



June 1, 2001

To the Bahá'ís of the World

A week ago today more than 2,500 representatives of 182 countries and dependent territories gathered, along with the friends serving at the Bahá'í World Centre, on the Arc on Mount Carmel for the last of the events that marked the completion of the projects on that holy mountain. Our hearts overflow with joy, our heads are bowed in gratitude to the Blessed Beauty, as we contemplate the astonishing success of the ceremony that inaugurated the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb. The awe-inspiring, worldwide effects are reflected in the many messages being received here from different parts of the planet where telecasts of the event via satellite were seen.

It is too soon to assess the immediate impact of this unexampled global proclamation of the Faith; nor can its implications for the progress of the Cause be immediately understood. There can be no doubt, however, that so vast a proclamation will accrue towards the advancement of the process of entry by troops, on which the energy of the loved ones of Bahá'u'lláh everywhere must be even more intensively focused than before. During the course of these events, we released two messages conveying our current views of the meaning of what transpired in the Holy Land. These are being sent separately to National Spiritual Assemblies, which will arrange to share them immediately with the friends throughout their communities.

May the manifest wonders of the Lord of Hosts invigorate and fortify the friends throughout the world in their devoted endeavours to pursue the avenues of service that He has so graciously opened before them.

[Signed: The Universal House of Justice]

The Official Opening of the Terraces: Reflections of a Participant

There was no doubt it was going to be an amazing week. When the invitation came to be a participant for the occasion of the official opening of the Terraces on Mount Carmel some nine months ago, it was with a feeling of great excitement tinged with a feeling of sweet responsibility that I accepted. With feelings also of humility and unworthiness, I was reminded of a story I was told about the late William Sears when he was appointed a Hand of the Cause. He said to the Guardian that he was not worthy to be a Hand. "Become worthy" he was told.

Although 19 Bahá'ís were generally invited to attend the Opening of the Terraces from each country, 30 Bahá'ís were invited to participate in this great event from the United Kingdom which, besides participants from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, included those from the Scottish Islands, the Isle of Man, the

Channel Islands and Gibraltar.

There were twenty of us in the 'UK group' who flew out together from London Heathrow, and other Bahá'ís representing St. Helena, Eritrea, Nepal, Portugal and Malawi. The Scottish Bahá'ís and the Bahá'ís from Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and Jersey left on a later flight.



Friends from Namibia



On arrival at Tel Aviv airport we were greeted by representatives from the Bahá'í World Centre and as we lined up to have our passports checked, there was great excitement as many of us recognised familiar faces amongst the crowds of eager and expectant Bahá'ís who were simultaneously arriving off other flights from around the world. Whilst waiting a while because we were not permitted to arrive in Haifa before sunset, we began to meet up with Bahá'ís from dozens of different countries, all happy and excited! There was already the sound of African singing from the Bahá'ís of Zambia as they waited for their bus! On arrival at our hotel later that evening, we were greeted by World Centre volunteers and given a pack welcoming us to the Holy Land.

Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Brigette Hasselblad, with Alan McKay. She delivered the Message to Alan's mother while working as a midwife on Shetland. She also delivered Alan. (photo: H. Docherty)

Friends from Namibia (photo: T. Batchelor)

The author



Margaret Appa, Manijeh Smith and the author, Thelma Batchelor (photo: T. Batchelor)

On Sunday morning, May 20, Margaret Appa and I visited the nineteenth terrace from where we could view Mount Carmel, the Mediterranean Sea and the bay of Haifa and where the elements of sea, land, mountain and sky are closely harmonised together. It was a gloriously warm and sunny day as we began to walk down the Upper Terraces. As we descended the beautiful terraced gardens we observed the many spectacular flowers growing alongside each grassy bank and beside each terrace. The water was rippling in the gullies down beside each step and the crystal clear fountains played and gurgled as we paused to digest the beauty of the landscape from each terrace. The birds were singing and it was the first of many exhilarating experiences - being aware of the priceless privilege we were about to have in one of the holiest spots on earth.



