

thought of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as an building alone, whereas the term is used in the Bahá'í Writings to refer to the building, an institution within the community structure, a meeting for worship (as in the quotation above), the mystic mainspring in our individual lives, the symbolic home of the Maid of Heaven and the symbol in this world of the Manifestation of God.[2] It refers to the idea of adoration, manifest in various forms, individual, institutional, and communal. Because of its multiple meanings, we will have to speak a little of the language of poets and visionaries to discuss its implications.

The House of Justice and the House of Worship - the Local Spiritual Assembly and the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar - are called by Shoghi Effendi the "two primary agencies providentially ordained for the enrichment of their spiritual life and for the conduct and regulation of their administrative affairs".[3] The call in the Ridvan message to develop "the practice of collective worship of God," implies that it is time for us to develop the second of these twin houses. This may be directly related to the theme of entry by troops which dominates the Ridvan message, since `Abdu'l-Bahá says:

... a Mashrak-el-Azcar will soon be established in America. The cries of supplication and invocation will be raised to the Highest Kingdom therefrom and, verily, THE PEOPLE WILL ENTER INTO THE RELIGION OF GOD BY TROOPS with great enthusiasm and attraction. (Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, p. 681)

If the twin houses are indeed the primary agencies of the Bahá'í community, if the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is, as the Universal House of Justice said in its letter regarding Social and Economic Development (October 20, 1983) "the spiritual center of every Bahá'í community",[4] then taking up the task of building the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar institution "in every hamlet and city" will entail substantial changes in our community structures, and a substantial rethinking of what it means to be a Bahá'í. It will then be worth our while, at the start of the four-year plan, to form a clearer conception of what the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is as a spiritual reality and as an institution, and what its relationship is to the Local Spiritual Assembly and other organs of the community, so that local and national communities can formulate concrete goals for the realisation of this aspect of the four-year plan and begin immediately to implement them. It would be a great pity indeed to reach the year 2000 and still be wondering what the Universal House of Justice might have meant by "the practice of collective worship of God" and in what sense 'entry by troops' could be a practical reality for the Bahá'í communities in Europe.

Three complementary reasons occur to me which might explain the link between building the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and achieving entry by troops which we see in the Tablet cited above, and which is implied in the Ridvan letter. The first is the power of prayer to attract the Spirit, transform the individual, and so energize the community, but this is too large a topic to be dealt with here. The second reason begins with the observation that this Tablet is addressed particularly to America, which might be characterized (with many other regions including Europe) as a land rich in the social technologies of government and social ordering but spiritually malnourished. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar gathering

and building are not created for the Bahá'ís alone, they are open to all who feel themselves "irresistibly attracted to seek the shelter of His House, and congregate therein ... to render homage to the one true God, the Essence and Orb of eternal Truth, and to exalt and magnify the name of His Messengers and Prophets".[5] So perhaps one part of the importance of the Mashriqu'l- Adhkar gatherings is the participation of non-Bahá'ís. It may be that in spiritually under-nourished societies a strongly developed pattern of community devotions will be particularly attractive, just as in rural India the example of the Bahá'í administrative order has already proved attractive. Western societies have already developed open and successful ways of ordering their public life, but have not found ways of integrating religion and spirituality into its public life and public service. Interesting, then, that Shoghi Effendi ascribes "the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh"[6] precisely to its integration of worship and service to the world. The third reason is that re-orienting the Bahá'í communities around their Mashriqu'l-Adhkar will bring with it changes in the communities themselves. The communities will come an important step closer to the pattern which Bahá'u'lláh intended for them when both of the 'primary agencies' are operating. However immature one or other partner may be (and the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is not mature until its dependencies have been developed),[7] when both are at least present the community will be in a sense 'complete'. Which may be why `Abdu'l-Bahá says that building the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar "marks the inception of the Kingdom of God on earth." [8]

Since my own interests lie primarily in the institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's pattern for world order and the relationships between them, I will concentrate in part 2 on the third of these possible reasons - the element of structural change. I will attempt to outline the shape of a local Bahá'í community which I think we find in the Writings, a community with the local Mashriqu'l-Adhkar at its heart, and in subsequent parts to set out a vision of what the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is at every level: as the individual devotional life, as community devotional meetings, as an institution and as a building. I hope that this will not be taken as a criticism of our existing communities, as if what these communities have achieved is of no importance because the command of the Aqdas to build the House of Worship has been neglected in favour of building up the House of Justice and other aspects of the administrative order. Nor am I intending to say that building the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar (beginning with holding devotional meetings) is the only way to achieve entry by troops at this time, and that teaching and administrative work is less important. On the contrary, I hope to make the concept of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar so clear that readers will realise that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar has always been with us in our communities, like Christ on the road to Emmaus, but it has been implicit and unrecognized. In fact the Universal House of Justice, in a letter to a National Spiritual Assembly dated 9 June 1974, lists the laws mentioned in the "Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas" which were not at that time binding in the western world. When they came to the command to build the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar,

they did not say that it was in abeyance, or that it was formulated for a future state of society, but rather that "The law of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is gradually being put into effect." If we consider the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in the broadest sense, this is indeed evident, with the Universal House of Justice repeatedly stressing the need for individual spiritual development and the importance of prayer and meditation, and now raising this to the collective level with the call for regular devotional meetings. Bringing the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar out as a distinct concept and exploring its place in the Bahá'í community will I hope release energy for the further development of the community, as a continuation of what has already been achieved, and open up one more path by which entry by troops may be achieved.

Notes

1. Paragraph 26
2. Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 163.
3. Bahá'í Administration, page 24.
4. A Wider Horizon, p. 139.
5. Bahá'í Administration, page 183.
6. Bahá'í Administration, page 186.
7. Bahá'í Administration, page 185.
8. Cited by Shoghi Effendi in Citadel of Faith, page 69, and God Passes By, page 346.

Exploring the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Part 2: The House of Worship and the House of Justice

We have seen in the previous article that `Abdu'l-Bahá called on the Bahá'ís to hold devotional meetings and said that these meetings "are none other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkars, the Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance, which must, at the direction of the Most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city".[1] Thus a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is not necessarily a building, but rather one of the lights of the Bahá'í life which is ignited first in 'the radiant heart' and radiates outward in forms such as the devotional meetings until it finds an outward expression in a building:

In reality, the radiant, pure hearts are the Mashrak-el-Azcar and from them the voice of supplication and invocation continually reacheth the Supreme Concourse. I ask God to make the heart of every one of you a temple of the Divine Temples and to let the lamp of the great guidance be lighted therein; and when the hearts find such an attainment, they will certainly exert the utmost endeavor and energy in the building of the Mashrak-el-Azcar; thus may the outward express the inward, and the form (or letter) indicate the meaning (or reality). (Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas page 678)

We have also seen that He made a link between building the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar

and achieving entry by troops,[2] and that both the devotional meetings and entry by troops are key themes of the Universal House of Justice's most recent Ridvan message.

