

Bahá'í World Center

Spiritual and administrative center of the Bahá'í Faith, established in the twin cities of Acre and Haifa as a consequence of Bahá'u'lláh's banishment to Palestine in 1868. The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, just north of Acre, and the Shrine of the Báb on the slope of Mount Carmel in Haifa, in a location chosen by Bahá'u'lláh, are the focal points of devotion for Bahá'ís around the world. The edifices of the administrative center are situated on Mount Carmel near the Shrine of the Báb.

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EARLY DEVELOPMENT

During the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh, the center of the Bahá'í Faith was wherever He happened to be. The Báb had written that the point toward which the faithful should turn in prayer (the *qibliḥ*) should be "He Whom God Will Make Manifest" (the messianic Figure promised by the Báb), wherever He should go, and ultimately would be fixed as the place where His remains would be laid to rest. Bahá'u'lláh confirmed this instruction in His book of laws, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Most Holy Book).¹

The prison city of Acre became the center of the Bahá'í Faith when Bahá'u'lláh arrived there on 31 August 1868 as an exile and a prisoner of the Ottoman authorities. He and His companions were taken to the citadel, where they were confined for more than two years. On 3 September 1868 the text of Sultan Abdülaziz's order condemning Bahá'u'lláh and His companions to perpetual banishment and forbidding the inhabitants of Acre from associating with the exiles was read out in the principal mosque of the city as a warning to the population. The resultant hostility and suspicion of the populace gradually gave way to respect for Bahá'u'lláh and for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who became increasingly responsible for relations between the exiles and the public; conditions became easier and the attitude of the local population more friendly. In October 1870 Bahá'u'lláh and His family were permitted to move from the citadel to the first in a series of rented quarters in Acre. In June 1877, although Bahá'u'lláh remained a prisoner, it became possible for Him to take up residence in pleasant surroundings outside the city walls, first at Mazra'ih and then at Bahjí, where He passed away in 1892.



The Mansion of Mazra'ih, c. 1900. Photographer: Edward Getsinger. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank

The activities of the Bahá'í World Center after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Palestine consisted primarily of the dictation of letters (known in Bahá'í terminology as "tablets") and, when circumstances permitted, the reception of pilgrims. Bahá'u'lláh dictated the tablets to His secretary, usually Mírzá Áqá Ján. They were then transcribed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí, Zaynu'l-Muqarribín, and others, and dispatched to the Bahá'ís of Iran and elsewhere through couriers, such as Shaykh Salmán and Hájí Amín, and through pilgrims. Letters from the Bahá'ís were brought to the Holy Land by the same means. The flow of pilgrims had to be

regulated, however. The undercurrent of antagonism to the Bahá'í Faith as a result of rumors that had been spread by its opponents, and the fact that the exiles remained prisoners of the government, meant that a sudden influx of pilgrims could have alarmed the authorities and created grave danger for the Faith. Bahá'u'lláh, therefore, required every pilgrim to obtain His permission before setting off on the journey and to pause at Beirut or Alexandria, where trusted representatives resided, for this permission to be confirmed before proceeding to Acre.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, who continued to live in the city of Acre in a residence known as the House of 'Abbúd, increasingly undertook day-to-day arrangements such as renting houses, securing food, and meeting with officials. Money to cover the expenses of the Bahá'ís came from a variety of sources. As was customary for those exiled for political reasons, the Ottoman government provided a small allowance for the maintenance of Bahá'u'lláh and those exiled with Him. This was later augmented by money that the Bahá'ís in the Holy Land were able to earn through trade. Also, Bahá'ís from Iran and other centers in the Middle East sent contributions and, later, payments of *Huqúqu'lláh* (Arabic: the "Right of God," a law providing for payment, as a private act of conscience, of a percentage of one's capital gains to a fund at the disposition of the Head of the Faith). Despite this income, however, financial resources were limited, and the exiles lived simply; a pilgrim who visited the Holy Land in the last months of Bahá'u'lláh's life records, for example, that the room in which Bahá'u'lláh lived at Bahjí was bare except for a chair and reed matting on the floor.²

Bahá'u'lláh arrived in Acre with sixty-six family members and companions. Over the years, numbers of Bahá'ís, some driven from their homes by persecution, some wanting to be close to Bahá'u'lláh, settled in the Acre–Haifa area. By the time of Bahá'u'lláh's passing in 1892, these totaled about three hundred. A few served in the household of Bahá'u'lláh and in the Garden of Ridván, a spot near Acre that Bahá'u'lláh often visited, and in other gardens, but the majority took up occupations such as shopkeepers, carpenters, and iron- and coppersmiths in Acre and Haifa. When, on Bahá'u'lláh's instructions, land was purchased on the Sea of Galilee, Mírzá Muhammad Qulí, Bahá'u'lláh's half-brother, moved to Nuqayb to farm a tract of land that had been assigned to him.



