

Holy Days in the Bahá'í Era

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

When the Báb declared His Mission on May 23, 1844, He initiated a new age in the history of humankind. As it is with the appearance of each Manifestation of God, a new era begins, which includes the addition of a new calendar. The new calendar in this Dispensation is referred to as the Badí' (wonderful) calendar, and is also called the Bahá'í Calendar. The Badí' calendar was introduced by the Báb and confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh. It consists of nineteen months of nineteen days each, with the addition of four days (five on leap years) placed between the eighteenth and nineteenth months to adjust the calendar to the solar year.

The Báb made use of the numerical value of words to symbolize spiritual concepts. The word "Vahíd" has a numerical value of 19, and means "Unity". The word and the number symbolize the unity of God, and thus it was used by the Báb as the basis for His calendar. The Báb named the nineteen months of the year after certain attributes of God. The nineteen days of each month are named the same as the nineteen months. The four or five "extra" days right before the days of fasting are designated as "Intercalary Days" (days not in the calendar) and are set aside as a time for feasting, rejoicing, charity, hospitality and gift giving. The Bahá'í day begins and ends at sunset and not at midnight. The calendar in the Bahá'í Era uses seven days for each week. `Abdu'l-Bahá stated that in the future, Friday will be considered the day of rest.¹

Holy Day celebrations have a profound effect on the spirit of believers and are thereby instituted in each religious cycle. With the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh and a new Dispensation, the renewal of all things past has begun. This renewal brings with it opportunities to recognize and commemorate special events and Prominent Figures associated with this new era.

There are nine Holy Days commemorated by the Bahá'ís each year. Out of their devotion the believers observe these Holy Days *and* abstain from work and school. Because the new calendar starts with the first day of spring, which fluctuates from year to year, the Bahá'í Holy Days also fluctuate year to year when compared to Gregorian or other calendars. The Bahá'í Holy Days include the following:

- Naw-Rúz, the Bahá'í New Year, which coincides with the spring equinox in the northern hemisphere and usually occurs on or near March 21st.
- the First, Ninth and Twelfth Days of Ridván (Paradise), which commemorate the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, fall on or near April 21st, April 29th and May 2nd.
- the Declaration of the Báb on or near May 23rd.
- the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh on or near May 29th.
- the Martyrdom of the Báb on or near July 9th.
- the Birth of the Báb varies from mid-October to mid-November.
- the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh varies from mid-October to mid-November.



The barrack-square in Tabriz, where the Báb suffered martyrdom. The pillar on the right marked with an X is the place where He was suspended and shot.

¹ *Lights of Guidance*, A Bahá'í Reference File, p. 109, ¶372

There are two additional Bahá'í Holy Days on which the believers are *not* obligated to take time off from work or school, namely, the Day of the Covenant, which is on or near November 26th, and the Ascension of `Abdu'l-Bahá, which is on or near November 28th. During the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá the believers begged Him to allow them to celebrate His birthday. They wanted to celebrate it on the *day* of His birthday, which was May 23rd, the same day as the Anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb. `Abdu'l-Bahá did not want His birthday celebrated, especially on the Anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb. Instead of celebrating his birthday, he asked the believers to observe the Day of the Covenant, which now commemorates his unique appointment as the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant.

The Local Spiritual Assembly has the responsibility for arranging observances for the Bahá'í Holy Days. Unlike the Nineteen Day Feast, two or more communities may combine activities on these occasions, and all people who wish to attend are welcome. There are some conditions in which certain work is necessary and is excusable to perform during a Holy Day, including emergencies for doctors and certain Bahá'í work that may be required to carry on Holy Day activities or other necessary Bahá'í services.

Bahá'ís now commemorate these days as holy, and *as a group* no longer observe the holidays of past religions. Individual Bahá'ís may, and many do, celebrate the holidays of past religions with the non-Bahá'í members of their families, acquaintances and friends. Observance of the Bahá'í Holy Days is sufficient for Bahá'ís, in that commemorating the Holy Days of this Dispensation may be considered a reverent recognition of all the religious Holy Days of past Dispensations.

OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon...*

Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding Holy Days in the Bahá'í Era.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*

To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:

 - A. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...
 - B. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **Holy Days in the Bahá'í Era**.

QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

1. “The adoption of a new calendar in each dispensation is a symbol of the power of Divine Revelation to reshape human perception of material, social, and spiritual reality. Through it, sacred moments are distinguished, humanity’s place in time and space reimagined, and the rhythm of life recast.”

(Universal House of Justice letter dated 10 July 2014 to the Bahá’ís of the World, p. 2)

adoption: formal acceptance and practice
dispensation: religious System that regulates human affairs under divine authority
distinguishing: set apart from others by prominent qualities
perception: concepts; awareness with understanding
recast: put forth anew
reimagined: reconsidered; reconceptualized

reshape: give new form or orientation to
Revelation: Communication of God and His Will to man
rhythm: regular recurrences of the related elements
sacred: holy and spiritually important
symbol: sign that stands for or is a representative

2. He wishes the Bahá’ís to press for recognition of their right to observe their own Holy Days, and to observe them whenever possible in strict accordance with our teachings.

He wishes also to stress the fact that, according to the Bahá’í laws, work is forbidden on our nine Holy Days. Believers who have independent businesses or shops should refrain from working on these days. Those who are in government employ should, on religious grounds, make an effort to be excused from work; all believers, whoever their employers, should do likewise. If the government or other employers refuse to grant them these days off, they are not required to forfeit their employment, but they should make every effort to have the independent status of the Faith recognized and their right to hold their own religious Holy Days acknowledged.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Directives from the Guardian*, pp. 37-38)

accordance: agreement or conformity
acknowledged: recognized as genuine and valid
employ: jobs or occupations
excused: granted exemption or released
forbidden: not permitted or allowed; prohibited
forfeit: give up or lose
independent: no requirement or control by others
observe: give respectful attention in customary ceremony [to]
press: insist or request urgently

recognition: formal acceptance and acknowledgment
recognized: formally accepted and acknowledged
refrain: hold oneself back
right: privilege to which they are entitled by authority
status: rank or position
strict: inflexible and precise
work: the labor, task, or duty that is one’s accustomed means of livelihood

3. Two other anniversaries which are observed, but on which work is not suspended, are the Day of the Covenant and the anniversary of the Passing of `Abdu’l-Bahá.

(Notes of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 225)

anniversaries: commemorations of notable events on the same day each year
anniversary: commemoration on the same day each year
Day of the Covenant: commemoration of the appointment of `Abdu’l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant

observed: given respectful attention in customary ceremony
suspended: temporarily taken off
Passing: Ascension to the next world
work: the labor, task, or duty that is one’s accustomed means of livelihood

4. The beloved Guardian made it absolutely clear that the command to cease work during the nine Holy Days is a matter for conscientious obedience by every individual believer. In the case of businesses and other undertakings entirely under Bahá'í control they must also close down during the Bahá'í Holy Days, even though non-Bahá'ís may be members of their staffs.

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, p. 301, ¶1021)

cease: stop or discontinue
close down: not be open for work or business
command: authoritative order or direction
conscientious: doing what one knows is right [in]

obedience: willing submission and compliance
undertakings: work, projects, or enterprises
work: the labor, task, or duty that is one's accustomed means of livelihood

5. The general principle ... is that a request for excuse from School sessions on Bahá'í Holy Days is desirable. This applies to all Bahá'í children regardless of their age. Children of Bahá'í parents, under the age of 15, are considered Bahá'ís.