It would be too simplistic to think that we can just add the devotional meetings to our already busy agendas. Shoghi Effendi refers to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh",[3] and `Abdu'l-Bahá calls it "the most important matter and the greatest divine institute." [4] If it is an institution, ordained in the Aqdas as the "the spiritual centre of every Bahá'í community", [5] then its development will entail changes in the institutional structure of the Bahá'í community and for each of the other organs. We have seen this pattern of organic development, in which the development of one organ affects all of the others, in the past. For instance, the progressive development of the appointed institutions has required that the friends and the elected institutions in particular should "obtain an integrated understanding of the Counsellors' responsibilities and sphere of action in relation to [their] own." [6] It will therefore be necessary to consider what the relationship may be between the House of Worship and the (local) House of Justice. Each must in effect understand the other, so that it can properly understand its own nature and its own function in the Bahá'í body.

I should begin by briefly outlining what I understand by organic unity as a structural principle of the Bahá'í community. The unity of Bahá'í communities as I understand it is neither the monolithic unity of a hierarchically-organized and centrally controlled apparatus, nor even the unity-in-diversity of an essentially uniform but flexible system (although this is part of the truth), but rather organic unity, characterised by differentiation into separate organs, each with its own intrinsic nature and mode of operation, and each organ requiring the others to fully express its own nature. Difference is not just dealt with, or even loved and appreciated. Rather the differences, in the form of differentiated organs, are the very essence of the rationale of the whole system. Differences are what makes it work, differences are what holds it together and it is increasing differentiation, as potential organs are unfolded and begin to operate, that makes its progress towards higher levels of unity possible.

In the Bahá'í administrative order we find a consistent pattern in which institutions are differentiated from a partner institution which operates on a radically different basis - elected and administrative bodies, fund and Huququ'llah, feast and Assembly, Guardian and Universal House of Justice, and so on. So the first thing I ask in trying to understand the Mashriqu'l- Adhkar and how its place in the organic structure is: "where is its partner?" This is not hard to find, because the Mashriq is ordained in the Kitab-i-Aqdas paragraph 31:

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.

and the previous paragraph ordains its partner:

The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established ...

Bahá'u'lláh's terminology would seem to deliberately underline the parallel between the two institutions, since the word He uses for the house of worship in this verse is not Mashriqu'l-Adhkar but 'House' (bayt), the same term which is used for the House of Justice. So this is our divine couple, the twin houses. The parallel between verses 30 and 31 of the Aqdas would at first glance point towards an elliptical model of the Bahá'í community, with the two houses as the two foci of the ellipse. Such an understanding might well be adequate for many purposes, and there are some texts which imply such a model. For instance, Shoghi Effendi refers to the twin houses as the "two primary agencies providentially ordained for the enrichment of their spiritual life and for the conduct and regulation of their administrative affairs".[7]

But I think in fact that it would be just as valid, and in some respects more valid, to think of a model of an ideal Bahá'í community as being indeed circular, but with the House of Worship at its heart. In the first place, there is a logical priority for the House of Worship, just as the recognition of the Manifestation is "the first duty prescribed by God for His servants" and the discipleship of obedience follows it, as a natural corollary, and is not in itself acceptable without mystic recognition (Aqdas para 1). In the same way, Shoghi Effendi says that the "Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is ... fundamentally mystic in character" and clearly gives priority to our task of providing spiritual nourishment for souls:

Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá'u'lláh can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and becomes a dead thing. (Directives of the Guardian, pages 86-87)

It is this sort of logical priority which `Abdu'l-Bahá seems to have in mind when he calls the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar the 'greatest' divine institute:

The Mashrak-el-Azcar is the most important matter and the greatest divine institute. Consider how the first institute of His Holiness Moses, after His exodus from Egypt, was the "Tent of Martyrdom" which He raised and which was the travelling Temple. It was a tent which they pitched in the desert, wherever they abode, and worshipped in it. Likewise, after His Holiness Christ - may the spirit of the world be a sacrifice to Him! - the first institute by the disciples was a Temple. They planned a church in every country. Consider the Gospel (read it) and the importance of the Mashrak-el-Azcar will become evident. (Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas pages 633-634)

If we read the Gospel - particularly the letters of Paul - it is interesting that the 'church' which was to be raised in each place was a worshipping community rather than a building. The church as a building is not mentioned in the New Testament. So while the recipient of this tablet probably read it in terms of the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in Wilmette, it could be that

`Abdu'l-Bahá is putting the emphasis on the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a 'divine institute' rather than as a building. This logical priority can also be envisioned in terms of the priority of the Spirit over the channel through which the Spirit may flow:

The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. (Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 14 October 1941, see the compilation *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, page 59)

In addition to this logical priority, there are a number of texts from Shoghi Effendi which indicate that the House of Worship could be considered as the centre of a circular model of a Bahá'í community, and some others - primarily from `Abdu'l-Bahá - which indicate why.

Shoghi Effendi refers to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as "the crowning institution in every Bahá'í community." [8] This could be hyperbolic praise: after all, the Guardian speaks highly of the station of the Local Spiritual Assemblies also. But there are some passages in his writings which place the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in relation to the administrative institutions, and at least imply that he had a Mashriq-centred model in mind. In the passage from Bahá'í Administration page 24 which I cited above, in which Shoghi Effendi speaks of 'two primary agencies', he goes on to refer to "the machinery of a fast evolving administrative order, functioning under the shadow of ... the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar". In another passage, he refers to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as "The seat round which its spiritual, its humanitarian and administrative activities will cluster." [9] The inclusion of administrative activities among the other institutions which cluster around the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in this passage is interesting, because in comparable lists from `Abdu'l-Bahá there is no mention of the House of Justice. It is also at least suggestive that, when the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is built on the site prepared for it on the top of Mount Carmel, the Universal House of Justice, in the heart of the mountain, will be physically under its shadow.

Some passages from the talks given by `Abdu'l-Bahá in America may explain why Shoghi Effendi seems to be envisioning the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as the centre of the community.

