

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
BAHÁ'Í WORLD CENTRE

Department of the Secretariat

16 June 1985

The National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Germany

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Readings in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

In response to your letter of 12 April 1985 the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to send you by separate mail a compilation of extracts concerning the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár among which you will find a number of references to the Sacred Scriptures of other Faiths. Two particularly pertinent to your specific question are from letters written by the Universal House of Justice, namely:

"...Bahá'í worship includes readings from the Holy Scriptures of any of the world's revealed religions." and

"Your Assembly is free to use its discretion in choosing excerpts from the generally recognized scriptures of the older religions."

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

EXTRACTS ON THE INSTITUTION OF THE MASHRIQU'L-ADHKÁR

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

O people of creation!

It is incumbent upon you to build, in the cities and in the name of the Lord of Revelation, Houses as perfect as can be built on earth, and to adorn them with that which beseemeth them, not with images and statues. Magnify ye then therein the praise of your Merciful Lord in a spirit of joy and radiance. Lo! It is through His mention that hearts are illumined and eyes solaced.

(Newly-translated extract)

Blessed is he who directeth his steps towards the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár at the hour of dawn, communing with Him, attuned to His remembrance, imploring His forgiveness. And having entered therein, let him sit in silence to hearken unto the verses of God, the Sovereign, the Almighty, the All-Praised. Say, the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár is in truth any House raised in towns or villages, for mention of Me. Thus hath it been named before His Throne; would that ye know it. And those who chant the verses of the Merciful in most melodious tones will attain thereby unto that with which the kingdoms of earth and heaven can never compare. And they will inhale therefrom the fragrance of My realms which none discerneth in this day save those who have been granted vision by this sublime Beauty. Say, verily, the verses of the Merciful uplift the stainless hearts unto those realms of the spirit which cannot be described in words or expressed in symbols. Blessed are they that hearken!

(Newly-translated extract)

Teach your children that which hath been sent down from the heaven of majesty and power that they may recite the Tablets of the Merciful in the halls of the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkárs in most melodious tones. Verily, he who hath been drawn by the magnet of the love of My Name, the Merciful, will recite the verses of God in such wise as to enrapture the hearts of those who are fast asleep. Well it is with him who hath quaffed the choice wine of immortal life from the utterances of his Lord, the Lord of Mercy, through the power of this exalted Name whereby every high and lofty mountain hath been reduced to dust.

(Newly-translated extract)

By My life and My Cause! Round about whatever dwelling the friends of God may enter, and from which their cry shall rise as they praise and glorify the Lord, shall circle the souls of true believers and all the favored angels. And should the door of the true eye be opened unto some, they shall witness the Supreme Concourse as it circleth and crieth: "Blessed art thou, O house, for God hath made thee a resting-place for those He favoreth, and a lodging for those He holdeth dear, and a home for those in whom He hath placed His trust. Unto thee be His praise and His glory and His endless grace."

(Newly-translated extract)

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

(No attempt has been made to include in this section all extracts available from the Tablets and Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the subject. These are too numerous for the purposes of this compilation.)

It befiteth the friends to hold a gathering, a meeting, where they shall glorify God and fix their hearts upon Him, and read and recite the Holy Writings of the Blessed Beauty—may my soul be the ransom of His lovers! The lights of the All-Glorious Realm, the rays of the Supreme Horizon, will be cast upon such bright assemblages, for these are none other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, the Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance, which must, at the direction of the Most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city.... These spiritual gatherings must be held with the utmost purity and consecration, so that from the site itself, and its earth and the air about it, one will inhale the fragrant breathings of the Holy Spirit.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 93-94)

Although to outward seeming the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a material structure, yet it hath a spiritual effect. It forgoeth bonds of unity from heart to heart; it is a collective centre for men's souls. Every city in which, during the days of the Manifestation, a temple was raised up, hath created security and constancy and peace, for such buildings were given over to the perpetual glorification of God, and only in the remembrance of God can the heart find rest. Gracious God! The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life. Experience hath, in the east, clearly shown this to be a fact. Even if, in some small village, a house was designated as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, it produced a marked effect; how much greater would be the impact of one especially raised up.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 95-96)

