

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH
The Divine Educator

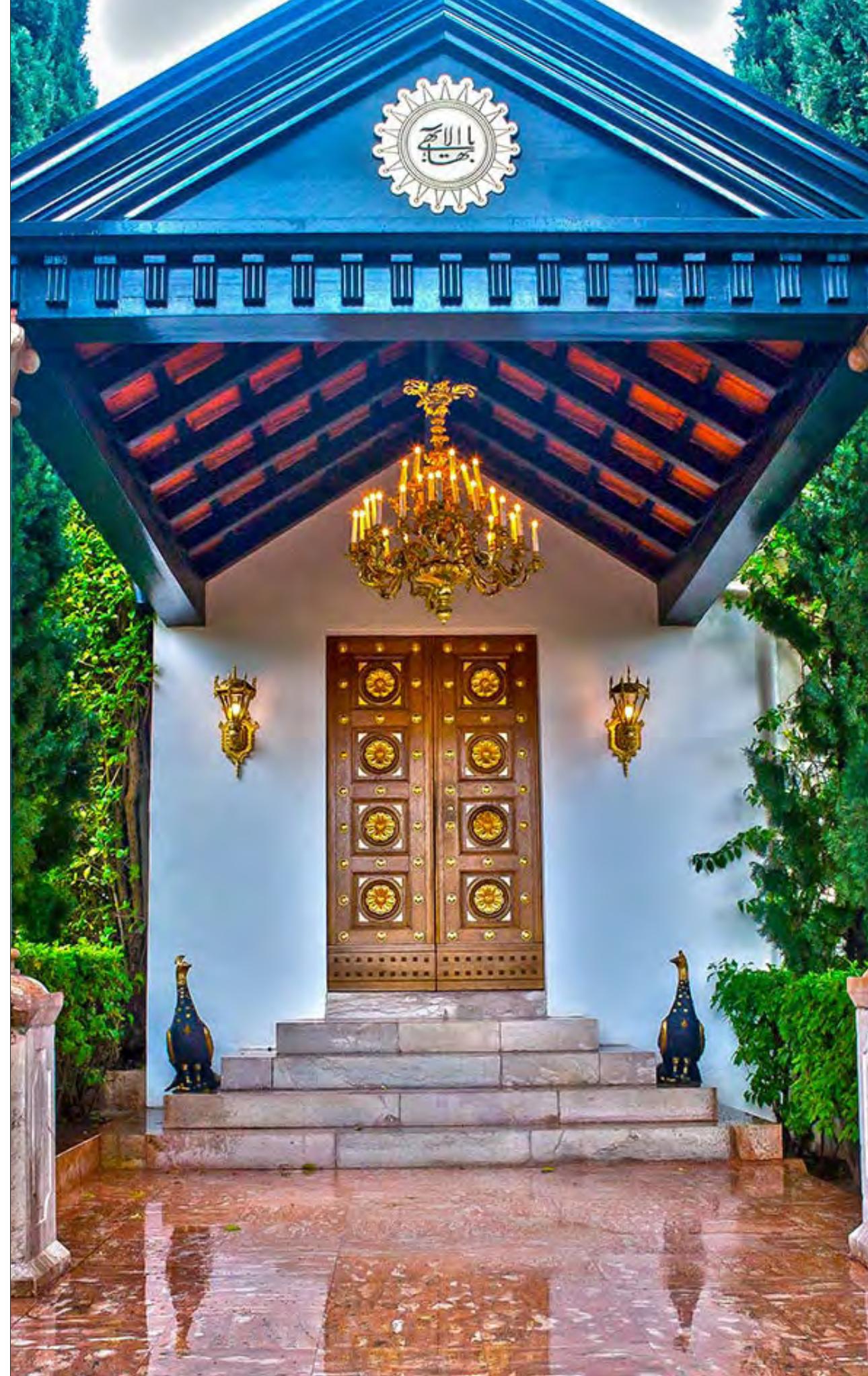
“These holy Manifestations have been as the coming of springtime in the world... For each spring is the time of a new creation...”

— ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

Bahá’í Faith The Bahá’í Faith began with the mission entrusted by God to two Divine Messengers – the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. Today, the distinctive unity of the Faith They founded stems from explicit instructions given by Bahá’u’lláh that have assured the continuity of guidance following His passing. This line of succession, referred to as the Covenant, went from Bahá’u’lláh to His Son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and then from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, ordained by Bahá’u’lláh. A Bahá’í accepts the divine authority of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh and of these appointed successors.

Bahá’u’lláh (1817-1892) – the “Glory of God”– is the Promised One foretold by the Báb and all of the Divine Messengers of the past. Bahá’u’lláh delivered a new Revelation from God to humanity. Thousands of verses, letters and books flowed from His pen. In His Writings, He outlined a framework for the development of a global civilisation which takes into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life. For this, He endured 40 years of imprisonment, torture and exile.

Entrance to the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh



*“I have never aspired
after worldly leadership.
My sole purpose hath
been to hand down unto
men that which I was
bidden to deliver by
God...”*

— BAHÁ’U’LLÁH



 Throughout history, the great religions have provided the primary driving force behind the civilising of human character, eliciting self-discipline, devotion and heroism from their followers. Many of religion’s moral principles have been translated into structures and patterns of conduct which have served to elevate human relationships and advance humanity’s collective life.

 Every time a Manifestation of God appears, a fuller measure of inspiration for the next stage in the awakening and progress of humanity is released into the world. A human being – ordinary in every outward respect – is called to be a mouthpiece for God. One may call to mind Moses standing before the Burning Bush, the Buddha receiving enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove, or the archangel Gabriel appearing to Muhammad.

