

Bahá'í Terms Pronunciation Training

Expected time to complete this training: 30 minutes

Bahá'í books commonly include some Persian words. These words, such as “Bahá'í” itself, may contain accented vowels, dot-under characters (like ḥ and ṭ) and underscored letter groups (such as dh, and th). These special characters help identify the original Persian letters and at the same time suggest a correct pronunciation — since Persian is a very phonetically consistent language.

Fortunately, the Persian transliteration system used in Bahá'í books is extremely simple and most letters are pronounced exactly as an English speaker would intuitively expect. There are just four exceptions to this rule which a reader will need to learn.

The goal of this simplified training is not to attain a 100% native pronunciation but rather to achieve a correct pronunciation within the normal range of European English.

Section 1: Three Vowels (a, i, and u)

The most important element of Persian pronunciation are the vowel sounds. There are basically three to remember (a, i, and u) and each one is either short or long. The long versions are indicated with an accent (á, í, and ú). To quickly learn the vowels, just remember a word for each which rhymes with the correct sound:

a - like cat	i - like bed	u - 'o' like boat
á - like father	í - like tree	ú - like moon

These are all simple and intuitive. **The only exception is the short “u” which is pronounced as an “o”**. Although this seems a bit odd, it is entirely consistent so once you have memorized the one exception, you have mastered basic Persian vowels.

You should also be aware of some commonplace vowel combinations:

aw - 'ow' as in 'row' or 'tow'. For example: Kawthar or Naw-Rúz
ih - 'eyh' — the feminine suffix. For example: Munirih or Táhirih
iy or **ay** - 'ay' as in 'say'. For example: Siyyid or Ḥusayn

Section 2: Underlines

Several Persian letters are represented by two English letters connected with an underscore, these are:

sh
ch
kh - as a 'k' from the back of the throat. For example: Khán or Khurásán

gh - as a 'g' from the back of the throat

dh - as a 'z' as in Ádhirbayján or Dhabíh

th - as an 's' as in Ḥadíth or Kawthar

The first four are pronounced as one might intuitively expect — except for **dh** (which is pronounced 'z') and **th** (which is pronounced 's').

Section 3: Dot-Unders

The Persian alphabet has some characters with nearly identical sounds (similar to how our 'c' in 'cat' and 'k' in 'kitten' are basically repeated sounds). In order to tell which letter is being used, the English transliteration sometimes provides a dot under the second version. For example, Persian has two letters with the 'h' sound. The second is indicated as ḥ. But it is still pronounced basically as 'h'. The dotted letters are:

ḥ

ṭ

ẓ

ṣ

ḍ - pronounced as 'z' as in Riḍván or Riḍá

These are fairly straightforward and **only the 'ḍ' is a surprise (pronounced as 'z')**.

One common mistake is to exaggerate dotted letters, for example, pronouncing "Aḥmad" as "Aḵmad". In Persian, consonants are not mixed together so each one is pronounced exactly as it is written. Therefore the 'ḥ' is simply aspirated lightly without a vowel: "Aḥmad"

Section 4: Some Other Simple Rules

The letter 'r' is very lightly rolled:

example: Táhirih, Rúḥí, Riḍván

When consonants are doubled, just pause on the consonant a little:

examples: Sunní, Mullá

When a connecting vowel is used between two words, the two words are often written as one word with dashes. The connecting vowel is pronounced as part of the first word:

examples: Alláh-u-Abhá, Kitáb-i-Íqán

In English, consonants are often merged into a new sound like with **th**, **sh**, and **ng**. This is not so in Persian. Each consonant should be pronounced separately.

examples: farangí, Sangisar, Baṭḥá

Section 5: Practice

Short a

Yazd
Aḥmad
Aqdas

Long á

Bahá
Afnán
Baḡhdád
‘Abá
‘Abbás
Abhá
bázár
Qájár

Short i

Big
Bismi‘lláh
Bishárát
Qá‘im
Sabzivár

Long í

‘Alí
Raṣhtí
Aḥsá‘í
Amín
Áqásí
‘Azíz
Bábí
Bahá‘í
Gílán
Raḥím
Nabíl
Vaḥíd
Báshí

Short u

muftí
Sultán

Qum

‘Uthmán
‘Abdu‘l-Bahá
Muḥammad
Gurgín
Gulistán
Alláh-u-Abhá
Ámul
Bahá‘u‘lláh

Long ú

Rúhí
Balúchistán
Ḥájí
Rúmí
Núr
Quddús
Şúfí
Túmán
Rúz
Bárfurúsh
Rúhu‘lláh
Mulúk

Diphthong ay or iy

‘Ayn
Ḥusayn
Nayríz
Siyyid

Diphthong aw

Kawthar
Naw-Rúz

Double Consonant

Muḥammad
Mullá
Sunní
ṭulláb
Quddús

Adjacent Consonants

Abhá
Bahjí
Ṭihrán
Aḥmad
Raḥmán
Raḥmat
Mujtahid
Qurbán
Yaḥyá
Baṭṭhá
Big
Fath-‘Alí
farangí
Sangisar

Feminine Suffix ih

Ṭahirih
Madrisih
Fáṭimih
Ábádih
Afchih
Bahíyyih
Başrih
Imám-Zádih

Odd: th, dh and ḍ

Riḍá
Riḍván
Faḍl
Ḥaḍrat
Qáḍí
Ḍhabíḥ
Adhán
Ádhirbáyján
Ḥadíth
‘Uthmán
kawthar