



A place for contemplation

The Bahá'í House of Worship in Europe

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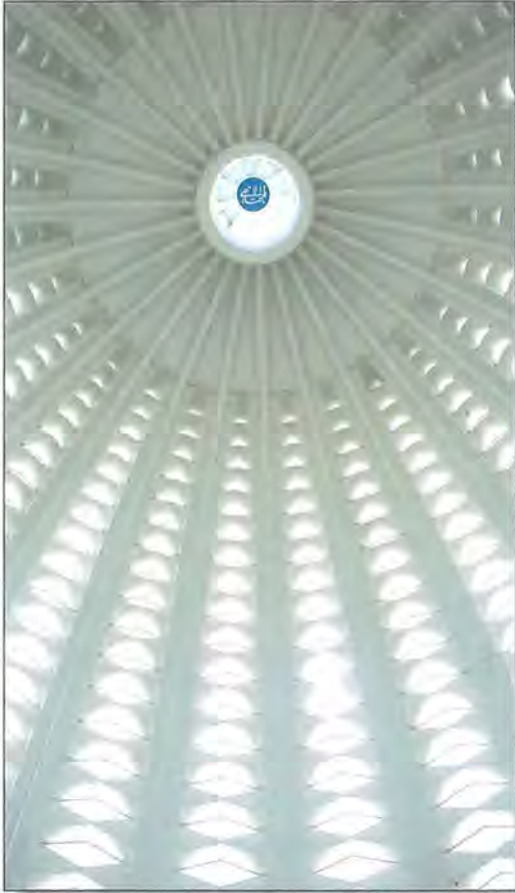


The Mother Temple of Europe

**The House of Worship in
Hofheim-Langenhain
(Taunus)**



Spiritual significance



The world's great religions have always provided special places for worshipping and glorifying God in an atmosphere of prayer and meditation. Temples, shrines, synagogues, churches and mosques often express the essence of a religion and reveal some of its spiritual significance.

Many such buildings are world renowned works of art. They are crafted and are lovingly maintained to provide an environment where people of all castes and creeds can venerate their Creator.

Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, called upon mankind to erect "Houses of Worship" – in Arabic "Mashriq'u'l-Adhkárs" or literally "Dawning-places of the remembrance of God":

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.¹

Despite the relative youth of the Bahá'í

Faith in the family of world religions, Bahá'í Houses of Worship can already be found on every continent. Bahá'ís see these buildings not only as the most visible ambassadors of an independently revealed religion, but also as a divinely ordained institution. They testify to the dynamic force behind the Bahá'í Religion's expansion and bear witness to its global orientation.

What is the deeper meaning and wisdom behind Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to build Houses of Worship? 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His son and authorised Interpreter of His Writings, says:

...at a given hour, the people should know it is time to meet, and all should gather together, and, harmoniously attuned one to another, engage in prayer; with the result



*that out of this coming together, unity and affection shall grow and flourish in the human heart.*²

*Although to outward seeming the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a material structure, yet it hath a spiritual effect. ... The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life...*³

The House of Worship in Hofheim-Langenhain, the first of its kind in Europe, was inaugurated on July 4th, 1964. In her dedication address, Rúhiyyih Khánum, widow of Shoghi Effendi*, said:

This building is dedicated to the three fundamental truths of the Bahá'í

Religion: the oneness of God, the oneness of His Messengers and the oneness of mankind. Its doors are open to individuals of all religious persuasions, to all races, all ethnic groups and all social classes. Within its walls will be heard not only prayers and scripture



*of our own religion, but also those of other great revealed religions of the world. We believe that these Holy Writings represent the treasure-houses of the eternal basic truths which God has revealed at different times for the guidance and salvation of the entire human race. Bahá'ís hope that each and every one of you will feel free to come to this temple to pray and to join us in worshipping and praising God, Whom we all love, to Whom we all turn in supplication, and from Whom we all hope for divine grace and blessings in this turbulent world full of cares and sorrows. ...*⁴

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has no clergy. Bahá'ís believe it is the responsibility of each individual to conduct his or her own personal search for truth based on the immediate, unadulterated and unobscured Word of God. Consequently, in the House of Worship reading and chanting of Holy Scriptures from the world's revealed religions is free of interpretation or elaboration through additional text or commentary.

