of a church lectionary. The pious recitation of the Qur'an is one of the earliest Islamic rituals, dating in the time before Muhammad's departure from Mecca, as the Qur'an itself attests. Muslim tradition encourages the recitation of the Qur'an as a pious act, especially if done from memory. The text of the Qur'an itself is marked to allow it to be recited in even portions over seven, thirty or 120 days. Parts of the Qur'an must also be recited during the five daily prayers.

Over the centuries professional Qur'an reciters developed elaborately formalized styles of chanting the Qur'an. The work of the best modern Qur'an reciters is well-known in Muslim countries through radio, television and recordings.

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PRAYERS OF THE QUR'AN AND THE PROPHET

Many prayers are found in the Qur'an and traditions. The most important is the Fatihah, the short prayer at the beginning of the Qur'an. This has been called 'the Lord's prayer of Islam' and is recited during the five daily prayers and on numerous other occasions. It has been the object of much thought and commentary throughout the ages.

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..... In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.

..... Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds,

..... the merciful, the compassionate,

..... Master of the Day of Judgement. {p40}

..... Thee do we worship, and to Thee do we turn for help.

..... Guide us on the straight path,

..... the path of those whom Thou hast blessed,

..... not the path of those with whom Thou art angry,

..... nor of those who have gone astray.

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Tradition also records prayers attributed to the Prophet Himself. These are in a style much like that of the Qur'an and are recited by Muslims from time to time. They are often used for particular occasions or purposes.

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PERSONAL PRAYER

Islamic law recognizes a class of free-prayer, du'a', literally 'calling to God'. Such prayer is for some spiritual or material need and may comprise either the believer's own words or some traditional text--a prayer attributed to the Prophet or an Imam, a Qur'anic text or a literary prayer from some other source. Legal scholars would have this personal prayer performed within a ritual framework resembling the salat prayers.

Closely related to du'a' is munajat, literally 'private conversation', the free-prayer whispered while sitting after the completion of the salat. This is usually an Arabic prayer from the traditions but may be in the vernacular and in the worshipper's own words. The term is sometimes used for literary prayers composed by individuals.

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SHI'I PRAYER

Shi'i salat differs only slightly from Sunni practice, the most noticeable difference being the requirement that during prostration one places the forehead directly on earth or things that grow from it, rather than on the prayer-carpet. A small tablet of baked clay from Karbala, the site of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn, is usually used. Shi'is sometimes combine the five prayers into three. Until recently, Shi'is placed less emphasis on the Friday prayer because its legitimacy in the absence of the Imam was in doubt.

Shi'i tradition has preserved a large number of prayers {p41} attributed to the Imams. These are prayers of visitation for the shrines of the Imams, prayers for special occasions and the like. These are often of high literary quality and play an important part in Shi'i devotion, particularly because of the intercessory role of the Imams in Shi'i theology. These prayers are often recited as part of mosque services in addition to salat.

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SUFI PRAYER

The Sufis, the mystics of Islam, devote much attention to prayer, usually stressing the precise and heartfelt practice of salat and other forms of Islamic prayer. However, the form of prayer most commonly associated with the Sufis is dhikr, literally [mention or remembrance of God' but here meaning the repeated recitation of names of God as an incantation. The Sufi masters carefully monitor the sort of dhikr appropriate for the spiritual states of their disciples: the recitation of a particular name of God might be appropriate at a certain spiritual level but harmful at another. Often the dhikr involves control of breathing and particular postures. It is valued as a means to attain both spiritual ecstasy and higher spiritual levels.

Sufi prayer also often involves music and dance.

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PRAYERS OF VISITATION

There are special prayers to be recited at the tombs of Prophets, saints and Imams. These take the form of an elaborate formal greeting addressed to the saint, praising his deeds and spiritual station. Here we may also mention the ritual blessings said after mention of the names of God, Muhammad and other sanctified individuals. These are discussed separately below.

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COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Most collective worship in Islam involves the salat, the Friday noon prayer service with its sermon being the most important occasion. The mosque observances of the major holy days also include the salat. {p42}

Shi'is, with their many holidays commemorating the births and deaths of Imams, hold services featuring the retelling of the sufferings of the Imams. These services are often led by a cleric (called in Persian rawdih-khan) specializing in this art. He may preach the Imam's sufferings to the people or lead them in contrapuntal chants, breast-beating or self-flagellation. In Iran, passion-plays dramatizing the sufferings of the Imam Husayn are common during 'Ashura, the ten-day commemoration of his death.

Sufis gather for dhikr and for music and dance, if their order uses them.

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Babi prayer

The most striking characteristic of the ritual life ordained by the Bab is the all-pervasiveness of prayer. Babi ritual life is steeped with it. The Bab's legal works specify dozens of rituals involving prayer.

In one way or another, the believer is to be in an almost constant state of remembrance of God: praying, repeating the names of God, reading the writings of the Bab. On the other hand, the Bab stresses that prayer and other ritual obligations should not be burdensome or tiring. Prayers should not be so long as to weary the worshipper. Prayer should be disinterested, fervent and attentive.[2.6] The Bab stresses that prayer should be motivated neither by hope nor fear.[2.7] Prayer should be performed in private so that the worshipper will be able to give it full attention.[2.8] Finally, like every other aspect of the Bab's religious thought, the efficacy of prayer is conditioned on the approval of Him Whom God shall make manifest.

..... [2.6. The Bab, Selections, p. 78.]

..... [2.7. ibid. pp. 77-8.]

..... [2.8. ibid. pp. 93-4.]

Distinctive rules for Babi obligatory prayer date from the revelation of the Bayan after the abrogation of Islamic law. The Bab's salat comprises one prayer of nineteen rak'ahs performed between noon and sunset. It is not to be performed in congregation. The Bab appears not to have specified a text but {p43} He did indicate that during the first three rak'ahs the worshipper is to testify to the unity of God's essence, in the next four to the unity of His attributes, in the next six to the unity of His actions and in the last six to the unity of His worship. A shortened form of the obligatory prayer is available for those who are travelling. Curiously, although there is only one Babi obligatory prayer, the prayer-call is still to be sounded five times a day; the text of this call to prayer is completely different from the Muslim prayer-call. There are a variety of specific regulations for obligatory prayer but nothing like the very detailed regulations found in Islam.

The earliest writings of the Bab contained many prayers intended for specific times, days, months and festivals. These were supererogatory observances to be added to the strict observance of Islamic law. Later, after the abrogation of Islamic law, the Bab ordained many daily observances, of which only a few examples can be mentioned here.

Each day the believer should recite one name of God ninety-five times. On the first day of the month he should say 'God is most glorious' (Allah-u-Abha); on the second, 'God is most mighty' (Allah-u-A'zam); and the nineteenth, 'God is most ancient' (Allah-u-Aqdam). Other names such as 'God is most great' (Allah-u-Akbar), 'God is most bright (Allah-u-Anvar) and 'God is most manifest' (Allah-u-Azhar) may be said on other days, apparently at the believers discretion.

The believer is to recite at least nineteen verses of the Bayan each day--or seven hundred, according to another passage. A simpler alternative is provided for those unable to do this.

Every Friday the believer is to fact the sun and recite a prayer to it. There is a similar monthly prayer to the moon. This is a striking contrast to Islam, which forbids prayer at sunrise, noon and sunset in order to avoid any suggestion of sun-worship.

The Bab provided special prayers for particular occasions, notably obligatory prayers (salat) for the newborn and the {p44} dead, each very similar to the Baha'i prayer for the dead. The prayer for the newborn is based on the number five and the prayer for the dead on six. These numbers correspond to the letters ha and vav respectively, which together form the word huva, 'He'--that is, God--symbolizing that we come from God and return to Him.

The Bab stated that the Bayan--meaning the whole corpus of His writings--was in five modes, of which the second was prayers, munajat. The Bab wrote hundreds of these Arabic prayers. They are in a lofty and intense style and are characterized by a vivid and personal awareness of the might and sublimity of God.

The Bab also wrote many Tablets of visitation to be recited at the tombs of saints or on occasions associated with them. Like their Shi'i counterparts, they take the form of elaborate greetings addressed to the saint. Early in His ministry the Bab wrote Tablets of visitation for the Shi'i Imams; later He wrote others for His own martyred disciples.

The Bab prohibited obligatory prayer in congregation--other than the prayer for the dead--and the public recitation of the names of God (dhikr). Nevertheless, He encouraged the believers to pray in mosques and shrines and to gather there to hear sermons on Fridays.

There are several works of the Bab, notably the Kitabu'l-Asma' (Book of Names) and the Panj Sha'n (Five Styles) that consist largely of extended meditations on particular attributes of God, each of which is repeated in innumerable variations, many of them grammatically impossible. These works, which were very popular among the Babis, are perhaps to be understood not as rational discourse but as ecstatic rhapsodies, mystical prayers whose recitation creates a mood of spiritual exhilaration.

In the short and bloody history of the Babi religion, there was little time to put into practice the laws of the Bab or even to investigate what they were. It is likely that none of these Babi prayers were put into regular use. Most of the Babis {p45} clearly continued to perform the Islamic salat, perhaps with the addition of some Babi prayers.

There are only scattered references to distinctively Babi practices. Shortly before the Bab's return to Shiraz, one of His followers used a Babi form of the prayer-call. The Zanjan Babis are said to have publicly recited the works of the Bab. During the battle they chanted what was evidently a variant of the

prayer-call given in the Arabic Bayan. It is not clear to what extent the later Azali Babi community practised these rituals.

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Baha'i prayer

The prayers revealed by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha are used by most Baha'is as part of their daily worship. Shoghi Effendi also composed many prayers. Baha'is frequently use prayers of the Bab, particularly some of the shorter ones.

Baha'i prayer and the laws and customs relating to it developed out of the traditions and practices of Islamic and Babi prayer. It should be noted that there are many types of Baha'i prayer and that several of the regulations and teachings relating to prayer apply only to particular types. Such distinctions are not always clear in translation.

The Baha'i writings state that the impulse to pray is natural and that prayer is essential to the development of spirituality.[2.9] However, it is not the physical act of praying but the spiritual state induced by prayer that is important. Thus Baha'u'llah stresses that brief and joyful prayer is superior to long but wearying prayer.[2.10]

..... [2.9. See, for example, Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Life [sic - Attitude] , passim; Baha'i Revelation, p. 304; and 'Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in Esslemont, Baha'u'llah and the New Era, p. 105.]

..... [2.10. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 149.]

Though prayer may be efficacious in obtaining specific material ends, it is more important to pray for conformity to the will of God. The highest prayer is offered only out of love for God, without any other hope or fear.[2.11] Prayer is essential to any undertaking and attracts the confirmations of God. Nevertheless, prayer must be linked with practical measures to attain the goals sought.

..... [2.11. 'Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in Compilation, vol. 2, no. 1756, p. 236.] {p46}

Baha'i prayer may be addressed to Baha'u'llah, which Shoghi Effendi several times recommends, to other Manifestations of God, to 'Abdu'l-Baha or to God Himself. [2.12]

..... [2.12. See, for example, a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, 27 April 1937 in Lights, no. 1488, p. 457, and a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 14 October, 1937, in ibid. no. 1489.]

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OBLIGATORY PRAYER (SALAT)

The most important kind of Baha'i prayer is the daily obligatory prayer.[2-13]

Its purpose is to cultivate humility and devotion.[2.14] The obligatory prayers and fasting are the most important ritual obligations of Baha'is and the Baha'i writings warn strongly against neglecting them or minimizing their importance. Unlike almost all other forms of Baha'i prayer, specific regulations govern the performance of the obligatory prayers. Obligatory prayer is a personal spiritual obligation and as such is not enforceable by Baha'i administrative institutions.

..... [2.13. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, question 93 and note 3.]

..... [2.14. 'Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in Compilation, vol. 2, no. 1744, p. 232.]

The original Baha'i obligatory prayer, mentioned in the Kitab-i-Aqdas,[2.15] consisted of nine rak'ahs to be said morning, noon and evening--possibly three rak'ahs at each time. Baha'u'llah revealed the text but did not release it in order to avoid provoking conflict with Muslims.[2.16] This prayer was one of the documents in the strongbox taken by 'Abdu'l-Baha's brothers shortly after the death of Baha'u'llah. Some time between the revelation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and its supplement Questions and Answers Baha'u'llah revealed a second set of obligatory prayers, which are in use today. Three alternative forms were provided: a very short prayer to be said at noon; a somewhat longer prayer to be said in the morning, the afternoon and the evening; and a long prayer to be said once in twenty-four hours.

..... [2.15. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 6.]

..... [2.16. Amr va-Khalq, 4:90-2.]

The obligatory prayers are binding on all Baha'is between the ages of fifteen and seventy except those who are ill. Partial exemptions apply to travellers and menstruating women. Travellers and others who are prevented from praying by some 'condition of insecurity'[2.17] are provided with another ritual to perform upon completing their journey or reaching a suitable place. For each prayer missed, they are to prostrate themselves and say 'Glorified be God, the Lord of Might and Majesty, of {p47} Grace and Bounty.' After completing the required number of prostrations, they are to sit cross-legged and repeat eighteen times 'Glorified be God, the Lord of the kingdoms of earth and heaven'.[2.18] Menstruating women are exempt provided that between noon of one day and the next they perform ablutions and say ninety-five times 'Glorified be God, the Lord of Splendour and Beauty'.[2-19]

..... [2.17. See Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, note 21.]

..... [2.18. ibid. para. 14.]

..... [2.19. ibid. para. 13.]

Baha'u'llah confirmed the Bab's prohibition of congregational obligatory prayer, such as is practised in Islam.[2.20] This refers only to the collective performance of the prayers; the obligatory prayer does not necessarily have to be said in private.[21] The prohibition only applies to the daily obligatory

prayers, not to any other Baha'i prayers.[2.22]

..... [2.20. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 12.]

..... [2.21. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets, p. 464.]

..... [2.22. See a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 6 February 1975, in Lights, no. 1503, p. 460.]

Ablutions must be performed before each obligatory prayer (see below). The prayer must be said in a clean place, though Baha'u'llah abolishes all the specific Islamic and Babi regulations governing the place of prayer. Unlike Islamic prayers, Baha'i obligatory prayers are not invalidated by contact with bone, fur or other items.

The obligatory prayer should be said facing the qiblih (point of adoration, i.e. the direction to face in prayer). The Bab had specified that in prayer believers should face Him Whom God shall make manifest. Thus during His lifetime Baha'is prayed facing the person of Baha'u'llah. 'Abdu'l-Baha later explained that after Baha'u'llah's death, the qiblih was Baha'u'llah's Shrine and that a Tablet explaining this existed but had been stolen by the Covenant-breakers.[2-23] Facing the qiblih is obligatory for all three obligatory prayers. (It should be noted that the establishment of a distinct qiblih is a statement of religious independence in an Islamic context. Early in His time in Medina Muhammad changed the qiblih from Jerusalem to signal Islam's independence from Judaism and Christianity. Thus when the Bab and Baha'u'llah changed the qiblih, it was a clear signal of their claims to independent prophecy and of their assertion of the independence of their religions from Islam.)

..... [2.23. Amr va-Kalq, 4:97-99.]

The short obligatory prayer is to be said between noon and {p48} sunset. The medium prayer is to be said between dawn and the astronomical noon, between noon and sunset, and between sunset and two hours after sunset. Clocks may be used to determine the times for prayer. In high latitudes, where days can be very long or short, prayer times may be fixed by the clock rather than determined by sunrise and sunset. There is no fixed rule for this at present and policies are set by the national spiritual assemblies involved.[2.24]

..... [2.24. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 13 June 1978, in Lights, no. 1532, p. 466.]

Unlike most other Baha'i prayers, the obligatory prayers include specific rules for postures and gestures during the prayers. These motions are part of the obligatory prayer and are themselves obligatory, unless an individual is physically incapable of performing them. Shoghi Effendi states that the motions and postures are symbolic and are aids to concentration in the prayers.[2.25]

..... [2.25. Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, note

4.]

The short obligatory prayer is a brief affirmation of the supreme power of God and the servitude of the worshipper. It is 'more fitting', though not required, to say it while standing 'in an attitude of humble reverence'.[2.26] As it is to be said between noon and sunset, it is commonly called 'the noon prayer'.

..... [2.26. Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, question 81.]

The medium obligatory prayer consists of four paragraphs preceded by two verses to be recited while performing ablutions. The first paragraph of the prayer is said while standing facing the qiblih, the second while bowing with hands on the knees, the third while standing with the palms facing upward, and the fourth while sitting--preferably on the floor rather than on a chair. Shorter alternative forms are supplied for the first and fourth paragraphs. The text of the prayer stresses the loftiness and power of God and His grace shown through revelation.

The long obligatory prayer consists of fifteen paragraphs of varying lengths, each of which is to be said while in a particular posture. These postures are the same as those in the medium prayer with the addition of prostration. The instructions also call for the recitation of several points of the {p49} Greatest name, the divine title baha--in this case, in the form of 'Allah-u-Abha'. One instruction calls for the worshipper to 'raise his hands thrice, and say: Greater is God than every great one!' Shoghi Effendi specified that the phrase itself was to be repeated each time the hands were raised.[2.27]

..... [2.27. From a letter written on behalf of the Univesal House of Justice, 13 February 1975, in Lights, no. 1534, p. 467.]

There are no authorized supererogatory observances associated with the obligatory prayer. However, the worshipper is free to read any other prayers and

selections from Baha'i scripture that he may wish.

The Prayer for the Dead is also an obligatory prayer. Unlike the daily prayers, it is to be said in congregation (see Funeral Laws, below).

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MUNAJAT

The greatest number of Baha'i prayers are of the type called munajat, 'private communion', literary prayers for private devotions. Most are in Arabic, although 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote many prayers in Persian and a few in Turkish. There are thousands of such prayers, mostly originally included in letters to individuals. Shoghi Effendi also wrote prayers in Arabic and Persian but none have been published in translation.

Most Baha'i prayers are in a classical Arabic style reminiscent of the Qur'an

and the Shi'i prayers. They are generally written in a less complicated style than the prayers of the Bab. The tone is austere and lofty. There is considerable variation in form and content. A typical prayer begins with the invocation of several attributes of God followed by a statement of praise and a request--for example, for assistance or protection--by virtue of something holy. The prayer concludes with a list of God's attributes. Any element may be elaborated, repeated or omitted. The imagery generally draws on that of Islamic religious literature and Persian poetry. The prayers are thus much more diverse than this simple outline suggests. Most prayers are general statements of praise and desire for spiritual qualities but some are for particular purposes, such as marriage or the protection of children. {p50}

There are a few specific rules about the use of these prayers other than general instructions to maintain dignity and to avoid the development of ritual. Prayers may be chanted, sung, recited in unison or repeated, and prayers may be used as the basis of songs or hymns.[2.28] The text of prayers should not be changed, even to the extent of changing the number or gender of pronouns.[2.29] It is not necessary to face the qiblih when using these prayers.

..... [2.28. From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia, 6 February 1973, in Lights, no. 1365, p. 411.]

..... [2.29. Letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 13 April 1944, in Lights, no. 1493, p. 458; and letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, 17 October 1934, in ibid. no. 1496.]

Baha'i prayers are most frequently used for private worship by individuals. They are also used for collective worship--for example, within families or at gatherings of Baha'is. In these instances, current Western and Middle Eastern practice is for one individual to recite a prayer while other [sic-others] listen silently. Prayers are often chanted in the original languages. A few of the most popular prayers have been set to music in English and other languages. Baha'is believe that the prayers of Baha'u'llah, the Bab and 'Abdu'l-Baha are the word of God and as such have special spiritual power. Thus most Baha'i private prayer and almost all public prayer consists of their recitation. Free prayer using one's own words is permissible, however.

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OTHER PRAYERS AND OBSERVANCES

Apart from the daily performance of the obligatory prayers, the Baha'i scriptures prescribe only a few devotional observances.

The last remnant of the many daily invocations ordained by the Bab is the requirement to perform ablutions then sit facing the qiblih and repeat 'Allah-u-Abha' (God is Most Glorious) ninety-five times.[2.30]

..... [2.30. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 18.]

Baha'is are obliged to recite the sacred text every morning and evening. Baha'u'llah strongly stresses this obligation in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, saying that whoever does not fulfil it is not faithful to the Covenant of God.[2-31. Any of the writings of Baha'u'llah or the Bab may be used but Shoghi Effendi has indicated that this injunction does not include the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha or his own works. Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha {p51} state that such recitation should not be so lengthy as to be wearying and dull: it is better to recite a short selection with joy than wearily to repeat whole books. Moreover, the purpose is to understand the texts, not uncomprehending recitation.

..... [2.31. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 149.]

There are a number of popular Baha'i devotional practices, some of them lacking strict scriptural authority.

According to Shoghi Effendi, certain prayers and texts have been 'invested by Baha'u'llah with a special potency and significance'.[2-32] These include the daily obligatory prayers, the long healing prayer and the Tablet of Ahmad addressed to Ahmad-i-Yazdi. Baha'is frequently recite these last in times of ill health and difficulty.

..... [2.32. Shoghi Effendi, Directives of the Guardian, p. 60.]

The several invocations based on the name Baha--'Allah-u-Abha' and 'Ya Baha'u'l-Abha'--and other invocations such as 'Ya Allahu'l-Mustaghath' (O God on Whom we call for help) and 'Ya 'Aliyu'l-A'la' (O Most Exalted One', referring to the Bab) are used, especially in times of difficulty.

The short prayer of the Bab that begins, 'is there any remover of difficulties save God', often called the 'Remover of Difficulties', is frequently recited by Baha'is in times of need. Although there is no scriptural basis for them, popular practices include the recitation of this prayer in turn by all those present and its recitation nine, nineteen, ninety-five or five hundred times.

A number of Baha'i prayers (munajat) are for particular circumstances or occasions. These are not obligatory and are of varying importance. At one extreme are the prayers for the Fast and for specific holy days, which have an importance nearly equal to the obligatory prayers. At the other extreme are prayers for particular purposes revealed at the request of individuals, such as table graces. In between are prayers for such purposes as healing, intercession for the dead, safety and assistance for particular occasions such as morning, night, leaving the house and going to bed.

In Islam, a special form of salat, the Prayer of the Signs, was to be said when frightening natural events, such as earthquakes {p52} and eclipses, occurred. Baha'u'llah abrogated this law, providing instead the verse 'Dominion is God's, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of Creation'.[2.33] Its recitation is not obligatory.

..... [2.33. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 11.]

Muslims customarily add a blessing after mentioning the names of Prophets and saints, for example, 'May God bless Him and give Him peace' after the name of Muhammad and 'May God have mercy on him', after the name of someone deceased. Middle Eastern Baha'is often use such phrases as 'May the Glory (Baha) of God rest upon him'. This is rarely done in Western languages except in translations of the sacred writings.

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COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

In contemporary practice, collective worship is not emphasized in the Baha'i Faith. A strict prohibition on the development of ritual not endorsed in the sacred writings prevents the development of liturgy, while the Faith's strong emphasis on social affairs directs attention to other things. Moreover, in the modern Baha'i community collective worship does not serve an essential religious purpose comparable to the sacraments of Christianity ro congregation salat in Islam. Consequently, although several occasions for collective worship are ordained in the Baha'i writings and a number of texts indicate its importance, it is not a well-developed aspect of Baha'i community life.[*]

..... [* Since the publication of this text [1996], the Universal House of Justice has encouraged the worldwide Baha'i community to engage in three core activities which are open to the public: study circles, children's classes and devotional meetings. The meetings may be held in local Baha'i centres, or on the homes of individuals, may be regularly schedules or spontaneous. Devotional meetings are often based on a theme, i.e., praise of God, progressive revelation, world peace, race unity, healing, aid and assistance, and triumph of the Cause of God, to name but a few. A program of readings and prayers may be selected ahead of time, or books of scripture may be read with the selections being randomly chosen. Prayers and scriptures from other religions are also often read, and many meetings include selections of music. gm]

One occasion of collective worship specified in the Kitab-i-Aqdas itself is dawn prayer (mashriqu'l-adhkar dawning-place of the remembrance or mention of God). The believers are encouraged to gather to listen to prayers and scripture in the early morning.[2.34] This worship service is the main purpose of Baha'i houses of worship, also called mashriqu'l-adhkar. Children are particularly encouraged to attend dawn prayers. Morning prayers are not yet common in the contemporary Baha'i community, although the Universal House of Justice encourages them, especially in villages.[2-35]

..... [2.34. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 115.]

..... [2.35. See letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is of the World, Naw-Ruz 1974.] {p53}

In the modern Baha'i community the main occasion for collective worship is the 'devotional portion' of the nineteen day feast. Based on a law of the Bab and instituted in the Kitab-i-Aqdas,[2.36] the modern Baha'i feast was developed, mainly under 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, as a way of meeting the

spiritual, administrative and social needs of local Baha'i communities. The worship service is the first part of the feast and usually consists of prayers and readings from the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, often combined with music. This is followed by community consultation and refreshments. (the nineteen day feast is discussed more fully in chapter 9.)

..... [2.36. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 57.]

Local Baha'i communities usually hold worship services to commemorate the Baha'i holy days. These are often much like the worship at feasts, although Baha'i law in fact allows more latitude for variation at holy day observances. There are special prayers for the individual holy days, though most are not yet available in translation. (Holy days are discussed in chapter 9.)

Baha'i communities sometimes hold meetings for community worship on other occasions. Early in the twentieth century most Baha'i communities in the West held Sunday morning worship services but this practice had largely died out by the 1940s. This practice has in recent years been reestablished in some places, although the frequency and timing varies. Baha'i conferences and summer schools usually feature 'devotions', consisting of prayers and readings and, often, songs. The meetings of spiritual assemblies are usually opened by prayers, as recommended by 'Abdu'l-Baha,[2.37] and Baha'i meetings of even the most prosaic character invariably begin with one or more prayers. Communities will sometimes hold special prayer meetings in connection with a major project or a crisis. Memorial meetings are sometimes held for believers who have recently died. Such meetings will be held worldwide on the occasion of the death of a major figure such as a Hand of the {p54} Cause. Families sometimes have devotions, often undertaken as part of the spiritual education of the children.

..... [2.37. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections, p. 86.]

Baha'i law, especially as it developed under Shoghi Effendi, strongly discourages the development of ritual. Even practices that are acceptable in themselves--the collective recitation of prayers, for example--are discouraged if they seem likely to turn into rigid traditions. Thus Baha'is usually distrust any practice that is seen as 'ritualistic'. In the West there is also a strong suspicion of anything reminiscent of Christian worship. Nonetheless, the actual rules governing Baha'i worship are not restrictive. The predominant element of worship should be the sacred writings, particularly the writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha; dignity and simplicity should always be maintained. Prayers and scripture may be chanted or sung. Hymns and poems based on Baha'i scripture may be used. When the sacred texts and prayers are read, those listening should sit still and be silent. No practice not ordained in the sacred text should be allowed to become a fixed ritual.

In practice, limits are somewhat narrower, especially in the West. In the Middle East, worship consists mainly of chanted prayer; in the West it is usually prayers read by individuals. In the early twentieth century in the West, the singing of Baha'i hymns was common and was encouraged by 'Abdu'l-Baha but died out with the ending of Sunday worship services around 1940. However,

the practice continues in many areas of Africa, the Pacific and Latin America and is being revived elsewhere.[2.38]

..... [2.38. On Baha'i hymns see Armstrong-Ingram, Music, Devotions and [the] Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.

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PUBLICATION, TRANSLATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF PRAYERS

Collections of the Bab's and Baha'u'llah's prayers circulated in manuscript in their own lifetimes. The America Baha'is published a prayer book in 1900. A convenient collection of important prayers and Tablets, Ad'iyiy-i-Hadrat-i-Mahbub, still in sue, was first published in Egypt in 1911. The most important collections of Baha'i prayers in Arabic, Persian and English are cited in the bibliography.

Translations of the sacred writings are encouraged. {p55} Prayers, especially the short obligatory prayer, are usually among the first pieces of Baha'i scripture translated into a language.

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Cleanliness, Purity and Refinement

Baha'i law enjoins purity, cleanliness and refinement (taharat, nizaft, litafat)[2.39] and specifies a number of practices relating to personal hygiene. The concept of ritual purity is not especially important but symbolic ablutions are required before obligatory prayer. Baha'u'llah, building on a tendency found in the laws of the Bab, abolishes the category of the unclean, stressing instead refinement in grooming and personal hygiene.[2.40]

..... [2.39. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 74.]

..... [2.40. ibid. para. 75.]

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Ritual purity in religion

Purity and pollution or impurity are fundamental religious categories, found with greater or lesser emphasis in every major religious tradition. Purity and pollution are normally considered to be objective states. A person or thing is made impure by contact with an impure thing or by violating a taboo. Whether the pollution is intentional or not, a state of impurity exists that must be removed by some process that restores purity.

Purity and pollution are thus categories defining the boundaries of the sacred and profane. Ritual purity is not to be confused with cleanliness or sanitation, although there are obvious relations. Purity is also not to be confused with personal spirituality, for a person can enter a state of impurity without sinning and can usually be purified without repentance.

The relative importance of purity and pollution varies greatly among religions.

They are central concepts in Judaism, Islam and Hinduism, while Christians believe that the crucifixion {p56} of Jesus was the final sacrifice needed to purify the world and that thus purity is entirely an inward matter of motive and spirituality--not something that can be destroyed or restored by physical things.

The ritual character of purity and pollution is evident from the great diversity among religions about those things considered pure and impure. Some generalizations can be made, however. The products of bodily processes, such as the urine and faeces of human beings and animals, are often unclean to varying degrees. Menstrual blood is usually among the most unclean of substances and in many religions and cultures the menstruating woman is surrounded by elaborate taboos. Sexual relations and semen are often considered polluting. More generally, any direct contact between the sexes or even the presence of women in sacred places or during ritual may be considered polluting.

Food can be polluting. Certain foods--such as pork for Jews and Muslims--are intrinsically unclean or food can become unclean by improper preparation--as when, in contravention of Jewish dietary laws, meat and milk products are prepared together. Sometimes particular foods are impure on particular occasions--such as meet on Fridays for Catholics--or to particular classes--the higher castes in Hinduism are bound by food laws that do not apply to others. Food can also transmit the uncleanness of those who supply or prepare it, for example food prepared or touched by non-believers, foreigners or those of lower caste.

Rites of passage often require purification from a previously unclean state. At birth the mother and child may be considered unclean and thus will be isolated until they have undergone purifying rites. The Christian denominations that practise infant baptism believe that thereby inherited sin is purged from the child. In many societies the afterbirth is surrounded by particular taboos. Puberty is often the occasion of purifying rites such as ordeals and circumcision for boys [as well as girls in some African societies - gm] and taboos associated with the onset of menstruation for girls. {p57} Marriage may also require purification, such as the ritual bath required for Muslim brides.

Death is perhaps the most universally recognized source of pollution. In Islam, for example, the dying person or the corpse is bathed. More important is the dangerous and infectious pollution caused by contact with the corpse.

Violation of the boundaries between the sacred and the profane causes pollution. People of high class or special holiness are vulnerable to pollution by contact with people of lower class. Contact with outsiders or non-believers may cause pollution, as in Islam and especially Shi'ism. This can be true for things as well as persons: a sacred thing or place touched by something impure may have to be cleaned or destroyed. On the other hand, a person who comes into contact with a sacred object, occasion or place without proper preparation may be polluted thereby and require purification. Finally, great sins, especially violent crimes and illicit sexual relations, may cause pollution that requires

purification. This is a common theme in classical Greek dramas such as Oedipus.

Short of their religious trappings and usually identified with ideas about cleanliness and sanitation, old concepts about the pure and impure continue in advanced secular societies. A contemporary American, for example, would probably find a meal of dog, lizard or horse meat nauseating, despite knowing that such meat is perfectly wholesome and is eaten in many other cultures. Obsessions with bathing, soaps, deodorants and the like transcend a simple desire for physical cleanliness and may well reflect older attitudes towards the pure and impure.

Purity is restored by a wide variety of materials and rites, depending on the religious attitudes and ways of the group concerned. Water is the greatest purifier and its use in rites of purification is almost universal. For a Muslim, washing with pure water removes the physical impurity caused by contact with the impure and restores him to the state of purity needed for prayer. For the Christian, baptism with water is the physical symbol of repentance. Water from certain places is particularly {p58} holy. Christians and Hindus make long journeys to bathe in the sacred waters of the Jordan and the Ganges. The Muslim carries home the sacred water of the well of Zamzam in Mecca. Running water is often considered especially pure.

Fire and smoke also purity. For the Zoroastrian, fire is the purest and most sacred of elements--too pure, indeed, to be used for ordinary processes of purification. Smoke, especially incense, purifies, whether used by the Catholic priest in a church or ban an ancient Greek purifying an article in the smoke of burning sulfur. Ashes, similarly, are used as a purifier.

Earth, mud, cow dung or urine, and other detergents can be used to purify. The Muslim uses earth to wash with before prayers if water is not available. Hindus, for whom cows are sacred, mix five products of the cow--dung, yogurt, milk, curds and urine--when special purification is needed. Sanctified bull's urine plays a major role in Zoroastrian purification ritual.

Prayer, meditation and ritual can purify. For Jews and Muslims, meat is only licit if the name of God has been invoked when the animal was slaughtered. Similarly, contact with a holy person, place or item may restore purity. Confession of sins as a way of restoring purity is found in groups as diverse as the Christians and the Inuit. Purgation and mortification, including fasting, shaving the head, ordeals, sexual abstinence and the like, are common means of restoring purity. Blood sacrifice is used to purify by some groups such as the ancient Jews. Even in Christianity the notion of sacrificial blood, transformed into the Eucharist, remains central. Punishment of the offender or a scapegoat may also remove pollution, as happens in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex and Oedipus at Colonus.

The concepts of purity and pollution serve various religious purposes. On the most basic level is the belief that pollution--at least, pollution allowed to become out of control and to encroach on the realm of the sacred--will lead to illness or other misfortunes in the community. Practically speaking, of {p59}

course, many laws of purity do serve the cause of cleanliness and sanitation and thus tend to prevent illness.

Considered sociologically, the laws of purification maintain order in the social system. In Hinduism, levels of purity order the whole society, with greater restrictions placed on the higher castes. At the bottom, the untouchables do unclean but necessary work, such as leather tanning, the disposal of wastes and the burying of corpses, leaving higher castes relatively free of such pollution. A similar system existed in Japan. Similarly, laws of purity serve to maintain the integrity of groups, especially of minorities.

Nevertheless, the central purpose of purity rituals is the relationship with the divine. Purity rituals impose order on life, creating an area of purity. By restoring purity, the person is able to draw near to the divine once again.

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Ritual purity in Islam

Purity (taharat) is a central concept of Islamic law: a Muslim cannot validly perform his five daily obligatory prayers unless in a state of ritual purity. A typical manual of Islamic law will devote about a fifty of its space to matters connected with ritual purity.

Muhammad emphasized the importance of purity, cleanliness and refinement. The Qur'an itself provides that the believers are to wash their hands and feet before praying.[2.41] With the aid of many traditions attributed to the Prophet, His companions and, for Shi'is, the Imams, these exhortations were elaborated into a systematic code of purity.

..... [2.41. Qur'an 4:46, 5:8.]

In Islam uncleanness is caused by contact with several classes of things: certain products of the body--blood, urine, faeces, pus, and semen--and things that are intrinsically unclean--unbelievers, alcohol, dead human bodies, the dirt of the road and such unclean animals as dogs and pigs.

In most cases a state of ritual purity can be restored by {p60} ablutions (vudu') in which clean water is used to wash the hands, lower arms, feet, beard and face, ears, nostrils and hair. This must be done with the intention of performing ablutions. The procedure to be followed in cleaning each part of the body is minutely specified.

Under certain circumstances a ritual bath (ghusl) is required. The entire body is washed, either by being entirely immersed in water or by pouring water over the whole body. A ritual bath is required after sexual intercourse, ejaculation, menstruation, bloodletting, childbirth and contact with a corpse. It is also required before Friday prayers and certain festivals, for the woman before marriage and for the corpse after death.

Objects can also become unclean by contact with unclean things. They can be restored to purity by various means: washing with water, drying in the sun,

transformation into something else such as vinegar made from wine or the conversion of an unbeliever to Islam (in which case his saliva, personal possessions and the like are no longer unclean), or by removal of the source of uncleanness.

The question of when water is to be considered clean greatly preoccupied the Muslim lawyers. Generally speaking, water to be pure must not have a discernible colour, taste or odour. Thus running water or water from a cistern of more than about 383 litre capacity (called kurr) remains pure even if something impure--a dead mouse, for example--is known to have fallen into the water, provided that the 'three'--colour, taste and odour--are unchanged. If there is no suitable water available for ablutions, it is permissible to perform them with dust or earth. It should be noted that in most aspects of the law of purity, doubtful cases are assumed to be pure in order to avoid unduly burdening the believer.

Food laws in Islam are relatively simple. Muhammad evidently commanded His followers to eat what was wholesome (tayyibah) and to eat freshly slaughtered meat. Pork and animals slaughtered in idolatrous rituals were forbidden. Later Islamic {p61} law placed further restrictions on allowable meats, thereby generally following Jewish law. More important, perhaps, was the insistence that food was not licit if bought with money not earned by legal means.

Generally, the Muslim laws of purity maintained a comparatively high standard of cleanliness among Muslims and thus served the cause of refinement and public health. On the other hand, the Muslim lawyers might justly be criticized for excessive preoccupation with the details of physical purity at the expense of moral aspects.

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Babi teachings on purity, cleanliness, and refinement

'Naught in the Bayan and in the sight of God', says the Bab, 'is more loved than purity and immaculate cleanliness.'[2.42] Among the qualities of the Bab that struck those who met Him were His delicacy and refinement. It is not surprising that there is a considerable emphasis placed on purity in His writings.

..... [2.42. The Bab, Selections, p. 80 (Persian Bayan 5:14).]

The Bab did not specifically break from Islamic law until about 1848. His earliest works, with regard to purity as in other topics, enjoin a very exacting interpretation of Shi'i law. Where the Bab's law does differ from the Shi'i, it is through additional rules such as an added emphasis on cleanliness and the prohibition of tobacco.

The composition of the Persian and Arabic Bayans marked a distinct break with Islamic law. The Bab criticized the Muslim clergy with regard to the law of purity on two grounds: first, for their obsessive concern for the details of the law while neglecting the purity of the soul--in this they were like those

Muslims who worried about the purity of the blood of a dead mosquito while participating in the killing of the Imam Husayn; and second, because the details of purification had been made overly complex and burdensome.

The law of purity and cleanliness laid down by the Bab in the Bayan may be summarized as follows: {p62}

..... 1. Purity, cleanliness and refinement are greatly loved by God. Physical cleanliness conduces to spirituality.

..... 2. Many things that had been regarded as unclean in Islamic law are declared not to be so, including semen, blood from gums after cleaning one's teeth, animal hair and bone, objects made by Europeans, the droppings of mice and bats, silk clothing, gold and silver vessels, dogs and other animals, and the faeces of infants.

..... 3. Things that have become unclean may be purified by belief in the Bayan (i.e. making the unbeliever pure); the book of God (presumably by declaring something clean); the recitation sixty-six times of the phrase 'In the name of God Most Pure' over the unpure thing; being owned by a believer (i.e. any possession of a believer is pure, even if it was purchased from an unbeliever); the Manifestation of God; transformation (i.e. unclean wood burning to ash); the four elements of earth, air, fire and water; and the Sun.

..... 4. The Islamic regulations governing the purity of water are mostly abolished. Water, regardless of its quantity, is considered pure if its colour, taste and odour are unaltered. Muddy water and water with which something pure has been mixed (such as rose water) are, contrary to Islamic practice, both considered pure. Things that are not unclean in substance may be purified by pouring water on them twice or dipping them once. The amount of water must be sufficient to clean the item properly. However, it is very desirable that each house have a cistern so that there is enough water available to ensure cleanliness. Each village should have a public bath.

..... 5. Ablutions are required after meals and after sexual intercourse before praying. These consist of washing the hands, forearms and face and drying them with a cloth. This is followed {p63} by a short prayer repeated nineteen times while prostrated.

..... 6. A bath is required every four days and removal of the body hair every eight days. Men should cut their hair and nails every four days. The moustache should be shaved or kept trimmed. Henna and perfume are recommended. Soiled or sweaty clothes should be changed.

..... 7. Friday, the day of rest, is a time for purity.

In comparison to Islamic law, then, the Bab laid relatively more emphasis on cleanliness and refined hygiene and grooming and relatively less on ritual purity and impurity. Although many provisions of His laws served to make the concept of the impure comparatively unimportant.

Of the actual practices of the Babis with regard to purity and cleanliness not

much is known. The detailed ordinances of the Bayan would not have been known to most of the believers but the prohibition on tobacco was widely followed. The Babis of Karbala are said to have bought food to Tahirih for her to purify by her glance--presumably on the basis of an early text of the Bab saying that the glance of the Holy Family purified. Food bought from non-Babis was presumably considered impure.

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Baha'i teachings on purity, cleanliness and refinement

Baha'u'llah's laws concerning purity, cleanliness and refinement are a much simplified version of those in the Bayan. The Kitab-i-Aqdas states:

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..... God hath, likewise, as a bounty from His presence, abolished the concept of 'uncleanness'... Verily, all cerated things were {p64} immersed in the sea of purification when, on that first day of Ridvan, We shed upon the whole creation the splendours of Our most excellent Names and Our most exalted Attributes.[2.43]

..... [2.43. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 75.]

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Thus Baha'u'llah did away with the Islamic category of the unclean, especially the uncleanness of non-believers, on the day He proclaimed His prophetic mission. Without the category of the impure, purity in its ritual sense also becomes unimportant. Thus Baha'i teachings on purity and cleanliness are necessarily built on a base different form Islamic teachings--the concept of refinement litafat, a term denoting elegance, daintiness and refined sensibilities. Thus refinement encompasses such things as spotless clothing, 'that you eyes may be preserved from beholding what is repugnant both to your own selves and to the dwellers of Paradise'.[2.44] 'Abdu'l-Baha explains that 'cleanliness will conduce to spirituality'.[2.45] The Baha'is of the time of Baha'u'llah are known to have laid great importance on cleanliness.

..... [2.44. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 46.]

..... [2.45. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections, p. 147.]

Although Baha'u'llah gives some specific regulations concerning cleanliness, His important statements are general:

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..... God hath enjoined upon you to observe the utmost cleanliness, to the extent of washing what is soiled with dust... Should the garb of anyone be

visibly sullied, his prayers shall not ascend to God...[2.46]

..... [2.46. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 76.]

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One's house is also to be kept clean. Baha'u'llah refuses, however, to make detailed regulations about cleanliness; 'common sense' (al-fitratu's-salimah) is to be the judge.[2.47] New water--i.e. water not previously used and unchanged in colour, taste and odour--should be used for washing. On the other hand, there is no harm if, for example, one uses water from a large cistern in which someone else has washed his hands or face.[2-48]

..... [2.47. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganifiniy-i-Hudud va-Ahkam, p. 78.]

..... [2.48. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, question 91.]

Thus, as demonstrated in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and its associated writings, Baha'u'llah has moved almost completely from {p65} the concept of purity as an objective ritual state to the concept of purity as cleanliness and refinement.

The most important remnant of the concept of ritual purity of Baha'i law is the requirement for ablutions before obligatory prayers. Ablutions are to be performed before each obligatory prayer, as well as before the ninety-five repetitions of 'Allah-u-Abha'. They consist of washing one's hands and face 'in preparation for prayer'.[2.49] (The medium obligatory prayer requires the recitation of certain verses at the same time.) Ablutions must be repeated for each obligatory prayer, even if one has just bathed. However, if they have already been performed for some other purpose or for another obligatory prayer said at the same time, it is not necessary to repeat them. The ablutions need not be made immediately before the prayer provided nothing has occurred to invalidate the ablutions.[2.50] If water is unavailable or its use would be harmful for some reason, the phrase 'In the Name of God, the Most Pure, the Most Pure' may be repeated five times before proceeding to one's prayer. Warm water may be used if the weather is cold.[2.51]

..... [2.49. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, note 34.]

..... [2.50. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjiniy-i-Hudud va-Akham, p.16.]

..... [2.51. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 10 and question 51.]

In abolishing the concept of ritual uncleanness, Baha'u'llah also does away with the idea that prayers are invalidated by materials such as animal hair, sable, bone and the like.[2.52] He also eliminates restrictions on the materials that may be used for prostration, stipulating only that the prayer be made 'on any surface that is clean'.[2.53]

..... [2.52. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 9.]

..... [2.53. Ibid. para. 10.]

There are a number of specific rules concerning personal hygiene and general cleanliness:

..... 1. Bathing in clean water once [a] week.

..... 2. Washing the feet daily in summer and every three days in winter.

..... 3. Washing soiled clothing in clean water.

..... 4. Trimming one's nails. {p66}

..... 5. Using perfume.

..... 6. Not using the common pool in Persian baths. In the old baths the water in the common pool was rarely changed and consequently was likely to be very dirty.

..... 7. Replacing one's household furnishings--excluding such items as antiques and treasured articles--every nineteen years. The purpose was to avoid having old and worn furnishings.

Strict cleanliness was one of the characteristics by which the early Middle Eastern Baha'i communities attempted to distinguish themselves from their Muslim neighbours. Baha'i men, for example, tended to dress in white. Later, as the Baha'i communities of Iran became organized, they sometimes established public baths. The early Iranian Baha'i schools also emphasized cleanliness. However, in the contemporary Baha'i world, not much overt attention is paid to cleanliness as a Baha'i principle, except perhaps in the Middle Eastern communities. Western Baha'is appear to assume that Western customs of washing and bathing more than satisfy Baha'i requirements, while elsewhere local customs are generally observed.

As in other religions, purity and cleanliness are used in a moral sense to mean sincerity and freedom from sin and bad qualities. Thus such expressions as 'to cleanse the heart' and 'pure and stainless deeds' and verses such as 'the reality of man becomes purified and sanctified from the impurities of the world of nature'[2.54] are much more frequent in the Baha'i writings than are references to physical cleanliness and ritual purity.

..... [2.54. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 92.]

'Abdu'l-Baha summarizes Baha'i teachings on purity and cleanliness in the so-called 'Tablet on Purity'.[2.55] In this text He discusses the spiritual importance of physical purity and criticizes the use of tobacco, alcohol and opium. Spiritual progress, He argues, is conditioned on being cleansed and purified. Thus the scriptures use water as a symbol of revelation. Even physical {p67} cleanliness conduces to spirituality; this is why the scriptures of the past forbade eating or using unclean things. Other things, whose harm was less immediate, were not forbidden but were considered repugnant and so were to be avoided. Among such things is tobacco, which the Bab prohibited but which Baha'u'llah allowed but disliked. Opium, however, is categorically prohibited and nay measures are acceptable to suppress it. 'Abdu'l-Baha cites

the physical prowess of the Sikhs, who avoid all such substances, and urges the Baha'is to distinguish themselves by inward and outward purity and cleanliness.

..... [2.55. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections, pp. 146-50.]

