

the sea and a gloriously sunny day. We ate breakfast--fresh bread, cheeses, yogurt, sour cream with various flavors in it, olives, cucumbers and tomatoes, jam, fruit, eggs, cereal, milk, coffee or tea. Then we were off to Haifa.

Bahji

On the first morning, but the second day, we met at the pilgrim house and then took a bus around the bay to Akka and then a bit past it to Bahji. At this place, in this mansion, Bahá'u'lláh died. He is buried there and the visit to His grave was for me the pivot of the pilgrimage, the center around which all the rest of the journey, perhaps the rest of my life revolved.

The gardens and indeed the house and the shrine seemed beyond description. We got off the bus and walked in through one of the wrought iron gates and up the long avenue past the olive grove, or rather through some of it, that is the working part of the estate. The gardens are very formal but full of native plants and geraniums.

Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'u'lláh's grandson, who laid out the gardens, loved geraniums so they are everywhere. The grounds are maintained mostly by youth who volunteer a year or two there. They come from all over the world. Some locals are also hired to work there and each place has a caretaker who lives there.

So we walked on the gravel, past the dark cypress and the marble monuments and the graceful wrought iron lamps that once stood in the streets of London. We spread out, each occupied with her own thoughts and spiritual state. I walked slower, pushing through what seemed like a force field, panic rising in me that I would not be able to enter the doorway, that I could somehow not get to that threshold and cross. The force field grew thicker and I walked slower. Ahead of me others rushed to enter that presence. I watched them walk away from me and struggled on. Would I be worthy, could I actually get there? The entrance receded as I approached and I struggled on from fear and embarrassment and determination.

At last I reached the gorgeous wrought iron gate and put down the camera. I removed my shoes and entered the gate. The walk way was swept clean, the door to the sanctuary stood ajar. Cold marble supported my feet as I went up the three steps and pushed the door back. Thick Persian carpets lined the floor inside the shrine. Some hung on the walls. In the center of the main outer room, a tiny garden flourished. Four climbing ferns, four tiny orange trees, an aloe and some low growing green stuff I couldn't name.

The scent of roses filled the room. Cleostory windows let in the brilliant light and a small breeze. Some people wept. Most were silent. Outside the eucalyptus trees rustled softly. I knelt down at the edge of the garden and waited. Alabaster lamps stand at the edges of the garden and in the corners. Flowers and roses filled the room and are laid on the threshold to the inner

room, where Bahá'u'lláh is buried. There a kind of net curtain hangs across that doorway, but you can see through it to the flowers and candles surrounding the grave within.

I sat and prayed for those who had asked and then for those who I wanted to say prayers for and then some for myself also. In that room I was stripped to the essence of my soul and I felt that Bahá'u'lláh knew everything there was to know about me and I was abashed. I sat there, isolated with my feelings and waited and waited. After awhile, I have no idea how long, since for once my watch didn't matter, I became aware that whatever God knew about me didn't matter. Whatever had gone before in my life, not just the things I have done, but things done to me, didn't matter. All that mattered in that presence was the future and what I would do there.

People began to go up to the threshold and bow there. The solemnity was overwhelming. And then from outside, a crow flew by cawing raucously. I nearly laughed with joy to know that crows are beloved of God too. I went to the threshold and bowed there and then went outside.

We were lovingly served tea by the fasting hosts and our guides. Then we had time to wander the grounds. Long alleys lead you out along various radii from the shrine, to the land around it. Bahá'u'lláh came here at the end of his life, after nearly 40 years in some of the worst prisons in the Ottoman Empire. He lived here under house arrest until He died in 1892. The place is an island of green fertility and order, of cleanliness and peace amidst what must have been then desert and grime. It is now guarded, albeit unknowingly, by the Israeli army who have a base just in front of it.

