

# The festival of Ridvan

CORRESPONDENT

Those festive, joyous holidays the worldwide Baha'i community celebrates between April 21 and May 2 every year provide the occasion for the holiest and happiest days of the Baha'i year.

The Ridvan Festival commemorates the anniversary of the garden sojourn where Baha'u'llah declared His mission outside Baghdad during the 12 days before His banishment to Istanbul (then called Constantinople) in 1863. Baha'u'llah had been exiled to Baghdad 10 years earlier in 1853 by a Persian government that feared the rapid spread of His teachings and their progressive impact on society; and now, because His teachings continued to spread and threaten the clerics, Baha'u'llah was being sent into further exile as a result of pressure from that same government.

Declaration of Baha'u'llah in the Ridvan Garden in 1863  
We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem Us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment.... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled what harm is there in this? – Baha'u'llah, The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah, p. VIII.

The weeks before Baha'u'llah's symbolic sojourn in this verdant garden had been tragically sorrowful ones for His friends, followers and family. Informed of the government's order – which would remove Baha'u'llah from Baghdad and tear Him away from most of them forever they mourned and lamented, crowding in and around His house in large numbers. In the midst of this sadness, Baha'u'llah began to announce the mission of His new Faith to a widening circle of believers. With this action, Baha'u'llah transformed the occasion of His banishment from tragedy to triumph.

Today, the eve of Baha'u'llah's banishment from Baghdad to Istanbul is commemorated each year by Baha'i communities around the world, not as a time of sorrow or regret, but as a festival of great joy. The holiday stands as a demonstration, despite Baha'u'llah's repeated exiles, of the power of the Manifestation of God to create good from evil, bring forth light from darkness, and win victory from seeming defeat.

Baha'u'llah's declaration of His mission in the Garden of Ridvan gave new faith to the handful of believers whom He chose to hear this new message. Moreover, it infused the entire gathering in the garden with joy and life. Even those who were completely unaware of the declaration reported feeling a sense of happiness and joy. These feelings are reclaimed by the Baha'is each year during the celebrations of this Most Great Festival.

Because Baha'u'llah spoke out against all forms of tyranny and oppression, the Ridvan period is also designated as the time when Baha'is around the world elect the democratic institutions that will serve them during the coming year. Baha'is have no clergy, so Baha'i communities are governed and directed by democratically-elected bodies of nine people called Assemblies. Elections for Baha'i Local Spiritual Assemblies (in every locality where Baha'is reside) and National Spiritual Assemblies (in every country) are held each year during the 12 days of Ridvan. Every five years, the Universal House of Justice is elected during this same period.

## The Seat of The Universal House of Justice

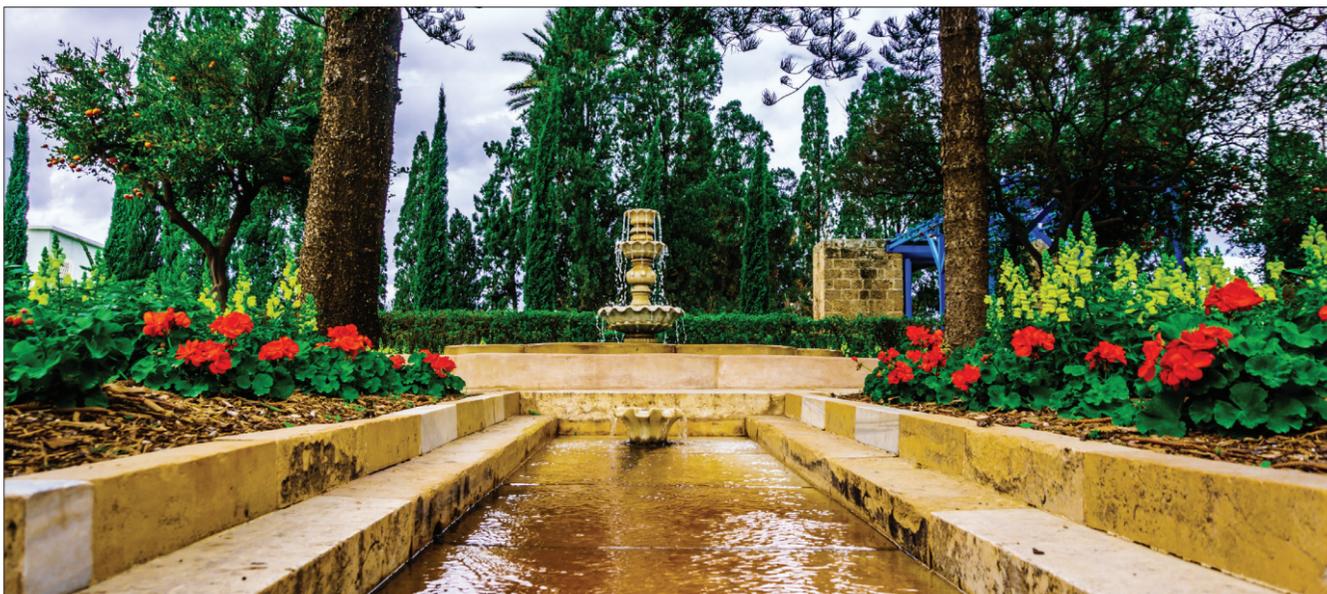
In gathering to say prayers and silently cast their ballots for the institutions that will help inspire and guide them through the year, Baha'is symbolically renew their covenant with Baha'u'llah, affirm the Baha'i teachings on freedom of thought, liberty of conscience and right of speech, and redeem that momentous declaration in the Garden of Ridvan, affirming the structure of a living world community established in Baha'u'llah's name.

From the beginning of the Baha'i faith, still persecution of Bahá'ís occurs in various Islamic countries, especially in Iran, where the Bahá'í Faith originated and where one of the largest Bahá'í populations in the world is located.

**\*This article was produced by Baha'i Public Affairs of Botswana**

### FORMORE INFORMATION

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