{nd}

Fasting

Fasting has been practised from the beginning of history and in virtually every culture. It can take various forms: abstention from certain favoured foods, often meat; complete abstention from food and sometimes drink for a specified time; or constant abstemiousness in diet--eating only one meal a day, for example. It is frequently associated with other austerities, such as abstention from sexual relations and the abandonment of all sorts of luxury. As a religious practice fasting serves various purposes:

..... Preparation for a great deed or a new stage of life

..... Mourning

..... Penitence

..... Purification {p68}

..... Supplication

..... Quest for dreams and visions

..... Moral or religious protest

Some random examples will give an idea of the forms and purposes of fasting:

..... As part of their initiation as adults American Indian boys fast in the wilderness seeking a vision of a guardian spirit.

..... Fasts are often part of the rituals associated with birth, marriage and death.

..... The ancient Jews fasted in times of danger or disaster, both as a sign of repentance and in order to avert God's wrath.

..... Modern Jews fast for twenty-four hours as a penitence on Yom Kippur.

..... Priests, holy men and sorcerers of various societies fast in preparation for particular rituals.

..... In most mystical and monastic traditions fasting is practised as a means of purification, especially for novices.

..... Roman Catholics traditionally abstain from meat on days associated with the passion of Christ.

..... In the modern world fasting is sometimes a form of moral protest.

{nd}

The Islamic fast

After the obligatory prayer, fasting is the most important ritual obligation of the Muslim; it is one of the five pillars of Islam. {p69} Leaving aside the complex regulations deduced by the Islamic clergy, fasting in Islam consists of deliberately abstaining from all food, drink and sexual relations from the time of the first light before dawn until the last light after sunset. The principal fast occupies the entire month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic year. This fast is binding on all Muslims past the age of puberty, with the exception of those who are travelling or unable to fast for reasons of health, such as sickness, pregnancy, old age or the like. Those who do not fast are obliged to compensate, preferably by fasting on another occasion or else by feeding the poor. Those who deliberately fail to fast or deliberately break the fast must compensate by fasting for two months or feeding sixty poor people. Because the Muslim year is eleven days shorter than the solar year, the fast of Ramadan can occur during any season of the year. The beginning of the month following Ramadan is celebrated as the 'Idu'l-Fitr, the holiday of fast-breaking, and is one of the great holy days of the Islamic year. It is observed with feasts and celebrations lasting several days.

Fasting is also encouraged at other times of the year, particularly the two months preceding Ramadan, on certain days of the week and month, and on certain anniversaries. Fasting is also prescribed in the Qur'an as expiation for offences ranging from manslaughter to the breaking of an oath. The rules for such fasts are the same as those for the fast of Ramadan.

The Qur'an specifically identifies fasting as an obligation that had been imposed in earlier religions. Muslims generally consider the purpose of fasting to be the purification and humbling of the human soul.

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The Babi and Baha'i fast

The Baha'i fast is established in the Kitab-i-Aqdas[2.56] and occupies much the same preeminent position that it does in Islam. Several passages in the writings of Baha'u'llah lay stress on its {p70} importance, listing it with the obligatory prayer as among the greatest of the ritual obligations.

..... [2.56. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 10.]

According to Baha'u'llah Himself, the Baha'i fast is adapted from the fast ordained in the Bayan. The Bab's fast mentioned in both the Arabic and Persian Bayans, occupied the last month of the Babi calendar, the month of 'Ala, roughly 2-20 March. Believers were to fast from the age of eleven (numerically equivalent to huva, 'He') until forty-two bala, 'Yea'). Children could fast until noon for the first eleven days. Those over forty-two were exempted from fasting. Thos fasting had to abstain from food, drink and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset--preferably from slightly before sunrise until slightly after sunset. No exemptions are mentioned. The real meaning of the fast, the Bab said, was abstention from the love of other than the Manifestation of God. The continuation of the fast was contingent on the acceptance of Him Whom God shall

make manifest.[2.57]

..... [2.57. The Bab, Arabic Bayan 8:18; Persian Bayan 8:18.]

Although Baha'u'llah accepted the fast of the Bab, He altered the details of its regulations in many important respects. The Baha'i fast is binding in all believers from the age of maturity, which for Baha'is is fifteen, until seventy. There is no provision made for children fasting. The following individuals are exempted from fasting:

.

..... Travellers, providing their journey is to last at least nine hours or two hours on foot. If they break their journey for more than nineteen days, they are only exempt for the first three days after their arrival. If they return home, they must begin fasting on arrival.

..... The sick.

..... Women who are pregnant or nursing.

..... Women who are menstruating, who must instead repeat the phrase 'Glorified be God, the Lord of Splendour and {p71} Beauty' ninety-five times between one noon and the next.[2.58]

..... [2.58. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 13.]

..... Those engaged in heavy labour, who are advised to be discrete and restrained in availing themselves of this exemption.

These groups are also exempted from fasting in Islam. Baha'u'llah does not require missed days of fasting to be made up later, nor does He mention abstention from sexual relations. An individual who is exempt from fasting at any part of a day is exempt from fasting the entire day. Smoking, 'Abdu'l-Baha explained, is called 'drinking smoke' in Arabic, and so smoking is banned while one is fasting.[2.59]

..... [2.59 Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, note 32.]

The fast is binding on Baha'is in all countries but it is an individual obligation, not enforceable by Baha'i administrative institutions. The secondary regulations of fasting, such as the prohibition on smoking, are at present only binding on Baha'is of Middle Eastern background.[2.60]

..... [2.60. From a letter of the Universal House of Justice.]

Baha'is are allowed to fast at other times of the year but as this is not encouraged, it is rarely done. Baha'u'llah permitted the making of vows to fast but preferred that such vows be 'directed to such objectives as will profit mankind'.[2.61]

..... [2.61. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, question 71.]

While in Edirne Baha'u'llah revealed a number of prayers for fasting (munajat or alvah-i-siyam), although one of them contains a reference to 'Akka. These

prayers, some rather lengthy, are the most important statements on the spiritual meaning of the fast in the Baha'i scripture: for example, '...Thou hast bidden all men to observe the fast, that through it they may purify their souls and rid themselves of all attachment to any one but Thee...'[2.62] Fasting itself is only acceptable if it is done purely out of love for God.

..... [2.62. Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 79.]

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Funeral Laws

Baha'i funeral law provides that the body should be buried in a {p72} shroud and coffin, not more than one hour's journey from the place of death. A formal prayer for the dead is obligatory for those who have attained the age of maturity (fifteen). Cremation and embalming are prohibited.

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Disposal of the dead as a religious rite

Death is among the fundamental experiences of human existence and arouses feelings of fear, awe and grief everywhere. Thus in every society death is hedged about with religious and quasi-religious rituals intended to ease the passage of the deceased into the afterlife, to console and protect the survivors, and to restore the wholeness of the group. Human beings face the bodies of their dead with a mixture of grief and fear. On the one hand, there is sorrow at the loss of a loved one and a desire to honour him; on the other, the corpse is almost universally viewed as a potent source of pollution. Many fear that the ghost of the deceased will threaten the living. These fears and the religious beliefs of the particular culture shape each other and determine the form of the funeral rites.

Anthropologists speak of the double funeral, found in almost all societies, in which rtes of separation, accompanying the initial disposal of the corpse, are followed--days, weeks, months or years later--by rites of integration in which mourning is ended and the corpse may be reburied.

Immediately after death measures must be taken to prepare the corpse for the funeral. Even before death, the dying person must be prepared. He should be brought home if possible, consoled, nursed, given such advice as he needs for the journey to the next life, and given whatever final religious rites his religion may require.

After death it must be ascertained and announced that the person is in fact dead, something that may involve more than an determination that vital signs have ceased but also such religious practices as the wailing of women. The body is likely to {p73} be washed, adorned and displayed in state to mourners, rituals that in many societies are closely linked to the rituals of childbirth. Moreover, the deceased must be helped in his transition to the next life. Food and water may be offered to the corpse. Often, goods that he will need in the next life are prepared for him. The most extreme example of this is the

elaborate burial ritual of the ancient Egyptians. In advanced societies these measures are likely to be reduced to prayers said for the advancement of the soul. However, the habit of burying the dead with prized or symbolic possessions--favourite clothes or jewellery usually, but sometimes other things as well, such as toys for children--shows that old attitudes still survive.

The wake is a nearly universal practice, a ritual that both honours the dead and comforts the living. As a result, the wake may have festive aspects. Especially universal is the funeral feast, in which the deceased himself often participates in some symbolic manner.

Such solicitous measures are likely to be balanced by rejection of the corpse and fear of haunting. The corpse itself is usually seen as polluting so that elaborate measures and taboos surround it and the survivors. Moreover, there is often fear that the soul of the deceased will not accept the invitation to join his ancestors. To ensure that he does so, a number of measures may be taken. The corpse may be bound securely: until recently in parts of Europe it was not uncommon to tie the feet or big toes of the corpse together. Measures may be taken to confuse the corpse: taking a roundabout route out of the house or to or from the cemetery. Loud noises or the firing of guns may frighten away the ghost. Finally, the corpse may be mutilated.

Eventually the decaying corpse must be disposed of. Rarely, if ever, does a society simply abandon it. Measures may also be taken to control decay. Burial is the most common means of disposing of the dead: decay is accepted but hidden. The details of burial are symbolic and infinitely variable. The body may be simply covered with earth or enclosed in a coffin or {p74} placed in an elaborate tomb. The position and orientation of the body have religious significance: Christians traditionally were buried with their feet facing east so that on the day of resurrection they would rise facing Jerusalem. The body may even lie on its back or side or be seated, in the foetal position, or even stand. Exposure of the body is practised, particularly among groups such as the Great Plains Indians for whom burial is not practical. The most important group practicing exposure of the body are the Zoroastrians, who believe that the corpse should not be allowed to pollute the earth. Instead the body is exposed in a 'Tower of Silence', where the flesh will be stripped by carrion-eating birds. Some groups preserve and display the body, usually as a way of honouring the deceased. Cremation is the normal practice in India and to an increasing extent in the West. In some cultures the fire is thought to free the soul from the body. Cannibalism prevents the decay of the body and honours the deceased by incorporating his substance into the rest of the group. The bones will then be disposed of in some honourable manner.

Eventually the mourning must end with some final ceremony. This may be very simple, perhaps the cessation of mourning dress and rituals. It may be some sort of memorial service. Often, however, the body is reinterred. The Iroquois Indians, for example, every twelve years exhumed the bones of those who had died in the interim and reburied the bones with great ceremony in a common grave. The community is once again whole and all grieving ceases.

The details of funeral rites and customs in the major world religions are too complicated to discuss in detail but a brief summary is appropriate.

Jewish funeral customs have varied considerably over three thousand years. Jews have invariably buried their dead, though often in caves. In medieval and modern times seven days of strict mourning are required. The eldest son must recite a form of the prayer called the Kaddish for eleven months after his father's death and on the anniversary of his death thereafter. {p75} The body is placed in a plain wooden coffin to symbolize the humbleness of the body. Ancient Judaism considered the corpse to be very unclean.

Traditional Catholicism stressed the need for last rites before death. Christians most often bury their dead, usually after a church service and a second service at the graveside. Christian funeral services emphasize the transitoriness of human life. Traditional Christians believe in the resurrection of the body, that the body will be restored to life at the day of resurrection.

Cremation is the universal practice among Hindus. Offerings of milk, water and other goods are made. Sometime after the cremation the remaining bone fragments are collected and either buried or reburied. Thereafter regular memorial offerings must be made to the deceased, a duty that falls on the heir to the estate. Hindu funeral rites are complex and vary greatly among castes.

Buddhist religious thought is less concerned with the mode of the disposal of the body than with spiritual aspects of death and rebirth. Such issues as the spiritual preparation of the dying man and the quality of his last thought are central. Thus Buddhist funeral ritual varies in the different Buddhist communities.

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Islamic funeral laws and practices

Islamic funeral practices date back to Muhammad and are comparatively uniform throughout the Islamic world, particularly the central rites of laying out and washing the corpse, the funeral prayer and the burial.

A dying Muslim should be turned so that he lies on his back with his feet facing Mecca. The testimony of faith in God, Muhammad and--for Shi'is--the twelve Imams is spoken into his ear. Certain chapters of the Qur'an are to be recited in his presence if possible. {p76}

Once the person is dead, his eyes and mouth should be closed, his limbs straightened and his body covered with a cloth. The body must be washed three times, normally by a close relative of the same sex, though a man may bathe his wife and vice versa. After the washing the corpse is dressed in three pieces of cloth: a waistcloth, a long shirt and a shroud covering the whole body. The shroud is paid for from the deceased's estate and the pious often buy their own shrouds before death; however, the husband is to pay for his wife's shroud. Martyrs who die in battle are to be buried unwashed in their blood-stained

clothes. After washing and shrouding, the body should be anointed with camphor. Shi'is mix the camphor with earth from the precincts of the grave of Husayn.

A special form of the obligatory (salat) is to be said for the dead after the preparation of the body and before the body is taken to the cemetery for burial. The body is laid out so that the head is to the right of the person leading the prayers. The prayer differs from the regular prayer in that it is said whilst standing throughout.

Burial is universal in Islam. It should take place as soon as possible--usually within a day after death, the popular wisdom being, 'If I am good, hurry me to God; and if I am bad, get rid of me quickly.' The body is carried to the cemetery on a bier, it being an act of piety for by bystanders to help carry the body for a little way. The procession is accompanied by wailing women (who may have been hired for the occasion), Qur'an reciters and the like. It may be noted that such extreme displays of grief as wailing and the tearing of clothes were discouraged by Muhammad but are nonetheless almost universal.

Originally Muslims were buried in the earth in their grave clothes but eventually coffins and tombs of various sorts became common. The tomb should be roomy enough for the deceased to sit up to answer the angels who will question him there. The body is laid on its right side with the face towards {p77} Mecca and the grave clothes are loosened. Shi'i law provides that the deceased be reminded for the last time of the essentials of his faith before the grave is closed. As a final act of respect the mourners pour water on the grave and offer a prayer.

In some areas memorial gatherings are held in the mosque on the seventh and fortieth days after the death.

In Islamic law a corpse is extremely unclean and any contact with it requires a ritual bath.

Especially characteristic of Shi'ism is the transporting of bodies to be buried around particular shrines, a practice that on at least one occasion resulted in a major epidemic at Karbala.

{nd}

Babi funeral laws

The funeral laws of the Bab do not differ greatly from Muslim laws and were adopted almost unchanged by Baha'u"llah. The Bab held that the body was the throne of the soul and that therefore the soul of the deceased could be offended by disrespect towards the body. Thus the body must be preserved with care and respect. First, the body should be washed one, three or five times, starting with the head, then the belly, right side, left side, right foot and left foot, at each stage reciting a specified name of God, respectively: 'O Single', 'Living', 'Self-Subsistent', 'Wise', 'Just' and 'Holy'. The body should be scented with rosewater or other perfumes. On the right hand should be placed a carnelian ring inscribed with 'And to God belongeth the Kingdom of the

heavens and the earth and what is between them', ending with 'and God knoweth all things' in the case of men and 'and God is powerful over all things' in the case of women. (The inscriptions are given slightly differently in the Arabic Bayan and the Haykal-i-Din, another work containing Babi law.) The body is to be shrouded in five pieces of cloth of silk or cotton, on which up to nineteen names of God may be written. The body may be placed in a hard stone or crystal coffin. {p78}

The expenses of the funeral are to be met from the estate of the deceased before its division.

The prayer for the dead is the only congregational obligatory prayer permitted by the Bab and in the Bayan is linked with a similar prayer for the newborn child. The prayer for the dead was adopted by Baha'u'llah and is discussed below. Relatives should visit the graves of their dead every nineteen days.

The Bab provides special prayers--'Tablets of visitation'--and rituals for visiting the graves of certain martyrs and saints. These are discussed in chapter 4.

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Baha'i funeral laws[2.63]

..... [2.63. Many of the details mentioned in this section may be found in Lights, nos. 637-78, pp. 194-204.]

Baha'i funeral laws are those of the Bab with only minor changes and additions. Baha'u'llah, like the Bab, taught that the physical body should be treated with respect after death, specifying in the Kitab-i-Aqdas that the funeral should be carried out 'with radiance and serenity'.[2.64] 'Abdu'l-Baha explained that the decomposition of the body was a natural process mirroring its gradual formation. The body ought to be allowed to decompose naturally so that its elements could once again enter the world of living things.[2.65] Shoghi Effendi indicated that this was a matter of respect: the soul after death had no more connection with the body.[2.66]

..... [2.64. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 130.]

..... [2.65. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Star of the West, vol. 11, no. 19, p. 317.]

..... [2.66. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 22 March 1957, in Lights, no. 667, p. 201.]

The custom of washing the body is not specifically mentioned in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, but Shoghi Effendi indicated that preparation for burial does include 'careful washing'.[2.67] The practice is generally followed, particularly among Middle Eastern Baha'is, although without the rituals given in the Bayan. After washing the body is to be wrapped in five pieces of silk or cotton--preferably white silk. One piece of cloth is sufficient for those who cannot afford more. The body may be anointed with rosewater or attar[2.68]--replacing the camphor used by Muslims. If the deceased has

attained the age of maturity, a ring should be placed on his finger bearing the inscription {p79} 'I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate'.[2.69] The body is not to be embalmed [unless required by law -- see Addendum regarding embalming and cremation -- gm].

..... [2.67. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 2 April 1955, in Lights, no. 639. p. 195.

..... [2.68. Amr va-Khalq, 4:201.]

..... [2.69. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 129.]

The body is to be buried: cremation is categorically forbidden. The burial should take place as soon as possible. The burial should take place as soon as possible after death. The body should be placed in a coffin of crystal, stone or hardwood and buried with its feet facing the qiblah--i.e. the Shrine of Baha'u'llah. The place of burial should be nor more than one hour's travelling distance from the limits of the city where the death occurred. This, Baha'u'llah said, could be by any means of transport, including steamships and railroads. The grave may be marked with an inscribed gravestone but the use of the Greatest Name or the Baha'i ringstone symbol on gravestones is considered inappropriate. The nine-pointed star or quotations from Baha'i scripture may be used, however.

The essential element of the Baha'i funeral service is the obligatory Prayer for the Dead. Other prayers may be said but Shoghi Effendi stressed that definite rituals should not be allowed to develop and that the original simplicity characteristic of the Prayer for the Dead should be maintained. A true Baha'i funeral may only be given for a Baha'i but there is no objection to Baha'i prayers being read at the funeral of a non-believer or to a Baha'i actually conducting such a service.

In accordance with the Islamic customs, memorial services were often held for eminent Middle Eastern Baha'is on the seventh and fortieth day after death. This was done, for example, after the deaths of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Bahiyyih Khanum. This is not, however, a Baha'i practice and though allowed is not obligatory. Often when an eminent Baha'i dies, local communities are asked to hold memorial services but no particular day or time is fixed.

The general Baha'i principle of moderation applies to mourning: the bereaved should not display extremes of grief or indifference.[2.70]

..... [2.70. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 43.; Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjiniy-i-Hudud va-Ahkam, pp. 145-7.]

The expenses of the funeral are paid by a man's estate before any other debts, the payment of Huququ'llah or {p80} bequests. A wife's funeral expenses, however, are to be paid by her husband.[2.71]

..... [2.71. Amr va-Khalq, 4:201.]

Like other aspects of Baha'i law, the application of the funeral laws is subject to constraints of wisdom and the degree of development of the Baha'i community. In the Islamic countries Shoghi Effendi insisted that Baha'is be buried according to Islamic law to avoid arousing hostility. In practice this meant that the body should be facing Mecca rather than 'Akka, since other aspects of Baha'i law were similar to Islamic practice and could be carried out without attracting attention. Even in the Holy Land this restriction was not lifted until the 1930s. In the West only the following provisions of Baha'i funeral are binding at present: the prohibition of cremation, the recitation of the Prayer for the Dead and the prohibition of the transport of the body more than an hour's travel from the place of death.

Despite the general tendency to avoid deciding fine points of Baha'i law, both Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice have ruled on various special cases.

Since the Baha'i view of life begins at conception, a miscarried foetus should be treated with respect, not casually discarded.

Where no cemetery is available within one hour's journey, a longer journey may be made, although it should be kept as short as possible.

It is permissible to bury Baha'is who have lost their voting rights, non-Baha'i relatives of Baha'is and other non-believers in a Baha'i cemetery.

It is permissible to donate one's remains for medical research but provisions should be made that the body may not be taken more than an hour's journey from the place of death and not be cremated.

The disinterment of bodies is not practiced by Baha'is, unless required by civil law. When it is undertaken it should be done with respect.

Should there be a conflict between Baha'i and civil funeral laws, civil law takes precedence over Baha'i law--for example, {p81} if civil law requires embalming, Baha'is thus are encouraged to make provision in their wills to be buried as nearly as permissible in accordance with Baha'i law.

Non'Baha'is are allowed to attend and participate in a Baha'i funeral. Baha'is likewise are permitted to attend non-Baha'i funerals, even the funeral of a Baha'i who is not being buried according to Baha'i law. On the other hand, a Baha'i institution is not allowed to participate in a funeral that violates Baha'i law--a cremation, for example. In this case a separate memorial meeting may be held.

Baha'is have no special customs for visiting cemeteries, although there are several prayers of intercession for the dead. In many cases Tablets of visitation were prepared for early believers. These are intended to be read at their graves and serve as a sort of memorial.

Shoghi Effendi began the custom of issuing a short eulogy in the form of a cable addressed to the Baha'i world, the relevant Baha'i national community or the family when an eminent believer died. The Universal House of Justice has

continued this practice, as have some national spiritual assemblies. Editions of the yearbook Baha'i World from 1925 to 1991 contain obituaries of important Baha'is, as do many national Baha'i magazines.

{nd}

Baha'i prayers for the dead

As in Islam, the obligatory prayer (salat) for the dead is the most important prayer to be said for the departed and must be said at the funeral. It was originally written by the Bab. Unlike the daily obligatory prayers, it is to be recited in congregation, that is, one person recites the prayer on behalf of the group. All must stand but there is no requirement to face the qiblih.

The prayer opens with a short prologue written by Baha'u'llah. The greeting 'Allah-u-Abha' is then repeated once followed by the repetition nineteen times of a short verse. {p82} This formula is followed for each of five other verses, that is, there are six sets of verses, each consisting of the greeting 'Allah-u-Abha' said once and a short verse repeated nineteen times. The six verses are:

..... We all, verily, worship God.

..... We all, verily, bow down before God.

..... We all, verily, are devoted unto God.

..... We all, verily, give praise unto God.

..... We all, verily, yield thanks unto God.

..... We all, verily, are patient in God.[2.72]

..... [2.72. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, pp. 101-2.]

Unlike most Baha'i prayers, the prologue has a distinct form to be used for women. This prayer is to be recited before the burial and is required only for those who have reached the age of religious maturity, that is, fifteen.

The Baha'i teachings state that the prayers of the living aid the spiritual progress of the dead. Hundreds of intercessory prayers exist, as do innumerable letters of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice consoling individuals who had lost members of their families. Such prayers typically admit that human beings are unworthy of God's gifts but appeal to His mercy. In a striking passage in one prayer Baha'u'llah cites the famous Islamic tradition commanding the believers to 'honour their guest' and on that basis appeals to God not to deal harshly with the soul of the departed.[2.73] Baha'i teachings lay special emphasis on the duty of the children to pray for the souls of their parents.

..... [2.73. Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Prayers, p. 45.]

Hurufat-i-'Alin is a Tablet often recited by Iranian Baha'is at memorial meetings. Its principal theme is the origin and progress of the human soul, its

ultimate fate and the death of the physical body (see appendix 5). {p83}

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RITES OF WEALTH

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Inheritance

In religious traditions that give particular emphasis to law, inheritance is likely to be governed by religious rather than secular law. Such is the case in Islam and to a lesser extent in the Babi and Baha'i Faiths. Inheritance law governs the distribution of goods, property or position upon the death of the owner. Baha'i law requires each individual to write a will giving instructions for the distribution of his property after his death. If there is no will, the estate is to be distributed to seven classes of heirs, with the largest portion going to the children. Where particular classes of heirs are absent, their portions are distributed variously to the other heirs, to more distant relatives or to the local House of Justice to be used for charity.

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Inheritance laws and customs

Every society has laws and customs governing the disposition of the property of those who have died. In societies of any complexity this is minutely governed by law. These laws differ drastically from country to country and even in different parts of a single country. Their details depend on the customs and values of the society and on historical circumstances and accidents. There is normally a close relationship between the laws and customs of inheritance and the social structure of the society. The nature of inheritance law is best seen by considering choices made in the various systems. {p84}

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DESTRUCTION OR INHERITANCE OF PERSONAL PROPERTY

In simple societies there is sometimes no inheritance of property. Land is often held in common and is thus unaffected by the death of an individual. Such personal property as exists is usually of little value and may be destroyed at the death of the owner or buried with him, either to provide the soul with the things it will need in the next world or to protect the living from the ghost of the dead person. The deceased's possessions may be expended to provide funeral celebrations.

Such customs are not entirely lost even in complex societies. In North America and elsewhere it is common for people to be buried with prized possessions such a wedding ring or a particular item of clothing. Nevertheless, in societies where possessions have considerable value or land and animals are owned by individuals, systems of inheritance naturally develop.

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DIVISION BY LAW OR FREEDOM OF INHERITANCE

All systems of inheritance put some limitations on the freedom of the individual to bequeath his possessions as he wishes--modern legal systems, for example, discourage the complete disinheriting of a wife or children. Early legal systems generally allowed the individual little or no freedom in bequeathing his property. Most commonly restrictions served to keep property within the family: for example, by not allowing daughters to inherit. Other purposes might be served as well: requiring the entire estate to be given to the oldest (or youngest) son kept farms from being divided into uneconomic units.

The belief that the individual has the right to bequeath his property as he wishes is a later development. In the West it was encouraged by the Church, which had an interest in people being free to bequeath property to religious institutions. The will, the document setting forth an individual's instructions for the disposition of his property, has also often been the place for last counsels to the heirs and for statements of religious faith. {p85}

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INHERITANCE BY KIN OR BY CHILDREN AND WIFE

In many societies great value is placed on keeping property within the kinship group. In this case, women usually have very limited rights to inheritance since they are liable to marry outside the family and take property along with them (although the heir may be required to provide suitable support and marriage settlements for daughters).

In the inheritance law of ancient Israel, daughters did not inherit if there were sons. If there were no sons, they could only inherit if they married within their clan. Widows did not inherit at all, although they could be guardians of their husbands' estates until their sons came of age. If a man died childless, his widow was to marry his brother. These laws were specifically intended to ensure that the tribes and clans retained the lands originally possessed by them in Canaan. Societies where the nuclear family is predominant are likely to consider a man's chief heir to be his widow and to treat daughters and sons more equally.

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DEBTS AND OTHER OBLIGATIONS

In some legal systems debts are inherited along with property. In such cases the heirs may acquire heavy obligations by accepting a bequest. Most legal systems, however, simply require that remaining debts be paid, if possible, out of the estate before it is distributed.

Obligations may include not only financial obligations but also the obligation to care for the dependents of the deceased and to carry out unfulfilled

religious obligations. In Hindu law, for example, inheritance of property and the obligation to carry out religious rites on behalf of the deceased are closely connected.

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REAL PROPERTY, PERSONAL PROPERTY AND OFFICES

Inheritance law often treats different classes of property in different ways. Real property--land and buildings--is likely to be {p86} the most tightly controlled because of its importance in agricultural society. It is not uncommon for even living persons to be prohibited from depleting the estate by selling ancestral property. In England it was very common for the aristocracy to entail estates, bequeathing them on condition that they not be sold or divided. Personal property--money, jewellery, clothing, furniture and other movable possessions--was likely to be less strictly controlled. Frequently offices, religious privileges and the like could be inherited and these would also be governed by laws of inheritance.

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Islamic law of inheritance

Pre-Islamic Arabia was a tribal society. A man's heirs were his adult male relatives. Women and minor children were more likely to be part of the estate than to share in it. Levirate marriage--the widow becoming the wife of one of her husband's kinsmen--seems to have been common, for the Qur'an prohibits compulsion in this matter.[3.1] In practice, daughters might obtain a portion of their father's estate but their position was hardly secure.

..... [3.1. Qur'an 4:19.]

Muhammad made a number of changes in the customary law of the Arabs. The major Qur'anic legislation dates from after the battle of Uhud in 625 AD. A widow of one of the Muslims killed in the battle complained that her husband's relatives had taken his entire estate, leaving nothing for her and her children. There were a number of other such complaints. The consequence was the legislation of Qur'an 4:2-14 allotting definite shares of the inheritance to the widow, daughters and other female relatives. Generally speaking, a female receives half the share of a male of the same relationship. Problems arose in the application of the law of inheritance soon after the death of the Prophet and the collections of traditions are full of accounts of judgements on inheritance made by various companions of Muhammad. {p87}

In its fully developed form Islamic law laid out the following providions for the division of inheritance:

---------- 1. Debts of the deceased had to be paid first. Provision might also be made for paying a substitute to fulfil uncompleted religious obligations such as missed prayers and the pilgrimage.

---------- 2. Specific bequests could be made up to the amount of a third of

the estate. Bequests could not exceed this amount without consent of the heirs and could not be made to those who were to receive a specified portion of the estate.

---------- 3. The Qur'anic heirs are those guaranteed a specified portion of the estate in the text of the Qur'an. These included, among others, the daughters, granddaughter, father, mother, paternal grandfather and grandmother, sisters and spouse.

---------- 4. The remnant of the estate went to the male relatives, normally the sons. If there were no sons, the remnant went to progressively more distant classes of relatives on the father's side.

Complicated rules governed the modification of the shares of each class of heirs in special cases.

Normally, Muslims and non-Muslims were not allowed to inherit from each other, although Shi'i law was more liberal in this respect.

Sunni and Shi'i inheritance laws differ significantly. Agnatic kinsmen are favoured in Sunni law whereas children and parents, including women, are more favoured in Shi'i law.

The proper division of an estate was an exceedingly complicated matter since the exact fraction of an estate due to each class of heir might be affected by the presence or absence of other classes of heirs. In practice, the proper disposition of {p88} an estate could be undertaken by professionals in the religious courts.

This inflexible system for the division of inheritance sometimes caused problems, particularly since it led to the rapid dissipation of even large properties. As a result various devices were used to circumvent the strict application of inheritance law, either by conveying property during the owner's lifetime or by constituting it as a religious endowment, frequently with its income designated in whole or in part as provision for the donor's descendants. This had the added advantage of protecting the property from seizure by the state.

Attempts by modern governments to replace the Islamic law of inheritance with civil law have been stoutly resisted by the clergy.

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Babi inheritance law

Although the Bab laid out a system of inheritance, it is very sketchy in its details. There are seven classes of heirs--the father, mother, wife, child, sister, brother and teacher--corresponding to the seven forms of each attribute of God in Arabic.[3.2] The inheritance is divided according to the following scheme:[3.3]

..... [3.2. The Bab, Persian Bayan 8:2.]

..... [3.3. The Bab, Arabic Bayan 10:3.]

----- Class --- Book -- Parts - # of Shares --- Numerical value - % share

----- Children - Ta ------ 9 --- mim qaf ta ----- 540 (9 x 60) ----- 21%

----- Spouse --- Ha ------ 8 --- ta fa ---------- 480 (8 x 60) ----- 19%

----- Father --- Za ------ 7 --- ta kaf --------- 420 (7 x 60) ----- 17%

----- Mother --- Vav ----- 6 --- ra fa ya 'ayn -- 360 (6 x 60) ----- 14%

----- Brother -- Ha ------ 5 --- shin ---------- 300 (5 x 60) ----- 12%

----- Sister --- Dal ----- 4 --- ra mim --------- 240 (4 x 60) ----- 10%

----- Teacher -- Jim ----- 3 --- qaf fa --------- 180 (3 x 60) ------ 7%

----- Total shares ---------- 2,520

'Teacher is defined as 'he who teaches you the knowledge of the Bayan'. The total number of shares, 2520, is presumably {p89} chosen because it is the smallest number evenly divisible by each number between one and nine.

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The Bab did not state whether this system is to be applied to all estates or only those in which a person dies without leaving a will or whether specific bequests are permitted.

The Bab specifies several other observances related to inheritance. First, each person is to write a will but this is a testimony of faith that is to be preserved by his descendants and eventually presented to Him Whom God shall make manifest. It apparently is not concerned with the disposition of property.[3.4] Second, each person who is able to do so is obliged to bequeath to his heirs nineteen sheets of fine paper and nineteen rings inscribed with various names of God.[3.5]

..... [3.4. The Bab, Arabic and Persian Bayans 5:13.]

..... [3.5. ibid. 8:2.]

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Baha'i inheritance law

Baha'i inheritance law is based mainly on passages in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and its supplement, Questions and Answers. The Kitab-i-Aqdas instructs each believer to write a will. The testator should 'head this document with the adornment of the Most Great Name, bear witness therein unto the oneness of God in the Dayspring of His Revelation, and make mention, as he may wish, of that which is praiseworthy'.[3.6] The parallel passage in the Qur'an, 2:180, makes it clear that the last phrase of the passage quoted refers to making reasonable and just bequests. The Baha'i will should thus consist of a written testimony of faith like the Babi one, followed by instructions for the disposition of property. In Questions and Answers Baha'u'llah explains that each individual is free to

leave his property to whomever he wishes.[3.7] In a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran Shoghi Effendi stated that so long as the bequests were not harmful to the Faith the assembly was bound by the wishes of the deceased.[3.8]

..... [3.6. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 109.]

..... [3.7. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, question 69.]

..... [3.8. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjiniy-i-Hudud va-Ahkam, pp. 114-15; cf. ibid., pp. 115-17; Amr va-Khalq, 4:207-11.]

Baha'i law provides that before an estate is distributed, funeral expenses, debts and Huququ'llah must be paid, in this {p90} order. If the estate is insufficient to pay all debts, the payments are to be prorated proportional to the amount of each debt.

Baha'u'llah's system for dividing estates when there is no will is based on the Bab's system. However, having heard 'the clamour of children as yet unborn', He doubled the share allotted to the offspring and reduced each of the other classes.[3.9]

..... [3.9. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 20.]

----- Class ----- Number of shares ------- Percent share

----- Children -- (540 + 540 = 1,080 --------- 43%

----- Spouse ---- (480 - 90 .= . 390 --------- 15%

----- Father ---- (420 - 90 .= . 330 --------- 13%

----- Mother ---- (360 - 90 .= . 270 --------- 11%

----- Brother --- (300 - 90 .= . 210 ---------- 8%

----- Sister ---- (240 - 90 .= . 150 ---------- 6%

----- Teacher --- (180 - 90 .=. . 90 ---------- 4%

----- Total shares --- 2,520

Baha'u'llah explains that the system of the Bab has not been fundamentally altered but rather that God has shown His bounty towards the children. This is because the Bab's system is based on the letter ta, whose numerical value is nine, corresponding to the numerical value of baha'.

The family house, its furnishings and outbuildings, and the father's clothing are given to the eldest son in addition to his usual share of the inheritance. Thus, 'Abdu'l-Baha explained, reflects both the precedence rightfully given to the eldest son and the need to maintain a home for the family. In His explanation He refers favourably to the system of entailment in England as having allowed families to maintain their positions for centuries. From this the House of Justice infers that it is the responsibility of the eldest son to care for his widowed mother.[3.10] The used clothing of a woman is distributed

among her daughters.

..... [3.10. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, note 44.]

The local house of justice, under certain circumstances, inherits part or all of the estate 'to be expended by the Trustees of the All-Merciful on the orphaned and widowed, and on whatsoever will bring benefit to the generality of the people':[3.11]

..... [3.11. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 21.] {p91}

---------- 1. If there are no children, their entire share.

---------- 2. If there are children but one of the other classes of heirs does not exist, one third of that share, with two thirds going to the children.

---------- 3. One third if the only heirs are nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles or first cousins.

---------- 4. One third of the family house and personal clothing of the father if there are daughters but no sons.

---------- 5. One third of the share of half-brothers and sisters who have the same mother as the deceased when these inherit.

---------- 6. The entire estate if there are no heirs.

The following relatives can inherit in special cases:

---------- 1. If all seven classes of heirs are missing, two thirds of the estate goes to nephews and nieces; lacking these, to aunts and uncles; and lacking these to first cousins.

---------- 2. The children of a son who dies before his parent inherit their father's share but the children of a deceased daughter inherit nothing.

---------- 3. Half-brothers and sisters who have the same mother as the deceased inherit two thirds of the brother's and sister's shares if there are no full brothers and sisters and no half-brothers and sisters who share the same father. Half-brothers and sisters share the same father as the deceased receive the same shares as full brothers and sisters.

Other provisions govern specific classes of possessions and heirs: {p92}

---------- Widows retain their used clothing and the gifts given to them by their husbands. Items purchased simply for the wife's use are considered part of the husband's estate and are to be divided among the heirs.

---------- Non-Baha'is do not inherit under the rules of intestacy but can inherit through a will.

---------- The inheritances of minors should be entrusted to an individual or company for investment. The trustee is entitled to a portion of the interest accrued.

Under current conditions civil law would in most places preempt any attempt to

apply the Baha'i law of intestacy. However, Baha'is commonly observe the obligation to write a will and might make provision for the payment of any Huququ'llah due at their deaths. There may be some tendency among Baha'is to make bequests in accordance with the system applicable in intestacy but there is no available evidence as to how common this is. In any case, there is nothing in the Baha'i writings relating to inheritance that specifically encourages the use of the law of intestacy as a model for the division of estates in a will. 'Abdu'l-Baha, in fact, points out that a major purpose in writing a will is to avoid problems caused by the application of the law of intestacy.

A somewhat more abstract application of the law of intestacy is the use of its provisions as evidence of normative Baha'i family structure. The most notable example of this occurs in a letter of the Universal House of Justice on family structure.[3.12]

..... [3.12. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, 28 December 1980, in Compilation, vol. 1, no. 916, pp. 413-16. cf. Linda and John Walbridge, 'Baha'i Laws on the Status of Men', World Order, vol. 19, nos. 1-2 (Winter 1984-5), pp. 25-36, and the criticisms of this article in 'A Question of Gender: A forum on the Status of Men in Baha'i Law', dialogue, vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 1987) pp. 14-34.]

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Symbolic uses of the concept of inheritance

In the Hebrew Bible the concept of inheritance of the people of Israel is closely linked with the concept of the Covenant. The land of Canaan, promised by God to Abraham, is the inheritance of his descendants. The people of Israel are sometimes referred to as the inheritance of God, for {p93} God ruled them directly, dwelling in their midst. Eventually the concept became more universal and eschatological and concerned not so much an earthly land as personal and communal salvation. The tendency culminated in the new Testament with the identification of Christ as the inheritance promised to Israel.

This concept is not especially important in the Baha'i writings but it does appear. Baha'u'llah opens the Book of the Covenant, His own will, by remarking that although he has no property to leave behind, nonetheless He has 'bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent and priceless heritage'.[3.13] 'Abdu'l-Baha writes of the believer receiving 'the most glorious heritage from the Prophets of God and His holy ones'[3.14] and God bestowing 'for a heritage, immortal life'.[3.15] The concept is also used of the redemption of the material world, as in a passage in which Baha'u'llah warns those who have busied themselves with the material world that God 'shall cleanse the earth from the defilement of their corruption, and shall give it for an heritage unto such of His servants as are night unto Him'.[3.16]

..... [3.13. Baha'u'llah, Tablets, p. 219.]

..... [3.14. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections, p. 13.]

..... [3.15. ibid. p. 66.]

..... [3.16. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 208.]

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Huququ'llah

Huququllah means the 'rights' or 'claims of God' and is a voluntary Baha'i religious tax of nineteen per cent payable to the Universal House of Justice on assets and income in excess of annual expenses.

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The Shi'i khums

Curiously, the ultimate origins of the Baha'i institution of Huququ'llah are found in the Islamic law governing the division of war booty taken from non-Muslims. After the battle of Badr in 2/624, the first Muslim military victory, a verse of the Qur'an was revealed, 'Know that, whatever booty you take, the fifth of it is God's, and the Messenger's, and the near {p94} kinsman's [i.e. of the Prophet], and the orphan's, and for the needy, and the traveller...'[3.17] Thus, one fifth of the booty was given to the Prophet to divide among the classes mentioned and the remainder was distributed to those who participated in the fighting.

..... [3.17. Qur'an 8:41.]

In later times the interpretation of this law of khums, 'the fifth', was one of the major differences between Sunnis and Shi'is. Sunni authorities held that this verse referred only to war booty and that the portions for God, the Prophet and His relatives were not to be paid after His death. Thus the khums was of little importance in later Sunni law. Shi'is maintain that this law applies to gains of all kinds--including treasure-trove and profits of mines, fisheries, trades and crafts--when these exceed the individual's annual living expenses. The khumsis also to be paid on wealth derived in part from illicit sources and on the proceeds of land sales to non-believers, thus purifying such income.

The khums is to be divided into six equal shares: for God, Muhammad, Muhammad's paternal relatives, orphans, the poor and destitute travellers. The first three shares are held to have been inherited by the Imams. Thus half the khums is to be paid to the Imam for him to use as he sees fit and is therefore called the sahm-i-imam, 'the Imam's share'. The other three shares are to be paid only to Siyyids--descendants of the Prophet--since these are not eligible to receive other kinds of alms. The khums is to be paid annually to the valiyu'l-amr, the religious leader, once the Imam but now one of the leading clerics. It is sometimes called huquq Al el Muhammad, 'the rights of the family of Muhammad'.

After the death of the Prophet the state no longer paid khums to the family of Muhammad but pious Shi'is paid it voluntarily to the Imams. After the line of Imams was broken there was a difference of opinion as to what to do with the

Imam's share of the khums, with many Shi'i authorities holding either that the money should be hidden until the return of the Imam or that the obligation had lapsed. Beginning in the seventeenth {p95} century the Usuli school of jurisprudence advanced the idea that the khums should be paid to the mujtahids as the deputies of the Imam, a practice that placed great financial resources in the hands of the leading Shi'i clergy.

In contemporary Shi'ism the khums is paid to the Grand Ayatu'llah (maraji'), although the individual might himself distribute the portion belonging to poor Siyyids. The Ayatu'llahs in turn use these funds to pay students, fund charitable or religious projects and in general aid Islam and extend their influence. Certain Shi'is, notably the minority Akhbari school, have bitterly criticized the clergy for presuming to spend the money that rightfully belongs only to the Imam.

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The Babi Huqúqu'llah

The Bayan contains at least two passages governing contributions to the Bab Himself and to Him Whom God shall make manifest. The exact meaning of these laws is somewhat obscured by the difficult style of the Bab.

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PRICELESS OBJECTS

Unique and priceless objects are to be given to the Bab.[3.18] After His death it is again permissible for believers to own such objects. However, when He Whom God shall make manifest appears, they must be returned to Him 'to the number of Vahid [19]'--perhaps meaning that only after the first nineteen such objects must be given to Him. Those who possess the means but do not own any such unique objects may give ninety-five mithqals of gold instead, about eleven troy ounces. The Bab exempts the craftsman who makes such objects--perhaps one in a year--who would not be able to bear the loss of such a donation.

..... [3.18. The Bab, Bayan 5:16.]

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THE HUQUQU'LLAH

In Bayan 5:19 the Bab defines the mithqal, a unit of weight, as {p96} equal to nineteen grains. Nineteen mithqals of gold are defined as equal to ten thousand dinars, and nineteen mithqals of silver as a thousand dinars. A person whose wealth exceeds 540 mithqals of gold or silver is obliged to give five per cent of each to a just Babi king to aid Him Whom God shall make manifest. The Bab refers to this as Huqúqu'llah ('the rights of God'), alluding to one of the terms used for the khums. It appears that this law was not to apply until the appearance of Him Whom God shall make manifest. The Bayan does not appear to contain regulations exactly corresponding to the Islamic khums and the other Islamic religious taxes.

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The Baha'i Huqúqu'llah

Huqúqu'llah literally means 'the rights of God', with 'rights' having the meaning of a legal claim. Unlike most Baha'i laws, which are usually closely related to the laws of the Bayan, the law of Huqúqu'llah is much more like the Islamic khums, although Baha'u'llah reforms the Islamic law and practice in a number of ways. Baha'u'llah does, however, specifically state that the law of Huqúqu'llah is a modification of the Babi law with two exceptions: the minimum value to which the Huqúqu'llah applies is nineteen mithqals of gold and the residence and its furnishings are exempted.

As soon as the provisions of the Kitab-i-Aqdas became known in 1873, Baha'is began offering Huqúqu'llah on the basis of the new laws. Baha'u'llah at first declined such payments. In 1878, however, faced with increasing practical needs of the new Faith, particularly the need to support travelling Baha'i teachers in Iran and the growing Baha'i community in the Holy Land, Baha'u'llah began to accept the Huqúqu'llah. He appointed Shah-Muhammad-i-Manshadi, an early believer from the Yazd area, as Trustee (amin) of the Huqúqu'llah, thus founding an institution that has continued to the present. Manshadi, later given the title of Aminu'l-Bayan ('trustee of {p97} the Bayan') for his services, collected Huqúqu'llah payments and letters from the believers in Iran an carried them to 'Akka, returning with news and Tablets from Baha'u'llah. He was assisted by his close friend Haji Abu'l-Hasan-i-Ardikhani, another Yazdi, later known as Haji Amin. They had been, in fact, the first Baha'is to visit Baha'u'llah in 'Akka.

In 1881 they were attacked on a journey by rebels, and Manshadi was fatally wounded. Baha'u'llah then appointed Haji Amin as his successor as Trustee of the Huqúqu'llah, a post he held for forty-seven years. With no home or property of his own, he travelled continually, was imprisoned twice, and became a familiar and beloved figure in most of the Baha'i communities of Iran. After his death in 1928, Shoghi Effendi named him a Hand of the Cause.

The next trustee was Haji Ghulam-Riday-i-Isfahani, known as Amin-i-Amin. He came from a wealthy Tehran merchant family and was converted to the Faith as a young man. During the lifetime of 'Abdu'l-Baha he became Haji Amin's assistant. During his trusteeship he began taking steps to register and protect Baha'i properties and endowments in Iran. He died in 1938.

The fourh Trustee was Valiyu'llah Varqa, the third son of Varqa the martyr. He was educated at the American University of Beirut and had accompanied 'Abdu'l-Baha to Europe and America. After his return to Iran he served on the Spiritual Assembly of Tehran, the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran and other agencies. He was appointed Hand of the Cause in 1951. He served as Trustee for seventeen years until his death in 1955.

The fifth Trustee was his son 'Ali-Muhammad Varqa, whom Shoghi Effendi appointed both Trustee and Hand of the Cause after his father's death. He

remains Trustee at present (1996).

After the death of Baha'u'llah, the Huqúqu'llah was paid to the successive leaders of the community: 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. It was and {p98} remains the largest source of funds available to the Baha'i World Centre. It thus played a large role in the major projects of the World Centre: the building of the Shrine of the Bab and the acquisition and restoration of other holy places; assisting in the acquisition and construction of temples, temple sites, centres and endowments around the world; subsidizing publications and translations; and the day-to-day work of the World Centre.

Until 1992 the law of Huqúqu'llah was applicable only to Baha'is of Muslim origin, mainly Iranian, regardless of their country of residence. However, from about 1986 the Universal House of Justice began to encourage Baha'is throughout the world to learn about Huqúqu'llah. A number of publications explaining the law were prepared at the World Centre, including a comprehensive compilation and a codification of the law. As a result, non-Iranian Baha'is in considerable numbers began to pay the Huqúqu'llah. The law became universally binding at Ridvan 1992.