The purport of this is that the church is a collective centre. Temples are symbols of the reality and divinity of God - the collective centre of mankind. Consider how within a temple every race and people is seen and represented ... Therefore, it is evident that the church is a collective centre for mankind. For this reason there have been churches and temples in all the divine religions; but the real Collective Centers are the Manifestations of God, of Whom the church or temple is a symbol and expression ... (Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 163, see also page 65)

Using this kind of symbolic logic, one could consider the monarch in a constitutional monarchy the 'centre', as a symbol of the majesty of God, without that necessarily implying that the monarch should have power over the

other constitutional elements.

Another reason for considering the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, as the centre of the community is that it is the act of worshipping together which creates a religious community:

It forgoeth bonds of unity from heart to heart; it is a collective centre for men's souls. (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá page 95)

...the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar inspiriteth the lovers of God and delighteth their hearts, and causeth them to become steadfast and firm. This is a matter of the utmost significance. If the erection of the House of Worship in a public place would arouse the hostility of evil-doers, then the meeting must, in every locality, be held in some hidden place. (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l- Bahá, page 95)

If we stand in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and look at all things in the light of the Mashriq, then it appears that the House of Worship is the centre of the community and the House of Justice is first among the institutions which cluster around it (first because of the exalted station of the House of Justice, and the fact that it is ordained alongside the House of Worship in the Aqdas and is nowhere listed as a 'dependency'). On the other hand, if we stand in the House of Justice and look across to the House of Worship, the community will appear as an ellipse with two foci, two 'primary agencies'.

All of this is not intended to diminish the station of the Houses of Justice, "the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries" (13th Glad Tidings). It is intended to emphasize the importance of making a real effort to understand the nature of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, in all of its diverse forms, as an organ in the body of the Bahá'í community.

Far from competing for status, these two organs complement and support each other.[10] Shoghi Effendi calls the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar "the Administration's mighty bulwark"[11] and, describes it as the source of the inspiration which those who work in the Haziratu'l-Quds, local or national, require to discharge "their duties and responsibilities as befits the chosen stewards of His Faith." [12] As we have already seen, the administrative order should function "under the shadow of, and in ... close proximity to, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar". [13]

If the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar are so necessary for the proper functioning of the elected institutions, how have we been able to build our communities without them? One answer is that we have not done very well: we have not thus far been able to attract and feed the spiritually malnourished populations of Western countries. However it would also be true to say that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar have always been among us, but we have not called them by that name or recognized them for what they are. In its 1983 message on Social and Economic Development, the Universal House of Justice said that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is "the spiritual centre of every Bahá'í community." They did not say that it would be the centre at some future date. As the Bahá'í Faith develops, the

various organs which are ordained in the vision of Bahá'u'lláh are successively unfolded. But they exist as ideas -- what `Abdu'l-Bahá would refer to as their 'realities' -- even before they become outwardly visible. For instance, in the time of Bahá'u'lláh the holy souls who were to become the Hands of the Cause were living and performing their particular function in the community even though they were not named as such until after their death, and the way in which Bahá'u'lláh named them did not make it clear that the Hands of the Cause were an institution of the Faith as well as quite special individuals. With the passage in `Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament which required the Hands of the Cause to elect nine of their number to work full-time to assist the Guardian, it became clear that this would develop into a definite institutional form, although this was not possible in practice until Shoghi Effendi had appointed enough living Hands of the Cause for an election among them to be meaningful. In the same way, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar has always been with us, first in the sense that our own individual faith, our 'radiant heart' is the foundation of the community, and also as a potential institution folded within the devotional portion of the 19-day Feast and other devotional aspects of the community life. If the Assembly members indeed recite a prayer as they begin their meetings "with a heart throbbing with the love of God and a tongue purified from all but His 'remembrance'[14] (Adhkar)", then, at least in a symbolic sense, the 'institution of the Haziratu'l-Quds' is functioning 'under the shadow of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar',[15] although neither institution may be visible except to the eyes of faith.

Having formed some preliminary idea of what the Mashriqu'l- Adhkar may be, its place in the Bahá'í community, and how its development may affect the other institutions, we should turn to putting this into practice. The first step is already clear from paragraph 26 of the Universal House of Justice's Ridvan message:

... it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.

As we put this into practice, many things will no doubt become clear, and many new questions will arise about the further evolution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. One aspect which has not been touched on yet is the dependencies of the Mashriqu'l- Adhkar, without which it is not 'complete and whole'. [16] Another is the forms of worship which are possible and the advice which `Abdu'l-Bahá has provided concerning these. The question of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a physical place will naturally arise, and in order to deal with the fact that some texts prescribe a particular form for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar while others speak of temporary Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in homes, rented properties and even underground, we will have to try to systematize the various types and levels of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar buildings which are mentioned in the Writings.

Notes

1. Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pages 93-94.

2. Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, page 681.
3. Bahá'í Administration, page 186.
4. Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, page 633-634.
5. Universal House of Justice, in its 1983 letter regarding Social and Economic Development.
6. Universal House of Justice, letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, May 19, 1994.
7. Bahá'í Administration, page 24.
8. Bahá'í Administration, page 108.
9. World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, pages 156-157.
10. There is a similar complementarity between worship and teaching, analogous perhaps to the roles of nutrition and exercise, respectively, in an athlete's training programme.
11. World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, page 80.
12. God Passes By, pp. 339-40.
13. Messages to America, page 24.
14. Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 85-6, cited in the compilation The Local Spiritual Assembly, page 45.
15. God Passes By, pp. 339-40.
16. Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 99-100, Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, page 627.

Exploring the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, Part 3: The practice of collective worship of God

Part 1 of this series extended the definition of a Mashriqu'l- Adhkar to embrace every manifestation of the spiritual reality of worship in our individual and community life. Part 2 considered the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as the 'greatest divine institute' and hinted at the change in community structures which might result as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar unfolds in the community. I could do no more than hint at the community structures, because the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a mature institution is a long-term vision, and the details are far from clear. This section will consider our immediate role in 'building the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which is clear:

... it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.[1]

This refers both to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a meeting, according to `Abdu'l-Bahá's saying that these "bright assemblages [for worship] are none other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar",[2] and to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a

building, if we use the term as `Abdu'l-Bahá does[3] to refer to any place where such meetings are held.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a meeting

Where to start? How are we to build the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a meeting? The fact that the Universal House of Justice, in gradually putting the law of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar into effect,[4] first emphasized the importance of prayer, meditation and the devotional attitude, and enhancing the vitality of the faith of individual believers[5] and only in 1996 called for the holding of "regular devotional meetings" already suggests a certain sequence. `Abdu'l-Bahá, in one passage, refers to the same sequence:

