



A teacher's guide to The Baha'i Faith

Religion Name	The Bahá'í Faith
Followers are called	A Bahá'í or Bahá'ís (plural)
Founders	The Báb – the Herald; Bahá'u'lláh – the Founder
When founded?	1844 when The Báb declared a new Messenger was to come to unite the whole world. In 1863 Bahá'u'lláh announced that He was that Messenger.
Holy / Special book/s	<p>Key texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hidden Words • The Kitáb-i-Iqán • The Kitáb-i-Aqdas <p>Bahá'u'lláh wrote the equivalent of one hundred volumes, in both Persian and Arabic. About one tenth of his Writings have been translated into English, and varying amounts into over 800 other languages. (See below for more information)</p>
Holy / Special building/s	<p>The administrative centre of the Bahá'í Faith is in Haifa, Israel. Here, the Shrines of The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh form part of Bahá'í pilgrimage. https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/life-spirit/devotion/pilgrimage http://www.bahaipictures.com/bahji.htm</p> 
Main Symbol	<p>A 9-pointed star – for example:</p> 

Beliefs about God

The Bahá'í Faith emphasises the oneness of humanity and its acceptance of the divine origin of the world's major religions. Throughout history, God has sent to humanity a series of divine Educators—known as Manifestations of God—whose teachings have provided the basis for the advancement of civilization. These Manifestations have included Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad. Bahá'u'lláh, the latest of these Messengers, explained that the religions of the world come from the same Source and are, in essence, successive chapters of one religion from God.

Bahá'ís believe the crucial need facing humanity is to find a unifying vision of the future of society and of the nature and purpose of life. Such a vision unfolds in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

God is transcendent and can't be known directly. God is known through the lives and teachings of his great **prophets**, the most recent of whom was **Bahá'u'lláh**.

All human beings have a **soul** that lives for ever. All human beings are members of a single race, which should soon be united in a single global community. All **human beings are different, but equal**; there should be no inequality between races or sexes. This concept is known as "Unity in Diversity" in the Bahá'í Faith. **All religions** have the same spiritual foundation, despite their apparent differences.

Bahá'í religion may be unique in the way that it accepts all other faiths as true and valid. Bahá'ís accept the divine nature of the missions of **Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster**, Krishna, the **Buddha, Jesus** and the Prophet **Muhammad**. They believe each one was a further stage in the revelation of God. Other prophets and Manifestations, including those lost in the mists of time, are also accepted.

Bahá'í beliefs about God

- Bahá'ís believe there is one God, the Source of all creation.
- God is omnipotent, perfect and has complete knowledge of life
- Bahá'ís believe that there has only ever been one God, who is called by different names in different religions
- God is too great to be ever understood by the finite human mind
- Knowledge of God means knowledge of the attributes of God
- The only thing we can actually know about God is that God exists

So when we attribute properties to God we are relying on human understanding - but it's the best that we can do.

Knowing about God - Since we can't comprehend God directly, the best way to get an idea of God is by looking at the lives and teachings of his messengers (the **Manifestations of God**) and at the world God created.

Thus for a Bahá'í, the different views of God held by different religions are the closest that that particular culture and time can come to an idea of the absolute reality of God, and are helpful to the people of that culture. The social teachings change from age to age, but the essence of religion is the same throughout time.

But these ideas of God are just a glimpse of the true reality of God, because humans don't have the mental ability to understand that reality.

Incarnation - Bahá'ís believe that God cannot become incarnate in a human being. The Manifestations are regarded as "perfect mirrors" of God.

Gender - Bahá'ís do not regard God as having a gender. Although the Bahá'í writings use a masculine pronoun to refer to God, this is to suit the language in which they were originally written.

Beliefs about the world including creation

Bahá'ís believe that the universe has always existed in some form, but that it evolves from one state to another. Any reference to "creation" in the Bahá'í Writings does not imply an instant appearance in a static form. The Bahá'í Writings also affirm the existence of creatures on other planets: "Know thou that every fixed star has its own planets, and every planet its own creatures, whose number no man can compute."