The Shrine of the Bab

We took a taxi from the kibbutz to Haifa. The driver assured us he knew Haifa, but he couldn't find the center. I mean you can see the Shrine of the Bab all over the city and from the bay. It has a gold dome and is made of white marble and is quite visible among the dark cypress trees which surround it. Well, we finally found it after wandering about for a bit. We dragged our luggage out of the trunk, since we hadn't had time to go to the hotel, and trucked it all up to the pilgrim house.

There we were greeted with such sweetness that it would melt your heart and served tea and coffee and invited to rest while we waited to register.

Ninety-two pilgrims milled about in the main part of the house, people from all over the world: Canada, Australia, India, Chile, South Africa, the World Centre itself, and the States. In addition to these folks, three-day visitors would come in during our visit and be there among the rest of us though their agenda was quite different.

We got registered and assigned to a group. Our guide Furio, a lovely Italian from Ethiopia, rounded us up and did the orientation bit, mostly going over the schedule. This was a man of such humility and sweetness that most of us adored him at first sight. Jessica was very comfortable with him and he was enchanted

with her.

From there we walked up to the Shrine of the Bab, a large domed building, halfway up Mt. Carmel. We went to the different sides, removed our shoes and entered the room outside the room where the Bab is buried. Persian carpets covered the floor, roses and flowers were arranged on the threshold of the inner room. Candles and flowers surround the grave inside. It was slightly dark and very solemn. This young man was killed in 1849 at the age of 30.

It happened this way. He had been arrested and imprisoned for heresy, the usual fate of some one bringing a new religion. The mullas and the Shah wanted him dead. The jailers brought him out of his cell and tied him against a wall, along with a follower who wanted to be martyred with him. They had taken the Bab away from his secretary, to whom he was still dictating something. And he told them that he was not finished, but they weren't interested.

A regiment of 750 lined up to shoot. The Christian leader of the regiment did not want to do this, so the Bab told him that he should obey and trust in God and it would be all right. The men fired. Everyone in the square held their breath while the smoke cleared, and there were thousands of Persians hanging off the roof and crowding the streets to see this execution. When the smoke cleared, the Bab and the young man with him were gone. The crowd went berserk (remember those pictures from the hostage crisis). When the soldiers found the Bab, He was back in his cell, finishing his dictation. When he was done, they took him again to the wall, and again tied him up with his young follower.

Sam Khan, the first officer, refused to try to shoot him again. He was sent away and another officer volunteered. His regiment fired and when the smoke cleared the two bodies were so riddle with bullets that they were meshed. But their faces were unharmed. The bodies were thrown over the wall and left for the dogs. Followers rescued them somehow and the remains were hidden for over 60 years until they could be brought to Akka, where they were also hidden until they could be appropriately buried.

The Shrine it seemed to me reflected the dark sorrow of the Bab's life. And I found it difficult to connect with. It was forbidding and beautiful, but not 'comfortable' despite the fact that I love His prayers. It got better with repeated visits but it wasn't until I went in at night, when it is lighted to commemorate the days the Bab spent in prison without even a candle, that I really connected with it.

Our Guides

After that initial visit, we caught up with our friends who work there and had dinner with them. By that time we had been up a long time and were exhausted. We went to our hotel and crashed.

The hotel was plain and comfortable. They served a similar breakfast to the kibbutz of less variety and quality. Israeli coffee also lacks. But both the tea and coffee at the Pilgrim house were quite good. What is so wonderful there was again the loving kindness and caring. The cups were picked up immediately

and washed by whoever was serving there.

Everything was served with such cheerful gentleness, by people who were themselves fasting. Our guides were fasting and yet managed incredibly long days of walking and talking, two of which were picnic days for us.

I have never felt so loved or cared for and doubt that I will again. Everything was arranged for our spiritual comfort and physical well being without intruding on our own journeys, without being oppressive or overbearing at all.

And it was all done with so much humility and love that you became aware in a physical, intellectual and spiritual harmony of the way people can be with each other when they serve something outside themselves and truly desire to be better than they are or would be with some direction of a spiritual nature.

