



Baha'i Faith

Faith Guide

A short introduction to the Baha'i faith, its origins and population in the UK

A Short Introduction to the Baha'i Faith

Origins of the Baha'i Faith

Began on 23rd May 1844, in Persia, with Ali-Muhammad's (1819-1850) declaration of himself as the Messenger of God announcing the coming of a "Greater One" who would lead the way to world peace.

Ali-Muhammad became known as the Báb (the Gate or Door). He was executed in 1850, charged with heresy against Islam. His early followers were known as Bábis.

In 1863, Husayn Ali (1817-1892) claimed to be the Greater One and the bringer of divine revelation fulfilling the promises made by previous Messengers in other religions. Exiled to Palestine in 1868, he died in Akka in 1892.

There then followed a succession which is at the heart of the Bahá'í faith.

1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), or the Servant of the Glory, was appointed in Bahá'u'lláh's Will as the authorised interpreter of Bahá'í teachings.
2. 'Abdul Bahá's grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), was appointed in 'Abdul Bahá's Will and became the Guardian of the Faith and Interpreter of Scripture.
3. From 1963, The Universal House of Justice, based at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa in Israel was established as the body which offers guidance to the contemporary Bahá'í community. It is elected every five years.

Central Aspects of the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Scriptures

Bahá'ís believe all documents that are handwritten by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá; all documents signed by them; and all directly or indirectly authenticated records of their spoken words, to be revealed by God.

Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Book) is seen as the foundation of Bahá'í moral principles and institutions.

Doctrinal beliefs are contained in The Kitáb-i-Iqán (The Book of Certitude), whilst Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Words is a collection of ethical sayings.

Summary of Bahá'í Beliefs

A summary of the main Bahá'í beliefs is set out in the collected talks which 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave in the USA. These beliefs are:

- belief in one God
- the unity of humankind
- independent investigation of truth
- the common foundation of all religions
- the essential harmony of science and religion
- equality of opportunity for men and women
- elimination of prejudice of all kinds
- universal compulsory education
- a universal auxiliary language
- abolition of extremities of poverty and wealth through international legislation
- the establishment of universal peace by world government which will have international courts of justice and an international military force
- the concept of progressive revelation

Unity and Progressive Revelation

Various Messengers, including Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ and Muhammad, are seen as “Manifestations of God” and are believed to have promised the coming of Bahá’u’lláh.

Unity, based upon the oneness of God, is a central theme of the Bahá’í religion. It is seen as the basis upon which a new world order of peace and unity can be built and Bahá’í communities are seen as modelling this.

Education and Spirituality

Education is a central theme in Bahá’í teaching and spirituality, and education for women is a priority, as nurturers of the next generation.

Religion and science are not seen as contradictory: science is seen as leading to truth through investigation whilst religion brings truth through revelation.

There are three “obligatory” prayers and every Bahá’í over fifteen years old must pray one of these daily as well as reading scriptural extracts every morning and evening.

To pray, Bahá’ís turn in the direction of Bahji, the burial place of Bahá’u’lláh, which is near Akka in Israel.

The Consultative Principle

Bahá’ís work on the basis of a principle of consultation which aims at unanimity.

Diversity within the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'ís do not acknowledge the legitimacy of any distinct traditions within their religion, believing part of its uniqueness to be that it has maintained its unity.

Those who have disputed the succession and leadership set out in the Wills of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá are referred to by Bahá'ís as Covenant-breakers and are expelled.

Baha'i Origins

Bahá'ís have been in the UK since 1899, with some of the religion's formative history taking place in London. Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), who became Guardian of the Faith and Interpreter of Scripture, lived here.

Bahá'ís in the UK include Iranians, reflecting the geographical origins of the religion. However, the community also includes Bahá'ís from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.

There are no organised traditions and movements in the Bahá'í Faith.

The Bahá'ís are organised locally in Local Spiritual Assemblies of at that can be formed when there are at least 9 Bahá'ís in a locality who are over the age of 21. There are also Local Groups which are formed where there are not sufficient Bahá'ís to create a Local Spiritual Assembly.

The [Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom](#) is the representative body of the religion in the UK.

Baha'is in the UK

Bahá'í Populations

Global	c. 7,306,000
UK	5,718
England	4,746
Wales	275
Scotland	459
Northern Ireland	238



Bahá'í Organisations

	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Local*	114	96	3	7	8
National	4	1	1	3	1

* Figures for Local Spiritual Assemblies. There are also Local Groups.

Bahá'í Places of Worship

There are no Bahá'í Houses of Worship in the UK. However, a number of Local Spiritual Assemblies meet in publicly accessible centres and other buildings.

Acknowledgement of Sources

'Bahá'í' was not one of the categories for response offered in the 2011 Census questions on religious affiliation. However, figures have been derived from an analysis of the write-in responses offered to the 'Any Other Religion' category that was provided. These can be found in the [Office for National Statistics](#)' Table QS210EW (Census 2011: Religion [Detailed], Local Authorities in England & Wales, Crown Copyright 2012), the [Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency](#)'s Table QS218NI (Census 2011: Religion – Full Detail), and the [National Records of Scotland](#)'s Table AT_001_2011 (Census 2011: Religion [Detailed], Crown Copyright 2013). Crown copyright material is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO.

Estimates for the global Bahá'í population are taken from Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim (eds.), *World Religion Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2012).

Estimates for the number of Bahá'í organisations is taken from P. Weller (ed.), *Religions in the UK: A Directory, 2007-10* (Derby: Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby, 2007). The section on 'A Short Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith' summarises and abstracts from the same publication's chapter on 'Introducing Bahá'ís in the UK' (pp. 91-102), which was developed with input from a range of consultants (pp. 329-338).

Materials in the sections on 'Bahá'í Origins' and 'Bahá'ís in the UK' were originally developed by the author for the [British Council](#) and used here by kind permission.

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