

Recent Developments in the Bahá'í Calendar

Dr Eric Kingston
Bahá'í World Centre
Haifa, Israel

Abstract

Since ancient times, humanity has used calendars based on astronomical observations – solar days, lunar months, solar years and the night sky constellations. Calendars have served a variety of purposes including:

- To align farming activities to the seasons, particularly projecting when to plant, when to move livestock to different pastures, when to hunt and gather from the environment;
- To project the timing of regular festivals and remembrances; and
- To record the passage of time in manageable units, years, decades of years, rather than days.

Religious calendars rather than civil calendars have most often lasted beyond ruling dynasties, empires, revolutions and nations.

The Bahá'í Faith has its own calendar, established in its early years. The Founders (The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh) and subsequent leaders progressively revealed and clarified aspects of the calendar until it was in worldwide use in the Bahá'í Community early in the 20th Century. In brief, it is a solar calendar with nineteen months of nineteen solar days, plus the required number of intercalary days to make up a solar year. New Year's day occurs at the Spring Equinox in the Northern Hemisphere. The day begins at sunset and the calendar's epoch year corresponds to 1844 AD. However certain aspects had been left to be clarified by the Faith's leadership at a later time. This was done two years ago and from last year the entire Bahá'í World entered into common implementation of the Bahá'í Calendar.

The final clarifications were the establishment of a consistent New Year's day ("Naw-Rúz") across the Bahá'í World, specifying the exact dates of Holy Days and incorporating the lunar character of two adjacent Holy Days into what is a solar calendar. To achieve this required, amongst other research, careful attention to astronomical detail around the Equinox, sunset and Lunar Conjunctions. A correlation of all relevant dates in the Bahá'í Calendar against the Common Era (Gregorian) Calendar, for the next 50 solar years, has been made available.

The Bahá'í Calendar is more properly known as the Badí' Calendar - "Badí'" meaning something that comes into being where there was nothing before, or wondrous. The Báb established a solar calendar with intercalary days initially for people using the Islamic lunar calendar with no intercalation. Bahá'u'lláh called for the Day of Naw-Rúz to be the day of the Equinox, contrary to Iranian practice of frequently using the next day, depending on Equinox timing. The name Badí' was later given to a young Bahá'í who fulfilled one of the great missions of the Faith, and consequently was martyred. The names of the months derive from a beautiful Ramadan dawn prayer. The cycles of years in the Badí' Calendar correlates with the astronomical Metonic cycle. This Calendar clearly fulfils a purpose greater than its technical role of recording the passage of time and projecting future dates.

20 January, 2016