In reality, the radiant, pure hearts are the Mashrak-el-Azcar and from them the voice of supplication and invocation continually reacheth the Supreme Concourse. I ask God to make the heart of every one of you a temple of the Divine Temples and to let the lamp of the great guidance be lighted therein; and when the hearts find such an attainment, they will certainly exert the utmost endeavor and energy in the building of the Mashrak-el-Azcar; thus may the outward express the inward, and the form (or letter) indicate the meaning (or reality).[6]

This suggests that we might begin by considering our hearts as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, and systematically performing there, at the morning hour, at noon and evening and in the night, the act of remembrance of God. And that when the inward reality has become the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in this sense, it will develop outwards through the various levels of holding devotional meetings and establishing the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as an institution. This is in any case my own experience: first studying the Writings and becoming aware of the importance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, and then finding that my own devotions had a new significance when each act was considered as one small step towards building that mystical Mashriqu'l-Adhkar which, ultimately, will be a building and a 'temple' embracing the whole of humanity.[7] The observance of reciting the Greatest Name 95 times per day, a meditational practice known as dhikr in Islam, has for me a particularly close relationship to the Mashriqu'l- Adhkar. Dhikr and Adhkar are in fact different forms of the same root, dh-k-r, to remember.

Resources and ritual

For those fortunate enough to live in a locality with a Bahá'í community, there is a natural evolution from personal devotions to "the practice of collective worship of God". Many devotional practices that we use in our personal devotions or which are already used in feasts and other meetings can be used equally well in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings. Another source of inspiration will be found in passages in the Writings which refer to worship and the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar,[8] and the volume of mystical writings by Bahá'u'lláh which is to be prepared in the course of this 4-year plan will provide new texts which make new demands. There are, for instance, poems by Bahá'u'lláh in the form of dialogues and visions which lend themselves to

dramatic or sung presentations. The devotional meetings themselves can be expected to generate new forms: hymns,[9] poems,[10] and chants, new forms of reciting the Writings and the use of material symbols such as candles and flowers. Choirs may find a new reason for existence, and singing may become a new activity for the whole community. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings in South Limburg, for instance, have sometimes been followed by a short singing practice.

We can also borrow a great deal from other traditions by participating in their worship[11] and their children's classes.[12] But this raises the question of whether, in borrowing forms of artistic expression for worship - that is, liturgies and parts of liturgies - we might not also be adopting undesirable rituals.[13] Shoghi Effendi says that "Bahá'u'lláh has reduced all ritual and form to an absolute minimum in His Faith,"[14] but the context in this case suggests that Shoghi Effendi is referring to the fact that there are only a few rites ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, such as the obligatory prayers. Shoghi Effendi also says that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar "is consecrated exclusively to worship, devoid of all ceremony and ritual,"[15] which would seem to imply that worship in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings should be austere and unadorned. In the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 115, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Blessed is he who, at the hour of dawn, centring his thoughts on God, occupied with His remembrance, and supplicating His forgiveness, directeth his steps to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and, entering therein, seateth himself in silence to listen to the verses of God, the Sovereign, the Mighty, the All-Praised.

This suggests a very simple meeting indeed, but perhaps this is a minimum or is a form particular to the dawn service.[16] We must also consider the praise given in the Writings to music and the arts as a means of elevating the soul, and `Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement of the use of hymns and poems in worship.[17] In fact, while Shoghi Effendi said that it was desirable to dissociate the Faith "in the eyes of the public, from the rituals, the ceremonials ... identified with the religious systems of the past,"[18] he also approved the use of Christian settings of the Psalms of David in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar services "as an evidence of the universality of the Faith"[19] and favoured the use of hymns based on either Bahá'í or other Sacred Writings.[20]

It would appear therefore that worship which is "devoid of all ceremony and ritual" can nevertheless have a place for the arts, especially for music, and for liturgical elements borrowed from other religions. From a study of the relevant Writings, I have found six objectionable characteristics of ritual which may be useful in deciding how particular liturgical elements developed by Bahá'ís or derived from others can appropriately be used in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings, and what is to be avoided. No doubt some of these are wrong, and there are others which are missing, but this list may serve to illustrate how Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings could approach ritual elements with due care without being reduced to the bare reading of prayers and texts (which would be a fixed form in itself).

The first is that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar should not appear to be a church or mosque, and the second that the Mashriqu'l- Adhkar service as a whole should show the universality of the Faith. These principles are both derived from the passages from Shoghi Effendi just cited. They suggest that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings should avoid borrowing from a single source, but also should not refuse to use "non-Bahá'í" elements at all. This is, after all, "the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future".[21] We have a great deal in common with those who have worshipped God through the centuries, and can be free to admit it. The third characteristic of ritual which might be objectionable is suggested by the fact that Shoghi Effendi refers above to rituals and ceremonials together. Perhaps one of the features which make some forms of ritual objectionable is that rituals are often designed to impress the observers. Ceremony, outward magnificence, exaggerated gravity and symbols of worldly power, such as gold, crowns and uniforms can be used to impress the human audience with the power of God or of God's supposed representatives. The 'worship' then becomes a drama, because it is addressed to the watchers rather than only to the One for whom it is intended. A fourth characteristic of some rituals is that they are thought to cause God to bring some desirable purpose about, rather like magic. Thus particular forms of prayer may be thought to bring rain in a drought, to bring the blessing of God on a child or a marriage, or to ensure sufficient declarations to save the Local Spiritual Assembly before Ridvan, and this is unworthy of the Self-sufficiency of God. A fifth characteristic which marks some rituals is that the participants follow a leader or allow one person to act in their place, and this is not permitted in the Bahá'í Faith except in the case of the prayer for the Dead. Finally, some rituals are treated as if they were prescribed: by custom or decree it may be expected that all the believers should perform them on some regular basis. Where they are not in fact prescribed by the Manifestation, the distinction between the teachings of the Manifestation and the response of His followers is obscured, and this is unworthy of the authority of the Manifestation. To avoid the gradual development of expectation to which the believers might be expected to conform, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings can consciously seek variety:

The danger in this, as in some other cases regarding Bahá'í worship, is that a definite system of rigid rituals and practices be developed among the believers. (Directives of the Guardian, page 33)

In a large community, multiple Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings could be held,[22] so that the friends would have a choice between silent meditation, Persian or Gregorian chanting, reciting the names of God (dhikr), singing vigorous hymns and any other forms they may discover. Seen in this way, Shoghi Effendi's statement that the worship of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar should be "devoid of all ceremony and ritual"[23] does not limit the forms of worship but rather encourages inventiveness and variety.

