



Glossary

It was deemed helpful to collect here the names of persons and places important to the Bahá'í Faith and some words and locutions which have taken on a particular significance in Bahá'í culture, giving a concise explanation of each. These comments express the personal understanding of the writer and have no claim to official value.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. ‘Abbás Effendi (Teheran 1844 – Haifa 1922), the eldest surviving son of Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.). His father appointed him the Centre of his Covenant and the authorised Interpreter of his Writings. He was his father's successor as the head of the Bahá'í Faith (q.v.). His title ‘Abdu’l-Bahá means the Servant of Bahá. He is also titled the Master. He penned many works that expound the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Notes taken from many of the speeches he uttered during his travels in the East and the West to divulge the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh are preserved and collected in a few volumes.

Abdul-Baha on Divine Philosophy. A collection of notes from talks delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris, compiled by Isabel Fraser Chamberlain and published by the Tudor Press in Boston in 1917

Akka. The city north of Haifa, where Bahá'u'lláh was exiled in 1868. He lived in or around the city until His passing in 1892.

Angels. Variouslly defined in the Bahá'í writings, this word often refers to the souls of those who have fulfilled their purpose on earth to know and love God and to promote an ever-advancing civilisation. From the spiritual realms in which they live, they help all those who bend their efforts towards that task in this nether world.

Auxiliary Board Members. Believers appointed by the Universal House of Justice (q.v.), at the suggestion of the Counsellors (q.v.), to advise, assist, and instruct Bahá'í institutions, communities, and believers in their efforts to propagate and protect the Faith. They remain in office for five years.

Báb, The. Siyyid ‘Alí-Muhammad (Shíráz 1819 – Tabríz 1850), the Forerunner of Bahá’u’lláh and the Founder of the Bábí religion.

Bahá’í Administrative Order. The body of institutions established by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and expanded by Shoghi Effendi for the administration of the affairs of the Bahá’í Community as well as the diffusion and implementation of the Bahá’í teachings. It is formed by two “arms.” One arm has a more specifically administrative character and is formed by the Local Spiritual Assemblies (q.v.), the National Spiritual Assemblies (q.v.) and the Universal House of Justice (q.v.). Its institutions are elected by the believers. The other arm has the function of assisting the elected arm and the whole community in the protection and diffusion of the Bahá’í Faith. It is presently formed by the Continental Counselors and the Auxiliary Board Members, and their assistants and its members are appointed by the Universal House of Justice, the Counselors, and the Auxiliary Board Members, respectively.

Bahá’í Faith. The independent religion founded by Bahá’u’lláh, whose most important teachings are the oneness of God and humankind. The fundamental principles of this Faith comprise the free and independent search after truth, the oneness of religions, the balance between science and religion, equality between men and women, universal education, the abolition of all prejudices, especially racism, a spiritual solution of the economic problems, the promotion of universal peace, and the adoption of a universal auxiliary language. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states that it is the most widely spread religion after Christianity.

Bahá’í International Community (BIC). An international non-governmental organisation (NGO), it represents the members of the Bahá’í Faith. It was first chartered in March 1948 with the United Nations and currently has affiliates in over 180 countries and territories.

Bahá’í World Centre. It is in Haifa and comprises Holy Places, such as the Shrine of the Báb (q.v.), the Monument Gardens (q.v.), the seats of the Universal House of Justice (q.v.) and other Bahá’í International administrative institutions, as well as the International Bahá’í Archives, in which are preserved important documents, such as

original manuscripts of Bahá'u'lláh's (q.v.), the Báb's (q.v.), 'Abdu'l-Bahá's (q.v.) and Shoghi Effendi's (q.v.) writings.

Bahá'u'lláh. Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alíy-i-Núrí (Teheran 1817 – Bahjí 1892), a Persian noble man, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith. His title Bahá'u'lláh means Glory or Splendor of God.