The House of 'Abbúd in Acre, Israel. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank

During the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from 1892 to 1921, the affairs of the Bahá'í World Center became more complex. With the rebellion of Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí ('Abdu'l-Bahá's half-brother, the second surviving son of Bahá'u'lláh) and his supporters against the covenantal authority of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Mansion of Bahjí, in which Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí and his family resided, was no longer under the control of the Head of the Bahá'í Faith. The activities of these Covenant-breakers (Bahá'ís who attempt to disrupt the unity of the Faith by opposing the authority of Bahá'u'lláh or His designated successors as Head of the Faith) caused further problems when they led to the renewal of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's incarceration within the walls of Acre in 1901.

In 1896 'Abdu'l-Bahá rented the House of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá in Acre, both to receive pilgrims, who were now coming from Europe and America as well as from the Middle East, and to house His growing extended family as His daughters began to marry. Later, from about 1907, He began to move His family to Haifa, where He joined them in 1909 after His release from incarceration. His house in Haifa, located on what is now known as Haparsim (Persian) Street at the foot of Mount Carmel, became the administrative center of the Bahá'í Faith.

'Abdu'l-Bahá had several secretaries who served Him in this capacity for varying lengths of time and who helped Him with His correspondence. Usually, one secretary was fluent in English and assisted with the correspondence received in that language. 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued Bahá'u'lláh's pattern of corresponding with individual Bahá'ís. As the postal services in the Middle East improved, the need to use Bahá'í couriers decreased.


One of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's main achievements in developing the Bahá'í World Center—indeed, one of the greatest achievements of His ministry³—was the construction of the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel at a spot that had been designated by Bahá'u'lláh. This was an enterprise fraught with problems at every stage. 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid the foundation stone for the Shrine in 1899, but construction continued for many years. On 21 March 1909 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid the remains of the Báb to rest in a vault within the Shrine. Twelve years later, on 29 November 1921, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was buried in an adjacent vault. [Shoghi Effendi](#) later enlarged the Shrine and completed the building by adding a superstructure (See Section: [Development under Shoghi Effendi](#)).



Historical frontal view of the House of the 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Haifa, Israel. © Bahá'í International Community. [Bahá'í Media Bank](#)

From about 1909 onward, pilgrims were accommodated in Haifa. A pilgrim house built near the Shrine of the Báb in 1909 by Mírzá Ja'far Rahmání, a Bahá'í from Ashgabat in Turkmenistan, housed pilgrims from the Middle East. Pilgrims from the West stayed in a house opposite 'Abdu'l-Bahá's residence in Haifa.

DEVELOPMENT UNDER SHOGHI EFFENDI

In 1921, when Shoghi Effendi became Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith according to the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's [Will and Testament](#) , he promptly considered the steps required for the establishment of the [Universal House of Justice](#), the supreme council of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (See: [Administration, Bahá'í](#)). In 1922 he gathered in Haifa "a group of representative and well-known Bahá'ís" to discuss establishing the Universal House of Justice.⁴ However, it became apparent that such a move would be premature, as it required a firm administrative foundation and a pool of well-informed Bahá'ís from which to draw both electors and membership—conditions that did not exist in 1922.

Thus Shoghi Effendi "set about trying to establish at least the preliminary forms that might precede its election."⁵ During the early years of his ministry, he began bringing to Haifa Bahá'ís who could form a secretariat to assist him in his work. His first collaborator, Dr. John E. Esslemont from England, arrived in Haifa in November 1924 but died suddenly a year later, in November 1925. Others whom Shoghi Effendi approached were unable for a variety of reasons to come to Haifa or came but soon had to leave. As a result, Shoghi Effendi gave up for the time being the idea of bringing a number of competent Bahá'ís to Haifa to form an international Bahá'í secretariat. Instead, he relied on members of his family to assist him in his work as Guardian. Whenever he was absent from the Holy Land, he left principal responsibility in the hands of his great-aunt Bahíyyih Khánum, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi's father, Mírzá Hádí Shírází Afnán, represented him in meetings with officials and assisted with Persian correspondence. Shoghi Effendi's cousins Rúhí and Suhayl Afnán and his brother Husayn Rabbání, all of whom had studied in Beirut, served Shoghi Effendi, among others, in the position of English secretary. He had Persian secretaries as well: 'Azízu'lláh Bahádur, Mahmúd Zarqání, and Núri'd-dín Zayn.

