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**Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism**  
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# BAHÁ'Í

St Philip's Centre is a charity set up in 2006 with the support of the Diocese of Leicester and is rooted in the multi-faith environment of Leicester, the UK's most plural city.

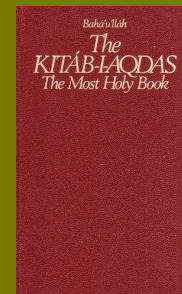
We have a superb track record of promoting positive community relations through our religion and belief training, community events, charitable activities, dialogue and community engagement.

St Philip's Centre works closely with several local and national public sector organisations including central and local government, Police, schools, colleges and universities. We welcome many international visitors and groups.

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©Riaz Ravat BEM DL, Bahá'í Literature Review Panel, Natasha S. Wilkinson & Minou Cortazzi  
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COVER PICTURES front: Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, Acre, Israel (main), Top: The Bahá'í House of Worship, Wilmette in the USA, a Study Circle in India, Devotional Meeting in Canada, flowers near the Shrine of the Báb in Haifa in Israel and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Thanks to Bahá'í Media Bank [www.media.bahai.org](http://www.media.bahai.org)



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## What is the Bahá'í faith?

The Bahá'í faith is a monotheistic faith and one of the youngest of the world's major faiths. It was founded by Bahá'u'lláh in what is now modern day Iran (Persia) in 1863. The faith was proclaimed by a young Iranian, who called himself the Báb. He said that a messenger would soon arrive from God, who would be the latest in a line of prophets including Adam, Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh, which means the Glory of God in Arabic, was born Mirza Husayn Ali in 1817 and Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh was the most recent Manifestation of God.

In the Bahá'í faith, religious history is seen to have unfolded through a series of divine messengers, each of whom established a religion that was contextualised to the needs and demands of that particular era. It is derived from the Arabic Bahá, meaning 'glory' or 'splendour'.



Universal House of Justice,  
Haifa, Israel

## Beliefs

Three key principles form the foundations for Bahá'í teachings: the unity of God, the unity of religion and the unity of humankind. Bahá'ís believe that each messenger prophesied of messengers to follow and Bahá'u'lláh's life and teachings fulfilled the end-time promises of previous scriptures. Humanity is understood to be in a process of collective evolution and the need of the present time is for the gradual establishment of peace, justice and unity on a global scale.

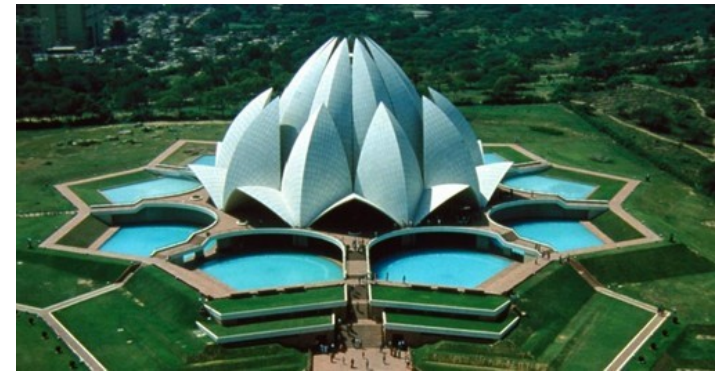
For Bahá'ís the life-long process of spiritual growth finds its highest expression in service to humanity. Whether in terms of spiritual practice, moral behaviour, social activism or community participation, Bahá'ís seek to continually improve themselves and the world around them.

## Holy Days

The Bahá'í Faith has its own calendar, beginning at Naw-Rúz, the Bahá'í New Year, on 21 March. The centrepiece of Bahá'í community life is the Nineteen Day Feast Held once every 19 days, the Feast is the local community's regular worship gathering -- and more.

Open to adults and children, the Feast promotes and sustains the unity of the local Bahá'í community. It always contains three elements: spiritual devotion, administrative consultation, and social fellowship. As such, it combines religious worship with grassroots governance and social enjoyment. Children, the elderly, expectant and new mothers and the sick are among those not required to fast.

The Ridván Festival is celebrated from sunset 21 April to sunset 2 May. The festival marks Bahá'u'lláh's time in the garden of Ridván in 1863 and his announcement that he was the prophet promised by the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh ordained this festival 'Most Great Festival'.



Lotus Temple,  
New Delhi, India

## Diet

There are no dietary restrictions in the Bahá'í faith. However, the consumption of alcoholic beverages and use of mind altering drugs is prohibited.

## Places of Worship

The burial places, or Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and other sites associated with their lives are revered as holy places. The Shrines are located in the Haifa and Acre areas of Israel. They are annual pilgrimage sites for thousands of Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh designated Bahá'í Houses of Worship as spiritual gathering places for prayer and meditation round which bring together social, humanitarian, educational and scientific institutions.

Seven Houses of Worship have been built, one on each continent, thus far. These venues are places for personal prayer and meditation, as well as collective worship, where sacred scriptures are recited and sung. In areas where there is no House of Worship, the Bahá'í community will often use their own personal homes for devotional meetings or hire community centres.





## Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh – an Arabic title meaning ‘The Glory of God’ was born Mírzá Ḥusayn-`Alí Núrí, into a noble family in the Persian capital of Tehran on 12 November 1817.

He became one of the Báb's leading adherents. After the martyrdom of the Báb, growing numbers of Bábís turned to him for guidance. Following an abortive attempt on the life of the Sháh in August 1852, by a small group of Bábís acting against Bahá'u'lláh's explicit instructions, Bahá'u'lláh was arrested and thrown into a noisome subterranean dungeon in Tehran, known as the Síyáh-Chál, the Black Pit.