Mt. Carmel

Anyhow, after that we walked, that is CLIMBED, back up to the Pilgrim House. Mt. Carmel is the western end of the Carmel range and it is a mountain, albeit not very high. It makes up for it in verticality.

In the afternoon, we walked back down about 200 steps to Allenby Street so we could walk back up the terraces that lead from Allenby Street at the bottom of the mountain, to the Shrine of the Bab, and will eventually lead to the top of the mountain. The stairs are marble with tiny little channels of water running beside them. Four of them lead up to the Shrine level. At each terrace there are fountains on each side of the steps and trees and benches behind the trees so you can go aside and pray or just sit and enjoy the view of the harbor and the gardens. All around the steps is landscaped. The slope is so steep it takes four men with ropes on each lawnmower to cut the grass. There are flowers everywhere and the tall dark cypress which are so lovely and which defeated the light meter on my camera.

I am not an experienced photographer and didn't know that what the light meter saw and what I saw might not be the same thing. So the grass on a lot of the pictures is washed out, but the angle of the hills shows and the composition is good.

The engineering of the terraces is astonishing. Mr Sabha, who is overseeing the project, also designed the House of Worship in India. That building is poured concrete in the shape of an opening lotus and has won numerous awards. Mr. Sabha talked to us on the last day and is quite fierce. But he has accomplished quite a feat here, working on slopes of 45 to 60 degrees, on schedule, under budget and without fatality.

The city of Haifa has undertaken on its own to straighten Ben Gurion Street and move the container harbor so that there will be a direct line from the harbor to the top of the mountain.

House of Justice

After we left Bahji, we traveled back through the industrial area that lies

between Haifa and Akka. We had approached Bahji from the country, the green side and this was quite a contrast.

We got lunch in one of the shops in Haifa and went back to the pilgrim house. From there we walked across Hatzionut Street and wound through the monument gardens, up up up to the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the elected body that administers the affairs of the world wide Bahá'í community. The body itself has much authority with us, but the members, though highly respected, have none unless they are all together as the House of Justice. It is an institution that exists outside its members who elected every five years.

The building stands most of the way up Mt Carmel. It is faced with white marble. The Corinthian columns were hewn from the marble fields in Carrara and carved by master artists from there. The carvers 'signed' them with a honey bee carved on one of the capitals, the honey bee is their signature. We went into a huge reception room lined with various Persian carpets. Most of the gorgeous things in the buildings are gifts from various Bahá'ís around the world. The carpets all come from Bahá'ís in Iran.

We were seated and served tea. The people who serve the tea have worked in the World Center and are getting ready to go home. They are given the honor of serving the pilgrims. The china was designed for the House by Mildred Mottahedeh, a renowned designer of fine china. After we had our tea and cookies, the 9 members of the House came in. One of them welcomed us and then they walked around and introduced themselves. Later, on the last day, we got a tour of the building and got to go out on the roof.

But meeting the House members was cool, since they themselves are not important, most of us never know who they all are. I mean the information is there for anyone, but it isn't very interesting. Still it was nice to meet the three of them I had met before in other places.

A Day in the City

We walked back to the pilgrim house in the twilight, through the gardens, past the old gas lamps of London now lit with electricity. We were exhausted but happy. Ron and J and I took a bus to the hotel, got a lovely omelet near by with some folk we had met in Amsterdam on the way over and crashed.

On Wednesday morning I took Jess and one of the girls on the pilgrimage to the park up the street from the hotel. I walked into the park and felt my shoulders rise and my stomach tighten in apprehension. What was I, a woman alone, escorting two young girls into a city park. I looked around and all I saw was other women and children and a group of young Arab girls. "Of course," I reminded myself. "This is Israel where interpersonal violence is rare." The girls ran around while I basked in the sun and the company of women and children. Lots of grandmothers were there with their grands, warm indulgent grandmothers following tiny little people around. The park itself was clearly designed for kids. Under every piece of equipment was a soft rubbery surface to protect the kids from hard falls.