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is one of the most vital institutions in the world, and it hath many subsidiary branches. Although it is a House of Worship, it is also connected with a hospital, a drug dispensary, a traveller's hospice, a school for orphans, and a university for advanced studies. Every Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is connected with these five things. My hope is that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will now be established in America, and that gradually the hospital, the school, the university, the dispensary and the hospice, all functioning according to the most efficient and orderly procedures, will follow. Make these matters known to the beloved of the Lord, so that they will understand how very great is the importance of this "Dawning-Point of the Remembrance of God." The Temple is not only a place for worship; rather, in every respect is it complete and whole.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 99-100)

You had asked about places of worship and the underlying reason therefore. The wisdom in raising up such buildings is that at a given hour, the people should know it is time to meet, and all should gather together, and, harmoniously attuned one to another, should engage in prayer; with the result that out of this coming together, unity and affection shall grow and flourish in the human heart.

(Newly-translated extract)

O servant of Bahá! Music is regarded as a praiseworthy science at the Threshold of the Almighty, so that thou mayest chant verses at large gatherings and congregations in a most wondrous melody and raise such hymns of praise at the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as to enrapture the Concourse on High. By virtue of this, consider how much the art of music is admired and praised. Try if thou canst, to use spiritual melodies, songs and tunes, and to bring the earthly music into harmony with the celestial melody. Then thou wilt notice what a great influence music hath and what heavenly joy and life it conferreth. Strike up such a melody and tune as to cause the nightingales of divine mysteries to be filled with joy and ecstasy.

(Newly-translated extract)

From the Writings and Letters of Shoghi Effendi

...I have no doubt that every conscientious and thoughtful Bahá'í will scrupulously and at all times observe the commandment of Bahá'u'lláh and the instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá relative to the maintenance of the sacredness, the dignity, and the universality of an edifice that will in time become God's universal House of Worship.

(16 January 1925; "Bahá'í Administration", p. 77)

It should be borne in mind that the central Edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, round which in the fulness of time shall cluster such institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant, should be regarded apart from these Dependencies, as a House solely designed and entirely dedicated to the worship of God in accordance with the few yet definitely prescribed principles established by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It should not be inferred, however, from this general statement that the interior of the central Edifice itself will be converted into a conglomeration of religious services conducted along lines associated with the traditional procedure obtaining in churches, mosques, synagogues, and other temples of worship. Its various avenues of approach, all converging towards the central Hall beneath its dome, will not serve as admittance to those sectarian adherents of rigid formulae and man-made creeds, each bent, according to his way, to observe his rites, recite his prayers, perform his ablutions, and display the particular symbols of his faith, within separately defined sections of Bahá'u'lláh's Universal House of Worship. Far from the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár offering such a spectacle of incoherent and confused sectarian observances and rites, a condition wholly incompatible with the provisions of the Aqdas and irreconcilable with the spirit it inculcates, the central House of Bahá'í worship, enshrined within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, will gather within its chastened walls, in a serenely spiritual atmosphere, only those who, discarding forever the trappings of elaborate and ostentatious ceremony, are willing worshipers of the one true God, as manifested in this age in the Person of Bahá'u'lláh. To them will the

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár symbolize the fundamental verity underlying the Bahá'í Faith, that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is not final but progressive. Theirs will be the conviction that an all-loving and ever-watchful Father Who, in the past, and at various stages in the evolution of mankind, has sent forth His Prophets as the Bearers of His Message and the Manifestations of His Light to mankind, cannot at this critical period of their civilization withhold from His children the Guidance which they sorely need amid the darkness which has beset them, and which neither the light of science nor that of human intellect and wisdom can succeed in dissipating. And thus having recognized in Bahá'u'lláh the source whence this celestial light proceeds, they will irresistibly feel attracted to seek the shelter of His House, and congregate therein, unhampered by ceremonials and unfettered by creed, to render homage to the one true God, the Essence and Orb of eternal Truth, and to exalt and magnify the name of His messengers and Prophets Who, from time immemorial even unto our day, have, under divers circumstances and in varying measure, mirrored forth to a dark and wayward world the light of heavenly Guidance.