Bahá'ís believe that the Universe is a deliberate creation, but that the Creative Force is by definition unknowable. Any created thing is incapable of understanding that which created it. Bahá'u'lláh used a number of terms such as the Unknowable Essence or the Supreme Being to refer to this entity. He also stated that the Universe has always existed, and will always exist. Humans were created, "to carry forward an ever-advancing civilisation". At the individual level, people were created "to know God and to worship Him". The purpose of life on earth is to acquire virtues and therefore become nearer to God in this world and the next.

"Every created thing in the whole universe is but a door leading into His knowledge..."— Bahá'u'lláh

God, the Creator of the universe, is all-knowing, all-loving and all-merciful. Just as the physical sun shines on the world, so the light of God is shed upon all Creation. Through the teachings of the Manifestations of God—among them Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and, in more recent times, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh—humanity's spiritual, intellectual and moral capacities have been cultivated.

The beauty, richness and diversity of the natural world are all expressions of the attributes of God. This inspires in us deep respect for nature. Humanity has the capacity to emancipate itself from the world of nature and, as steward of the planet's vast resources, it is responsible for using the earth's raw materials in a way that preserves harmony and contributes to the advancement of civilization.

Bahá'u'lláh regarded kindness to animals as a pre-requisite to anyone sincerely setting out on a search for truth, and said that we should "show forth the utmost consideration to every living creature". He proclaimed the natural environment as the Will of God, and proclaimed its inviolability. "If carried to excess, civilisation will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation."

Beliefs about the Afterlife

Bahá'ís believe in an afterlife in which the soul is separated from the body. At death, according to the Bahá'í faith, the soul begins a spiritual journey towards God through many planes of existence. Progress on this journey towards God is likened to the idea of "heaven."

Other key beliefs

- Whilst unity is a central teaching, this does not imply uniformity. Traditions, languages and cultures are valued and celebrated for the insights and deep understanding they can bring.
- Education should be compulsory for all children the world over. Not only should every child learn to read and write, and learn skills for life, arts and crafts, great emphasis should be placed on the development of virtues such as honesty, trustworthiness, kindness and compassion.
- Men and women are to have equal rights, everyone is entitled to an education, and a world-wide system of administration should be introduced. He stated, "This earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

Important stories

Several Stories for reading aloud - <http://bahaistoriesforchildren.blogspot.com/>

How should we treat others?

Bahá'ís believe that all human beings should be like one family. This means that loyalty to humanity is more important than the loyalty to tribes and nations, which causes so much trouble in the world. Bahá'ís therefore think that it is important for everyone to be united. People must lose all their prejudices of race and religion, and treat everyone with love and kindness. Bahá'ís must never say bad things about anyone.

Bahá'ís are taught to avoid all habit-forming drugs, including alcohol. Sexual activity is only legitimate within the context of marriage. No excuse is acceptable for fraud or theft, and the word of a Bahá'í should be his/her bond. No discrimination is regarded as acceptable in any circumstances.

Questions relating to abortion have both spiritual and medical aspects. Practical decisions rest, on a case-by-case basis, with the doctors and the mother. Bahá'ís believe that the soul becomes connected with the body at the point of conception, that it makes spiritual progress through its life in this world and that it continues to develop in the next world. These beliefs also impinge on the question of euthanasia.

Criminal activity relates to spiritual immaturity or irresponsibility, but Bahá'u'lláh emphasises the crucial importance both of justice and of carrying out the penal laws. Certain ordinances relating to crime and punishment are found in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, "The Most Holy Book", but they are intended for a future Bahá'í civilisation and are not enforced at present. Bahá'u'lláh said, "The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment." At the same time, the Bahá'í Writings stress the need for the proper education and upbringing of children, in such a way that people will shy away from committing crime.