The Arab girls in their head scarves, laughed and teased each other and picked the park flowers. Some boys came by, but there was none of the overt sexual teasing I might have seen in a park here. There of course, the boys walk arm in arm and the girls do too. The need for human contact that finds expression in sex in our Puritanical culture is accepted as normal and allowable within gender there.

After the park, we took the funicular train downtown. Talk about weird. We entered the train area--it is an underground on a cable, so it goes down by gravity and is hauled up. We got tickets from a machine, cleared security, more young men with guns, and waited on the perfectly level platform. The train arrived. It labors up a slope of at least 45 degrees and it stops at the platform. My inner ear told me quite clearly that I was standing upright, but my eyes told me I was kilted over at an odd angle. So there I am, leaning I think in order to align with my eyes, while my brain argued it out, watching the security guys go through the train looking for packages left. After a while they open the doors. We step in and voila! Equilibrium again. The train goes down two stops and we get off. I look back for one more balance check. And I am, indeed, off balance again. Very strange but delightful in its complexity. Eyes, ears and head all arguing about vertical.

Laughing to myself, I herded the kids and Ron off to the Hadar, the midway down part of the city. We wandered around poking into this tiny shop and that one. Jewelry and underwear seemed to outnumber the other kinds of shops. Fascinating. There are department stores and even a mall over in Akka, but the shops were every so much more interesting. I was fascinated by the underwear shops. Who needs that much underwear??

But it did remind me of the market day in Italy. On Thursday, the travelling market came to our village and there amid the produce and olives and bikes and tires were tables of used bras and stockings. I used to go every Thursday, just to gawk. I mean USED underwear? And used stockings. And such sizes!

We got a bit of bread and some cow cheese for lunch and started counting shades of red hair. Israeli women have a fascination for red hair of every shade from pale pink to eggplant. Mostly it is women of a certain age, but I did see younger women with henna hair. The girls there have the best curly hair I have ever seen. Mops and mops of corkscrew, wild, long hair of all colors. The young Israelis are drop-dead gorgeous. We wove along the street dodging people and just walking. After the first day, I loved it. I didn't have to say excuse me or worry about being rude because I wanted to pass someone. They just walk and expect everyone else to do so too. At first it felt a bit abrupt, but then I realized that that is my style anyhow. I don't mean any rudeness, I just want to go where I am going with the least possible fuss and interaction.

A Wonderful Day

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The next day was Thursday. Some of the pilgrims were scheduled to go to the Archives Building. We had a free day so after hanging around and sleeping a bit, we went down the mountain and caught a bus back to Akka. It let us off in front of the army base.

We walked back a bit to the north gate of Bahji and went along the gravel avenue to the Collins Gate, so named for one of the early Western believers, and from there straight down to the shrine. No one was visible, so we went round to the back, and into the caretaker's area through what was the donkey door during Abdu'l Baha's lifetime. A suitable bit of humility enhancing that, entering into the courtyard through the door the donkey used. One of the caretakers came to open the shrine for us. He would not let us enter until he had gone ahead and swept the three leaves off the entrance way and gone in to prepare the room. Ron, Jessica and I had the entire shrine of Bahá'u'lláh to ourselves. We sat for a long time, saying prayers to ourselves and meditating.

J and Ron went out after awhile, but I sat on filled with peace and joy. Some noise from the outside does creep in, but it is barely noticeable in the palpable atmosphere of serenity and rightness that fill the shrine. Whatever troubles you can be laid down there, if only for a while, and quiet fills your heart just as the attar of rose fills your senses and the soft light envelops you. Time almost doesn't pass. I sat and have no idea how long I was there. My watch still worked, I think, but I didn't look at it, didn't need to look at it, nor want to.

I never wanted to leave that place. I wanted to lie down and sleep there and then wake in that room. I didn't quite have the nerve to do that. But I stayed until I felt ready to leave. As I came out and chatted with the caretaker for a moment, some other pilgrims arrived. My time alone was over, but I was grateful for it.