For over four decades, the Bahá'í House of Worship in Hofheim-Langenhain has been welcoming guests from all over the world and of every religious persuasion. It has come to



be publicly recognised and accepted not only as a symbol of religious unity, but also of the unity of mankind.

*... The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár symbolizes the fundamental verity underlying the Bahá'í Faith, that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is not final but progressive.*⁵

* Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957) was Bahá'u'lláh's great-grandson and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith



Design

According to Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to build Houses of Worship in the name of the Lord of Religions in every country and city, Shoghi Effendi gave instructions in 1953 to build the first European House of Worship near Frankfurt am Main. A decisive factor



in the choice of the location was this city's central location with respect to both Germany and Europe as a whole.

Thus, with the echoes of World War II still ringing in many ears, the daunting responsi-

bility of planning the first European House of Worship fell on the shoulders of the humble German Bahá'í community.

In 1957, after years of effort searching for a suitable site, a purchase contract was finally signed and sealed. Located on the Taunus hills overlooking a picturesque area of the Rhein-Main region, the property proved ideal for the proposed structure.

A competition to design the House of Worship had already taken place in 1954. Following careful scrutiny of all proposals submitted by the nineteen participating architects, the design by a young Frankfurt-based architect named Teuto Rocholl was selected.

The basic requirements for the structure of a House of Worship had been formulated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá... The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, which is to be erected over a central floor plan,

...must have nine sides, doors, fountains, paths, gateways, columns and gardens, with the ground floor, galleries and domes, and in design and construction it must be beautiful...⁶

Teuto Rocholl painstakingly incorporated these requirements in his design, explaining as follows:

... Nine approaches are to lead to the building from all sides, and the central hall is to be made accessible via nine entrances. Since two entrances would suffice logisti-



cally, the requirement suggests an emphasis on the relationship between the outer world and the interior of the structure.

The deliberate dissolution of the wall surrounding and enclosing the central hall – an effect which this design feature implies – appears to have a deeper mean-

ing. Why not make it a design principle for the entire structure? Why not make inward and outward permeability a feature of the architectural conception of the enveloping, demarcating dome?

The requirement for a domed central area in which people may congregate as equals, as well as that for a room with an eastward orientation, are succinct features. ... Thus a further element of the architectural conception consisted in creating an ordering principle which satisfied and stressed the requirement for a central space which utilises the circle as a community-building force, but which nevertheless incorporates a perceptible, externally located point of reference to the east.

... Three sets of nine pillars, which bear the dome, delineate the interior room. The resulting twenty-seven



recesses between the pillars will be closed with large glass walls. Nine portals connect the central hall with the interior ambulatory, which encircles the temple. Here the visitor, prior to entering the central hall, finds a space to concentrate and contemplate. From here, nine further portals lead outwards over open stairways to the surrounding gardens...

The dome is built in form of an ellipse. Twenty-seven ribs lead from the temple floor right up to the apex of the dome, ending in a ring which bears a lantern. The segments between the ribs consist of glass-filled units, assembled in such a way that it permits daylight to flood in and thus counterbalances the otherwise massive impression of the dome. This feature imparts both a befitting solemnity

and an uplifting and joyful atmosphere to the central hall.

... Thanks to the transparent ambulatory walls, the supports are visible from the ground level all the way up to the lantern, even from the outside. Furthermore, every third rib is highlighted – guaranteeing a clearly discernable division into nine parts. The conspicuous profile of the



individual fields between the ribs of the dome create an interesting play of light and shadow further accentuating the dome with its 540 diamond-shaped glass panes.



With its series of slender, protruding supports and its lightly slanting ceiling, the ambulatory is invitingly open.

The building is surrounded by a lovingly maintained garden ...⁷

The House of Worship was built using a steel concrete skeletal (exposed concrete) construction. The preconstructed steel concrete ribs were assembled on site and fixed in place with poured steel concrete rings brought into place at the lower and upper extremities of the ribs.

After three and a half years of construction, Europe's first Bahá'í House of Worship was dedicated in July 1964. The glass walls originally planned as insulation between the interior central room and the ambulatory are to be installed at a later date.