What a Bahá'í parent or your Assembly should do is apply to the School Board to grant to their children permission to remain away from School on Bahá'í Holy Days, and then abide by whatever decision the School Board may make, and not try in any way to force the matter.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1990, Vol. I, p. 308, ¶690)

abide by: conform to, accept as valid, and take the consequences of
applies: is in effect or operation
Assembly: local administrative body of the Bahá'í community

desirable: that which is beneficial and advisable
excuse: being allowed to be absent
principle: governing truth or standard
School Board: body charged with maintaining the accommodations of the school

6. As regards the celebration of the Christian Holidays by the believers; it is surely preferable and even highly advisable that the friends should in their relation to each other discontinue observing such holidays as Christmas and New Years, and to have their festal gatherings of this nature instead during the intercalary days and Naw-Rúz.

(Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, p. 303, ¶1029)

advisable: recommended or suggested as proper
believers: Bahá'ís
celebration: refraining from ordinary routine or business, and honoring in some special way
discontinue: stop
festal: festive, joyous, and holiday-like
Holidays: Holy Days
intercalary days: four or five days of feasting, rejoicing, charity, hospitality and gift giving, ↗

designated between the eighteenth and nineteenth Bahá'í months [also called Ayyám-i-Há Days]
Naw-Rúz: the Bahá'í New Year [literally, New Day]
observing: giving respectful attention in customary ceremony [to]
preferable: the favored choice
relation to: dealings or activities with

SHARING EXERCISE: *A breath from the spirit of inspiration...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

It made me feel _____

Explain _____

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. Bahá'ís do not _____ and Bahá'í children do not attend _____ during the nine designated Bahá'í Holy Days, which begin at sunset the day before the given date and end at sunset on the specified date.
2. There are two Holy Days Bahá'ís observe on which they are *not* required to abstain from work or school. These two days are _____
3. People who are not Bahá'ís are welcome to attend Bahá'í Holy Day services and activities.
 true false
4. Shoghi Effendi said he wanted the Bahá'ís to press for recognition of their right to observe their own Holy Days. What does this mean to you? _____
5. Bahá'ís do not celebrate the Holy Days of past religions *among themselves*. This means...
 a. Bahá'í children may not participate in school events that commemorate the Holy Days of other religions.
 b. Bahá'ís do not exchange gifts *among themselves* on Holy Days of past religions.
 c. Bahá'ís cannot attend parties sponsored by their employers that commemorate the Holy Days of other religions.
 d. Bahá'ís cannot exchange gifts with non-Bahá'ís during the holiday seasons that commemorate Holy Days of past religions.
 e. Bahá'ís may exchange gifts with their *non-Bahá'í* family members in commemoration of the Holy Days of past religions.
 f. Bahá'ís may *individually* participate in the Holy Day activities of past religions.

APPLICATION: *Showing forth divine light...*

Facilitator

Read through #1 together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action in #2. (these are not shared) When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

1. IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES: *Visions of radiant lights...*

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *“It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action....”* Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: **“One could....”** Suggest as many ideas as you want.

2. DECIDING ACTION: *Mirroring forth a beam of light...*

From your experience in this study class on Holy Days in the Bahá'í Era, describe what **you** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will make conscious efforts to...*** _____

My next step will be... _____

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

A talk by `Abdu'l-Bahá on the Feast of naw-Ruz, 1912, Alexandria, Egypt.

According to the ancient customs every one of the nations have general holidays when all the people become happy and enjoy themselves. That is, they choose the day of the year wherein a great event or a glorious matter occurred. On that day, they manifest great joy and happiness. They visit one another. If there are any feelings of bitterness among them they become reconciled on that day, hard hearted feelings pass away and they unite and love each other. As great events occurred on the day of Naurooz [Naw-Rúz] for the Persians, therefore, that nation made it a national feast and considered it as a holiday.

This is indeed a blessed day because it is the beginning of the temperate season and the commencement of springtime in the northern hemisphere. All earthly things whether trees, animals or human become refreshed; they receive power from the life-giving breeze and obtain a new life; a resurrection takes place, and because it is the season of springtime there is a general marvelous activity in all contingent beings.