We ate our bite of lunch in the tea room in the caretaker's house, though they were fasting. We had bought some bread and stuff on Haifa. It was a glorious day, windy and bright. We wandered the grounds, admiring the gardens of cacti and succulent, laid out to look like Persian carpets. An olive grove was left on the property and still bears olives. We walked under the olive trees. These are younger than the rambling, falling ancient trees I knew in Italy, but they have the same gray foliage and rough bark and gnarly, tortured trunks. Some Arab families in the area harvest the olives, process them and some of the oil and sell them back to the Bahá'ís as part of their livelihood.

After awhile, some of us decided to get a cab or a sherut back to Haifa. We found one easily. They cruise the bus stops looking for passengers. Two young Arab boys got on with us and determined to talk. One told us he was going to New York soon. He had lots of energy and was very social. His friend laughed at him a lot. Interesting reactions to J over there, mostly staring, trying to figure her with us. She doesn't react to it mostly and the Bahá'ís were enchanted with her, so I don't think she minded too much that the Israelis stared.

It was a wonderful day.

Akka

On Friday, we toured Akka, the ancient crusader city. When Bahá'u'lláh and the Holy Family arrived there from Adrianople, the city was renowned for its foul miasma. It was said that a bird that flew over Akka would die from it.

They were brought ashore through the sea gate, the same place that Richard III and the Crusaders landed. It was August and very hot. All of them, the women and children too were locked into a courtyard and left without food or water for a day. Later they were crowded into a few cells on the upper floor. In those days the prison didn't feed you, or if they did, it was not fit to eat. They were hungry and crowded and often ill there. They lived in the prison for over two years and were only moved when the Turks wanted to barrack soldiers there.

The prison is under renovation so we did not get to go into the cell. Instead, we stood on the very hill and place where the pilgrims who came from Persia to visit stood and looked for Bahá'u'lláh to wave to them. They were not allowed to see him and those who worked actively against Him often rented rooms along the main streets and watched all day for believers so they could point them out to the Turks.

After the family was released, they were given space in a Khan, a caravansari. We went there. The place still stands and is just as you would imagine such a place, large open space in the center of four walls. The animals were kept there. Goods were stored in the lower rooms and people stayed upstairs. The sandstone is old and scarred. Pillars march around the yard and we could see the top of the main mosque there.

An Arab guy sold orange juice and candy in the middle of the open place. Funny

guy, not above yelling and urging folk to buy his goods. Several of the people on the trip found him offensive or were at best taken aback by him.

We next went to the house where Bahá'u'lláh and most of the family lived for the next few years, before finally going to Bahji. It is called the House of Abud and is really two houses joined One half belong to Udi Kammar and official of the city. The other belonged to Abud, don't know who he was. They lived in the Abud half until the eldest son got married and then Udi Kammar let them have part of the other half and eventually they lived in all of it. The house is two very tall stories, white and blue. It stands out among the aging limestone houses on the street. In these places we got to see the rooms where they lived and where some of Bahá'u'lláh's most important tablets and books were revealed. We were able to go into the lovely large room all done in white with Persian carpets where He used to receive those other pilgrims who still walked from Persia to see Him.

Like all the Bahá'í places we went, it was spotlessly, loving kept. Part of me longs to be a caretaker at such a place and serve tea to the pilgrims. It would be such a privilege. The work is done by volunteers in the sense that people ask to come work in the Holy Land and if the House of Justice accepts them, they are paid a living wage but not much more. Many young people go for a year or two after high school or college. The boys are often the security guards, although a young woman from our area was the first woman to be a guard. The kids do all sorts of cleaning and maintenance work. More skilled workers go for longer stretches. Some people go as 'indefinites' which means they decide when they will come home. In exchange for all the work, you get to go to the Shrines whenever and have constant access to the gardens. It would seem an excellent trade to me.