With few exceptions the House of Worship complies with Teuto Rocholl's original design and has reaped considerable acclaim in professional circles.

In 1987, the House of Worship was declared a cultural monument by the State of Hesse (i.e. the state incorporating the City of Frankfurt and its environs).





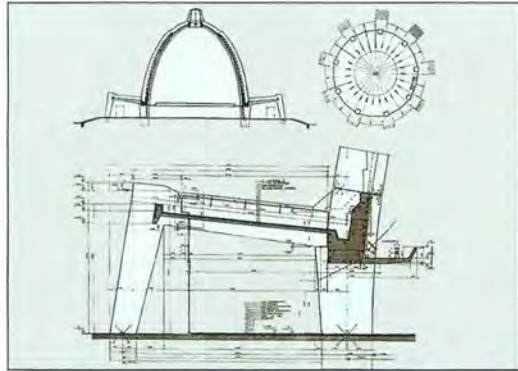
Chronology

April 1953

Shoghi Effendi announces that a House of Worship is to be built near Frankfurt to serve the European Bahá'í communities.

Until 1957

Decision in favour of Hofheim-Langenhain in the Taunus after several years of inspection of around 120 potential building sites.



May 1958

Following challenging negotiations with the district building authorities over details of construction, the temple model is presented to the

Bahá'ís and to the press during the Bahá'í International Conference in Frankfurt in 1958.

November 1958

Renewed rejection of the construction plans by the regional government.



December 1959

Following innumerable negotiations with seventeen different offices, the property is finally registered in the name of the Bahá'í community.

April 1960

Final approval of the temple construction.

20 November 1960

Laying of the foundation stone by Hand of the Cause of God Amelia Collins.



Until April 1961

Termination of excavation and blasting; completion of the foundation.

Until May 1962

Assembly of the preconstructed lower and middle rib elements; completion of the lower poured concrete connexion rings.



Until September 1962

Completion of the ribs, pouring of the upper concrete rings and assembly of the 540 roof segments.

16 November 1962

“Richtfest” (a ceremony in which the building contractor hands over the finished shell of a building to its owner).

Until June 1963

Installation of the dome glass elements, the pillar illumination, the sunshades on the roof segments and the mosaic rendition of the Greatest Name.



September 1963

Pouring of the transformer station and construction of the caretaker's house.

4 July 1964

Hand of the Cause of God Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum dedicates the House of Worship to the unity of God, the unity of religion and the unity of mankind.



Technical details

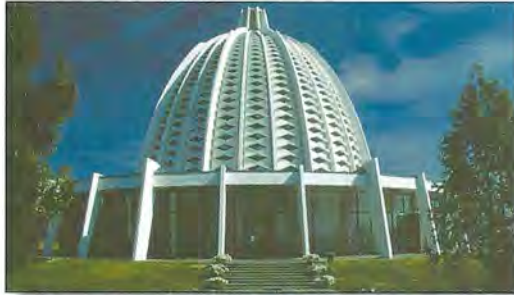
- Area of the temple property at the beginning of construction: 29,068 m²
- Site's altitude above sea level: 363 m
- Diameter of the ambulatory area: 48 m
- Diameter of the central hall area: 25 m
- Height from ground level: 28 m
- Twenty-seven upward-stretched cambers supporting 540 diamond-shaped glass windows



- Glassed area of the dome: 386 m²
- Glassed area of the ambulatory: 505 m²
- Weight of each middle camber segment: 14.000 kg
- Weight of each upper camber segment: 8.000 kg



Around and about the House of Worship



The dome of the first European House of Worship high in the Taunus mountains can be glimpsed from the Frankfurt-Wiesbaden Motorway.

On leaving the motorway, follow the narrow, winding road to the small village of Langenhain in the Taunus. You will find that the inhabitants are used to seeing visitors from all parts of the world arriving daily at the House of Worship. Along with hiking groups, school classes and omnibus tours, the mildly curious and religious seekers alike can often be seen walking around the House of Worship alone or in small groups. Many visitors come to learn more about the Bahá'í Faith, the youngest of the world religions; others to enjoy the peace and quiet of the House of Worship, or to recharge their spiritual batteries in prayer and contemplation. Some visitors simply want to take a peaceful walk in the gardens far from the maddening bustle of the Rhein-Main lowlands. Whatever their wishes, all are welcome.