There are several tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá which set out a programme for a devotional meeting, and which specifically include the obligatory prayers:

Thy proposal that the friends should assemble on Sundays for the purpose of joining together in worship is most commendable. As for the manner in which such a devotional gathering should be conducted: first, the Friends should read prayers and turn themselves to God, invoking his aid and assistance; then, when all are assembled, there should be a period of silent prayer (namaz); lastly, prayers and readings should be recited aloud, before the whole company of the Friends, in the sweetest and most melodious of accents. As this is the commencement of holding meetings, this is sufficient.[24]

The word which the world centre has translated as 'silent prayer' is namaz, which, according to a contemporary dictionary,[25] means "Prayers, those especially prescribed by law (which are repeated five times a day)" - that is, it is the Persian equivalent of the Arabic salat, obligatory prayer. This seems to have given rise to some questions, because in a later Tablet, `Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

As to the obligatory prayer (to be said three times a day): Each one must say his prayer alone by himself, and this is not conditional on a private place; that is, both at home and in the worshipping-place, which is a gathering-place, it is allowable for one to say his prayer; but each person must say his prayer by himself (i. e., not in company with others who might recite the same words and continue the same postures together at the same time). But if they chant supplications (communes, etc.) together (and in company), in a good and effective voice, that is very good.[26]

This opens up many possibilities for the enrichment of the devotional services. Any service which included the recitation of an obligatory prayer would be a distinctively Bahá'í service, just as the salat and the Lord's Prayer or creed are distinctively Muslim and Christian forms. But would this also exclude non-Bahá'ís and make it more difficult for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar to function as "God's universal House of Worship."?[27] If the obligatory prayer is to be included in a devotional programme, how is this to be done? The possibilities are intriguing, but they come with many questions. It might well be wise not to implement this aspect of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings for the present, at least until there is some understanding and broad agreement about how it is to be done. Saying the Obligatory Prayers and fasting define our individual Bahá'í identities, and our various individual ways of saying them are important to each of us. It would be unfortunate if anything was done which might discourage some of the friends from participating in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings at all. Perhaps as the meetings develop in various forms, those who worship in the meetings gradually become a worshipping community with a deeper level of unity, and the local Bahá'í communities gradually re-orient themselves around "the Mashriqu'l Adhkar, the spiritual center of every Bahá'í community,"[28] such questions of practice will become clear.

Dawn prayers

Paragraph 115 of the Aqdas, cited above, gives a special blessing to "he who,

at the hour of dawn ... directeth his steps to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar". Turning to God at dawn is particularly recommended in many places:

At the dawn of every day he [the seeker] should commune with God, and, with all his soul, persevere in the quest of his Beloved. Gleanings, CXXI

However there are probably almost as many passages which refer to reciting prayers or turning to God 'at eventide and at dawn'[29] including one mention in the Aqdas itself (paragraph 33), and not a few passages which refer also to worship or remembrance at noon or day and night.[30] The tablet of `Abdu'l-Bahá which calls the devotional meetings a form of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar does not mention dawn:

It befitteth the friends to hold a gathering, a meeting, where they shall glorify God and fix their hearts upon Him, and read and recite the Holy Writings of the Blessed Beauty - may my soul be the ransom of His lovers! The lights of the All-Glorious Realm, the rays of the Supreme Horizon, will be cast upon such bright assemblages, for these are none other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, the Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance, which must, at the direction of the Most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city... (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pages 93-94)

Thus there seems to be no reason for thinking that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings can only take place at dawn: any heart, meeting or place from which the remembrance of God rises is a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. A more flexible approach to the time of meetings will facilitate the first steps in establishing Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in local communities. Perhaps different forms of worship will develop for different times: re-centering on the written word in the morning, chanting and individual devotions at noon, 'vespers' after work, hymns in the evening and, in the middle of the night, to listen as "some of the angelic souls" chant the mystic odes "with wondrous voices".

The object and purposes of worship

The possible forms of worship (liturgies) are intriguing, but in establishing the devotional meetings it seems to me important that we keep our eyes first of all on what we are doing, and why, rather than on how we are to worship. The purpose of the meetings is defined in the Ridvan message as the "collective worship of God", the Beloved, the Mystery, the One. Secondary purposes might include cultivating joy in prayer and building up the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as Bahá'u'lláh as commanded us. In fact, these two are aspects of the same, since `Abdu'l-Bahá says that the radiant hearts are the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.[31]

Genuine, God-centred worship can be expected to produce several effects in the community. My contact with various communities around the world which have established devotional meetings shows that such meetings enrich the life of the communities and meet a hunger among Bahá'ís for specifically religious activities. I have already mentioned, in part 1, that `Abdu'l-Bahá relates the establishment of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar to entry by troops,[32] and have suggested some possible reasons for this, including the fact that they are

community activities which are open to non-Bahá'ís.

Other effects include a welcome increase in the diversity of the activities and institutions in the community. While the Feasts, Assemblies and committees may have come a long way in ensuring that people from all social strata and from different cultural and religious backgrounds can participate, not everyone finds such activities satisfying. People, from whatever background they come, have different psychological types and capacities for different kinds of work.[33] The one delights in study, another in institutional service, a third in prayer, a fourth in public teaching activities and a fifth in practical social services. A person fitted by talent and inclination to serve in the appointed institutions may be less well suited for administrative work, and a scholar may be unfit for both. Greater variety of institutions in itself makes it easier to offer a place to people of every type, and to utilize their capabilities. Too many people enter the Faith, look around, and finding no place in the community which reflects their own particular spiritual calling, pass on -- a little richer perhaps but still wishing to attain to the knowledge of God, and not knowing where to go for it and from whom to seek it. Thus I would expect the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar to relate to the teaching work not only as a magnet in its own right but also as a sort of waiting-room and common space, a common point of reference which makes it easy to see the diverse activities of a Bahá'í community as aspects of one whole. The meetings for worship are symbolized by a building with doors open on all sides,[34] through which Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, the talented and strong and the socially marginalized and wounded of every type, can enter to become part of the worshipping community. 'Membership' in such a community is fuzzily defined, and the threshold - the perceived barrier to entry - is correspondingly low. But membership can be no less deeply felt because of that, if the hearts are indeed bound to the hearts as `Abdu'l-Bahá says:

.. the original purpose of temples and houses of worship is simply that of unity - places of meeting where various peoples, different races and souls of every capacity may come together in order that love and agreement should be manifest between them.[35]

From the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, doors lead outward in various directions. One leads to the Bahá'í administrative order, where formal declaration of belief is a pre-requisite. Other doors lead to humanitarian and spiritual activities and to the 'dependencies' - e.g. care for the aged, medical care, education etc. Like the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar itself, the dependencies exist at various levels, first in an individual attitude of concern, second in community activities, and ultimately also in institutional forms. Some people may be content to spend all their time 'in' the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, but most will be driven to express the God-centred consciousness in the activities going on through one or more of those doors. The concept of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is broad and flexible enough to provide a common centre for all of these. Work, in the spirit of service, is a form of worship, so work and service are languages of praise, and we have seen that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is present wherever the praise of God ascends.