The Archives

The Archives Building is built to resemble the Parthanon. It is filled with the 'things' of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh and His son Abdu'l Baha. There are also pictures of them there. Real photographs. Imagine having a picture of Christ or Moses or Mohammed or Buddha.

After we got into the building the first things we were shown were the pictures. Getting in however, involved our Persian guide setting off the alarm three times. Some poor security guard had to come running up to check it out. And the building is quite a ways up Mt. Carmel. He was pretty winded when he got there. We were trapped between the outer doors and the inner doors while the alarm went off in our ears. Finally we got in. The central room is filled with cases and tables which are, in turn, filled with artifacts.

The pictures were amazing and almost impossible to talk about. The Bab was 30 when he was martyred. He was a beautiful young man, a long oval face, sloe eyes, a lovely mouth. Bahá'u'lláh's picture was taken shortly after he had been poisoned by his half-brother and my first reaction was "So this is what suffering looks like." He too was remarkably handsome,

but it is a face ravaged by illness, exile, and the sorrow of being betrayed by almost all of his family.

Of the rest of the things kept in the Archives, I was most struck by the Bab's clothes. He was quite a stylish dresser and some of his lovely things are kept there, as are the shirt he wore when he was killed. Actually it is bits of the shirt since his body was so riddled by bullets that it was fused with the body of the young man who chose to be killed with Him.

Most interesting and beautiful to me, were the tablets. Both of them had exquisite calligraphy and their letters and tablets have been illuminated in the Persian and Arabic style with much gold and red and blue ink. The script is gorgeous, the illuminations surrounding it are joined flawlessly to the pages of writing so that they look as if they were done as one piece. The illuminations lack the wonderful gargoyles and fantastic animals of the Medieval mss., but they do have an abstract design element that echoes the writing. I suspect if I could read the writing, the decorations would be even more beautiful or meaningful to me, but they do represent that urge to decorate the sacred word that drives both the eastern and western tradition of illumination. We have no prohibition against representational art, so there are leaves and birds in the designs, refined and elegant as the gold ink from which they are drawn.

To my Methodist upbringing, artifacts and relics smacked of Papism. It was a bit of a shock to me when I became a Bahá'í to discover pilgrimage. And it took years for me to even think about wanting to go. As a medievalist, I was curious about the sort of pilgrimage we would have, as opposed to the great journeys of the middle ages. I also knew a bit about the Muslim haj, and various pilgrimages one can make in India. But I really didn't know what to expect and I was apprehensive, especially about the Archives.

What I found there was the human factor, the pieces of the Manifestations' lives that made them human. I will never think of the Bab again without thinking of his lovely, silk beige coat with the peach colored lining or his dark turquoise coat with the gorgeous silk buttons on the sleeves.

Their pen cases and pens are there, the instruments of their revelations. The actual writings exist for us to go and look at, to read if you have the language. Of all the things I saw there I think the writings themselves were the most impressive and astonishing. I have read them in English and found them beautiful. To see that beauty reflected in the script itself was to experience a kind of reality on two planes. Without the illuminations the texts would be exquisite, the penmanship regal as if reflecting the content itself. And I stood there thinking that these were the texts from their own hands.

Imagine if we had the Writings of Jesus or any of the other Manifestations in His own handwriting. Beyond that, the writings were the thing that brought me to the Bahá'í Faith, the word was all I had to go on, and it worked. It reached my heart. It also challenged and rewarded my intellect. It provided a balance for my life, in a way I could understand and accept and appreciate. And the writings and prayers continue to challenge and comfort. They never become

tiresome or boring and they are always beautiful. Now I have seen their beauty with my outer eye as well as having seen it with my inner eye.

Market Day

On Saturday we went back to Akka with a friend who works at the World Centre. We have known Jennifer since she was three and Amy was four. They went through really rough adolescences together, ran away together at 13 and 14 and generally were singularly unpleasant.