But however inspiring the conception of Bahá'í worship, as witnessed in the central Edifice of this exalted Temple, it cannot be regarded as the sole, nor even the essential, factor in the part which the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, as designed by Bahá'u'lláh, is destined to play in the organic life of the Bahá'í community. Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits centering around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervor, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshiper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote. Nor will the exertions, no matter how disinterested and strenuous, of those who within the precincts of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will be engaged in administering the affairs of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth, fructify and prosper unless they are brought into close and daily communion with those spiritual agencies centering in and radiating from the central Shrine of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centering in the heart of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affairs in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted humanity. For it is assuredly upon the consciousness of the efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, reinforced on one hand by spiritual communion with His spirit, and on the other by the intelligent application and the faithful execution of the principles and laws He revealed, that the salvation of a world in travail

must ultimately depend. And of all the institutions that stand associated with His Holy Name, surely none save the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá'í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world. Therein lies the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh.

(25 October 1929; "Bahá'í Administration", pp. 184-186)

Prayers in any language may be offered in the Temple. Nor is the offering of prayer confined to children. Slight alterations in the text of the prayers are permissible, and I would advise you to give a musical form to the revealed word itself which I feel will be exceedingly effective. I will pray that the Beloved may inspire you to accomplish this great service to His Cause.

(8 April 1931 to an individual believer)

From the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, ordained as a house of worship by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the representatives of Bahá'í communities, both local and national, together with the members of their respective committees, will, as they gather daily within its walls at the hour of dawn, derive the necessary inspiration that will enable them to discharge in the course of their day-to-day exertions in the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds—the scene of their administrative activities—their duties and responsibilities as befits the chosen stewards of His Faith.

(God Passes By, p. 340)

From Letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

(To the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, unless otherwise noted.)

As to the character of the meetings in the auditorium of the Temple, he feels that they should be purely devotional in character, Bahá'í addresses and lectures should be strictly excluded. For the present, he feels that there would be no objection to having Bahá'í meetings including addresses and the business sessions of the Convention held in the Foundation Hall. Shoghi Effendi would urge that choir singing by men, women and children be encouraged in the auditorium and that rigidity in the Bahá'í service be scrupulously avoided. The more universal and informal the character of Bahá'í worship in the Temple the better. Images and pictures, with the exception of the Greatest Name, should be strictly excluded. Prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master as well as the sacred writings of the Prophets should be read or chanted as well as hymns based upon Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í sacred writings.

(2 April 1931)

He sincerely hopes that the sight of the Temple as well as the principles it stands for, will sink down in the heart of the people in that locality and help to attract them to the Faith. It is not sufficient to build a beautiful edifice, we have to fill it with sincere and devoted souls who will seek its spiritual atmosphere.

(6 May 1931)

...He sincerely hopes that now that the Temple is completed it jwill be filled to the full with pure seeking souls. It should be different from the other houses of worship which even if they are filled, their source of attraction is the music heard. Here the spirit should be so powerful as to awaken the heart of every one that enters it to the glory of Bahá'u'lláh and to the importance of the message of peace He has brought to the world....

(31 May 1931 to an individual believer)

Concerning the rush of the crowds to visit the Temple, Shoghi Effendi would like the committee in charge to be very careful to maintain order and also show a spirit of courtesy and hospitality to those who visit it. Should those that come to see the building be properly treated they would be attracted to the movement or at least carry back a nice spirit to their homes. The friends have to be very considerate to such visitors if they desire to have the Cause spread. This, however, should not necessarily mean that disorder has to prevail in the building. It is for the committee in charge to devise the proper method that is in close conformity with the spirit of the movement.