 In the middle of the 19th century, God summoned Bahá’u’lláh – meaning the “Glory of God” – to deliver a new Revelation to humanity. For four decades thousands of verses, letters and books flowed from His pen. In His Writings, He outlined a framework for the development of a global civilisation which takes into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life.

 Bahá’u’lláh suffered 40 years of imprisonment, torture and exile for bringing God’s latest message to humanity. Today, His life and mission are becoming increasingly well-known across the planet. Millions of people are learning to apply His teachings to their individual and collective lives for the betterment of the world.

Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings...now present us with the highest and purest form of religious teaching...

– Count Leo Tolstoy, Russian author

The Life of Bahá'u'lláh

April, 1863. Men and women, young and old, from all walks of life, gathered on the thoroughfare leading to the banks of the

River Tigris in Baghdad to bid a tearful farewell to One Who had become their friend, their comforter and their guide.

 Mirza Husayn-'Alí – known as Bahá'u'lláh – was being banished from their midst. As a prominent follower of the Báb, whose teachings had swept through Persia two decades before, Bahá'u'lláh had forfeited the privileged life into which He had been born, and instead embraced imprisonment and exile for the rest of His days.

 But despair would soon be transformed into hope: Before leaving the environs of Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh would announce to His companions what many of them had already suspected – that He was the great Divine Educator heralded by the Báb, the initiator of a new era in history in which the tyrannies and injustices of the past would give way to a world of peace and justice: an embodiment of the principle of the oneness of humankind.

 The “Divine Springtime,” He would unequivocally proclaim, had arrived.

Detail of the letter “B” on a gate in the gardens of Bahjí, ‘Akká (Acre), Israel



Early life

Born in Tehran, Iran on 12 November, 1817, Mirza Husayn-'Alí enjoyed all the advantages conferred by noble birth. From a very early age, He displayed extraordinary knowledge and wisdom.

As a young man, rather than pursuing a career in government service as His father had done, Mirza Husayn-'Alí chose to devote His energies to the care of the poor. He showed no interest in seeking position or prominence.

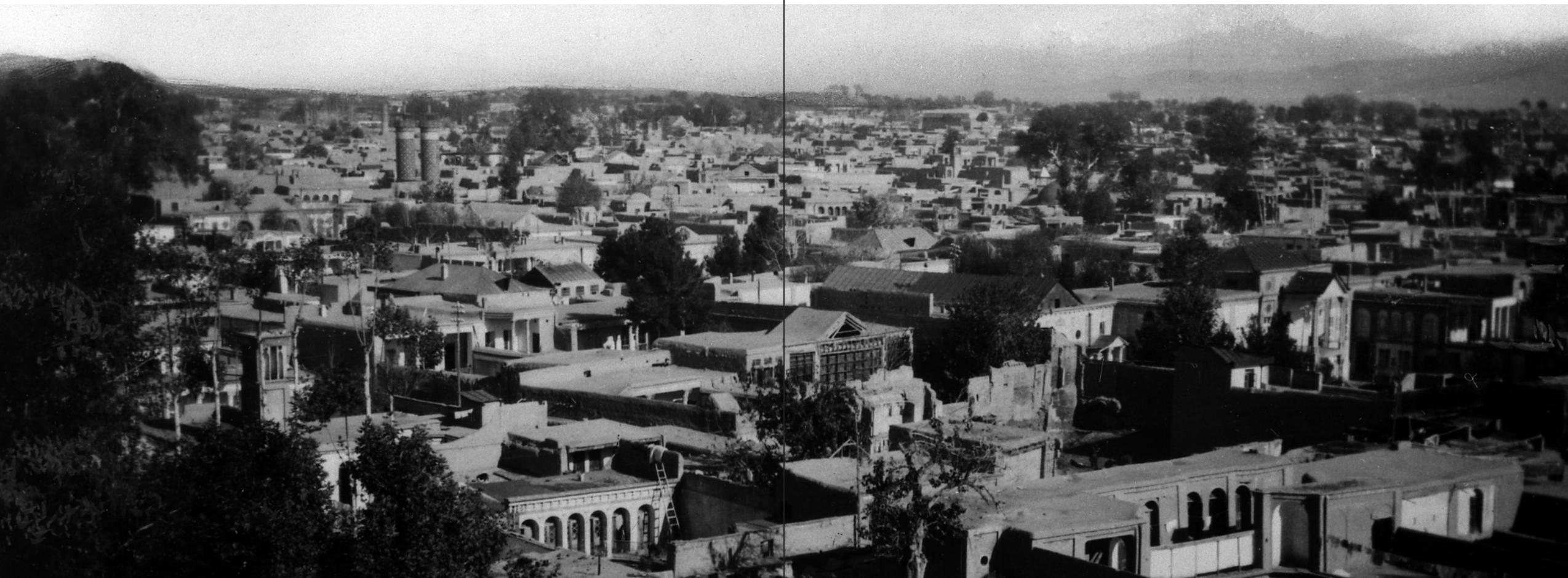
With His acceptance of the religion of the Báb, life permanently changed for the young nobleman and His family. Although They never met in person, from the moment Mirza Husayn-'Alí heard of the Báb's message, He declared His wholehearted belief in it and put all of His energy and influence into promoting it.

In 1848, a significant gathering of the Báb's followers took place in a village in the northeast of Iran named Badasht. Mirza Husayn-'Alí played a central role in the proceedings, which affirmed the independent character of the new religion. From this time onwards, Mirza Husayn-'Alí was known as Bahá'u'lláh, meaning the "Glory of God" in Arabic.

As the community of the Báb's followers grew, so did the fierce opposition it provoked. Thousands upon thousands were subjected to the most cruel and barbaric treatment, and many were put to death. When three hundred Bábís sought refuge in a deserted shrine called Shaykh Tabarsi, Bahá'u'lláh set out to join them, but He was prevented from reaching His destination.

In 1850, the Báb was publicly executed. With the majority of the Báb's leading supporters killed, it soon became evident that Bahá'u'lláh was the only One to Whom the remaining Bábís could turn.

*The city of Tehran, Iran, (1930)
where Bahá'u'lláh was born.*





Revelation

In 1852, Bahá'u'lláh was falsely

charged with complicity in an attempt on the life of Nasiruddin Shah, the King of Iran. When the warrant was issued, He set out to face His accusers, much to the astonishment of those who were charged with arresting Him. They conducted Him, barefoot and in chains, through teeming streets to a notorious subterranean dungeon, known as the "Black Pit."



The dungeon had once been the reservoir for a public bath. Within its walls, prisoners languished in the cold and unhealthy air, clamped together by an unbearably heavy chain that left its mark on Bahá'u'lláh's body for the rest of His life.



It was in this grim setting that the rarest and most cherished of events was once again played out: a mortal man, outwardly human in every respect, was chosen by God to bring to humanity a new message.



This experience of Divine Revelation, touched on only indirectly in surviving accounts of the lives of Moses, Christ, and Muhammad, is illustrated in Bahá'u'lláh's own words:

"During the days I lay in the prison of Tihrah, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain...At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear."

The village of Afchih, near Tehran where Bahá'u'lláh was staying when a warrant was issued for His arrest and detention.

Exile to Baghdad

After four months of intense suffering, Bahá'u'lláh – now ill and utterly exhausted – was released and exiled forever from His native Iran. He and his family

were sent to Baghdad. There, the remaining followers of the Báb increasingly turned to Bahá'u'lláh for moral and spiritual guidance. The nobility of His character, the wisdom of His counsel, the kindness that He showered upon all and the increasing evidences of superhuman greatness in Him, revived the downtrodden community.

 Bahá'u'lláh's emergence as the leader of the community of the Báb's followers increasingly aroused the intense jealousy of Mirza Yahya, His ambitious, younger half-brother. Mirza Yahya made several shameless efforts to slander Bahá'u'lláh's character and sow seeds of suspicion and doubt among His companions. To remove Himself from being the cause of tension, Bahá'u'lláh retired to the mountains of Kurdistan, where He remained for two years, reflecting on His divine purpose. This period of His life was reminiscent of Moses' withdrawal to Mount Sinai, Christ's days in the wilderness, and Muhammad's retreat in the Arabian hills.

 Yet even in this remote region, Bahá'u'lláh's fame spread. People heard that a man of extraordinary wisdom and eloquence was to be found there. When such stories reached Baghdad, the Bábís, guessing Bahá'u'lláh's identity, dispatched a mission to implore Him to return.

 Residing once more in Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh reinvigorated the Báb's followers; the stature of the community grew and His reputation spread ever further. He composed three of His most renowned works at this time – the Hidden Words, the Seven Valleys and the Book of Certitude (Kitáb-i-Íqán). While Bahá'u'lláh's writings alluded to His station, it was not yet the time for a public announcement.

 As Bahá'u'lláh's fame spread, the envy and malice of some of the clergy was rekindled. Representations were made to the Shah of Iran to ask the Ottoman Sultan to remove Bahá'u'lláh further from the Iranian border. A second banishment was decreed.

 At the end of April 1863, shortly before leaving the environs of Baghdad for Istanbul (known as Constantinople in the English language of the time), Bahá'u'lláh and His companions resided for twelve days in a garden which He named Ridván, meaning "Paradise". There, on the banks of the River Tigris, Bahá'u'lláh declared Himself to be the One heralded by the Báb – God's Messenger to the age of humanity's collective maturity, foretold in all the world's scriptures.

Historical view of Baghdad and the Tigris river.



Further banishments

Three months after departing Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh and His fellow exiles reached

Constantinople. They remained there for just four months before a further banishment took them to Edirne (Adrianople), a gruelling journey undertaken during the coldest of winters. In Adrianople, their accommodation failed to protect them from the bitter temperatures.

 Bahá'u'lláh referred to Adrianople as the “remote prison.” Yet despite the inhospitable conditions under which the exiles were forced to live, inspired verses continued to flow from Bahá'u'lláh's pen, and His message reached as far away as Egypt and India.



 During this period Mirza Yahya, the jealous half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh, contrived to poison Him. This tragic episode left Bahá'u'lláh with a tremor that showed in His handwriting to the end of His life.

 Beginning in September 1867, Bahá'u'lláh wrote a series of letters to the leaders and rulers of various nations. In these prescient writings, He openly proclaimed His station, speaking of the dawn of a new age. But first, He warned, there would be catastrophic upheavals in the world's political and social order. He summoned the world's leaders to uphold justice and called upon them to convene an assembly where they would meet and put an end to war. Only by acting collectively, He said, could a lasting peace be established. His warnings fell upon deaf ears.

 Continued agitation from Bahá'u'lláh's detractors caused the Ottoman government to banish Him one final time, to its most notorious penal colony. Arriving in the Mediterranean prison city of 'Akká on 31 August 1868, Bahá'u'lláh was to spend the rest of His life in the fortified city and its environs.