There was a time when the Persian dynasty became extinct and no trace remained thereof. On such a day (Naurooz) it became renewed. Jamsheed ascended the throne. Persia became happily settled. Its power, which had been dissipated, once more returned. The hearts and souls became possessed with wonderful susceptibilities, to such a degree that Persia became more advanced than it was in former days, under the sovereignty of Kayomrth and Hoshang. The glory and greatness of the government and nation of Persia took a higher station. Likewise, a great many events occurred upon the day of Naurooz that brought honor and glory to Persia and to the Persians. Therefore, the Persian nation, for the last five or six thousand years, has always considered the Feast of Naurooz as a day of national happiness and until now it is sanctified and recognized as a blessed day.

Briefly, every nation has a day known as a holiday which they celebrate with joy. In the sacred laws of God, in every cycle and dispensation, there are blessed feasts, holidays and workless days. On such days all kinds of occupations, commerce, industry, agriculture etc., are not allowed. Every work is unlawful. All must enjoy a good time, gather together, hold general meetings, become as one

assembly, so that the national oneness, unity and harmony may become personified in all eyes. As it is a blessed day it should not be neglected or without results by making it a day limited to the fruits of mere pleasure. During such blessed days institutions should be founded that may be of permanent benefit and value to the people so that in current conversation and in history it may become widely known that such a good work was inaugurated on such a feast day. Therefore, the intelligent must search and investigate reality to find out what important affair, what philanthropic institutions are most needed and what foundations should be laid for the community on that particular day, so that they may be established. For example, if they find that the community needs morality, then they may lay down the foundation of good morals on that day. If the community be in need of spreading sciences and widening the circle of knowledge, on that day they should proceed in that direction, that is to say, direct the thoughts of all the people to that philanthropic cause. If, however, the community is in need of widening the circle of commerce or industry or agriculture they should start the means so that the desired aim may be attained. If the community needs protection, proper support and care of orphans, they should act upon the welfare of the orphans, etc. Such undertakings that are beneficial to the poor, the weak and the helpless should be pursued in order that, on that day, through the unity of all and through great meetings, results may be obtained, the glory and blessings of that day may be declared and manifest.

Likewise in this wonderful dispensation this day (Naurooz) is a blessed day. The friends of God should be confirmed in service and servitude. With one another they must be in the utmost harmony, love and oneness, clasping hands, engaged in the commemoration of the Blessed Beauty and thinking of the great results that may be obtained on such a blessed day.

Today, there is no result or fruit greater than guiding the people, because these helpless creatures ... have remained without a share of all the bestowals of God. Undoubtedly, the friends of God, upon such a day, must leave tangible, philanthropic or ideal traces that should reach all mankind and not only pertain to the Bahá'ís.

In all the cycles of the prophets the philanthropic affairs were confined to their respective peoples only — with the exception of small matters, such as charity, which was permissible to extend to others. But in this wonderful dispensation, philanthropic affairs are for all humanity, without any exception, because it is the manifestation of the mercifulness of God. Therefore, every universal matter — that is, one that belongs to all the world of humanity — is divine; and every matter that is sectarian and special is not universal in character — that is, it is limited. Therefore, my hope is that the friends of God, every one of them, may become as the mercy of God to all mankind.

(`Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in *Star of the West*, Vol. IX, No. 1, pp. 8-9)

Naurooz Greeting:

The STAR OF THE WEST enters upon its ninth year with this issue. We rejoice that it was founded on the blessed day of Naurooz. May it become an institution of permanent benefit, universal in scope and divine in character. Allah'o'Abha!

The Editors.

(*Star of the West*, Vol. IX, No. 1, p. 9)

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. work; school
2. the Day of the Covenant and the Ascension of `Abdu'l-Bahá
3. true
4. all answers are valuable
5. b, e, and f

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