The principles and regulations of the Huqúqu'llah are explained in unusual detail in the writings of Baha'u'llah Himself, since, unlike many other areas of Baha'i law and administration, the law of Huqúqúq'llah was put into full practice during His lifetime. Thus there are, for example, many letters of instruction addressed to the Trustees.

Baha'u'llah's writings identify two general purposes of the Huqúqu'llah: spiritual and practical. The spiritual purposes of the Huqúqu'llah are to enable the believer to demonstrate his fidelity to the Covenant of God and the sincerity of his faith. Through it the believer purifies his possessions. Payment of Huqúqu'llah attracts blessings, prosperity and protection in this world and secures a reward in the next. It creates a direct link between the believer and the Centre of his Faith. However, there is no disgrace in being poor and thus not having to pay the Huqúqu'llah.

The spiritual purpose of the Huqúqúq'llah is based on the fact that spiritual goals must be accomplished through material {p99} means. The Huqúqu'llah makes large sums of unrestricted funds available, thus assuring 'the independence and decisive functioning of the World Centre'. The Huqúqu'llah is considered to be a 'sacred institution'.[3.19]

..... [3.19. Codification of the Law of Huqúqu'llah, p. 1.]

The amount owed for Huqúqu'llah is considered the property of God. Thus failure to pay the Huqúqu'llah is failure to give God what is His, a failure to act honestly towards Him. Unlike other Baha'i funds, the donor has no say over the recipient or uses of the Huqúqu'llah contributions: they must be paid to the central authority of the Faith--originally Baha'u'llah and now the Universal House of Justice--and may be used in any way it sees fit. The Huqúqu'llah therefore cannot be earmarked. Huqúqu'llah funds can only be spent with the

permission of the central authority, even for Baha'i purposes.

The right of the Universal House of Justice to receive and spend the Huqúqu'llah is based on its position as the centre of the Faith and on the mandate given it by Baha'u'llah to make regulations governing the Huqúqu'llah. In contrast with Shi'i custom, Baha'u'llah denied His family any claim to the Huqúqu'llah.

Although the payment of Huqúqu'llah is obligatory, Baha'u'llah prohibited any personal solicitation for it. The Trustees and other Baha'i institutions may only make general appeals with 'the utmost regard for the dignity of the Word of God'.[3.20] Moreover, the Trustees may not accept the Huqúqu'llah unless it is offered voluntarily and joyfully.

..... [3.20. Baha'u'llah, in Huqúqu'llah, no. 27.]

The collection of the Huqúqu'llah is managed by the Trustee, his deputies and their representatives in various parts of the world.

Huqúqu'llah is a one-time tax of nineteen percent of the value of an individual's assessable assets. It is payable when their value reaches the equivalent of nineteen mithqals (2.2 troy ounces) of gold. This is equivalent to $222.00 for each #$100 of the price of gold per ounce. Thus if the price of gold is $400 per ounce, nineteen mighqals of gold are worth $800. The {p100} Huqúqu'llah is due again when the value of the individual's possessions have risen by at least the equivalent of another nineteen mithqals of gold and is due only on whole units of nineteen mithqals. The timing of the payment is up to the individual depending on his own conscience and financial circumstances. The unpaid balance of Huqúqu'llah should be paid out of an individual's estate after the payment of burial expenses and remaining debts and before the distribution of legacies. Payment of Huqúqu'llah takes precedence over donations to other Baha'i funds.

Huqúqu'llah is again due when an asset changes hands by legacy or gift, even if the previous owner had already paid Huqúqu'llah on that asset.

Certain assets are exempt from Huqúqu'llah. These are:

---------- Any amounts on which an individual has already paid Huqúqu'llah. Thus if an individual has paid Huqúqu'llah on assets having a value of a hundred mithqals of gold, he is only liable for Huqúqu'llah on assets above this amount. This is also the case if the value of his assets drops below the amount and is later regained. Thus income making up earlier losses is exempt.

---------- The residence and its necessary furnishings.

---------- Necessary living expenses. The Huqúqu'llah is sometimes explained as being due on the excess of annual income over expenses.

---------- Losses and expenses on the sale of property.

---------- Taxes and duties.

---------- Increases in value of possessions not yet realized by sale. {p101}

---------- Property that does not yield income.

---------- Payment of debts.

---------- Burial expenses.

An individual is also exempted from paying the Huququ'llah if he is financially unable to do so.

Pending further legislation by the House of Justice, certain questions are left to the discretion of the individual. These include:

---------- What constitutes 'necessary' expenses for a residence, furnishings and living. The Universal House of Justice has condemned the practice of spending lavishly on such things to avoid the payment of Huququ'llah. On the other hand, individuals are discouraged from practising excessive frugality.

---------- When payment is to be made.

---------- Whether a married couple should make payments individually or together.

---------- Whether to consider contributions to other Baha'i funds as exempt living expenses.

---------- Whether to exempt capital used to produce income. {p102} {p103}

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Part Two

Sacred Space {p104} {p105}

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THE JOURNEY TO MEET THE HOLY

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Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage (hajj, ziyarat, shaddu'r-rihal) is a journey made with the intention of visiting a shrine or holy place. In the Baha'i Faith three places are consecrated to pilgrimage: the House of the Bab in Shiraz, the House of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad and the Shrine of Baha'u'llah in 'Akka. Contemporary Baha'i pilgrimage consists of a nine-day visit to the Baha'i shrines and holy places in the 'Akka-Haifa area. It is considered meritorious to visit other Baha'i historic sites and the tombs of important believers.

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Pilgrimage as a religious rite

Pilgrimage is an almost universal religious phenomenon, practised throughout

the world and during the whole of recorded history.

Pilgrimage sites may be of several kinds: places associated in history or legend with the life of a holy person, a dramatic or strange feature of the landscape or the site of a miracle or apparition. A new religion may reinterpret an older pilgrimage site, which thus retains its holiness despite the change of religion--as happened, for example, at Mecca, Jerusalem, Mount Carmel, Canterbury in England and Guadeloupe in Mexico. At other times the association of a place with the life or death of a holy person sanctifies the spot, as occurred at {p106} Nazareth, Medina, Tiberias and Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. The location of relics or famous images similarly become sites of pilgrimage. Some shrines are the sites of apparitions or miracles, such as the modern Catholic shrines of Fatima and Lourdes.

Although pilgrimage may be a central rite of a religion, as it is in Islam, it tends to be a phenomenon of popular religion. The pilgrim is removed from normal controls and constraints, may journey to sites not sanctioned by orthodox religion and is prone to extremes of enthusiasm. Pilgrimage, however orthodox it may be, thus tends to be viewed with suspicion by both religious and secular authorities, who can never be sure of controlling the religious impulses of pilgrims, and by liberals, who object to the credulity and corruption that tend to surround shrines.

The typical experience of pilgrimage may be summarized as follows: The departure on a pilgrimage marks a break with day-to-day life. The pilgrim is released from ordinary social ties and restraints. Joining others on the way and unchecked by the usual barriers of family and class, the pilgrim forms strong friendships. When he at last reaches the sacred place, he feels an intense joy at walking on the very ground where the divine was manifested in the world. After long and blissful prayer, the pilgrim tours the minor holy places around the shrine. He makes offerings, eats sacred food and buys pious mementoes. The pilgrim returns home joyfully to share with family and friends the blessings he has acquired.[4.1]

..... [4.1. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. II, p. 328.]

The number of pilgrimages has increased enormously in recent times as technology has eased the pilgrim's journey and spread the fame of old and new shrines.

Pilgrimage continues to be a powerful experience for those who undertake it. Its effect transcends both daily life and ordinary religious experience. {p107}

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Islamic pilgrimage

The hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, is one of the five pillars of Islam. Every adult Muslim who is capable of doing so is obliged to make the hajj to Mecca once during his life. The hajj occupies a central position in Islamic religious experience, for in it enormous numbers of pilgrims from the

entire Muslim world come together in equality, demonstrating the strength and universality of Islam.

The hajj predates Islam, originating in an annual festival in the plain of 'Arafah outside Mecca. It was a pagan affair, involving rituals at sites in and near Mecca, especially at the ancient cubical stone temple known as the Ka'bah. However, for Muhammad the Ka'bah and the hajj were associated with Abraham, the father of monotheism, and His son Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs. Thus when Muhammad conquered Mecca in 630, he destroyed the idols in the Ka'bah and returned the following year to perform the hajj. The modern Muslim hajj exactly follows the pattern set by Muhammad in 631.

The hajj takes place in the first two weeks of the Muslim month of Dhi'l-Hijjih. Visiting Mecca at other times (the 'umrih), while commendable, does not fulfil the obligation of pilgrimage. Arrived at the sacred area around Mecca, the pilgrim dons the simple white garments that symbolize his state of consecration (ihram). As he enters the sacred territory, the pilgrim calls out a special prayer beginning, 'Here am I, O Lord! What is Thy command?' He then visits the Great Mosque in which is found the Ka'bah, which he must walk around seven times. He then may visit other minor shrines. The formal visit to the Ka'bah ends with the pilgrim trotting seven times between two other shrines, symbolizing Hagar's desperate search for water for her son Ishmael.

On 8 Dhi'l-Hijjih the pilgrims set off for the Plain of 'Arafah, twenty-four kilometres southeast of Mecca, where they spend the afternoon of the following day together before {p108} the hillock known as the Mount of Mercy. Sermons are preached in commemoration of the sermon given there by Muhammad on His final pilgrimage. After sunset, again following the example of Muhammad, the pilgrims hasten back towards Mecca. The next day at Mina, near Mecca, each pilgrim must throw seven small stones at each of three pillars as a symbol of the rejection of the temptations of the devil. Later that day, those who can afford it sacrifice sheep, goats or camels. This is called the Holiday of Sacrifice ('Idu'l-Adha). After this the pilgrims can break their state of consecration and resume normal dress. The pilgrims may return to Mecca for a final circumambulation of the Ka'bah, which has been refurbished in their absence. Otherwise, they remain to Mina until the thirteenth of the month, exchanging social visits. That evening the hajj is over and the pilgrims must leave Mina, although they may stay on longer in Mecca.

Although it is not part of the hajj and is not obligatory, many pilgrims make an additional visit (ziyarah) to Medina, either before or after the hajj. There they visit the Mosque of the Prophet, where are found the tombs of Muhammad and the first two caliphs, and the other tombs and monuments of the family and companions of the Prophet.

The impact of the hajj on Islamic society, past and present, cannot be underestimated. For the pious it is an affirmation of the strength, unity and universality of Islam. Islamic governments vied for influence by their patronage of the pilgrimage. Some still do, notably Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Scholars used the long journey as an opportunity to meet their peers in the countries they passed through. With modern improvements in transportation, the hajj has grown rapidly. Several million pilgrims now attend each year, while television and film allow other Muslims to share in the experience. For a Muslim the hajj is likely to be the central religious experience of his life, and he will proudly bear the title 'Haji' until the end of his days.

Although they are not mandated by Islamic law, pilgrimages {p109} to other shrines are an important part of Islamic religious life. There are thousands of shrines scattered through the Islamic world, ranging from the tombs of local saints in neighbourhood mosques to great shrines that draw pilgrims from all over the world. A typical shrine consists of a stone sarcophagus surrounded by a metal lattice, perhaps in a separate room attached to a mosque. The visitor recites a specified prayer (the 'Tablet of visitation' for that shrine), touches the grate to acquire the blessing of the tomb, and pushes an offering through the lattice. He may leave a note making some special request of the saint. The larger shrines have other religious institutions attached to them--seminaries and the like.

Attitudes towards shrines differ among different groups of Muslims. A few groups reject them entirely. Modernists have often rejected them as manifestations of popular superstition, while the fundamentalist Wahhabis of Central Arabia went so far as to destroy the cemetery at Medina, obliterating the tombs of many companions of the Prophet, claiming that veneration of such sites was tantamount to idolatry. For other groups, notably the Sufis--the Islamic mystics--and the Shi'i, the shrines of their founders are central to their identities as communities.

The Shi'i shrines--the tombs of a number of the Imams and other members of the Prophet's family in Iraq and Iran--are particularly important. Not only were they primary objects of pilgrimage, they were and remain the chief centres of Shi'i learning. Pious Shi'is would visit the shrine cities and remain for long periods worshipping at the shrines and attending the lectures of the great clergy who resided there. These cities were crowded with scholars, students, pilgrims, shrine officials, political refugees and old people waiting the blessing of dying in the holy spot. Caravans brought the bodies of the pious dead for burial as well.

Comments in the Babi writings concerning Islamic pilgrimage practices show a balance between the desire to abolish old abuses on the one hand and respect for the holy places, particularly {p110} the tombs of the Imams, on the other. The Bab proclaimed the deconsecration of all the old shrines, since what made a place holy was its relation to God. There is no point in worshipping at these places if one ignores the new Manifestation, who is their real purpose.[4.2] He remarks disapprovingly of the 'vast concourse of pilgrims' who visited Mecca in the year of His own pilgrimage while He, the Manifestation of God, went unnoticed except by a single companion.[4.3] On the other hand, the Bab first proclaimed His mission publicly while on pilgrimage in Mecca and revealed Tablets of visitation for many of the Shi'i shrines, suggesting that the older

customs of praying at tombs and veneration of the shrines of the Imams continued, although they were not institutionalized in the Bayan. Further, the Bab dispatched His messenger Sayyah to perform rites of visitation on His behalf at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsi.

..... [4.2. The Bab, Persian Bayan 4:12.]

..... [4.3. The Bab, Selections, pp. 89-90.]

Baha'u'llah set aside the Islamic practice of making long journeys to visit tombs, stating that they were 'not necessary'[4.4] but He is known to have visited the Shi'i shrines in Iraq, where He chose to be exiled. Some Iranian Baha'is seem to have continued to visit Islamic shrines and make the hajj until the early twentieth century.

..... [4.4. Baha'u'llah, Tablets, pp. 27-8.]

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Baha'i pilgrimage

According to the Bayan[4.5] the House of the Bab in Shiraz is the Holy House (baytu'l-haram, the title of the Ka'bah in Mecca) during the Bab's dispensation and is thus the object of the Babi hajj. This house should be elaborately ornamented, at least to the extent of being covered with mirrors. (Perhaps this suggestion has something to do with Shah Chiragh, the shrine in Shiraz famous for its decoration of mosaic mirrorwork.) it should have ninety-five doors--possibly meaning that the House itself should be in the courtyard of a large building having ninety-five entrances (the Great Mosque in Mecca has {p111} twenty-four), thus allowing the pilgrims to circumambulate the House. The pilgrim who goes to the Holy House should display gentleness, modesty and tranquillity--qualities in contrast to those shown by some with whom the Bab made the pilgrimage to Mecca. No one should sell or buy in the precincts of the House. The Babi hajj should be made once in a lifetime but the obligation applies only to those sufficiently wealthy to travel in comfort. It is not binding on women, for whom the journey would be especially burdensome. Those living near the house may visit yearly since to do so is not difficult. Women living nearby may visit the House at night. Those pilgrims whose means allow it are to give nineteen mithqals of gold to the nineteen servants of the House who sit on the thrones at its four corners. These servants, however, are to treat the pilgrim with the greatest respect and are not to ask for this gift. The dead are not to be brought to the Holy House for burial. The Bab does not seem to have prepared a specific hajj ritual.

..... [4.5. The Bab, Bayan, Arabic and Persian 4:13-5:2.]

The Bab also specified that eighteen other shrines should be built in places associated with the Letters of the Living, presumably their tombs. These nineteen shrines were to replace the shrines of previous religions. Matters are thus eased for the pilgrim, since visiting these nineteen by implication encompasses visiting the shrines of all the prophets and saints. There are no

rituals prescribed for these shrines, although the Bab did write Tablets of visitation for certain of the Letters of the Living and for other believers and martyrs, implying that it would be meritorious to visit their tombs. The Bab also specified that those living within sixty-six parsangs of Tabriz, 'the place of the blow where He was bastinadoed in 1848, should visit there for nineteen days each year.

None of this, of course, could be put into practice during the lifetime of the Bab. Babi pilgrimage in fact was the journey to meet the Bab in person--for most of His ministry, the long difficult journey to the fortresses in northwestern Iran where the Bab was held prisoner. This was visitation (ziyarah) rather than hajj. {p112}

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Baha'i pilgrimage

The term 'pilgrimage' in English Baha'i usage translates two terms in Arabic and Persian: hajj, the ritual visit to a sacred house--for Baha'is either the House of the Bab in Shiraz or the House of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad--and ziyarat, the visitation of any holy place, especially a tomb. After the passing of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha designated the Shrine of His father as a place of pilgrimage, stating that to visit it was 'obligatory' if one 'can afford it and is able to do so, and if no obstacle stands in one's way'.[4.6] At present, 'pilgrimage' for Baha'is almost always refers to the pilgrimage to 'Akka and Haifa in the Holy Land and the visitation of the holy places there, particularly the Shrines of Baha'u'llah and the Bab, as it is virtually impossible for Baha'is to go to either of the two objects of hajj. In the present chapter 'hajj]' will be used when reference is specifically to the formal pilgrimage to the two houses or the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca; 'ziyarat' or 'visitation' will be used to refer specifically to Islamic, Babi or Baha'i pilgrimages to the tombs of holy individuals; and 'pilgrimage' will be used either for sacred journeys in general or where the context makes clear whether hajj or visitation is meant.

..... [4.6.

Baha'is believe that the reverent visiting of holy places is of spiritual benefit. In addition to the principal Baha'i shrines, such places include the resting place of Shoghi Effendi in London, the graves of martyrs and eminent believers and places associated with the lives of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. 'Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, note 54.]

In Baha'i law pilgrimage (hajj) is a major ritual obligation, although it is only obligatory for men who are able to make the journey; women are exempted but not prohibited from making the hajj.[4.7]

..... [4.7. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 32, note 55.]

In His Kitab-i-Aqdas and its supplement Questions and Answers, Baha'u'llah commands male believers who are able to do so to perform the hajj to either the

House of the Bab in Shiraz or the house in Baghdad where He Himself lived prior {p113} to the declaration of His mission. The believer may visit whichever house is convenient for him. In this Baha'u'llah follows the law of the Bayan, which ordains pilgrimage to the House of the Bab and implies that the place of manifestation of Him Whom God shall make manifest will also be a place of pilgrimage (Masjidu'l-Haram).[4.8]

..... [4.8. The Bab, Persian Bayan 5:1.]

Baha'u'llah had first promulgated this law in Adrianople in two Tablets addressed to Nabil-i-Zarandi, both known as Suratu'l-hajj. Having received the first Tablet, containing instructions for performing pilgrimage to the House of the Bab on behalf of Baha'u'llah, Nabil made his way to Shiraz and performed the required rites. He then received the second Tablet giving him instructions for performing the pilgrimage in Baghdad, which he also carried out on behalf of Baha'u'llah. Nabil is, so far as is known, the only person to have visited both Houses and performed the full rituals laid down by Baha'u'llah.

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THE SHIRAZ HAJJ

The House of the Bab was visited by Baha'i pilgrims from sometime in the mid-1860s until it was expropriated and demolished in September 1979. Baha'is hope one day to rebuild the House. The ritual prescribed by Baha'u'llah for making a hajj to this House is summarized as follows:

---------- On resolving to go, purify yourself spiritually.

---------- On first seeing the city, dismount and recite the specified prayer addressing the city of Shiraz.

---------- Raise your hands and recite a prayer of thanksgiving.

---------- Go on to within a thousand paces of the city. Stop, wash, trim hair and nails, and put on your best clothing.

---------- Recite two specified prayers. {p114}

---------- Walk humbly to within twenty paces of the city gate repeating a prayer announcing your presence to God.

---------- Pray and look around at the things the Manifestation of God has looked on.

---------- Prostrate yourself and kiss the ground. Rise and say 'Allah-u-Abha' and 'Allah-u-Akbar' nineteen times each.

---------- Walk humbly to the House.

---------- Stop and recite a prayer praising the station of the House.

---------- Prostrate yourself and recite a prayer for acceptance.

---------- Stand facing the right side of House and recite a prayer.

---------- Circumambulate the House seven times.

---------- Stop and recite another prayer.

---------- Finish now. Out of respect, do not enter the House.

Baha'u'llah wrote that this was the short version of the rites of pilgrimage. It is not clear whether a Tablet giving more details actually exists.

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THE BAGHDAD HAJJ

The 'House of Baha'u'llah' is the house in Baghdad in which He lived from 1856 until His departure in 1863. It is discussed in more detail in chapter 6. It is known as the Most Great House of God. It was seized by Shi'i religious authorities in 1922 and has been closed to Baha'is ever since.

The rites for the hajj to this house are summarized as follows: {p115}

---------- On entering the city praise God until you reach the river.

---------- Change into your best clothes and do ablutions.

---------- Praise God while crossing the bridge.

---------- When you reach the other side, recite a specified prayer.

---------- Circumambulate the House seven times.

---------- Kiss the door of the House.

---------- Ask forgiveness seventy times and recite a prayer for forgiveness.

---------- Walk quietly to the door praising God then recite a prayer testifying to the station of the House.

---------- Recite three specified prayers standing, prostrated and kneeling at the door.

---------- Walk respectfully into the court of the House and recite two prayers while facing the place Baha'u'llah usually sat.

---------- Wait silently. If you do not perceive God's call, then repeat the ritual. (This last refers to perceiving God in your heart and is not to be taken literally, according to 'Abdu'l-Baha.)

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PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

At present, when Baha'is refer to pilgrimage, they almost always mean pilgrimage to the Shrines of the Bab and Baha'u'llah in the Holy Land. This pilgrimage seems to have evolved, rather than having been established by a clear text in the writings of Baha'u'llah. Although it is not referred to as hajj, {p116} it was always much more important in practice than pilgrimage to the Baghdad or Shiraz Houses. The Shrine of Baha'u'llah was named an obligatory

place of pilgrimage by 'Abdu'l-Baha after the passing of Baha'u'llah. Shoghi Effendi states that the House of Baha'u'llah is 'second to none except the city of 'Akka' as a 'centre of pilgrimage'[4.9] and that the holiest place for Baha'is is the Shrine of Baha'u'llah,[4-10] followed by the Shrine of the Bab,[4.11] and then the two Holy Houses.[4.12] The pilgrimages to Baghdad and Shiraz are generally considered rites that will be put into practice in the future.[4.13]

..... [4.9. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 110.]

..... [4.10. Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Baha'i World, p. 75.]

..... [4.11. ibid. p. 74.]

..... [4.12. ibid. p. 152.]

..... [4.13. Taherzadeh, Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 4, p. 240.]

Believers had begun to visit Baha'u'llah while He was in Baghdad and Edirne, as they had earlier visited the Bab. In 'Akka pilgrims were treated as guests of Baha'u'llah and were accommodated in caravansaries or guest houses or with the Holy Family itself. Baha'u'llah would receive them separately or as a group, and they would participate in the social life of the Baha'i community in 'Akka. Visits often lasted many months. There were no specific rituals concerning pilgrimage but it was necessary to obtain permission from Baha'u'llah before setting out.

During 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry pilgrimage assumed something like its modern form. 'Abdu'l-Baha made it clear that the purpose of pilgrimage was to pray at the Shrines of Baha'u'llah and the Bab. Pilgrims stayed in various pilgrim and guest houses in Haifa and 'Akka as guests of 'Abdu'l-Baha. During their stays they were taken to the various holy and historic sites in the are and viewed the portraits of Baha'u'llah and the Bab. 'Abdu'l-Baha and sometimes other eminent believers would speak to the pilgrims and answer questions. Sometimes 'Abdu'l-Baha would entrust pilgrims with messages or particular missions for their return. The first Western pilgrims arrived in December 1898. Eastern and Western pilgrims were usually housed separately. 'Abdu'l-Baha began the process of developing the Baha'i holy places as a centre of pilgrimage, building the Shrine of the Bab and making the first efforts to develop gardens around the Shrines. {p117}

Shoghi Effendi devoted enormous efforts to beautifying the Shrines and holy places and to acquiring additional holy places and historic sites. At the start of his ministry pilgrims came for nineteen days and stayed in Haifa as his guests. Acknowledging difficulties pilgrims would have with language, he maintained two separate pilgrim houses in Haifa, one for Middle Eastern believers and one for Westerners. It was his custom to take meals with the Western pilgrims and to visit the Shrine of the Bab with the Eastern pilgrims.

After its election, the Universal House of Justice took over the old Western Pilgrim House for its own offices, reduced the pilgrimage to nine days, and

began housing all pilgrims in the old Eastern Pilgrim House near the Shrine of the Bab. A few years later the steadily increasing number of pilgrims made it necessary for all pilgrims to find accommodations in hotels.

At present about two thousand Baha'i pilgrims visit the Holy Land each year for the full pilgrimage. Pilgrims come in groups of about a hundred, usually from a dozen or more countries.

Generally, on the first two days of pilgrimage, the pilgrims are taken to the Shrines of the Bab and Baha'u'llah and are received by the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre. Following the practice of Shoghi Effendi, it is not uncommon for the Universal House of Justice to make the first announcement of major news to the pilgrims in Haifa. On succeeding days the pilgrims are taken to visit the other main holy places in the 'Akka-Haifa area, roughly following the sequence in which the heads of the Baha'i Faith were associated with these sites. The main sites visited are Baha'u'llah's prison cell, the sea and land Gates of 'Akka, the House of 'Abbud, Mazra'ih, the Mansion of Bahji, the Monument Gardens, the site of the future Haifa mashriqu'l-adhkar, the Garden of Ridvan, the House of 'Abdu'llah Pasha, the International Baha'i Archives, the House of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Seat of the Universal House of Justice. Baha'i pilgrims also visit other parts of the Holy Land before or after their visit to the 'Akka-Haifa area. {p118}

Baha'is may also make three-day visits to the holy places, although this is not considered to be a pilgrimage.

There are very few specific rules and customs connected with the pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Pilgrims must receive an invitation to come, normally through the Office of Pilgrimage at the Baha'i World Centre, and are expected to follow the organized programme for pilgrimage. Visitors are usually expected to remove their shoes before entering holy places and to behave in a quiet and dignified manner. Baha'is visiting holy places, especially the major Shrines, often will prostrate themselves at the threshold. Pilgrims are sometimes given fruit from the orchards at certain of the holy places and they often take home as gifts and keepsakes petals from flowers placed in the Shrines. There is no organized trade in souvenirs or holy objects. No particular clothing is required for pilgrims although dress should be modest and appropriate. Some pilgrims will wear their national dress for some part of the pilgrimage, especially at formal occasions.

Pilgrimage plays a major role in Baha'i life, both social and spiritual. The spiritual atmosphere of the Shrines makes a deep impression on most pilgrims. At present pilgrims are allowed to pray in the Shrine buildings but this may not be possible in the future as numbers grow.

Many Baha'is recall pilgrimage as a pivotal experience in their spiritual lives. The diversity of the pilgrimage groups powerfully reinforces the pilgrim's sense of belonging to a world community and deep friendships are formed. Shoghi Effendi said that 'the flow of pilgrims' constitutes 'the lifeblood' of the Baha'i World Centre.[4.14]

..... [4.14. Shoghi Effendi, Advent, p. 4.]

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VISITATION OF OTHER HOLY PLACES

Baha'u'llah stated that it was 'not necessary' to make long journeys to visit the tombs of the dead, suggesting that those who might otherwise do this should 'offer the cost of such journeys to the House of Justice'.[4.15] However, this is not interpreted as a general prohibition of visiting shrines and holy {p119} places but only of making long journeys solely for the purpose. 'Abdu'l-Baha explains that it is appropriate to show respect for the graves of the dead, especially of martyrs and eminent believers,[4.16] and he, as well as the Bab and Baha'u'llah wrote many Tablets of visitation for individual believers and martyrs.

..... [4.15. Baha'u'llah, Tablets, pp. 27-8.]

..... [4.16. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjiniy-i-Hudud va-Ahkam, pp. 348-9.]

The places most commonly visited by Baha'is are the graves of martyrs and important believers such as Hands of the Cause and places visited by the Central Figures of the Faith. Perhaps the most important of these at present are the House of Baha'u'llah at Edirne and the grave of Shoghi Effendi in London. There are no fixed rituals for visiting such places, but usually Baha'is will read prayers silently or aloud, including the Tablet of visitation if there is one. At some sites it is customary to remove one's shoes before going into the holy place.

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Tablets of Visitation

It is the custom at the tombs of Islamic saints to recite a specified prayer called a Tablet of visitation (Arabic, suratu'z-ziyarah; Persian, ziyarat-namih). This prayer, a copy of which is usually mounted by the tomb for the convenience of visitors, takes the form of an elaborate greeting addressed to the deceased saint in which his virtues are praised and the dramatic features of his life recalled. It is likely to be written in an elegant and elevated Arabic. Such Tablets of visitation were especially important in Shi'ism, where pilgrimages to the tombs of the Imams and members of their families to some extent supplanted the pilgrimage to Mecca (as has, in a sense, happened in the Baha'i Faith). The Tablets of visitation for the most important shrines are found in popular collections of prayers. The authorship of some was attributed to the Imams themselves and they were thus an important object of study and meditation. The founder of the Shaykhi school, Shaykh {p120} Ahmad Ahsa'i, wrote an extensive commentary on one of them, as did many others. Tablets of visitation were sometimes recited on holy days associated with the individuals they were addressed to or as part of ordinary worship.

A typical Shi'i Tablet of visitation (this one for visiting the shrine of the head of the Imam Husayn) reads in part: [Peace be upon thee, O scion of the

Apostle of God! Peace be upon thee, O son of the Commander of the Faithful ['Ali]! Peace be upon thee and God's blessings, o Child of the queen of all the women of the world, she who was true and pure [Fatimih]! Thou didst perform the prayer ... and fight in the way of God. I bear witness that those who opposed thee and fought against thee are cursed by the tongue of the Prophet.'

The Bab wrote a great many Tablets of visitation, some for the Shi'i Imams and some for His own martyred disciples. Tablets of visitation attributed to the Bab exist for the shrines of the Imams 'Ali and Husayn, Fatimih, the Letters of the Living, the shrine of Shah 'Abdu'l-'Azim near Tehran, as well as a Tablet of visitation for visiting any of the Shi'i shrines. According to Nabil, the Bab spent a week during the first part of Muharram 1266 Ah/November 1849--for Shi'is a period of mourning for the Imam Husayn--revealing Tablets of visitation for Mulla Husayn, Quddus and the martyrs of Shaykh Tabarsi[4.17] and on the day of 'Ashura (26 November 1849) He dispatched Sayyah, His messenger, to visit the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsi on His behalf. Several such Tablets survive. Finally, there is a Tablet of visitation for the site where the Bab was beaten, 'the place where this Tree was struck'. This was probably Tabriz but possibly Shiraz, in both of which He suffered beatings. It is also possible that this refers to the site of the Bab's martyrdom. The more detailed Tablets of visitation contain precise instructions for the rites to be conducted during the pilgrim's visit to the shrine. These rites are characterized by a stress on cleanliness, refinement and extreme respect for the shrines.

..... [4.17. Nabil, Dawn-Breakers, p. 431.]

Baha'u'llah wrote many Tablets of visitation, usually as a {p121} sort of eulogy for a martyr or eminent believer. For example, such Tablets are known for His sister Sarih Khanum; His sister-in-law Maryam; His brother Mirza Musa; His wife Navvab; Khadijih Bagum, the wife of the Bab; the father of Badi', who was himself a martyr; the King and Beloved of Martyrs; Haji Nasir and others. He also revealed Tablets of visitation for some of the martyrs of the time of the Bab, such as Mulla Husayn, Vahid and the Nayriz martyrs.

Baha'u'llah's Tablets of visitation, like their Islamic and Babi counterparts, are usually addressed to the person whom they honour. In an elevated Arabic they greet the person, alluding to his life, virtues and death, and asking God's blessings for him. The purity of the individual's life and the sufferings he endured in the path of God are common themes.

For modern Baha'is the best known Tablet of visitation is the one for the Shrines of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. After the ascension of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha asked the historian Nabil-i-Zarandi to prepare a Tablet of visitation for the Shrine of Baha'u'llah. Using selections from three Tablets written by Baha'u'llah, Nabil prepared a suitable Tablet of visitation. This now serves as the Tablet of visitation for both the Shrine of Baha'u'llah and the Bab. It is also recited on holy days associated with them, particularly the anniversaries of their deaths. Shoghi Effendi instructed that it is not to be used as a Tablet of visitation for anyone else. Baha'is consider this Tablet of

visitation to be among the weightiest and most important of their prayers.

The first four paragraphs were taken from a Tablet to one Aqa Baba and were evidently intended as a Tablet of visitation for those unable to visit Baha'u'llah in person during His lifetime. They are a solemn statement, lofty in tone, of the Baha'i understanding of the divine station of Baha'u'llah. They conclude with a plea for blessings and nearness to God.

The fifth and sixth paragraphs, taken from a Tablet to an unidentified individual, are a lamentation for the sufferings of Baha'u'llah. {p122}

The seventh and last paragraph, taken from the Tablet of visitation for the wife of the Bab, is a prayer for blessings and protection for the Holy Families of the Bab and Baha'u'llah.

Another important Tablet of visitation written by Baha'u'llah is the Tablet for the Imam Husayn (Ziyarat-Namiy-i-Siyyidu'sh-Shuhada.) Baha'u'llah wrote this Tablet, about ten pages in length, in 'Akka. Superficially it is a eulogy of the Imam Husayn. The opening of the Tablet testifies that the Promised One has come. It then laments the sufferings that have befallen 'the scion of the lote-tree beyond which there is no passing'--i.e. the descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. The greatness of Husayn is extolled in terms proper to a Prophet, and the station, greatness and knowledge of Husayn are described in cosmic terms. The blessings destined for those who grieve for him are described. The Tablet closes with a prayer for God's blessings and appeal to Him to cast down the throne of tyranny and replace it with justice.

The Tablet as a whole bears a consistent double meaning, for it can equally well be read as referring to the Bab, whose life and death paralleled those of His ancestor, the Imam Husayn. Many specific allusions in the Tablet point to the Bab and perhaps beyond Him to Baha'u'llah. The Tablet is written in the elevated Arabic usual in such prayers. The structure of symbolism and allusion in the Tablet is extremely rich.

During the ministries of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi this Tablet was customarily chanted at the Shrine of the Bab on the anniversary of His martyrdom.

'Abdu'l-Baha revealed many Tablets of visitation for martyrs and believers who died during His ministry, mainly for believers in the East, where the custom was understood. Like Baha'u'llah's Tablets of visitation, these served as eulogies. In some cases 'Abdu'l-Baha would commission a particular believer to go to a believer's grave and recite the Tablet of visitation on His behalf.

Strictly speaking, there is no Tablet of visitation for the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Baha. However, 'Abdu'l-Baha had written of {p123} one of His prayers, 'Who reciteth this prayer with lowliness and fervour will bring gladness and joy to the heart of this Servant: it will be even as meeting Him face to face',[4.18] so this prayer, known in Persian as 'the prayer of meeting' (munajat-i-liqa), serves as a Tablet of visitation at His shrine and in private prayer and is commonly referred to as the 'Tablet of Visitation of

'Abdu'l-Baha'. It is a fervent prayer for humility and steadfastness in servitude to God and His servants.

..... [4.18. 'Abdu'l-Baha, [Baha'i Prayers, p. 234.]

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UNDERSTANDING THE SACRED SPACE

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Shrines and Holy Places

Baha'i shrines and holy places (maqam, biqa' mutabarrikih) include the tombs of martyrs and eminent believers and sites associated with the lives of Baha'u'llah, the Bab and 'Abdu'l-Baha, as well as their Shrines. Baha'i beliefs and concepts regarding holy places have much in common with those of older religious traditions. For the believer, whatever his creed may be, the holy place is a place set apart, a place chosen in some way by the divine and thus objectively sacred. The sacredness may be marked by some dramatic feature of the landscape: a mountain, a cave or a meeting of rivers, for example. Other places owe their holiness to religious events that took place in them or to the tombs or relics that are there. Sometimes a holy place is simply chosen, either by a holy man or by divine agency as expressed in some sign. Very often a place acquires its holiness form several causes, and it may retain its holiness--though not necessarily its original meaning--despite changes of religion.

Some examples: Bethlehem and Bodh Gaya owe their holiness solely to their association with David and Jesus and with the Buddha. Hebron, the burial place of the patriarchs of Israel, and Mashhad, the burial place of the eighth Shi'i Imam, owe their holiness to those buried there. The holiness of the sacred mountains of Japan and China was suggested by their forms. Many Christian, Hindu and Buddhist shrines are holy by virtue of the ancient images or relics they contain. {p125} Medina in Arabia is both Muhammad's place of exile and the site of His tomb. Many Catholic shrines mark the place where a miracle occurred, particularly a vision of the Virgin Mayr.

Often, a place, originally holy for one reason, accumulates religious significance through time. Mecca's holiness undoubtedly derived originally from its dramatic situation and its spring. However, Muhammad held it sacred because of its association with Abraham and, in turn, it gained added importance through its association with Muhammad and Islam. Jerusalem no doubt once contained a minor Canaanite holy place; the temple of Solomon made the city holy to Jews. Thus Jesus came up to Jerusalem and by His death added more holiness to it. Later the city became identified with Muhammad's night journey and thus was sacred to Muslims. Legend located other events of the Old Testament in Jerusalem, thus adding to its holiness. There can be little doubt that the sacredness of the cape of Mount Carmel originally sprang from its

dramatic situation. Canaanites worshipped Baal there. Jews Yahweh and Romans Jupiter. Pythagoras is said to have gone there to learn from the holy men of Syria. The Crusaders established a monastery, laying claim to a tradition that they said went back to Elijah. When Baha'u'llah chose Mount Carmel as the site of the Shrine of the Bab and as the holy mountain of His faith, corresponding to Zion and Sinai, He was endorsing a tradition of veneration of Mount Carmel that goes back to the dawn of history.

For the believer the shrine or holy place is a spot where the divine and human meet. The holy place has a power, whether it is to bring salvation or spiritual improvement to the individual, to heal the body, to induce repentance or to bind the believer to the honoured dead of his tradition. This power is likely to be perceived as an objective fact. It is tapped by the believer when he goes to the holy place or touches the shrine or caries out its rituals. It may be carried back to others through pious gifts, through holy food or water, or through the pilgrim himself. Through the shrine or holy place religious lore is conveyed {p126} to the believer as he sees places associated with the holy ones or perhaps re-enacts events associated with them.

It should be noted that not all religious sites are holy. In most cases a place of worship or religious meeting is not perceived to be holy apart from its function. Some traditions--Islam and Protestantism--stress the universality and placelessness of the divine and design their places of worship to deny them any significance apart form their use. Nevertheless, even in such traditions certain sites retain a particular holiness: Jerusalem remains holy even to Protestant and Muslim groups that reject the veneration of shrines on principle. The believer may become a pilgrim and journey to such places. There he will find a threshold where the ordinary world opens into the divine.

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Babi and Baha'i shrines and holy places

According to the Bab there is nothing objective that distinguishes holy places form other places: their distinction consists in God's having chosen to associate them with Himself. Thus there is no value in visiting a shrine if one fails to recognize the Manifestation of God. In Baha'i as in Babi belief the importance and legitimacy of shrines and holy places rests on God having chosen them. In reality, God has no need of shrines or holy places and the essential relationship of all places to God is the same. If their special relationship is cut by the failure of those who venerate a shrine to recognize the appearance of a new Manifestation of God, the shrine becomes, as it were, a place of idol worship.[5.1] 'Abdu'l-Baha explains that holy places are to be venerated because of their association with a pure soul, not because their dust is intrinsically holy in any sense.

..... [5.1. Baha'u'llah, Majmu'ih, pp. 135-6.]

Nevertheless the legitimacy of visiting holy places is affirmed in Baha'i law. Although Baha'u'llah abolished the custom of making long journeys to visit the

tombs of the dead, He commanded the Baha'is 'to raise up and exalt the two {p127} Houses in the Twin Hallowed Spots, and the other sites wherein the throne of your Lord, the All-Merciful, hath been established'.[5.2] In the Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitab-i-Aqdas this is framed as an 'exhortation' to 'restore and preserve the sites associated with the Founders of the Faith'.[5.3] In Questions and Answers Baha'u'llah specified that the two houses hallowed to pilgrimage--those of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad and the Bab in Shiraz--were to be restored. The decision is left to local believers whether to restore every place in their city associated with the Manifestation or to choose just one. 'Abdu'l-Baha further explained that the tombs of martyrs and eminent believers were also to be respected.[5.4] By reverently visiting them, the heart will be moved.[5.5] There is no obligation to make special journeys to visit such places, however, apart from the three hallowed for pilgrimage. It is permissible to visit holy places of other religions as well.

..... [5.2. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 133.]

..... [5.3. ibid. p. 161.]

..... [5.4. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Ganjinih, p. 349.]

..... [5.5. Synopsis and Codification, note 26.]

There are few rules for Baha'is visiting holy places. It is customary to maintain a quiet and reverent demeanour, to recite prayers, and usually to remove one's shoes before going into a holy place. One may sit or kneel. At holy places associated with the Bab or Baha'u'llah, it is not uncommon for Baha'is to prostrate themselves in the holy place or at its threshold. Baha'is have a strong preference for simplicity and dignity in such places. Dress should be modest.

Baha'is believe that holy places should be beautiful and dignified. Where possible they are landscaped, particularly with flower gardens. Rooms are likely to be decorated with pictures of 'Abdu'l-Baha and of other holy places, with calligraphs, with antique furniture and decorations, and with flowers. Baha'is have strong aversion to any sort of commercialization of holy places. Generally when a holy place is restored, an effort is made to preserve its original character while beautifying it.

Baha'i efforts to acquire and restore holy places go back to the time of Baha'u'llah, who, for example, arranged for the custody of the Baghdad and Shiraz Houses and selected the {p128} site for the Shrine of the Bab. It was Shoghi Effendi, however, who placed the greatest role in acquiring and restoring Baha'i holy places. By 1957 numerous historic sites in the Holy Land, Iran and elsewhere had been acquired and many had been restored and were open to visits by pilgrims. Other important sites have been acquired or restored since through the efforts of the Universal House of Justice and local and national Baha'i communities. In addition to holy places associated with the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha and the tombs of eminent Baha'is, these sites

include historic places such as early Baha'i schools and centres. Although not holy places as such, these are considered worthy of preservation and restoration. Since 1979 most of the holy places in Iran belonging to the Baha'i community have been seized and a number have been razed.

There is no comprehensive catalogue of Baha'i holy places. The following is a preliminary list of places of spiritual, religious and historic importance to Baha'is, not just of holy places as such. Often their identification as an important site is a matter of local acceptance. This list is limited to identified sites likely to have been visited by Baha'is in the past or to be visited in the foreseeable future.

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List of important sites

BAHA'I WORLD CENTRE, HAIFA AND 'AKKA

'Akka and vicinity

. . . Sea and land gates

. . . Barracks and citadel

. . . Houses of Malik, Mansur Khavvam and Rabi'ih

. . . House of 'Abbud

. . . House of 'Abdu'llah Pasha

. . . Khan-i-'Avamid

. . . Khan-i-Shavirdi

. . . Liman (prison) {p129}

. . . Governorate

. . . Hammamu'l-Basha

. . . Mansion of Mazra'ih

. . . Mansion of Bahji

. . . Ridvan, Ashraf and Firdaws Gardens

. . . Aqueduct

. . . Nabi Salih cemetery

. . . Muslim cemetery

. . . Samariyyih Hill

. . . Tell 'Akka

. . . Junaynih Garden

. . . Abu-Sinan

Haifa

. . . Mount Carmel

. . . Shrine of the Bab

. . . House of 'Abdu'l-Baha

. . . Eastern and Western pilgrim houses

. . . Monument Gardens

. . . The Arc

. . . International Baha'i Archives

. . . Seat of the Universal House of Justice

. . . Centre for the Study of the Sacred Texts (when completed)

. . . International Teaching Center (when completed)

. . . International Library (when completed)

. . . Baha'i Cemetery

. . . Caves of Elijah

. . . Mashriqu'l-Adhkar site, Mount Carmel

. . . House of the Master

Galilee

. . . Tiberias

. . . Nazareth

. . . Nuqayb

. . . Samras

. . . Samakh {p130}

AUSTRALIA

. . . Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Sydney

GERMANY

. . . Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Frankfurt

INDIA

. . . Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, New Delhi

IRAN

Abadih

. . . Hadiquatu'r-Rahman

Arak

. . . Graves of the Seven Martyrs

. . . Graves of the Four Martyrs

Babul

. . . Grave of Quddus

Badasht

. . . Gardens rented by Baha'u'llah

Bushihr

. . . Shop of the Bab

Chihriq

. . . Fortress and part of the village

Isfahan

. . . House of the Imam-Jum'ih

. . . House and tomb of the King and Beloved of Martyrs

. . . Tomb of Keith Ransom Kehler

Kashan

. . . House of Haji Mirza Jani {p131}

Kirmanshah

. . . House where the Bab's remains were concealed

Mashhad

. . . Babiyyih

. . . House of Mulla Husayn

. . . Nayriz

. . . House of Vahid

. . . Fort of Khajih

Qum

. . . House where the Bab's remains were concealed

Shiraz

. . . House of the Bab

. . . House of the Bab's maternal uncle

. . . Masjid-i-Vakil

. . . Masjid-i-Ilkhani

. . . Public bath

. . . Qahviy-i-Awliya

Takur

. . . House of Baha'u'llah

Tehran

. . . Haziratu'l-Quds

. . . House of Baha'u'llah

. . . House of Mahmud Khan Kalantar

. . . House of Mirza Husayn-'Aliy-i-Nur

. . . Sabzih-Maydan

. . . Siyah-Chal

Urumiyyih

. . . Apartments occupied by the Bab

. . . Public bath {p132}

Zanjan

. . . House of Hujjat

. . . Mosque of Hujjat

. . . Caravanserai

. . . Graves of Ashraf and his mother

IRAQ

. . . House of Baha'u'llah, Baghdad

. . . Ridvan Garden, Baghdad

. . . Sar-Galu

. . . Takyih of Mawlani Khalid, Sulaymaniyyih

PANAMA

. . . Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Panama City

SAMOA

. . . Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Apia

TURKEY

. . . House of Rida Big, Edirne

. . . Garden of Baha'u'llah, Edirne

UGANDA

. . . Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Kampala

UNITED KINGDOM

. . . Grave of Shoghi Effendi, London

UNITED STATES

Illinois

. . . Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Wilmette

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There are many sites associated with the visits of 'Abdu'l-Baha in Europe and North America, such as the Canadian national Shrine in Montreal (the home of the Maxwell family); Green Acre Baha'i school in Eliot, Maine; the cabin at Teaneck, New {p133} Jersey; and the home of Lady Blomfield in London which attract many Baha'i visitors. Baha'is often visit the graves of the Hands of the Cause--such as graves of Louis Gregory in Maine, of Hasan Balyuzi in London, and Martha Root and Agnes Alexander in Hawaii--and the graves of other prominent believers, such as Laura Clifford Barney in Paris, Thornton Chase in California and Marion Jack in Bulgaria. The graves of early believers, such as Ethel Rosenberg in London, are often tended by local Baha'is.

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Baha'i Cemeteries

A special class of sacred space is the Baha'i cemetery (Persian gulistan-i-javid; Arabic, rawdih abadiyyih, both meaning 'garden of eternity'). Baha'i cemeteries are most common in areas of the world where there are large communities of Baha'is and where Baha'is are not allowed access to existing cemeteries.