 Confined to a prison for more than two years, He and His companions were later moved to a cramped house within the city's walls. Little by little, the moral character of the Bahá'ís—particularly Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá—softened the hearts of their jailers, and penetrated the bigotry and indifference of 'Akká's residents. As in Baghdad and Adrianople, the nobility of Bahá'u'lláh's character gradually won the admiration of the community at large, including some of its leaders.

 In 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh revealed His most important work, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (the Most Holy Book), in which He outlined the essential laws and principles of His Faith, and established the foundations for a global administrative order.

When He first arrived in 'Akká (Acre), Bahá'u'lláh and His family were confined in this prison on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. The two windows farthest right on the second floor show the room that Bahá'u'lláh occupied in the prison.

Final years

In the late 1870s, Bahá'u'lláh—while still a prisoner—was granted some freedom to move outside of the city's walls, allowing His followers to meet with Him in relative peace. In April 1890, Professor Edward Granville Browne of Cambridge University met Bahá'u'lláh at the mansion near 'Akká where He had taken up residence.

 Browne wrote of their meeting: *"The face of Him on Whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow...No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain."*

 Bahá'u'lláh passed away on 29 May, 1892. In His will, He designated 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His successor and Head of the Bahá'í Faith – the first time in history that the Founder of a world religion had named his successor in a written irrefutable text. This choice of a successor is a central provision of what is known as the "Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh," enabling the Bahá'í community to remain united for all time.

The Mansion of Mazra'ih viewed from the east where Baha'u'llah stayed after being released from the prison city of 'Akká (Acre), Israel.

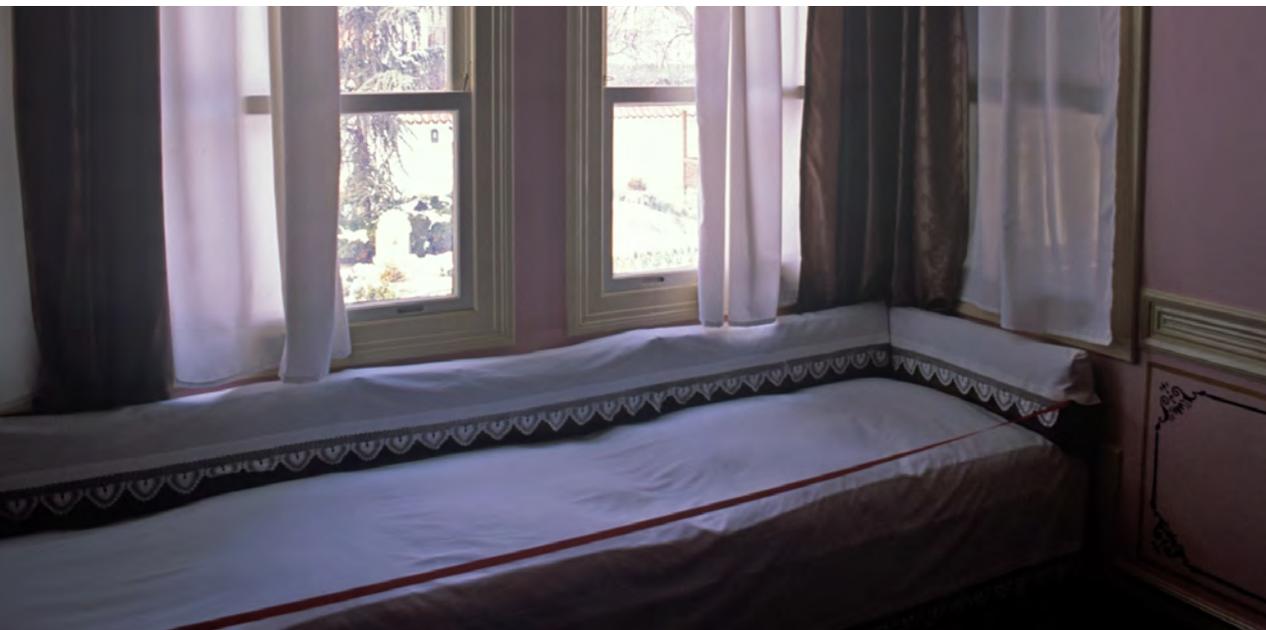


The Early Bahá'í Community

In the decade immediately following the execution of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh assumed the effective leadership of the community of the Báb's followers in Baghdad, reorganising its affairs and reviving the spirits of its members. He furthermore entered into dialogue with the people of Baghdad, including religious leaders.

 Despite declaring His mission to His companions on His departure from Baghdad, it was not until Bahá'u'lláh was in Adrianople that He began to proclaim openly that He was the Manifestation of God for today, promised by the Báb. He also sent emissaries to Iran to inform the Báb's remaining followers there of these tidings. All but a small number of the Bábís turned to Bahá'u'lláh, and so became known as Bahá'ís.

 Among the messengers whom He sent was a devoted follower from Yazd named Ahmad. In 1865, Bahá'u'lláh addressed a powerful letter—or "Tablet"—to Ahmad in which He describes Himself as "the Nightingale of Paradise", and "this resplendent Beauty", foretold in the holy books of the past. Today, this Tablet is often read at times of difficulty, and is a source of solace to Bahá'ís around the world.



Persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran

As the nascent Bahá'í community began to emerge in Iran, it frequently encountered extreme persecution and repression. Among the most renowned Bahá'ís killed during this period was a youth known as Badi. In 1869, at the age of about 17, he became one of the first Bahá'ís from Iran to reach the prison city of 'Akká and enter the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh entrusted to Badi a letter to the Shah of Iran, instructing Badi to return alone to deliver it. Having bravely presented the message to the Shah while they were out on a hunting trip, Badi was tortured and cruelly put to death.

 In 1879 in the city of Isfahan, two brothers—who were highly esteemed and trusted local merchants—were arrested and beheaded at the instigation of the leader of the Friday prayers, who owed them a large sum of money and wished to avoid payment of the sum. Bahá'u'lláh mourned the loss of these two brothers in a number of His Writings, naming them the "King and Beloved of Martyrs", and "the Twin Shining Lights."

 When Bahá'u'lláh's confinement in 'Akká began to ease, the number of pilgrims from Iran to the Holy Land increased. When they returned home, the upsurge in their activities provoked further opposition from the Iranian authorities. A number of leading members of the Tehran Bahá'í community were arrested and condemned to death in 1882 and 1883. Bahá'ís were frequently arrested and imprisoned in other major cities.

Interior of Bahá'u'lláh's residence in Adrianople

Initial spread of the Bahá'í Faith

During the final years of His life, Bahá'u'lláh instructed and encouraged some of His followers to take up residence in other countries, such

as Egypt, Caucasia, Turkmenistan, and India, thus spreading the new religion. While interest in the Bábí movement had been essentially confined to Shiah Muslims, the late period of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry saw Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians also join the ranks of His followers.

 Nabil-i-A'zam, the author of a famous historical narrative of the Bábí period, travelled to Egypt, Iraq and Iran to proclaim the advent of Bahá'u'lláh. In Cairo, Nabil was imprisoned. There, he befriended a Christian cellmate, Faris Effendi, who became probably the first Christian to accept Bahá'u'lláh's claims.

 In 1875, Baha'u'llah dispatched another accomplished teacher of His faith, Jamal Effendi, to India. There, he helped establish Bahá'í communities in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Among those he taught was one Siyyid Mustafa Rumi, who subsequently founded the Bahá'í community of Burma. In later years, Jamal Effendi himself travelled to teach the Bahá'í Faith in Burma, as well as Java, Siam, Singapore, Kashmir, Tibet, north-western China and Afghanistan.

 Word of Bahá'u'lláh's Faith also began to spread to the West during the last years of His life. In March 1889, the distinguished Orientalist, Professor Edward G. Browne of Cambridge University, delivered a lecture in Newcastle, England about the new Faith's genesis, followed by similar papers at the Royal Asiatic Society in London.

 By the time Bahá'u'lláh passed away in 1892, His Faith had spread to some 15 countries.



In 1913 Miss Margaret Stevenson became the first New Zealander to fully embrace the Bahá'í teachings.



The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh

At the hour of dawn on 29 May 1892, in the 75th year of His life,

Bahá'u'lláh passed away, His spirit at long last released from a life filled with tribulations. The news of His passing was conveyed to the Ottoman Sultan who was advised of the intention of interring Bahá'u'lláh's remains within the precincts of the Mansion of Bahjí, where He spent the last 13 years of His life. He was interred shortly after sunset on the same day.

 The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh became the point of devotion on earth for Bahá'ís, the spot towards which they turn each day in prayer.

 Today, the Shrine consists of a light-filled, central room, striking in its simplicity and beauty. A garden stands in the middle of the room, which is surrounded by smaller rooms. In one corner of the central room is the chamber where Bahá'u'lláh's remains are laid to rest.

For Bahá'ís, the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh is the holiest spot on earth and the point towards which they turn in prayer each day.

 Throughout his ministry as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi—the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh—conceived and created beautiful surrounding gardens as a befitting setting for this most sacred spot. With the Shrine and Mansion at its centre, Shoghi Effendi's vision took the form of an expansive circle, each quadrant of which became a garden of different composition and design. He built the five gates and nine pathways of this garden, surfacing the paths with small white pebbles from a beach on the Sea of Galilee, and crushed roof tiles. After the passing of Shoghi Effendi, his great plan for the beautification of the environs of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh continued.

 To set foot in the heart of the site is to enter a place of peace and serenity, a wall-less sanctuary that is protected without being enclosed. Here the formal, precise gardening flows around the historic buildings and natural elements that include a centuries-old sycamore fig tree and the remains of an ancient olive grove.

Quotations from Bahá'u'lláh

As the Torah is to Jews, the Bible to Christians, or the Qur'an to Muslims, the collected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are considered by His followers to be Revelation from God. They form the foundation of the Bahá'í Faith.

Throughout the long years of His exile, Bahá'u'lláh revealed passages, equivalent to more than 100 volumes. They include social and ethical teachings, prayers, laws and ordinances, mystical writings, and a fearless proclamation of His message to the most powerful rulers of His time.

Let their glorious, peace-bringing, love-creating words and lessons sink into your hearts...

– Queen Marie of Romania

The following is a small selection of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.



To every discerning and illumined heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute...Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery.





The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace... hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence.



These sanctified Mirrors...are, one and all, the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty.



Led by the light of unfailing guidance, and invested with supreme sovereignty, They are commissioned to use the inspiration of Their words, the effusions of Their infallible grace and the sanctifying breeze of Their Revelation for the cleansing of every longing heart and receptive spirit from the dross and dust of earthly cares and limitations.



