

Glossary: Rastafari worldview traditions

This glossary is also available on our website. We also have an accompanying in-depth subject knowledge essay, available both on our website and for download.

[In-depth subject knowledge essay](#)

[Glossary](#)

'Reasonings'

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Groundings

DEFINITION: The primary means of Rastafari philosophical consideration. A ceremony in which participants orally contemplate cosmological and theological aspects of the movement. This is often accompanied with the ritual smoking of ganja. These meetings can feature prayer and scriptural readings.

Babylon

The epitome of the wicked and evil, both worldly and spiritual. This is often conceptualised as forces of injustice in the world, particularly Colonial/state regimes and the forces of power that prop them up such as the police and the military. Originally Biblically derived in both the Jewish and New Testament.

Much of Rastafari praxis is oriented towards bringing about the downfall of Babylon, when it is understood by many that a new glorious age will be enacted as Haile Selassie returns to redeem those world and the righteous within it.

Binghi

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Binghi

DEFINITION: A ritual celebration to mark a significant holy day in the Rastafari calendar often held at a Rastafari tabernacle or another site of gathering. Celebrations involve drumming, chanting, dancing, reasoning, prayer scriptural readings amongst some communities and the sacramental use of ganja and go on for several days or stretch over weeks.

Bob Marley

DEFINITION: Jamaican reggae music of the 1960s/70s/80s. Marley alongside other pioneers of reggae music was instrumental in the spread of Rastafari around the world in the 1970s, in disseminating Rastafari ideas and themes throughout the world, using

his music. For this he is seen by some as a prophet, whereas others offer criticism of his role in commercialising the Rastafari message and widely reported infidelities.

Bobo Shanti

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Bobo Ashanti, Ethiopian African Black International Congress

DEFINITION: One of three prominent mansions (denominations) within Rastafari. Identifiable by the wearing of tall turbans to cover the hair and through the wearing of long robes. The Bobo Shanti are often considered to a more 'monastic' form of Rastafari that emphasises communal living and devoted adherence.

Chalwa

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Chalice

DEFINITION: A type of smoking pipe mainly used within Rasta ritual celebrations for the inhalation of ganja smoke.

Chanting

DEFINITION: A key participatory feature of Ises and Binghi's where the congregation sings/chants along to drumming provided by a drum circle. As well as its inspirational quality chanting is understood by many Rastafari to have an important eschatological function as it can very directly help to bring about the downfall of Babylon often articulated as 'Chanting Down Babylon'.

Coronation Day

DEFINITION: Rastafari holy day marking the coronation of Haile Selassie and Empress Menen Asfaw on November 2nd 1930.

Dread

DEFINITION: Hardship, adversity. Often used to describe an inherent aspect of living in Babylon.

Dreadlocks

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Dreads, Locks

DEFINITION: Long, matted, or twisted hair worn as a symbol of Rastafarian lifestyle and spiritual dedication. The hair is sometimes called a crown, compared to the crown of Emperor Haile Selassie, or the mane of a lion.

Ethiopian Christmas

Ethiopian Christmas is celebrated on the 7th of January using the Julian calendar rather than the Gregorian calendar to calculate Jesus' birth.

Celebrated by some though not all Rastafari, with some rejecting Christianity and the Bible completely as a tool of Western imperialism and a text used repeatedly to justify slavery.

Ganja

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Wisdom weed, holy herb

DEFINITION: Ganja, a commonly used name for cannabis. Also 'herb' or the 'holy herb'. Smoked as a sacrament and in order to enhance divine connection and mental clarity.

Groundation day

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Grounation Day

DEFINITION: Rastafari Holy Day marking the first visit of Haile Selassie I to Jamaica on 21st April 1966. This day is often celebrated with Binghi sessions, including music, chanting, and prayer.

Haile Selassie I

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ras Tafari, Tafari Makonnen

DEFINITION: Emperor of Ethiopia (1930-1974). Divinisation in some form of Haile Selassie stands as a defining feature of Rastafari. His divine status is variously understood by Rastafari, with some viewing him as God, whilst others identify him as a Messiah, a prophet or a divinely inspired leader.

Iration

DEFINITION: Lyaric word meaning 'creation,' a phrasing which indicates the created universe in its most fundamental form inseparable from the Almighty.

Irie

DEFINITION: Good, pleasing. A blended lyaric form of 'I free,' eventually becoming 'Irie.'

Ises

DEFINITION: A regular ritual celebration involving drumming, dancing, reasoning, prayer, scriptural readings amongst some communities and the sacramental use of ganja. Some communities will meet weekly/monthly, whilst others meet more irregularly.

Ital

DEFINITION: A central philosophical notion which combines a demand for the respect of all life in 'iration' (creation) and a yearning towards everything in iration in its most natural and organic form. Perhaps most recognisably Ital manifests as a dietary mode which is largely plant based and rejects any adulteration of food with additives, preservatives, sweeteners and historically salt.

Jah

DEFINITION: Term for God, shortened from Biblical phrase 'Jehovah'. Interpretations of the nature of Jah are various in a Rastafari faith which has no central orthodoxy, with some believing him to have taken the form of Haile Selassie whilst others believe him to be entirely transcendent. Many Rastafari practice a panentheistic form of belief which understands God to be simultaneously present in all things in creation whilst also being above and separate from it.

Leonard Howell

DEFINITION: Rastafari preacher (1898-1981). One of the first preachers of the divinity of Haile Selassie alongside Archibald Dunkley, Robert Hinds and Joseph Hibbert. Howell was persecuted by British colonial forces for his beliefs throughout his life who saw the message of Rastafari as undermining white minority rule.

Livity

DEFINITION: An adherents individualised means of practicing and 'living' Rastafari. Roughly, 'way of life'. It is also used as an alternative to terms such as 'religion' where Livity is used to emphasise the nature of Rastafari as a 'lived' spirituality.

Lyaric

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Iyaric, I-talk, Dreadtalk

DEFINITION: Form of dialect distinct to Rastafari. Iyaric often inverts inferred meanings from words to emphasise positivity/negativity within them i.e 'downpression' instead of 'oppression' or 'livicate' instead of 'dedicate'. Pronouns are often also replaced with 'Ini' or 'I n I', a phrasing which is intended to emphasise the unity of the speaker with those they are addressing, and the unity of all in the Almighty.

Mansion

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: house

DEFINITION: Different denominations in Rastafari. Three of the oldest and most significant are the Twelve Tribes, Bobo Shanti, and the Nyabinghi Order.

Marcus Garvey

DEFINITION: Prominent Jamaican labour organiser and advocate for Black empowerment through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (1887-1940). Garvey is viewed by many Rastafari as a divinely inspired leader or prophet. He is also often considered to represent the prophetic spark for the movement as he is said to have uttered 'Look to Africa, when a black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is at hand'. The coronation of Haile Selassie in 1930 is then considered to have fulfilled this prophecy. In this, Garvey is sometimes identified as Biblically as Aaron whilst Selassie is identified as Moses.