Bahá'u'lláh forbids Bahá'ís from any form of retaliation, and his exhortation to the rulers of the world, that they should fix the boundaries and agree rules for the conduct of international affairs, has not yet been taken up. The goals of the necessary world peace conference are set out in some detail, and the result should be a world united in ensuring that every country adheres to its agreed level of armaments. Bahá'u'lláh predicts that war will cease and a long period of peace will follow. Bahá'ís see this as gradually evolving into a world civilisation, incorporating the many diverse cultural expressions of human existence. Bahá'u'lláh said: "This earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

The approach to social justice is clearly implicit in the main principles of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'lláh urged the adoption of a Bill of Rights, as part of the world civilisation he was advocating. He proclaimed the principle that humans are one people, and rejected divisions based on gender, race, class, income and level of education. He unequivocally asserted justice as the guiding principle in social policy, and instituted mechanisms for the fairer distribution of wealth.

Places of Worship

Worship can in principle take place anywhere, but in practice the vast majority of Bahá'í devotional meetings take place either in a private home or in a Bahá'í Centre.

In the future, each town or village will have its own Mashriqu'l-Azhkar, or House of Worship. Mashriqu'l-Azhkar literally means "Dawning Place of the Remembrance of God". The House of Worship should not be considered complete until it has a number of dependencies built round it – such as a care home, a clinic, a library or a hostel.

The House of Worship has nine sides, nine gardens and nine doors, and all the world's Scriptures are to be read there. The building is open to people of all races and of all religions or none.

The first to be built was at Ishqabad (Ashkabad) in what is now Turkmenistan. It was confiscated by the Soviet authorities, and later suffered earthquake damage. There is one Mashriqu'l-Azhkar in each continent

at present, with a further one being recently completed, in Chile. The architecture of some of these buildings is very striking, particularly that of the Chile temple and the one in India. Known locally as the “lotus mandir”, the House of Worship in New Delhi is built on the design of a giant lotus flower, and is reputed to have now become the most visited building in the world. Each of these Houses of Worship has three tiers, representing the world of God (topmost), the world of man (lowest), and the world of the Manifestations of God, connecting man to God.

Places of pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is made to Bahá'í sites in the Holy Land. On a full nine-day pilgrimage the pilgrims are taken to

- Bahá'u'lláh's prison cell in Akká,
- to the house where He was subsequently confined,
- and to the two houses in the countryside where He ended his days.
- Adjacent to Bahji, His last house, is the building in which He was interred. This is referred to as “The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh”, and is the spot Bahá'ís face when saying their obligatory prayers.

The pilgrimage also includes prayer at the Shrine of the Báb, where the latter's remains were interred, some years after his execution. The steps and terraced gardens leading up to the Shrine, and beyond the Shrine towards the top of Mount Carmel, provide a fitting and spiritual setting to the building itself. The beauty of the Shrine and the tranquillity of the gardens bring peace to the soul.

The Garden of Ridvan in Istanbul, where Bahá'u'lláh announced His mission.

Holy books

Guidance for Life

For Bahá'ís the central principles of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, together with the laws and ordinances of the Faith, are to be found in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. His written work is very extensive, with a very large quantity of tablets, books and prayers. He refers to his Writings as an ocean.

- The Kitáb-i-Iqán, the “Book of Certitude”, is his main theological work, tackling many of the important questions facing Jews, Christians and Muslims in the interpretation of Holy Texts.
- “The Hidden Words” purports to include the essential spiritual teachings of all religions.
- The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the “Most Holy Book”, contains ordinances pertaining to the future.
- “The Seven Valleys” describes the progress of the soul in a mystical style.
- The book, “Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh” contains a number of tablets concerned with the social principles of the new religion.