(19 February 1932 to an individual believer)

As to the question of the relationship of an administrative building to the Temple; this also will have to be defined in future, but whatever the actual form which such relationship may assume, and whatever its details, it should be based on the general principle that these two sets of Bahá'í institutions embody two vital and distinct, yet inseparable aspects of Bahá'í life: worship and service. The central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, which is exclusively devoted to purposes of worship, represents the spiritual element, and therefore fulfils a primary function in every Bahá'í Community, whereas all other Temple accessories, whether of a strictly administrative, cultural or humanitarian character, are secondary, and come next in importance to the House of Worship itself,

(28 January 1939)

...MEETINGS IN TEMPLE AUDITORIUM CONFINED READING HOLY SCRIPTURES AND PRAYERS. AVOID RIGIDITY MANNER CONDUCT MEETINGS. AUDIENCE SEATED IN MAIN AUDITORIUM SHOULD FACE EAST. SEATS IN SURROUNDING SPACE SHOULD FACE CENTRE AUDITORIUM...AVOID ASSIGNING FIXED POSITION OR FORMAL PROCEDURE FOR SINGERS....

(1 July 1946, Cable)

As regards the whole question of the Temple and services held in it: He wishes to emphasize that he is very anxious, now that this first and greatest Temple of the West has been built, and will, within a few years, be used for worship and regular services by the Bahá'ís, that no forms, no rituals, no set customs be introduced over and above the bare minimum outlined in the teachings. The nature of these gatherings is for prayer, meditation and the reading of writings from the Sacred Scriptures of our Faith and other Faiths; there can be one or a number of readers; any Bahá'í chosen, or even non-Bahá'í, may read. The gatherings should be simple, dignified, and designed to uplift the soul and educate it through hearing the creative word. No speeches may be made, no extraneous matter introduced.

The use of pulpits is forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh; if, in order to be more clearly heard, the person reading stands on a low platform, there is no objection, but this should not be incorporated as an architectural feature of the building....

The reader should stand where he or she will be best seen and heard by all. All minor details regarding this matter are left to the discretion of your Assembly to decide after receiving the advice of experts. As he already informed you, he suggests using fixed rather than movable seats.

Vocal music alone may be used and the position of the singers, or singer, is also a matter for your Assembly to decide; but again, there should be no fixed point, no architectural details marking a special spot. Acoustics should certainly be the main consideration in placing the singers....

He need not tell you how very important the decisions are which you will now be called upon to make in connection with completing the Temple...He urges you, at all times, to receive the very best technical advice, and to bear in mind that the main thing is that the meetings in the Temple should be conducted in a beautiful and peaceful setting, in comfort and with dignity and simplicity, and that the audience should be able to hear perfectly and the tone values be pleasant to the ear.

(20 July 1946)

He is not sufficiently informed about western musical composition to give you any guidance on this subject; all he can tell you is that from the Master's instructions it seems there will be no use of any kind of musical instruments in the Bahá'í Temples. Chanting or singing will be the only sound (aside from reading) and what forms this will take must depend on the artists who create the music itself.

No doubt prayers and parts of the Tablets, Hidden Words, etc., will be suitable, but he does not feel it would be advisable to abridge any given part, in other words to leave out parts of a paragraph or a meditation and foreshorten it in this manner.

(3 July 1949 to an individual believer)

Questions submitted to the Guardian and his replies:

Question: On what schedule are meetings of public worship to be held in the auditorium: - daily, weekly, or at other intervals, or at stated periods during the day?

Reply: Weekly, or more often, if your Assembly deems advisable.

Question: Are such meetings, if weekly, to be held on Sunday and if so at the morning hour customary with churches, or in the afternoon?

Reply: Left to your discretion.

Question: Should the auditorium be open daily from dawn for individual prayer and meditation?

Reply: Yes.

Question: Can photographs be taken, for historic record or publicity, of any meeting of worship held for Bahá'ís only, and of any meeting open to the public?

Reply: Yes.

Question: The present plan is to hold a meeting of dedication for Bahá'ís only, followed by a public dedication on the same day. Is this plan approved?

Reply: Yes.

Question: Should an order of service or program be printed with the list of readings selected for each service?

Reply: Left to your discretion.

Question: Are the present weekly public lectures to be continued in Foundation Hall?

Reply: There is no objection to this until such time as we have a suitable meeting place at our disposal.

Question: As there is no trained Bahá'í choir or chorus for singing, shall we begin to train a choir? Can non-Bahá'ís be included among the singers? Are soloists permitted, Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í?