In any human group that disposes of the dead by burial, the form, location and use of cemeteries is determined by the religious, social and sanitary needs of the community. Religious attitudes are reflected in the simplicity or grandeur of the graves and tombs. In America, for example, seventeenth century gravestones are simple and sometimes macabre, intended to remind the passerby of his own impending death. These were supplanted by the often sentimental grave markers of the nineteenth century and the antiseptic tombstones of the twentieth--each reflecting the religious attitudes of the time. Religious cemeteries are usually considered holy ground.

A cemetery is often a communal site, reserved in most places and times for the members of the family, clan, or religious group that owned the cemetery. Those outside the group--non-believers, strangers, apostates, suicides, witches, criminals and the like--faced a disgraceful burial in the potter's field or, in extreme cases, were denied burial.

Sanitary and aesthetic considerations also govern the location {p134} and use of cemeteries. Although the Romans had buried their dead alongside the roads outside of town. Christians freely buried their dead in and around their churches. By the nineteenth century the huge growth of cities had made the traditional churchyard burial impractical and unhealthy in many Western countries. Large cemeteries, frequently government owned, were established on the edge of cities.

Islamic law provides that only Muslims may be buried in Muslim cemeteries. Despite the fact that Muhammad seems to have prohibited even simple ornamentation of graves, it soon became customary to mark graves with headstones bearing the name, date of death and Qur'anic inscriptions. The graves of important or holy people may be covered with a small or large domed building or mosque--the Taj Mahal being the example best known to non-Muslims. Older Muslim cemeteries thus closely resemble older Christian cemeteries with their mix of headstones and mausoleums of various sorts. Modern Muslim cemeteries are often influenced by Western examples. A few groups, notably the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, still follow the oldest practice of burying their dead in graves marked only with a low mound of earth outlined by small stones.

Neither the Bab nor Baha'u'llah made any specific laws governing the design and use of cemeteries, apart from the laws of burial themselves and the general principle stated in the Kitab-i-Aqdas that the dead should be buried 'with radiance and serenity'.[5.6] In a letter to the Baha'is of Bombay, who had purchased a site for a cemetery, 'Abdu'l-Baha gave instructions on its design. Four wide paths should form a cross with a pool at the point where they meet. Trees should border the cemetery and the central pool. Each grave should be sufficiently separate from the others to allow flowers to be planted around it.

..... [5.6. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 130.]

A few other regulations have been made by Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. Gravestones may use the nine-pointed star and selections for the Baha'i sacred writings but should not use the Greatest Name in either its {p135} calligraphic or ringstone form. Land for a cemetery may be accepted from the civil authorities. Non-Baha'is may be buried in a Baha'i cemetery.

There are no required forms for Baha'i graves and tombstones. Two specific forms of gravemarkers are of interest as having been used by Shoghi Effendi. In the Baha'i cemetery in Haifa, graves are covered by stepped marble platforms with carved inscriptions. Elsewhere, in a number of cases he specified that the grave be covered with an inscribed marble plate level with the ground. Neither, however, is obligatory for Baha'i graves or even much used.

In general, Baha'is follow the burial customs of their own cultures except in matters specifically governed by Baha'i law. In most cases Baha'is at first continued to use the cemeteries of the communities they came from. Thus early Middle Eastern Baha'is were usually buried in Muslim cemeteries.

Although a portion of the Muslim cemetery in 'Akka was reserved for Baha'is as

early as the 1880s, the greatest impetus for the establishment of Baha'i cemeteries in the Middle East came in the 1920s and 1930s when the community was becoming recognizably distinct from Islam. In Egypt, for example, agitation against Baha'i burials in Muslim cemeteries resulted in the government granting the Baha'is land for cemeteries in four cities. During this time Baha'i cemeteries were established by most of the larger and many of the smaller Baha'i communities in Iran.

Outside the Middle East, the establishment of Baha'i cemeteries has rarely been an important priority. In the West, non-denominational and even denominational cemeteries are usually easily available to Baha'is. Baha'i cemeteries are therefore rare, although sometimes a portion of a public cemetery may be reserved for Baha'i use. Where Baha'i communities are small, an exclusively Baha'i cemetery is not generally practical.

Finally, there are a number of what might be called informal Baha'i cemeteries--usually cemeteries where some {p136} important Baha'i has been buried and attracted other Baha'i burials. Examples are the area around Shoghi Effendi's grave in London (which was bought by the Baha'is in the 1990s and is now considered a Baha'i cemetery), and the cemetery in Eliot, Maine, near the Green Acre Baha'i School.

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Nabi Salih cemetery, 'Akka

Amid the earthworks just outside the eastern wall of 'Akka is a cemetery at the centre of which is a small domed Muslim shrine containing the tomb of 'Nabi Salih'. It is not known who this is--certainly he was not the prophet Salih mentioned in the Qur'an--but he is considered the patron saint of 'Akka. Fourteen Baha'is who died in 'Akka before 1880 were buried in this cemetery. The most important of these was Baha'u'llah's son Mirza Mihdi, the Purest Branch, whose remains were transferred to Mount Carmel in 1939. An iron fence now encloses the remaining Baha'i graves.

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Muslim cemetery, 'Akka

East of 'Akka near the former railway station is a large Muslim and Jewish cemetery. After 1880 a northern section was used by the Baha'i community. Among the more notable Baha'is buried there were Navvab, the wife of Baha'u'llah, whose remains were moved to Mount Carmel in 1939; Mirza Musa, known as Kalim, the brother of Baha'u'llah; Husayn, the four-year-old son of 'Abdu'l-Baha; Nabil-i-Zarandi, the historian and poet; and about twenty of those mentioned in 'Abdu'l-Baha's Memorials of the Faithful. The Baha'i section of this cemetery is now walled. Shaykh Mahmud 'Arrabi, once the Mufti of 'Akka who became a Baha'i in the time of {p137} Baha'u'llah, is buried in an unmarked grave in his family plot elsewhere in the cemetery.

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Baha'i cemetery, Haifa

The cemetery currently in use at the Baha'i World Centre, a six-acre plot purchased at the behest of 'Abdu'l-Baha, is located on the plain at the very tip of the promontory of Mount Carmel, almost directly below the mouth of the lower Cave of Elijah. Its first recorded burial was that of Haji Mirza Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, Vakilu'd-Dawlih, in August 1911. The earliest graves are on the western side of the enclosure and the most recent on the eastern. In recent decades the cemetery has been systematically beautified with hedges, palm-trees, and floral plantings. Among the more important graves are those of several distinguished early believers--Husayn Aqay-i-Tabrizi, Haji Muhammad-Khan and Muhammad-'Aliy-i-Ardikani, all of whom are mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Baha in Memorials of the Faithful; Haji Mirza Hayday-'Ali and Haji Mirza Abul-'Hasan Afnan and his wife. Later tombs include those of seven Hands of the Cause--John E. Esslemont, Horace Holley, Amelia Collins, Leroy Ioas, Tarazu'llah Samandari, Abu'l-Qasim Faizi and Paul Haney--three members of the Universal House of Justice--Lutfu'llah Hakim, Amoz Gibson and Charles Wolcott--and many individuals who served at the Baha'i World Centre.

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Nuqayb (Ein Gev)

A brother of Baha'u'llah, Mirza Muhammad-Quli, and members of his family are buried in a Baha'i cemetery on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. The family had settled nearby, where they farmed until the 1948 Israeli War of Independence made the area unsafe and a military zone. The {p138} farm was abandoned and eventually traded for land at Bahji but the family cemetery remained behind. In 1985 the remains of those buried in the old cemetery were moved to a new Baha'i cemetery nearby looking over the Sea of Galilee to the west. {p139}

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CAVE, HOUSE AND MOUNTAIN

THREE BAHA'I HOLY PLACES

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Sar-Galu, Iraqi Kurdistan

According to 'Abdu'l-Baha,[6.1] Baha'u'llah spent most of His sojourn in Kurdistan in the mountains behind the district capital of Sulaymaniyyih in a place called Sar-Galu--'so far removed from human habitations that only twice a year, at seed growing and harvest time, it was visited by the peasants of that region'[6.2]--living either in a stone hut or a cave. After the murder of His servant, Baha'u'llah was entirely alone there, living a life of extreme simplicity and eating only milk or rice. Only occasionally did He go to Sulaymaniyyih, several days' walk away. Evidently He was sometimes visited by

the people of the district. Since He lived the life of a wandering dervish, they would have brought Him gifts in return for His blessings. It seems likely that He also bought supplies, for His servant was murdered while on a journey to Iran to obtain money and provisions.

..... [6.1. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Traveller's Narrative, p. 38.]

..... [6.2. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 120.]

Sar-Galu is a small village surrounded by lush orchards in the mountain valley also called Sar-Galu. The first Baha'i to visit there, Daoud Toeg in August 1940, was received warmly by the Kurdish inhabitants, who were, however, able to tell him little about Baha'u'llah's stay there or which of the four caves in the neighbourhood was the one used by Baha'u'llah. One ancient man recalled going to see a dervish in a cave called Ashkah-wti Ash Zangi and that a woman named Fatimih Rash of the nearby village of Chal-Avih had been {p140} devoted to Him and would bring Him food; these details, however, could not be confirmed. Toeg visited and photographed all four caves and concluded that Baha'u'llah is most likely to have stayed in an artificial cave large enough for two people known as Tashwih Tash.

The current situation of the village of Sar-Galu is unknown. It may possibly be a victim of recent air strikes in the region or it may be unchanged from the days of Baha'u'llah.

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The Most Great House in Baghdad

The Most Great House (Bayt-i-A'zam), the house in which Baha'u'llah lived for most of His sojourn in Baghdad, is one of the four great Baha'i holy places. Because it was the house in which His revelation was first manifested, Baha'u'llah declared it a site of pilgrimage, corresponding to the House of the Bab in Shiraz and the Ka'bah in Mecca.

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The station of the Most Great House

In Islam the main object of pilgrimage is not the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad but the Ka'bah, which is called the 'House of God'. In the Bayan the Bab had decreed that His own house in Shiraz was the new 'House of God' and place of pilgrimage and that 'the first land wherein the bodily form of Him Whom God shall manifest shall appear become the Holy Sanctuary'.[6.3] Thus it is not surprising that Baha'u'llah should choose as a site of pilgrimage the house in Baghdad where He lived when He revealed His earliest works and won the allegiance of most of the Babi community and from which He departed, 'proceeding to the Spot [Ridvan] from which He shed upon the whole of creation the splendours of His name, the All-Merciful'.[6.4]

..... [6.3. The Bab, Persian Bayan 5:1.]

..... [6.4. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 35.] {p141}

Usually known as 'the Most Great House', the Baghdad house is praised by Baha'u'llah with such titles as the 'Most Great House of God', His 'Footstool' and the 'Throne of His Glory', the 'Cynosure of an adoring world', the 'Lamp of Salvation between earth and heaven', the 'Sign of His remembrance to all who are in heaven and on earth', the 'Shrine round which will circle the concourse of the faithful'.[6.5]

..... [6.5. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 110.]

The Most Great House, along with the House of the Bab in Shiraz, is the object of the Baha'i hajj, the formal pilgrimage (see chapter 4). A lengthy Tablet addressed to Nabil-i-Zarandi gives rites to be carried out when making pilgrimage to the House, including several prayers referring to the station of the House. A shorter Tablet of visitation for the House, addressed to Shaykh Muhammad Damarchi, an Arab Baha'i, is available in English.[6.6]

..... [6.6. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 111.]

In several passages Baha'u'llah prophesies the degradation of the House at the hands of unbelievers: 'In truth, I declare, it shall be so abased in the days to come as to cause tears to flow from every discerning eye... And in the fullness of time, shall the Lord by the power of truth exalt it in the eyes of all the world, cause it to become the mighty standard of His dominion, the shrine round which shall circle the concourse of the faithful.'[6.7]

..... [6.7. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 115.]

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Baha'u'llah's residence in the House

After Baha'u'llah arrived in Iraq in April 1853, He stayed for about a month in the Shi'i shrine city of Kazimayn, a few miles from Baghdad. However, the Persian Consul-General suggested it would be better if He moved to Baghdad, away from Kazimayn's population of Persian clergy and pilgrims. A very small house belonging to Haji 'Ali Madad was rented. Baha'u'llah and His family were still living there when Baha'u'llah departed for Kurdistan in April 1854, At some point before Baha'u'llah's return, His brother Mirza Musa, {p142} who was caring for Baha'u'llah's family in His absence, rented the much larger house of Sulayman Ghannam in the Shaykhi Bashshar quarter of the Karkh district, the western part of the city, across the Tigris from the main part of Baghdad. The house at this time became known as 'the house of Mirza Musa the Babi'. Eventually, Baha'u'llah purchased the House from Mirza Musa Javahiri, a Baha'i to whom Baha'u'llah gave the title of Harf-i-Baqa ('letter of eternity').[6.8]

..... [6.8. Taherzadeh, Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 1, p. 211.]

Baha'u'llah lived in the House from His return to Baghdad on 19 March 1856 until His departure for the Garden of Ridvan on 22 April 1863. The house, although not small, was a very modest mud brick structure. Baha'u'llah alludes to His reception room as 'this low-roofed room made of mud and straw with its diminutive garden'.[6.9] In the years after His return, this reception room

became the goal of crowds of visitors of all kinds: Babis, clergy, both Shi'i and Sunni, Kurds, Arabs and Persians, diplomats, government officials and princes. The House was also the site of revelation of most of Baha'u'llah's works of the Baghdad period.

..... [6.9. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 135.]

When in April 1863 it became known that Baha'u'llah was to leave Baghdad permanently, the House was so thronged with visitors that it was impossible for the family to pack for the journey. Baha'u'llah therefore accepted the loan of the Najibiyyih garden, later known as the Ridvan Garden. On 22 April 1863 He left the House for the last time, an event that in His later writings became a symbol of His open assumption of prophethood. His family left the House nine days later.

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The House after Baha'u'llah's departure

After Baha'u'llah's departure from Baghdad, the House was in the custody of Mirza Muhammad-i-Vakil, the trustee of Baha'u'llah's property in Iraq. A few years later Nabil, the historian, returned to perform on Baha'u'llah's behalf the newly instituted pilgrimage to the House of the Bab and the Most {p143} Great House. In 1868 Aqa 'Abdu'r-Rasul, the water-carrier of the Most Great House, was murdered, and the Baha'is of Baghdad were exiled to Mosul. For the next fifty years the history of the House is obscure. It was held in the names of a series of custodians and occasionally pilgrims came. Gradually the House fell into dilapidation.

Early in the new century 'Abdu'l-Baha attempted to have the House restored but the work on it proved impossible. In 1917 the British occupied Baghdad and after the war were given Iraq as a mandate of the League of Nations. 'Abdu'l-Baha again authorized work to begin on the House. The foundations of the House were reinforced and it was restored as nearly as possible to its original appearance.

When the custodian of the House died around 1920 without leaving an heir, a religious court awarded custody of the House to the Shi'is. Appeals and further court cases over the next five years ended with the Baha'is losing the property. In 1928 the Baha'is took the case to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, under whose authority the British governed Iraq. The Permanent Mandates Commission and its Council supported the Baha'i claim. However, the House was not returned to the Baha'is and is today used as a Husayniyyih, a meeting hall for preaching and the recitation of poems commemorating the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn at Karbala.

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Description of the Most Great House

Old published photos and plans of the Most Great House show a large but simple house of the old Iraqi style. The House is built of mud brick, the universal

material of traditional Iraqi architecture. Such decoration as it has is provided by simple ornamental brickwork and the wooden grills of doors and windows. The House is built around a single courtyard with an arched passageway leading in from the street. {p144}

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Mount Carmel

Mount Carmel is a ridge about 25 kilometres long by 14 kilometres at its widest separating the plain of Sharon from the valley of Jezreel and the plain of 'Akka. The western end of the ridge forms the southern end of the Bay of Haifa. The mountain is about 530 metres at its highest, but in Haifa is about 150 metres high. Carmel receives more rain than most parts of Palestine, so in biblical times it was noted for its luxuriant production of fruits and vegetables. It was heavily wooded then and even today boasts a national forest. The mountain dominates much of northwestern Israel.

Although Mount Carmel was never a centre of civilization--its woods and caves in fact giving shelter to outlaws and fugitives--it was a religious site from early times. The Egyptians of the time of Moses knew it as 'the Holy Cape'. Carmel's symbolism developed from both its reputation for fertility and for the display of God's power. In Old Testament times it was holy both to Yahwah of the Israelites and the Canaanite Baal. In the Bible it is associated with Elijah, for here was the site of his contest with the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah in which he called down fire from heaven to consume his sacrifice.[6.10] Its agricultural splendour, along with that of Lebanon and Sharon, were often cited by such prophets as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos as a symbol of the spiritual well-being of Israel. Isaiah 33:9 and Amos 1:2 prophesied its desolation, but Jeremiah 50:19-20 promised the return from exile of Judah and Israel, their sins forgiven, to a fruitful Carmel.

..... [6.10. 1 Kings 18:17-46.]

The mountain's isolation and dramatic situation continued to attract religious interest: the philosopher Pythagoras came here to meditate; its famous oracle encouraged Vespasian's imperial ambitions; Christian monks were there in early times and had established a 'Monastery of Elisha the Prophet' by the sixth century. The Carmelite orders, first founded on Mount Carmel in the twelfth century during the Crusader occupation and quickly spreading to Europe, traced their {p145} origins back to Elijah. They claimed that monks, first Jewish and later Christian, had existed as a single community since the time of Elijah. Because of the Carmelites' preoccupation with mysticism, Carmel itself became a symbol of the mystical path, as in the famous work of St. John of the Cross, The Ascent of Mount Carmel. The Carmelites established a monastery of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at the head of the mountain, overlooking the sea and the two caves traditionally associated with Elijah. The Carmelite monks still maintain a monastery there, now known as Stella Maris.

The other strain of Christian thought about Carmel comes from references in Old

Testament poetry, notably Isaiah 35:2, to the beauty of Carmel: 'The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.' These passages gave to Christians the image of Carmel as an idyllic spiritual paradise, as well as associating it with the return of Christ.

The Baha'i associations with Mount Carmel build on the Christian while adding specifically Baha'i experiences. With the exception of a reference in the Kitab-i-Aqdas to Kawmu'llah--i.e. Carmel--the most important references to Carmel in the Baha'i writings date from late in Baha'u'llah's life, particularly the Tablet of Carmel[6.11] and two references in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.[6.12] These echo the lyrical references to Carmel in Isaiah and link Carmel with Zion, the holy mountain of Jerusalem: 'Call out to Zion, O Carmel...' Baha'is associate Isaiah's prophecy (35:2) with Baha'u'llah.

..... [6.11. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 14.]

..... [6.12. Baha'u'llah, Epistle, pp. 38, 145-6.]

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Mount Carmel in Baha'i history

Mount Carmel's association with Baha'i history began on the day of Baha'u'llah's arrival in the Holy Land in 1868, when His ship anchored in Haifa Bay in the shadow of the mountain. That day He and His fellow exiles were taken without landing by small boats across the bay to 'Akka. Later, after the {p146} conditions of His imprisonment were relaxed, Baha'u;llah visited the mountain occasionally. During His fourth and last visit to Haifa in 1891, Baha'u'llah spent time on Mount Carmel. One day He went up to the promontory of the mountain where He pitched His tent a few hundred yards east of the monastery. That day He visited the nearby monastery and later revealed His Tablet of Carmel. On another occasion, He climbed halfway up the mountain from the German colony. Standing beside an isolated clump of cypresses, He pointed out to 'Abdu'l-Baha a spot just below and instructed Him to build the Bab's mausoleum there.

Soon after His Father's passing, 'Abdu'l-Baha began buying the land required for the Shrine of the Bab and the necessary access road. At this time the slope of the mountain was occupied by brush and the vineyards of the German colony. By 1909 'Abdu'l-Baha had completed the original building of the Shrine, a solid rectangular building of native stone. The Bab's remains were interred there by 'Abdu'l-Baha's own hand on Naw-Ruz 1909. Mirza Ja'far Rahmani built the Pilgrim House nearby, also completed in 1909. 'Abdu'l-Baha put a small fenced garden in front of the Shrine, all the meager water supply would support.

'Abdu'l-Baha's plans for the future development of the area were much more elaborate, however. The Shrine building was to be expanded into a complete square and surmounted with a dome. Nine terraces below and nine above--nineteen in all including the terrace of the Shrine itself--were to climb the whole height of the mountain.

When Shoghi Effendi became Guardian of the Baha'i Faith in 1921, only about ten thousand square metres of land on Mount Carmel were in Baha'i hands--little more than the immediate surroundings of the Shrine and the Pilgrim House.

After World War I Jewish immigration into Palestine greatly increased, and the slopes of Mount Carmel began to develop quickly. On 24 October 1925 Shoghi Effendi issued an emergency plea for donations to buy open land around the Shrine of {p147} the Bab. A large portion of the Baha'i land on Mount Carmel was bought at this time. Nevertheless, important pieces of land could not be purchased and the problem of filling in these gaps occupied the Guardian at intervals throughout his ministry. From time to time he would appeal for funds for a particularly important purchase or announce the successful conclusion of a difficult negotiation or legal case. The problem was complicated by the rapidly rising price of land and the fact that several key parcels were owned by people hostile to the Faith or by Covenant-breakers. It was not until 1951, for example, that Shoghi Effendi was able to purchase a narrow parcel running through the middle of the Baha'i properties from near the Shrine of the Bab all the way to the top of the mountain. Another plot owned by Farah Sprague, a Covenant-breaker, adjoined the Monument Gardens and could not be purchased until 1954.

One of Shoghi Effendi's earliest acts as Guardian was to install a pipeline from the well in the yard of the House of 'Abdu'l-Baha up to the Shrine and a high-powered pump. By the 1930s handsome gardens surrounded the Shrine. These were designed by Shoghi Effendi himself and were of a formal and distinctive style. Characteristic features--also used at the other gardens laid out by Shoghi Effendi--included paths paved with white pebbles or crushed red roof tiles and lined with hedges, flowered borders or trees; vases, statues and other ornamental metalwork on stone pedestals; elaborate wrought iron and stone gates, walls and fences; and skilful use of plants adapted to the arid climate.

The large gardens on the terrace of the Shrine itself were Shoghi Effendi's first major project and were expanded at intervals throughout his ministry. He also built seven of the nine smaller terraces below the Shrine early in his ministry but only finished the two closest to the Shrine in 1951 when difficulties caused by the Covenant-breakers could finally be overcome. Shoghi Effendi made no effort to construct the nine terraces planned for the area above the Shrine to the top of the mountain, although he did purchase the necessary land. {p148}

In addition to the land needed for the terraces and the immediate surroundings of the Shrine of the Bab, Shoghi Effendi also purchased land southeast of the Shrine--above and to one side of it. In a part of this land, about 280 metres from the Shrine, the Greatest Holy Leaf was buried in 1932; Munirih Khanum, the wife of 'Abdu'l-Baha, was buried nearby in 1938. In 1939 Shoghi Effendi brought the remains of Navvab, the wife of Baha'u'llah, and Mirza Mihdi, His son, from 'Akka and reinterred them near the grave of the Greatest Holy Leaf. Surrounding the graceful monuments marking the resting places of Baha'u'llah's family, Shoghi Effendi laid out a handsome garden, now known as the Monument Gardens.

In his letter of 21 December 1939, Shoghi Effendi clearly identified Mount Carmel, and particularly the area near the Monument Gardens, as the future seat of the Baha'i World Centre.

Between 1951 and 1956 several critical land purchases allowed Shoghi Effendi to specify further the development of the future buildings on Mount Carmel. These were to be arranged along a 'far-flung arc', a path making a semi-circle around the Tomb of the Greatest Holy Leaf. Shoghi Effendi himself laid out this arc and set the location of its first building, the International Baha'i Archives Building, a museum to display the relics and manuscripts that he had collected and previously displayed in three rooms of the Shrine of the Bab and another temporary location.

The Universal House of Justice has further developed the land around the Shrine of the Bab. In 1972 plans to build the Seat of the House of Justice on the arc were announced; the building was occupied in February 1983. Since then work has begun in earnest on two other buildings on the arc--the International Teaching Centre and the Centre for the Study of the Holy Texts--the expansion of the International Archives building, and the development of the terraces below the Shrine of the Bab. Plans to complete the arc buildings with the International Library are in hand. {p149}

The remaining part of 'Abdu'l-Baha's plan for the Baha'i properties on Mount Carmel is a house of worship--mashriqu'l-adhkar--at the head of the mountain. In 1955, after prolonged negotiations, Shoghi Effendi purchased a site of 36,000 square metres near the Carmelite monastery. A marble obelisk--commissioned by Shoghi Effendi but erected only in 1971--and a small garden mark the site pending the building of the house of worship itself. {p150}

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THE REALM OF THE MYSTICAL IMAGINATION

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Two Mystical Journeys: The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys

Baha'u'llah's mystical writings portray a pilgrimage of the soul. These works draw on the tradition of Islamic mysticism--Sufism--for their language and ideas. Particularly during His time in Kurdistan, Baha'u'llah associated with Sufis and wrote several of His mystical works in reply to their questions. The best known and most important of these is the Seven Valleys (Haft Vadi). The seven valleys of the title are the seven stages in spiritual life mentioned in the twelfth-century Persian mystical poem The Conference of the Birds.

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The Seven Valleys

The Seven Valleys was written in Baghdad in response to the question of Shaykh

Muhyi'd-Din, a Sufi of the Qadiri order. He was the son of Shaykh Hasan of Gilzarda and became Qadi (religious judge) of Khaniqin, a town on the southern edge of Iraqi Kurdistan.[7.1] Later Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din succeeded to his father's position as a religious leader in Gilzarda. Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din had written books on Sufism and, at about the time that he wrote to Baha'u'llah, he gave up his position and set out wandering from place to place until his death in Kurkuk in 1877. He may have been one of the Kurdish Sufis whom Baha'u'llah had met in Sulaymaniyyih.

..... [7.1. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 140.]

The Seven Valleys is a letter, a common format for short {p151} learned works in traditional Islamic scholarship. Although the Shaykh's letter is not available, it is clear from the content of Baha'u'llah's reply that the Shaykh had written to Him asking about the meaning of certain Persian mystical poems and giving his own views on the classical Sufi topics of the stages of mystical life and the hidden meanings of the letters of the Arabic alphabet.

The Seven Valleys is written in Persian in the style used by Persian mystical writers. It contains many lines form famous Persian mystical poems and the stories, terminology and imagery common to Persian mystical literature. It is often published with another work of Baha'u'llah, the Four Valleys (see below), which was written about the same time and is similar in style and content. However, the two works are independent treatments of the same subject.

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FARIDU'D-DIN ATTAR AND HIS CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

The bulk of the Seven Valleys is, in effect, a short commentary on the seven stages of the development of the soul as they appear in the famous Persian mystical poem The Conference of the Birds (Mantiqu'l-Tayr) of Shaykh Faridu'd-Din 'Attar (c. 1145-1221?).

Not much is known with certainty about 'Attar's life except that he spent most of it in Nishapur in northeastern Iran. He earned his living as a pharmacist, as his name indicates, selling a mixture of drugs, cosmetics and medical advice, much as pharmacists still do. Unlike most medieval Persian poets, he did not depend on the royal court for his income and thus was not obliged to write panegyrics, a fact in which he took satisfaction.

'Attar was also a Sufi--a Muslim mystic--and Sufism is the subject of all his writings.

Perhaps because he avoided the court, 'Attar was almost unknown as a poet until his rediscovery in the fifteenth century. As a result, many legends arose to fill in the blanks in his biography, so it is difficult to determine the authentic facts {p152} of his life. The issue is further confused by the fact that many spurious works are attributed to him. He is said, for example, to have been initiated into Sufism by various eminent masters and to have been tried for heresy and banished. As a very old man he is said to have given the

young Rumi a copy of his Asar-Namih ('Book of Secrets'). Finally, he is said to have died a violent death in the massacre that followed the Mongol capture of Nishapur in April 1221.

Despite the multitude of doubtfully attributed works, 'Attar's fame rests on four works of undoubted authenticity:

..... Tadhkiratu'l-Awliya' ('Memorials of the Saints'), a biographical dictionary of early Sufis, important both for the information it supplies on the history of Sufism and as an early example of Persian prose.

..... Mantiqu'l-Tayr ('Conference of the Birds'), a mathnavi (narrative poem composed of rhymed couplets) epic allegory in which the journey of the birds to seek the immortal phoenix, their true king, symbolizes the mystical path.

..... Musibat-Nami ('The Book of Affliction'), the second of his great epics. In this poem the wayfarer appeals to the forty metaphysical entities and creatures--the throne of God, the elements, the Prophets, etc.--for advice on escaping the torment, bewilderment and restlessness of the mystical search.

..... Illahi-Namih ('The Book of God'). In this third great mystical epic, the frame-story tells of a king who asks his six sons what each most wants. Each son gives an answer reflecting worldly desire--the hand of the daughter of the king of fairies and the secret of alchemy, for example. The king explains the spiritual absurdity of each desire and reinterprets it in a way that allows its fulfilment with the soul. {p153}

There are many other works, some certainly authentic, but less popular and well-known.

'Attar's three great mystical epics each consist of a frame-story interspersed with little stories drawn from Sufi folklore and with moral and religious comment. The language is fresh and immediate. With Sana'i and Rumi, 'Attar is considered one of the three great mystical epic poets of Iran. His works have been favourites in Iran for five centuries and have often been translated into Islamic and European languages.

'Attar was not a theorist but something can be said about his ideas. He was firmly part of the Sufi tradition, with hagiographical material about early Sufis occupying a large place in his works. Generally, he advocated the moderate Sufism of his time. He stressed the importance of following a master (shaykh) when setting out on the mystical path. The lower self must first and foremost be tamed lest secret hypocrisies block the mystic's progress. The path itself is difficult, full of pain and confusion, as the mystic struggles to break all attachments to everything except God. Eventually the mystic may find annihilation in God and through this, eternal life in God. 'Attar was more interested in the psychological and ethical analysis of the mystical path than in metaphysical issues. Although his poems have pantheistic overtones, it is a psychological and poetic pantheism, and he drew back from any direct assertion of metaphysical pantheism.

The best known of 'Attar's epic poems is The Conference of the Birds. In this poem the birds meet to choose a king. The hoopoe--the bird which in Islamic tradition bore King Solomon's message to the Queen of Sheba--addresses them, telling them that their true king is the phoenix (simurgh), who lives on Mount Qaf, the mountain surrounding the world. They pronounce themselves ready to journey to find their king but one by one each makes his excuses. The nightingale cannot bear to leave the rose, the duck cannot leave the water to cross vast deserts, the hawk is too proud of his position on the king's wrist and so on. The hoopoe answers each in turn, in the process explaining {p154} various aspects of mystical psychology. The hoopoe now describes the seven valleys that they must cross.

Eventually the birds set out but almost all turn back or fall victim to the perils of the journey. In the end, only thirty bedraggled birds reach the palace of the phoenix. There they are greeted by a herald who haughtily tells them that they are unworthy of the phoenix and should return home. At the birds' pleading, he finally allows them into the palace but gives them a paper on which all their deeds, sins and secret hypocrisies are written. This final humiliation destroys the last trace of ego in the birds. Then a new life flows into them. Looking about they see that they themselves are the phoenix--a turn of plot that depends on a Persian pun, 'thirty birds' (si murgh) being the same as 'phoenix' (simurgh). The voice of their unseen lord then tells them that at the end of the mystical quest each seeker finds his own reality as God, for the distinction between 'I' and 'Thou' has vanished. The birds, having passed through death and annihilation, find eternal life and their selfhood is restored.

The poem is, of course, an allegory of the mystical quest and illustrates many characteristically Sufi ideas: the stages of mystical life, the necessity for annihilation in God as the goal of mystical life and as the precondition for eternal life in God, the subtle analysis of spiritual states. The poem is full of stories illustrating various moral and spiritual points and is written in lively and vivid language. It has been a favourite work of Persian literature since the fifteenth century and has been published and translated many times.

Baha'u'llah quotes several lines from the poem and alludes to its teachings, language and stories throughout the Seven Valleys.

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CONTENT OF THE SEVEN VALLEYS

In form the Seven Valleys is a long letter on the stages of mystical life, supplemented by two postscripts--perhaps indicating that it was written in reply to several letters. {p155}

---------- i. Invocation: As is usual in books written in the Islamic world, the Seven Valleys begins with a formal invocation praising God and the Prophet Muhammad. Baha'u'llah's introduction is noteworthy in that it is Islamic on the surface but full of allusions to the Bab and His religion.

---------- ii. Introduction: Here Baha'u'llah acknowledges the Shaykh's letter and explains His intention of writing about the nature of mystical attainment. Sufi psychology teaches that the mystics pass through consecutive psychospiritual stages. At a given time a mystic has attained a certain spiritual level--called a 'stage'--that has particular characteristics. Sufi writers analyzed these at great length. Baha'u'llah here discusses the well-known idea that the mystic must pass through seven stages before attaining God.

---------- iii. The Valley of Search (talab): First, one must diligently search, purifying one's heart and showing endless patience. One's only goal must be to find his Beloved.

---------- iv. The Valley of Love ('ishq): The word translated here as 'love' has the sense of unrestrained and overpowering passion. It was a central concept to the Sufis. Love is a kind of madness that makes its possessor oblivious to everything except his Beloved and through its pain burns away the self.

---------- v. The Valley of Knowledge (ma'rifat): 'Knowledge' here carries the sense of direct and personal knowledge rather than acquired learning. At this stage the seeker comes to understand providence, seeing that the evil that befalls him is no less providential than the good. This is, however, the last stage at which such a distinction is made.

---------- vi. The Valley of Unity (tawhid): Tawhid is an important Islamic concept and means not union with God but the assertion of God's unity. This is the stage of an overwhelming intuition of {p156} God's emanation upon all things. Baha'u'llah criticizes those who have not reached this plane yet are driven by their own passions to judge others by their own knowledge--probably alluding to the Bab's or His own sufferings at the hands of the Muslim clergy. He refers to the Sufi doctrine that it is in the pure heart that God manifests Himself most perfectly but warns against interpreting these ideas in a way that would imply the incarnation of God in the world. He mentions various complexes of Sufi ideas but declines to discuss them in detail, preferring to expound His own inspired knowledge rather than quoting the words of the writers of the past. This section contains a number of allusions to His own prophetic claims.

---------- vii. The Valley of Contentment (istighna'): This term has the meaning of independence and lack of need. Thus in this station one has no need for anything except God.

---------- viii. The Valley of Wonderment (hayrat): Sufi psychology asserts that one is subject to astonished bewilderment before God. There are thus innumerable stories of Sufis behaving in bizarre fashion because their bewilderment before God left them unconscious of the ordinary things of the world. The confusion and astonishment of this stage, says Baha'u'llah, is dear to the mystic. This section also contains a digression in which He discusses dreams as an evidence of the immortality of the soul.

---------- ix. The Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness (faqr-i-haqiqu va-fana-yi-asli): The Sufis often talk of 'extinction' (fana) and 'abiding (baqa) in God'. By this they mean that until the soul, and particularly the lower self, has perished in the quest for God, it cannot find eternal union with God. Thus 'Attar's birds must undergo a last humiliation in which their pride is finally destroyed before they find the phoenix. Baha'u'llah once again alludes to His own prophethood. He also criticizes the pantheistic doctrines held by certain Sufis, saying that such {p157} speculations are left behind at this stage. (Although Baha'u'llah sometimes uses the pantheistic language of Persian mystical poetry, He does not admit the possibility of real union with or comprehension of God. This point is made very clear in theological works such as the Kitab-i-Iqan.)

---------- x. Conclusion: Baha'u'llah insists that strict obedience to the sacred law is necessary throughout the mystical quest--in contrast to certain Sufis who held that religious observances were only necessary as a preparation for spiritual attainment. He appeals to the Shaykh to write again if there is anything in this that he does not understand. With the confirmation of God, the seeker might pass through these stages in a single breath. Finally, although the Sufis think that eternal life in God--i.e. the end of the seventh stage--is the final stage, yet He Himself thinks that beyond it are four stages of the heart, which He might someday explain. He ends with the formal salutation, 'Peace!'

---------- xi. Postscript on steadfastness: Baha'u'llah alludes to the dangers to which He is exposed and appeals to the Shyakh to continue, although the path of the love of God inevitably leads to sacrifice and suffering.

---------- xii. Second postscript on letter symbolism: Apparently the Shaykh had written giving his ideas about the meaning of the letters of the Persian word gunjishk, 'sparrow'. Baha'u'llah gives an interpretation in which all the letters have meanings relating to purifying or sanctifying the soul.

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THE FOUR VALLEYS

The Four Valleys (Persian, Chahar Vadi) is the second of Baha'u'llah's guides to the mystical life. It was written in about 1857 in Baghdad. A letter on the stages of mystical life, it was addressed to Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Rahman-i-Talabani of Kirkuk. {p158} It is written in the style common to Persian prose works on mystical love and closely resembles the Seven Valleys.

Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Rahman (1797-1858) was the head of the Talibanis, a prominent Kurdish family, and leader (shaykh) of the Qadiri Sufi order in Kurdistan. He had met Baha'u'llah in Sulymaniyyih and addressed questions to Him after Baha'u'llah's return to Baghdad. The questions are not preserved. By the time of Baha'u'llah's journey to Istanbul, Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Rhaman had died but Bahau'llah was received very warmly by his son Shaykh 'Ali in Kirkuk. The Talabanis continue to be an important family in Kurdistan and still play a

leading rose in Kurdish politics.

The four 'stages' (valleys are not mentioned in the Persian text) are to be understood as successive stages of spiritual life, not as parallel paths. In them God is seen successively as 1) the Desired One (Maqsud), associated with the self; 2) the Praiseworthy One (Mahmud), associated with reason; 3) the Attracting One (Majdhub), associated with consciousness or the heart. Although there is no known earlier use of this same set of four stages, they closely resemble other Sufi schematizations of the mystical path, notably the schema of Repentance, Law, Path and Truth; but they differ from most Sufi treatments in their emphasis on the central role of the prophet. The self, for example, is not the lower self that must be subdued by asceticism, but the Self of God--i.e. the Manifestation of God. The fourth section contains many hints of Baha'u'llah's own station.

The Four Valleys has no direct relation to the Seven Valleys, with which it is often published, although they share many themes.

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The Visionary Allegories: The Maiden and the Youth

Conspicuous among Baha'u'llah's Baghdad writings are the series of allegorical or semi-allegorical texts in which mythological {p159} symbols such as the Maiden, the Deathless Youth, the Holy Mariner and others are used to foreshadow His prophetic claims. Such works are written in an ecstatic prose and are often highly personal in nature. Some narrate visions or dreams that Baha'u'llah had. He largely ceased to write such texts after His departure from Baghdad, although such themes do appear occasionally, even in His later writings of the 'Akka period.

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Baha'u'llah's Maiden

The Maiden (Huriyyih, also rendered 'maid', 'damsel', 'houri') is the heavenly being who personified for Baha'u'llah the spirit of God. In the Qur'an the 'blacked-eyed maidens' (hur 'in), hence the English, houris) are the beautiful white-skinned dark-eyed virgins destined for the believers in Paradise. The Islamic tradition followed the Qur'an in classing them among the delights enjoyed in paradise by the believers, whether taken symbolically or with literalist carnality. In the writings of Baha'u'llah there are isolated references to the maids of heaven serving the believers in the next life,[7.2] but almost always they are symbols of the inaccessible holiness of God. They are 'behind the veil of concealment'[7.3] 'in their celestial chambers',[7.4] as in the translation 'huris of inner meanings' used in the Kitab-i-Iqan[7.5] in a passage explicitly referring to Qur'an 55:56.

..... [7.2. Baha'u'llah, Tablets, p. 189.]

..... [7.3. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, pp. 327-8.]

..... [7.4. ibid. p. 136]

..... [7.5. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 70.]

What is important for Baha'u'llah, however, is the Maiden, the personification of His revelation. Baha'u'llah states that while He was in the dungeon of eh Siyah-Chal in 1852-3, He had a vision of the Maiden, 'the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord'.[7.6] The Maiden thereafter appears as the personification of the spirit of God in such allegorical works of Baha'u'llah as the Ode of the Dove, the Deathless Youth, the Tablet of the Maiden, the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, the Tablet of the Vision and the Surih of the {p160} Bayan. In these works the Maiden's emergence from her hidden chamber symbolizes the appearance of Baha'u'llah's revelation in the world, and her afflictions mirror Baha'u'llah's. In the Surih of the Bayan Baha'u'llah identifies with Himself a passage in the Qayyumu'l-Asma' in which the Bab had referred to 'the Maid of Heaven begotten by the Spirit of Baha'.[7.7] 'Abdu'l-Baha identifies the Maiden with the New Jerusalem.[7.8] Shoghi Effendi identifies her with 'the Most Great Spirit', 'symbolized ... by the Sacred Fire, the Burning Bush, the Dove and the Angel Gabriel'.[7.9]

..... [7.6. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, pp. 101-2.]

..... [7.7. The Bab, Selections, p. 54. Baha'u'llah cites this passage in Gleanings, p. 284.]

..... [7.8. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections, p. 12.]

..... [7.9. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 140.]

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THE TABLET OF THE MAIDEN

The Lawh-i- or Munajat-i-Huriyyih, the 'Tablet' or 'Prayer of the Maiden' is one of a number of allegorical Tablets written in Baghdad and is similar in style to such Tablets as the Holy mariner. It is entirely in Arabic. According to Nabil, it was one of the many writings that Baha'u'llah ordered destroyed and was rescued only by the pleadings of Mirza Aqa Jan, Baha'u'llah's secretary.

The Tablet begins with a prayer of ecstatic praise of God that turns into an account of a meeting between Baha'u'llah and the heavenly maiden who personifies His spirit of revelation. When God desires to manifest His beauty and glory, He sends forth a maiden who had been concealed for all eternity in the pavilion of holiness. Her beauty strikes dumb all the dwellers in heaven and illuminates the earth. She walks through the air and stands before Baha'u'llah. He is lost in wonderment at her beauty and in love for her. He unveils her, revealing her hair, her shoulder and her breast. The maiden, however, detects an extraordinary sadness in Baha'u'llah and questions Him closely about it, becoming more and more agitated as she comprehends the depth of His sorrows. They embrace and weep together. Once more she examines His inner being, realizing that His sorrows have entirely destroyed His heart. She

asks Him is He is in fact the Beloved of the worlds and whether His sorrows are from the people of the {p161} Qur'an or the people of the Bayan--the Muslims or the Babis. Then she throws herself on the ground at His feet and dies. He washes her with His tears, shrouds her with His own robe and takes her body back to the place in paradise from which she came. The Tablet ends with Baha'u'llah's challenge to those who claim to possess understanding to interpret the meaning of His vision.

Shoghi Effendi states that in this Tablet 'events of a far remoter future are foreshadowed'.[7.10]

..... [7.10. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 140.]

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THE TABLET OF THE VISION

The Lawh-i-Ru'ya, the 'Tablet of the Vision', prophesies Baha'u'llah's death. Written in 'Akka in the House of 'Udi Khammar on the Birthday of the Bab 1 March 1873 (1290 AH), it is in Arabic rhymed prose with a refrain after each verse in the style of such Tablets as the Holy Mariner.

At the beginning of the Tablet Baha'u'llah addresses an unnamed believer and tells him that He will recount His vision in order to give this believer assurance about the other worlds of God.

Baha'u'llah says that one day a luminous maiden dressed in white came into the room where He was sitting and unveiled herself. She walked about the room enchanted at the presence of Baha'u'llah. He beheld the divine beauty of her hair and face. She asked Him why He consented to remain imprisoned within the city of 'Akka. She appealed to Him to go to His 'other dominions ... whereon the eyes of the people of names have never fallen'--an allusion to His own death. Baha'u'llah states in the Tablet itself that He had this vision on the Birthday of the Bab.

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The Youth

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THE TABLET OF THE DEATHLESS YOUTH

The Lawh-i-Ghulamu'l-Khuld, the 'Tablet of the Deathless {p162} Youth', was written partly in Arabic and partly in Persian in honour of the holy day of the Declaration of the Bab. This Tablet was certainly written in Baghdad, although whether Baha'u'llah wrote it during His stay in the Garden of Ridvan as some sources claim, is less clear. Whether it was written for a specific individual is also unknown.

The Arabic portion of this Tablet is written in rhymed prose, an Arabic literary form that uses irregular rhyme and rhythm and occupies a place between poetry and prose. Like some other Tablets of this period, notably the Holy

Mariner, short verses alternate with refrains. The Tablet concludes with a section in formal Persian prose.

The Tablet begins with the announcement that it is 'in commemoration of what hath been made manifest in the year sixty'--i.e. the Declaration of the Bab. The Tablet describes how the gates of paradise swing open and the Deathless Youth--symbolizing the Bab--comes out and stands in the midst of heaven, dazzling all the spiritual beings with His beauty. Then the gates of heaven open a second time and the Maid of Heaven appears--the personification of Baha'u'llah's spirit of revelation. Her beauty, her song and the lock of hair that slips from beneath her veil likewise dazzle the creatures of earth and heaven. She stands before the Youth and lifts the veil from His [?] face. When His [?] face is revealed, the pillars of the throne of God tremble and all creatures are struck dead. Then the Tongue of the Unseen is heard proclaiming that the eyes of the ancients longed to behold this Youth. The Youth raises His eyes. By a word He restores the spirits of the creatures of heaven and with a glance He raises up the people of the earth, indicating only a few of these. He then returns to His place in paradise.

The Tablet continues in Persian, proclaiming to the people that the true morn has dawned, the eternal wine is flowing, the fire burns again on Sinai--appealing to the people to heed the call of the Bab and hinting at Baha'u'llah's own station.

The Tablet of the Deathless youth is allegorical and full of {p163} symbols drawn from the Qur'an and Persian mystical literature. It is extremely beautiful and ecstatic in tone. It is chanted at commemorations of the Declaration of the Bab and other joyful occasions. Thus Munirih Khanum chanted it at her wedding to 'Abdu'l-Baha.

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THE TABLET OF THE HOLY MARINER

Another work in the same style is the Tablet of the Holy Mariner (Lawh-i-Mallahu'l-Quds). Baha'u'llah observed Naw-Ruz 1863 camped at the Mazra'iy-i-Vashshash, a farm along the river not far from His residence in Baghdad which He often visited. On the fifth day of the two-week Naw-Ruz festival, 26 March, He revealed the Tablet of the Holy mariner. The foreboding that this Tablet induced among Baha'u'llah's followers was increased when He unexpectedly ordered the party to strike their tents and return to Baghdad. The party had not yet left when a messenger arrived from Namiq Pasha summoning Baha'u'llah to the governorate the next day to receive the order for Him to go to Istanbul.

The Tablet of the Holy mariner consists of an Arabic allegory in rhymed prose, with a refrain after each verse and a concluding section in Persian prose. In the first Arabic part of the Tablet the Holy Mariner is instructed to launch the ark of eternity in the ancient sea. He is to allow the angels to enter and then unmoor it. When He has delivered them to the shore of holiness, they are

to disembark, for this is where the beauty of God has appeared in the deathless tree. The Mariner is told to teach the passengers in the ship everything that He has learned behind the veil of the cloud that conceals the Divine Essence so that they will not wait there but will fly on the wings of holiness to a station of surpassing holiness. However, the passengers attempt to rise above the stations destined for them. They are driven out by flaming meteors and the voice of God orders them to be returned to the world below.