A believer from Thailand (photo: BWNS)

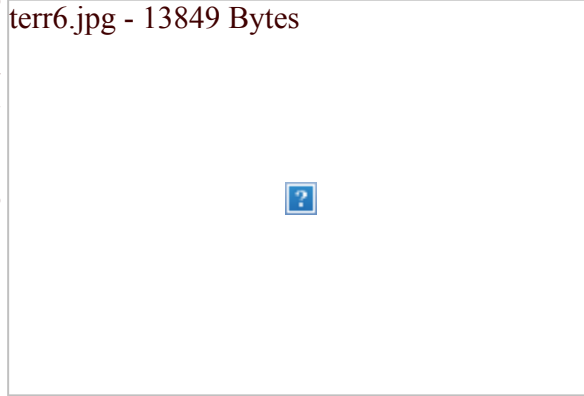
We looked ahead at the Shrine of the Báb, viewing the beautifully laid out gardens in hues of red, blue and purple,

to the clump of cypress trees standing just to the right of the Shrine - the spot where Bahá'u'lláh, during one of His visits to Haifa, had indicated to 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to be the resting



place of the Báb.

We made our way to the old pilgrim house and as we refreshed ourselves with cold drinks, we met up with a great many other Bahá'ís who were beginning to arrive from all around the world. Sounds of African singing from outside the pilgrim house drew us out into the open again and we



*The Congo choir performing at the opening ceremony
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we were delighted to see a group of singers from the Congo rehearsing for their performances later in the week. There's something about Africans singing that warms the heart and makes for instant happiness! We made our first visit to the Shrines of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, afterwards mingling with the many participants who were arriving from the four corners of the earth, many having travelled vast distances to get there.

A great moment of joy for me was meeting up with the Bahá'í friends from Nepal, to which country I had been a pioneer with my family for nine years. Nine Bahá'ís had come from Nepal and most of them had never been out of the country before, let alone coming to Haifa, and they were all excited to be there. That evening, as the temperature cooled, we walked together up the Upper Terraces to the home of one of the Counsellors who, with her family, had been pioneering in Nepal for 22 years. It was warm and sunny, and the terraces a steep climb, but as we neared the topmost terrace and looked back towards the Shrine of the Báb, it was a marvellous sight!

The next morning in our hotel the breakfast tables were crowded with many and various nationalities of Bahá'ís. Although at this stage no ceremonies had commenced, the excitement was beginning to dawn on us at how amazing it was to be part of such an international group of people who represented almost every country on earth, Bahá'ís from large countries such as the United States and the Russian Federation and Bahá'ís from little dots of islands in the Pacific Ocean. Such love and unity amongst all these nations was all the more apparent as we came together in a country torn apart by strife and hatred. The people gathered here represented the kind of world we are working for as Bahá'ís, a unified community of people from every nation, religion, race, ethnic group and culture, from Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and other regions of the world.

Early in the afternoon everyone went to Bahji. The gardens were so incredibly beautiful, and the people everywhere from every nation were reflecting the

flowers of one garden. It was so moving to see people from Cambodia and Laos, Papua New Guinea, Jamaica, Mongolia, Belize, Iceland - everywhere - thousands of us, many experiencing their first visit to Bahji, some weeping outside the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and prostrating themselves along the paths and in the gardens. There were far too many of us for it to be possible to enter the Shrine this day but everyone was enjoying the beauty of the gardens, and marvelling at the unique surroundings.

A special devotional programme took place around the Haram-i-Aqdas to celebrate the completion of the projects on the Arc. The programme featured prayers

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and devotional elements, lasting just over an hour, designed to spiritually prepare everyone for the week ahead. It ended with the Tablet of Visitation. We were seated in several rows of chairs opposite the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. The sun was hot. After it was over we all circumnambulated the gardens around the Shrine - the Haram-i-Aqdas - led by the members of

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the Universal House of Justice. It was an incredible sight to witness the sheer diversity of humanity as their feet crunched on the crushed terracotta brick tiles on the paths around the Haram-i-Aqdas as they observed with due solemnity the occasion.