Bahíyyih Khánum. (Teheran 1846 – Haifa 1932) Faithful daughter of Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.). She was entrusted with the responsibility of the Bahá'í Community during short periods after her brother 'Abdu'l-Bahá's (q.v.) passing while Shoghi Effendi (q.v.) was far from the Holy Land.

Bahíyyih Khánum's Tomb. Bahíyyih Khánum's tomb is in the Monument Gardens (q.v.) in Haifa, whose most precious ornament is. Its architectural structure is inspired by the Choragic monument of Lysicrates, known as the Lantern of Diogenes (334 BC), in Athens. Shoghi Effendi (q.v.) said that this monument symbolises the threefold structure of Bahá'u'lláh's (q.v.) Administrative Order. The steps represent Local Spiritual Assemblies (q.v.), the columns are like the National Spiritual Assemblies (q.v.), and the dome, which is raised above the columns, symbolises the Universal House of Justice (q.v.).

Bahjí. A site on the plain of 'Akká in which arises the Mansion where Bahá'u'lláh lived between 1879 and 1892 until He passed away. The name Bahjí means “place of delight.” Since it is the site of the Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh, today it is one of the foremost goals of Bahá'í pilgrimage.

Carmel, Mount. The mountain called by Isaiah “the mountain of the Lord,” on whose slopes are the town of Haifa and the Bahá'í World Centre (q.v.).

Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. The Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith are Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.), the Báb (q.v.), 'Abdu'l-Bahá (q.v.), and Shoghi Effendi (q.v.). They are the Founder, the Precursor, the Centre of the Covenant (q.v.), and the Guardian (q.v.) of the Bahá'í Faith.

Centre of the Covenant. One of the titles given to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (q.v.) as appointed by His Father Bahá’u’lláh (q.v.) as His successor to whom all should turn after His death.

Counselors. Believers appointed by the Universal House of Justice who serve in a particular geographical area or at the Bahá’í World Centre in Haifa. They are invested with the twofold responsibility of propagating and protecting the Faith. They remain in office for five years.

Covenant. “A Covenant in the religious sense is a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behaviour in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way. There is, for example, the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fulness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure. If not, the Faith becomes divided and its force spent. It is a Covenant of this kind that Bahá’u’lláh made with His followers regarding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá perpetuated through the Administrative Order that Bahá’u’lláh had already created.” (From a letter dated 23 March 1975 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

God Passes By. A concise and exhaustive exposition of the first century of Bahá’í history, written in English by Shoghi Effendi (q.v.), published in 1944, on the occasion of the first centenary of the birth of the Bahá’í Faith (q.v.).

Guardian. The title of the successor whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (q.v.) named in His Testament with the responsibility of guiding the Bahá’í community and of continuing the interpretation of the Holy Writings which He had carried out until His passing. The two institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice (q.v.) are the pivot of the Administrative Order of Bahá’u’lláh (q.v.).

Learned. Bahá'u'lláh described as outstanding among the learned one who, as stated by an Islamic Tradition, “guardeth his self, defendeth his faith, opposeth his desires, and obeyeth his Lord’s command” (*The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* 118, sec.1, para.232, Súriy-i-Haykal: Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh)

Haifa. A city located in northern Israel. Together with neighbouring Akka (q.v.), it is the seat of the Bahá’í World Centre (q.v.). The international administrative buildings of the Bahá’í Faith, such as the Seat of the Universal House of Justice (q.v.), the Shrine of the Báb (q.v.), and the surrounding terraces and gardens are all located on Mount Carmel (q.v.), in the heart of the city.

Hands of the Cause of God. Eminent Bahá’ís appointed for life by Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi with the twofold responsibility of propagating and protecting the Faith.

Heroic and Formative Age. Shoghi Effendi (q.v.) divides Bahá’í history into three epochs: the Heroic Age (1844-1921), the birth of the Faith and its initial spread throughout the world; the Formative Age, from 1921 to an unspecified date, the affirmation of the Faith and its principles until the unification of all the peoples of the world and the end of all wars, when the Golden Age, characterised by universal peace, will begin.