In 1925 Shoghi Effendi invited Effie Baker, the first Australian woman to become a Bahá'í (See: [Dunn, Clara, and Dunn, John Henry Hyde. Arrival in Australia](#)), to remain in Haifa after her pilgrimage. She

served until 1936 as the keeper of the Western Pilgrim House and the custodian of the International Bahá'í Archives. An accomplished photographer, she took photographs of the Bahá'í World Center, many of which were published in early volumes of the publication called *The Bahá'í World*. Between July 1930 and January 1931, at Shoghi Effendi's request, Baker traveled extensively in Iraq and Iran, creating a photographic record of sites associated with Bábí and Bahá'í history.

In the summer of 1929, Shoghi Effendi conceived the idea of holding an international conference at which the formation of National Spiritual Assemblies (See: [Administration, Bahá'í](#). Institutions of Bahá'í Administration. National Spiritual Assemblies) in the Middle East, as well as the subject of the Bahá'í administration in general, could be informally discussed. Plans for the conference were in hand when Shoghi Effendi learned that some of the older believers saw this as an opportunity to elect some form of interim international body. Shoghi Effendi believed this to be untimely and canceled the conference, saying it would be "a source of confusion, misunderstanding and even controversy."⁶ He held in abeyance for the next twenty years the idea of setting up a precursor to the House of Justice, concentrating instead on building up the network of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies around the world as "the bedrock upon the strength of which the Universal House is in future to be firmly established and raised."⁷

From the beginning of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi also devoted great effort to the physical development of the Bahá'í World Center—safeguarding, extending, and beautifying its properties. Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí and his supporters let the Mansion of Bahjí fall into so dilapidated a condition that by November 1927 the roof was in danger of collapsing, causing them to seek assistance from Shoghi Effendi. He was then able to insist that they evacuate the building before he undertook repairs. They moved out of the mansion two years later, and Shoghi Effendi immediately set about restoring it. Later he obtained the approval of the British authorities for it to become a museum, permanently transferred to his control as Head of the Faith. In 1952 he was able to acquire extensive land around Bahjí for its beautification. Just before his passing in 1957, Shoghi Effendi succeeded in negotiating the expropriation by the state of the last of the properties around Bahjí occupied by the remnants of the Covenant-breakers. He also obtained permission for the Bahá'ís to have access to the room in the Acre citadel that had been occupied by Bahá'u'lláh, and in 1950 he secured the lease of the property at Mazra'ih, where Bahá'u'lláh resided from 1877 to 1879.




Shrine of the Báb during the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1910-1919. Haifa, Israel. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank



The dome and drum of the Shrine of the Báb take shape over the completed octagon and colonnade, 1952. Haifa, Israel. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank

In Haifa, Shoghi Effendi improved the facilities for pilgrims by building the Western Pilgrim House, which had been contemplated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on a site across Haparsim Street from the House of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This project had been initiated through a benefaction by Harry Randall, one of the early Bahá'ís in the United States, and was completed in 1926 with the assistance of Amelia Collins, another prominent American Bahá'í. Shoghi Effendi supervised the addition of three rooms to the Shrine of the Báb, as intended by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, built its superstructure (completed in 1953), and progressively

extended the terrace on which it stands; purchased land for the buildings of the permanent administrative center, the terraces above and below the Shrine of the Báb, and the site for the future Bahá'í House of Worship ([Mashriqu'l-Adhkár](#)) in Haifa; laid out rudimentary and symbolic terraces below the Shrine, linking it to the main avenue of the city; erected a befitting memorial over the resting place of Bahíyyih Khánum and transferred the remains of the brother (See: [Mihdí](#), [Mírzá](#)) and the mother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a location near it; and constructed the first of the buildings of the administrative center, the International Archives Building, which was completed in 1957. Shoghi Effendi frequently referred to Bahá'u'lláh's [Tablet of Carmel](#) , written in 1890 during one of His visits to Mount Carmel, as the charter for the development of the Bahá'í World Center.

