

Glossary : Baha'i worldview traditions

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[In-depth subject knowledge essay](#)

[Glossary](#)

Abdu'l-Bahá

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Abdul Baha, Abdu l Baha

DEFINITION: A title meaning “Servant of Bahá’u’lláh”. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844-1921) was the eldest son of Bahá’u’lláh, and his appointed successor. Bahá’u’lláh instructed all after his passing to turn to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, not only as the authorized interpreter of the Bahá’í Writings but also as the perfect exemplar of the Faith’s spirit and teachings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá devoted his ministry to furthering his Father’s faith and to promoting the ideals of peace and unity. He encouraged the establishment of local Bahá’í institutions, and guided nascent educational, social and economic initiatives.

Báb

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Bab

DEFINITION: An Arabic title meaning “Gate”. The Báb was born Siyyid Ali-Muhammad (1819-1850). Bahá’ís believe that the Báb was a Manifestation of God, whose principal purpose was to prepare the way for the coming of Bahá’u’lláh. Both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh suffered years of persecution, imprisonment and banishment. The Báb was publicly martyred in Tabriz, Iran.

Bahá’í

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Bahai, Baha’i, Baha i

DEFINITION: A religious worldview followed by the Bahá’í community. The Arabic word “Bahá” means the glory, splendour and light of God but it is usually translated simply as “Glory”. A Bahá’í is a follower of Bahá’u’lláh. Bahá’ís usually refer to their religion as the Bahá’í Faith rather than just “Bahá’í”.

Bahá'u'lláh

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Bahauallah, Bahau llah, Baha u llah

DEFINITION: An Arabic title meaning “Glory of God”. Bahá'u'lláh was born Mirza Husayn-Ali. The Bahá'í Faith is based on the claim of Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) to be the Promised One of all religions. Bahá'u'lláh spent much of His life in exile and imprisonment, his final incarceration being in the Ottoman Empire's prison city of Akká, which is now in northern Israel.

Dispensation

DEFINITION: Bahá'ís use the word in the sense of a religious system prevailing at a particular time. Bahá'ís believe that the coming of a Manifestation of God initiates a new dispensation, which lasts until the appearance of the next Manifestation.

Heroic Age

DEFINITION: The period from the Declaration of the Báb in 1844 to the death in 1921 of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the eldest son and appointed successor of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'ís then entered the Formative Age in 1921, during which they expect the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to progress towards its maturity, known as the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation.

Local Spiritual Assembly

DEFINITION: At the local level, the affairs of the Bahá'í community are administered by the Local Spiritual Assembly. Each Local Assembly consists of nine members who are chosen in annual elections (for details of elections, see “National Spiritual Assembly”). As with all other elected Bahá'í institutions, the Assembly functions as a body and makes decisions through consultation. They oversee the needs of the local Bahá'í community and are also concerned with the wellbeing of the wider community.

Manifestations or Messengers of God

DEFINITION: Bahá'ís believe that throughout the ages, humanity's spiritual, intellectual and moral capacities have been guided and improved by the founders of the great religions, among them Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muḥammad, and—in more recent times—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'ís believe these figures are not simply ordinary people, nor are they God Himself. Bahá'ís refer to them as “Manifestations of God” because they manifest or show the perfections of God. Bahá'ís describe a Manifestation as like a perfect mirror through whom we can see God and also through whom God speaks.

National Spiritual Assembly

DEFINITION: At the national level, the affairs of the Bahá'í community are administered by the National Spiritual Assembly, a nine-member elected council responsible for guiding, co-ordinating, and stimulating the activities of Local Spiritual Assemblies and individual members of the Bahá'í community within their country. The National Spiritual Assembly is elected annually, following the basic Bahá'í electoral procedures: a secret ballot, no nominations or canvassing, and voting for those with moral character and practical ability. Those women and men who receive the most votes are elected.

Naw Rúz

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Naw Ruz, Nawruz, Nowruz

DEFINITION: The first day of the Bahá'í year, determined by the timing of the spring equinox (in the northern hemisphere). It is usually on the 20th or 21st March. It marks the end of the Bahá'í month of fasting. It is one of the nine Bahá'í Holy days on which work should be suspended, if possible.

New World Order

DEFINITION: Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh's teachings will inspire and enable the complete transformation of society, eventually creating a global civilisation based upon spiritual principles of unity, justice and peace for all humanity, a world in which spiritual and material prosperity will advance hand in hand.

Oneness of God

DEFINITION: Bahá'ís believe that all major religions come from the same source, the one God. God is one, alone and transcendent, far beyond human understanding and comprehension, though we may find expressions of his attributes in every created thing.

Progressive revelation

DEFINITION: The process in which the Manifestations of God have successively provided the guidance necessary for humanity's social and spiritual evolution is known by Bahá'ís as "progressive revelation."

Ridván

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ridvan, Rizwan

DEFINITION: The name of this festival means Paradise and it is the most sacred festival for Bahá'ís. This name was given by Bahá'u'lláh to the garden outside Baghdad where, in April 1863, he spent 12 days during which he declared His mission as God's Messenger for a new age and revealed the spiritual principles that are the foundation of his teachings. The First Day of Ridván is usually on the 20th or 21st April. During the 12-day festival there are 3 Bahá'í Holy Days on which work should be suspended, if possible.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kitab i Aqdas, Kitab i Akdas

DEFINITION: In English, "The Most Holy Book". This contains not just the laws of the Bahá'í Faith, but also describes the Bahá'í administrative order and appoints Abdu'l-Bahá as the person to whom all Bahá'ís should turn after Bahá'u'lláh's passing.

The Kitáb-i-Iqán

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kitab i Iqan, Kitab i Ikan, Kitab i Egan

DEFINITION: In English, "The Book of Certitude". This is Bahá'u'lláh's major explanation of what Bahá'ís believe to be the relationship between the Revelations and Messengers of the past.

The Nineteen Day Feast

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: 19 Day Feast, Nineteen Day Gathering

DEFINITION: This is the basic meeting of a Bahá'í community. It consists of prayers and readings, discussions around community matters and then sharing of food in a social setting. A Bahá'í month consists of 19 days and this meeting is held on the first day of each Bahá'í month. The Bahá'í calendar is solar and has 19 months of 19 days each, plus 4 or 5 intercalary days, depending on the vernal equinox.

Universal House of Justice

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: UHJ

DEFINITION: The Universal House of Justice is the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh described the function of this institution in his book of laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The Universal House of Justice is a nine-member body, elected every five years by the entire membership of all National Bahá'í Assemblies. It applies the Bahá'í teachings to the requirements of an ever-evolving society and legislates on



matters not explicitly covered in the Faith's Sacred Texts. The Seat of the Universal House of Justice is close to the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel.