

sunset. (See
“Nineteen-Day Feast [Baha’i].”) Baha’u’llah (1817–1892),
prophet-founder of the
Baha’i Faith, ordained Ayyam-i-Ha as follows:

O Pen of the Most High! Say: O people of the world! . . . Let the days in
excess of the months be placed before the month of fasting. . . . It behoveth
the people of Baha, throughout these days, to provide good cheer for them-
selves, their kindred and, beyond them, the poor and needy, and with joy
and exultation to hail and glorify their Lord, to sing His praise and magnify
His Name . . . Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Lord of all man-
kind. (Baha’u’llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, 24–25)

As this passage of Baha’i scripture indicates, this time of festivity
(“good
cheer”) is not only to have a good time, but to do some good at the same
time,
by giving to the less fortunate. It is a time of both cheer and charity, in
which
reaching out to those in need enriches the quality of this time and renders it
all
the more worthwhile.

The numerical (abjad) value of the Arabic/Persian letter “Ha” is five,
which cor-
responds to the potential number of intercalary days. The Baha’i
Writings attach
symbolic significance to the letter “Ha,” which represents, inter alia,
the mysterious
and transcendent “Essence” of God. Since the days and months of the
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calendar are named after some of the “attributes” of God, the “Days of
Ha” may
symbolize the transcendence of the essence of God over the attributes of
God, which represent the “nature” of God as manifest in creation, and as
perfectly
manifested in the “Manifestations of God.” This is a Baha’i term for
the great proph-
ets and messengers of God, including, inter alia, Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster,
Bud-
dha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Bab, and Baha’u’llah, whom Baha’is
recognize as great
God-inspired truth-bearers and lawgivers in their respective religious eras.
Thus, Ayyam-i-Ha can signify the “Days of God” and are thus invested
with
spiritual meaning beyond their pragmatic calendrical function, where symbolism

and celebration go hand in hand. As one report stated: “Ayyam-i-Ha can be thought of as days outside of time, days that symbolize eternity, infinity and the mystery and unknowable Essence of God Himself.” (“ ‘Days Outside of Time’ Festival Reveres Eternal Essence of God” [2008].)

Shoghi Effendi (Guardian of the Baha’i Faith, who led the Baha’i world from 1921 to 1957 and who furthered the development of the system of elected councils at the local, national, and international levels that administer Baha’i affairs today), wrote: “As regards the celebration of the Christian Holidays by the believers, it is surely preferable and even highly advisable that the friends should in their relation to each other discontinue observing of such holidays as Christmas and New Year’s, and to have their festal gatherings of this nature instead during the intercalary days and Naw-Ruz.” (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 19, 1938; cited in *Lights of Guidance*, 302.) In practical terms, young Baha’i children in cultures where the celebration of Christmas is pervasive may be inclined to view Ayyam-i-Ha as “Baha’i Christmas,” as it is most likely a time when they will receive gifts from family and friends. In turn, Baha’i parents often find this a good time to strengthen the children’s identity as Baha’is, by holding Ayyam-i-Ha parties to which they can invite their friends and celebrating it with their classmates at school when possible. A Baha’i children’s book, *The Ayyam-i-Ha Camel*, shows one family’s way of personalizing the holiday: inventing an “Ayyam-i-Ha Camel” to represent the gift-giving nature of this Baha’i festival.

Baha’is celebrate Ayyam-i-Ha worldwide, since the Baha’i Faith has been established in every country in the world, except for the Vatican and North Korea, making it the second-most widespread religion in the world today, next to Christianity. Among the world’s six million Baha’is, Ayyam-i-Ha traditions are

highly diverse

and “in the making.” In 2008 in Zambia, for instance, one Baha’i blogger posted:

“Last Friday we had an Ayyam-i-Ha party with the children’s classes. We had a treasure hunt, a pinata, a water balloon fight and some arts+crafts! The kids had so much fun.” (Karrie, “Service in Zambia,” online at <http://serve-zambia.blogspot.com>.)

Baha’i families and communities are to remain free to creatively express their observance of this occasion, so as to avoid creating hard-and-fast customs or rituals.

Some other examples of ways in which Ayyam-i-Ha has been celebrated include: sending “Ayyam-i-Ha cards” to friends and family; having an annual

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family “Ayyam-i-Ha dinner”; organizing treasure hunts for Baha’i children and

their friends; bringing small presents to a Baha’i child’s kindergarten classmates

and organizing an edible art activity; giving children an “Ayyam-i-Ha present”

on each day of the four or five days; hanging “Ayyam-i-Ha stockings”; baking

“Ayyam-i-Ha cookies” (in the shape of a nine-pointed star, a symbol of the Baha’i

Faith); making Baha’i prayer beads; decorating the home with nine-pointed stars;

making “Ayyam-i-Ha banners” with pockets for small gifts; having a community

bowling party or pancake party; etc.

As for Ayyam-i-Ha charity and service projects, these examples are representative: organizing a food drive or hunger relief for donating food to local

food banks; paying surprise visits to friends or home-bound acquaintances, with heartwarming displays of friendship and songs; visiting people in hospitals and homes for the aged; providing crafts activities for residents at nursing homes; giving

gift packages to people at homeless shelters; and so forth.

In 2008 in Malaysia, for instance, the Local Baha’i Youth Committee of Kuching

organized a blood donation campaign at the Kuching Baha’i Centre in Malaysia. In

2007, the Baha’is joined with Temple Israel, a conservative synagogue in Albany,

New York, in co-organizing a multicultural music and dance concert in the majestic sanctuary at Temple Israel on February 25, 2007, during which \$1,701.50 was raised among the some 200 attendees and donated to the Food Pantries for the Capital District. In 2003 in Singapore, Baha'is observed Ayyam-i-Ha with a blood donation drive, followed by a picnic for families in a beachside park. Recently, "home visits" seem to be a popular mode of service among Baha'is. There is a special Baha'i prayer for Ayyam-i-Ha (found in most Baha'i prayer books), and in which these blessings are invoked:

I implore Thee, O Thou the King of kings and the Pitier of the downtrodden, to ordain for them the good of this world and of the world to come. Write down for them, moreover, what none of Thy creatures hath discovered, and number them with those who have circled round Thee, and who move about Thy throne in every world of Thy worlds. (Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Prayers, 236–37)

Here, God is represented as "the Pitier of the downtrodden," which makes the one who is praying mindful of those who are less fortunate, and of the need to reach out to make this world a better place. For Baha'is, personal salvation is bound up with social salvation, in that personal transformation is dynamically related to the efforts a person makes to transform society. The Baha'i Intercalary Days are therefore all about good cheer, hospitality, and doing good for others, when celebrations and service go hand in hand.

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See also 'Abdu'l-Baha, Ascension of; Bab, Festival of the Birth of the; Bab, Festival of the Declaration of the; Bab, Martyrdom of the; Baha'i Calendar and Rhythms of Worship; Baha'i Faith; Baha'i Fast; Baha'u'llah, Ascension of; Baha'u'llah, Festival of the Birth of; Covenant, Day of the; Naw-Ruz, Festival of; Nineteen-Day Feast (Baha'i); Race Unity Day; Ridvan, Festival of; World Religion Day.
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— Ayyam-i-Ha (February 25) (Used by permission of the curator)