When the Jewish-Arab conflict in the Holy Land reached a peak in the 1940s, Shoghi Effendi asked the majority of the Bahá'ís to leave the country, except for a small number whom he retained as caretakers of the Bahá'í holy places and gardens and for other essential services.

Shoghi Effendi maintained cordial contacts with local and national figures in Mandatory Palestine and later in the State of Israel, thereby facilitating the recognition of the Bahá'í World Center by the authorities and the granting of tax-exempt status to the Bahá'í holy places, beginning in 1934 with the properties on Mount Carmel. The recognition thus won from the British Mandate authorities was continued after 1947 by the State of Israel. Among the actions taken by Shoghi Effendi to consolidate the position of the Bahá'í World Center was the establishment of Palestine branches (later, Israel branches) of several National Spiritual Assemblies. Shoghi Effendi was then able to transfer to these officially incorporated bodies various Bahá'í properties in the Acre–Haifa area that had previously been held in the names of individuals.

As the Bahá'í administrative institutions around the world developed, they became the primary focus of Shoghi Effendi's extensive correspondence, which comprised approximately thirty-six thousand letters and messages. He also remained in contact with individual Bahá'ís in every land.

The support and secretarial assistance that Shoghi Effendi's family gave him gradually diminished during the 1940s and early 1950s, as one by one the surviving relatives broke the Covenant and were expelled from the Bahá'í community. Soon only his wife, Rúhíyyih Khánum (See: [Hands of the Cause of God](#)), whom Shoghi Effendi described as "my helpmate, my shield . . . and my tireless collaborator,"⁸ remained to assist him with his English correspondence. Her father, Canadian architect Sutherland Maxwell (See: [Hands of the Cause of God](#)), designed the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb and aided Shoghi Effendi in its construction. In 1947 Rúhíyyih Khánum's close friend Gladys Anderson was invited to move from the United States to Haifa, where she took over a wide range of responsibilities. In early 1948 her fiancé, Ben Weeden, was also invited to serve at the Bahá'í World Center. He assisted with the building projects, among other assignments. After their marriage, the couple attended many official functions and played a role in contacting government officials on Shoghi Effendi's behalf. Their services in this capacity continued until February 1951, when Ben Weeden had to leave Haifa because of ill health. Gladys Weeden continued her work in Haifa for nearly a year, leaving to join her husband in early 1952.

During the months spanning the end of 1950 and the beginning of 1951, Shoghi Effendi took a major



The dome and drum of the Shrine of the Báb take shape over the completed octagon and colonnade, 1952. Haifa, Israel. © Bahá'í International Community. [Bahá'í Media Bank](#)

step in the development of the administrative institutions at the Bahá'í World Center. In November 1950 he invited five Bahá'ís to serve in Haifa. They were Lutfu'lláh Hakím, originally from Iran but then residing in England, who had served at the Bahá'í World Center during the ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá; Amelia Collins and Charles Mason Remey, prominent American Bahá'ís since the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá (both of whom Shoghi Effendi would shortly name among the first contingent of the Hands of the Cause of God); and Ethel Revell and Jessie Revell, sisters from the United States who had also been Bahá'ís since the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá. After these five arrived, he informed them, the Weedens, and Rúhíyyih Khánum of his intention to appoint them as members of an International Bahá'í Council, with Rúhíyyih Khánum to be the liaison between the Guardian and the Council. In a message dated 9 January 1951, he proclaimed to the Bahá'í world the "weighty epoch-making decision" to form the "first embryonic International Institution" of the Bahá'í Faith.⁹

With the unexpected departure of the Weedens, the Council consisted of six members. In March 1952 Shoghi Effendi announced the enlargement of the Council to include Leroy Ioas from the United States, as Secretary-General, and Ugo Giachery from Italy, member at large. Like Collins and Remey, both had recently been named Hands of the Cause. Subsequently, Shoghi Effendi appointed a ninth member, Sylvia Ioas, who resided in Haifa with her husband, Leroy. Shoghi Effendi gave the members of the International Bahá'í Council many of the functions of liaison with government authorities.