At this point, the Maid of Heaven, the personification of the spirit of Baha'u'llah's revelation, appears from her {p164} chamber. Her beauty fills earth and heaven with light and all created things are shaken. She proclaims that no one will ascend to the highest heaven unless he loves the luminous Iraqi youth--an allusion to Baha'u'llah. She dispatches one of her handmaidens to the lower world to search for the scent of His love. The handmaid descends in all her glory but she does not find what she seeks. Crying aloud, she returns to heaven. She says one word under her breath then cries aloud to the inhabitants of heaven that she had found no trace of fidelity. Instead, she had found the Youth abandoned in His exile and in the hands of the ungodly. Then she shrieks and falls down dead. The other maidens of heaven come out form their chambers and find her dead body thrown on the ground. When they hear what happened, they tear their clothes and mourn.

The Tablet continues with a Persian section that has not been translated into English, again speaking of the voyage of the ark. The passengers embark and sail on the mystic sea until they reach a place where movement is no longer possible. Then the ship of spirit comes to rest. A command comes from God to the Mariner to teach the passengers one letter of the hidden word in order that they might fly from the valley of sensual bewilderment to the mountain at the end of the world where they will meet their Beloved. The passengers immediately spread their wings and with the aid of the grace of God rise above their previous limitations and fly to the homeland of true lovers. The inhabitants of that land arise in service and good works, are served the ruby wine and become drunk with divine knowledge.

The winds of tests, however, begin to blow. The people become preoccupied with the beauty of the cupbearer and forget the face of God. They mistake the shadow for the sun and seek to fly to the heights of the Most Great Name. They are met by the divine assayers who, not finding the scent of love for the Divine Youth, bar them all.

The Tablet concludes with a warning addressed to the believers not to let the things of this world distract them from {p165} the love of God. They should seek the water of life from the Beauty of the Divine, not from the wicked of this world. Baha'u'llah's own activities are intended only to awake the people from their heedlessness. He urges the believers to make sure that their outward works and inner dispositions are in accord and to prepare to sacrifice themselves in the path of their Beloved.

Baha'is have generally understood the difficult imagery of the Tablet of the

Holy Mariner to be a prophecy and warning of Covenant-breaking, particularly of Mirza Yahya's activities directed against Baha'u'llah. The ark--in both Arabic and English an allusion to Noah's ark--is the religion of Baha'u'llah or His Covenant. The Holy Mariner is clearly Baha'u'llah Himself. The Tablet thus tells of those who rise to high spiritual stations but who overreach and fall. Thus 'Abdu'l-Baha writes: 'Study the Tablet of the Holy mariner that ye may know the truth and consider that the Blessed Beauty hath fully foretold future events. Let them who perceive, take warning.'[7.11]

..... [7.11. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections, p. 314.]

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The Mystical Temple: Suratu'l-Haykal

The 'Tablet of the Temple' is a major Arabic Tablet of Baha'u'llah containing a mystical interpretation of the body (haykal) of the Manifestation of God. Surah, the term used for chapters of the Qur'an, is used for many of Baha'u'llah's Arabic writings, especially those written in the style of the Qur'an. Haykal is a loan word in Arabic. Its Hebrew cognate hek'l means 'temple', particularly the Jerusalem temple. In Arabic, in addition to meaning a Jewish or Christian temple, it means the body or form of something, particularly the human body, or something large. In the Bab's usage, a haykal is a talisman, particularly one in the form of a five-pointed star, which in many traditions represents the human body. In the Suratu'l-Haykal, the primary sense of haykal is the human body, {p166} particularly the body of the Manifestation of God, but the meaning 'temple' is also present.

Another Tablet of Baha'u'llah states that the Suratu'l-Haykal was first written in Edirne but was revised in 'Akka, probably in 1869. Thus it contains no obvious allusions to Baha'u'llah's exile to 'Akka. The numerous passages criticizing the Azali Babis confirm its dating to the late Edirne or early 'Akka periods. The existence of two editions probably explains the numerous variations between the two published texts. It was not written for a particular individual; when asked about the matter Baha'u'llah said that He Himself was both the addresser and addressee.[7.12]

..... [7.12. Asraru'l-Athar, 5:277.]

The Suratu'l-Haykal was one of the earliest works of Baha'u'llah to be translated into English. However, the translation was poor and its recondite mystical symbolism was difficult for Western Baha'is to comprehend. The translation went out of circulation and the Tablet is today little known to Western Baha'is apart from some passages translated by Shoghi Effendi.[*]

..... [* This Tablet has now been translated at the Baha'i World Centre, and is included in the book entitled Summons of the Lord of Hosts, published in 2002.]

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Content

The Suratu'l-Haykal begins with an invocation and a prayer in which Baha'u'llah praises God as the author of revelation and thanks Him for the affliction He has undergone for His sake. He describes how in His greatest affliction, the Maiden (huriyah) appeared to Him calling joyfully, 'This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not.' She then addresses the Babis who had not accepted Baha'u'llah, warning them that God would raise up another people in their place if they did not aid Baha'u'llah. The Babis, she says, are the blindest of people, since they deny the like of that by which they prove the truth of their own religion--presumably a reference to Baha'u'llah's claim that His own writings too are divinely inspired. She calls upon 'this temple' to arise since all {p167} contingent beings are resurrected by Him. She addresses the eye, the ear and the tongue of Baha'u'llah, calling on His eye, for example, to look only at the beauty of God, not at the heavens or the earth.

Baha'u'llah replies to the maiden, telling her how Azal, the brother whom He had raised, had tried to kill Him. He tells her that when this act became known, Azal had written to the Babis saying that Baha'u'llah had tried to kill him. (The context suggests that Baha'u'llah's discovery of Azal's plot was the occasion of writing this Tablet but it is not certain.)

Baha'u'llah now moves to the central theme of the Tablet, the exposition of the metaphysical significance of the haykal. The four Arabic letters of the word are each associated with an attribute of God whose Arabic name contains that letter and with an aspect of God's relation with the universe:

---------- ha: huwiyih (essence): God's will

---------- ya: qadir (power, which is spelled QDYR in Arabic): God's sovereignty

---------- kaf: karam (generosity): God's bounteousness

---------- lam: fadl (grace): God's grace

Elsewhere in the Tablet Baha'u'llah meditates on the spiritual significance of various parts of the body of the Manifestation: the hem of His robe, which purifies by its touch; the foot, created from the steel of might to be steadfast in the path of God; His breast, which reflects the lights of God upon all things; and the heart, the repository of all knowledge and from which new and wondrous sciences will come forth. Baha'u'llah is told that His temple has been made the fountainhead of each of God's names and attributes. He has thus been given the power to recreate all things, bringing forth suns from motes of dust. He is called the 'Self of God', for the saying 'there is no God but I' applies to Baha'u'llah.

The Tablet returns often to the theme of the disbelief of the Babis, criticizing Babi leaders for priding themselves on {p168} such titles as 'mirror' and 'letter' while it is Baha'u'llah who is the creator of the letters and mirrors. God's acceptance of their pious deeds is, He warns, dependent on their belief. He warns that their unbelief will lead the mass of believers astray. He criticizes those who accepted the new faith but came to Him with

questions about the Shi'i Imams and Babs, in the end losing their faith. These, He says, are like the Jewish leaders with Jesus. Finally, He insists that it was He who was prophesied by the Bab in His writings. He calls Himself the Primal Point, a title of the Bab, thus identifying Himself with the Bab.

The Suratu'l-Haykal defies easy summary, for it is a dense tapestry of mystical imagery drawn from esoteric Shi'ism, the Qur'an, the writings of the Bab and even the Bible.

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Relation to other texts

As Baha'u'llah's orders, the Suratu'l-Haykal was written as one point of a five-pointed star, with the Tablets to the kings forming the other points.[*] To judge by the first publication of these Tablets, these other Tablets were those addressed to the Pope, Napoleon III, the Czar of Russia, Queen Victoria and the Shah of Iran. Of this combined Tablet Baha'u'llah says, 'Thus have We built the Temple with the hands of power and might, could ye but know it. This is the Temple promised unto you in the Book',[7.13] evidently an allusion to Rev. 21:22-3, which in early Arabic translations of the Bible evidently said, 'the glory of God [baha'u'llah] is its light', a passage quoted by Baha'u'llah elsewhere. Shoghi Effendi identifies an allusion to 'the temple of the Lord' that will be built by 'the man whose name is the Branch' foretold in Zachariah 6:12-13.[7.14] In addition to the Bible there is the famous tradition of Kumayl, a well-known mystical tradition of Shi'ism, which identifies one of the five stages of reality as 'a light that shines form the morn of eternity and illumines the temples of unity (hayakilu't-tawhid). {p169} Shi'i commentators identify the 'temples of unity' as the prophets and imams. Elsewhere the Imam Husayn is called 'the temple of revelation' (haykalu'l-wahy wa't-tanzil.[7.15]

..... [* The Tablets to the Kings are also included in the book The Summons of the Lord of Hosts.]

..... [7.13. Baha'u'llah, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, Promised Day is Come, p. 47.]

..... [7.14. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 95.]

..... [7.15. Qummi, Muntaha'l-Amal, p. 286.] {p170} {p171}

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Part Three

Sacred Time {p172} {p173}

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In the Baha'i Faith time--both the linear time of history and the cyclical time of the religious year--is a theatre of the sacred. The Baha'i Faith shares with almost all religions an annual cycle of religious observances embodied in a religious calendar and cycle of festivals and commemorations. This annual cycle

shapes the rhythm of the community's devotional life.

In addition, the Baha'i Faith has a keen sense of the sacredness of historical time. A religion need not have such a sense; it does not matter religiously to the followers of many religions in what century or age they happen to live. To the follower of a tribal religion, time before his grandparents and after his grandchildren is an undifferentiated realm composed of equal parts of myth and forgetfulness; time passes but goes nowhere, for only three times matter: the present of living memory, the dreamtime when the present world came to be and perhaps an equally mythical time when all will come to an end. Even for the Qur'an, which consciously looks back over several thousand years of religious history, historical time between the Creation and the Day of Judgement is an often repeated cycle of prophets coming to warn their people and deliver God's message, only to be rejected and thus set the stage for the repetition of the cycle.

But to the Baha'i it matters very much when he lives. History for the Baha'i is a teleological drama in which the maturation of the human race is worked out through religious history. The prophets build on each other's messages, slowly preparing humankind for a promised day in which the kingdom of God can be erected by human hands according to a divine plan with the stage of the world and historical time. A Baha'i seeks not only salvation for himself but an earthly paradise for those who will come after him. He sees his place in historical time as a particular stage in the building of a new world. He and all other people ware a caravan and their journey's end is no longer many years away. {p174}

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THE BAHA'I CALENDAR

The Baha'i or Badi' calendar used by Baha'is consists of nineteen months of nineteen days each, with four or five days intercalated before the last month. The new year is the day of the vernal equinox, 21 March. At present, the Baha'i calendar is used mainly for religious purposes. During the year Baha'is celebrate nine major and two minor holy days, in addition to nineteen monthly meetings known as nineteen day feasts.

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The History of Religious and Secular Calendars

Calendars are devices for naming days and grouping them into larger units. They care an ancient invention, dating back to the dawn of history, important both in practical life and religion.

Almost all calendars are based on three readily observable natural cycles: the day, the lunar month and the solar year. The advantage of using a lunar month is that the month can be determined by simple observation and does not require sophisticated calculation. A solar year is useful for administrative purposes,

since tax collections, many religious festivals and other annual activities often must be synchronized with the seasons. Most calendars also incorporate a cycle intermediate between the day and the month, such as the seven-day week. This reflects the needs of religious worship and the regular market day. Other astronomical or arbitrary cycles are also sometimes used in calendars. In calendars that keep track of years, an era--the year from which the calendar starts--is also {p175} necessary. This is usually an important historical event--the foundation of the nation or religion, the accession of an important king or, in the case of the Jewish calendar, the creation of the world.

The day is a universal feature of calendars, although the point at which the new day begins is not standard. Dawn, noon, sunset and midnight have all been used.

The principal difficulty in calendar-making is the incommensurability of the three astronomical cycles. The lunar month is 29.53 days long. Most calendars deal with this difficulty by periodically adding an extra day or month to bring the calendar, the solar year and the lunar cycle back into agreement.

The ancient calendars of the Middle East were lunisolar. The months were defined by the phases of the moon. Such a calendar stays in reasonable agreement with the solar year if an extra month is added in seven of every nineteen years. The ancient Mesopotamians had developed such a lunisolar calendar by about 2000 BC. This calendar was the basis of the Jewish religious calendar, which still uses the ancient Babylonian names for the months. Originally the start of the new month was determined by observing the new moon, and the extra month would be proclaimed by the civil or religious authorities. By the fourth century BC astronomy had advanced sufficiently to allow the new months and intercalation to be calculated in advance.

The modern Gregorian calendar derives from a calendar reform--the 'Julian' calendar--undertaken in about 46 BC by Julius Caesar. The lunar month was abandoned, and a 365-day year divided into twelve months of 28 to 31 days was adopted. An extra day was added to February every fourth year. This gives a year that is too long by about three-quarters of a day per century. Therefore in 1582 Pope Gregory XIII introduced a new calendar--known as the 'Gregorian' or 'New Style'--that omitted the leap year three times in every four centuries and omitted ten days to bring the vernal {p176} equinox back to 21 March. The calendar reform provided bitter debate and even riots. The new calendar was adopted immediately in the Catholic countries. Most Protestant states adopted it in the eighteenth century. The eastern European countries kept the Julian calendar until the early twentieth century and the Orthodox churches still use it for religious purposes. The Gregorian calendar is now used for civil purposed almost everywhere.

The ancient Egyptians used three calendars: a solar calendar based on the star Sirius, a lunisolar calendar and a second lunisolar calendar used for calculating the dates of religious celebrations. The Hindu religious calendar is based on an old lunisolar calendar in which a month was added every five

years. The Hindu calendar was heavily influenced by Hellenistic astrology. Unusual features include the use of a lunar day--one thirtieth of a lunar month--which is slightly shorter than a solar day, and the twelve-year cycle of Jupiter for dating. The Chinese used a lunisolar calendar in which intercalation was controlled by sophisticated observations of the movements of the sun. In place of the week the Chinese counted cycles of ten and sixty days, a system that has endured for three thousand years. The Mayans of Central America developed remarkable calendars using 365 day years divided into eighteen months of twenty days and five intercalary days. This was combined with a ritual cycle called a 'calendar round'. Longer periods were measured by cycles of twenty and four hundred years. This calendar seems to reflect a cyclical view of history. The Aztecs used a similar but less sophisticated calendar.

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The Muslim Calendars

Muslim countries usually use the Muslim religious calendar, which is wholly lunar, in combination with a solar calendar for administrative purposes. {p177}

The ancient Arabian calendar was lunisolar, consisting of twelve lunar months with a thirteenth periodically intercalated. The year apparently started in the autumn, like the Jewish year. Four months were sacred and were used for trade and pilgrimage; fighting was forbidden. The week was adopted from the Christians and Jews.

Muhammad adopted the ancient Arabian calendar but prohibited the intercalation that is necessary to keep a lunar calendar in agreement with the solar year. Thus the Muslim year of 354 or 355 days is eleven day shorter than the solar year. Muslim dates and months therefore can fall at any time during the solar year. A hundred Muslim lunar years equal ninety-seven solar years.

The main features of the Muslim calendar are the following:

---------- The day begins at sunset.

---------- The week is the Jewish and Christian week. There is no day of rest but Friday (Jum'ih, 'gathering') is the day of the congregational prayer and thus roughly corresponds to the Jewish Saturday Sabbath and the Christian Sunday.

---------- The month begins on the first day after the new moon is sighted by reliable witnesses. Because the new moon is very close to the sun and is first seen just before sunset, it is difficult to predict exactly on which of two days the new month will begin. Although Muslim astronomers soon learned to calculate when the month should begin, there are to this day regular disagreements about the beginning and end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. Because of this, conversions of Muslim dates to Gregorian dates are subject to a one-day error.

---------- The year comprises twelve lunar months, totalling 354 or 355 days.

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---------- The Muslim era begins with 1 Muharram of the year 622 AD, which fell on 15 or 16 July. In that year Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina. Muslim dates are thus referred to as hijri (from hijrah, 'emigration') or hijri qamari ('lunar hijri', distinguishing the date from the Iranian calendar known as hijri shamsi, 'solar hijri'). In European languages Muslim dates are identified by AH (anno higirae). Most Muslim years fall in two Gregorian years. Thus the Muslim year 1413 AH began on about 2 July 1992 and ended about 21 June 1993.

{nd}

Use of the Muslim calendar

The Muslim calendar has always posed practical problems because a given month is not necessarily related to a season. Although the Muslim calendar is invariably used for religious purposes, dating books and documents and the like, almost all Muslim countries also use a solar calendar for practical purposes, now usually the Gregorian calendar. There have also been various attempts to regularize the process of determining the date of the new month but none of these have found broad acceptance. The determining of the new month remains, for the most part, a jealously guarded privilege of the 'ulama.

The following is a summary of the main holidays of the Islamic year, with special attention to Shi'i festivals. There are also hundreds, even thousands, of local festivals and saints' days.

MUHARRAM: Literally, 'the Sacred', the first month, one of the four sacred months. Before the institution of the Ramadan fast, Muhammad had made to Muharram, the day of 'Ashura, a day of fasting resembling the Jewish Day of Atonement. It is still considered commendable by {p179} Muslims to fast on this day and on the 9th (Tasu'a). Because the Imam Husayn was killed on 'Ashura, this day has become the great day of mourning for Shi'is. The first ten days are filled with mourning observances, penitential rites such as self-flagellation, and passion plays. 'Muharram' is occasionally a personal name.

SAFR: One thought to be unlucky.

----- 28: anniversary of the death of the Prophet.

RABI'U"L-AVVAL: (Rabi' I) the birth month of the Prophet, celebrated by Sunnis on the 12th and Shi'is on the 17th. The most distinctive feature of the celebration is the recitation of poems about the life of the Prophet.

JUMADA'L-ULA and JUMADA'L-AKHIRIH: (Jumada I and II) no major holidays.

RAJAB: one of the four holy months. Fasting during Rajab and Sha'ban is commendable but not required.

----- 13: Birthday of the Imam 'Ali.

----- 27: anniversary of the Prophet's night-journey to heaven.

'Rajab' is used as a personal name.

SAH'BAN:

----- 8 anniversary of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam.

----- 15: anniversary of the birth of the Twelfth Imam. The night of the full moon is called the 'Night of Bara'ih'--and is popularly supposed to be the night when the fates for the next year are determined. It is observed with fasting and vigils or with celebrations. Some of the orthodox disapprove of this. {p180}

RAMADAN: The month of fasting.

----- 21: Martyrdom of the Imam 'Ali.

The 'Night of Power', associated with the revelation of the Qur'an, is one of the last odd-numbered nights of Ramadan.

SHAVVAL:

----- 1: The 'Idu'l-Fitr; the holiday of fast-braking, one of the two great holidays of Islam, observed with feasting, new clothes and visiting. Fasting for the next six days is commendable.

DHI'L-QA'DIH: The 'month of sitting'--i.e. before the pilgrimage. One of the four sacred months. No major holidays.

DHI'L-HIJJIH: The 'month of pilgrimage', during the first two weeks of which the annual pilgrimage to Mecca is held. The fourth of the four holy months.

----- 10: the 'Idu'-l-Adha, the 'feast of sacrifice' commemorating Abraham's offer to sacrifice His son. Muslims, both those on pilgrimage and at home, are to sacrifice an animal and distribute the extra meat to the poor. This is the second great holy day of Islam.

----- 18: Day of Ghadir, on which Shi'is celebrate Muhammad's appointment of 'Ali as His successor.

{nd}

Other Calendars Used in Iran

The usual secular calendar in Iran is the old Zoroastrian solar one. The year begins at the vernal equinox, 19, 20 or 21 March. The new year's festival, Naw-Ruz, is the national holiday of Iran and lasts for two weeks. The twelve months and the thirty-one days of the month are named for Zoroastrian angels. The months are: {p181}

Farvardin: 31 days

Urdibihisht: 31 days

Khrudad: 31 days

Tir: 31 days

Murdad: 31 days

Shahrivar: 31 days

Mihr: 30 days

Aban: 30 days

Azar: 30 days

Day: 30 days

Bahman: 30 days

Isfand: 29 or 30 days

The modern Persian era, like the Muslim era, starts from 622 Ah but counts in solar years; therefore 1992 was 1370-1 according to the Persian calendar. In 1977 the Shah instituted a new era starting with the coronation of Cyrus the Great. Naw-Ruz of 1977 thus began the year 2536 instead of 1356. The change was not popular, however, and the old system was restored two years later after the Islamic Revolution.

{nd}

The Badi' Calendar

The Baha'i religious calendar, called the 'Badi' (wondrous) calendar', was devised by the Bab and completed by Baha'u'llah. Most features of the Badi' calendar are laid down in the later writings of the Bab, notably the Persian Bayan 5:3 and the Kitabu'l-Asma'. The Bab specified that the year consists of nineteen months of nineteen days each, the whole equalling 361, which is the numerical value of the phrase kull-i-shay, 'all things'.

The new year is Naw Ruz, the old Zoroastrian new year, which falls on the vernal equinox, the first day of spring. The Bab appointed Naw-Ruz as a great festival at which were {p182} allowed luxuries and amusements not permitted at other times. A Second holy day is the anniversary of the declaration of the Bab on 23 May.

The months are named for attributes of God; the nineteen days of each month have the same names as the months. The days of the week also bear the names of the attributes of God, some of which are the same as the names of the months. The years are counted in cycles of nineteen called vahids, each year being known by an attribute of God. Nineteen vahids make up a kull-i-shay'.

The first year of the Badi' calendar began on Naw-Ruz of 1844, the Naw-Ruz immediately before the declaration of the Bab.

The Bab's calendar resembles the Zoroastrian calendar much more closely than the Muslim one, being a solar calendar with non-lunar months and with months and days named for divine attributes.

Although some features of the Badi' calendar were known to the Babis and early Baha'is, there was considerable confusion about such details as the exact names

of the months and days, the year in which the Badi' era began and the location of the four or five intercalary days necessary to bring the calendar into agreement with the solar year. Nabil-i-Zarandi records, for example, that the Azalis placed the intercalary days just before Naw-Ruz and either ceased fasting several days before Naw-Ruz or began fasting several days after the beginning of the last month and fasted through the intercalary days. Some Baha'is held that the Badi' era began in 1863, the year in which Baha'u'llah publicly declared His mission. Near the beginning of 1870 Baha'u'llah instructed Nabil to prepare a summary of the Badi' calendar for the benefit of the Baha'is. In this document and in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, revealed soon after, most of the difficulties were resolved. Baha'u'llah specified that the Badi' era began with the Naw-Ruz of 1844, the year of the Declaration of the Bab. The intercalary days were placed before the nineteenth month, were designated the Ayyam-i-Ha, the days of {p183} Ha, and were dedicated to hospitality, charity and, as Shoghi Effendi elucidated, the giving of gifts.

{nd}

Baha'i holy days

The Baha'i holy days and anniversaries were only gradually specified, as all but Naw-Ruz relate to events in the lives of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. In the Kitab-i-Aqdas Baha'u'llah confirmed the holy days set by the Bab and added others: the twelve-day festival at Ridvan commemorating Baha'u'llah's public announcement of His mission and His departure from Baghdad, which was ordained the Most Great Festival; and the birthdays of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, which in the lunar calendar fall on the 1st and 2nd of Muharram and which are to be regarded as one feast. The martyrdom of the Bab was also commemorated as a holy day, as was, in due course, the anniversary of Baha'u'llah's passing. On these holidays--nine in all including three of the twelve days of Ridvan--work is prohibited.

'Abdu'l-Baha was born on the night the Bab declared His mission. When the Baha'is began to celebrate His birth on that day, 'Abdu'l-Baha stated that this was not befitting and that He would give them another day on which to celebrate. He therefore instituted the Day of the Covenant on 26 November. The anniversary of His passing on 28 November 1921 is also observed. Work is not suspended on these two anniversaries.

The Baha'i holy days on which it is obligatory to suspend work are:

---------- Naw-Ruz, 21 March: the new year.

---------- First Day of Ridvan, 21 April: the anniversary of Baha'u'llah's public declaration of His mission and His departure from Baghdad in 1863. To be celebrated at {p184} three o'clock in the afternoon, the time at which Baha'u'llah entered the Garden of Ridvan.

---------- Ninth Day of Ridvan, 29 April.

---------- Twelfth Day of Ridvan, 2 May.

---------- Declaration of the Bab, 23 May. The anniversary of the Bab's announcement of His mission to Mulla Husayn. In Islamic countries this is celebrated on 5 Jumada 1 according to the Muslim lunar calendar. To be commemorated at about two hours after sunset[*] on 22 May, the time at which the Bab made His Declaration.

..... [* 2 hours and 11 minutes after sunset, according to Persian Bayan (Vahid 2, B·b 7), found in a footnote of The Dawn-Breakers, on page 61.]

---------- Ascension of Baha'u'llah, 29 May: the anniversary of Baha'u'llah's death. To be observed at three o'clock in the morning,[*] the time of His death at Bahji.

..... [* Where Daylight Savings Time is in effect, the observance is to be held according to standard time, which places this observance at 4:00 AM. See Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities, Section 9, selection 7.]

---------- Martyrdom of the Bab, 9 July: the anniversary of the Bab's execution. In Islamic countries it is observed on 28 Sha'ban according to the Muslim lunar calendar. To be observed at noon,[*] the time of the Bab's martyrdom in Tabriz.

..... [* Where daylight savings time is in effect, the observance is to be held according to standard time, which places this observance at 1:00 PM. See Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities, Section 9, selection 7.]

---------- Birth of the Bab, 20 October.

---------- Birth of Baha'u'llah, 12 November.

The Universal House of Justice has stated where observances of holy days are to be held at certain times, standard time, rather than daylight savings time or similar, should be followed.

Baha'is are discouraged form celebrating among themselves the holy days of other religions, such as Christmas, but they may share the celebration of such holidays with relatives who are not Baha'is. {p185}

{nd}

Names of months and days

The names of the Baha'i months come from a Shi'i dawn prayer recited during the Ramadan fast and attributed to either the Imam Muhammadu'l-Baqir or the Imam Ja'faru's-Sadiq which begins: 'O my God! I entreat Thee by Thy most splendid splendour, for splendid is all Thy splendour! O my God! I entreat Thee by all Thy splendour. O my God! I entreat Thee by Thy most beautiful beauty...' The names of the nineteen months and the nineteen days of each month are:

Day or Month . . Arabic Name . . English Name . . First day of month

1 ---------- Baha ---------- Splendour ------ 21 March

2 ---------- Jalal --------- Glory ---------- 9 April

3 ---------- Jamal --------- Beauty --------- 28 April

4 ---------- 'Azamat ------- Grandeur ------- 17 May

5 ---------- Nur ---------- Light ---------- 5 June

6 ---------- Rahmat -------- Mercy ---------- 24 June

7 ---------- Kalimat ------- Words ---------- 13 July

8 ---------- Kamal --------- Perfection ----- 1 August

9 ---------- Asma' --------- Names ---------- 20 August

10 ---------- 'Izzat -------- Might ---------- 8 September

11 ---------- Mashiyyat ----- Will ---------- 27 September

12 ---------- 'Ilm ---------- Knowledge ------ 16 October

13 ---------- Qudrat -------- Power ---------- 4 November

14 ---------- Qawl ---------- Speech --------- 23 November

15 ---------- Masa'il ------- Questions ------ 12 December

16 ---------- Sharaf -------- Honour --------- 31 December

17 ---------- Sultan -------- Sovereignty ---- 19 January

18 ---------- Mulk ---------- Dominion ------- 7 February

19 ---------- 'Ala' --------- Loftiness ------ 2 March

The exact starting day of each month depends on the date of Naw-Ruz, which may be as early as 19 March. {p186}

The nineteen day feast, a community meeting for worship, community business and fellowship, is held once in each Baha'i month, usually of the first day of the month.

Each day has two names as a day of the week and as a day of the month, another resemblance to the Zoroastrian calendar. The names of the days of the week are:

Saturday ------ Jalal --------- Glory

Sunday -------- Jamal --------- Beauty

Monday -------- Kamal --------- Perfection

Tuesday ------- Fidal --------- Grace

Wednesday ----- 'Idal --------- Justice

Thursday ------ Istijlal ------ Majesty

Friday -------- Istiqlal ------ Independence

The Badi' calendar follows the Persian practice of beginning the week with Saturday. Friday is the Baha'i day of rest. For the present, however, Baha'is

observe the day of rest of the country in which they live.

The names of the days of the month are the same as the names of the months. Therefore, Monday, the twelfth day of the seventeenth month is 'the day of Kamal, the day of 'Ilm, of the month of Sultan'.

{nd}

Years

As mentioned above, in the Badi' calendar years are grouped into cycles of nineteen and 361 years, referred to respectively as a vahid ('unity', with a numerical value of nineteen) and kull-i-shay' ('all things', with a numerical value of 361). The years of each vahid are named as follows: {p187}

Year --- Arabic Name --- English Name

1 ----- Alif ---------- A

2 ----- Ba' ---------- B

3 ----- Ab ---------- Father

4 ----- Dal ---------- D

5 ----- Bab ---------- Gate

6 ----- Vav ---------- V

7 ----- Abad ---------- Eternity

8 ----- Jad ---------- Generosity

9 ----- Baha ---------- Splendour

10 ----- Hubb ---------- Love

11 ----- Bahhaj -------- Delightful

12 ----- Javab --------- Answer

13 ----- Ahad ---------- Single

14 ----- Vahhab -------- Bountiful

15 ----- Vidad --------- Affection

16 ----- Badi ---------- Beginning

17 ----- Bahi ---------- Luminous

18 ----- Abha ---------- Most Luminous

19 ----- Vahid --------- Unity

The name of each year has a numerical value equal to the number of the year, e.g. the numerical value of the letter 'V' (vav) is six, and the numerical value of the letters of the word of 'bahhaj' is eleven.

Years, according to this system, are identified by the name of the year, the

number of the vahid and the number of the kull-i-shay'. Therefore the Badi' year that began in March 1992 is, according to this system, the year of Badi', of the eighth vahid, of the first kull-i-shay'.

{nd}

Practical use

At present, the Badi' calendar is almost never used in isolation, except to mark the first day of the Baha'i month for the {p188} purpose of commemorating the nineteen day feast. Although Baha'i dates are sometimes used for dating letters and the like, they are almost invariably used in conjunction with Gregorian dates or another calendar prevailing outside the Baha'i community.

A number of questions about the application of the Badi' calendar have not yet been resolved. These include whether Naw-Ruz should be determined by the time of the equinox at come one place, such as the Baha'i World Centre; whether there should be a dateline; and whether there should be a regular or irregular system of intercalation.

The Badi' calendar as it is used in the contemporary Baha'i community differs in certain respects from the system outlined by the Bab and Baha'u'llah:

NAW-RUZ

At present, the Naw-Ruz is fixed at 21 March for the West, regardless of the actual date of the equinox. As a result, in many years Naw-Ruz and the other days of the Baha'i year are one day later than they should be.

YEARS

Years are always numbered rather than identified by the cycles of nineteen ordained by the Bab. This practice is well attested in the Baha'i writings.

HOLY DAYS

According to the explicit instructions of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, the births of the Bab and Baha'u'llah were to be observed according to the Muslim lunar calendar and all other holy days according to the Badi' calendar. At present, in Muslim and Middle Eastern countries the births of the Bab and Baha'u'llah and the declaration and martyrdom of the Bab are celebrated according to the Muslim lunar calendar. Elsewhere all holy days are celebrated according to the Baha'i {p189} calendar. This discrepancy dates from the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha and was left by Shoghi Effendi for the Universal House of Justice to resolve.

{nd}

The Meaning and Symbolism of Month and Year Names

The following are brief descriptions of the literal and symbolic meanings of the names of the days, month and years of the Badi' calendar, together with their other important uses in the Baha'i writings.

Ab. 'Father'. In other contexts it most commonly appears in the forms abu and abi 'father of', common elements of Islamic names. Ab is the third year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar, as in Arabic ab is numerically equivalent to three. If 'Ab' is meant as a title of God, it shows Christian influence, since Muslims do not refer to God as 'Father'.

Abad. 'Eternity', referring to time beginning now and without end. The seventh year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. Abad in Arabic is numerically equivalent to seven.

Abha. 'Most glorious', 'splendid', or 'luminous', the superlative form of baha. It appears in various phrases and contexts where it is usually roughly equivalent to 'divine', 'Baha'i' or 'Baha'u'llah'.

---------- IN THE BAHA'I WRITINGS: Abha is one of the forms of baha that appears in the writings of the Bab: it appears twice in the Persian Bayan, both times paired with a'la. Evidently this is an allusion to the first and last months of the Babi year, Baha and 'Ala'.

---------- Abha appears frequently in the writings of Baha'u'llah {p190} and 'Abdu'l-Baha. The more common uses include:

---------- Abha kingdom or paradise: the kingdom of heaven, usually the afterlife.

---------- Abha Pen or Beauty: Baha'u'llah

---------- Abha horizon: heaven.

---------- Year: Abha is numerically equivalent to eighteen and is the name of the eighteenth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar.

{nd}

Ahad. 'Single', numerically equivalent to thirteen. The name is the thirteenth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. This is an attribute of God attested in the Qur'an.[8-1] In later mystical speculation it represents the level of God's primal unity that transcends and precedes the multiplicity of His attributes.

..... [8.1. Qur'an 112:1.]

{nd}

'Ala'. 'Loftiness'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the nineteenth and last month of the year and the nineteenth day of each Baha'i month. 'Ala' is the month of the Baha'i fast.

---------- MEANING: 'Loftiness', 'glory', 'exaltation', 'high or noble rank'. Related forms of the word are often used of God in the Qur'an, notably the phrase 'exalted be He' (ta'ala), which pious Mulsims habitually add when mentioning the name of God. This root, from which the last month of the Baha'i year takes its name, is associated with the Bab--for example, in the common title 'His Holiness, the Exalted One' (hadrat-i-a'la)--whereas Baha, the name

of the first Baha'i month, is associated with Baha'u'llah.

---------- THE MONTH OF 'ALA': From sunset 1 March to sunset 20 March. Adult Baha'is in sound health fast during daylight {p191} throughout the entire month. The four or five intercalary days needed to keep the calendar in agreement with the solar year are inserted immediately before the beginning of 'Ala'. These are the Ayyam-i-Ha, the 'days of H'. They are not part of 'Ala' or the previous month, Mulk.

{nd}

Alif. The first letter of the Arabic alphabet, numerically equivalent to one. It always has the shape of a straight vertical line.

---------- SYMBOLIC MEANINGS: Because of its shape the alif symbolizes in mystical and love poetry the slender figure of the beloved; for this reason and its numerical value of one, it also symbolizes God. In an important Baha'i symbol derived from the Shaykhis, the alif that is the second letter of vav (the letter 'V') stands for Baha'u'llah, as He occupies the central point of religious history between the prophetic cycle of Adam, symbolized by the first 'V', and the cycle of fulfilment, symbolized by the second 'V'.

---------- ABBREVIATIONS: In the Baha'i writings, alif can also stand for several words that begin with it. In the writings of the Bab, 'the Point of the Alif' means the Point of the Gospel--i.e. Jesus. 'The Alif between the two Bas' is the Bab. In Baha'u'llah's writings the 'Land of Alif' stands for several places, among them Adharbayjan and Ardistan. The latter is also referred to as 'the land of Alif and Ra'.

---------- THE YEAR: Alif is the name of the first year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar, possibly because it is numerically equivalent to one and a symbol of the divine.

{nd}

Asma'. 'Names'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the ninth month of the year and the ninth day of each Baha'i month.

---------- MEANING: 'Attributes' of God. The Qur'an says of God that 'to Him belong the most beautiful names',[8.2] by which are {p192} meant the many attributes that describe God in the Qur'an. These names and attributes are central to Islamic piety and thought. The devout count the m=ninety-nine names of God on the rosary. Theologians, philosophers and mystics pondered the role of the divine names in mediating between the essence of God and His creation. In Baha'i belief, all created things are signs of the names and attributes of God.

..... [8.2. Qur'an 7:180, 17:110, 59:24.]

---------- THE MONTH OF ASMA': From sunset 19 August to sunset 7 Septemer. There are no holy days or other special occasions in Asma'.

{nd}

Azamat. 'Grandeur'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the fourth month of the year and the fourth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: An attribute of God, also translated in the Baha'i writings as 'glory', 'majesty', 'dominion' and 'great'. Its root meaning is 'large' or 'great'. In various grammatical forms it is applied very frequently to God in the Qur'an. The superlative form a'zam, usually translated 'most great', is associated with Baha'u'llah.

---------- THE MONTH OF 'AZAMAT: From sunset 16 May to sunset 4 June. The 7th and 13th of 'Azamat are the Holy Days of the Declaration of the Bab and the Ascension of Baha'u'llah. The former, however, is celebrated according to the lunar calendar by Baha'is in Muslim countries.

{nd}

Ba. The second letter of the Arabic alphabet, numerically equivalent to two.

---------- SYMBOLIC MEANINGS: The symbolic importance of the ba in Islam arises from its position as the first letter of the Qur'an. The entire meaning of the Qur'an was said to be implicitly present in the dot under the ba that distinguished {p193} it from other letters. In Baha'i symbolism it is associated with the Greatest Name, Baha, and thus symbolizes Baha'u'llah, who often refers to Himself as 'the Ba and the Ha'--i.e. the B and the H, the first two letters of His name.

---------- ABBREVIATIONS: In the Baha'i writings, ba can also stand for several words that begin with it, a sort of code used as a symbol to protect the recipients of Tablets. In the writings of the Bab it refers to Mulla Muhammad-Baqir-i-Bushru'I, one of the Letters of the Living. The 'land of Ba' or 'BA and Shin'. Baku (Badkhubih) in Soviet Azerbaijan is 'Ba and "Dal'. Bunab in Adharbayjan is 'the land of Ba and Nun'.

---------- THE YEAR: Ba is the name of the second year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar, probably because it is numerically equivalent to two and because of its symbolic association with revelation.

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Bab (year). 'Gate'. The fifty year of the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar; the letters of the word 'bab' are numerically equivalent to five.

{nd}

Badi. 'Beginning', numerically equivalent to sixteen. The name of the sixteenth year of the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. The word connotes the act of divine creation.

{nd}

Baha (calendar). 'Splendour', numerically equivalent to nine. It is the name of the first month of the Baha'i year, the first day of each month and the ninth year in each cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. The Bab stressed

the importance of the month of Baha, associating it with God, Himself, the Letters of the Living, and Him Whom God shall make manifest. The day of Baha each month is the day of the nineteen day feast. The day of Baha in the month of Baha is the first {p194} day of eh Baha'i year, Naw-Ruz.

---------- THE MONTH OF BAHA: From sunset 20 March to sunset 8 April. Naw-Ruz occurs on the first day of Baha.

{nd}

Bahhaj. 'Delightful', numerically equivalent to eleven. The name of the eleventh year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. This is a neologism, coined by employing a real root in a possible but unused form, and is the typical example of the Bab's willingness to take liberties with Arabic grammar and syntax.

{nd}

Bahi (year). 'Luminous', 'splendid' or 'glorious', numerically equivalent to seventeen. The name of the seventeenth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. The word is the adjectival form of baha.

{nd}

Dal. The eighth letter of the Arabic alphabet and the tenth of the Persian, numerically equivalent to four. The name of the fourth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar.

{nd}

Fidal. 'Grace'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of Tuesday, the fourth day of the week. From a root meaning 'extra' and thus 'grace'--what is given over and above what is merited. Fidal literally means 'contending in excellence'. The Bab uses it analogously to Jalal, Jamal and Kamal. Fidal therefore is taken as a neologism meaning 'grace' or 'the quality of being bounteous' and perhaps should be spelled Fadal.

{nd}

Hubb. 'Love', numerically equivalent to ten. The name of the tenth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. This is a general term for love and affection of all sorts and degrees.

{nd}

'Idal. 'Justice'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of Wednesday, {p195} the fifth day of the week. From a root meaning 'identical' and thus 'equity' or 'justice'--giving exactly what is due. 'Idal literally means 'to be wavering between two alternatives' to 'to be equal or to treat as equal'. The Bab uses it analogously to Jalal, Jamal and Kamal. 'Idal therefore is taken to mean 'justice' and perhaps should be spelled 'Adal. In Islam justice and grace--the names of Tuesday and Wednesday in the Bab's calendar--are considered to be opposites: justice is giving exactly what is deserved while grace is giving

more than is deserved.

{nd}

'Ilm. 'Knowledge'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the twelfth month of the year and the twelfth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: 'Knowledge', 'wisdom', 'science', 'learning'. Discursive knowledge of the principles of things rather than knowledge by direct acquaintance. One of the most important attributes of God in Islamic and Baha'i thought. The Qur'an has innumerable references to God's knowledge. Later Islamic thought was much concerned with reconciling the knowledge of God with His unity and with human free will. The Baha'i writings stress God's knowledge and the value of human knowledge as the essential ingredient of faith.

---------- THE MONTH OF 'ILM: From sunset 15 October to sunset 3 November. In most parts of the world the holy day of the Birth of the Bab is observed on the 5th of 'Ilm, 20 October.

{nd}

Istijal. 'Majesty'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of Thursday, the sixth day of the week. From a root meaning 'greatness'. It is often found paired with istiqlal, 'independence', which is the Baha'i name for Friday.

{nd}

Istiqlal. 'Independence'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of Friday, the last day of the week and the Baha'i day of rest. Its original meaning is 'to be independent or alone in some matter'. {p196}

{nd}

'Izzat. 'Might'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the tenth month of the year and the tenth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: 'Might', 'strength', 'pomp', 'grandeur'. A secondary meaning is 'to be precious or dearly beloved'. It is used often in various grammatical forms in the Qur'an, Islamic prayers and religious literature, and the Baha'i writings. 'Izzat is a man's name in Turkish and a woman's name in Arabic and Persian.

---------- THE MONTH OF 'IZZAT: From sunset 7 September to sunset 26 September. There are no holy days or other special occasions in 'Izzat.

{nd}

Jad. 'Generosity', numerically equivalent to eight. The name of the eighth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. This is a neologism.

{nd}

Jalal. 'Glory'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the second month of the year, the second day of each month, and Saturday, the first day of the week.

---------- MEANING: An attribute of God mentioned twice in the Qur'an.[8.3] Its root meaning is greatness. In later Islamic speculation, the names and attributes of God were grouped into attributes of glory (Jalal) and (Jamal). The attributes of glory were those indicating God's might, power or wrath. Jalal is also translated in Baha'i writings as 'Majesty'. It is sometimes used for a man's name.

..... [8.3. Qur'an 55:27, 78.]

---------- THE MONTH OF JALAL: From sunset 8 April to sunset of 27 April. The holy day of Ridvan is the 13th of Jalal.

{nd}

Jamal. 'Beauty'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the third month of the year, the third day of each month, and Sunday, the second day of the week. {p197}

---------- MEANING: An attribute of God. It is not applied to God in the Qur'an but is applied to Him in such traditions as 'God is beautiful and loveth beauty'. In later Islamic speculation, the names and attributes of God were grouped into attributes of glory (Jalal) and beauty (Jamal). The attributes of beauty were those indicating God's grace and mercy.

---------- THE MONTH OF JAMAL: From sunset 27 April to sunset 16 May. The first five days of Jamal are in Ridvan. The 2nd and 5th of Jamal are the holy days of the 9th and 12th of Ridvan.

{nd}

Javab. 'Answer', numerically equivalent to twelve. The name of the twelfth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. In the Qur'an 'to answer' is most commonly used to refer to those who accept the call of the Prophet. It is also used to refer to God's answers to prayers and to the defiance of those who refuse to accept the summons to faith.

{nd}

Kalimat. 'Words'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the seventh month of the year and the seventh day of each month.

---------- MEANING: An attribute of God. Jews, Christians and Muslims were all fascinated by the concept of God's word and made it the object of much theological, mystical and philosophical speculation. Interest centred on such questions as the relations between the word of God and the creation of the world, fate and predestination, and the holy book. The word of God remains a central concept in the sacred writings of the Babi and Baha'i Faiths.

---------- THE MONTH OF KALIMAT: From sunset 12 July to sunset 31 July. There are no holy days or other special occasions in Kalimat.

{nd}

Kamal. 'Perfection'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the {p198} eighth

month of the year and the eighth day of each month. It is also the Baha'i name for Monday, the third day of the week.

---------- MEANING: An attribute of God. Its root meaning is 'completeness'--perfection in the sense of not having any lack or deficiency. It is not used of God in the Qur'an but is in the traditions and later Islamic thought. In Islam the Prophet is the Perfect Man since He possesses all the divine attributes in the most complete way possible for a human being.

---------- THE MONTH OF KAMAL: From sunset 31 July to sunset 19 August. There are no holy days or other special occasions in Kamal.

{nd}

Kull-i-Shay' (or (Kullu Shay'). 'All things, everything', numerically equivalent in Arabic to 361 or nineteen nineteens.

---------- SYMBOLIC MEANING: The word vahid, 'one', is numerically equivalent to nineteen. Thus kull-i-shay' symbolizes the totality of God's creation emanated from God's attributes united in His essence.

---------- IN BABI ORGANIZATION: The Bab instructed that the believers be registered in groups of nineteen and 361, known as vahids and kull-i-shay's. This may have been done for the first kull-i-shay' but the practice quickly lapsed in the confusion attending the rise and suppression of the Bab's faith.

---------- UNIT OF YEARS: In the Badi' calendar established by the Bab, years are counted in groups of nineteen--vahids--and 361--kull-i-shay's. The first kull-i-shay' began in 1844 and the second will begin in 2205.

{nd}

Masa'il. 'Questions'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the fifteenth month of the year and the fifteenth day of each month.{p199}

---------- MEANING: 'Questions', 'issues in question' or 'matters'. In this context it evidently should not be understood literally as 'questions' but in the more general sense of 'affairs' or 'matters' as they are decreed by God--God's actions in the world as signs of His bounty and wisdom.

---------- THE MONTH OF MASA'IL: From sunset 11 December to sunset 30 December. There are no holy days or other special occasions in Masa'il.

{nd}

Mashiyyat. 'Will'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the eleventh month of the year and the eleventh day of each month.

---------- MEANING: 'Will', 'desire', 'purpose'. One of the most important attributes of God in Islamic and Baha'i thought. Although this form is not used in the Qur'an, the corresponding verb appears hundreds of times, usually referring to the will of God. In the Baha'i writings the will of God is both what God desires for His creatures and a metaphysical entity, God's first creation through which the rest of the creatures are brought into being.

---------- THE MONTH OF MASHIYYAT: From sunset 26 September to sunset 15 October. There are no holy days or other special occasions in Mashiyyat.

{nd}

Mulk. 'Dominion'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the eighteenth month of the year and the eighteenth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: 'Sovereignty', 'dominion', 'kingdom'. The root meaning is 'to possess or own'. Since malik, 'king', is derived from the same root, mulk acquires the meaning of 'the possessions of a king'--i.e. dominion or sovereignty. Both mulk and malik are applied to God in the Qur'an, where God is {p200} often said to possess the dominion mulk of heaven and earth. The 'world of mulk' ('world of creation', 'contingent world') is the physical world, the opposite of the spiritual world of God.

