

was executed in 1850. Large-scale persecutions of his adherents, the Babis, followed.

One of the Bab's earliest disciples and strongest exponents was Mirza Hosayn 'Ali Nuri, who had assumed the name Baha'u'llah when he renounced his social standing and joined the Babis. Baha'u'llah was arrested in 1852 and jailed in Tehran, where he became aware that he was the prophet and messenger of God whose coming had been predicted by the Bab. He was released in 1853 and exiled to Baghdad, where his leadership revived the Babi community. In 1863, shortly before being moved by the Ottoman government to Constantinople (now Istanbul), Baha'u'llah declared to his fellow Babis that he was the messenger of God foretold by the Bab. An overwhelming majority of Babis acknowledged his claim and thenceforth became known as Baha'is. Baha'u'llah was subsequently confined by the Ottomans in Adrianople (now Edirne, Turkey) and then in Acre in Palestine (now in Israel).

Before Baha'u'llah died in 1892, he appointed his eldest son, 'Abd al-Baha' (1844–1921), to be the leader of the Baha'i community and the authorized interpreter of his teachings. 'Abd al-Baha' actively administered the movement's affairs and spread the faith to North America, Europe, and other continents. He appointed his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897–1957), his successor.

The Baha'i Faith underwent a rapid expansion beginning in the 1960s, and by the early 21st century it had more than 180 national spiritual assemblies (national governing bodies) and several thousand local spiritual assemblies. After Islamic fundamentalists came to power in Iran in 1979, the 300,000 Baha'is there were persecuted by the government.

Practices

The writings and spoken words of the Bab, Baha'u'llah, and 'Abd al-Baha' form the sacred literature of the Baha'i Faith. Membership in the Baha'i community is open to all who profess faith in Baha'u'llah and accept his teachings. There are no initiation ceremonies, no sacraments, and no clergy. Every Baha'i, however, is under the spiritual obligation to pray daily; to abstain totally from narcotics, alcohol, or any other substances that affect the mind; to practice monogamy; to obtain the consent of parents to marriage; and to attend the Nineteen Day Feast on the first day of each month of the Baha'i calendar. If capable, those between the ages of 15 and 70 are required to fast 19 days a year, going without food or drink from sunrise to sunset. The Nineteen Day Feast, originally instituted by the Bab, brings together the Baha'is of a given locality for prayer, the reading of scriptures, the discussion of community activities, and the enjoyment of one another's company. The feasts are designed to ensure universal participation in the affairs of the community and the cultivation of the spirit of brotherhood and fellowship.

As of 2024 there were 14 Baha'i houses of worship: in Australia, Cambodia, Chile, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Germany, India, Kenya,

Panama, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the United States, Uganda, and Vanuatu. In the temples there is no preaching; services consist of recitation of the scriptures of all religions.

The Baha'is use a calendar, established by the Bab and confirmed by Baha'u'llah, in which the year is divided into 19 months of 19 days each, with the addition of 4 intercalary days (5 in leap years). The year begins on the first day of spring, March 21, which is one of several holy days in the Baha'i calendar.

Organization

The Baha'i community is governed according to general principles proclaimed by Baha'u'llah and through institutions created by him that were elaborated and expanded on by 'Abd al-Baha'. The governance of the Baha'i community begins on the local level with the election of a local spiritual assembly. The electoral process excludes parties or factions, nominations, and campaigning for office. The local spiritual assembly has jurisdiction over all local affairs of the Baha'i community. On the national scale, each year Baha'is elect delegates to a national convention that elects a national spiritual assembly with jurisdiction over Baha'is throughout an entire country. All national spiritual assemblies of the world periodically constitute themselves an international convention and elect a supreme governing body known as the Universal House of Justice. This body applies the laws promulgated by Baha'u'llah and legislates on matters not covered in the sacred texts. The seat of the Universal House of Justice is in Haifa, Israel, in the immediate vicinity of the shrines of the Bab and 'Abd al-Baha' and near the Shrine of Baha'u'llah at Bahji, near Acre.

There also exist in the Baha'i Faith appointive institutions, such as the Hands of the Cause of God and the continental counselors. The members of the Hands of the Cause of God were appointed by Baha'u'llah and Shoghi Effendi. The continental counselors are appointed by the Universal House of Justice. The primary functions of both groups are to propagate the Baha'i Faith and protect the community.

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