

History and Significance of the First Mashriqu'l-Adhkár¹ in the West

A Dramatic Reading by Marlene Macke *

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May 1901 Bahá'ís in Chicago elect a nine-man Board of Council for a term of 5 years (later called the House of Spirituality); two weeks later Bahá'í women elect their own Board called the "Women's Auxiliary Board".

Mar 1903 Inspired by the news of the 'Ishqábád Temple project in Russia, the Chicago House of Spirituality asks 'Abdu'l-Bahá for permission to construct a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Chicago.

A few years later when Mrs. Corinne True visits 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa, she presents Him with a scroll containing 800 signatures petitioning permission to begin construction of the Temple; 'Abdu'l-Bahá subsequently conveys most of His guidance about the Temple through Mrs. True.

Nov 1907 A one-day conference in Chicago to foster national cooperation on the Temple project and to choose a suitable site.

Apr 1908 Two building plots purchased in Wilmette for \$2,000; later purchases bring the tract of land to a total of 9 acres.

1909 The first American Bahá'í Convention held in home of Corinne True with 39 delegates. The Bahá'í Temple Unity is incorporated to hold title to the Temple property & to provide for its construction; Corinne True was appointed "financial secretary" and in the next 40 years played such a pivotal role in the building of the Temple, she came to be known as "Mother of the Temple"; in 1952 Shoghi Effendi elevated her to the rank of Hand of the Cause of God.

May 1, 1912 'Abdu'l-Bahá lays the cornerstone.

Apr 1920 At the Bahá'í National Convention in New York, having considered some 19 proposed designs for the Temple, the one created by Canadian architect Louis J. Bourgeois, is unanimously selected. The delegates had consulted the president of the Architectural League of New York, H. Van Buren Magonigal, one of the widely-known architects of America. After a study of the exhibits his verdict was: "This is the first new idea in architecture since the thirteenth century. I want to see it erected." 'Abdu'l-Bahá later concurs with this choice.

¹ Translates to "Dawning-place of the Praise of God"; also known as Bahá'í House of Worship

* See more about this document at https://bahai-library.com/macke_dramatic_readings . Dated 2012, it is the oldest of Macke's Dramatic Readings.

From the beginning, the Bahá'ís wisely decide that no work will be done until the money is raised; therefore for the next 33 years, contracts are let for progressive elements of the construction.

At several times through the next 30 years, fund raising lagged; at the 1928 Convention, Siegfried Schopflocher spontaneously donated \$25,000, thus spurring donations again. A year later he donated \$100,000. In 1937 he again donated \$100,000. These are just the noteworthy donations that we know about. In recognition of this zeal for constructing the Temple, Shoghi Effendi called him the "Chief Temple Builder" and later in 1952 also raised him to the rank of Hand of the Cause of God.

May 1931 The superstructure of the Temple is completed.

Jan 1943 The exterior ornamentation of the Temple is completed.

Ridván 1953 The House of Worship is consecrated.

All Bahá'í Houses of Worship have certain requirements: nine sides with nine doors, a dome, and there is no "pulpit". Only Sacred Texts are recited, chanted or sung within the Temple; this means there are no sermons or commentary or musical instruments.

1. "O people of the world! Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions. Make them as perfect as is possible in the world of being, and adorn them with that which befiteth them, not with images and effigies. Then with radiance and joy, celebrate therein the praise of your Lord, the Most Compassionate. Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light." Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para 31
2. The Bahá'í House of Worship is dedicated to the praise of God. The House of Worship forms the central edifice of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, a complex which, as it unfolds in the future, will comprise in addition to the House of Worship a number of dependencies dedicated to social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* as "one of the most vital institutions in the world", and Shoghi Effendi indicates that it exemplifies in tangible form the integration of "Bahá'í worship and service". Anticipating the future development of this institution, Shoghi Effendi envisages that the House of Worship and its dependencies "shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant". In the future, Bahá'í Houses of Worship will be constructed in every town and village. Notes, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp 190-191

3. Now the day has arrived in which the edifice of God, the divine sanctuary, the spiritual temple, shall be erected in America! I entreat God to assist the confirmed believers in accomplishing this great service and with entire zeal to rear tis mighty structure which shall be renowned throughout the world. The support of God will be with those believers in that district that they may be successful in their undertaking, for the Cause is great ...because this the first Mashrak-el-Azcar in that country and from it the praise of God shall ascend to the Kingdom of Mystery and the tumult of His exaltation and greetings from the whole world shall be heard! Whosoever arises for the service of this building shall be assisted with a great power from His Supreme Kingdom and upon him spiritual and heavenly blessings shall descend, which shall fill his heart with wonderful consolation and enlighten his eyes by beholding the glorious and eternal God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp 67-68

4. “[speaking of the Temple in Wilmette] ... this enterprise – the crowning achievement of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in the first Bahá’í century...” Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p 349

