



BAHÁ'Í FAITH

UNITED STATES BAHÁ'Í NATIONAL OFFICES

Office of Communications

Information about the Bahá'í Faith for Funeral Directors

General Information

- **Adherents:** There are about 175,000* Bahá'ís in the United States (less than one percent of the nation's population), residing in more than 9,000 localities. The makeup of the faith's adherents is very diverse. (*As of Sept. 2015)
- **Location:** The largest communities are in California, Georgia, Illinois, South Carolina, and Texas. There are Bahá'í communities in every state.
- **Variations/Denominations:** There are no variations, denominations, sects, or other divisions within the religion. The worldwide Bahá'í Faith is united and under the leadership of one international council known as the Universal House of Justice.
- **Clergy:** There is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith. The faith is administered by a combination of Local Assemblies, a National Spiritual Assembly, and the Universal House of Justice.
- **Sacred Texts:** The writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder, are the primary texts of the Bahá'í Faith.
- **Symbols:** A nine-pointed star is generally used as a symbol of the Bahá'í Faith. Nine is the highest single digit number and symbolizes completeness. Calligraphic forms of the word "Bahá", which means glory and is known as the Greatest Name, are also frequently displayed by Bahá'ís.

Overview

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent monotheistic religions. Founded in Iran in 1844, it now has more than 5 million adherents in 236 countries and territories. Bahá'ís come from nearly every national, ethnic and religious background, making the Bahá'í Faith the second-most widespread religion in the world. Bahá'ís view all the world's major religions as part of a single, progressive process through which God reveals His will to humanity. The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), is recognized as the most

recent in a line of Divine Messengers that stretches back beyond recorded time and includes Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad. The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for humanity's unification into one global society. While reaffirming the core ethical principles common to all religions, Bahá'u'lláh also revealed new laws and teachings to lay the foundations of a global civilization.

Dietary Restrictions

Alcohol consumption is forbidden for Bahá'ís, unless prescribed by a physician. This includes the use of alcohol in cooking. All other foods are acceptable and are usually governed by local tradition.

From March 2 to March 20 Bahá'ís observe a fast. During this time they do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset. Bahá'ís will typically rise before sunrise for a meal, and have another meal after sunset during the fast. A number of circumstances lead to exemption from the fast, including illness, pregnancy and nursing, travel, and arduous physical labor. Also exempt are those who are under 15 or over 70 years of age.

Medical Concerns

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that individuals should seek the help of competent physicians for medical treatment. The Faith also teaches that science and religion cannot contradict, since God is the creator of all and science is simply a reflection of God's creation. This being true, medical science and its advancements do not contradict Bahá'í beliefs.

Views of Death

The purpose of human life for Bahá'ís is to know and love God, to acquire virtues and spiritual qualities, and to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. Bahá'ís view life in this world as a preparation for life in the next world. The soul comes into existence at conception and is immortal.

Bahá'ís believe that the soul is eternal and is on a journey to be closer to God. The soul is not reborn into a different body. Death is seen as a passing into the next world and is often equated to birth by Bahá'ís. It is thought that passing from this world to the next through death is much like a child's passing from its mother's womb into this world. In the same way that a child passes out of a small and known place into a much greater world through birth, so the soul moves through death from this knowable world to a world that is wonderful and beyond comprehension. The transition to death is seen as a natural part of the process of spiritual growth for Bahá'ís. The soul will continue to develop and grow closer to God in the next world.

Heaven and hell are not literal places to Bahá'ís, but rather measures of closeness to God. Heaven is being close to God and hell is being separated from God. Because the soul continues to develop after death, being separated from God is not necessarily an eternal condition. Since Bahá'ís believe God loves all people, regardless of faith, and the Bahá'í Faith is the continuation of other major religions, Bahá'ís are not likely to feel added stress due to the death of a loved one who is not a Bahá'í.

The sadness in death for Bahá'ís is for those left behind to grieve. Death is not viewed as something to celebrate, because those who die will be missed; however, death is seen as a part of God's plan. There is a feeling among Bahá'ís that God is too vast for us to know and understand; in the same way it is impossible for individuals to know and understand God's plans or ways. Bahá'ís believe that everything happens for a reason (including death and suffering), even if that reason is not understood. Bahá'ís also believe that spiritual existence is much more important than physical existence. This belief, combined with belief in the eternal nature of the soul and its continuing development beyond death, may eventually bring peace to Bahá'ís at the end of the grieving process.

Suffering and Injury

Though suffering may be from God, it is not handed out as a punishment; rather it is a way to further an individual's spiritual development. Bahá'ís believe that God will not test anyone beyond what they are capable of handling. There are no negative eternal consequences to suffering for Bahá'ís, this includes physical injuries, handicaps, and other potentially

debilitating or life-long problems. In fact, many Bahá'ís may see dealing with long-term suffering or difficulties as especially beneficial to spiritual development. This is not to imply in any way that Bahá'ís wish for suffering, only that suffering, while painful and difficult, can be an eternally positive experience for an individual.

Suicide

The act of suicide is strongly condemned in the Bahá'í Faith, but Bahá'ís do not adopt a condemnatory attitude towards those who commit suicide. Suicide victims are allowed to have traditional Bahá'í funerals.