Reply: By all means prepare a choir. There is no objection to non-Bahá'í singers or to soloists, Bahá'í, or non-Bahá'í.

Question: Is the auditorium to be open for special prayer by Bahá'í Committees meeting in the vicinity, or by visiting groups who may arrive at times when no general meeting is scheduled?

Reply: The auditorium may be used for such purposes.

Question: In preparing the readings, shall we use only Holy Books extant and available in English for religions listed by you in the series of recognized Revelations?

Reply: Yes. But if occasionally a reading is in another language there can be no objection, as long as the text is from a Holy Scripture. Persian, Arabic and Hebrew are all very beautiful when chanted.

Question: At the opening of a meeting of worship is any reader to explain the nature of Bahá'í worship or are the readings to proceed without any announcement?

Reply: This is not permissible: there must be no speeches in the auditorium.

Question: Can meetings of worship be broadcast over the radio or television? Can special meetings be recorded for reproduction by believers locally?

Reply: There is no objection to this.

(Published in U.S. "Bahá'í News" No. 260, October 1952)

"NOT PERMISSIBLE"

(Guardian's cable to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 10 February 1953. In reply to question whether it was permissible to use appropriate recorded a capella music in auditorium.)

It is permissible and satisfactory to use the Prayers of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the devotional services in the Temple. His public talks and tablets should not be used, but His prayers may be used.

It is understood of course that there is to be no talking in the auditorium of the Temple. However, the Guardian does feel that in an emergency, it may be necessary to carry on a conversation for a very limited period, in a subdued tone of voice. The Guardian feels that in matters of this type, careful judgment must be used.

(3 October 1953)

As regards the chanting of Tablets in the Temple. Shoghi Effendi wishes in this connection to urge the friends to avoid all forms of rigidity and uniformity in matters of worship. There is no objection to the recital or chanting of prayers in the Oriental language, but there is also no obligation whatever of adopting such a form of prayer at any devotional service in the auditorium of the Temple. It should neither be required nor prohibited. The important thing that should always be borne in mind is that with exception of certain specific obligatory prayers Bahá'u'lláh has given us no strict or special rulings in matters of worship whether in the Temple or elsewhere. Prayer is essentially a communion between man and God, and as such transcends all ritualistic forms and formulae.

(15 June 1955)

As regards producing a book of Bahá'í songs, your understanding that there is no cultural expression which could be called Bahá'í at this time, (distinctive music, literature, art, architecture, etc. being the flower of the civilization and not coming at the beginning of a new Revelation), is correct. However, that does not mean that we haven't Bahá'í songs, in other words, songs written by Bahá'ís on Bahá'í subjects. There is no objection to getting out a compilation of these, but he does not think money should be spent in printing it, in view of the state of the National Fund, and the much more important work in the teaching field which needs to be undertaken this year. If you can get out such a book in a mimeographed form, he feels this would be sufficient to meet the needs at this time.

(21 September 1957)

From Letters written by the Universal House of Justice

(To National Spiritual Assemblies unless otherwise noted.)

While the Bahá'í House of Worship is open to all, non-Bahá'í as well as Bahá'í, for individual prayer and meditation, and while all are welcome to attend Bahá'í Worship Services, all services held in the House of Worship are under the supervision and control of the Bahá'ís. You may point out that as no doubt he knows, Bahá'í Worship includes readings from the Holy Scriptures of any of the world's revealed religions.

(19 December 1963, United States)

We have given careful consideration to the questions you have raised in your letter of January 23, 1964 about the use of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

Your Assembly is free to use its discretion in choosing excerpts from the generally recognized scriptures of the older religions.

With reference to your query about the use of several readers in unison, this is permissible provided it does not seem, or become theatrical in the view of your Assembly. Concerning the placement of the reader, the beloved Guardian has already indicated, "the reader should stand where he or she will best be seen and heard by all."

Music in the House of Worship is to be vocal only, whether by singers or a singer. It does not matter if a guest a capella choir, or soloist is used, provided such use is not made the occasion to publicise services of Worship and the precautions you mention are taken. No doubt the excellent recordings available today would assure the highest quality of performance at low cost, but all references to vocal music in the central Edifice imply the physical presence of the singers.