---------- THE MONTH OF MULK. From sunset 6 February to sunset 25 February. There are no holy days or other special occasions in Mulk. The four or five intercalary days--the Ayyam-i-Ha--needed to keep the calendar in agreement with the solar year are inserted immediately after the end of Mulk.

{nd}

Nur. 'Light'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the fifth month of the year and the fifth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: An attribute of God, also translated in the Baha'i writings as 'light', 'radiance', 'splendour', 'luminary' and 'brightness'. The famous 'Light Verse' of the Qur'an[8.4]--'God is the Light of the heavens and the earth... Light upon light; God guides to His light whom He will'--has prompted theological, mystical and philosophical speculation throughout the history of Islam. Light imagery is very common in the Baha'i writings. As it happens, Baha'u'llah's home district in Mazandaran is named Nur.

..... [8.4. Qur'an 24:35.]

---------- THE MONTH OF NUR: From sunset 4 June to sunset 23 June. There are no holy days or other special occasions in Nur.

{nd}

Qawl. 'Speech'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the fourteenth month of the year and the fourteenth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: The word or speech of God, as the logos, derived from the ordinary Arabic word 'to say'. As a theological term it is close in meaning to kalimat. In Arabic this word in its various grammatical forms is commonly used to refer to revelation, especially in phrases such as 'God Most High {p201} says, and what He says is truth...'--used to introduce quotations from the Qur'an.

---------- THE MONTH OF QAWL: From sunset 22 November to sunset 11 December. The minor holy days of the Day of the Covenant and the Ascension of

'Abdu'l-Baha are observed on the 4th and 6th of Qawl respectively, 26 and 28 November.

{nd}

Qudrat. 'Power'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the thirteenth month of the year and the thirteenth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: 'Power', 'strength', 'might', 'potency', 'authority'. Its root meaning is 'the ability to do a thing'. As an attribute of a living creature, it means the ability to do something voluntarily. Thus the Qur'an often asks the unbelievers whether they doubt that God has the ability to do what He has promised. This attribute had theological importance because God's activity would seem to imply change in the Divine Essence. The root has a second meaning: 'to measure'. Thus the adjectives formed from this noun and applied to God mean both 'one who is powerful or mighty' and 'one who appoints, decrees or ordains'.

---------- THE MONTH OF QUDRAT: From sunset 3 November to sunset 22 November. In most parts of the world the holy day of the Birth of Baha'u'llah is observed on the 9th of Qudrat, 12 November.

{nd}

Rahmat. 'Mercy'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the sixth month of the year and the sixth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: An attribute of God, also translated in the Baha'i writings as 'grace', 'compassion', 'providence' and 'blessing'. In various grammatical forms it is applied to God hundreds {p202} of times in the Qur'an. Every Islamic book, letter and document, religious or secular, begins with the invocation 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate', both attributes being grammatically derived from the root rahmat

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---------- THE MONTH OF RAHMAT: From sunset 23 June to sunset 12 July. The 16th of Rahmat is the holy day of the Martyrdom of the Bab. The latter, however, is celebrated [sic - observed] according to the lunar calendar by Baha'is in Muslim countries.

{nd}

Sharaf. 'Honour'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the sixteenth month of the year and the sixteenth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: 'Nobility', 'honour', 'elevation', both worldly and religious. It often means 'to have noble ancestry'. It also refers to the quality conferred by the favour of the great, whether kings or God. It is not used in the Qur'an.

---------- MONTH OF SHARAF: From sunset 30 December to sunset 18 January. There are no holy days or other special occasions in Sharaf.

{nd}

Sultan. 'Sovereignty'. In the Baha'i calendar, the name of the seventeenth month of the year and the seventeenth day of each month.

---------- MEANING: The root meaning is 'to exercise superior power over another'. From this is derived the meanings of 'authority' and specifically 'the authority of a king' or 'sovereignty. Thus in the Qur'an it means 'divine authority', particularly the authority of a prophet. In the Middle Ages it was a title of kings, particularly Turkish rulers. In the nineteenth century 'Sultan' was the most commonly used title of rulers of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. In the Baha'i writings it refers either to the authority of God or is a title of God meaning 'King'. {p203}

---------- THE MONTH OF SULTAN: From sunset 18 January to sunset 6 February. There are no holy days or other special occasions in Sultan.

{nd}

Vahab. 'Bountiful', numerically equivalent to fourteen. The name of the fourteenth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. This is an attribute of God mentioned three times in the Qur'an,[8.5] meaning 'one who gives liberally'.

..... [8.5. Qur'an 3:8, 38:9, 35.]

{nd}

Vahid. 'One', 'single', 'unity'. An attribute of God and an important symbolic term in the writings of the Bab. It is also the name of the nineteenth Baha'i year.

---------- IN ISLAM: Islamic thought lays great emphasis on the unity of God. Many of the classic problems of Islamic theology, philosophy and mysticism concern how to reconcile the unity of God with the multiplicity of His creation. Many of the attributes of God mentioned in the Qur'an affirm God's unity, among them 'the One (al-Vahid). In mystical speculation 'al-Vahid' is God considered in the unity of His attributes--not the absolute and unconditioned unity of His essence. In this sense 'vahid' is the unity of the many in one whole.

---------- IN THE BAB'S WRITINGS: The numerical value of vahid is nineteen, which is also the numerical value of vajhuhu, 'His Face', i.e. the divine essence as manifested to the world. A vahid or vahids is 361--19 x 19--the numerical equivalent of kull-i-shay', 'all things'. Vahid thus symbolizes the unity of the many in God. Vahid is used in several important ways in the writings of the Bab.

---------- As an attribute of God: Al-Vahid, 'the One', is one of the innumerable attributes of God mentioned in the Bab's writings. {p204}

---------- As a title of the Letters of the Living: At the beginning of His ministry the Bab attempted to organize His followers into groups of

nineteen and 361, referred to as vahids and kull-i-shay's. The first vahid consisted of the eighteen Letters of the Living and the Bab Himself. The first vahid is also referred to as 'the Vahid of the Bayan'.

---------- As a unit of the Bayan: The chapters (bab's) of the Persian and Arabic Bayan are grouped in units of nineteen called vahids. A chapter is thus identified, for example, as the twelfth bab of the third vahid of the Persian Bayan.

---------- As a synonym for the number nineteen: Sometimes vahid simply represents the number nineteen.

---------- As a year: Vahid is the name of the nineteenth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. It is also the name of the nineteen-year cycle. Nineteen years make up one vahid and nineteen vahids make up one kull-i-shay' of 361 years.

..... IN BAHA'U'LLAH'S WRITINGS: Baha'u'llah used numerological symbolism much less often than the Bab. When Bahau'llah uses the term vahid, it is as a specifically Babi technical term or a usage carried over from the writings of the Bab. Baha'u'llah also commonly uses it as an attribute of God.

{nd}

Vav. 'V' or 'W', the twenty-seventh letter of the Arabic and thirtieth letter of the Persian alphabets, numerically equivalent to six. Vav is the name of the sixth year in the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. For Baha'u'llah's symbolic interpretation of the vav and alif, see 'Alif'.

{nd}

Vidad. 'Affection', numerically equivalent to fifteen. The name {p205} of the fifteenth year of the cycle of nineteen years in the Baha'i calendar. The adjectival form is used as an attribute of God in the Qur'an where it is said to mean 'the One who is loving towards His righteous servants'. {p206}

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BAHA'I FESTIVALS

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The Nineteen Day Feast

The nineteen day feast (diyafat-i-navazdah-ruzih) is the monthly Baha'i community meeting for worship, administrative business and fellowship. The feast is held every nineteen days in each Baha'i community, usually on the first day of each Baha'i month.

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The origins of the feast

The root meaning of 'feast', diyafat, in Arabic is hospitality, particularly the giving of food to a guest. From this comes its meaning of banquet or feast. It is thus sometimes associated in 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings with 'table'--the Lord's supper of Jesus, which the Qur'an 5:112-15 portrays as a banquet table sent down from heaven from which the disciples were fed.

Hospitality in the form of food given to guests has been admired as a virtue throughout history. Tales of the generous man who unwittingly entertains a divine guest are common in mythology. The stories in the book Genesis of Abraham and Lot entertaining angels are typical. Hospitality as a virtue was especially admired in the Semitic world of the Middle East where the hospitality due to the stranger served to lessen the evils of desert lawlessness. 'Abdu'l-Baha elates one of the tales of Bedouin hospitality in Secret of Divine Civilization.[9.1]

..... [9.1. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Secret of Divine civilization, pp. 46-51.]

Both Christianity and Islam also emphasize the duty of the {p207} believer to feed the poor. The Qur'an stresses the responsibility of those with means to provide for the poor and makes the feeding of a specified number of poor people the expiation for certain offences. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus describes how He will come on the Day of Judgement and condemn those who did not feed or succour those less fortunate, for in failing to do so, they had left Christ Himself hungry, thirsty, sick and unclothed.[9.2] This passage has inspired centuries of Christian charitable work.

..... [9.2. Matt. 25:31-46.]

In many religions the sharing of food or a meal is a religious rite. The most important example is the Christian Eucharist or holy communion, the 'Lord's Supper'. This is the ritualized re-enactment of the last meal that Jesus shared with His disciples.

The Baha'i feast originates in the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. It appears first in the Arabic Bayan as a command to entertain nineteen people every nineteen days, even if one is only able to give them water. Baha'u'llah confirms the commandment in His Kitab-i-Aqdas, explaining that its purpose is to 'bind hearts together' with material means,[9.3] although in Questions and Answers He states that the feast is not obligatory.[9.4] In these passages the Feast is a personal observance, in which the believer displays hospitality by receiving and feeding guests. There is no indication that it is an administrative or community institution.

..... [9.3. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 57.]

..... [9.4. ibid. question 48.]

Banquets and shared meals were an important part of the activities that surrounded the person of 'Abdu'l-Baha, at home and during His travels. The meals in 'Abdu'l-Baha's house served to unite the Baha'i pilgrims who came from different countries and cultures. Often the visitors themselves hosted

banquets. Early Baha'is often mention these shared meals in accounts of their pilgrimages.

However, during 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry the feast also came to have a technical meaning as a monthly Baha'i community meeting. This seems initially to have been a wholly social occasion--certainly Middle Eastern Baha'is of the nineteenth {p208} century interpreted it this way--although it soon began to be formalized as a religious institution. Illustrative of this phase were the 'Nineteen Day Teas' for Baha'i women, begun in Chicago in 1901 and soon observed in other cities. After 1905 a more formal feast, combining a meal and devotions came into practice in America, largely through the efforts of Isabella Brittingham. The Baha'is at first precisely copied a feast hosted by 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Akka in 1905. On the basis of the passage in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Baha'is understood the feast as a way of unifying the Baha'i community. In America it supplemented the weekly worship meetings that most communities held. Not surprisingly, the American Baha'is associated the feast with the Lord's Supper, an analogy that 'Abdu'l-Baha Himself made.

These developments were certainly guided and encouraged by 'Abdu'l-Baha. His writings on the subject stress the importance of the feast and its role in increasing the unity of the Baha'i communities. He made clear that the feast was to be a devotional occasion, with prayers and readings in addition to the meal. 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote that the Baha'i feast carried on the ancient religious obligation to display hospitality and to be generous with food. The aspect of the feast most stressed in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha was the creation of an atmosphere of spirituality, unity and prayer. .

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The modern administrative feast

The modern form of the feast arose during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi and parallels the rise of the modern local spiritual assembly. Shoghi Effendi seems to have turned his attention to the nineteen day feast in the early 1930s. To the two-fold feast at the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha, he added a third element, a community business meeting included 'in direct response to the growing needs of the Baha'i community in this formative period of the Baha'i Era for better training in the {p209} principles and practice of Baha'i administration'.[9.5]

..... [9.5. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 29 July 1935, in Compilation, vol. 1, no. 393, p. 433.]

In a statement prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and endorsed by Shoghi Effendi, the form of the modern nineteen day feast is clearly described. The feast is to consist of three parts: first, devotional, consisting of readings from the Baha'i sacred writings; second, a general community meeting, at which the local spiritual assembly and the community can consult; and third, a social meeting, at which food is served. Only Baha'is are to be present. Baha'is usually call these the 'devotional' or 'spiritual', the

'administrative' or 'business', and the 'social' or 'material' portions of the feast. The feast is described as the 'foundation of the new World Order'.[9.6] Shoghi Effendi stressed the importance of the feast in Baha'i community life, warning against both exaggerating and minimalizing the relative importance of the feast.[9.7]

..... [9.6. The Universal House of Justice, Compilation, vol. 1, p. 420.]

..... [9.7. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 2 October 1935, in Compilation, vol. 1, no. 940, p. 434.]

The feast is held once during each Baha'i month, preferably on the first day. In various places Shoghi Effendi allowed the feast to be held later in the Baha'i month, the day before the first Baha'i month and during the Intercalary Days before the beginning of the month of fasting. The exact date, time and place for the feast are the responsibility of the local spiritual assembly.

Shoghi Effendi stated that the feast was intended only for the members of the Baha'i community.[*] Children of Baha'is, whether or not they are registered members of the community, are allowed to attend. However, if a visitor who is not a Baha'i happens to attend, he should be received hospitably. If he is well known to the community, he might be asked to leave the room during the community's business meeting. Otherwise, the business portion of the feast should be omitted. Feasts are also open to Baha'is from other communities and no believer in good standing may be excluded from a feast.

..... [* In a letter to the U.S. Baha'i community for the Feast of Sharaf, dated December 16, 2008, 2008, the following is quoted:

..... "As both the beloved Guardian and the House of Justice have numerous times pointed out, the Feast is for Baha'is only, and non-Bah·'Ìs should not be invited to attend any portion of it. Our understanding has for some time been that if a non-Baha'i should appear at the Feast, however, he or she was to be welcomed and invited to participate in its spiritual and social portions, while the administrative portion was to be suspended. The new guidance we have received from the House of Justice makes it clear that the administrative portion can now be modified to accommodate the attendance of non-Baha'is rather than being postponed. The House of Justice has further specified that:

..... 'The sharing of local and national news and information about social events, as well as consultation on topics of general interest, such as expansion and the multiplication of core activities, service projects, the fund, and so on, can continue as usual, while discussion of sensitive or problematic issues can be set aside for another occasion when the friends can express themselves freely without being inhibited by the presence of guests.'

..... The definition of what constitutes "sensitive or problematic issues," beyond the general exceptions specified above, is left to the local Assembly.

..... The House of Justice has also stated that a similar approach can be taken when a family with some members who are not Baha'is hosts a Feast in their home....]

The modern feast is usually sponsored by the local spiritual assembly. Ideally, it is held in the haziratu'l-quds or Baha'i centre but in smaller communities it usually rotates among the homes of the individual Baha'is. In large communities there are {p210} sometimes several district feasts, each of which is attended by representatives of the assembly. Communities with fewer than nine believers often have feasts, although this is not strictly necessary since there is no local spiritual assembly.

Attendance at the feast is desirable but not obligatory. No sanctions may be taken against a believer who fails to attend feasts.

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DEVOTIONAL PORTION

The role of the devotional programme at the nineteen day feast was first indicated by 'Abdu'l-Baha. Shoghi Effendi stated that the readings should be chosen mainly from the prayers and Tablets of Baha'u'llah and the Bab and to a lesser extend from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha. In a letter to the American Baha'is Shoghi Effendi asked that they not read his own writings in the devotional portion of the feast. In Iran, however, it was common for his prayers to be read as part of the devotional programme. Shoghi Effendi also permitted the use of selections from the scriptures of other religions although he recommended that Baha'i readings should predominate.

The Universal House of Justice has suggested a programme, based on Shoghi Effendi's statements, in which the feast opens with prayers and devotional readings from the writings of Baha'u'llah, the Bab and 'Abdu'l-Baha, followed by readings from other Tablets, the writings of Shoghi Effendi and the scriptures of other religions.[9.8] Hymns, poems and chants based on the holy writings, as well as instrumental music may also be included.

..... [9.8. Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Hands of the Cause of God, 25 August 1965, in Lights, no. 818, p. 244.]

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ADMINISTRATIVE PORTION

It was Shoghi Effendi who first envisioned the feast as an administrative occasion. The programme of the administrative portion of the feast is well summarized as 'general consultation on the affairs of the Cause, at which time the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities to the community, asks for suggestions and consultation, and also delivers messages received {p211} from the Guardian and the National Assembly'.[9.9]

..... [9.9. Baha'i Meetings, the Nineteen Day Feast, p. 23.]

The feast is thus the most important occasion for communication between Baha'i

administrative institutions and the believers. At the feast the believer is encourage to offer his views, suggestions and criticisms fully and frankly. The only limitation on freedom of discussion is that it should not be of a nature to undermine the authority of the Baha'i institutions or involve criticism of individuals.

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SOCIAL PORTION

The sharing of food is the original core of the feast and derives from the commands of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. 'Abdu'l-Baha particularly emphasizes the duty of hospitality incumbent on the host of the feast. This portion of the feast is intended as a social meeting of the believers.

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CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

The feast, as the only required routine community meeting, is usually one of the first Baha'i activities established in a community. The regular holding of feasts is often viewed as a measure of the health of a Baha'i community. Although the three-part format of the feast is observed everywhere in the Baha'i world, there is considerable variation in the details of the programme among countries, communities and even individual hosts, a diversity encouraged by the Universal House of Justice. The style and length of devotions, the amount of time devoted to administrative matters, and the elaborateness of the food and entertainments of the social portion of the feast vary according to the cultural traditions of the area or the local Baha'is, the tastes of the host and the particular circumstances of the community.

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Related practices and observances

Several other aspects of Baha'i life may conveniently be discussed {p212} here in the light of Baha'u'llah's original injunction to display hospitality as a way of uniting hearts.

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HOSPITALITY

The feast was originally a display of hospitality, as the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha on the subject make clear, whose purpose was the furtherance of unity. Moreover, Islamic societies lay great stress on hospitality, and this was carried over into the Baha'i community by Baha'is of Islamic background. Early Western Baha'is also were inspired by the example of the mutual hospitality of the early Christians of the New Testament. The exchange of hospitality has thus always been an important factor in knitting together diverse Baha'i communities. 'Abdu'l-Baha emphasized the importance of hospitality as a way of reducing the distrust between different nations.[9.10] Baha'is often cite the example of 'Abdu'l-Baha's generous and unquestioning

hospitality to friends and strangers alike.

..... [9.10. 'Abud'l-Baha, Paris Talks, pp. 15-16.]

Baha'is are counselled by their administrative institutions not to allow others to take undue advantage of their hospitality and not to presume on the hospitality of other Baha'is.

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SHARED FOOD AND MEALS

In practice, the sharing of food occupies a large place in Baha'i community life. Baha'i meetings--whether for administration or for teaching, study or the observance of holy days--usually involve food and food and drink. Often this is simply cakes and beverages but full meals are not uncommon. Like the nineteen day feast itself, such practices vary widely depending on the cultural background and personal tastes of the Baha'is.

{nd}

SHARING FOOD AS CHARITY

In 'Akka 'Abdu'l-Baha maintained extensive charities, amounting to a sort of private social welfare system. Much of this involved the distribution of food, a great part of which came from Baha'i farms in Galilee and the Jordan Valley. He was knighted by the British government for His services in averting {p213} famine in the 'Akka area during World War I. since then, Baha'is, with their very limited resources, have rarely been able to emulate His example. However, since 1983 the Baha'i community has begun to devote many more resources to community development. Although many of these local projects involve food, these usually take the form of agricultural development rather than food distribution.

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Naw-Ruz: The Baha'i New Year

Naw-Ruz ('New Day') is the Baha'i and Iranian new year, which occurs on the date of the vernal equinox, about 21 March. It is one of the nine Baha'i holy days on which work is suspended.

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The Iranian Naw-Ruz

Naw-Ruz is the first day of Farvardin, the first month of the Iranian solar year. Since ancient times it has been the great national holiday of Iran, the only holiday celebrated by more than one religious group.

The origins of Naw-Ruz are unknown but it obviously began as a pastoral fertility festival. Legend attributes its foundation to the mythical antediluvian King Jamshid. Naw-Ruz and Mihrajan, the corresponding festival of the autumnal equinox in September, are the two great annual festivals of

Zoroastrianism. Originally, a somber festival dedicated to the spirits of the dead was held for five or ten days before Naw-Ruz, followed by a further five days corresponding to the Baha'i Ayyam-i-Ha. Later Naw-Ruz gradually became a secular holiday and as such it continued to be observed even after the triumph of Islam in Iran. Muslim kings in Iran, like their Zoroastrian predecessors, celebrated Naw-Ruz with great magnificence. As late as the nineteenth century Naw-Ruz {p214} was the only day the Shah would dine with other people.

Shi'i traditions attributed to the Imams endorsed the observance of Naw-Ruz, which was, it was said, the day of many events of great religious significance, among them God's first covenant with mankind, the first rising of the sun, the grounding of Noah's ark on Arafat, Gabriel's first appearance to Muhammad, the destruction of the idols in the Ka'bah by 'Ali, Muhammad's appointment of 'Ali as His successor, the appearance of the Qa'im, and the final triumph of the Qa'im over the Antichrist. Such traditions echoed similar accounts of Naw-Ruz found in Zoroastrian literature.

Naw-Ruz is celebrated rather like the Christian Easter, with many symbols indicating spring and renewal. A week or so before the holiday lentils are placed in a dish to sprout into a mass of green blades. On the day of Naw-Ruz, the family gathers in new or freshly cleaned clothes. The table is decorated with fruit, cakes, coloured eggs and other treats, as well as symbolic objects such as a holy book and a mirror. Among the best known customs of Naw-Ruz is the haft-sin--the 'seven S's'. These are seven objects beginning--in Persian--with the letter 'S', such as hyacinths, apples, lilies, silver coins, garlic, vinegar and rue, decoratively arranged on a table. A great deal of time is spent exchanging visits with friends and relations. The celebrations end on the thirteenth day of Naw-Ruz with a picnic in the country. The sprouted lentils are thrown into running water, carrying away the bad luck of the previous year.

Naw-Ruz is observed wherever Iranian culture has penetrated, notably among the Zoroastrians of India and in the ÈmigrÈ Iranian communities around the world.

'Naw-Ruz' is occasionally used as a personal name in Iran.

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The Babi and Baha'i Naw-Ruz

In the Badi' calendar of the Bab, Naw-Ruz is the day of Baha of the month of Baha, a day called by the Bab 'the Day of {p215} God' (yawmu'llah). It was also the 'Day of the Point' (yawm-i-nuqtih)--i.e. the day of the Bab. Finally, it was a day associated with Him Whom God shall make manifest, the Promised One of the Bab. The remaining eighteen days of the month were associated with the eighteen Letters of the Living, an indication that the Bab envisioned the Naw-Ruz festivities encompassing the nineteen days of the month of Baha, just as the traditional Iranian Naw-Ruz festivities last thirteen days. During Naw-Ruz the Bab permitted the use of musical instruments and other luxuries prohibited at other times. During the night of Naw-Ruz each believer was to

recite 361 times the verse 'God beareth witness that there is no God but Him, the Ineffable, the Self-Subsistent'; and during the day, 'God beareth witness that there is no God but Him, the Precious, the Beloved'. Fasting was prohibited during the whole month of Baha.

During the six years of His mission, the Bab and His followers observed Naw-Ruz, although it is difficult to say how much this represents a distinctively Babi holy day.

Baha'u'llah adopted the Babi holy day of Naw-Ruz as the feast day following the fast and stressed that it is associated with the Most Great Name, bearing as it does Baha'u'llah's own name. 'Abdu'l-Baha explained the significance of Naw-Ruz in terms of the symbolism of the new life of spring.

Baha'u'llah defines Naw-Ruz as the Baha'i day on which the vernal equinox occurs. Thus, even if the equinox should occur just before sunset, that day--which in the Baha'i calendar began at the moment of sunset on the previous day--is Naw-Ruz. At present, however, Naw-Ruz is fixed as 21 March for Baha'is in all countries outside the Middle East, regardless of exactly when the equinox occurs.

Naw-Ruz is one of the nine Baha'i holy days on which work is to be suspended. It is generally observed with a meeting for prayer and celebration--often combined with a dinner since the sunset on which Naw-Ruz begins ends the last day of the Baha'i fast. As with all Baha'i holy days, there are {p216} few fixed rules for observing Naw-Ruz, although Iranian Baha'is often follow Iranian traditions. Many Baha'is use Naw-Ruze as a day of gift-giving. Baha'is do not usually observe Naw-Ruz for longer than one day.

Since Naw-Ruz is the first day of a Baha'i month, it is also the day of a nineteen day feast. It is not permitted to combine this feast with the observance of the holy day.

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Ayyam-i-Ha: The Intercalary Days

The Ayyam-i-Ha, literally 'the days of H', are the four or five intercalary days inserted before the last month of the Baha'i calendar. Since the nineteen months of nineteen days in the Badi' calendar would yield a year four and a quarter days shorter than the solar year, some additional days are needed to complete the solar year of 365 or 366 days. The Bab did not specify where the additional days were to be placed. In the Kitab-i-Aqdas Baha'u'llah instructed that they be celebrated before the month of 'Ala', the last month of the Baha'i year and the month of fasting, and that they not be included within any month. He further specified that during the Ayyam-i-Ha the Baha'is should 'provide good cheer for themselves, their kindred and, beyond them, the poor and needy, and with joy and exultation to hail and glorify their Lord, to sing His praise and magnify His Name'.[9.11] The Ayyam-i-Ha are thus celebrated with parties, meetings, dinners, gift-giving, as well as giving to charity, 'good deeds' and the like. There is a specific prayer for the Ayyam-i-Ha.

..... [9.11. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 16.]

The numerical value of the letter ha or 'H' is five, so the term may literally mean 'the five days'. Ha is also an abbreviation of huva, Arabic for 'He', referring to God. Thus Baha'u'llah refers to these days as 'manifestations of Ha--i.e. sacred days. Finally, Ha is associated with the names of both the Bab and Baha'u'llah--bab having a numerical value of five and ba and ha being the root letters of Baha. {p217}

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The Birthday of the Bab

The Bab was born in Shiraz on 1 Muharram 1235 AH, the first day of the Muslim year, corresponding to 20 October 1819. His date of birth is known from references in two of His earliest works, the Sahifiy-i-Bayna'l-Haramayn and the Kitabu'l-Fihrist.

Although the Bab did not specifically instruct the believers to celebrate His birthday, the Babis, who as former Shi'is were accustomed to celebrating the birthdays of the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams, seem to have don so. The earliest recorded instance was in 1845 when the Bab's birthday fell on 30 December, and Tahirih, who at that time was living in Karbila with the widow of Siyyid Kazim-i-Rashti, instructed her relatives and Babi followers to dress in bright clothing and joyously celebrate the Bab's birth. However, the Bab's birthday according to the Muslim calendar is also the first day of the mourning observances for the Imam Husayn. As a result there was a considerable disturbance--even some of the Babis were shocked--and Tahirih was arrested and expelled form the city.[9.12]

..... [9.12. Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal, p. 305, citing Tarikh-i-Samandar, pp. 78, 346-7.]

The birthday of the Bab was one of seven holy days specified by Baha'u'llah in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. It happened that Baha'u'llah was born on 2 Muharram 1233 AH (12 November 1817). Since the birthday of Baha'u'llah in the Muslim calendar falls on the day after the birthday of the Bab, Baha'u'llah called them the 'Twin Birthdays' and said that 'these two days are accounted as one in the sight of God'.[9.13] Thus these were the only Baha'i holy days to be celebrated according to the lunar, Muslim calendar rather than the Baha'i, solar one. It remains for the Universal House of Justice to decide whether these two holy days will be celebrated in future on a solar or lunar basis.[9.14] Baha'u'llah directed that if these two days happen to fall during the month of fasting, the fast is to be suspended for those two days.[9.15]

..... [9.13. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, question 2.]

..... [9.14. ibid. note 138.]

..... [9.15. ibid. question 36.]

Baha'u'llah also wrote a Tablet for the eve of the Bab's {p218} birthday

(Lawh-i-Mawhud) in which He addresses the night of the first of Muharram, speaking of it as being the night on which the Bab was born and praising the station of the Bab.

In Muslim countries and at the Baha'i World Centre the Baha'is celebrath the birthday of the Bab according to the Muslim calendar. Everywhere else it is celebrated according to the Gregorian calendar on 20 October. Probably because of the difficulty of determining the proper date, the birthday of the Bab seems to have been the last of the major Baha'i holy days to be observed in the West.

There are no required observances connected with the birthday of the Bab. It is a happy occasion observed with meetings for prayer, community dinners and celebration, and the like.

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The Declaration of the Bab

The Declaration of the Bab commemorates the Bab's announcement of His prophetic mission to His first believer, Mulla Husayn-i-Bushru'i, on the evening of 22 May 1844.

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The Bab's declaration of His mission to Mulla Husayn

After the death of the Shaykhi leader Siyyid Kazim-i-Rashti on the last day of 1843, the Sahykhi community was left without clear leadership. Although certain Shaykhis in Karbila, Tabriz and Kirman attempted to claim leadership of the sect, many others believed that Siyyid Kazim had prophesied the imminent appearance of a messianic leader. One such group, led by the talented young Shaykhi Mulla Husayn-i-Bushru'i, gathered in the Mosque of the Imam 'Ali in Kufah in Iraq for a forty-day vigil of prayer. The first group to complete the vigil, Mulla Husayn and two relatives, took ship to Bushihr in southern Iran and reached Shiraz sometime in May 1844. {p219}

In Shiraz Mulla Husayn encountered a young merchant named Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad-i-Shirazi, who soon became known at the Bab ('Gate'). The Bab inquired about the nature of Mulla Husayn's quest and hinted to him that He Himself was the messiah promised by Siyyid Kazim. Although sceptical at first, Mulla Husayn soon came to accept the Bab's claims on the basis of His writings. According to all the sources Mulla Husayn's final acceptance of the Bab took place in the upper room of the Bab's house in Shiraz on the evening of 22 May 1844. Over the next several weeks other Shaykhis found their way to Shiraz. Some became believers in the Bb. The Bab called His first eighteen believers 'the Letters of the Living'. He dispatched those who were in Shiraz to various parts of Iran and Iraq to those who were in Shiraz to various parts of Iran and Iraq to announce the new Faith.

Although the main features of the Bab's declaration are well known, there are a few aspects that have not yet been completely settled:

---------- a) The expectations of Mulla Husayn and the Shaykhis. The messianic teachings of Siyyid Kazim were evidently given orally and were not included in his books. There certainly way no clear agreement among the Shaykhis as to the nature of the expected messiah. It is probable that they expected not a new prophet but an inspired teacher like the two previous Shaykhi leaders, perhaps a holy man with direct spiritual access to the Hidden Imam. Some denied altogether that a messianic figure was expected.

---------- b) The claims of the Bab. It seems likely that certain Shaykhis had attributed special qualities to the Bab as early as His stay in Karbila in 1841-2. In early 1844 He completed the first half of a commentary on the first two chapters of the Qur'an. During this period He had several dreams, in on e of which He drank seven drops of the blood of the martyred Imam Husayn and was filled with divine knowledge. The Bab later said that He had only gradually unveiled His claims in order to make it {p220} easier for people to accept Him. Thus for some years there was confusion as to whether the Bab claimed to be a prophet, the return of the Hidden imam or the Gate to the Hidden Imam. It is therefore difficult to determine exactly what station Mulla Husayn understood the Bab to be claiming. However, the form of the Bab's first work revealed after His declaration, the Qayyumu'l-Asma' (Commentary on the Surih of Joseph), was written in the style and format of the Qur'an, something that according to Muslim belief could only be done by a Prophet.

---------- c) Mulla Husayn's meeting with the Bab. The best known account of the conversation of Mulla Husayn is that of Nabil but there are several other accounts that differ in some details. It is not clear why Mulla Husayn came to Shiraz: the most likely explanation is that he was on his way to Kirman to meet with Muhammad-Karim Khan, the Sahykhi leader, there. Mulla Husayn may already have known the Bab from His stay in Karbila; if not, he would have known of Him and His family, for the Bab had for several years had admirers among the Shaykhis of Karbila and His uncles were supporters of the Shaykhis. The Bab in turn may have had news of Mulla Husayn's coming from the family office in Bushihr. Thus the meeting between the two would not have been surprising and may possibly have been arranged.

It is also possible that Mulla Husyan's final conversion took place some days after his first meeting with the Bab. Several sources confirm this and Mulla Husayn himself later told friends that all his education had done for him was to lead him to reject the Bab's claims for three days. The sources, however, agree that Mulla Husayn's final conversion took place on the evening of 22 May 1844 and was effected by the revelation of the first chapters of the Qayyuu'l-Asma'.[9.16]

..... [9.16. A summary of the historical questions is found in Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal, pp. 166-74. On the Bab's claims see Denis M. MacEoin, 'From Shaykhism to Babism: A Study in Charismatic Renewal' (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1979), pp. 156-85, and B. Todd Lawson, 'The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Bab' (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1987), pp. 250-398.] {p221}

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The holy day of the Declaration of the Bab

The Declaration of the Bab is one of the nine major Baha'i holy days on which work is suspended. The Bab provided prayers for its observance in the Sahifatu'l-Makhzunah, a work written during His pilgrimage to Mecca, where it is listed among Muslim holy days. He also specified the date and time of His declaration in the Persian Bayan. As early as 1849 the Bab's uncle Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, a believer and one of the Seven Martyrs of Tehran, referred specifically to the anniversary of the Bab's declaration in a letter. In the Kitab-i-Aqdas Baha'u'llah appointed it and Ridvan as 'the two Most Great Festivals.'[9.17]

..... [9.17. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 110, note 138.]

'Abdu'l-Baha indicated that the Declaration of the Bab is to be celebrated on the 8th (the day of Kamal) of 'Azamat.[9.18] This corresponds to 24 May if Naw-Ruz falls on 21 March. At present, however, the Declaration of the Bab is observed in most of the world on 23 May, the date of the anniversary according to the Gregorian calendar. In Islamic countries Baha'is observe this holiday on 5 Jumada'l-Ula according to the Muslim lunar calendar as had been the practice in the time of Baha'u'llah. 'Abdu'l-Baha has stated, however, that eventually the holy day will be observed everywhere according to the Baha'i solar calendar.

..... [9.18. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, p. 121.]

The Declaration of the Bab is observed at approximately two hours after sunset on 22 May (i.e. the eve of 23 May). In the Persian Bayan the Bab gives the time of His declaration as two hours and eleven minutes after sunset. Apart from the timing of the commemoration, there are no special observances connected with this holy day.

'Abdu'l-Baha was born at midnight on the say day as the Bab's declaration to Mulla Husayn. He did not think it was proper to observe His birthday on the holy day and instead appointed a day in November, the 'Day of the Covenant', for the Baha'is to observe in His honour. {p222}

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Tablets associated with the Declaration of the Bab

Baha'u'llah composed several Tablets in honour of the Declaration of the Bab. These include:

..... Lawh-i-Ghulamu'l-Khuld (the Tablet of the Deathless Youth) revealed in Baghdad (discussed above).

..... Lawh-i-Naqus (the Tablet of the Bell) composed in Constantinople on the eve of the Declaration of the Bab (5 Jumada'l-Ula 1280 Ah, 17 October 1863) for Aqa Muhammad-'Ali Tambaku-fuush Isfahani. A hymn of joy filled with imagery of music and celebration. After each verse is the chorus 'Subhanaka ya Hu'

('Exalted art Thou, Thou Who art He, He Who is He alone.')

..... Fi Laylati'l-Mab'ath ('On the Night of the Declaration'), addressed to one Husayn in Isfahan. Another Arabic Tablet of celebration similar in tone to the two preceding Tablets.

Also associated with this holy day are a number of talks and Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha discussing the significance of the Declaration of the Bab. Several times He refers to the Declaration of the Bab as marking the first light of dawn heralding the rising of the sun of Baha'u'llah.

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The Martyrdom of the Bab

The Baha'i holy day of the Martyrdom of the Bab commemorates the execution of the Bab for heresy by the Iranian government on 9 July 1850. {p223}

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The condemnation of the Bab

In nineteenth-century Iran two parallel systems of law and authority existed: the government and the Shi'i religion. The Bab's claim to speak with the authority of the Hidden Imam threatened both, since their authority was only legitimate in the absence of the Imam. Although the Bab throughout His ministry refrained from open attempts to overthrow the government or the clerical establishment, His claims in themselves were perceived as a threat.

The Bab was arrested for the first time as he returned to Shiraz from His pilgrimage in June 1845 as a result of the activities of His followers in the city. The governor convened a trial at which the Bab was abused and humiliated and condemned to house arrest. To appease the clergy the governor forced the Bab to make a public recantation. Before a large crowd in the Vakil Mosque, the Bab made a statement denying that He was the deputy of the Hidden Imam. Since the disturbances had been local, no further action was taken and the Bab was eventually allowed to go to Isfahan.

In Isfahan the Bab was under the protection of Manuchir Khan Mu'tamidu'd-Dawlih, the governor, and He therefore remained in safety despite the condemnations of the clergy and an order from the prime Minister, Haji Mirza Aqasi, summoning Him to Tehran. When Manuchihr Khan died in 1847, the Bab was taken into military custody and eventually dispatched to Maku in a remote corner of northwestern Iran. This order of exile took the form of an invitation from the Shah and thus no judicial proceeding was needed to justify the imprisonment.

In July 1848 the Bab was summoned to Tabriz to be tried by the clergy. The trial was ordered by Haji Mirza Aqasi and was evidently intended to discredit the Bab publicly. Most of the clergy did not attend the gathering, not wishing to be seen siding with either the Babis or the prime minister. The chief clerics who participated were Shaykhis, bitter enemies of the {p224} Bab. The

president of the court was the young crown prince, the future Nasiri'd-Din Shah. Various other officials, courtiers and curious bystanders were also resent. The Bab was gven an opportunity to recant His writings and claims. Instead, He openly asserted that He was the Qa'im, the promised one of Islam. He was then questioned about abstruse points of religious law, theology and grammar in a manner intended to ridicule Him and expose His supposed ignorance. The Bab, though indignant at this treatment, refused to recant and the meeting broke up without decisive result. The clergy issued a verdict of insanity, thus avoiding the need for the government to take further action against Him.

By June 1850 the situation had drastically changed. Following Babi armed resistance at Shaykh Tabarsi, Nayriz and Zanjan, the new prime minister, Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir, was convinced that such disturbances would continue unless the Bab was put to death. Despite the qualms of the Shah and Aqa Kahn-i-Nuri--the second most important minister--Amir Kabir issued orders for the execution. The Bab was brought to Tabriz, but the governor, Hamzih Mirza, refused to act against Him. A second set of orders were issued and Amir Kabir's brother, the Vizir-Nizam, undertook to carry them out.

Amir Kabir was anxious to obtain the sanction of the clergy for the execution but this was not easy. The clergy disliked his ambitions and feared possible retaliation by the Babis. In the end, no general tribunal was held. Instead, one morning three weeks after His arrival in Tabriz, the Bab was taken through the streets on foot to the houses of several clerics who had been induced to issue fatwas (legal opinions) condemning Him to death. Mulla Muhammad-Baqir, the Imam-Jumih, and Mulla Murtada Harandi, 'Alamu'l-Huda, had death warrants waiting and avoided any confrontation with the Bab. At the home of Mulla Muhammad Mamaqani, the Bab was admitted, but when He would not recant His claims, {p225} Mamaqani, a leader of the Tabriz Shaykhis, issued a death warrant. In order that there should be no doubt about the Bab's death, a public execution was arranged at an army barracks.

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The execution of the Bab

The Bab had been treated with reasonable courtesy during His journey to Tabriz and His initial stay under the authority of Hamzih Mirza. However, after the Vazir-Nizam took the authority for the affair, the Bab, without the turban and sash that indicated His descent from Muhammad, was taken on foot from the house where He had been staying, to the army barracks connected to the citadel. With Him were His secretaries, the two brothers Siyyid Hasan and Siyyid Husayn-i-Yazdi, and a young Babi mulla of Tabriz, Mirza Muhammad-'Ali-i-Zunizi, called Anis (companion) by the Bab who had been arrested for his open advocacy of the religion of the Bab. These four were confined together in the barracks cell.

The young Mirza Muhammad-'Ali posed a further problem for the 'ulama, for his step-father was Siyyid 'Aliy-i-Zunizi, one of the leading clerics of Tabriz, and his brother was an important merchant. Despite emotional appeals by family

and friends--who went so far as to bring his wife and baby before him--the young mulla refused to recant and was sentenced to death with the Bab. A letter survives in which Mirza Muhammad-'Ali explains himself to his brother.

The night before the execution, the Bab asked that one of His followers kill Him then and there, that He might be spared the indignity of dying at the hands of His enemies. When the others shrank from this in horror, the young Mirza Muhammad-'Ali leaped to his feet to strangle the Bab. The others held him back. It was for this reason, Siyyid Husayn later reported, that the Bab chose Mirza Muhammad-'Ali to {p226} die with Him and instructed Siyyid Husayn and his brother to recant their faith and be messengers carrying the final news and instructions of the Bab to the Babis.

The next morning the Bab was taken to the homes of the clerics who were to issue death warrants and then paraded around the city to display Him to the population. Siyyid Husayn and Siyyid Hasan recanted and were released; Siyyid Husayn was killed in Tehran two years later for his faith.

By noon the Bab had been brought back to the barracks, He and His remaining disciple were brought out, tied up and suspended from a spike nailed into the wall of the barracks. The authorities, wishing to prevent any rumours that the Bab might be alive, had arranged a public execution by firing squad. The roofs were jammed with people.

The Christian Bahaduran Regiment, commanded by the Russian Armenian Sam Khan, was assigned to carry out the execution. Although the various accounts of the Bab's execution differ on many particulars, all agree on what happened next. When the smoke of 750 muskets cleared, the Bab's ropes were cut and the Bab Himself was nowhere to be seen. After a short but frantic search, the Bab was found in His cell, apparently completing some dictation to His secretary that had earlier been interrupted. The soldiers cleared the courtyard of the crowd that had rushed in. The Bab was roughly hurried back and once more suspended for execution. The original regiment wanted no more to do with the matter and the Muslim Nasiri Regiment was brought in. This time the Bab and His disciple were killed instantly by many bullets.

Historians are not in agreement about many of the details of the execution of the Bab. Apart from intangible matters such as the motives of the participants, the main points of disagreement are: the date of the execution; the identity of the mujtahids who issued the death warrants; the identities of the regiments responsible for the first and second attempts to execute the Bab; and whether Mirza Muhammad-'Ali was shot separately in the first of three volleys or, if he was shot {p227} with the Bab, whether he was killed in the first or second volley.

No convincing explanation has been offered for the Bab's escape from the first volley but the fact is beyond doubt.

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The fate of the body of the Bab

After the execution the bodies of the Bab and His disciple were tied to a ladder and dragged through the city. They were eventually thrown into the dry moat outside the city gate to be devoured by animals. This was clearly intended to demonstrate that the Bab was indeed dead and to prove the fraudulence of His claims, for tradition held that the body of the Imam could not be eaten by animals. The Russian consul went to the moat the next morning and had an artist draw a sketch of the bodies. Although the bodies were shattered by bullets, the face of the Bab was untouched.

A day or two after the execution of the Bab, Haji Sulayman Khan, a Babi who had come from Tehran in the hope of saving the Bab, arrived and decided to rescue the bodies of the Bab and Mirza Muhammad='Ali. Being the son of an important army officer in Tabriz, he had many friends in the city and was able to remove the bodies form the moat. The remains were concealed in the silk factory of a Babi named Haji Ahmad-i-Milani. Acting under the instructions of Baha'u'llah, Mirza Musa, Baha'u'llah's brother, had the casket containing the remains of the Bab brought to Tehran, where it was concealed in the shrine of the Imam-Zadih Hasan. For nearly fifty years the casket was hidden in various places, mostly minor shrines, being moved form time to time to avoid detection. It eventually became generally known that the remains of the Bab had been rescued but only a handful of people knew where they were concealed--the pious visits of the believers being themselves a threat to the security of the remains. {p228}

By 1890 Baha'u'llah had decided that the remains of the Bab should be brought to the Holy Land and be entombed on Mount Carmel. On 3 January 1899 the casket containing the remains of the Bab reached 'Akka. Still a closely guarded secret, the casket was hidden first in the room of Bahiyyih Khanum in the House of 'Abdu'llah Pasha in 'Akka and later in 'Abdu'l-Baha's house in Haifa. The remains of the Bab were finally laid to rest on Naw-Ruz of 1909 in the shrine 'Abdu'l-Baha had built for them on the spot chosen by Baha'u'llah.

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The influence of the Bab's martyrdom

For the Babis the death of the Bab was an agonizing loss but it was not unexpected nor did it cause despair. The Bab had openly prophesied His own martyrdom. Moreover, eh Babis almost all came from a Shi'i background and thus had the example of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn always before hem. The Babis of Zanjan fought on for five months after receiving the news of the death of the Bab, surrendering only when almost all their fighters were dead. Two years later some of the Tehran Babis attempted to overthrow the government by assassinating the Shah, while in the south large-scale fighting broke out for a second time between government troops and the Babis of Nayriz. Thus the execution of the Bab cannot be said to have achieved its political purposes. In the end it was less the execution of the Bab than the slaughter of almost all the Babi leaders and a considerable number of ordinary believers that suppressed the Babi movement.

For later Babis and Baha'is, the martyrdom of the Bab was an act of redemptive

suffering comparable to the deaths of Jesus Christ and the Imam Husayn and an ultimate example of personal sacrifice in the path of God. In one passage 'Abdu'l-Baha says, 'Let us take for our example the great and sacred Tree of the exalted Bab... Like Him let us bare our beasts to {p229} the shafts of agony...'[9.19] Similar statements may be found throughout the Baha'i sacred writings of modern Baha'is and their administrative institutions.

..... [9.19. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections, p. 236.]

The martyrdom of the Bab--as well as the lives and deaths of His chief disciples, especially Tahirih--made a great impression on late nineteenth-century Europe. The French poet and critic Jules Bois wrote, 'in the Paris of 1890, the martyrdom of the Bab was still as fresh a topic as had been the first news of his death. We wrote poems about him. Sarah Bernhardt entreated Catulle Mendes for a play on the theme of this historic tragedy.'[9.20] Monographs and literary works touching on the Bab and His martyrdom were published in a number of European countries. It was not until after the First World War that the martyrdom of the Bab began to fade from the literary consciousness of Europe.

..... [9.20. Cited in Momen, Babi and Baha'i Religions, p. 50.]

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The holy day of the Martyrdom of the Bab

Although the martyrdom of the Bab is not one of the holy days mentioned in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, it was observed by Baha'u'llah and thus is included as one of the nine major Baha'i holy days on which work is suspended. It is observed by Baha'is living in the Middle Eastern countries on 28 Sha'ban, its anniversary according to the lunar calendar, and elsewhere in the world on 9 July. Two specific ordinances are connected with the observance of the Martyrdom of the Bab. First, commemorative gatherings should, if possible, take place at noon,[*] the time of the Bab's execution. Second, the Tablet of visitation is to be recited. According to 'Abdu'l-Baha, the observance of the Martyrdom of the Bab will eventually be observed everywhere according to the solar calendar. Shoghi Effendi instructed that the anniversary be observed as it had in the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha until such time as the Universal House of Justice clarified the matter.