*This is the changeless Faith of
God, eternal in the past, eternal
in the future.*



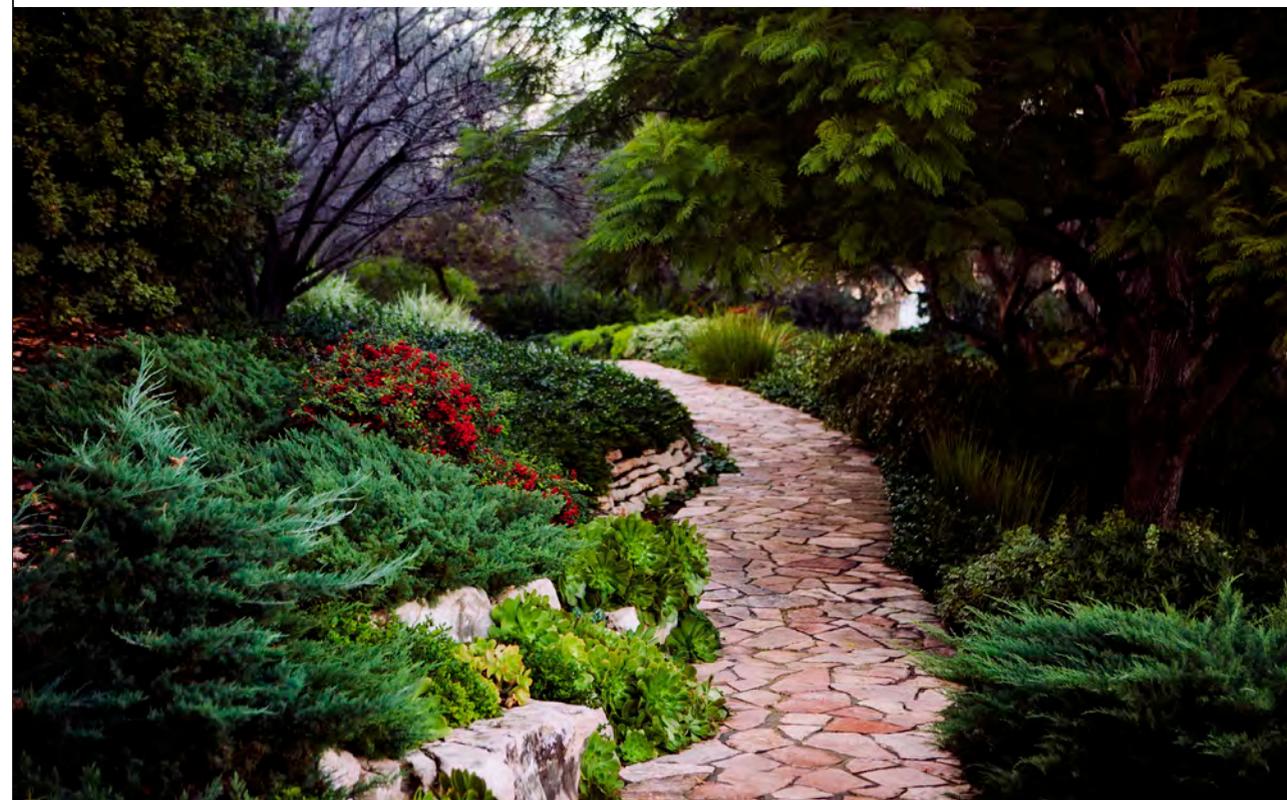
*Verily I say, this is the Day in
which mankind can behold the
Face, and hear the Voice, of the
Promised One.*



*I am the Sun of Wisdom and the
Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the
faint and revive the dead. I am the
guiding Light that illumineth the
way. I am the royal Falcon on the
arm of the Almighty. I unfold the
drooping wings of every broken
bird and start it on its flight.*



*I was but a man like others,
asleep upon My couch, when lo,
the breezes of the All-Glorious
were wafted over Me, and taught
Me the knowledge of all that
hath been. This thing is not
from Me, but from One Who
is Almighty and All-Knowing.
And He bade Me lift up My voice
between earth and heaven, and
for this there befell Me what hath
caused the tears of every man of
understanding to flow.*





The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.



This is the Day in which God's most excellent favours have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things. It is incumbent upon all the peoples of the world to reconcile their differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, abide beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness.





That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith.



Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.



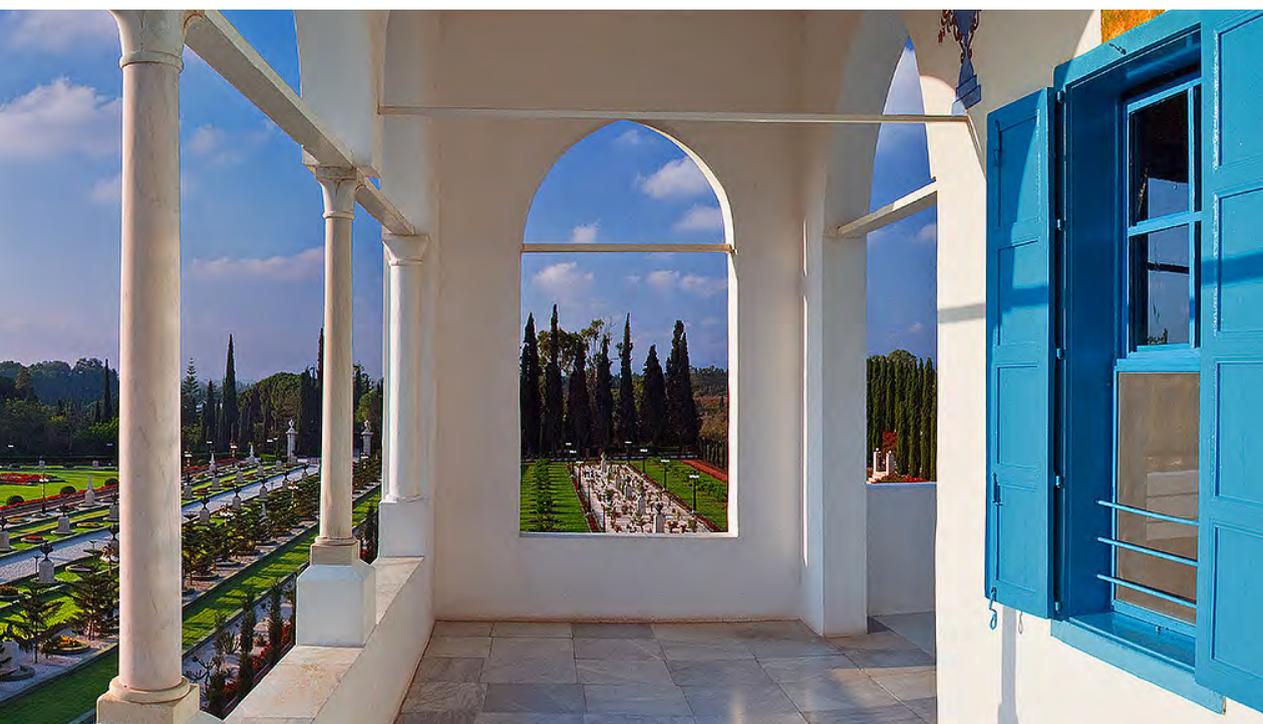
Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Daystar of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.



