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Bab, Martyrdom of the (July 9)

The yearly commemoration of the Martyrdom of the Bab is one of the nine major Baha'i holy days on which work is suspended. Observed by Baha'is in the Middle

East on 28 Sha'ban—in accordance with the Islamic lunar calendar—the occasion

is annually observed on July 9 throughout the rest of the Baha'i world.

For many

participants, it is a deeply moving experience.

Sayyid 'Ali-Muhammad of Shiraz (1819–1850)—known by his spiritual title as

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“the Bab” (“the Gate”) and regarded as the precursor and herald of

Mirza H.usayn-

'Ali Nuri, known as Baha'u'llah (the “Splendor” or

“Glory of God,” 1817–1892)—

was martyred on July 9, 1850, in Tabriz, Persia (now Iran). The circumstances of

the Bab's martyrdom, and its subsequent commemoration as a Baha'i holy day, will

be discussed below.

The Bab founded the 19th-century movement generally known as Babism, an independent (albeit short-lived) religion that clearly broke from its parent religion,

Persian (i.e., Twelver Shi'i) Islam. As Orientalist Edward G. Browne observed regarding the Babi phenomenon, “whatever its actual destiny may be, is of that

stuff whereof world-religions are made.” As Browne predicted, the Babi religion

emerged as a “new world-religion” through its eventual transformation into what

is now known as the Baha'i Faith.

While the Babi and Baha'i religions are distinct, they are intimately related both

historically and doctrinally. The writings of the Bab, for instance, are considered

sacred scripture by all Baha'is. A number of the Bab's religious laws were adopted

and adapted by Baha'u'llah, as was the Badi' calendar (a solar calendar of

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19 months of 19 days, each named after godly attributes to foster goodly virtues, which the Bab had created. Because the Bab and Baha'u'llah are so historically and doctrinally related, they are actually called the "Twin Founders" of the Baha'i Faith.

According to Armin Eschraghi, the Bab established a new, post-Islamic faith that fulfilled all the criteria of an independent religion. These include a new founder, newly revealed scriptures, a new set of metaphysical and theological teachings distinct from those of Islam, new religious laws and principles. In revealing his new code of laws, the Persian Bayan (1848), the Bab intended to pave the way for the advent of the Promised One; to provoke the clerical establishment and shatter the foundations of their often-abused institutionalized authority; and to prove the independence of his own religion as distinct from Islam. The Bab declared that he was a messenger from God sent to proclaim the imminent advent of one greater than himself. Religious and state persecution fell upon his followers, leading to the torture and religious martyrdom of thousands. In July 1848, the Bab was summoned to Tabriz to stand trial before Muslim clerics.

Ordered by H.aji Mirza Aqasi, prime minister of Persia, the trial was doubtless intended to publicly discredit the Bab. Presiding over the trial was the young Crown Prince, who later became the reigning monarch of Persia, Nasiri'd-Din

Shah. The Bab was pressured to recant his writings and claims. Instead, the Bab openly proclaimed that he was the promised Qa'im, the expected deliverer in Shi'i Islam (and, as the Mahdi, by Sunni and Shi'i Muslims alike). To subject him to public ridicule by exposing his supposed ignorance, the Bab was then questioned about abstruse points of Arabic grammar, theology, and religious law. Throughout the course of the trial, the Bab staunchly refused to renounce his messianic claims and writings. After the trial reached its unsuccessful conclusion, the Bab was bastinadoed and again imprisoned. In their verdict, the clergy pronounced the Bab insane, thinking that a declaration of madness would quell the religious furor that the Bab had created. However, a series of Babi defensive clashes with the attacking state

militias at Shaykh Tabarsi, Nayriz, and Zanjan persuaded the new prime minister Mirza Taqi Khan that the unrest would endure unless the Bab was put to death. The prime minister therefore ordered the execution of the Bab, who was then brought to Tabriz. When, at the house of Mulla Muhammad Mamaqani, the Bab still would not recant his claims, a leader of the Tabriz Shaykhis, Mamaqani, issued the Bab's death warrant by public execution at an army barracks in Tabriz. Imprisoned with the Bab in the barracks cell were his secretaries, the two brothers Siyyid Hasan and Siyyid H.usayn Yazdi, along with a young Babi mulla of Tabriz, Mirza Muhammad-Ali Zunuzi, who was called Anis ("Companion") by the Bab. Arrested for openly proclaiming the Bab's new religion, the young Anis refused to recant and so was sentenced to death with the Bab. The Bab chose Anis to die with him together as companion martyrs in a single execution, rather than in separate executions.

