

VII. CEREMONIES

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



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1. Not Accurate to State that Bahá'í Faith Has No Ceremonies

"It is not accurate to state that the Bahá'í Faith has no ceremonies. The marriage ceremony and the funeral service are examples of such observances in our teachings."

"It would be correct, however, to state that the Faith has certain basic laws and simple rites prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh and that its teachings warn against developing these into a system of uniform and rigid rituals by introducing into them man-made forms and practices. Rituals in other religions usually consist of elaborate ceremonial practices, such as those of the Catholic Church in the celebration of the Mass and the administration of the sacraments, which are performed by a member of the clergy."

"In carrying out the basic laws of our Faith the friends should always maintain a standard of utmost simplicity and observe flexibility in all matters of detail."

(From a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Colombia from the Universal House of Justice, August 31, 1967)

1. Naming Ceremonies

"We have your letter of August 22, 1966 inquiring whether 'naming ceremonies' for children should be encouraged as a community activity. In a letter to an individual believer, dated December 20, 1938, the beloved Guardian said:

"Regarding your question whether there is any special ceremony which the believers should perform when they wish to 'name' a baby: The Teachings do not provide for any ceremony whatever on such occasions. We have no 'baptismal service' in the Cause, such as the Christians have. There could be no objection, however, for the friends to come together on such happy occasions, provided they do not hold an official public ceremony, and provided also they strictly avoid any uniformity and rigidity in all such practices..."

"We feel that this activity should be left to the discretion of the parents."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, September 7, 1966: American Bahá'í, December 1970, p. 10)



ORIGINAL

1. Spiritual Baptism of Children

"Thou hast asked regarding the naming of children: When thou wishest to name a babe, prepare a meeting therefore; chant the verses and communes, and supplicate and implore the Threshold of Oneness and beg the attainment of guidance for the babe and wish confirmed firmness and constancy; then give the name and enjoy beverage and sweet-meat. This is spiritual baptism."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. I, pp. 149-150)

1. Baptism of Child

"We have your letter of September 14th inquiring about the baptism of a child where [pg 139] one of the partners to the marriage is a Christian and the other is a Bahá'í."

"Obviously, if both parties are Bahá'ís they cannot baptize their child, however, in the case of a non-Bahá'í spouse insisting upon the baptism of the children, we said in a letter to the National Assembly of Spain on 18 February 1965:

"The Bahá'í parent may attend the ceremony with the understanding that he will not undertake any commitment or vow which is contrary to the principles of his Faith."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, September 21, 1966)

1. Bahá'ís May and Should Participate in Harmless Cultural, Traditional Observances

"In deciding whether or not to participate in such traditional activities, the Bahá'ís must guard against two extremes. The one is to disassociate themselves needlessly from harmless cultural observances and thus alienate themselves from their non-Bahá'í families and friends; the other is to continue the practice of abrogated observances of previous dispensations and thus undermine the independence of the Bahá'í Faith and create undesirable distinctions between themselves and their fellow-Bahá'ís..."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Malaysia, May 26, 1982)

1. There Are Some Religious Ceremonies in which Bahá'ís Should Not Participate

"There are some exclusive religious ceremonies in which Bahá'ís should not participate, in order to safeguard the independence of the Faith. In this regard, the beloved Guardian has given the following advice to another National Assembly: 'In these days the friends should, as much as possible, demonstrate through their deeds the independence of the Holy Faith of God, and its freedom from the customs, rituals and practices of a discredited and abrogated past.' In observing this principle, the House of Justice advises the Bahá'ís to maintain a balance between

their adherence to the Cause and obedience to its laws on the one hand, and their role in society on the other. When an individual becomes a Bahá'í he acquires, as you are aware, a wider loyalty to the Manifestations of God. Having found this new way of life, he should be careful not to isolate himself from his family and his people, and he should show respect for his former religion. The Bahá'ís should, of course, avoid performing any acts which could be considered as implying their membership in another religion or which are contrary to Bahá'í principles. There is a clear distinction between participating in festive and cultural events, as opposed to performing religious ceremonies and rituals."

"It should also be remembered that the weaning away of the Bahá'ís from customs and traditions, which have been established among communities for centuries, takes time and is a gradual process. Therefore, while the National Assembly should avoid rigidity in these matters, it should also not compromise when the interests of the Faith and its integrity and independence are at stake."

(Ibid.) [pg 140]

1. Bahá'í Parent May Attend Baptismal Ceremony, but Cannot Make Any Commitment or Vow

"In reply to your letter of 5 September 1984 saying that a ... believer will soon marry a member of the Roman Catholic Church and asking whether it is permissible for their children to be baptized, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to convey its guidance."

"Children of such a union may be baptized if the Christian parent so wishes; from the Bahá'í point of view the baptism has no effect. It must be emphasized, however, that the Bahá'í parent, while perfectly free to attend the baptismal ceremony, should not undertake any commitment or vow contrary to Bahá'í law and should not surrender her parental right to impart the Bahá'í teachings to her child."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Switzerland, September 20, 1984) [pg 141]