The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.



The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation.





O SON OF SPIRIT! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.



Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.



Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being.



Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer to the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgement, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility.



What Bahá'ís Do

In neighbourhoods across New Zealand, Bahá'ís are striving to bring the vision of the oneness of humanity into reality. All individuals, of whatever race, gender, religion or social status, are invited to contribute to this effort.



SPIRITUAL EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG

Bahá'ís see the young as the most precious treasure a community can possess. In them are the promise and guarantee of the future. Yet, in order for this promise to be realised, children need to receive spiritual nourishment. The Bahá'í community offers classes for the spiritual education of children and young teenagers.

Within the Bahá'í community there is a strong culture of learning among all age groups. Bahá'ís believe that everyone has the right and duty to investigate spiritual truth for themselves.

That process of learning is a life-long journey for each individual, no matter what level of education or ability he or she has. This journey starts in the family and is supported by children's classes, open to all, for the spiritual and moral education of children. This is followed by groups for young teenagers and youth, with a focus on building capacities for service to the community.

In these activities, no distinction is made between Bahá'ís, peoples of other faiths, and those who follow no particular faith or religion. All are welcome to join and to contribute.

Children's Classes

Of all our treasures, the most precious are our children! 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "Every child is potentially the light of the world—and at the same time its darkness; wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance."

Bahá'í communities around New Zealand run regular classes that are open to children of all backgrounds and are often run in collaboration with their families. Drawing on the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, the classes aim to inspire in children a love for all the great religions in the world.

Children learn about applying spiritual principles – such as love, unity and kindness – to their own lives, to their families and their friends.

These classes include short lessons, activities to build social skills and friendships, games, stories, art and music.



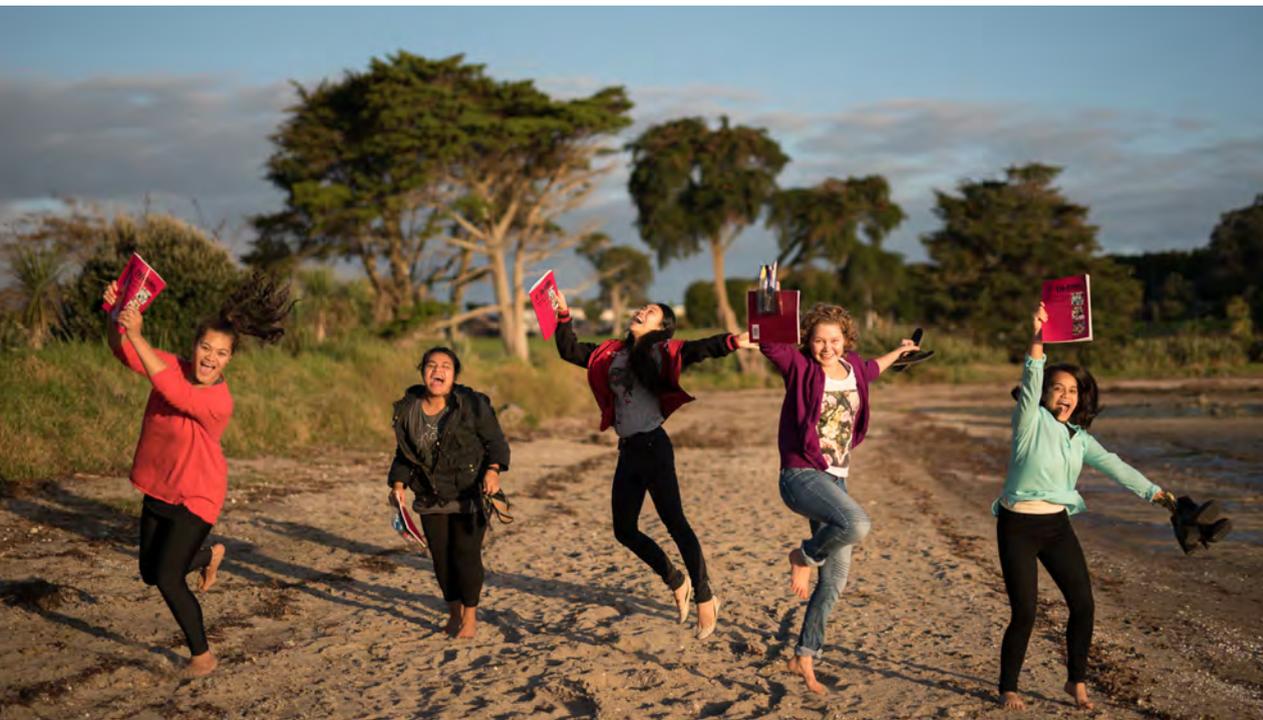
Groups for young teenagers

The Junior Youth Empowerment Programme for young teenagers aged 12 to 15 years is a global initiative aimed at equipping young people with the ability to recognise the positive and negative forces in society, and to channel their energies towards becoming agents of constructive change in the world.