The following day, Tuesday, May 22, was an early start and the coaches arrived to take all the participants to the Haifa International Conference Centre for an official welcome to the gathering in preparation for the up and coming events. Before the start people were outside in the sun, many wearing their national dress for the first time. Bahá'ís were mingling and mixing and chatting and there was a feeling of instantaneous love as the many nationalities greeted each other.

We went into the Conference Hall for an amazing hour and a half long programme. Prayers were said and special messages read which had been sent by the King of Samoa, the President of Mauritius and the Bahá'ís of Iran who, in addition, had sent 215 long stemmed red roses, which were placed at the foot of the stage.

With enormous feelings of love, we greeted the two Hands of the Cause, Mr Furutan and Mr Varqa, who spoke of the significance of this momentous gathering for the inauguration of the terraces on Mount Carmel. They placed emphasis on the importance of being able to take back home the atmosphere of the Bahá'í World Centre and to rise to the heights of service expected of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. Delightful performances were given by the Bahá'í youth choir of the Congo and the Tabarsi singers (Roma people of Spain).

In the late afternoon participants began to arrive for the Official Opening ceremony of the Mount Carmel Terraces. The Inaugural Events Office had arranged for the construction of a massive 4,000-seat temporary amphitheatre around the plaza that forms the first terrace on the mountainside, at the top of Ben Gurion Avenue.

The sun was hot as we first looked ahead to the lower terraces leading to the Shrine of the Báb. At 6.30 pm the Israel Northern Symphony Haifa, three soloists and the 70-voice Transylvanian Choir entered the Plaza and the Oratorio commenced. As shadows lengthened and the air began to cool, birds started to soar over the terraces in picturesque harmony. The first piece of music was "O

Queen of Carmel!", a cantata in three movements, written by Tolib Shahidi, a composer from Tajikistan. The second piece, "Terraces of Light", was composed by Lasse Thoresen, one of Norway's best known classical composers.

The musical climax was timed to occur just after the sun had set, and as the music reached its crescendo, the 19 majestic series of garden terraces, extending nearly a kilometre up the north face of Mount Carmel, were lit up one-by-one in a brilliant flourish that will be remembered by participants for a lifetime.

The Dan Carmel hotel on the top of the mountain synchronised with its lights going on too. I felt so proud and so honoured to be there. Watching the Shrine of the Báb at this time was absolutely glorious. Why me? Such an honour and a bounty to be sharing this moment with so many nationalities reflecting the cultural diversity of the human race.

© T. Batchelor

At the finish, and as we moved to get ready to leave the auditorium to pick up our coaches to take us back to our hotels, our gaze turned towards the lighted Shrine. At either side of the terraces, the palm trees were lit up like shadowy feathers giving an ephemeral touch to

the scene. It was a tapestry of beauty! Such a beautiful scene! So memorable! Oh, what a night - Tuesday, May 22.

As we left the amphitheatre and walked along Ben Gurion Avenue to the buses, we walked through crowds of people who had lined the avenue to see us. We felt like kings as the people of Haifa watched, with enormous interest and friendliness, as our international group of Bahá'ís walked in their midst.

Wednesday, May 23: Holy Day of the Declaration of the Báb. Already the sun was very hot. It was 9.30 am and we were back in the amphitheatre again, looking up at Mount Carmel and the first nine terraces to the Shrine of the Báb. Gardeners appeared to be busy providing last minute attention to the grassy slopes. Ahead of us was the glorious panoramic scene of the Golden Dome, the white gleam of the marble Shrine, and the Terraces.

At 11 o'clock an hour long devotional programme commenced in several languages, followed by a magnificent performance by the Congo singers and the choir of the Bahá'í World Centre. Then came the moment when the members of the Universal House of Justice began the ascent of the Terraces, and slowly and reverently we all followed up the Terraces and made a circumambulation of the Shrine of the Báb. It was a majestic scene and one that I hope will always remain in my mind's eye.