So all of these forms of service can be considered as 'building the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar' in the most inclusive sense. There are some people who remember God briefly - but gladly - as they hurry on their way to serve, to study, to work in their profession or to visit the sick. There are others who come before dawn to worship and leave reluctantly. So far as I can see, these are the same in the eyes of Bahá'u'lláh.

Another specific effect which is promised as we begin to build up the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is a strengthening of the administrative institutions. Shoghi Effendi calls the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar "the Administration's mighty bulwark..."[36] We have already seen, in part 2, that the House of Justice and House of Worship are a complementary pair, the "two primary agencies", and that the administrative activities and institutions are to "cluster around"[37] and stand "under the shadow of"[38] the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar which is "the spiritual center of every Bahá'í community."[39] In fact Shoghi Effendi warns that the administrative activities "no matter how disinterested and strenuous" will not "fructify and prosper unless they are brought into close and daily communion with those spiritual agencies centering in and radiating from the central Shrine of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar."[40] It seems important as the Bahá'í world moves towards the creation of local Mashriqu'l-Adhkar institutions to emphasize that this development should strengthen, not weaken, the Local Spiritual Assemblies. The House of Justice and House of Worship are not rivals, but bridegroom and bride.

Conclusion

Part 3 began by noting that paragraph 26 of the 1996 Ridvan message referred both to devotional meetings and to the places in which they are held. It has touched on various aspects of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a devotional meeting: the resources we might use to establish Mashriqu'l-Adhkar meetings, the passages in the Writings which suggest a sequence of prayers and readings in such meetings, the times at which they might be held and the effects of such meetings in a Bahá'í community. The fourth and final part of this series will consider the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a place of worship and will ask why it is important to have a specific place for worship and how we are to reconcile some references in the Writings to temporary, rented and even underground Mashriqu'l-Adhkar with other passages in the Writings which prescribe a specific physical form for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar building.

Notes

1. Universal House of Justice, Ridvan message to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridvan 1996, paragraph 26.
2. Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, page 93.
3. See for example Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, pages 12, 149, 437; Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 95- 96; also Kitab-i-Aqdas, paragraph 115. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a building will be discussed in part 4 of this series.

4. Universal House of Justice, in a letter to a National Spiritual Assembly dated 9 June 1974.
5. Universal House of Justice, *Ridvan Message to the Bahá'ís of the World*, Ridvan 1993, paragraph 7.
6. *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas*, p. 678.
7. See *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pages 65-67, for a passage in which the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* is compared to a home for the whole of mankind.
8. A compilation is forthcoming from Kalimat Press.
9. The use of hymns, music and singing in worship is mentioned in many passages, many of them gathered together in the *Compilation on Music*. An interesting account of `Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement for the hymn-writing of Louise Waite can be found in R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, *Music Devotions and Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* (Kalimat Press, 1987) pp. 34-37.
10. See *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas*, pp. 57-58, for the use of poetry in the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* meetings.
11. *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 75, "Consort ye then with the followers of all religions..".
12. In a passage in *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 144, `Abdu'l-Bahá envisions Bahá'í children attending both their own 'Sunday school' and Sunday schools in churches.
13. For a more extensive discussion of the issues discussed here, see Linda Walbridge, 'Rituals: an American Bahá'í dilemma' in *The Bahá'í Studies Review* Vol. 5 No. 1 (1995).
14. Letter of 24 June 1949 to an individual believer, cited in *Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude* (page 243 of the *Compilation of Compilations*).
15. *God Passes By*, page 350.
16. Paragraph 150 of the *Aqdas* adds that the children should be taught the Writings "so that, in most melodious tones, they may recite the *Tablets of the All-Merciful* in the alcoves within the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkars*".
17. See notes 9 and 10 above.
18. *God Passes By*, page 373.
19. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 28 March 1943, cited in Armstrong-Ingram, *op cit*, p. 227.
20. Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2 April 1931, cited in Armstrong-Ingram, *op cit*,. page 356.
21. *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, paragraph 182.

22. "Multiplicity of Mashriqu'l-Adhkars in a single locality is acceptable." Provisional translation, from a Tablet of `Abdu'l- Bahá to Mirza `Ali-Asghar Faridi-yi Usku'i, cited in Ishraq Khavari's Ganjinih-i-Hudud va Akham, page 230.
23. God Passes By, page 350.
24. This translation was made at the Bahá'í World Centre in 1987, as published in Robert Stockman's The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion 1900-1912, (vol. 2), p. 105. An earlier translation (1903) can be found in Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, pp. 15-16 and in Armstrong-Ingram, op. cit., p. 318. The more recent translation omits the last sentence, which I have taken from the text in Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas. The significance of the word namaz is noted by Armstrong-Ingram. Another Tablet very similar in content is given in Ishraq Khavari's Ganjinih-i-Hudud va Akham, p. 230.
25. F. Steingass, A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary, 1892.
26. Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, p. 464.
27. Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'í Administration, page 77.
28. Universal House of Justice, letter on Social and Economic Development, 1983.
29. e.g., Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, page 119.
30. e.g., Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, page 53.
31. Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, p. 678.
32. Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, p. 681.
33. "Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration." Gleanings, CVI. See also Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 285.
34. Purpose-designed Mashriqu'l-Adhkars are not in fact required to have nine doors (Light of Divine Guidance, Vol.1, page 232) and, as we will see in part 4, Mashriqu'l-Adhkars can have a great variety of shapes. But we can refer in metaphor to 'the' shape of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar because the Wilmette Mashriqu'l-Adhkar has assumed an archetypal position, symbolizing all Mashriqu'l-Adhkars of whatever shape.
35. Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 65.
36. World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, page 80.
37. World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 156.
38. God Passes By, page 340, and Messages to America, page 24.
39. Universal House of Justice, letter on Social and Economic Development, 1983.
40. Bahá'í Administration, page 186.