..... [* Noon standard time. If daylight savings time is in effect, the hour is 1:00 p.m.]

There is some confusion over the date of the martyrdom of {p230} the Bab. The Muslim court historian Sipihr gives the date as Monday, 27 Shaban/8 July, whereas most Baha'i sources give Sunday, 28 Sha'ban/17 Rahmat, corresponding to 9 July on a year when Naw-Ruz falls on 20 March. 8 July is confirmed by a British diplomat in Tabriz and is actually a Monday, whereas 28 Sha'ban could not have fallen on a Sunday. Such one-day disagreements are common in the Muslim calendar since there is often disagreement about the day on which the month should start.

The holy day is defined as 17 Rahmat but is observed on 9 July, the Gregorian anniversary, regardless of the date of Naw-Ruz.

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Related texts

THE TABLET OF VISITATION FOR THE BAB AND BAHA'U'LLAH

This Tablet is to be recited in the holy days of the Martyrdom of the Bab and the Ascension of Baha'u'llah, as well as at their respective shrines. It is discussed in chapter 4.

THE BAB'S TABLET OF VISITATION FOR THE SITE OF HIS MARTYRDOM

In the Bayan 8:12 the Bab ordains pilgrimage once a year to 'the place where this Tree was struck' for those who live within sixty-six parsangs of the site and have reached the age of twenty-nine. The visitors should spend nineteen days there in pious devotions. A prayer attributed to the Bab to be recited on departure exists. This is generally understood to refer to the place of the Bab's martyrdom but might refer to the beatings He received in Shiraz or Tabriz.

THE TABLET OF VISITATION FOR THE IMAM HUSAYN

This Tablet was commonly recited at the Shrine of the Bab on the anniversary of His martyrdom. It is discussed in chapter 4. {p231}

OTHER WRITINGS

There are many references to the martyrdom of the Bab in Baha'i literature. The accounts in Nabi's Dawn-Breakers and Shoghi Effendi's God Passes By are greatly respected by Baha'is and are often read on the holy day. Finally the Arabic prayer of Shoghi Effendi, 'O our Most Exalted Lord, I ask of Thee by Thy blood spilled upon the dust...' is associated with this day.

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The Birthday of Baha'u'llah

Baha'u'llah was born in Tehran in the house of His father, Mirza Buzurg-i-Nuri, at dawn on 2 Muharram 1233 AH/12 November 1817. The Birthday of Baha'u'llah is one of the seven holy days appointed in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and it is one of the nine holy days on which work is suspended.

In the Muslim lunar calendar the birthdays of the Bab and Baha'u'llah fall on consecutive days--the first and second days of the Muslim year. Thus Baha'u'llah specified that these two holy days be celebrated as a double holiday according to the Mulsim calendar, rather than according to the solar Baha'i calendar like the other holy days. Since these two days of Baha'i celebrations fall on the first two of ten days of mourning for the Imam Husayn in Shi'i Islam, Shi'is often mistook the Baha'i celebrations as mocking their days of mourning and this has frequently been a cause of outburst of persecutions against the Baha'is.

In Middle Eastern countries Baha'is celebrate the Birthday of Baha'u'llah according to the Muslim calendar. Everywhere else it is celebrated on 12 November. Baha'u'llah specified that if--as is possible with the Muslim lunar calendar--the Birthday of the Bab and Baha'u'llah fall during the Baha'i fast, fasting is suspended for these two days.

It is not clear when the Birthday of Baha'u'llah was first celebrated as a holy day but it was certainly during His lifetime {p232} and probably not long after His formal assumption of prophethood in the 1860s. One of the Tablets He revealed in honour of His birthday refers to observing the holy day in the Most Great Prison. In the West the Birth of Baha'u'llah was first observed about 1904 on the solar date of 12 November.

There are no required observances for the Birthday of Baha'u'llah. It is a joyful occasion and is usually celebrated with meetings for prayer, community dinners and the like. Some Western Baha'is, following the example of the Christian Christmas, exchange gifts.

Baha'u'llah revealed several Tablets in Arabic in honour of His birthday. They praise the holy night and the dawn on which He was born, explaining the transcendent significance of the occasion in cosmic and eschatological terms drawn from the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. These Tablets have not been translated.

{nd}

The Festival of Ridvan

Ridvan is an Arabic word meaning 'good pleasure'. Because it is used in the Qur'an for God's satisfaction with the believers in heaven, it has come to mean 'paradise'. Its meaning in Baha'i usage are:

---------- 'Paradise', as in such expressions as 'the Ridvan of unfading splendour (Ridvan-i-Quds-i-Munir). In this sense it is translated as 'paradise', 'heaven', 'tabernacle' and 'garden'.

---------- Garden of Ridvan: the name given by Baha'u'llah to two gardens--the Najibiyih Garden in Baghdad and a garden belonging to Baha'u'llah outside 'Akka.

---------- Holy day of Ridvan: the most important Baha'i festival commemorating Baha'u'llah's public announcement of {p233} His prophetic mission and His departure from Baghdad.

---------- A Baha'i name for the city of Nishapur in Iran.

---------- An element of names, Baha'i and Shi'i, such as Ridvan-'Ali ('Paradise of 'Ali'), Ridvaniyyih (a girl's name), and Ridvani (a surname).

The most usual modern Baha'i usage of ridvan is for the twelve-day festival commemorating Baha'u'llah's open announcement of His claim to prophethood and His departure from Baghdad in 1863. This holiday is observed from sunset 20 April through sunset 2 May. The first, ninth and twelfth days of Ridvan are

major Baha'i holy days on which work is suspended. Baha'i elections are usually held during Ridvan. The name derives from the Najibiyyih Garden in Baghdad where Baha'u'llah stayed during this period and to which He gave the name Ridvan.

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Baha'u'llah's departure from Baghdad

Following Baha'u'llah's arrival in Iraq in the spring of 1853, He had gradually established warm relations with the ordinary people of Baghdad as well as with notables of all sorts: Ottoman officials, clergy and Persian pilgrims and exiles. He had also become the generally recognized leader of the Babi community, although His reclusive brother Mirza Yahya was still accepted as the appointed successor of the Bab. Baghdad--close to the Iranian border, adjacent to several Shi'i shrine cities and home to many Iranian political exiles--was a hotbed of political intrigue; and the Iranian authorities feared that Baha'u'llah would use His growing prestige to threaten the governments. The Persian ambassador in Istanbul, Mirza {p234} Husayn Khan Mushiru'd-Dawlih, therefore demanded that Baha'u'llah be removed from Baghdad. Eventually, 'Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier, and Fu'ad Pasha, the Foreign Minister, yielded, and Baha'u'llah was summoned to Istanbul. Baha'u'llah was, however, a person of consequence and had by this time become an Ottoman subject, so the summons was issued in the form of a polite invitation.

Namiq Pasha, the governor of Iraq and sympathetic to Baha'u'llah, was reluctant to deliver the summons. Finally he sent a courteous message asking Baha'u'llah to call on him at the governorate. The message reached Baha'u'llah on the fifth day after Naw-Ruz, 26 March 1863, at the Mazra'iy-i-Vashshash, an open area outside the city where Baha'u'llah and His followers had camped to observe the new year. The message arrived shortly after Baha'u'llah had completed the revelation of the Tablet of the Holy mariner, 'whose gloomy prognostications had aroused the grave apprehension of His Companions'.[9.21] Baha'u'llah arranged to meet the governor in the mosque across the street from the governorate. He ordered the tents struck and the party returned to the city amidst furious rumours.

..... [9.21. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 147.]

Baha'u'llah met the next day with the deputy governor and agreed to go to Istanbul with His family and a number of attendants. At the urging of the authorities He accepted the money provided by the government for the journey and immediately distributed it to the poor.

The next few weeks were very busy. Baha'u'llah received innumerable visitors, wrote Tablets to each of the friends who would be left behind and made the practical preparations necessary for the journey. Eventually, Baha'u'llah decided to move to the Najibiyyih Garden across the river and receive visitors there, thus clearing the house of extra people and allowing the family to pack.

Baha'u'llah left His house in Baghdad for the last time on the afternoon of 22

April 1863 and walked, 'amidst weeping and lamentation',[9.22] through crowds of friends, acquaintances {p235} and the merely curious down to the river where He took a small boat across to the garden. He was accompanied by His sons, His secretary Mirza Aqa Jan and perhaps others. He reached the garden just at the time for afternoon prayers. There for the next eleven days He received farewell visits from His friends, including the governor, who crossed the river by a floating bridge. The river rose soon after His arrival, so it was not until the ninth day, 30 April, that His family was able to join Him. Mirza Assadu'llah Kashani raised a tent for Baha'u'llah in the open space of the garden by the side of the river upstream from the Njibiyyih Palace. A small village of tents was created with Baha'u'llah alone in the centre.

..... [9.22. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 149.]

The twelfth day was appointed for departure. The garden was filled with people coming for final farewells. It was late afternoon before the party got underway. Baha'u'llah a=mounted a fine roan stallion named Sa'udi (He also had two others, named Sa'id and Farangi), and the party left the garden amidst displays of affection and grief. The party travelled as far as Firayjat, three miles up the Tigris. There they stayed in a borrowed garden for a week while Baha'u'llah's brother Mirza Musa completed their affairs in Baghdad and packed the remaining goods. Visitors still came daily. The party finally set out on 9 May for the three-month journey to Istanbul.

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The significance of Ridvan

Ridvan is the anniversary of Baha'u'llah's declaration of His prophetic mission to His followers. The details of this declaration remain mysterious. Shoghi Effendi comments that 'The words Baha'u'llah actually uttered on that occasion, the manner of His Declaration, the reaction it produced, its impact on Mirza Yahya, the identity of those who were privileged to hear Him, are shrouded in an obscurity which future historians will find it difficult to penetrate.'[9.23] It is clear, {p236} however, that the symbolic significance of Ridvan is richer than the simple fact of Baha'u'llah's open announcement of His prophetic claim.

..... [9.23. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 153.]

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THE ANNOUNCEMENT

While the exact nature and details 'of Baha'u'llah's declaration are unknown,' 'Abdu'l-Baha states that on the afternoon He arrived at the garden Baha'u'llah disclosed His claim to be Him Whom God shall make manifest. Baha'u'llah's daughter Bahiyyih Khanum is also reported to have said that on that day Baha'u'llah privately stated His claim to prophethood to 'Abdu'l-Baha and four other followers. According to this account 'he enjoined upon them secrecy as to this communication, as the time had not come for a public declaration; but that

there were reasons which caused him to deem it necessary to make it at that time to a few whom he could trust'.[9.24]

..... [9.24. Reported words of Bahiyyih Khanum, recorded in Phelps, Master in 'Akka, p. 39.]

Baha'u'llah clearly did not make a general public announcement of His prophetic claim at the Najibiyyih Garden: that did not happen until after His arrival in Edirne.[9.25] Most Babis--even those in exile with Him--seem to have been unaware of Baha'u'llah's claim until a year or two later--although, of course, His Baghdad writings are full of hints about it.[9.26]

..... [9.25. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 151, 404.]

..... [9.26. ibid. p. 152.]

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THE DEPARTURE FROM THE MOST GREAT HOUSE

In some places Baha'u'llah stresses His departure from the Most Great House: 'as He departed from His House proceeding to the Spot from which He shed upon the whole of creation the splendors of His Name, the All-Merciful.'[9.27] Another Tablet recounts His journey from the House to the Ridvan Garden, giving supernatural significance to each stage of the journey. Another refers to His 'exile (hijrih) from Iraq', thus linking Baha'u'llah's departure from the Most Great House to Muhammad's emigration from Mecca, the site of the most holy House of Islam, to Medina, the city where Muhammad fully exercised the prerogatives of prophethood.

..... [9.27. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 35.] {p237}

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THE THREE ANNOUNCEMENTS

In a Tablet written some years later Baha'u'llah states that three announcements were made on the first day of Ridvan. First, Baha'u'llah's followers were forbidden to fight to advance or defend their faith. (Religious war, jihad, had been permitted in Islam and under certain conditions by the law of the Bab.) Second, there would not be another prophet for a full thousand years. Third, at that moment all the names of God were fully manifest in all things. These are perhaps to be regarded as an oblique announcement of His own prophethood. The first two anticipate basic features of Baha'i law recorded in the Kitab-i-Aqdas.

The third announcement is echoed in many passages from Tablets related to Ridvan, for example:

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[.//]

..... For We perceive the fragrance of the Day whereon He Who is the

Desire of all nations hath shed upon the kingdoms of the unseen and of the seen the splendor of the light of His most excellent names, and enveloped them with the radiance of the luminaries of His most gracious favors--favors which none can reckon except Him, Who is the omnipotent Protector of the entire creation.

..... [Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, pp. 32-33]

[.///]

[.]

Thus Baha'u'llah's arrival in Ridvan marks a mystic transformation of the world, in which the entire creation is infused with the glory of God's names. His announcement should, therefore, be viewed less as the revealing of a secret to a few individuals than as a fundamental transformation in the relationship between God and the world.

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COMPLETION OF THE FIRST VAHID OF THE BAHA'I CALENDAR

Naw-Ruz 1863 marked the beginning of the nineteenth year of eh calendar established by the Bab, the last year of the first vahid--'unity'--of nineteen years. Baha'u'llah's first prophetic experience had been in 1852-3 during His imprisonment in Tehran--the 'year nine' of the Babi calendar. One, nine and {p238} nineteen all have important symbolic and prophetic significance in the writings of the Bab.

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The Festival of Ridvan

On the afternoon on which Baha'u'llah entered the garden, He proclaimed the festival of Ridvan. All twelve days of His sojourn in the garden are regarded as part of this festival. The Kitab-i-Aqdas, revealed about ten years later, ordains Ridvan as one of the two 'Most Great Festivals', along with the anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab. Baha'u'llah specified that the first, ninth and twelfth days were to be major holy days--days on which work is prohibited. These mark the days of Baha'u'llah's arrival, the arrival of His family and His departure. Several Tablets state that the festival properly begins at the time of Baha'u'llah's arrival in the garden, that is, two hours before sunset. However, work is prohibited for the entire Baha'i day, beginning on the previous evening.

Ridvan is observed everywhere according to the Baha'i calendar. It begins on the 13th of Jalal--21 April if Naw-Ruz is on 21 March--the thirty-second day of the Baha'i year. The ninth day falls on 29 April and the twelfth on 2 May.

Most Baha'i elections are held during Ridvan, a practice that began in the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Local spiritual assemblies are elected on the first day of Ridvan each year. The national conventions at which national spiritual assemblies are elected each year are usually held sometime during the Ridvan period, as is the international convention presently held every five years to

elect the Universal House of Justice.

Like other Baha'i holy days, there are few specific rules concerning the observance of Ridvan.[*] It is usually observed with community gatherings for prayer and celebration on the three holy days.

..... [* A quote from Principles of Baha'i Administration p. 56: 'The Guardian would advise that, if feasible, the Friends should commemorate ... the first day of Ridvan, at about 3 p.m. on 21 April.' All Baha'i holy days are held according to standard time, so if daylight savings time is observed, the time is moved to 4 p.m.]{p239}

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Tablets and writings associated with Ridvan

A number of important Tablets of Baha'u'llah are associated with Ridvan. These include:

---------- Lawh-i-Ayyub: The Tablet of Job, also known as Suriy-i-Sabr ('the Surat of Patience'), Madinatu'l-Sabr ('the City of Patience'), and Surat Ayyub. A long Tablet in Arabic written on the afternoon Baha'u'llah arrived at the Garden of Ridvan. It was written for Haji Muhammad-Taqiy-i-Nayrizi, whom Baha'u'llah named Ayyub, 'Job', a veteran of the battle of Nayriz. The Tablet praises Vahid, the Babi leader at Nayriz, and the believers of Nayriz.

---------- Tablet of Ridvan, beginning 'Huva 'l-Mustavi 'ala hadha 'l-'arshi'l-munir' 'He is seated upon this luminous throne'. An Arabic Tablet speaking joyfully of the lifting of the veils that had concealed God's beauty and the manifestation of all His names in created things and appealing to the people to answer the call of their Lord. After each verse is a refrain of the form, 'Gald tidings! This is the Festival of God, manifest from the horizon of transcendent bounty'.

---------- Hur-i-'Ujab: 'The Wondrous Maiden'. An allegorical Tablet in Arabic rhymed prose celebrating the unveiling of Baha'u'llah's glory. In this allegory the Maid of Heaven comes forth and unveils herself. Her unveiled beauty inflames creation. In joy she passes round the wine of life, plays music and serves the food of beauty. But the arrogant spurn her, and she returns saddened to her heavenly palace, grieving that the people of the Book have rejected her and vowing not to return to them until the Day of Resurrection.

---------- 'The Divine Springtime is come...' (Qad ata Rabi'u'l-Bayan): {p240} The superscription of this Tablet says that it 'was revealed in the Ridvan for all to read during the Festival of Ridvan...' The Tablet takes the form of a dialogue between God and 'the Most Exalted Pen'--i.e. Baha'u'llah. God chides Baha'u'llah for not openly proclaiming the greatness of this day. Baha'u'llah replies that He is silent only because the people are veiled and because He Himself is not privy to the essence of God. God answers that today only His face can be seen in creation. God excuses Baha'u'llah's silence and proclaims that He has made Baha'u'llah the trumpet of the Day of Resurrection. The Tablet

explains in mystical terms the significance of Baha'u'llah's entry into the garden of Ridvan and commands Baha'u'llah to attract the hearts of men through the Word of God. The Tablet appeals to the believers to heed the call of God. Baha'u'llah concludes the Tablet with the statement that the Word of God has so inebriated Him that He can write no longer.

---------- 'When the gladness of God seized all else...' (Fa-lamma akhadha farahu'llah kulla ma sivahu...): An Arabic Tablet in which Baha'u'llah describes, with much mystical symbolism, His departure from the Most Great House, the grief of the people in the streets, His crossing of the Tigris and entry into the garden, and His final departure. This Tablet is a rich source for understanding the symbolic significance of Ridvan and provides some historical information as well.

Other Tablets and talks: There are other prayers, Tablets and talks of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha relating to Ridvan, usually composed at or for a particular Ridvan observance. {p241}

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Ridvan messages

As early as 1923 Shoghi Effendi sent a letter of encouragement and greeting to the American national Baha'i convention at Ridvan. Later it was his regular practice to write a Ridvan letter to the Baha'is of the world summarizing the progress of the Faith in the previous year and setting out general directions for the upcoming year. The Universal House of Justice has continued this practice. Other Baha'i institutions, especially national spiritual assemblies, also sometime issue Ridvan letters. Such letters are found in the collections of the letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice and in national Baha'i journals.

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Garden of Rdivan, Baghdad

The Najibiyyih Garden in Baghdad, known to Baha'is as the Ridvan Garden, was probably named for Muhammad-Najib Pasha who had been governor of Iraq between 1842 and 1847. It was a large agricultural area situated immediately north of the walls of the city on the east bank of the Tigris about 450 metres from the Mu'azzam gate and directly across the river from the district in which Baha'u'llah lived. It was also on the road Baha'u'llah would take to Istanbul and thus was well-placed to assemble the caravan for the journey, as well as being a convenient spot to receive visitors.

Early maps and photographs show the Najibiyyih as a wooded garden. Najib Pasha built a palace there and a wall around the garden. Najib Pasha died in may 1851 and the garden was presumably in the possession of his heirs when Baha'u'llah used it. It was purchased by the government in 1870 and used as a guest house for Nasiru'd-Din Shah when he visited Iraq in 1870. In the twentieth century the Royal Hospital was established there and it is now the site of Medical

City, a large modern teaching hospital. {p242}

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The Ascension of Baha'u'llah

The holy day of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah commemorates the death of Baha'u'llah at Bahji near 'Akka in Palestine on 29 May 1892.

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The death of Baha'u'llah

Baha'u'llah passed His last years in good health and relative tranquillity living in the mansion of Bahji near 'Akka. He had alluded to His own death as early as the 1870s in several of His works--notably in the Kitab-i-Aqdas in which He made preliminary provision for His successor. In the last nine months of His life, He spoke frequently of death, although His health remained sound. During the night before Sunday, 8 May 1892, He came down with a fever which abated by morning but resumed in the afternoon. By Tuesday He was well enough to receive many visitors; but the symptoms continued and He received no more visitors until a week later, when He seemed to have recovered and received many visitors. He gave what proved to be His last audience on about the fifteenth day of His illness. The symptoms once again grew worse. He died at dawn, eight hours after sunset, on Saturday, 2 Dhi'l-Qadih 1309 AH/28 May 1892, on the twenty-first day after the onset of the illness.[*]

---------- [* Eight hours after sunset of 28 May, in places where daylight savings time is in effect, occurs at 4 a.m. of 29 May.]

A telegram was sent to Sultan 'Abdu'l-Hamid beginning 'The Sun of Baha has set' and asking permission to bury Him at Bahji. Permission being given, Baha'u'llah was buried shortly after sunset the same day in the northernmost room of the complex of three houses just west of the mansion of Bahji.

Even during Baha'u'llah's illness considerable numbers of visitors had come from the surrounding districts. For a week after His death throngs of visitors arrived, including friends from all the religious groups of the area and from every level of society. Telegrams of sympathy came to 'Abdu'l-Baha from {p243} all over the Middle East. The poets who composed elegies included al-Hijj Muhammad Abu'l-Halq, a Muslim; Amin Zaydan, a Christian writer; 'Ali Effendi, the Qadi of 'Akka; and Ya'qub al-Lubnani, one of the Bustanis, a famous Lebanese Christian literary family.

On 7 June 1892 Baha'u'llah's will, in which He appointed 'Abdu'l-Baha as His successor, was unsealed and read publicly at Baha'u'llah's tomb.[*]

..... [* 'Written entirely in His own hand ... this unique and epoch-making Document, designated by Baha'u'llah 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, not excluding that of the B·b Himself.' (Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 238)]

Soon after Baha'u'llah's burial 'Abdu'l-Baha arranged to have the walls of the house containing the tomb reinforced. He also asked Nabil-A'zam to prepare, from the writings of Baha'u'llah, a Tablet of visitation and to write an account of Baha'u'llah's passing. Soon after completing these two tasks Nabil, overcome with grief, drowned himself in the sea.

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The holy day of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah

Immediately after the death of Baha'u'llah His Ascension came to be observed as the ninth Baha'i holy day. It is observed everywhere according to the Baha'i solar calendar--13 'Azamat, the seventieth day of Naw-Ruz, corresponding to 29 May in years when Naw-Ruz falls on 21 March. The holy day is to be commemorated at about 3:00 AM,[*] corresponding to the time of Baha'u'llah's death.

..... [*"...Regarding your question of the proper time to celebrate or hold our meetings of commemoration: the time should be fixed by counting after sunset; the Master passed away one hour after midnight, which falls a certain number of hours after sunset; so His passing should be commemorated according to the sun and regardless of daylight saving time. The same applies to the ascension of Baha'u'llah Who passed away about 8 hours after sunset." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, August 12, 1944, found in Lights of Guidance, p. 301.) This places the observance at 4 AM on 29 May for places where daylight savings time is in effect.]

The term 'Ascension' is Christian in origin, although used in Arabic, and is a respectful euphemism for natural death. It implies that the person referred to possessed a very high spiritual station, 'ascended' to heaven and lives still in Paradise.

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Related Tablets and writings

Although there are few Tablets particular to this holy day, there are a number of works of special relevance to it: {p244}

---------- The Tablet of Visitation of the Bab and Baha'u'llah

---------- The Book of the Covenant

---------- Passages in the Kitab-i-Aqdas relating to the succession of 'Abdu'l-Baha

---------- 'Abdu'l-Baha's first message to the Baha'is, in which He announces His father's death and urges the Baha'is not to be downhearted, to be steadfast and to continue to spread the Faith of Baha'u'llah: 'The world's great Light...'[9.29] The Tablet is written mostly in Arabic.

..... [9.29. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Selections, p. 17.]

---------- Nabil's account of the ascension of Baha'u'llah. This contains a

detailed account of Baha'u'llah's last illness and the reactions of the local people.

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The Day of the Covenant

The Day of the Covenant is a minor Baha'i holy day honouring 'Abdu'l-Baha, celebrated on 26 November. After the death of Baha'u'llah and His appointment of 'Abdu'l-Baha as His successor, Baha'is in a number of places began to celebrate 'Abdu'l-Baha's birthday. Elsewhere, they celebrated His ascension to leadership of the community. Both practices displeased 'Abdu'l-Baha since His birthday was the same day as the holy day of the Declaration of the Bab and the day of His accession was the day of the death of Baha'u'llah, also a holy day and one inappropriate for celebrations. Therefore He prohibited commemoration of the anniversaries relating to Him and instead allowed the Baha'is to observe 26 November in His honour. This day was chosen because it was 180 days after the holy day of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah--as far away as possible {p245} from the most solemn occasion. In the East the holy day was called 'the Day of Accession (Yawm-i-Julus)'--alluding to 'Abdu'l-Baha's title of 'the Most Great Branch'. In the West it was first known as 'the Fete-Day of 'Abdu'l-Baha' or 'the Master's Day' but became known as the 'Day of the Covenant'--alluding to 'Abdu'l-Baha's title of 'Centre of the Covenant'. It was first celebrated in the West in 1901.

The Day of the Covenant is one of the two minor holy days on which the suspension of work is not required.[*] There are no special observances or prayers connected with it. It is always observed according to the solar calendar on the 180th day after the Ascension of Baha'u'llah--that is, the 250th day of the Baha'i year or 4 Qawl--26 November if Naw-Ruz falls on 21 March.

..... [* "The Day of the Covenant Nov. 26th, and the Day of the Ascension, Nov. 28th, anniversaries of the birth and the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bah· must be observed by the friends coming together, but work is not prohibited. In other words the friends must regard observance of these two anniversaries as obligatory--but suspension of work not to be regarded as obligatory." (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 89)]

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The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha

The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha is a minor Baha'i holy day commemorating the death of 'Abdu'l-Baha on 28 November 1921.

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Death and funeral of 'Abdu'l-Baha

In 1921 'Abdu'l-Baha was seventy-seven years old. Although He suffered from

occasional bouts of illness, He remained vigorous, His faculties were unimpaired and He maintained His busy schedule. Nevertheless, a number of His last Tablets alluded to His own death. From this and from his words and actions in the last days of His life, the Baha'is later concluded that He was aware of His imminent death.

On 26 November 1921 'Abdu'l-Baha came down with a fever that abated the following morning. On 28 November He awoke at about 1:15 AM and complained to His daughter Ruha, who was watching by the bed, that He was too warm and was {p246} having difficulty breathing. He drank some water and returned to bed. Sitting up in bed He drank some rose water. He lay down again and when food was brought, He said, 'You wish me to take some food, and I am going?'[9.30] Then He died but His expression was so calm that at first those watching thought He had fallen asleep.

..... [9.30. Recorded in Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 311.]

'Abdu'l-Baha's funeral was held on the morning of Tuesday, 29 November and was perhaps the largest the city had seen. Among those attending were Sir Herbert Samuel, the High Commissioner of Palestine and the highest official in the country, various other British officials, the foreign consul in Haifa, the chief religious and secular dignitaries of the area, the city police, the Boy Scouts, both Muslim and Christian, and thousands of townspeople. It took two hours for the casket to be carried a distance of under a mile, from 'Abdu'l-Baha's house at the foot of Mount Carmel to a simple table in the garden in front of the Shrine of the Bab. Nine eulogies were given by representatives of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities. After the mourners had paid their respects, 'Abdu'l-Baha's casket was interred in a vault beneath the floor of the north central room of the Shrine of the Bab, adjacent to the room where the Bab's remains are entombed.

During the first days after 'Abdu'l-Baha's death, fifty to a hundred poor people were fed each day at His house, culminating with a mass distribution of grain on the seventh day. In accordance with custom in Muslim countries a memorial feast was held on the fortieth day after His death and additional eulogies were given. In the days following 'Abdu'l-Baha's death, obituaries were published in a number of newspapers in the Middle East, Europe, America and India.

Most of the arrangements for the funeral of 'Abdu'l-Baya and the various activities that followed in later weeks were made by Bahiyyih Khanum, 'Abdu'l-Baha's sister, who opened His will to see if any instructions for the burial were contained in it. Since 'Abdu'l-Baha had given no specific instructions, she decided to inter Him in the spare room of the Shrine of the Bab. {p247}

The official reading of 'Abdu'l-Baha's will did not occur until after Shoghi Effendi's return from England: it was read to the family on 3 January and to a gathering of Baha'is on 7 January 1922.

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The Holy Day

The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha was observed as a Baha'i holy day beginning in 1922, the first anniversary of His death, and appears in lists of 'Baha'i anniversaries' and holy days thereafter. Since 'Abdu'l-Baha had stated that it was not necessary to suspend ordinary work on the Day of the Covenant, the other holy day in His honour, Shoghi Effendi ruled that it was also unnecessary to suspend work on the anniversary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha. It was, however, obligatory to observe both these holy days in some other way.[*]

..... [* "The Day of the Covenant Nov. 26th, and the Day of the Ascension, Nov. 28th, anniversaries of the birth and the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha must be observed by the friends coming together, but work is not prohibited. In other words the friends must regard observance of these two anniversaries as obligatory--but suspension of work [is] not to be regarded as obligatory." (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealanda, p. 89)]

If possible, the ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha is to be observed at about 1:00 AM, the approximate time of His death. Like most other Baha'i holy days, there are no specific rituals connected with its observance but Baha'is frequently choose to read the Tablet of visitation for 'Abdu'l-Baha and parts of His will and testament. This holy day is always observed according to the solar calendar, on 28 November. {p248}

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APPENDIX 1

TWO BAHA'I LEGAL TEXTS

The Kitab-i-Aqdas: Baha'u'llah's Book of Laws

Al-Kitab al-Aqdas, literally 'the Most Holy Book', is generally known among western Baha'is by the Persian form of its title, Kitab-i-Aqdas. It is Baha'u'llah's book of laws and His most important work. It was written while He was living in the House of 'Udi Khammar in 'Akka, about 1873,[A1.1] a date confirmed by its reference to the fall of Napoleon III and reference in other Tablets to its revelation early in His imprisonment in 'Akka. In the latter part of 1873 the existence of the book was first made known to the believers, although parts of it had been in existence for several years.

..... [A1.1. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 213.]

The title Kitab-i-Aqdas was given the work by Baha'u'llah Himself. It is referred to in English by the Persian title as well [as] [the Aqdas', 'the Most Holy Book' and occasionally 'the Book of Aqdas'. It is also referred to as 'the Mother Book' of the Baha'i Revelation.

The Aqdas is written in a lofty and austere Arabic with little rhetorical ornamentation in a style somewhat similar to that of the Qur'an. As is usual in

Baha'u'llah's Arabic, there are some deviations from Arabic norms reflecting Persian usage. There are occasional grammatical innovations but many fewer than in the Arabic writings of the Bab.

Discussion of particular subjects are generally succinct, important laws often being given in a sentence or two. The book as a whole is quite short: the full English translation occupies only seventy pages. {p249}

The Aqdas begins with a proclamation of the inseparable duties of recognizing the Manifestation of God for the age and obedience to His laws. Other subjects discussed may be classified as follows:

---------- a. Establishment of Baha'i administrative institutions, including the appointment of 'Abdu'l-Baha as Baha'u'llah's successor and interpreter, an anticipation of the Guardianship and the command to establish the House of Justice.

---------- b. Laws concerning prayer, fasting, marriage and divorce, and many other aspects of spiritual, social and political life.

---------- c. Abrogation of various Islamic and Babi laws, practices and abuses.

---------- d. Exhortation concerning specific virtues and vices.

---------- e. Addresses to leaders and classes of humanity and prophecies concerning various nations and regions.

The laws of the Aqdas somewhat resemble those of Islam and the Bab but they are considerably less rigorous than either. The Aqdas tends to replace specific ordinances with general spiritual and moral principles. For example, the Islamic ban on listening to music is abrogated but music is brought under the general principle of moderation. Except in certain specific areas--notably prayer, fasting, marriage and inheritance--much of the legislation of the Aqdas relates to the community as a whole or is of a relatively general character, while many of the more specific ordinances either abrogate older laws or prohibit specific offensive practices.

The laws of the Aqdas are supplemented by Questions and Answers, which consists of questions submitted to Baha'u'llah by Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin (one of His secretaries {p250} who had advanced training in Islamic law) concerning the application of the laws of the Aqdas and Bahau'llah's replies. The social principles of the Aqdas are amplified by a series of major Tablets revealed in 'Akka, collected under the title Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas. A great many Tablets of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha and letters of Shoghi Effendi clarify and supplement specific points of the Aqdas.

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Manuscripts

The original manuscript of the Kitab-i-Aqdas in Baha'u'llah's hand is at the Baha'i World Centre. The frontispiece of Taherzadeh's The Revelation of

Baha'u'llah, volume 3, shows the first page of a manuscript of the Aqdas in the hand of 'Abdu'l-Baha. When 'Abdu'l-Baha was asked which manuscript of the Aqdas should be regarded as authoritative, He stated that the accurate text of the book is the one transcribed by Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin.[A1.2] Less authoritative manuscripts are common; several pages of one are reproduced in Miller's The Baha'i Faith.

..... [A1.2. Letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, 9 June 1975.]

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Translations

The Aqdas is the most important Baha'i book and the basis for almost every distinctive feature of the Baha'i community. Evidently many Baha'is were anxious to implement its laws, for in several Tablets dated soon after the release of the Aqdas Baha'u'llah cautioned against doing so unwisely.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas was first published in Arabic in Bombay in 1891 on the instructions of Baha'u'llah. Since then there have been a few other editions (Bombay, Cairo, Tehran). Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice each discouraged indiscriminate circulation of the Aqdas. Thus apart from these early editions, the Aqdas {p251} was not published by the Baha'i community in full translation until 1992 (in English, other languages shortly after).

Anton Haddad translated the entire work into English in about 1900 but this was never published although it enjoyed considerable circulation in typescript in the early American community and is still occasionally found. It seems to have been an important source of early American Baha'i administrative practice and understanding of Baha'i teaching, especially before contact with 'Abdu'l-Baha became frequent.

Shoghi Effendi translated most of the passages of general interest, comprising perhaps a third of the whole. A number of short passages were translated under the auspices of the House of Justice. Non-Baha'i translations include an English translation by Earl. E. Elder and William McE. Miller, an inept and tendentious version, and a Russian translation by Alexander Tumanski, prepared with the help of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl-i-Gulpaygani.

In 1986 the Universal House of Justice made the publication of a fully annotated English translation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas a goal of the Six Year Plan. A task force was established at the Baha'i World Centre to undertake the project. The lead translator was Mark Hellaby, a British Arabist. The appearance of the translation in March 1993 was a major event in the Baha'i world.[*]

..... [* Computer texts of English, Arabic and Persian writings of Baha'u'llah were used in order to compare the translation style and word usage of Shoghi Effendi so that the translation work of the Most Holy Book would

match his style as much as possible. These programs were developed by Mr. Lee Nelson, who had developed an English version of the software, REFER, for the writings of the Central Figures and Shoghi Effendi. When it was suggested the Persian and Arabic texts might also be used with such a program, Mr. Nelson consulted with Mr. Habib Riazati, developing a free-ware software program into an Arabic/Persian word-processing system called Gate. Mr. Nelson next wrote a REFER program using the Arabic and Persian texts. Mr. Riazati engendered the help of many volunteers to do text entry for Arabic and Persian texts. Mr. Nelson finally developed a reference computer program which allowed English passages and identical Arabic and/or Persian passages to be seen side-by-side for comparison. This program was used extensively in the process of completing the translation work for the Kitab-i-Aqdas.]

The translation is the most sophisticated edition of a piece of Baha'i scripture produced to that time. The full translations of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and Questions and Answers occupy less than half the volume. The remaining contents include a short introduction to the text by the Universal House of Justice, several shorter supplementary texts, the outline synopsis and codification first published in 1973, extensive explanatory notes to the various texts, a glossary and an analytical index. The text employed a system of paragraph numbering intended to facilitate reference to the text independent of language and edition. {p252}

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Synopsis and Codification

As a preliminary to a full annotated translation of the Aqdas, Shoghi Effendi began work on a synopsis and codification of the laws of the Aqdas. On the basis of his outline and preliminary notes, the House of Justice completed the work and published it as A Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitab-i-Aqdas in 1973 in fulfilment of a goal of the Nine Year Plan.[*] This work contains all the passages translated by the Guardian, a detailed outline of the contents of the Aqdas and Questions and Answers, and explanatory notes. It was incorporated into the English edition of the Aqdas.

..... [* Judge Dorothy Nelson, U.S. Appellate Court Judge, District 9, and her husband, Judge James Nelson, went to the Holy Land at the behest of the Universal House of Justice and together worked to ready the codification and synopsis for publication.]

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Lawh-i-Tarazat

Literally 'The Tablet of Ornaments', the Lawh-i-Tarazat was one of the Tablets revealed by Baha'u'llah after the Kitab-i-Aqdas expounding Baha'i principles. It is mostly in Persian. It was written for an unknown individual Baha'i around 1889. Its date is not known exactly but it seems to contain an allusion to an event that took place in October 1888 and it was certainly written after the Ishraqat, another well-known text of a similar type.

The main themes are justice and knowledge. The Tablet begins with praise of God, referring specifically to His power to thwart the plots of the oppressors of His faith. After a prayer, the main body of the Tablet is occupied with six tarazat, 'ornaments', containing statements of Baha'i principles. The individual sections sometimes discuss more than one subject.

The first taraz speaks of man's need for self-knowledge. It praises vision, specifically physical vision, which is identified as 'the agent and guide for true knowledge'.[A1.3] It states that wealth earned through crafts and professions is both necessary and praiseworthy.

..... [A1.3. Baha'u'llah, Tablets, p. 35.] {p253}

The second taraz reiterates the commandment of the Kitab-i-Aqdas to associate with people of all religions with friendliness in order to promote unity and concord. Baha'is are to convey to their fellows the teachings of Baha'u'llah and to treat all people with fairness.

The third taraz praises good character and justice, quoting the famous passage on justice from the Hidden Words.[A1.4]

..... [A1.4. Baha'u'llah, Hidden Words, Arabic no. 2.]

The fourth taraz praises trustworthiness as essential to the stability of human affairs. Baha'u'llah quotes a passage from the Ishraqat describing a vision in the Ridvan Garden near 'Akka of a heavenly maiden personifying trustworthiness.[A1.5]

..... [A1.5. Baha'u'llah, Tablets, pp. 121-2.]

The fifth taraz treats two themes: the respect due to the practitioners of arts and professions and the lack of truthfulness and sincerity in Baha'u'llah's time. Perhaps these together are intended as a criticism of the attitudes and practices of the aristocratic society from which Baha'u'llah came.

The sixth taraz praises technology and scientific knowledge. It is obligatory to acquire the knowledge of these arts and sciences. They have in fact arisen through the influence of the new revelation. This section also speaks of newspapers, at this time already very important in the Middle East. Baha'u'llah praises them as 'the mirror of the world' but warns journalists to investigate carefully so as to be able to write the truth. Most of what had been written about Baha'u'llah Himself had been 'devoid of truth', for example the report that He had fled from Iran.[A1.6]

..... [A1.6. Baha'u'llah, Tablets, pp. 39-40.]

The remainder of the Tablet contains an address to the Azali Babis, particularly their leader in Iran, Mirza Hadi Dawlatabadi, who was eventually to be the successor of Mirza Yahya. Baha'u'llah states that the Babis are behaving like the followers of the religions of the past, being unwilling to recognize the new Manifestation of God, despite the fulfilment of the predicted signs. Mirza Hadi is particularly criticized because he ought to know better

but instead is leading his followers astray. He has no personal knowledge of Baha'u'llah but has visited Mirza Yahya in Cyprus. Baha'u'llah orders him {p254} to speak fairly about what he had seen there.

Baha'u'llah also criticizes him for concealing his faith while among non-believers--he was a Muslim cleric of some rank--and compares him unfavourably with the martyrs who willingly sacrificed their lives and property. This probably refers to the martyrdom of Siyyid Ashraf of Abadih in Isfahan in October 1888. It is said that at that time Mirza Hadi denied from the pulpit that he was a Babi. {p255}

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APPENDIX 2

WOMEN AND BAHA'I LAW

The Legal Status of Women in Baha'i Law

There is no sharp distinction made in Baha'i law between the legal positions of men and women. The Baha'i sacred writings clearly affirm the spiritual, legal and social equality of men and women. There are, however, some differences in the legal treatment of men and women in Baha'i law in the areas of ritual obligations, marriage and divorce, and inheritance. The full application of the principle of the equality of men and women has been dependent on the local circumstances of Baha'i communities, with Baha'is taking progressive but not radical stands on the matter in terms of the development of their own societies.

In Qur'anic law women are the spiritual equals and social inferiors and dependents of men. The Qur'an, while emphasizing the spiritual equality of men and women, explicitly gave women a rank in society below men because of their economic dependence. Nonetheless, this probably represented a reform in terms of pre-Islamic Arabian practice in that it made men explicitly responsible for their wives and children, thus putting an end to the causal family relationships that had resulted in the neglect of women and children. Later Islamic societies tended to keep women--at least, middle and upper class women--in seclusion whenever possible and out of an extreme concern for modesty and chastity.

Like most areas of the Bab's teachings, there has been no careful study of the Bab's laws concerning the status of {p256} women. Whatever they were, they were certainly never applied. The laws concerning marriage and inheritance seem to have been close to those of Baha'u'llah. The Bab exempted women from the obligation to perform pilgrimage, specifically because of the discomforts of travel. Women were to go to the mosques at night, men during the day. The Bayan mentions several petty differences in ritual obligations: men use one greeting, women another; women write talismans in the form of circles, men in pentacles. The Bayan does not allow men and women to talk together in public. It is not clear whether the Bab's writings redefined the general status of women in society. It is known that when the independence of the Babi religion was

proclaimed at Badasht in 1848, Tahirih, the Bab's most eminent female disciple, appeared unveiled. Enemies of the Babis also complained of the freedom of their women; hence the emancipation of women was perhaps understood to be a Babi principle.

For the most part the legal status of women in the Baha'i Faith is governed by the general principle of the equality of men and women. Sex is not a determinant of social or spiritual status. Baha'u'llah explicitly abolished the Islamic distinction between the status of men and women. In accordance with this principle He wrote in His Kitab-i-Aqdas that both boys and girls were to be educated and to learn a trade. 'Abdu'l-Baha attributed the previous failure of women to equal men in accomplishments solely to women's lack of education and opportunity. Men and women do differ somewhat in temperament and mentality but this should not be used to justify the exclusion of women from certain areas of life. He stressed that women and men are complementary factors in society and that peace will not be achieved until women participate fully in the economic, social and political life of the world. Many of the deficiencies of modern life are precisely due to the limited participation of women. Both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha state that, spiritually, women have tended to excel men in the Baha'i Faith. {p257}

Such legal distinctions as are made in Baha'i law between men and women are for the most part based on the biological fact of motherhood and the resulting need for special protection of the mother and child. The major Baha'i laws apply equally to men and women. Both men and women must pray and fast. Each can marry a spouse of his or her choice but only with the permission of all natural, living parents. Divorce is by mutual agreement with a waiting period of identical length for both parties. Some of the differences that do exist between the legal positions of men and women simply reflect common sense. Exceptions are made to ritual obligations for women during menstruation, pregnancy and nursing. The father's clothing is inherited by the sons and the mother's by the daughters.

Other differences in the legal treatment of men and women reflect the difference in roles implied by the fact of motherhood. First, married women receive a degree of economic protection to which men are not entitled. Women receive a small dowry at marriage. A woman has the right to be supported by her husband. In the case of divorce the husband pays the living expenses of the wife during the year of waiting before the divorce becomes final. Although all Baha'is are required to make a will, Baha'u'llah also lays out a set of rules for dividing the estates of the intestate. In most cases men and women receive equal treatment. The largest share of the estate is divided among the children, with the family's home being included in the estate of the eldest son. A widow receives a relatively small share of the estate; and, except for gifts given her by her husband, her home and the household effects are included in the husband's estate. The obvious implication is that the husband is mainly responsible for the economic well-being of the family and that this responsibility passes to the sons, especially the eldest, after his death. It

should be noted, however, that women are encouraged to work outside the home and they have the same obligation as men to learn a trade. {p258}

The only difference in the treatment of men and women in Baha'i administration is that women cannot be elected to the Universal House of Justice, although they can and do serve at all other levels of Baha'i administration. There is not explanation for this in the Baha'i writings, save that 'Abdu'l-Baha states that the reason will one day be as clear as the sun at noon.

The full application of the Baha'i principles and laws on the status of women has been hindered by a number of factors. First, the principles themselves were promulgated gradually and were not completely clear to the Baha'is until 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to the West in 1911-13, although the main features were present in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, completed in 1873. Second, Baha'i law was not put into practice when doing so would threaten the safely of the community or offend the sensibilities of the population at large. Therefore, Baha'i women in Iran remained veiled until the time of Reza Shah and were not elected to administrative institutions until the 1950s. In all such matters Baha'is were instructed to be progressive but not radical in terms of their own societies. Third, the application of Baha'i principles concerning women has been limited by the understanding and habits of the Baha'is themselves. Even in Iran it was rare for a woman to be elected to an administrative body in a large Baha'i community. In most parts of the world Baha'i women have only slowly broken away from their traditional roles, despite encouragement from Baha'i administrative institutions.

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Polygyny

Polygyny is the practice of a man having more than one wife and is prohibited by Baha'i law.

Polygamy--the practice of having more than one spouse at a time--can be either polyandry, in which a woman may have more than one husband, or polygyny, in which a man has {p259} more than one wife. Polyandry is uncommon but polygyny is very widespread and has existed to one extend or another in most times and places. The modern West is almost alone among major cultures past and present in completely abolishing legal polygyny. (Martin Luther at one point allowed polygyny on the grounds that its prohibition had no biblical basis but he was forced to back down owing to popular indignation.) Although polygyny is not often the most common form of marriage, where it is practised it is very widely accepted.

Polygynous marriages exist for several reasons. In some cases a second wife may be taken because the original wife is barren. Most often, though, additional wives are a sign of status for the wealthy and powerful. Further, plural marriages may serve to extend the family alliances of the husband. Thus in many societies the ruler has a very large number of wives.

Although the legal details of polygyny differ in different societies, the

structure of the polygynous family is generally similar. Almost always the first wife has a special status and outranks all other wives and concubines. Often the first wife will be from the same social class as the husband whereas later wives will be from lower classes. Usually, the additional wives are divided into secondary wives and concubines. The secondary wives will usually enjoy some sort of social and legal status whereas the concubines will be slaves, either captured or purchased. Often the concubines are brought into the household as maids to the legal wives. Children of all three classes of wives are usually recognized as legitimate, although the children of the wives, especially the first, generally take precedence.

The appeal of the polygynous family to men is obvious. It also provides for women where there is a shortage of men and allows labour to be shared. Defenders of polygyny argue that regulated polygyny is preferable to the prostitution, adultery and divorce that tend to take its place. On the other hand, polygynous families are commonly plagued by jealousy among the wives. {p260}

Islamic law allows a man to have four legal wives and an unlimited number of concubines. In theory, all four wives are to be treated equally. The children of concubines are considered legitimate if acknowledged by the father, which would usually happen. If a concubine does have children, she cannot be sold or given away and becomes free at her husband's death.