(13 March 1964, United States)

With reference to your letter of August 2, 1964, and the questions you have asked concerning services at the House of Worship, we have now had opportunity to study your questions in the light of available texts, and we are glad to share with you our conclusions.

We will set forth your questions, which fall under five categories and then make our comments at the end of each section:

- A. Is congregational singing the same as congregational worship? Is it permissible to have singing in which anyone can join? If so, is it permissible for "Alláh'u'Abhá" or "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá" to be sung?

Singing by a congregation present at a service in the House of Worship should not be confused with congregational prayer prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh for the dead. As the Guardian in a letter written on his behalf by his secretary pointed out: "When the Aqdas is published the form of congregational prayer prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh will be made clear to all the friends." (Bahá'í Procedure, 1942, page 5) Regarding singing in the Temple, we must bear in mind the reference made by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas to the need for the person who enters the Temple to sit silent and listen to the chanting of the verses of God, as well as the statements made by the Guardian regarding "the reader" or "a number of readers" or a "choir".

In connection with the desire of the Africans to sing, this aptitude in them should be encouraged. The Guardian elucidated this principle in a letter written on his behalf by his Secretary: "Shoghi Effendi would urge that choir singing by men, women and children be encouraged in the Auditorium, and that rigidity in the Bahá'í service be scrupulously avoided." (Bahá'í News, September 1931)

- B. Could we develop musical programmes with words not necessarily from Sacred Scriptures? Could Christian hymn tunes with Bahá'í words be used?

We feel that the first question is covered by the following instruction given by the Guardian: "Prayers...should be read or chanted, as well as hymns based upon Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í sacred writings." (Bahá'í News, September 1931). As regards using hymn tunes of other religions there is no objection to this. As the Guardian once pointed out, we do not have at this time distinctive music which could be called Bahá'í, as such a cultural expression is the flower of the civilization and does not come at the beginning of a new Revelation.

- C. Is it necessary at the present time to uphold at all costs a standard of excellence in Temple singing? If so, should it be a Western or an African standard?

In everything we do we should always try to attain a standard of Excellence. Bearing in mind the basic principle of unity in diversity and the undesirability of attempting uniformity, the National Assembly should do all possible to ensure the dignified presentation of whatever is sung in the Temple, African, Western or other.

- D. In view of current difficulties in having a printed programme available, may the reader preface his reading by "This reading is from..." or words to that effect? Is it permissible to make short comments which might add to the understanding and effectiveness of the readings, such as: "The following readings are on the subject of humility..." or "the following healing prayer is for..."

There is no objection to the reader very briefly stating at the beginning of his reading, the reference and source of the passage he is about to read. Beyond this, any other comment regarding the passage to be read is inappropriate. If in the future, your Assembly is able to overcome the difficulty of making a printed programme available, it would be far better to have such a programme.

- E. May the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá be used in the Temple as these are most easily translatable and many are already prepared in the most common local language - Luganda?

The Guardian's advice on this point is: "Prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master as well as the Sacred Writings of the Prophets should be read or chanted." (Bahá'í News, September 1931). In response to a specific question put to the Guardian regarding the Public Talks and Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Guardian advised that these should not be used in the devotional services in the Temple.

We hope the above comments will prove useful to your National Spiritual Assembly in working out the programmes and arranging the services of the Mother Temple of Africa. The Bahá'í House of Worship is one of the most mighty institutions of our beloved Faith. It is the privilege of your National Assembly to administer such an institution "wherein", in the words of the beloved Guardian, "the spirit of an unconquerable Faith can dwell, within whose walls the African adherents of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh

can congregate, and from which anthems of praise glorifying the Most Great Name can ascend to the Concourse of the Abhá Kingdom."

(19 August 1965, Uganda and Central Africa)

In your letter of 4 October, 1965 we note your request for further clarification of points (a) and (b) of your August 2nd communication concerning services at the House of Worship.