During four months chained to the floor in this hellish place, Bahá'u'lláh experienced a revelation from God and received his mission as the Promised One foretold by the Báb.

Expelled from Persia in January 1853, Bahá'u'lláh and his family travelled through a bitter cold winter to Baghdad, where he began a succession of exiles, which took him via Constantinople and Adrianople to the ancient city of Acre in the Holy Land. He arrived here in August 1868.

Just before leaving Baghdad in 1863, Bahá'u'lláh declared to a few of his closest companions that he was the One promised by the Báb. From Adrianople and Acre he addressed an unprecedented series of letters to the rulers of his day, proclaiming his mission and the coming unification of humankind, calling on them to devote their energies to the establishment of universal peace.

Bahá'u'lláh spent the remainder of his earthly life in Acre and its environs. Initially he, his family and companions were confined to the barracks in Acre. Later they were moved to a cramped house within the city's walls.

During his time in Acre, Bahá'u'lláh revealed his most important work, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, the repository of laws for the Bahá'í dispensation.

Bahá'u'lláh took up residence outside the walls of Acre in the late 1870s. From 1879 to his passing in 1892 he lived in the mansion of Bahjí on the outskirts of Acre, Israel. He is laid to rest in a garden room adjoining the mansion. For Bahá'ís this is the holiest place on the planet.



## God

Bahá'í religion may be unique in the way that it accepts all other faiths as true and valid. Bahá'u'lláh himself stated that he is not God's final messenger and that other prophets and Manifestations are accepted. The central idea of the faith is that of unity. Bahá'ís believe that people should work together for the common benefit of humanity.

- Bahá'ís believe there is one God and that all the universe and creation belongs to him
- 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

## Holy Texts

The Bahá'í administration has four charter documents:

### Kitáb-i-Aqdas

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas is a central book of the Bahá'í faith written by Bahá'u'lláh. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas is referred to as ‘The Mother-Book’ of the Bahá'í teachings and the ‘Charter of the future world civilisation’. It is not only a book of laws as the Kitáb-i-Aqdas also discusses the establishment of Bahá'í administrative institutions, Bahá'í religious practices, laws of personal status, criminal law, ethical issues, social principles, miscellaneous laws and abrogations and prophecies.

### Tablets of the Divine Plan

The Tablets of the Divine Plan collectively refers to 14 letters (tablets) written between September 1916 and March 1917 by `Abdu'l-Bahá to Bahá'ís in the United States and Canada.

### Tablet of Carmel

The Tablet of Carmel is a short tablet of only a few pages but is considered as one of the charters of Bahá'í administration. It consists primarily of a conversation between God and Mount Carmel.

### Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá

The Will and Testament of `Abdu'l-Bahá describes his circumstances, lays out his testimony, refers to the ambitions of certain enemies, settles certain affairs of the Bahá'í faith and appoints his grandson, Shoghi Effendi as his successor and the ‘Guardian of the Cause of God’. He also refines the structure of Bahá'í administration by the establishment of the Spiritual Assembly at national level and defines the mechanism for the election of these assemblies as well as the House of Justice.



## Leadership

Authoritative direction to Bahá'ís came first through the Manifestation of God (Bahá'u'lláh), then through the chosen Center of the Faith (`Abdu'l-Bahá) and subsequently the Guardian of the Faith (Shoghi Effendi). However, with the passing of Shoghi Effendi and the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, guidance for the Bahá'í community no longer came from a personal channel, organically linked to the Manifestation of God but from an elected body chosen by the Bahá'í membership itself.

The Universal House of Justice located at Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel was established in 1963 and became the supreme legislative body of the global Bahá'í community. It is an institution with authority to employ and enhance the laws of Bahá'u'lláh. The institution was defined in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá (Bahá'u'lláh's successor).

The nine members of the Universal House of Justice are elected every five years through an electoral college consisting of all the members of each Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly around the world.

Bahá'í initiatives involve full community participation. Collective decision-making is important so that people have a stake in the activities and feel part of a wider network of unity.

If a person would like to be part of the Bahá'í community, they must indicate this to the Local Spiritual Assembly or the National Spiritual Assembly. The local Spiritual Assembly is the coordinating body for Bahá'ís in a particular area. It consists of 9 members of the community elected by community members to hold office for one year.

In the UK, a person can indicate verbally to a Bahá'í friend or in writing or by email that they consider themselves a Bahá'í and wish to be part of the community. Unless there is some very good reason for not doing so, their enrolment in the community is accepted without question.

Enrolled Bahá'ís can serve on the Local Assembly or other Bahá'í administrative roles if they are elected. Almost every other Bahá'í meeting is open to anyone.



Left: Summer School attendees in Iceland



Right: Celebration event in Congo

## The Báb



On 23 May 1844, a young merchant in the Iranian city of Shiraz made an extraordinary announcement to a guest he'd met earlier in the day at the city gate. The young merchant was Siyyid `Alí Muhammad Shirazi, who took the title of the Báb – meaning “Gate” in Arabic.

The Báb announced that He was the Herald of a new Revelation from God, to be delivered by an upcoming new Divine Educator. He referred to this Promised One as “Him Whom God shall make manifest”. Tens of thousands of people joined the Báb's movement and were known as Bábís.

The religious upheaval surrounding the Báb frightened the Islamic religious authorities. At their urging the Báb was arrested in 1845. After being released for a time – during which His popularity again increased – and then arrested again, the Báb was eventually tried and sentenced to death. The Báb was executed by firing squad in the town square of Tabriz, in Persia's far northwest on 9 July 1850. Some 20,000 of His followers were subsequently killed in a series of brutal massacres throughout Persia.



Shrine of the Báb  
Mount Carmel, Israel