In the basement of the House of Worship the visitor is invited to meditate upon the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Those who would like further information on

all aspects of the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings will find a warm welcome in the Visitors' Centre at the entrance of the area. Guests can enjoy an impressive multimedia show over tea and biscuits. A bookshop with literature in several languages and audio-visual materials are in the second floor of the building.



The third building on the premises is the National Bahá'í Centre, which houses the National Secretariat with its dependencies and a conference hall.

Both small- and large-scale events take place year round in the vicinity of the House of Worship. Among the most popular is an international summer festival which has been held every year since 1996. The 800 visitors



to the first festival must have enjoyed themselves, for the average number of visitors has already risen to over 3000.

The festival is not only a welcome occasion for Bahá'ís from all over Europe to come together. It also provides an opportunity for the residents of the Frankfurt metropolitan area to get to know the Bahá'ís and their goals, or just to enjoy a pleasant atmosphere of fun and games, theatre and dance, as well as a wide range of international dishes.



A series of public events, called “Forum Langenhain”, has been held since 1993. They provide a forum for open dialog, both on topics of current and perennial themes. They include talks and lectures on all aspects of life, podium discussions, concerts, and other artistic presentations. In addition, international conferences, deepening courses in the

understanding of the Holy Writings, seminars, weddings, celebrations, exhibitions, and many interesting visitors fill the building with life throughout the year.

The unique acoustics of the House of Worship are a source of fascination for the many international choirs. For the listener, the sound is like a ladder ascending directly to heaven.

A public devotional service is held each Sunday in the House of Worship. It consists



of readings from the Holy Writings of different religions as well as a cappella singing. Visitors from every conceivable religious persuasion and world view find an answer here to mankind's age-old question: how to live at peace with one another while recognising that our differences are in fact a source of joy and wonder. After all, don't the different

flowers and plants in the gardens each make a unique, irreplaceable contribution to the beauty of the whole?

Since its renovation in 1998, the House of Worship has been radiating in renewed splendour – a fact which the local press has acknowledged by naming it “the Crown of the Taunus”.

“The magnet of Taunus” might also be an appropriate name, as the following story indicates:



... One evening, a woman from Bad Soden arrived exhausted at the House of Worship. She explained that she had seen a beaming white dome from her dwelling nearly twenty kilometres away and felt drawn to it as to a lighthouse. She compared it to the “Star of Bethlehem”, and it animated her to undertake a two-hour search for this light that very same evening.



The Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. Its founder, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), is regarded by Bahá'ís as the most recent in the line of Messengers of God that stretches back beyond recorded time and that includes Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ, and Muhammad.

The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in one global society. Bahá'u'lláh declared that God has set in motion historical forces that are break-

ing down traditional barriers of race, class, creed, and nation, which will, in time, give birth to a universal civilization. The principal challenge facing the peoples of the earth is to

accept the fact of their oneness and to assist the processes of unification.

One of the purposes of the Bahá'í Faith is to help make this possible. A worldwide community of some five million Bahá'ís, representative of most of the nations, races and cultures on earth, is working to give Bahá'u'lláh's teachings practical effect.



Their experience will be a source of encouragement to all who share their vision of humanity as one global family and the earth as one homeland.⁸

That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith.⁹

So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.¹⁰

O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.¹¹

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to

reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.¹²

The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.¹³



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- 2 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 58
- 3 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 60
- 4 Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih *Khánúm*, Die drei Wahrheiten des Glaubens; in: Bahá'í-Briefe, Vol. 17 (July 1964), p. 412 (translation; talk given in German)
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- 8 Bahá'í International Community, <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-2-0-1.html>
- 9 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 120:3
- 10 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 132:3
- 11 Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic 22
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Opening hours

House of Worship,
daily from 9:00 a.m. till dusk

For guided group tours, please enquire in advance

Devotional Service,
Sundays 3:00 – 3:30 p.m.
Visitors are always welcome

Thank you for coming to visit the first European Bahá'í House of Worship. You are welcome to come back at any time.

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