The Seat of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa, Israel. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank

After Shoghi Effendi's death in 1957, the staff at the Bahá'í World Center continued to expand. The Hands of the Cause of God, who functioned as the Head of the Bahá'í Faith during the interregnum between Shoghi Effendi's passing and the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963, appointed nine of their number to serve at the World Center under the overall authority of the body of the Hands of the Cause. For ease of reference in relations between the Bahá'í World Center and the Israeli authorities, these nine Hands residing in the Holy Land were designated the Custodians. They established their office in a building within the precincts of the House of `Abdu'l-Bahá.¹⁰ The office of the International Bahá'í Council remained in the Western Pilgrim House. The Council continued to function under the direction of the Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land, who called on all the members of National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world to elect a new nine-member council in 1961, for a two-year term, in preparation for the election of the Universal House of Justice in April 1963.

DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

When the Universal House of Justice was elected in 1963, its nine members and their families took up residence in Haifa. The Western Pilgrim House became the offices of the Universal House of Justice, and a small secretariat was recruited to serve it. From that time onward, the Bahá'í World Center has continued to grow, and the number of those working as volunteers has increased, by March 2008 totaling 665 full-time volunteer workers from seventy-nine countries. A large proportion of the staff consists of youth volunteers (numbering some 338 between the ages of 18 and 30 in March 2008) who assist with various support activities.

A measure of the expansion at the Bahá'í World Center is the fact that whole departments are now responsible for tasks that Shoghi Effendi used to undertake single-handedly. The exact organization of

departments and offices varies from time to time, but they can be grouped into the following categories:

- Secretariat—concerned with the correspondence of the Universal House of Justice, including the filing, indexing, and retrieval of this material, as well as the processing of responses to incoming letters.
- Research Department—responsible under the direction of the Universal House of Justice for preparing material from the authoritative Bahá'í texts on issues specified by the Universal House of Justice, as well as producing compilations of scripture, translating and checking translations, and researching questions that come from all parts of the Bahá'í world.
- Department of Library and Archival Services—divided into an Archives Office, responsible for the preservation, arrangement, and description of the Bahá'í authoritative texts; a Conservation Office, responsible for preserving the Bahá'í sacred writings and relics, as well as other historic documents and artifacts; and the Bahá'í World Center Library.
- Offices charged with the responsibility for major construction and renovation projects and for the preservation and maintenance of the holy places and other Bahá'í properties at the World Center, including acquisition, restoration and construction, cleaning, maintenance, security, and gardens development. Important acquisitions include outright ownership of Mazra'ih (1973), the House of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá (1975), and additional land around Bahjí and Mazra'ih and on Mount Carmel. This group of offices also organizes pilgrimages.
- Offices concerned with all legal issues and relations with government agencies, the media, and civil society. On 22 April 1987 an international agreement was signed with the State of Israel, carrying forward the recognition that had been obtained by Shoghi Effendi under the British Mandate and in the early years of the creation of the State of Israel and defining the relationship of the Bahá'í World Center with the state.
- Offices responsible for statistical analysis and for audiovisual resources.
- Offices responsible for worldwide issues related to socioeconomic development and the environment.
- Offices concerned with the management of funds, including such functions as handling contributions, accounting, purchasing, disbursements, and cost analysis.
- Offices that perform service functions—meeting needs for data processing, personnel, accommodation, health, telecommunications, and administrative development.

Certain offices and institutions have functioned as adjuncts and auxiliaries of the Bahá'í World Center although physically located outside the Acre–Haifa area. The first of these was the International Bahá'í Bureau, established in 1925 in Geneva. Currently, Bahá'í official contacts with most international organizations are carried out through the external affairs offices of the Bahá'í International Community situated in Haifa, New York, Geneva, and elsewhere.

In 1973 the International Teaching Center was established to function as the central institution coordinating the work of the Continental Boards of Counselors and their Auxiliary Boards around the world. The members of the International Teaching Center were the Hands of the Cause, throughout their lifetimes, and Counselors appointed by the Universal House of Justice to serve in that capacity. The former Western Pilgrim House was the office of the International Teaching Center for many years until its own building on Mount Carmel was completed in 2000. At present the International Teaching Center has nine full-time Counselors as members and a growing support staff.