These were impressive and wonderful moments. It was an act of deep spiritual significance to the participants. I was thinking of family and friends and praying that they were accompanying me in spirit as I made my way up the spiritual path of the Terraces, symbolic of the ascent of the soul to heaven. The diversity of the worldwide Bahá'í community was evident as participants made their way up Mount Carmel in a spirit of devotion. Many wore traditional native costumes and the procession was a showcase of the human garden, resplendent in all its races and colours. It was very very hot but I felt far from tired. The Concourse on High was surely circling around that hallowed spot.

The verse of the prophet Isaiah came to mind: "And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." (Isaiah 2:2) It is an understatement to say how exciting it was to be part of the surging sea of humanity that was fulfilling this prophecy.

That afternoon and the next day, arrangements had been made for groups of participants to visit Bahji. With so many of us, we naturally had to be divided into smaller groups to visit the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh for a period of approximately half an hour. Attired in national costume, there was a long line of Bahá'ís stretching along the path from the Collins Gate, waiting for their moment to enter the



Shrine. Piles of shoes and bags were left outside on the path and I have to admit that at one point I was amused to observe a huge pair of knee-length fur boots and a Mongolian coal-scuttle-type hat placed carefully on the grass beside the Shrine!

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The evening event back at the Conference Centre was entitled "Dazzling Achievements". It included devotions, music, addresses, and an audio-visual presentation about the raising up of the edifices on the Arc and the Terraces. A wide range of Bahá'í artists from around the world took to the stage to inspire and uplift. There was a thank you and a tribute to the composers of last night's performances on the Terraces. Lasse Thoresen touchingly presented the score of his music to the Universal House of Justice.

The architect who designed the new buildings, Hossein Amanat, along with Fariborz Sahba who designed the garden terraces, were given warm appreciation, the highlight of which was the showing of a new 38-minute video documentary entitled "Not even a lamp" on the roughly 15-year-long construction process for the new structures.

It had been a long and memorable holy day starting the previous evening with the celebratory events in connection with the Official Opening of the Terraces and the illumination of the Terraces, and then the morning's events with the devotional programme and the ascent of the Terraces, the visit to Bahji and then the evening performance at the conference centre. We were full to bursting!

Thursday, May 24: At the Conference Centre the evening's programme "Reflections" focused on the achievements of the Faith during the twentieth century. Drawing on "Century of Light", a new book published by the Bahá'í World Centre, the programme used a dramatic narrative to explore the growth and development of the Faith over the last century, exploring how events and trends in the world at large converged or coincided with the evolution of the Bahá'í community.

All nine members of the Universal House of Justice were seated on the stage. A special message from the Universal House of Justice was read by Mr Glenford Mitchell, House member. An awe-inspiring moment!

On the final morning of celebrations on Friday, May 25, everyone made their way to the Arc and on arrival we were served refreshments by World Centre staff. Always, at every step of the way, the honoured participants were provided with refreshments. The sun was very hot, and a ray of colourful umbrellas were up as we made efforts to shade ourselves from the sun's glare. The steps of the four buildings on the Arc, and the areas in between, were crowded with Bahá'ís for the recitation of the Tablet of Carmel. Looking ahead of me from where I was standing on the steps of the Archives building, the Arc truly appeared like a rainbow - curved with colour - a sea of humanity in all its radiant hues.

This gathering marked another historic moment for Bahá'ís inasmuch as it celebrated the completion of the administrative headquarters of the Bahá'í World Centre with the addition of the two newly completed buildings of the International Teaching Centre and the Centre for the Study of the Texts. In their letter dated May 24, 2001, the Universal House of Justice states that 'The majestic buildings that now stand along the Arc traced for them by Shoghi Effendi on the slope of the Mountain of God, together with the magnificent flight of garden terraces that embrace the Shrine of the Báb, are an outward expression of the immense power animating the Cause we serve'.

Saturday, May 26, and participants had to leave the Haifa - 'Akká area by sunset. Thus ended a week which none of us who had the bounty of being there will ever forget. We were so lucky, so fortunate and so privileged! We experienced an event which happens not just once in a lifetime, but in a Dispensation!

With grateful thanks to the Universal House of Justice and to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom,