Hidden Words, The. It was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.) in Baghdad in 1858 and consists of 71 aphorisms in Arabic and 82 in Persian. Considered Bahá'u'lláh’s ethical masterpiece, it was translated into many languages and distributed worldwide. It is one of the best-known works of Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.).

Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The most important book revealed by Bahá'u'lláh (Akka 1873), it contains the laws of the Bahá’í Faith. Revealed in Arabic, it was published in English by the Universal House of Justice (q.v.) in 1992 and translated from English into many other languages, including Italian. The first Italian edition dates back to 1995.

Kitáb-i-Íqán. The Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh’s most important doctrinal work (q.v.), explains the fundamental doctrines of the Bahá’í Faith: the existence, oneness,

and unknowability of God, divine revelation through His prophets, the Manifestations of God (q.v.), and its progressiveness; the nature and history of the Manifestations of God always persecuted by those to whom God sends them; the meanings of some metaphors used by the Manifestations of God to explain their message.

Local Spiritual Assembly. The administrative body of a Bahá'í local community. The Bahá'í local community is the body of believers residing in the territory of a municipality. The Local Spiritual Assembly is formed by nine members elected by secret ballot each year by and among all the adult members of the Bahá'í local community.

Master. It is one of the titles of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (q.v.), describing the virtues He manifested and His role as a perennial example for humanity to imitate. It translates the Arabic word *áqá*.

Manifestations of God or Prophets of God. The founders of the great revealed religions, such as Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, the Báb (q.v.), and Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.), are unique creatures, all united by a special relationship with the Deity that makes them a metaphorical mirror capable of reverberating all the attributes of God towards the human world.

Monument Gardens. The gardens in the vicinity of the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel, where the beautiful tombs of four of the members of Bahá'u'lláh's family (q.v.) are.

National Spiritual Assembly. The administrative body of a Bahá'í national community. It is formed by nine members elected by secret ballot each year by delegates from all the Bahá'í communities of the nation and from among all the members of the Bahá'í national community. They are the electors of the Universal House of Justice (see.).

Naw-Rúz. Literally, "New Day." It is the New Year's Day celebrated in Iran and other Central Asian territories, adopted by Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.) as the New Year's Day of His Faith. It occurs on the day when the sun enters the constellation Aries, the vernal equinox in the northern hemisphere, which occurs on March 20 or 21.

Paris Talks. The title of a collection of the Parisian conversations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (q.v.), published also under the title *The Wisdom of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*.

Pioneers. Bahá’í believers who leave their residence to move to other national or international locations to teach the Faith.

Prayers and Meditations of Bahá’u’lláh. A collection of prayers and meditations revealed by Bahá’u’lláh (q.v.), compiled and translated into English by Shoghi Effendi (q.v.) in 1938.

Principles of the Bahá’í Faith. In the early days of the spread of the Bahá’í Faith in the West, they spoke of twelve Bahá’í principles, which were variously listed. George Townshend (1876-1957), an Irish Anglican pastor and regarded as one of the luminaries of the Bahá’í world, grouped them under twelve headings as the “twelve Points” of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. They are as follows: 1. Unfettered search after truth. 2. The oneness of humankind. 3. Religion, a cause of love and harmony 4. Harmony between science and religion. 5. Universal peace. 6. An international language. 7. Education for all. 8. Equal opportunities for both sexes. 9. Justice for all. 10. Work for all. 11. Abolition of extremes of poverty and wealth. 12. The Holy Spirit is the prime motive power in life.

Prophets of God. See **Manifestations of God**.

Promulgation of Universal Peace, The. A collection of notes taken from the talks delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (q.v.) in the United States and Canada in 1912, compiled by Howard MacNutt.

Ridván. Literally, “paradise” is the name of the most sacred and important twelve-day Bahá’í festival, commemorating Bahá’u’lláh’s sojourn from 21 April to 2 May 1863, in a garden on the Tigris River, where He went to take leave of Bahghdad’s friends, on the eve of His departure for Constantinople, where The Sultan had summoned him. In those days, Bahá’u’lláh announced His divine Mission to His companions. On this feast, the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies (q.v.) are elected each year, and every five years, the Universal House of Justice is elected (q.v.).

