

Bahá'í Calendar, Prayer, and Fasting

Summary: The Bahá'í solar calendar consists of nineteen months of nineteen days, with one day for fasting and nine holy days related to the lives of the Báb and Baha'u'llah. Bahá'ís recite one of three daily obligatory prayers of varying lengths, offer prayers for special occasions, and perform personal prayers, all of which are done in private.

The Bahá'í calendar, originating with the Báb's ministry in 1844, is a solar calendar divided into nineteen months of nineteen days each with four or five intercalary days to bring the total number of days in the year from 361 to 365 (366 in a leap year). The year begins on the vernal equinox, March 21. The Bahá'í year includes nine holy days, most of which commemorate events in the lives of the Báb and Baha'u'llah, on which Bahá'ís should suspend work. Holy days, like all Bahá'í days, start at sunset and end the following sunset. They are generally celebrated by a worship program followed by refreshments. All holy day observances are open to non-Bahá'ís.

Near the end of each year, during the Bahá'í month of 'Ala or "Loftiness," which begins at sunset March 1 and ends at sunset, March 20, Bahá'ís observe a period of fasting. The Bahá'í fast involves abstaining from food, drink, and tobacco from sunrise to sunset each day. Exempted from fasting are those under the age of fifteen or over age seventy; women who are pregnant, nursing or menstruating; travelers; the ill; and those performing heavy physical labor. Bahá'ís often gather at restaurants or in each others' homes to pray and eat before dawn, or to pray and break their fast in the evening. The purpose of the fast is to remember one's dependency on God and to learn detachment from material things.

Baha'u'llah revealed three obligatory prayers. Bahá'ís are under a spiritual obligation to choose one of these prayers and perform it each day. The Long Obligatory Prayer can be said any time within a twenty-four hour period and is repeated only once. The Medium Obligatory Prayer must be repeated three times in a day, once between dawn and noon, once between noon and sunset, and once between sunset and midnight. The Short Obligatory Prayer is said once a day, between noon and sunset. These Obligatory Prayers are always performed in private.

Individuals often asked the Báb, Baha'u'llah, and Abdu'l-Baha for prayers for special circumstances, such as grieving for a lost one, restoration of health, the spiritual growth of their children, or preparation

for marriage. Hundreds of these prayers have been published in Bahá'í prayer books. They are among the first Bahá'í scriptures translated. Repeating them is an important part of a Bahá'í's daily worship; and the recitation of these prayers is central in most Bahá'í worship services. Bahá'ís also pray to God in their own words, but not in community or public worship services.