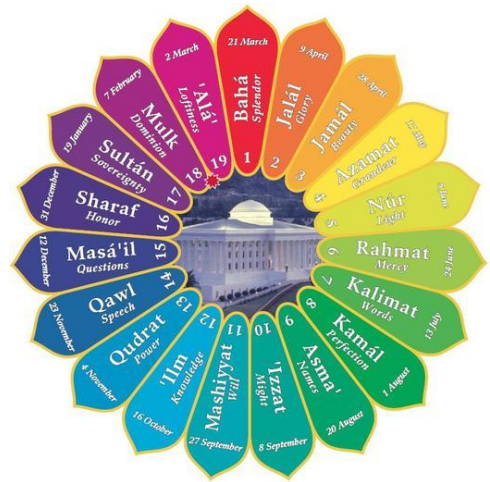


Ayyám-i-Há

Bahá'ís all over the world celebrate the intercalary period known as the Ayyám-i-Há (literally 'the Days of H' – Ha is the Arabic letter 'h'), a period of joy and celebration preceding the start of the Bahá'í Fast. The days fall between the end of the month of Mulk and the beginning of Alá in the Bahá'í calendar² and vary in number according to the timing of the vernal equinox.

The Báb, who was the herald and forerunner to Bahá'u'lláh, designed a new calendar called the Badí' calendar. It consists of nineteen months made up of nineteen days each, named after a divine attribute, such as Might, Loftiness, and Splendour. This adds up to 361 days, so the four or five days of the Ayyám-i-Há (also known as 'the Intercalary Days') allow the Badí' calendar to line up with the solar calendar. The calendar was later confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh, who adopted Naw-Rúz as the Bahá'í New Year.



The days of Ayyám-i-Há provide a time for the particular practice of spiritual qualities, such as generosity and hospitality, as well as service to humanity. During this time Bahá'ís are enjoined 'to provide good cheer for themselves, their kindred and, beyond them, the poor and needy'. Bahá'ís also use this period to prepare for the subsequent month of fasting, which is a time of reflection, detachment and spiritual discipline. Bahá'u'lláh wrote: '... and when they end – these days of giving that precede the season of restraint – let them enter upon the Fast.'

There are no particular practices prescribed in the Bahá'í scriptures for the observance of the Ayyám-i-Há. Bahá'ís around the world show their generosity, friendship and hospitality in ways that reflect their own varied cultures. In the UK, Bahá'ís tend to give gifts to one another, to gather together in their homes and invite their friends to share in peaceful fellowship.



As Ayyám-i-Há comes to a close, the Fast draws near. This time of spiritual renewal comes to an end with the celebration of the festival of Naw-Rúz (the Bahá'í New Year) on the spring equinox, marking the end of winter and the beginning of springtime in the northern hemisphere – the birth of new life.

² Over a 4-5 day period between the 25 February and 1 March, depending on the timing of Naw-Rúz and whether it is a leap year in the Gregorian calendar.