Bahá'u'lláh's Writings are the repository of his teachings, and Bahá'ís are encouraged to read them for themselves. Bahá'u'lláh also appointed his son `Abdu'l-Bahá as the authorised interpreter of his teachings, and Bahá'ís treat his Writings as authoritative.

Some of Bahá'u'lláh's main teachings could be summarised as: belief in one God, one Creative Force; the divine origin of all religions; the oneness of humanity; the elimination of prejudice; the equality of men and women; harmony between religion and science; the individual investigation of truth; the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth; world government; a world tribunal; a world police force; choice of a common world language and universal education.

Important people within the tradition

The Bahá'í Faith is based upon the claim of [Bahá'u'lláh](#) (1817-1892) to be the Promised One of all religions. He was preceded by **Siyyid Ali-Muhammad (1819-1850), who took the title of the Báb ("Gate")**, and who came to prepare the way for Bahá'u'lláh. For a Bahá'í, the events of this period were in fulfilment of Biblical and Qur'anic prophecy, and the Writings of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are seen as the Word of God. Both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh suffered years of persecution, imprisonment and banishment, and the Báb was publicly martyred in Iran.

The Báb announced that humanity stood at the threshold of a new era. His mission, which was to last only six years, was to prepare the way for the coming of a [Manifestation of God](#) Who would usher in the age of peace and justice promised in all the world's religions: [Bahá'u'lláh](#)

Bahá'u'lláh was born in Tehran on 12th November, 1817 to a wealthy family. He became a follower of The Bab. He was imprisoned and then exiled to Iraq. When exiled and in Constantinople (now called Istanbul), he announced that he was the Promised One of all religions and had come to unite the whole world. His followers became known a Bahá'ís.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

In the early years of the 20th century, 'Abdu'l-Bahá—the eldest Son of [Bahá'u'lláh](#)—was the Bahá'í Faith's leading exponent, renowned as a champion of social justice and an ambassador for international peace. Bahá'ís refer to him as the 'Perfect Exemplar' and follow his lead on matters of conscience and in putting faith into action. He was appointed by [Bahá'u'lláh](#) in His will as His successor and the authorised interpreter of the Holy Writings.

Festivals

There are nine full Holy Days, eight of which commemorate specific events in Bahá'í history. On these nine days, work should be suspended. Children are usually granted absence from school for these days.

- New Year ("Naw Rúz") is at the spring equinox in the northern hemisphere, and usually falls on **21st March**. There are no Bahá'í rituals as such, but the month of fasting comes to an end at Naw Rúz, so there is often a big party.
- Bahá'u'lláh was born in Teheran on **November 12th**, 1817, into a noble family. His father was a minister in the court of the Shah. The date of Bahá'u'lláh's birth is often celebrated with a party, beginning with prayers and finishing with refreshment and entertainment.
- The Báb was born on **October 20th**, 1819. His birthday is celebrated on this day, often with readings from his own Writings and from accounts of his childhood in Shiraz.
- The Báb declared that he was the promised Qa'im which Shi'a Muslims were expecting, in his own home in Shiraz, Persia, after sunset on **22nd May**, 1844. This event is therefore celebrated within the same 24 hours – late on 22nd or during daylight on 23rd. Passages from the story, as related by his first disciple, are often read. [It is of historical interest that Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was born at some time within the same 24 hour period.]
- Noon on **9th July**, 1850 was the time of the "Martyrdom of the Báb". An entire regiment was lined up, in three ranks, to shoot him and one of his disciples. This is commemorated at noon on this date, and is naturally a more solemn event.
- There are three holy days in the Ridván period: The First Day of Ridván (**April 21st**) celebrates the day in 1863 when Bahá'u'lláh first announced that he was the Messenger of God for this age. The Ninth Day of Ridván (**April 29th**) was the day his family was able to join him in the Garden of

Ridván, near Baghdad. The Twelfth Day of Ridván (**May 2nd**) was the Day he and his family started on their enforced journey to their next exile, in Constantinople.