Communications between the Bahá'í World Center and the rest of the Bahá'í world have increasingly moved from letters and cablegrams to newer electronic forms such as electronic mail, entailing a corresponding increase in use of electronic data storage and retrieval.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Bahá'í World Center entered a new stage in its development. Several new buildings were erected. The first was the Seat of the Universal House of Justice; ground was broken in 1975, and the building was occupied in January 1983. The next major construction on Mount Carmel occurred in the period 1990–2001, with completion between 1999 and 2001 of the buildings for the International Teaching Center and the Center for the Study of the Texts; an extension to the International Bahá'í Archives Building; landscaped Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb, which stretch from the foot of Mount Carmel to its crest; and an Office of Public Information building, located under Terrace 11, that includes a Visitor Information Center.



Participants ascending the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb during their inauguration, May 2001, Haifa, Israel. © Bahá'í International Community. [Bahá'í Media Bank](#)

On 22–23 May 2001, over four thousand people—Bahá'ís and guests from 180 countries, dignitaries from Israel, international diplomats, and representatives of the news media—attended ceremonies marking the opening to the public of the Terraces on Mount Carmel. Free guided tours, which began in June 2001, are staffed by multi-ethnic guides trained by the Beit Hagefen Arab-Jewish Cultural Center and by Bahá'í volunteer workers. In March 2009, to accommodate the half million people who visit the Bahá'í gardens in both Acre and Haifa annually, the Bahá'í International Community launched an informational website for visitors (See: [The Bahá'í Gardens](#)) and announced expanded tour options.

In the vicinity of the Shrine of the Báb, a Pilgrim Reception Center opened in 2000. Located in two historic buildings that were restored and remodeled, the complex accommodates activities by increased numbers of pilgrims. At Bahjí, a Pilgrim Facilities and Visitor's Center was built in 2001.

In late 2008 work began on restoration and updating of the Shrine of the Báb. The four-year project, which includes earthquake reinforcement and various renovations, will not alter the building's appearance. Although the shrine will be enclosed in scaffolding and covered in canvas sheeting for approximately

two years, it will remain open to pilgrims and visitors except for brief periods.

In July 2008 the UNESCO World Heritage Committee chose to add the [Bahá'í Holy Places in Haifa and Western Galilee](#) to the [World Heritage List](#) of properties of "outstanding universal value" in the world's cultural and natural heritage.

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Bahá'u'lláh describes the land to which He was banished thus: "This Holy Land hath been mentioned and extolled in all the sacred Scriptures. In it have appeared the Prophets of God and His chosen Ones. . . . This is the promised Land in which He Who is the Revelation of God was destined to be made manifest. . . . the Land of unfading splendor. Whatever hath come to pass in this Day hath been foretold in the Scriptures of old."¹¹ Shoghi Effendi describes it as "the Land promised by God to Abraham, sanctified by the Revelation of Moses, honored by the lives and labors of the Hebrew patriarchs, judges, kings and prophets, revered as the cradle of Christianity, and as the place where Zoroaster . . . 'held converse with some of the Prophets of Israel,' and associated by Islám with the Apostle's night-journey . . . to the throne of the Almighty."¹²

Shoghi Effendi stresses the significance of both the spiritual and administrative world centers of the Bahá'í Faith having been permanently fixed in the Acre–Haifa area in the Holy Land. The most important

location is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, the qiblah of the Bahá'í world. Second in spiritual importance is the Shrine of the Báb, situated on Mount Carmel, the "Mountain of God." Shoghi Effendi describes the remains of the Báb as being at the center of "nine concentric circles," the outermost of which is the entire planet, the next being the Holy Land, then Mount Carmel, the Bahá'í properties on Mount Carmel, the gardens and terraces that enclose the Shrine of the Báb, the superstructure of the Shrine itself, the original Shrine built by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the vault under the central room of the Shrine, and the alabaster sarcophagus in which the remains of the Báb lie.¹³ The presence of the tombs of the sister, brother, and mother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Monument Gardens adjacent to the Shrine of the Báb "incalculably reinforces the spiritual potencies of that consecrated Spot,"¹⁴ which is "designated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself" as "the seat of God's throne."¹⁵ The world administrative institutions of the Bahá'í Faith are, thus, inextricably linked with sites of great spiritual significance.