In addition, Shi'i, but not Sunni, law allows temporary marriages (mut'ah, sighah), in which a marriage for a specified period of time is contracted in return for a fee paid to the woman. This practice is very widespread, though controversial, in Iran, especially in the neighbourhoods of the Shi'i shrines. Temporary marriage had been officially abolished in Iran under the Pahlavi regime but has been revived since the Revolution, both on the grounds that it is a legitimate Shi'i practice and as a way of meeting the sexual needs of young soldiers and revolutionaries not yet in a position to marry.

In practice, polygyny was and is not especially common among Muslims, apart from the upper classes, since few ordinary people can afford to support more than one wife. Concubines were quite common among the middle and upper classes: if a middle class family bought a slave, it was likely to be a girl and sooner or later the owner or his son would have sexual relations with her.

Although some modern Islamic thought and civil law in the Middle East discourages polygyny, religiously oriented regimes and individuals have encouraged it as a realistic alternative to the sexual immorality of the West. In areas less affected by modernization, polygyny has continued in its traditional form. Concubinage has nearly disappeared with slavery.

The Bab does not seem to have legislated concerning the allowable number of wives. The Kitab-i-Aqdas prohibits taking more than two wives and adds, 'Whoso contenteth himself with a single partner from among the maidservants of God, both ha and she shall live in tranquillity.'[A2.1] Baha'u'llah also prohibited slavery and abolished the Shi'i prohibition on {p261} employing an unmarried

maiden as a servant. These had the effect of abolishing concubinage.

..... [A2.1. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 63.]

'Abdu'l-Baha stated that the permission to have two wives was conditioned on treating each of them with absolute justice and equality. Since such justice was impossible, having more than one wife was in practice not permissible.[A2.2] (Muhammad 'Abduh, a famous Islamic reformer of Egypt and a friend of 'Abdu'l-Baha, made exactly the same argument, using Qur'an 4:3 and 4:29 to argue that polygyny was prohibited in Islam.) However, 'Abdu'l-Baha said that He was not abrogating the law permitting two wives an on occasion reassured believers who already had more than one wife that they were not violating the law of Baha'u'llah. To Western believers who inquired, He explained that Baha'u'llah having more than one wife was in accordance with Islamic law and that polygyny had been permitted in biblical times and had in fact not been prohibited by the New Testament. The Islamic law permitting up to four wives reflected the large number of unattached women in the time of Muhammad. 'Abdu'l-Baha also stated that temporary marriage was prohibited by Baha'i law.

..... [A2.2. 'Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in Kitab-i-Aqdas, note 89.]

Modern Baha'is are not permitted to take a second wife. The only case in which polygyny is permitted is when an individual who already has more than one wife becomes a Baha'i. In this case--out of justice for the women--he is allowed to keep his wives but is not allowed to marry more.

Early Babis and Baha'is naturally followed Muslim customs. The Bab, for example, took two wives, Khadijih-Bagum and, while he was in Isfahan, Maryam, the daughter of a Babi there. Baha'u'llah married three times, twice to cousins and in Baghdad to a Babi girl, Gawhar Khanum, who had fled persecutions in Kashan. She was the mother of his daughter Furughiyyih. His first wife, known as Navvab, was the mother of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Bahiyyih Khanum and Mirza Mihdi. She was called by Baha'u'llah, His 'perpetual consort in all the worlds of God'.[A2.3]

..... [A2.3. Quoted in Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 108.]

Baha'u'llah's marriages were typical of a man of His class--His {p262} father had had children by four wives and three concubines--and were considered perfectly proper, being in accord with both Muslim and Babi law. 'Abdu'l-Baha, however, refused to take a second wife despite the law of the Kitab-i-Aqdas permitting it and the urgings of various Baha'is eager for Him to marry their daughters. Later He essentially prohibited polygyny and the practice quickly died out among Baha'is.

Christian critics of the Baha'i Faith have often cited the practice of polygyny among early Baha'is, especially by Baha'u'llah, as proving the hollowness of the Baha'i principle of the equality of men and women. {p263}

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APPENDIX 3

ALLAH ABHA

A well-known Islamic tradition holds that God has ninety-nine names. Islamic esoterics hold that there is a hundredth name of God that will eventually become known. For Baha'is this name, the 'Greatest Name' (Ism-i-A'zam), is baha, 'splendour', in its various Arabic forms. The form of the Greatest Name used as a greeting by Baha'is is Allah Abha[#] ('God is Most Glorious'). It is also used as a prayer or invocation.[*]

..... [# In English the expression is usually, but incorrectly, written 'Allah-u-Abha' instead of the correct 'Allahu Abha' or the form used here. (E-text editor finds this statement quite presumptuous, especially since the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith spelled it 'Allah-u-Abha' in all of his correspondence!)]

..... [* The form of the Greatest Name most often used as an invocation is 'Ya Baha'ul-Abha!]

In Islam a similar expression, 'Allah Akbar' ('God is Most Great'), is used as an exclamation of approval, surprise or astonishment or as a war cry. The Bab specified the use of a number of expressions of this form in various circumstances. The Persian Bayan provides that on the first day of the Babi month the believer should recite 'Allah Abha' ninety-five times, on the second day 'Allah A'zam' (God is Most Mighty), and on the nineteenth 'Allah Aqdam' (God is Most Ancient).[A3.1] The Haykalu'd-Din, a late work of the Bab, provides that on the first day of the Babi month the believer should recite 'Allah Abha' ninety-five times, on the second day 'Allah A'zam' ('God is Most Mighty'), and on the nineteenth 'Allah Aqdam' ('God is Most Ancient'). On the other days the choice of divine name to be used in invocation is left to the individual.[A3.2] Such formulas, including 'Allah Abha', were said to have been the watchwords of the besieged Babis of Zanjan.[A3.3]

..... [A3.1. The Bab, Bayan, Persian 5:17.]

..... [A3.2. Nabil, Dawn-Breakers, 552-3.]

..... [A3.3. The Bab, Bayan, Arabic 6:4, Persian 6:5.]

The Bayan[A3.4] provides that a man is to greet another with {p264} 'Allah Akbar', to which the reply is 'Allah A'zam'. The corresponding greeting for a woman in 'Allah Abha', to which the reply is 'Allah Ajmal' ('God is Most Beautiful'; the Haykalu'ld-Din gives a different set of greetings: 'Allah Akbar' and 'Allah Azhar' for men and 'Allah Ajmal' and 'Allah A'azz' for women[A3.5]).

..... [A3.4. The Bab, Haykalu'd-Din, 6:4, p. 22.]

..... [A3.5. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 176.]

In the Baha'i Faith 'Allah Abha' came into use as the sole greeting among the Baha'is in Edirne in the 1860s[A3.6] and eventually supplanted the Babi

greetings because of its relation to Baha'u'llah's title. 'Abdu'l-Baha explained that while the use of the Babi greetings is acceptable, 'Allah Abha' is the Baha'i greeting.[A3.7] The Kitab-i-Aqdas provides that each believer is to recite 'Allah Abha' 95 times daily while sitting cross-legged[*] and after ablutions.[A3.8] 'Allah Abha' is also the form of the Greatest name used in obligatory prayer.

..... [A3.6. Amr va-Khalq 3:74-9.]

..... [A3.7. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 18.]

..... [* Baha'u'llah wrote, according to the authorized translation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas into English, Para 18, p. 26, that the believer, after having performed ablutions, "is to seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat 'Allah-u-Abha' ninety-five times." "Turning unto God" means to face the East; however, seating oneself is not defined as whether to sit on a bench or chair, or to sit cross-legged as Mr. Walbridge claims.]

..... [A3.8. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 17 July 1951, in Lights, no. 893, p. 266.]

In modern Baha'i practice 'Allah Abha' is the universal Baha'i greeting, although its use when in the presence of non-believers is discouraged when this might set the Baha'is apart.[A3.9] 'Allah Abha' is also often chanted or sun repetitively.

..... [A3.9. {p265}

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APPENDIX 4

APOSTASY

The abandonment of one's religion, whether voluntarily or by compulsion, is or has been viewed as a grave offence in a number of religions. In the early Christian church apostasy was an unforgivable sin, even--or perhaps especially--if it was elicited through threats or torture. In Islam almost all legal authorities held that apostasy was a capital offence, although they differed on whether the apostate might be given the opportunity to repent. In Shi'i law the issue of apostasy was complicated by the doctrine of taqiyah, which held that a Shi'i whose life and property were threatened might renounce his faith verbally while maintaining a mental reservation.

In the Baha'i Faith apostasy is not considered a crime and the believer who renounces his faith falls into the same category as any other non-believer and incurs no special blame. Covenant-breakers and those who have lost their administrative rights owing to some offence are not identified as apostates since both groups are considered to be believers. There are, however, a few instances of apostates who attacked the Baha'i Faith and to whom Shoghi Effendi refers in terms very similar to those which he uses for Covenant-breakers.[A4.1]

..... [A4.1. See, for example, Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 327.]

The term 'Apostate' is occasionally used by Baha'is to refer to those who have renounced their Faith under threat, as has sometimes occurred in Iran. Unlike Shi'is who are protected by the doctrine of taqiyah, such insincere renunciation of faith are prohibited to Baha'is. Such individuals are usually considered non-Baha'is who might be readmitted to the Faith if they are shown to be sincere in their professions of belief.[*]

..... [* Mr. Walbridge seems to make light of someone actually believing in Baha'u'llah but denying or recanting one's faith. Doing so leaves one in a grave spiritual condition, for if someone recants their faith, that person has lost the protection of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah.] {p266}

The concept of apostasy plays its most important role in Baha'i history as an excuse used by Muslims for persecutions. Muslim authorities have often identified Baha'is as apostates from Islam, whose lives and property were therefore forfeit. Baha'is have denied this charge, on several grounds:

---------- Most Baha'is never were Muslims, being either Baha'is by birth or converts from non-Muslim religions.

---------- Baha'is do not deny Islam, being believers in God, the prophet Muhammad, and the divine origin of the Qur'an and the Islamic religion.

---------- The charge that Baha'is are apostates is inconsistent with the other common charge that the Baha'i Faith is not a religion independent of Islam. {p267}

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APPENDIX 5

THE EXALTED LETTERS

The Hurufat-i-'Alin, 'The Exalted Letters', is a Tablet of Baha'u'llah written in Baghdad and concerned with the death and the development of the human soul. Variously known as 'Huruf-i-'Alin' or "Aliyat' and 'Musibat-i-Huruf-i-'Alin' ('The suffering of the exalted letters'), this Tablet was written in Arabic after the death of Mirza Muhammad-i-Vazir and was addressed to his wife Havva' and his sister Maryam. All three were first cousins of Baha'u'llah and had become Babis soon after Baha'u'llah's own conversion. 'Letters' in the title is thus used in the Babi meaning of believers.

Baha'u'llah says that He originally wrote the Tablet for a particular person--His cousin--but later translated the entire text of the Tablet at the request of some of the Baha'is who had asked for an explanation of it in Persian. It is not a literal translation, He explains, because this is not in accordance with sound taste. He mentions that so as not to arouse the criticism of the unbelievers. Because of its theme and its elevated language, it is often chanted at funerals and memorial meetings.

In its present published form the Tablet begins with a brief prologue in which

Baha'u'llah explains how it came to be translated. The Tablet itself consists of eight sections, with the Persian translation following the original Arabic of each. The entire Tablet is an address to God and is thus a prayer.

Baha'u'llah begins by stating that His sorrow makes it difficult for Him to write. He than eloquently praises God's all-encompassing wisdom and providence. The heart of the Tablet is devoted to an exposition of the origin, life and {p268} destiny of the individual human soul. In the Qur'an conception and birth were described as wonderful signs of God's power and providence. Baha'u'llah elaborates on this theme, describing in elevated language how the pearl-like fluid of the father's semen links generation to generation, finally descending into the shell of a maidservant. There God forms it and makes it to grow until He at last brings it forth as a child, nursing it and making it grow to maturity. But God also afflicts it, until at last it returns to its Maker, abandoning its body and leaving loved ones behind to grieve.

Baha'u'llah makes two other analogies for the human body. First, it is the holy tree that God causes to grow but then blasts, breaking its branches, searing its leaves and driving away the birds. The other is the house that God raises by His decree but then destroys, wrecking its foundations and causing its pillars to fall until it is as though it had never been.

Baha'u'llah Himself does not complain about the afflictions that have befallen Him, for He has seen God's wisdom and has beheld the state of the one who has ascended to God. However, He knows that God has concealed this vision from others so that the separation of death is difficult for them. Now the afflictions of the world have been decreed for Havva' and Maryam. They have no mother or women friends to share their sorrow. Baha'u'llah asks God to bless them and to give them relief and patience, for they are believers. Finally He asks God to make 'this weak one'--Mirza Muhammad--ascent to His court. The Tablet ends with unconditional praise of God, for His decree is absolute and is His most perfect gift. {p269}

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Universal House of Justice, letter to the Baha'is of the World, Naw-Ruz 1974. {p272}

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References

[E-text editor: The actual endnotes are attached to the paragraph in which they occur.]

Note on Sources

Except where I am citing specific information, the sources given for background are chosen for their accessibility to a general reader, both in terms of their readability and the likelihood that they will be found in a general library. More enthusiastic readers can pursue items given in the bibliographies of these works. References for subjects directly related to the Babi and Baha'i Faiths are to primary sources and significant secondary sources and contain the information needed by specialists.

{nd}

Chapter 1. Baha'i Law and Its Background

Sources:

For general information on the philosophy and sociology of law, jurisprudence and religious law, see Great Books of the Western World, vol. 2, pp. 962-90, 'Law'; Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Law'; International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, s.v. 'Law', 'Legal Systems'; Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. 'Natural Law', 'Philosophy of Law', 'Sociology of Law'; Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Law and Religion'.

For Islamic law, see Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Law (Muhammadan)'; Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Islamic Law', 'Madhhab'; Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1st ed., s.v. 'Shari'a'; Moojan Momen, Introduction to Shi'i Islam (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 172-207.

Babi law is summarized in some detail in Denis MacEoin, Rituals in Babism and Baha'ism (London: British Academic Press, 1994). Later Babi law can be found in the Arabic and Persian Bayans. {p274}

Baha'i law is summarized in Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, which also contains an outline of Baha'i law, supplementary texts and notes. Detailed compilations on Baha'i law, amounting nearly to codifications, are found in 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjinih, and Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 1, pp. 1-254. The Egyptian codification of Baha'i law is found in Baha'i World, vol. 6, pp. 363-79 (Arabic) and vol. 8, pp. 493-9 (Persian). There is no comprehensive compilation on the concept of law in the Baha'i writings. A good

summary of the contemporary Baha'i understanding of Baha'i law is found in Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 3, pp. 275-98. There are numerous references to law throughout the Baha'i writings, too many to list here.

[The endnotes followed] {p275}

Chapter 2. Rites of Life and Death

{nd}

Prayer and Worship

Sources:

Prayer is an extremely broad and complex topic, with a large literature.

Prayer in other religions: Curiously, there are few books on prayer as a general phenomenon, although there is a huge literature of and about prayer in particular religions. The major work is Friedrich Heiler, Prayer, trans. S. MacComb (Oxford, 1932). More accessible are the relevant encyclopedia articles: Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Prayer', 'Worship', 'Communion with deity' (these three {p276} being book-length articles with very detailed information), 'Devotion and devotional literature'; Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Prayer', 'Worship and the cultic life'; 'Incantation', 'Belssing', 'Liturgy', 'Devotion', 'Psalms'; New Catholic Encyclopaedia, s.v. 'Prayer.' The Oxford Book of Prayer, ed. G. Appleton et al (New York, 1985), is an anthology of prayers of many religions, including Baha'i.

Islamic Prayer: In addition to references in the general articles above, especially Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Prayer' (Muhammadan)', see Encyclopaedia of Religion and Eithics, s.v. 'Salat', 'Dhikr'; Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1st edn., s.v., 'Salat', 'Takbir', 'Wird'; Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edn., s.v. 'Du'a". Very little of the large Arabic literature on Islamic prayer has been translated, although information on prayer will be found in legal manuals written for English-speaking Muslims and in collections of traditions. See also al-Ghazzali, Worship in Islam, trans. E. E. Calverley (Madras, 1925), on salat. The wonderful compilation of Shi'i prayers- -'Abbas Qummi, Matatihu'l-Jinan (Beirut, n.d.)- -is a useful point of comparison in understanding the genres of Baha'i prayers.

Babi prayer: The only systematic study of Babi prayer (and Babi ritual in general) is Denis MacEoin, Rituals in Babism and Baha'ism. Otherwise, information must be sought in the Bab's own works, for the early period 'Sahifiy-i-Baayna'l-Haramayn' and 'Sahifiy-i-Makhzunih' and for the later period the Persian and Arabic Bayans. A selection of the prayers of the Bab is found in Selections from the Writings of the ab, ch. 7.

Baha'i prayer: There are thousands of Baha'i prayer books in hundreds of languages, as well as prayers scattered throughout Baha'i scripture. The most important original collection in Arabic and Persian are Tasbih va-Tahlil, containing the obligatory prayers and prayers for particular occasions and

purposes; Ad'iyiy-i-Mahbub, a compact prayer book for daily use; Nafahatu'r-Rahman, a collection of munajat reproduced from a manuscript of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin; and Majmu'ih-i-Munajat, several small volumes of prayers of 'Abud'l-Baha in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, of the Bab and of Shoghi Effendi. The most important sources in English are Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, a collection of translations of the prayers of Baha'u'llah made by Shoghi Effendi; and Baha'i Prayers, an American compilation of prayers for daily use, derived from Prayers and Meditations an other {p277} sources. Most prayers in other languages are translated from these two sources.

On the theology and spiritual value of prayer, see Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude, a compilation by the Universal House of Justice. Laws and regulations concerning prayer are found in Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjinih, and Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 4. A modern Baha'i interpretation of prayer is William and Madeline Hellaby, Prayer: A Baha'i Approach (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985).

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Cleanliness, Purity and Refinement

Sources:

For general accounts of purity and cleanliness as religious concepts, see Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Purification', 'Ablutions', and Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Purification'. The most influential recent anthropological account is Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo, (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1966). For the Muslim law of purity, see Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Purification. Muslim'; Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1st edn., s.v. 'Tahara', 'Wudu", Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edn., s.v. 'Ghusl.' Works dealing comprehensively with Islamic law such as legal manuals and collections of traditions usually have extensive sections on ritual purity.

For the Bab's teachings on cleanliness and purity, see Persian Bayan 5:7, 14-15; 6:1-3, 17; 7:17; 8:6, 8; 9:10; Arabic Bayan 5:7; 6:5; 9:12; 10:15. For a summary, see Denis MacEoin, Rituals in Babism and Baha'ism.[*]

..... [* In Nader Saiedi's Gate of the Heart, p. 318 from a section starting on p. 315 entitled "Perfection and Refinement", he states: "The principle of perfection and refinement is the basis of a number of ordinances of the Persian Bayan that emphasizes the necessity of physical cleanliness and the beautification of one's own body...." The entire section speaks of perfection, refinement and cleanliness.]

Baha'u'llah's teachings on purity and cleanliness are found in Kitab-i-Aqdas, passim. For details see 'A. H. Israq-Khavari, Ganjinih, pp. 14-17, 77-85, 153-4, and Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 3, pp. 294-302; vol. 4, pp. 79-83. The Tablet of Purity is in Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 146-50, para. 129.

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Fasting

Sources:

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Funeral Laws

Sources:

On the general subject of funeral practices, see Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Death and Disposal of the Dead', a book-length survey of funeral practices and attitudes towards death throughout the world. Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Funeral Rites', 'Tombs', 'Death' are more up-to-date but less detailed analyses. Philippe Aries, The Hour of our Death, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981) surveys the development of Western funeral practices. On Islamic funeral practices see Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edn., s.v. 'Djanaza'. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. vol. 4, pp. 500-2. Manuals of Islamic law invariably contain chapters on funeral law.

On Babi and Baha'i funeral practices, see Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, passim; Lights of Guidance, pp. 194-202; 'A. H. Israq-Khavari, Ganijinih, pp. 135-47; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 3, pp. 71-3, 102-4, 199-205; Per. Bayan 5:11-13, 8:11, 9:9. Unto Him Shall We Return collects Baha'i texts on death, including many prayers. Bishartu'n-Nur collects Persian and Arabic texts on death and the soul.[*]

..... [* Also see "Baha'i Burial and the Baha'I Funeral Service", Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1995, Baha'i World Centre.]{p279} {p280} {p281}

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Chapter 3. Rites of Wealth

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Inheritance

Sources:

General accounts of inheritance are found in Encyclopaedia Britannica 'Inheritance and Succession' and Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Inheritance', the former stressing legal aspects and the latter religious. Accounts of Islamic inheritance laws are found in Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1st edn., s.v. 'Mirath', Encyclopaaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Law (Muhammadan) 8. Law of Inheritance', and Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Islamic Law: Personal Law'. Summaries of the Baha'i law of inheritance are found in Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Kalq, vol. 3, pp. 205-25; and 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjinih 114-34. The theological aspects of inheritance are discussed in New Catholic Encyclopaedia, s.v. 'Inheritance (in the Bible)'.

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Huququ'llah

Sources:

Works on Shi'i law usually devote a chapter to the khums. This article is based on Da'iratu'l-Ma'arifu'sh-Shi'iyyih, s.v. 'Khums'; Biharu'l-Anvar 93:184-245; Muhammad-Kazim al-Tabataba'i al-Yazdi, Al-'Urwatu'l-Wuthqa (Beirut: al-Mu'assasat al-A'lami, 1984), vol. 2, pp. 366-407. Summaries available in English include [Abu'l-Qasim al-Khu'i], Islamic Practical Laws Explianed: Part One: Taharat (New York: World Shi'a Association, 2nd edn. 1980), pp. 346-69; and Khomeini, A Clarification of Questions ons. 1751-1852. See also Abdulaziz Sachedina, 'Al-Khums: The Fifth in the Imami Legal System', Journal of Near East Studies, 39 (1980), pp. 275-89.

For the Bab's laws concerning priceless objects and Huququ'llah, see Ar. And Per. Bayan 5:16 and 5:19. The latter section in the Persian Bayan appears to be missing several sentences of the introduction in the Persian edition. These are found in Nicolas's translation, vol. 3, pp. 52-3.

The main texts relating to Baha'i Huququ'llah are in Huququ'llah, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, rev. edn. 1989.), also published elsewhere in several languages, including Persian/Arabic in Pakistan. The Universal House of Justice has released two documents dated March 1987 by their Research Department entitled 'A Codification of the Law of Huququ'llah' and 'The Development of the Institution {p282} for the Huququ'llah' summarizing the regulations and history. These and the text of a speech given by the Trustee 'Ali Muhammad Varqa at the Baha'i International Convention, 1 May 1988, have been widely distributed through National Spiritual Assemblies.

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Chapter 4. The Journey to Meet the Holy

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Pilgrimage

Sources:

On pilgrimage in general, see Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Pilgrimage', especially 'An Overview'. Hastings, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Pilgrimage'. {p283}

On the Islamic hajj, see Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edn., s.v. 'Hadjdj'; Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Pilgrimage (Arabian and Mohammadan)'. Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Pilgrimage: Muslim Pilgrimage'. Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 93. For its history see F. E. Peters, The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). There is an extensive literature on the hajj, particularly memoirs of pilgrimages. Some are available in English, for example, the classic Richard F. Burton, Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El Medina and Mecca (1855.

On Babi pilgrimages, see Bayan (Arab. And Pers.) 4:13-5:2.]

Large numbers of Baha'i pilgrimage accounts exist, going back to the time of Baha'u'llah. Most are not published. They range from sketchy notes on talks and answers to questions to detailed descriptions of visits to Haifa and 'Akka. Some of the more interesting that are available in English are:

For the time of Baha'u'llah:

Haji Mirza Hibibu'llah Afnan, quoted in H. M. Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah, King of Glory, pp. 406-19; Haji Muhammad-Tahir Malmiri, in Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, passim. Perhaps Edward Browne's account of his visit to 'Akka should be included among these, as well, in ['Abdu'l-Baha], Traveller's Narraive, 1st edn., pp. xxvi-xliii, and Moojan Moen, The Babi and Baha'i Religions, pp. 225-32.

For the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha:

May Maxwell, An Early Pilgrimage (London: George Ronald, 1969). Thornton Chase, In Galilee (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1985).

For the time of Shoghi Effendi:

Ugo Giachery, Shoghi Effendi: Recollections (Oxford, George Ronald, 1973).

Several guides to the holy places visited on pilgrimage have been published: David S. Ruhe, Door of Hope: A Century of the Baha'i Faith in the Holy Land (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983). Baha'i Holy Places at the World Centre (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1968). Amakin-i-Tarikhiy-i-Baha'i dar Ard-i-Aqdas (Tehran: Lajniy-i-Milliy-i-Nashr-i-Athar-i-Amri, 128 BE). {p284}

The most important references to the laws and rules governing pilgrimage to the Holy Land are Kitab-i-Aqdas; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 3, pp. 137-45; Baha'u'llah, Iqtidarat, pp. 26-8. On visitation of other holy places, see Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 4, pp. 164-5; 'A. H. Israq-Khavari, Ganjinih, pp. 348-9.

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Tablets of Visitation

Sources:

On the Bab's Tablets of visitation, see Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 3, pp. 74-7. Browne describes several such Tablets: see Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 21 (1891) 896-902; 24 (1892) 445, 460, 474-6, 481-3, 896-902; 24 (1892) 445, 460, 474-6, 481-3. On Baha'u'llah's Tablets of visitation, see Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 4, pp. 77-85 and Baha'i World, vol. 18, p. 843, where a number of such Tablets are mentioned. The Arabic text of the Tablet of Visitation for the Shrine of Baha'u'llah is found in 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 227-30, and the English in Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 313, sect. 180. it can also be found in most Baha'i prayer books. The three Tablets from which its text are taken are in Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 4, pp. 77-8, Kitab-i-Mubin, p. 327 and 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, p. 31. See also 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganj-i-Shaygan, p. 207; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 222. The Arabic text of Baha'u'llah's Tablet of Visitation for the Imam Husayn is found in Bah'au'llah, Majmu'iy-i-Alwah-i-Mubarakih, pp. 202-11, 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih 231-44. See also Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p.219; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 3, pp. 100-3. The text of the Tablet of Visitation of 'Abdu'l-Baha is found in 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 529-30. The English version was translated by Shoghi Effendi and is found in most English Baha'i prayer books. A number of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Tablets of visitation are in Muhammad-'Ali Faizi, 'Abdu'l-Baha, passim. {p285}

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[Bold Chapter 5. Understanding Sacred Space

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Baha'i Shrines and Holy Places

Sources:

On shrines and holy places in general see Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Shrines', 'Sacred Space.'

{nd}

Baha'i Cemeteries

Sources:

On the Nabi Salih cemetery see Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 188-9. David S. Ruhe, Door of Hope, pp. 80-1. Guide to Acre, p. 70.

On Muslim cemetery in 'Akka and the Baha'i cemetery in Haifa, see David S. Ruhe, Door of Hope, pp. 81, 181-3, 201.

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Chapter 6. Cave, House and Mountain

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Sar-Galu, Iraqi Kurdistan

Sources:

Report of David S. Toeg to Shoghi Effendi, 14 December 1940 (also summarized in Baha'i News 145, August 1941, p. 11). Traveller's Narrative, p. 38. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 120-4. {p286} Nabil-i-Zarandi, Dawn-Breakers, p. 585. H. M. Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 392. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 250. H. M. Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah, King of Glory, p. 119. Lady Blomfield, The Chosen Highway, p. 256. Map: Army map Service, Series 1301-1, No. 138-D (Sulaymaniya).

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The Most Great House in Baghdad

Sources:

For the spiritual station of the Most Great House, see Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 2, pp. 109-13; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 3, p. 135; vol. 4, pp. 2, 427-8; Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 75; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 411; Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 111-14, sect. LVII; Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, pp. 175-7, sect. CV.

For the history of the House in the time of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, see: Baha'u'llah, Athar-i-Qalam-i-A'la, vol. 2, pp. 5, 100; vol. 6, p. 137; Lady Blomfield, The Chosen Highway, p. 47; Moojan Momen, The Babi and Baha'i Religions, p. 265; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 110-11, 129-30, 134-6, 152, 155, 176-8, 300, 307; Baha'i World, vol. 2, p. 68; 'Huququ'llah' p. 31; Khatirat-i-Mu'ayyad, pp. 108-9; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Muhadirat, p. 217; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Rahiq-i-Makhtum, vol. 1, pp. 205-6; Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 2, pp. 211-12.

For details of the legal struggle over ownership of the House, see: Baha'i World, vol. 3, pp. 33-7, 50-5, 198-203; vol. 4, pp. 97-9, 237-47; vol. 5, pp. 31-3, 351-9; Baha'i News, vol. 9, p. 1; vol. 11, insert, vol. 14, p. 2; vol. 15, p. 1; vol. 20, p. 2; vol. 30, p. 3; vol. 31, p. 6; vol. 32, pp. 5-7; vol. 41, p. 6; Ma'idiy-i-Asmani vol. 5, pp. 93-6; Ruhiyyih Rabbani, Priceless Pearl, pp. 54, 71, 94-9; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Qamus-i-Tawqi', vol. 1, pp. 294-9; vol. 2, pp. 313-19.

Shoghi Effendi's letters of the time contain many references to the legal struggle for the House. See Baha'i Administration, pp. 76, 94-5, 99-100, 106, 127, 157-8, 164-5, 175-80; Citadel of Faith, p. 133; Dawn of a New Era [sic - Day], pp. 10, 22-3; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 330, 340, 344-5; Messages to the Baha'i World, p. 25; Tawqi'at, vol. 1, pp. 266, 274, 279, 296; vol. 2, pp. 105, 192; Unfolding Destiny, pp. 37-9, 44-6, 60, 85.

For a plan and pictures of the Most Great House, see Baha'i World, vol. 6, p. 437 and vol. 3, p. 203; vol. 5, p. 136 respectively. {p287}

Chapter 7. The Realm of Mystical Imagination

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Two Mystical Journeys: The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys

Sources:

On 'Attar's life and works see Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edn., s.v. "Attar'; Encyclopaedia of Religion, Encyclopaedia Iranica and E. G. Browne, Literary History of the Persians, vol. 2. pp. 506-15. Three of his chief works are available in English: The Conference of the Birds, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), a charming verse translation; The Ilahinama; or, Book of God, trans. John A. Boyle (Manchester, 1976); Muslim Saints and Mystics trans. John A. Boyle (Manchester, 1976); Muslim Saints and Mystics (Tadhkiratu'l-Awliya'), abridged trans. A. J. Arberry (London, 1964). Works in other languages are cited in encyclopedia articles mentioned above, although Helmut Ritter, Das Meer der Seele (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), a monumental study of 'Attar's intellectual and spiritual world, must be mentioned.

The Seven Valleys: A Popular work among Baha'is, this little book has often been published and translated. The earliest editions appeared in Bombay in 1312/1894-5 and 1331/1912-13 and in an undated compilation in Cairo. The current Persian edition is in Baha'u'llah, Athar-i-Qalam-i-A'la, vol. 3, pp. 92-137, which also contains several other mystical and poetic works of Baha'u'llah. The Seven Valleys first appeared in English in 1906 in a translation by Ali Kuli Khan. In 1945 he and his daughter Marzieh Gail published a revised translation. This translation with minor revisions has often been reprinted since. The French Baha'i orientalist Hippolyte Dreyfus translated the work into French directly from Persian. The {p288} work is translated into the major languages of Western Europe and into many other languages throughout the world. For Enlish translation, see Baha'u'llah, The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, pp. 1-43. (The pagination of the current English edition differs from earlier editions.) See also Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bah'au'llah, vol. 1, pp. 96-101.

The Four Valleys: The text is found in Baha'u'llah, Athar-i-Qalam-i-A'la, vol. 3, pp. 138-57 and the translation in Baha'u'llah, The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, pp. 45-65. See also Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 122, 140; Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 1, p. 104; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganj-i-Shaygan, p. 18.

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The Visionary Allegories: The Maiden and the Youth

Sources:

The text of Lawh-i-Huriyyih is found in Baha'u'llah, Athar-i-Qalam-i-A'la, 4:342-50. A misleading and incomplete translation is found in Baha'i [sic - Bahai] Scriptures. See also Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 1, p. 125; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 140; H. M. Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah, King of Glory, p. 167. On the Tablet of the Deathless Youth, see for the text 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 92-9. Baha'i World, vol. 14, pp. 630-1. There is no published English translation. Munirih Khanum, Munirih Khanum (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1987), p. 51. Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 3, pp. 211, 213-14. Lady Blomfield, The Chosen Highway, p. 89.

Tablet of the Holy Mariner (Langenhein: Baha'i Verlag, 1985) contains a handsome illuminated edition of the original text and the English translation of Shoghi Effendi. The English text is also in Writings of Baha'u'llah and Baha'i Prayers (England). See also Baha'i World, vol. 14, pp. 625-6; H. M. Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah, King of Gory, p. 154; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 140, 147; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganj-i-Shaygan, pp. 19-20; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 5, pp. 299-300.

the text of the Tablet of the Vision is in 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 16-20. There is no translation. See also Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 3, pp. 223-4; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 221; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganj-i-Shaygan, pp. 149-50. {p289}

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The Mystic Temple: Suratu'l-Haykal

Sources:

The text has been published at least three times: Baha'u'llah, Athar-i-Qalam-i-A'la, 1:2-49, 4:268-300 and Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Mubin, Tehran, 120 B.E./1963, pp. 2-38. The early English translation made by Anton Haddad is Surat'ul-Hykl: Sura of the Temple (Chicago: Behais Supply and Publishing Board, 1900). Short quotations are translated by Shoghi Effendi in The Promised Day is Come, pp. 47-8, World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 109-10, 138-9, 169; God Passes By, pp. 102, 212.[*] See also Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 3, pp. 133-46. Research Department, Baha'i World Centre, 'Questions about the Suratu'l-Haykal', unpublished memorandum, 5 September 1993. Khazeh Fananapazir, personal communication.

..... [* The entire Tablet is included in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, published by the Baha'i World Centre in 2002.]

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Chapter 8. The Baha'i Calendar

Sources:

For convenient accounts of calendars in general, see Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. 'Calendar'; Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Calendars'; Encyclopaedia of

Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Calendars'; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Muhadirat, pp. 609-50. For Iranian calendars, see Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. 'Calendar'. For the Islamic calendar and religious year, see the above and Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Islamic Religious Year' and Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Festivals and Fasts (Muslim)'. For enthusiasts, the classic medieval Islamic {p290} work on calendars in use in and around the Middle East is by the eleventh century Iranian scientist al-Biruni, Chronology of the Oriental Peoples, trans. E. Sachau (London, 1879). General accounts of the Badi' calendar are found in Baha'i World 18:598-601, Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 3, pp. 1-20, 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjinih, pp. 36-43.

{nd}

The meaning and symbolism of month and year names

Sources:

Alif: Annemarie Schimmel, The Triumphal Sun, pp. 163-4. Per. Bayan 2:1, 2:4, 6:4. Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 1, p. 178. 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Da'iratu'l-Ma'arif, vol. 3, p. 332; vol. 5, pp. 587, 589; vol. 15, p. 2367. Ba': Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 2, pp. 3-6. 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Da'iratu'l-Ma'arif, vol. 3, pp. 333-5. Per Bayan 2:17. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 257. Vav: 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Da'iratu'l-Ma'arif, vol. 3, p. 392.

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Chapter 9. Baha'i Festivals

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The Nineteen Day Feast

Sources:

Baha'i Meetings, pp. 17-33. Lights of Guidance, pp. 239-46. 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjinih, pp. 156-8. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Hospitality', 'Feasting.' Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Hospitality.'

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Naw-Ruz

Sources:

On the history of Naw-Ruz and Iranian customs connected with it, see Encyclopaedia of Religion, s.v. 'Nawruz', and Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edn., s.v. 'Naw Ruz'. Shi'i traditions connected with Naw-Ruz are found in Biharu'l-Anvar, vol. 56, pp. 91-143. For Babi and Baha'i statements on Naw-Ruz see Per. Bayan 5:3 and 6:14; Days to Remember, pp. 15-23; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjinih, pp. 34, 52; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 340-54; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 3, pp. 1-5; Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, {p291} passim; Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, pp. 67-9, sect. XLVI; Star of the West, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 4; vol. 7, no. 1, p. 1; vol. 9,

no. 1, pp. 1, 8.

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Ayyam-i-Ha

Sources:

Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 4, pp. 5-6. Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Aqdas, para. 16. Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 5, p. 248.

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The Birthday of the Bab

Sources:

Days to Remember, pp. 113-22. 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 12-44. Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 4, pp. 40-4. Nabil-i-Zarandi, Dawn-Breakers, pp. 271, n. 1. Tarikh-i-Samandar, pp. 78, 346-7. Abbas Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal, pp. 110, 305-6. H. M. Balyuzi, The Bab, Herald of the Days, pp. 32-3.

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The Declaration of the Bab

Sources:

The best known account of the Declaration of the Bab is Nabil-i-Zarandi, Dawn-Breakers, ch. 3, which is in turn the basis of Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 5-7, and H. M. Balyuzi, The Bab, Herald of the Days, ch. 1. Another version available in English is Mirza Husayn Hamadani, New History of the Bab, pp. 31-9. A detailed discussion of the sources and historical problems is found in Abbas Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal, pp. 146-74. Collections of Tablets and materials bearing on the Declaration of the Bab are found in 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 92-186 and Days to Remember, pp. 45-64. See also Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 3, pp. 6-8; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjinih, pp. 369-87; and 'Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 138-9.

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The Martyrdom of the Bab

Sources:

'The Bab': Accounts of His Martyrdom', World Order, vol. 8, no. 1 (Fall 1973), pp. 6-32, collects six versions, four translated into English for the first time, including Gobineau, Sipihr, Kazem Bek and Za'imu'd-Dawlih. The best known Baha'i account is Nabil-i-Zarandi, Dawn-Breakers, ch. 23, upon which most later Baha'i accounts are based. Muslim accounts are usually based on Sipihr, Nasikhu't-Tavarikh, vol. 3, pp. 99-101. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, ch. 4, add theological interpretation to Nabil's information. Moojan Momen, Babi and Baha'i Religions, pp. 77-82, collects the diplomatic reports. Other versions

are H. M. Balyuzi, The Bab, Herald of the Day of {p292} Days, ch. 12; 'Abdu'l-Baha, Traveller's Narrative, pp. 25-8; and Mirza Husayn Hamadani, New History of the Bab, pp. 284-312, 382-3. Abbas Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal, pp. 385-405, is the most recent and detailed study. For collections of writings related to the martyrdom of the Bab, see 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 187-245, and Days to Remember, pp. 93-113. For the Tablet of visitation for 'the place where this Tree was struck', see E. G. Browne, 'A Catalogue and Description of 27 Babi MSS', Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 24 (1892), ms. BBF 3.65, and Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne, p. 400. Photographs of the scene of the Bab's martyrdom are found in Nabil-i-Zarandi, Dawn-Breakers, p. 511, and Baha'i World, vol. 3, p. 67. A drawing, not authentic, of the Bab's martyrdom comes from an early Armenian work.

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The Birthday of Baha'u'llah

Sources:

Days to Remember, pp. 123-32. 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 45-91.

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The Festival of Ridvan

Sources:

Collections of material on Ridvan are found in 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 246-339; Days to Remember, pp. 25-43; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 3, pp. 6-10, 29-39; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Asraru'l-Athar-i-Khususi, vol. 4, pp. 21-4. Accounts of the events of Ridvan are found in Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 146-58; H. M. Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah, King of Glory, pp. 154-8, 168-76; Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, 1:257-82; Myron Phelps, The Master in 'Akka, pp. 35-41; Lady Blomfield, Chosen Highway, pp. 56-8, 122-4. For photographs of the Garden of Ridvan in Baghdad, see Baha'i World, vol. 2, p. 108, 111; vol. 5, pp. 81, 146, 369.

Lawh-i-Ayyub: text: 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 262-304. For the Tablet of Ridvan, see 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 246-50.

Hur-i-'Ujab: text see 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 251-4. Adib Taherzadeh, Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 1, p. 281.

'The Divine Springtime is come...': This Tablet is very well known and is quoted in a number of places. See 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 254-61; Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, {p293} pp. 27-35, sect. XIV; Days to Remember, pp. 27.31.

'When the gladness of God seized all else...': text: 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 305-12.

Other Tablets and talks: Collections of such material may be found in 'A. H.

Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 313-21, 324-31; Days to Remember, pp. 31-4; Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 3, pp. 29-39.

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The Ascension of Baha'u'llah

Sources:

The main source for the circumstances of Baha'u'llah's death is Nabil's account, published originally in Egypt and later in 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 399-407, and summarized in Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, ch. 13. Texts relating to the holy day are found in 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 355-426, which includes a selection of poems and eulogies, and Days to Remember, pp. 65-91. See also H. M. Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah, King of Glory, ch. 42, and H. M. Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Baha, ch. 3. Giachery, Shoghi Effendi: A Recollection, pp. 22-4, contains an account of the observance of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah in Bahji in 1952. 'Abdu'l-Baha's first message to the Baha'is is found in Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 5.

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The Day of the Covenant

Sources:

Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 4, pp. 7-8, 16-18. Days to Remember, pp. 157-65.

{nd}

The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha

Sources:

Lady Blomfield and Shoghi Effendi, The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust), first published in 1922, is the primary source on the last days, death and funeral of 'Abdu'l-Baha. H. M. Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 452-83, has some additional details. Other accounts are Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 309-20; and Moojan Momen, Babi and Baha'i Religions, pp. 347-9. Readings for commemorative meetings are found in Days to Remember, pp. 137-56, and 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ayyam-i-Tis'ih, pp. 427-550. {p294} {p295}

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Appendix 1. Two Baha'i Legal Texts

The Kitab-i-Aqdas

Manuscripts:

The original manuscript in Baha'u'llah's hand is at the Baha'i World Centre. The first page of a manuscript in the hand of 'Abdu'l-Baha is in the frontispiece of Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 3. Less authoritative manuscripts of the Aqdas are common. Several pages of one

manuscript are reproduced in Miller, The Baha'i Faith.

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Editions:

Arabic editions under Baha'i auspices: Kitab-i-Aqdas (Bombay, Cairo, Tehran: n.p., n.d.) 187 pp.; Aqdas-i-Buzurg (Bombay: n.p., 1314 AH), containing several other important Arabic Tablets. A Persian counterpart of the 1992 English translation was published by the Baha'i World Centre (1996); an Arabic translation and commentary is forthcoming.

Non-Baha'i editions: Kitab-i-Aqdas, ed. Kh. A. Enayat (1st edn.; Baghdad: Maktabatu'l-Amrikaniyah, 1349/1931; 'Al-Aqdas', in Al-Babiyun wa'l-Baha'iyun (Sidon, 1969?), pp. 150-72.

The legal passages are collected with supplementary material from Questions and Answers and other Tablets in 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganjinih, and Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 4. The messages to kings and rulers may be found in Baha'u'llah, Athar-i-Qalam-i-A'la, Alvah-i-Nazilih Khitab bi-Muluk va-Ru'asay-i-Ard. [e-text note: These messages to the kings and rulers may now be found in English in Summons of the Lord of Hosts.]

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Translations:

Shoghi Effendi translated most of the passages of general interest, comprising perhaps a third of the whole Kitab-i-Aqdas, passim). Since then the remainder of the work has been translated under the auspices of the House of Justice. Passages addressed to kings and rulers may be found in The Promised Day Is Come and the Proclamation of Baha'u'llah. Anton Haddad translated the entire work into English in 1900 but his translation was never published although it enjoyed considerable circulation in typescript in the early American community and is still occasionally found. Non-Baha'i translations include Earl E. Elder and William McE. Miller, Al-Kitab al-Aqdas or the Most Holy Book (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1961), 74 pp., reprinted in Miller, The Baha'i Faith, an inept and tendentious version, and a Russian translation by Alexander Tumanski, Kitabe Akdes (Zapiski Imperatorskoy Academii Nauk S. {p296} Peterburg [Memoires de L'Academie Imperiale des Sciences de St Petersbourg] 8th ser., vol. 3, no. 6, 1899) prepared with the help of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl-i-Gulpaygani.

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Related Works:

As a preliminary to a full annotated translation of the Aqdas, Shoghi Effendi began work on a synopsis and codification of the laws of the Aqdas. On the basis of his outline and preliminary notes, the Universal House of Justice completed the work and published it as A Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitab-i-Aqdas in 1973 in fulfilment of a goal of the Nine Year Plan. This work contains all the passages translated by the Guardian, a

detailed outline of the contents of the Aqdas and Questions and Answers, and explanatory notes. This work is incorporated into the 1992 English edition. Other works discussing the Aqdas in detail and not mentioned above are:

Works on the Aqdas: For detailed summaries of the contents of the Aqdas see Shoghi Effendi, God Psses By, pp. 213-16; and Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 3, chaps. 13-17. Two short monographs on the Aqdas are Badi'u'llah Farid, 'Kitab-i-Aqdas' (Tehran: Mu'assasiy-i-Matbu'at-i-Amri, 130 BE), 53 pp., and Soheil Bushrui, The Style of the Kitab-i-Aqdas: Aspects of the Sublime (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 1995), 74 pp.

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Lawh-i-Tarazat

Sources:

Texts and translations. The Tazarat has been published many times, notably in the early compilation Ishraqat, pp. 147-60, the originally untitled compilation of Baha'u'llah's writings lithographed from a manuscript of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin written in 1893 (pp. 182-201), and the modern Persian edition of Tablets of Baha'u'llah. It was first translated into English by Ali Kuli Khan in Tablet of Tarazat (1906), reprinted several times, notably in Baha'i World Faith, pp. 166-72, which, however, omits the address to the Azalis. The modern authorized translation is contained in Tablets of Baha'u'llah, pp. 31-44, sect. 4, which incorporates several passages translated by Shoghi Effendi. There were early translations into Arabic, Urdu and German. There are also recent translations into other languages based on the English version. The Tablet is discussed in Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 4, pp. 168-76 and 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganj-i-Shaygan, pp. 158-9. {p297}

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Appendix 2. Women and Baha'i Law

Sources:

Compilation of the Universal House of Justice, Women: Extracts from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, rev. edn. 1990). Linda and John Walbridge, 'Baha'i Laws on the Status of Men', World Order, vol. 19, nos. 1-2 (Fall/Winter 1984-5), pp. 25-36.

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Polygyny

Sources:

A detailed but dated account of polygamy is found in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. 'Concubinage'. An interesting account of temporary marriage in modern Shi'ism is Shahla Haeri, Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'i Iran (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989). For Baha'i law on polygamy see

Fadil-i-Mazandarani, Amr va-Khalq, vol. 4, pp. 173-81. For a Christian criticism of Baha'i law and practice relating to polygyny, see Samuel Wilson, Bahaism and its Claims (New York, 1915), pp. 158-65.

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Appendix 3. Allah Abha

[no comments or source materials - endnotes only] {p298}

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Appendix 4. Apostasy

[no comments or source materials - endnote only]

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Appendix 5. The Exalted Letters

Sources:

The text is in Bisharatu'n-Nur, pp. 54-95. There is no translation. See also 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Ganj-i-Shaygan, p. 25-7; Baha'i World, vol. 14, pp. 628-9; 'A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, Da'iratu'l-Ma'arif, vol. 13, pp. 2039-40; Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, vol. 1, pp. 122-5; Ma'idiy-i-Asmani, vol. 2, p. 12.

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