Rúhíyyih Rabbani. (1910-2000) Mary Maxwell, Canadian, also known as Rúhíyyih Khánum; consort of Shoghi Effendi (q.v.), the Guardian (q.v.) of the Bahá'í Faith. In 1952, she was appointed Hand of the Cause of God (q.v.). Rúhíyyih (meaning “spiritual”) is the name given to her by Shoghi Effendi when they were married. Another title of her is Amatu'l-Bahá.

Satan. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explains that Satan is not a truly existent demonic spirit intent on hindering the progress of the good, but it is “the evil ego within us” (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 287)

Seven Valleys, The. The foremost mystical work revealed by Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.). Although written in the Sufi language known to His interlocutors, it lays the foundations of a radically renewed mysticism devoid of the ancient connotations of esotericism and total disinterest in the affairs of the world and transformed into a profitable path that everyone can take to get closer to the Divine through an active life dedicated to the service of humanity in the pursuit of an ongoing material, intellectual, and spiritual progress of human civilisation. The most recent revised English edition dates back to 2018.

Shoghi Effendi. Shoghi Rabbani (Haifa 1897 – London 1957), ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's (q.v.) grandson and his successor as the head of the Bahá'í Faith, with the title the “Guardian.” During his guardianship, Shoghi Effendi established the foundations of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, contributed to the diffusion of the Bahá'í Faith throughout the world, established the foundation of the Bahá'í World Centre in the Holy Land, authored the earliest authorised translations of Bahá'u'lláh's and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's writings, published many writings in which he expounds the meaning of the first century of Bahá'í history and the foremost teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Some Answered Questions. Published in London in 1908, this book reports the answers given by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (q.v.) to Laura Clifford Barney (1879-1974), an American believer who, during her visits to Haifa (q.v.) between 1904 and 1906, asked Him many questions on Christian, philosophical, and doctrinal subjects. The most recent English translation dates back to 2015.

Star of the West. Bahá'í monthly published from 21 March 1910 to March 1935. It contained translations of Tablets (q.v.) by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (q.v.) and later writings by Shoghi Effendi (q.v.), as well as news about the Bahá'í world.

Tablet. A short Arabic or Persian scripture.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. A collection of Tablets (q.v.) of Bahá'u'lláh (q.v.) revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (q.v.), compiled, translated into English, and published by the Universal House of Justice (q.v.) at the Bahá'í World Centre (q.v.) in 1978. Among the Tablets published in this collection are the “Lawh-i-Aqdas” (The Most Holy Tablet) addressed by Bahá'u'lláh to Christians, the “Lawh-i-Dunyá” (Tablet of the World), which deals with the theme of good governance, and the “Lawh-i-Hikmat” (Tablet of Wisdom), which deals with the theme of the creation of the world and the origins of philosophy.

Ṭáhirih. Literally, “the Pure.”(c. 1817 -1852). She was a famous theologian and poet, the only woman among the Letters of the Living, the first disciples of the Báb, and is considered the most eminent heroine of the Bábí Dispensation. She is also known as Qurratu'l-'Ayn, Consolation of the Eyes.

Traditions, Islamic (ḥadīth). They are a series of accounts of what Muḥammad (or for Shi'ites, also the Imams) said or did during His lifetime, collected by so-called “compilers,” devout believers who immediately after His death set out to interview all those who had met the Prophet in person and to preserve a written record of their memories. Some of them are called *Ḥadīth-i-Qudsí*, or sacred traditions, because they are characterised by the fact that, although attributed to Muḥammad, they are presented as if God were pronouncing their words in the first person.

The Universal House of Justice. The supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, established by Bahá'u'lláh in his Kitáb-i-Aqdas (q.v.). Its members are elected, among all the adult male Bahá'í believers, by the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world, usually gathered at the Bahá'í World Centre (q.v.) in an International Convention for that purpose. Presently, it includes a total of nine members.