In May 2001 the Universal House of Justice, addressing the Bahá'ís gathered in Haifa for the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb, linked the developments on Mount Carmel with a new stage in the Bahá'í Faith's and humanity's evolution:

The majestic buildings that now stand . . . on the slope of the Mountain of God, together with the magnificent flight of garden terraces that embrace the Shrine of the Báb . . . offer timeless witness to the fact that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh have successfully laid the foundations of a worldwide community transcending all differences that divide the human race, and have brought into existence the principal institutions of a unique and unassailable Administrative Order that shapes this community's life. In the transformation that has taken place on Mount Carmel, the Bahá'í Cause emerges as a visible and compelling reality on the global stage, as the focal center of forces that will, in God's good time, bring about the reconstruction of society, and as a mystic source of spiritual renewal for all who turn to it.¹⁶




Approach and entrance to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, 1990s, Bahjí, Acre, Israel. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank

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Notes:

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, 1st pocket-size ed. (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993, 2005 printing) ¶137: 68.
2. Tarázu'lláh Samandarí, *Moments with Bahá'u'lláh: Memoirs of the Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandarí*, trans. Mehdi Samandari and Marzieh Gail (Los Angeles: Kalimát, 1995) 52.
3. Erection of the mausoleum has been called "the greatest victory" of the early years of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry. See *Century of Light*, prepared under the direction of the Universal House of Justice (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2001, 2003 printing) 13.
4. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, 2nd ed. (Oakham, U.K.: Bahá'í Publishing, 2000) 55–56, 247. The participants in the consultation included Lady (Sara Louisa) Blomfield, Emogene Hoagg, Ethel Rosenberg, Roy Wilhelm, Mountfort Mills, Mason Remey, Laura and Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney, Consul and Alice Schwarz, and Wellesley Tudor Pole.

5. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 248.
6. Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 250.
7. Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages, 1922–1932*, 1974 ed. (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974, 1998 printing) 63.
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16. Universal House of Justice, letter to the Bahá'ís gathered for the events marking the completion of the Mount Carmel Projects, 24 May 2001, <http://www.infonet.st-johns.nf.ca/bahai/24May.html>  (accessed 14 Jan. 2009).

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Other Sources and Related Reading:

- Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Carmel (*Lawh-i-Karmil*), regarded as the charter for the development of the Bahá'í World Center, is published in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh, 1st pocket-size ed. (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, 2005 printing) 1: 3–5, and in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* 11: 14–17.
- A comprehensive volume on the history and development of the Bahá'í World Center is David S. Ruhe, *Door of Hope: The Bahá'í Faith in the Holy Land*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 2001). Much information on the development of the Bahá'í World Center is also included in Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*.
- Accounts of the development of the Bahá'í World Center up to 1992 are found mainly in the "International Survey of Current Bahá'í Activities" section of a number of *Bahá'í World* volumes (original series), beginning with vol. 4: 1930–32 (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1933) and concluding with vol. 20: 1986–92 (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1998) 120–29, 133–35. In several of these volumes, relevant accounts and topical articles are also included in another section entitled "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh"—for example, Husayn Amánat, "The Permanent Seat of the Universal House of Justice," *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 16: 1973–76 (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 399–404. In the original series of *Bahá'í World* volumes, material on aspects of the Bahá'í World Center can also be found occasionally in other sections, including "The Completion of the Construction of the Sepulcher of the Báb in the Holy Land, 1953," *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 12: 1950–54 (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956) 235–52; and Paul Haney's "The World Centre of the Bahá'í Faith—Its Supreme Administrative Importance," *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 14: 1963–68 (Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1974) 433–38. Since 1992, the new series of annual *Bahá'í World*

volumes has included a section entitled "Mount Carmel Projects" that summarizes progress during the year—for example, "Mount Carmel Projects: Progress 1996–97," *The Bahá'í World, 1996–97: An International Record* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1998) 115–24. Information about the Bahá'í World Center is available online at Bahá'í International Community, "Bahá'í World Centre," <http://www.bahai.org/dir/bwc> (accessed 14 Jan. 2009), and "The Bahá'í Gardens," <http://www.ganbahai.org.il/en/> (accessed 19 Mar. 2009), and in reports published by the *Bahá'í World News Service*, such as <http://news.bahai.org/story/684>, regarding restoration of the Shrine of the Báb (accessed 2 January 2009) and <http://news.bahai.org/story/705> (accessed 19 Mar. 2009), regarding visiting the Bahá'í sites on Mount Carmel and at Bahjí. .

- The late John Wade provided invaluable assistance with early drafts of this article. Information concerning stipends for Ottoman prisoners was received from Neçati Alkan and from Fikret Adanir, Faculty of History, History of Southeastern Europe, Ruhr University Bochum, Germany.

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