With reference to point (a), it would be undesirable to include in the program singing by the congregation in unison. However, if the congregation should spontaneously join in singing with the choir or solo singer they, of course, should not be stopped. This is not a matter that should be circulated among the friends in your news bulletin.

With reference to point (b), the nature of the hymns sung in the House of Worship we leave to your discretion for the time being. Whatever policy you have currently adopted in this matter you should continue to follow. Should we in future make any specific rulings on this subject we will advise you.

(8 November 1965, Uganda and Central Africa)

Your Assembly is free to hold memorial meetings for Bahá'ís whose services on a national level warrant the holding of such a programme at the Temple.

In addition, you may, when requested, grant permission to the bereaved family of any believer who has passed away to hold a private meeting in the Temple, provided the family makes all the arrangements and your sponsorship is not involved.

(1 June 1967, United States)

We have your letter of 29 March, 1968, asking whether it would be permissible to use records or tapes of "a cappella" choirs in connection with the services held at the House of Worship.

When the Guardian was asked this question by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States he said that recorded music was not permissible.

However, there is no objection to non-Bahá'ís singing in a choir for the House of Worship.

(4 April 1968, Germany)

Concerning Bahá'í marriage ceremonies, we see no objection to the ceremony being performed on the steps outside the central hall, but we suggest that an even more appropriate place would be the lodge on the Temple grounds. Also, it would be appropriate either before or after the ceremony for prayers and meditations to be recited or chanted in the Temple itself.

(29 July 1973, Panama)

From Letters written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice
(To National Spiritual Assemblies, unless otherwise noted.)

The House of Justice acknowledges your letter of October 30th inquiring whether it is permissible to read from other versions of the Bible than the King James Authorized Version. We are instructed to say that while there do not appear to be any grounds for limiting selected readings from the Bible to the Authorized Version only, the decision is left entirely to your discretion.

(13 November 1974, Australia)

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 8 April 1975 and we have been asked to say that there is no objection to the use of microphones and amplifying equipment in the House of Worship.

(20 April 1975, Australia)

Obviously, the occasions when a prominent singer will be on the program of worship in the Temple will be infrequent, but in principle the Universal House of Justice sees no objection to including the name of the artists on the program as long as it is done in a dignified manner; this is left to your discretion. However, use should not be made of such an occasion to publicize the services of worship.

In deciding whether or not to hold memorial service for a prominent believer, the National Spiritual Assembly will have to use the utmost wisdom and discretion. Such actions can establish precedents and you will necessarily have to be selective.

Beyond this, provided the general rules governing the nature of services in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár are observed, there is no objection to your Assembly permitting the use of the auditorium for special prayer meetings by visiting groups at times when no general service is scheduled, and such meetings could include memorial services for departed souls, whether Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í. However, in some religions it is customary to hold memorial services for the departed at a specific time after the death - for example, in Islám it is forty days after the passing. The Guardian has stated that such practices have nothing to do with the Faith, the friends should be quite clear on this matter, and should preferably discontinue the practice. Therefore, in all such things the National Spiritual Assembly should be careful to ensure that no set practices or forms arise.

(24 November 1976, Panama)

Concerning the question with regard to the extent to which the prohibition of the use of musical organs within or without the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is applied, the answer is given on page 61 of "Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas" which states:

"Within the central edifice there shall be read, chanted or sung only the words of the Sacred Scriptures of the revealed religions, or hymns based upon those words."

This means of course that in the dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár there is no restriction to the use of musical instruments.

(16 August 1982, to an individual believer)

As to non-Bahá'ís taking part in the programs of worship as readers, the Universal House of Justice sees no objection to this in principle, but feels at the present time this should happen only occasionally or for special events, and non-Bahá'ís should not be invited to read as a regular feature of the worship in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

(1 June 1983, Panama)

We confirm the advice you quote in your letter, that is, the Bahá'í marriage ceremony in its entirety should be held outside the House of Worship. If, apart from the ceremony and the readings related to it, it is desired to have prayers and meditations in the Temple, either before or after the ceremony, there is no objection to this. And if it is also desired to include vocal music, either choral or solo, such selections of course must be without instrumental accompaniment.

(1 August 1984, Panama)