Jen now speaks fluent Arabic and has taught in Egypt. She has matured into a lovely young woman. We laughed a lot about the past and the irony of us spending time together in the Holy Land. It was astonishing.

Jen took us to the Crusader fortress again and to the al-Jazzar mosque, where we were promptly herded out again and sent to the cistern. I guess the little man at the mosque just couldn't deal with three females, one who spoke fluent Arabic, and one man in his mosque. The cistern was smelly and nasty, but the structure itself was amazing.

The fortress was at one time much larger; the Turks reduced the size during their rule of Akka. But when you get into the cistern, you can see the hugeness of it. The groined arches and the huge blocks of stone dwarf the people walking around looking at it. I am always fascinated by the size of the steps on buildings built long ago, when people were supposedly shorter than we are now. Jeez.

After the mosque, we went to the bazaar, the suk. We ate, but Jennifer was fasting. The falafel is really to die for there. I am exceedingly fond of the pickled eggplant you can put on it. After some lunch we went into the suk to shop. We had looked at stuff in a little shop near the fortress where Jennifer knew the woman who runs it and could get a good price. But the suk itself was so vibrant, so alive with people selling and shopping. It was crowded and jostling, just a narrow alley, lined with tiny shops. Some sold junk, most had cheap household things for sale. We bought two sets of tea glasses, one for us and one for Amy.

We spent a lot of time in the spice store. First your nose comes alive. Bins of spices and herbs, peppers, cinnamon bark, clove, dried lemon and bitter oranges, basil, herbs I didn't know the name for, lentils, beans, shelves of bottles of rose water and various flavorings. It was nose heaven. We bought candy and an eggplant for dinner. The man who ran it was enchanted with Jennifer and gave her candy and let her taste anything she wanted. He also sold halva. So we bought a couple kinds of that to share with the other pilgrims when we got back.

Then we walked back along the sea wall and out onto the further reach of it. We sat out there in the breeze, just enjoying the sea and counting waves. Jennifer pointed out the Lebanese border on one side of us. Haifa is directly across the bay, but the haze shut it out. Then we wandered back through some of the side streets, watching the Arab girls out on their roofs and the Arab boys on the

streets.

Books in the Archives

One of the highlights of the trip for everyone is the Archives building. In this lovely replica of the Parthenon are stored in archival conditions of humidity and temp control, artifacts from the lives of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh and the Holy Family. I think for me, and I suspect for lots of us, the pictures of the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh were central to the visit. There is one photograph of each of them. What faces they had.

The Bab is young, with a lovely oval face and classic Persian almond eyes. He is stern and forbidding looking, or He was to me.

Bahá'u'lláh, on the other hand, was photographed shortly after he had been poisoned by his half brother and nearly died from it. He is regal and handsome and his face is the face of suffering. I had less of the feeling of being totally vulnerable to His insight there than I had in the Shrine. In the Shrine, I felt stripped naked to the center of my soul. But here, I felt a different connection, one of compassion and love for Him. Here was a being not only ravaged by poison at the hand of a family member, but One who had been stripped of titles and property, permanently exiled from His homeland and sentenced to prison for the rest of His life. Not only was He imprisoned, but His family, His wife and small children were exiled and kept in the worst jails of the Ottoman Empire with him.

Such suffering and such nobility constructed that face that I was less concerned with how He might have seen me than with my visceral understanding of what He had written about Himself--"The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness."

After we viewed the pictures, we were shown various things that belonged to them. I loved the clothes. The Bab, who was a merchant, was also a most elegant dresser. He had, before He was thrown into prison, lovely clothes. I was taken so aback by this, because I never thought of His life before the terrible years of persecution.

And the purpose of the archives, I think, is to connect us to the human side of these men who occupy such a special position between us and the Unmade. I grew up vaguely Methodist and had a spell of serious Christianity in early adolescence, and I kept thinking "What if we had a robe from Jesus, or one from Mohammad or the Buddha." Of course we couldn't touch anything. I wanted to, on one level, just to stroke the fabric of the shirts or the coats. On another level, I doubt I would have been able to make myself do it, even if we could.