5. “This unique edifice, the first fruit of a slowly maturing Administrative Order, the noblest structure reared in the first Bahá’í century, and the symbol and precursor of a future world civilization, is situated in the heart of the North American continent...” *ibid.*, p 350

6. “Its inception,” the architect of the Temple has himself testified, “was not from man, for, as musicians, artists, poets receive their inspiration from another realm, so the Temple’s architect, through all his years of labor, was ever conscious that Bahá’u’lláh was the creator of this building to be erected to His glory.” *ibid.*, p 351

Talk by 'Abdu'l-Bahá
 at Public Meeting Concluding Convention of Bahá’í Temple Unity
 Drill Hall, Masonic Temple, Chicago, Illinois, 30 April 1912; Notes by Joseph H. Hannen

7. Among the institutes of the Holy Books is that of the foundation of places of worship. That is to say, an edifice or temple is to be built in order that humanity might find a place of meeting, and this is to be conducive to unity and fellowship among them. The real temple is the very Word of God; for to it all humanity must turn, and it is the center of unity for all mankind. It is the collective center, the cause of accord and communion of hearts, the sign of the solidarity of the human race, the source of eternal life. Temples are the symbols of the divine uniting force so that when the people gather there in the House of God they may recall the fact that the law has been revealed for them and that the law is to unite them. They will realize that just as this temple was founded for the unification of mankind, the law preceding and creating it came forth in the manifest Word.

8. Jesus Christ, addressing Peter, said, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my

church.” This utterance was indicative of the faith of Peter, signifying: This faith of thine, O Peter, is the very cause and message of unity to the nations; it shall be the bond of union between the hearts of men and the foundation of the oneness of the world of humanity. In brief, the original purpose of temples and houses of worship is simply that of unity—places of meeting where various peoples, different races and souls of every capacity may come together in order that love and agreement should be manifest between them. That is why Bahá’u’lláh has commanded that a place of worship be built for all the religionists of the world; that all religions, races and sects may come together within its universal shelter; that the proclamation of the oneness of mankind shall go forth from its open courts of holiness—the announcement that humanity is the servant of God and that all are submerged in the ocean of His mercy. It is the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár.

10. The world of existence may be likened to this temple and place of worship. For just as the external world is a place where the people of all races and colors, varying faiths, denominations and conditions come together—just as they are submerged in the same sea of divine favors—so, likewise, all may meet under the dome of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár and adore the one God in the same spirit of truth; for the ages of darkness have passed away, and the century of light has come. Ignorant prejudices are being dispelled, and the light of unity is shining. The differences existing between nations and peoples will soon be annulled, and the fundamentals of the divine religions, which are no other than the oneness and solidarity of the human race, are being established. For thousands of years the human race has been at war. It is enough. Now let mankind, for a time at least, consort in amity and peace. Enmity and hatred have ruled. Let the world, for a period, exercise love. For thousands of years the nations have denied each other, considering each other as infidel and inferior. It is sufficient. We must now realize that we are the servants of one God, that we turn to one beneficent Father, live under one divine law, seek one reality and have one desire. Thus may we live in the utmost friendship and love, and in return the favors and bounties of God shall surround us; the world of humanity will be reformed; mankind, enjoy a new life; eternal light will illumine, and heavenly moralities become manifest.

11. Then divine policy shall govern the world, for the divine policy is the oneness of humanity. God is just and kind to all. He considers all as His servants. He excludes none, and His judgments are correct and true. No matter how complete human policy and foresight may appear, they are imperfect. If we do not seek the counsel of God or if we refuse to follow His dictates, it is presumptive evidence that we are knowing and wise, whereas God is ignorant; that we are sagacious and God is not. God forbid! We seek shelter in His mercy for this suggestion! No matter how far the human intelligence may advance, it is still but a drop, while divine omniscience is the ocean. Shall we say that a drop is imbued or endowed with qualities of which the ocean is devoid? Shall we believe that the policy and plan of this atom of a human soul are superior to the wisdom of the Omniscient? There is no greater ignorance than this. Briefly, some are mere children; with the utmost love we must educate them to make them wise. Others are sick and ailing; we must tenderly treat them until they recover. Some have unworthy morals; we must train them toward the standard of true morality. Other than this we are all the servants of

one God and under the providence and protection of one Father.

12. These are the institutions of God and the foundations of His temple, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. The outer edifice is a symbol of the inner. May the people be admonished thereby. I pray in your behalf that your hearts may be enlightened with the light of the love of God; that your minds may develop daily; that your spirits may become aglow with the fire and illumination of His glad tidings, until these divine foundations may become established throughout the human world. The first of these institutions and foundations is the oneness of humanity and love among mankind. The second is the Most Great Peace. Praise be to God! This American democracy manifests capacity, showing forth readiness to become the standard-bearer of the Most Great Peace. May its hosts be the hosts of the oneness of humanity. May they serve the threshold of God and spread the message of the good pleasure of God. ...