Exploring the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar Part 4: The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a building

We have seen that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar takes many forms, since it can refer to any place, time or gathering from which the remembrance of God rises. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a building or sacred space has a particularly significant effect. Lora McCall, who is a member of a Bahá'í community in Nebraska which has purchased Mashriqu'l-Adhkar land, describes it like this:

Whenever I avail myself of the opportunity to walk on our near-acre of land where we will build our House of Worship, I find that whatever problems I thought I had in my life fade into the background. I go to the land at least a couple of times a week, and find the pattern of my life changing. It used to be that when I was angry or upset about something I'd fuss and fume and try to distract myself. It is getting so that now I think, "I'll go walk on the land, maybe hum a few lines of the Halih,[1] pick up a little trash or pull a thistle. I know I'll feel better." And sometimes it isn't even conscious, I just find myself there. I've wondered about this phenomenon. Is it magical thinking to believe that our problems will be solved just by going to some little piece of land? I guess the answer is partly in this: not every problem has a direct solution. The resolution lies in reframing the situation by remembering God first, and the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is the Dawning Place of the Remembrance of God. I go there to remember. This doesn't mean that I don't remember my God in other places and under other circumstances. Most certainly, I do. The goal is to live a life of constant remembrance. But there is something about the outward expression of the inner reality -- it's that hidden treasure desiring to be known. It can't help it, it's just in the nature of things. We need these physical structures to be built in the world. It isn't enough to carry the remembrance of God in our hearts -- the hidden treasure desires to be known! As 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "In reality, the radiant, pure hearts are the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar I ask God to make the heart of every one of you a temple of the Divine Temples ... and when the hearts find such an attainment, they will certainly exert the utmost endeavor and energy in the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar; thus may the outward express the inward" (Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, p. 678) My heart aches to stand within the sacred space of the Mashriq and lift up my voice in praise of the one true God. When I walk on that land, I can see it and hear it, and I stand in awe before my Lord. In this way, everything gets reframed, and the very pattern of my life begins to change. Let the outer reflect the inner! And then, there's always the divine command, "Build ye houses of worship throughout the land in the Name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions." What are we waiting for? The hidden treasure desires to be known.

In addition to providing a necessary physical manifestation of the reality of adoration, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar buildings serve an important social function:

When the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is accomplished, when the lights are emanating therefrom ... then the believers shall rejoice, the hearts shall be dilated and overflow with the love of the All-living and Self-existent God. The people shall hasten to worship in that heavenly Temple, the fragrances of God will be

elevated, the divine teachings will be established in the hearts like the establishment of the Spirit in mankind; the people will then stand firm in the Cause of your Lord, the Merciful. (Bahá'í World Faith, page 415)

and further

Although to outward seeming the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is a material structure, yet it hath a spiritual effect. It forgoeth bonds of unity from heart to heart; it is a collective centre for men's souls. Every city in which, during the days of the Manifestation, a temple was raised up, hath created security and constancy and peace, for such buildings were given over to the perpetual glorification of God, and only in the remembrance of God can the heart find rest. Gracious God! The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life. Experience hath, in the east, clearly shown this to be a fact. Even if, in some small village, a house was designated as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, it produced a marked effect; how much greater would be the impact of one especially raised up. (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pages 95-6)[2]

These effects on our lives and communities are said to result "even if ... a house was designated as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar" but to be greater for a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar which is "especially raised up". The 'experience in the east' would, with the exception of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in Ishqabad, be entirely with lesser forms of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. This distinction between purpose-built Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and lesser forms may help us to make sense of some apparent contradictions in the Writings regarding the guidelines for the design and use of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.

On the one hand, there are some passages referring to buildings which are "as perfect as is possible in the world of being,"[3] or "magnificent"[4] and requiring that both the building and, if possible, the grounds should be circular or nine-sided.[5] There are also passages which restrict the possible uses of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, such as in Question 94 of the Kitab-i-Aqdas where Bahá'u'lláh says:

Whatever hath been constructed for the worship of the one true God, such as mosques, chapels and temples, must not be used for any purpose other than the commemoration of His Name. This is an ordinance of God, and he who violateth it is verily of those who have transgressed.

This means that other activities should not take place in the main hall of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which is dedicated to worship,[6] and it may well be an endorsement of the Shi`ih teaching that a property once dedicated as a mosque can never be used for another purpose.[7]

On the other hand, the Aqdas itself defines Mashriqu'l-Adhkar buildings in broader terms as "each and every building which hath been erected in cities and villages for the celebration of My praise." [8] `Abdu'l-Bahá also uses the name Mashriqu'l-Adhkar to refer to buildings which are not especially erected 'for the celebration of My praise' but have been 'set aside' for worship. For

instance:

This is a matter of the utmost significance. If the erection of the House of Worship in a public place would arouse the hostility of evil-doers, then the meeting must, in every locality, be held in some hidden place. Even in every hamlet, a place must be set aside as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, and even though it be underground.[9]

We have also seen above that He refers to houses being designated as Mashriqu'l-Adhkars, yet underground spaces and houses would not normally conform to the requirement of being circular or nine-sided. And despite the rule of the Aqdas that a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar should not be used for other purposes, `Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

Inform the maid-servant of God, who prepared her home as a [temporary] Mashrak-el-Azcar, that this service was accepted in the Kingdom of ABHA.[10]

It seems reasonable therefore to conclude that the rules of design and use which apply to a perfected Mashriqu'l-Adhkar do not necessarily apply to lesser forms. The inner reality of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar strives not only to be manifest in every level of reality, but also to attain "its highest prescribed degree of perfection." [11] This is a gradual process of growth: we need not seek to reach perfection in one step:

God willing, in all the states of America in the future there will be erected Temples with infinite architectural beauty, art, with pleasing proportion and handsome and attractive appearances ... But for the present, be ye satisfied with a rented place.[12]

This gives the Bahá'í communities a wide latitude to use a variety of different buildings as (temporary) Mashriqu'l-Adhkars, in accordance with their means and the needs of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar institution as it passes through the various phases of development. And so we return to the beginning:

... it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.[13]

Notes

1. See Stephen Lambden, 'A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh of the Late Baghdad Period: Lawh-i Halih Halih Halih, Ya Bisharat, Bahá'í Studies Bulletin 2:3 (pp. 105-112), December 1983 (since revised).
2. For further passage on the effect of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, see Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pages 94-95; Promulgation of Universal Peace, pages 65-66; Bahá'í World Faith, pages 414-419. For its particular effect on the administrative organs see the passages cited in part 2 of this series. For the effect on entry by troops see part 1.
3. Kitab-i-Aqdas, paragraph 31. This may be a reflection of the Bayan (Persian Bayan, VI 3, as summarized in Selections from the Writings of the E.G. Browne,

M. Momen (ed.), page 376).

4. Memorials of the Faithful, page 20.

5. Promulgation of Universal Peace, pages 71-72, and Light of Divine Guidance Vol.1, pages 247-248. Other elements such as having nine doors or a dome are not requirements (Light of Divine Guidance Vol. 1, page 229).