The artifacts are marvelous, but the true wonder of the Archives is the tablets, the letters and essays written in the actual hand of the Bab or

Bahá'u'lláh. Neither of them went to any kind of formal school and each has calligraphy adjudged exquisite by experts in their own country. The manuscripts have been preserved, as many as can be found. The ones in the Archives have also been illuminated in the style of Persian and Arabic masters. They are gorgeous with gold and red and blue ink, flawlessly joined to illuminated borders. Some are important prayers or letters, others are as simple and touching as note from Bab, when he was travelling, to his wife promising her a present.

One of the things preserved there is the text of the entire Qur'an written by an early Bahá'í calligrapher. The tablet is the opening invocation of the Qur'an written in large open letters. Within those letters, in tiny calligraphy done with one horsehair, is the entire text of the Qur'an. Our guide told us that the manuscript had been examined and confirmed accurate. The page is astonishing. I gaped in awe at the accomplishment, and I must admit, at the idea of doing it at all.

It made me think seriously about books again, about the wonder of them and the spirituality of creating them. Artists reflect the creative attributes of God, the arch-creator. It is easy to think of art as unimportant or simply commercial, when in reality the artist partakes of one of the qualities of God and allows others to understand that reality.

Our Last Day

The day after the archives we went back to Bahji for a last visit to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and then we toured the mansion itself. It is a gorgeous place. We saw the room where Bahá'u'lláh died. We saw many of his things. The house is painted white and blue, a bright Mediterranean blue and kept immaculately. Turkish primitives are painted on the wall behind the upstairs balcony. They signify nothing but are examples of the art form. thanks to my camera which is much better at pictures than I am, I got some great shots of them.

I spent Monday evening with my friend Pat. We have been friends off and on for over 20 years. She has made some disastrous life choices and recovered beautifully. It was wonderful to see her there working and serving after so much grief.

On the last day we walked down the hill again to go Abdu'l Baha's house. He designed it and had it built at the foot of Mt. Carmel from there he succoured the poor of Haifa and gathered and stored grain with which he fed much of the populace of Haifa during WWI. He was knighted by the British and Allenby's first message when he captured Haifa was Abbas Effendi safe. It was here, I believe, that Kahlil Gibran painted him. And here where he died in 1921. After we toured the house, we went out for lunch and a last bit of shopping.

In the afternoon we climbed up the hill to tour the Universal House of Justice Building, a huge structure that goes several stories down into the mountain and rises three stories up from it. Faced in Carrara marble, it is very classical in style with Corinthian columns. The inside is decorated in Italian walnut. In

the entrance hall is an eight sided carpet especially designed for the space by Mildred Mottehedeh, who also designed the china the House uses for receptions. The building is full of lovely things, mostly given by Bahá'ís from around the world. The money to build it was also given exclusively by Bahá'ís since no one but Bahá'ís can give to the funds.

The Israelis think we are rich, which is not true for the majority of Bahá'ís around the world. That evening we went to the Shrine of the Bab for our farewell. We said prayers and stayed in the lighted Shrine for as long as we wanted to. We said goodbye to our friends and headed back to the hotel to catch a sherut to Tel Aviv. The pilgrimage itself was over, but I think it stays and grows in you over the years. In five years I will sign up to go again, though the next time will be vastly different. The groups will be larger. We will be different and it will resonate with the first pilgrimage and deepen it and strengthen it.

METADATA

Views16802 views since posted 1998; last edit 2012;

previous at [archive.org.../holt-fortin_bahai_pilgrimage](#);
URLs changed in 2010, see [archive.org.../bahai-library.org](#)

Language

English

Permission

author

History

Formatted 1998 by Kathleen Ely; Proofread 2012-09-23 by Jonah Winters.

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