The programme is founded on the belief that the early adolescent years are particularly powerful and many young people want to contribute to the construction of a better world.

Group members meet on a weekly basis to develop their intellectual and spiritual capabilities, and to carry out service projects in their communities. The programme also includes sports, music and arts.

All young people are welcome to participate and older youth can be trained to run the groups, too.



DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Worship is at the heart of the community life that Bahá'ís around the world are trying to bring into being. Devotional gatherings, often held in homes, bring family and friends together in prayer and meditation. This empowers them in their service in all aspects of their lives.

Prayer and meditation are fundamental aspects of a healthy spiritual life. Together, these practices develop spirituality and mindfulness, and allow us to reflect on our higher purpose. The Bahá'í writings tell us:

“There is nothing sweeter in the world of existence than prayer... The most blessed condition is the condition of prayer and supplication.”

In the Bahá'í Faith, prayer is not about merely reciting a list of personal wishes. Rather, prayer is a means for drawing nearer to God. It helps us develop a radiant confidence and gives us strength to overcome difficulties.

The daily practice of prayer provides a natural opportunity to meditate on profound concepts and to reflect on how they might be applied to one's own life and character, so that we can play a part in the progress of society.

Devotional gatherings, held in homes and Bahá'í centres all over New Zealand, are a space for people of diverse cultures and beliefs to worship, pray and meditate together. These gatherings often include readings and prayers from other Faiths and are open to all. For many, these devotional gatherings provide an opportunity for reflection and inspiration.



LEARNING TO SERVE OUR COMMUNITIES

To build a better world requires a growing number of people who have the skills and desire to serve their local neighbourhoods. Study circles are small groups that meet on a regular basis to learn how to walk the spiritual path with practical feet.

Bahá'ís strive to contribute to the material and spiritual well-being of the wider community.

To build capacity to contribute more effectively, they organise and attend study circles which are open to people of all faiths and background. Study circles assist participants to deepen their understanding of the Bahá'í teachings, and to gain the spiritual insights and practical skills they need to carry out the work of the community. In response to the materials they study, participants arise to carry out specific acts of service.

Closely related are the efforts of Bahá'ís to contribute to the public welfare at the level of thought through participation in the discourses of society.



Study Circles

Study circles have been created to develop capacity in young people and adults to offer service to their communities as a result of exploring spiritual concepts and how to apply them to everyday life.

Participants of study circles use materials for their collective study on themes like prayer, life after death, and service to mankind. This remarkable educational programme is perhaps the most widespread, but it is more than just study circles—it also encompasses action and service to the community. Bahá'ís in New Zealand along with their friends, co-workers, and neighbours join millions of others in more than 180 countries who are also taking part in this programme.

Women and men, young and old alike, in Aotearoa New Zealand are warmly invited to participate in one of the study circles that are organised in local communities throughout the country.



Contributing to Public Discourse

The Bahá'í community is learning how to contribute to discussions on issues facing New Zealand. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are relevant to many challenges we face as a country such as fostering unity between culturally diverse peoples, advancing towards equality between women and men, and the need to rebalance the economy to eliminate extremes of wealth and poverty.

Individual members of the Bahá'í community—whether through their involvement in the life of the local community, their efforts of social action, or in the course of their studies, occupations, or professional activities—strive to participate fruitfully in such discourses, learning with and from others and offering their personal insights, informed by the Bahá'í teachings, to the unfolding discussions. Bahá'í-inspired agencies also contribute to discourses associated with aspects of social and economic development relevant to their work.

Ethnic Diversity and Race Unity

One area of focus for the New Zealand Bahá'í community is learning about fostering unity between culturally diverse peoples. The principles of racial equality and unity are central to the Bahá'í teachings. The elimination of racial prejudice is essential to peace, prosperity and the well-being of humankind. Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

“Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Daystar of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.”

For many years the New Zealand Bahá'í community has been active in promoting positive race relations, partnering with the NZ Police and the Human Rights Commission. The Bahá'í community was instrumental in the establishment of Race Relations Day as an annual celebration, observed on 21 March each year.

In 2001 the New Zealand Bahá'í community initiated and organised the Race Unity Speech Awards in support of Race Relations Day. Initially held in Auckland, the competition has now spread to many cities and towns around the country.





GET IN TOUCH

Contact the Bahá'í community for more information about the Bahá'í Faith

Website: bahai.org.nz / bahai.org

Facebook Page: facebook.com/newzealandbahaicommunity

Bookshop: bds.bahai.org.nz

Phone: 0800 BAH AIS (0800 224 247)



SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Section on Bahá'u'lláh: bahai.org

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The Bahá'í Reference Library provides access to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh: bahai.org/library



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Te Rūnanga Wairua Tapu o nga Bahá'í o Aotearoa