In addition to these nine, there are two other holy days commemorating `Abdu'l-Bahá, but work need not be suspended on these. All of these events can be held in private homes, but for larger numbers a town hall, community centre or school may be hired.

There are nineteen months in the Bahá'í year, and nineteen days in each month. This totals 361 days, not the astronomical 365. The remaining four days (five in a leap year) are called the "Ayyám-i-Há", and are special days for exchanging presents, visiting friends, the sick and the elderly, and having parties.

Rites of passage/important life events

Daily Prayer - Bahá'u'lláh wrote three special prayers which are known as Obligatory Prayers. Each day a Bahá'í should say one of these prayers, e.g. the short one which is to be said in the middle of the day. Each morning and evening Bahá'ís should read something from the Bahá'í scriptures and meditate upon it.

Work - Bahá'ís should try to find a job which is useful and constructive. If a person does a job to the best of his or her ability, in a spirit of service to others, this is another way of worshipping God. Bahá'ís should be honest, trustworthy and fair.

There is no baptism of children – up to the age of 15 they are automatically accepted as belonging to the Bahá'í community. Bahá'í children are taught about all the religions of the world. When they reach the age of 15 they can decide for themselves.

Rules for Life - Bahá'ís should not drink alcohol or take drugs, nor should they indulge in sex outside marriage. However, there are no stipulations as to dress or, for example, the cut of the beard.

Soul - The Bahá'í writings state that each human being has a soul. It is this which provides humans with a unique capacity to recognise both God's station and humanity's relationship with its creator. Every human has a duty to recognise the Messenger of God for that Day, and to follow his teachings. Through this recognition, and through service to humanity, together with prayer, meditation and fasting, the soul becomes closer to God. The individual can never completely understand God, any more than a flower can understand the gardener, yet can understand his attributes, and move closer to him. This journey towards the divine is the subject of one of Bahá'u'lláh's mystical works, "The Seven Valleys".

The development of the soul, which is the real purpose of this life, is enhanced by understanding and acquiring such attributes as tolerance, compassion, trustworthiness and detachment. These will assist us in the next world, although we clearly do not yet understand how! Heaven and Hell are understood to be metaphors for the spiritual states of nearness to, or distance from, God. It must be emphasised that each soul is individual, as noted by Bahá'u'lláh in his saying, "Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration." This reflects the unending variety between souls, as well as the infinite aspects of change through time

The Soul & the Next World - According to Bahá'í belief, the soul becomes associated with the body at the point of conception. While in this life, it acquires virtues, such as honesty, love, truthfulness, kindness, etc. These qualities are needed in the next world, which is "as different from this world as this world is different from that of the child while still in the womb of its mother". At the point of death, the soul separates from the body. Souls continue to progress "throughout the worlds of God".

The Bahá'í Faith has few rituals. Parents may choose to have a naming ceremony, but this is not a religious requirement. Bahá'u'lláh fixed 15 years as the age of spiritual maturity, and therefore "obligatory prayer" and fasting commence from that age. No pressure can be put upon the young person to become a Bahá'í if they choose not to.

Marriage - A Bahá'í has complete freedom of choice when looking for a husband or wife. But when a couple wish to marry, both sets of (natural) parents must then agree to the wedding. Bahá'ís believe that the main purpose of marriage is to rear children in a happy, secure environment, and the active support of both families makes this more likely. If a couple are spiritually united, they will progress together in the next world. During the marriage ceremony, the bride and groom each repeat the sentence, "We will all, verily, abide by the will of God". This has to take place in front of two reliable witnesses. In addition, the bride and groom will add prayers, readings and music of their choice.