Euthanasia

There is nothing in the Bahá'í sacred texts that relates specifically to the question of euthanasia or the removal of life support in medical cases where physiological interventions prolong life in disabling illnesses. Until such time as the Universal House of Justice considers legislation on this subject, decisions on these matters are left to the conscience of those responsible.

Contacting Families

There is not a specific mourning period when families should not be contacted.

Body Preparation and Interment

Certain Bahá'í laws, including some burial laws, are implemented in parts of the world as Bahá'í communities evolve. Bahá'ís are universally required to observe the following burial laws:

- The body is not to be embalmed unless required by law;
- Cremation is forbidden;
- Interment must take place within one hour's travel time from the city or town where the death occurs;

- Calcination or other means of speeding the process of natural decomposition should not be used;
- Bahá'ís may donate their bodies or organs to medical science but provisions must be made to treat the remains with dignity and bury the remains within one hour's travel from the place of death.

Bahá'ís from Iran and other countries in the Middle East are required to observe certain procedures for the preparation of the body. If a Bahá'í who is originally from such a region dies while in the United States, his family and Bahá'í community will desire that appropriate preparation of his body be carried out. Those requirements include that the body should be washed carefully and wrapped in a shroud of white silk or cotton. If the deceased is an adult (over the age of 15) a Bahá'í burial ring is to be placed on one finger. If this is not possible due to missing body parts or other circumstances the ring may be placed in the coffin. The burial ring has an inscription written in either Arabic or Persian which says, "I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate."

The body should be placed in a coffin made of stone, a hard fine wood, or crystal and buried with the feet pointed toward the Holy Land (Israel). Bahá'ís from other parts of the world may choose to follow these requirements, but are under no obligation to do so at this time.

Unrecoverable, Missing, or Damaged Bodies

In the case of an unrecoverable, missing, or damaged body, a memorial service will likely still be performed. The Bahá'í Faith is non-dogmatic and places emphasis on the spirit of the law rather than the specific requirements of the law. This emphasis should allow for relative flexibility and coping by Bahá'ís in the event of accidents or extreme circumstances that may accompany a disaster situation.

Funerals and Memorial Services

The contents of a Bahá'í funeral are generally left to the discretion of the family of the deceased, but typically will include prayer, reading of Bahá'í scriptures, and music. There is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, therefore, the conduct of the service and arrangements for interment are left to the relatives of the deceased in consultation with the local Bahá'í community.

Funerals should be simple and free of rituals, save the reading of the “Prayer for the Dead” for Bahá'ís over the age of 15. There is no specific dress requirement for funerals. Non-Bahá'ís are permitted to attend funerals and interments. It is appropriate to convey condolences directly to the bereaved.

The “Prayer for the Dead” is recited by one person while all present stand. (If the person who has died is a woman, the prayer below is modified to: This is Thy handmaiden and the daughter of Thy handmaiden, etc.)

O my God! This is Thy servant and the son of Thy servant who hath believed in Thee and in Thy signs, and set his face towards Thee, wholly detached from all except Thee. Thou art, verily, of those who show mercy the most merciful.

Deal with him, O Thou Who forgivest the sins of men and concealest their faults, as beseemeth the heaven of Thy bounty and the ocean of Thy grace. Grant him admission within the precincts of Thy transcendent mercy that was before the foundation of earth and heaven. There is no God but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.

Alláh-u-Abhá

We all, verily, worship God. [Recited 19 times]

Alláh-u-Abhá

We all, verily, bow down before God. [Recited 19 times]

Alláh-u-Abhá

We all, verily, are devoted unto God. [Recited 19 times]

Alláh-u-Abhá

We all, verily, give praise unto God. [Recited 19 times]

Alláh-u-Abhá

We all, verily, yield thanks unto God. [Recited 19 times]

Alláh-u-Abhá

We all, verily, are patient in God. [Recited 19 times]

- Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'í Cemeteries

Many local Bahá'í communities own cemeteries or sections of larger cemeteries. However, in the United States, most Bahá'í localities use available cemetery facilities which are not restricted by race, religion or nationality.

Grave Markers

Appropriate symbols for use on the grave marker of a Bahá'í are a nine-pointed star, a nine-pointed star with the word “Bahá'í” in the center, or the word “Bahá'í”.



Gifts and Donations

Gifts of flowers and donations on behalf of the deceased are appropriate. Contributions in honor and memory of a loved one and good works performed in their name are believed to be beneficial to the progress of the soul of the deceased.

Mourning Customs

There are no particular mourning customs and no defined mourning period for Bahá'ís.

Resources

For further information on the Bahá'í Faith contact a local Bahá'í community, call the Bahá'í National Center at (847) 869-9039 or visit the website of the Bahá'ís of the United States: www.bahai.us

Bahá'í burial rings, a “Guide to Bahá'í Funeral and Burial Practices”, and books with compilations of Bahá'í writings and prayers that discuss the topic of death are available for purchase through the Bahá'í Bookstore: www.bahaibookstore.com. Use the search function and enter the key words “burial” and “death” to find these and other related items.