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At noon, the Bab and Anis were brought out into the barracks square, and, bound by ropes, suspended from a spike driven into the wall of the barracks. The surrounding rooftops were thronged with an estimated 10,000 onlookers. The Russian Armenian Sam Khan commanded the Christian Bahaduran Regiment, which was ordered to carry out the execution. Although accounts of the Bab's execution vary in details, all agree that, after thick smoke—from the volley of 750 muskets—had cleared, the Bab had vanished, with Anis standing before the astonished multitude, unhurt. The Bab's escape from the first volley of musket fire is beyond doubt, as his ropes were cut by the shots. One witness to this extraordinary event, Sir Justin Shiel, Queen Victoria's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, in Tehran on July 22, 1850, records:

The founder of this sect has been executed at Tabreez. He was killed by a volley of musketry, and his death was on the point of giving his religion a lustre which would have largely increased his proselytes. When the smoke and dust cleared away after the volley, Bab was not to be seen, and the populace pro-

claimed that he had ascended to the skies. The balls had broken the ropes by which he was bound, but he was dragged from the recess where after some search he was discovered and shot. His death, according to the belief of his disciples, will make no difference as Bab must always exist. (Momen, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844–1944*, 78)

A frantic search ensued, and the Bab was found back in his cell, evidently completing dictation to his secretary that was earlier interrupted. Soldiers swiftly cleared the barracks square, and the Bab was once more suspended by ropes for execution, with Anis placed in front of the Bab. But Sam Khan refused to order his troops to fire again and so the Muslim Nadiri Regiment was summoned. On the second attempt, the Bab and Anis were instantly killed. Their bodies, in fact, were fused together by the sheer number of bullets that struck them. Despite the claims of some two dozen Babis in their rival bids to succeed the Bab, the majority of his coreligionists, the Babis, turned to Baha'u'llah, who effectively led the Babi community until such time as he formally established the Baha'i religion in 1863 by his announcement that he was the messianic figure the Bab foretold, although the designation “people of Baha” (i.e., followers of Baha'u'llah, the Baha'is), was not current until March 1866. In 1873, Baha'u'llah subsequently incorporated a number of the laws of the Bab, in modified form, in his book of laws, the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* (“The Most Holy Book”). Although not one of the holy days mentioned in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, the martyrdom of the Bab was observed by Baha'u'llah. Two practices are associated with the observance of the Martyrdom of the Bab. First, commemorations should take place at noon, the time of the Bab's execution. Second, the “Tablet of Visitation”—a special commemorative prayer—is usually recited. Typically, it is Nabil's narrative of the events surrounding the martyrdom of the Bab that is read

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on this occasion, although it is not a requirement to do so. Nabil's narrative, which describes the prophetic passion of the Bab's martyrdom in detail and is based on

eyewitness accounts, is remarkably objective in style, yet never fails to stir deep emotions in the hearts of participants in this solemnly commemorative holy day.
Christopher Buck

See also 'Abdu'l-Baha, Ascension of; Ayyam-i-Ha (Baha'i Intercalary Days); Bab, Festival of the Birth of the; Bab, Festival of the Declaration of the; Baha'i Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Baha'i Faith; Baha'i Fast; Baha'u'llah, Ascension of; Baha'u'llah, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Ruz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Baha'i); Race Unity Day; Ridvan, Festival of; World Religion Day.

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Babaji Commemoration Day (July 25)

In his autobiography, Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952) introduced his readers to a mysterious Indian saint known only as Mahavatar Babaji. Yogananda, one of the founders of Hinduism in North America, had been the student of Sri 966 About the Editor and Contributors

The Contributors

MARTIN BAUMANN is professor of the Study of Religions at the University of Lucerne in Switzerland. His research interests focus on religious pluralism and public space, migration and religion, diaspora studies, and Hindu and Buddhist traditions in the West. He has published on these topics in both English and German, and his most recent coedited book is *Eine Schweiz—viele Religionen* (2007).

JAMES A. BEVERLEY is professor of Christian thought and ethics at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, Canada, and associate director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion. He is a specialist on new religious movements and the relationship of Christianity to other world religions. He is author and editor of 10 books, including *Islam* (2011), *Islamic Faith in America* (2011), and *Nelson's Illustrated Guide to Religions* (2009).

CHRISTOPHER BUCK is a Pennsylvania attorney and independent scholar. He holds a PhD from the University of Toronto (1996) and JD from Cooley Law School (2006). He previously taught at Michigan State University (2000–2004), Quincy University (1999–2000), Millikin University (1997–1999), and Carleton University (1994–1996). His publications include: *Religious Myths and Visions of America: How Minority Faiths Redefined America's World Role* (2009); *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (2005); *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha'i Faith* (1999); *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Baha'u'llah's Kitab-i Iqan* (1995, 2004), various book chapters, encyclopedia articles, and journal articles.

EDWARD ALLEN IRONS is the director of the Hong Kong Institute for Culture, Religion, and Commerce, a religious studies research facility concentrating on Hong Kong and Chinese cultural studies, Chinese religions, and the interaction of cultural and religious issues with commerce in contemporary society.

CONSTANCE A. JONES is a professor of transformative studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco. She received her PhD in sociology from Emory University and was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship at the Center for the Study of New Religious Movements of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Beginning with her doctoral dissertation on the caste system in India, she has pursued a lifelong interest in the cultures and religions of the East. As a Fulbright scholar in India, she taught at Banaras Hindu University and Vasanta College and conducted research at the Krishnamurti Study Center, Varanasi. She is a member of the International Advisory Board for “The Complete Teachings of J. Krishnamurti, 1910–1986.” Her publications include: the Encyclo-

pedia of Hinduism (with James D. Ryan, 2007); The Legacy of G. I. Gurdjieff

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