Death - When a person dies, the body must be treated with respect and there is a special prayer which is said when a Bahá'í is buried. We should be happy for the soul who is progressing to the next world. Bahá'u'lláh says: "I have made death a messenger of joy unto thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve?" In addition to the "obligatory" Prayer for the Dead there are a number of others which can be used at will. The body should be wrapped in cloth and placed in a coffin made from a substantial material. A ring, engraved with a specific verse: "I came forth from God and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His name, the Merciful, the Compassionate" placed on one of the fingers. In Bahá'í understanding, life after death is neither cyclical (as in reincarnation theories) nor static, as progress is without end.

Family and Community - Within the family group, it is stressed that the rights of no-one should be ignored, whether husband, wife or child. Within a religion dedicated to unity, the family is clearly an essential unit. If only one partner within a marriage is Bahá'í, then for the sake of family unity they may have to forego attendance at Bahá'í meetings. However, a non-Bahá'í partner does not have the right to insist that the Bahá'í leave the faith. Religious belief is seen as between the individual and God. Being part of the Bahá'í community is seen as a very important part of being a Bahá'í. This includes praying together, discussion of local matters and a social time. All of these are equally important and all are conducive to the unity of the community.

The family is ideally based upon a secure marriage, marriage having been termed "a fortress for wellbeing". In this context, children should be taught morals and a spiritual outlook. The Bahá'í family should have the outlook encouraged by Bahá'u'lláh in his advice: "Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self."

Important practices

Bahá'í worship Bahá'ís see themselves as a people with a mission to bring harmony and unity in the world, and this is reflected in their spiritual practice. The main purpose of life for Bahá'ís is to know and love God. Prayer, fasting and meditation are the main ways of achieving this and for making spiritual progress.

Bahá'í texts state that work performed in the spirit of service to humanity is a form of worship.

Absence of ritual - The Bahá'í faith has no clergy or sacraments, and virtually no rituals. There are only three Bahá'í rituals:

- a) Obligatory daily prayers

- b) Reciting the prayer for the dead at a funeral
- c) The simple **marriage** rite

There are two reasons Bahá'ís avoid ritual:

- Rituals can easily degenerate and become meaningless, so that people carry them out for the sake of the ritual and forget the spiritual purpose behind them
- Rituals can be a form of cultural imperialism, imposing the same rituals across different cultures and destroying their rich diversity

Doing without rituals does not mean doing without celebrations or special events.

Communal worship - Bahá'ís have no liturgy, since the minimising of ritual makes it impossible to develop one. The emphasis on prayer and meditation, and on social action in Bahá'í thinking means that congregational worship plays a much smaller part in Bahá'í life than it does in other faiths.

Bahá'í services are very simple with readings from the scriptures, along with interpretations of them and prayers. Hymns and poetry are allowed, but not common. The atmosphere is usually dignified.

Bahá'í are encouraged to come together in communal worship, but there are no congregational prayers. Individuals will recite prayers in turn, on behalf of everyone present. This is because prayer is seen essentially as a personal matter, not a ritual. There are no professional clergy in the Bahá'í faith – every person is responsible for their own spiritual development, and the fulfilment of their responsibilities within their Faith.

Nineteen day feast - For Bahá'ís the main occasion for group worship is the devotional portion of the **nineteen day feast**. Regular devotional meetings – open to all, whether Bahá'is or not - are also encouraged and held in many communities around the world.

Other important information

7th biggest religion in the world with several million followers (source: Warwick Bahá'í Bookshop resources for KS2 and 3) around 6,000 live in Britain. (Source BBC)

Key term glossary

Term	Definition
https://www.reonline.org.uk/news/re-definitions-a-new-app-for-re-teachers/	

Useful Websites

www.bahai.org <http://re.bahai.org.uk/>

Resources for Schools <http://re.bahai.org.uk/classroom-resources/>

https://kids.kiddle.co/Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%AD_Faith

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/>

<https://media.bahai.org/> for free downloads of high-quality pictures of and about the Bahá'í Faith

With grateful thanks to Dorset SACRE & Debbie Tibbey deb.tibbey@googlemail.com for proof-reading and supporting the content of this document.