6. See Bahá'í Administration, page 77.

7. In a Tablet to Aqa Ni`matu'llah Naraqí quoted by Ishraq Khavari's in Ganjinih-i-Hudud va Akham, `Abdu'l-Bahá has said that the Universal House of Justice will have to rule on this question.

8. paragraph 115.

9. Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, page 95.

10. Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, page 149.

11. Selections from the Writings of the Bab, page 61.

12. Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, page 437.

13. Universal House of Justice, Ridvan message to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridvan 1996, paragraph 26.

Exploring the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar Part 4: addendum

[this expanded section of Part Four was written as a separate document, posted to an email list]

This is a section from a paper I am working on [above]. I think that the function of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar buildings deserves new attention, especially as the UHJ's letter to the LSA of Omaha regarding their plans for a local Mashriq did not deal with the theological - theo-logical - significance of the building. I can share the distaste for church buildings if they are put up to claim a share of a promising market, like so many shopfronts. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar should be something else - the singing of the physical universe and a building of service to the whole community. In this the notes markers have been lost in the text and the notes are all in a pile at the end. You will just have to buy the published version when it is eventually ready... The point regarding the importance of a physical manifestation comes around the second page

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a building

In contrast to the New Testament, which speaks of 'the church' and 'churches' as communities of worship without referring to the building in which the church meets, the Bahá'í Writings do refer to the building for worship, giving it a high station and in some cases setting quite specific requirements for it. Thus the Kitab-i-Aqdas, in the key text which ordains the building of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar "throughout the lands" speaks of buildings which are "as perfect as is possible in the world of being." Other texts require that both

the building and, if possible, the grounds should be circular or nine-sided, and this pattern is in fact applied in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar buildings which have been erected by the Bahá'ís in or near to the cities of Chicago, Frankfurt, Sydney, Apia, Panama City, New Delhi and Kampala. There are also passages which restrict the possible uses of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, such as in Question 94 of the Kitab-i-Aqdas where Bahá'u'lláh says:

Whatever hath been constructed for the worship of the one true God, such as mosques, chapels and temples, must not be used for any purpose other than the commemoration of His Name. This is an ordinance of God, and he who violateth it is verily of those who have transgressed.

This means that other activities should not take place in the main hall of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which is dedicated to worship, and it may well be an endorsement of the Shi'ih teaching that a property once dedicated as a mosque can never be used for another purpose. The goal of achieving physical perfection, the requirement that the building have a particular shape and the restriction on multiple uses form a considerable barrier to local and even national communities wanting to establish a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. In practice, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar buildings mentioned above have all required the cooperative efforts of national Bahá'í communities around the world. On the face of it, there is a large gap between the model of what a Bahá'í community should be, with a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in its midst as the centre of community life, and the reality that the Bahá'í community does not have the means to erect more than a few such specially-designed buildings. However there are other Bahá'í texts, equally authoritative, which are more relaxed about both the physical requirements for a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and the possibility of other uses. The Kitab-i-Aqdas itself defines Mashriqu'l-Adhkar buildings without reference to their shape, as "each and every building which hath been erected in cities and villages for the celebration of My praise." `Abdu'l-Bahá uses the name Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in this broader sense to refer to buildings 'set aside' for worship:

This is a matter of the utmost significance. If the erection of the House of Worship in a public place would arouse the hostility of evil doers, then the meeting must, in every locality, be held in some hidden place. Even in every hamlet, a place must be set aside as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, and even though it be underground. (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, page 95)

He does not apparently consider it essential that the dedication to worship be permanent and exclusive, since He wrote to one of the early North American believers who had prepared her home as a temporary Mashriqu'l-Adhkar to say that "this service was accepted in the Kingdom of Abha." One way of understanding these apparently contradictory statements about the requirements for a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar building is to see the more exacting formulation as an ideal form for a perfected Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which does not prevent the designation and use of buildings not meeting these requirements as Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, at least as an interim measure. This thesis is supported by passages in two letters from `Abdu'l-Bahá:

The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life. Experience hath, in the east, clearly shown this to be a fact. Even if, in some small village, a house was designated as the Mashriqu'l Adhkar, it produced a marked effect; how much greater would be the impact of one especially raised up. (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l Bahá, pages 95-6)

God willing, in all the states of America in the future there will be erected Temples with infinite architectural beauty, art, with pleasing proportion and handsome and attractive appearances ... But for the present, be ye satisfied with a rented place. (Tablets of `Abdu'l Bahá Abbas, page 437.)

Clearly rented buildings, houses and underground spaces would not normally be circular or nine-sided. Since these are nevertheless approved by `Abdu'l-Bahá as Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, it seems reasonable to conclude that the rules of design and use which apply to a perfected Mashriqu'l-Adhkar do not necessarily apply to lesser forms. The inner reality of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar strives not only to be manifest in every level of reality, but also to attain "its highest prescribed degree of perfection" within each level. This is a gradual process of growth. Rather than seeking to reach perfection in one step, Bahá'í communities might use a variety of different buildings as more or less temporary Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, in accordance with their means and the needs of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar institution as it passes through the various phases of its development. In understanding the importance of the physical building, it is necessary to relate this to the Bahá'í teachings concerning the station of physical reality itself. Although the physical and metaphysical worlds are referred to as levels, the physical creation in the Bahá'í teachings is not a lesser order of creation. There is an order of priority, in which the names of God emanate through the worlds of God. The physical world is the last level in this ordering, and the first in the reverse ordering through which human realities ascend towards God, but it is not morally below other worlds. It is the capstone of the ordered universe, rather than God's afterthought. The process by which the names of God emanate and are manifest is imperfect until these names also have physical and worldly analogies. In contrast to most Christian theologies, the fundamental distinction is not between the spiritual world and this world, but between God and all of creation, both spiritual and physical. This is why physical church buildings have at most a small place in Christian treatments of ecclesiology, perhaps under the headings of 'consecration' and 'deconsecration', whereas a theological treatment of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar may well begin with its physical manifestation. Neither the physical form, nor the individual, collective or institutional forms of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar can be called the 'true' Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, but just as the last station on a railway line gives its name to the whole route, the physical Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, which is the perfection of the process of emanation and the beginning of the return to God, can serve to identify the whole process. It may also be useful to touch on the Bahá'í teachings on the diversity of things. If there is a single divine 'idea' which is manifested by degrees in all of the physical forms of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, from the rented, underground and

domestic Mashriqu'l-Adhkar referred to in the citations above to an ultimate perfected form, it might appear that the physical architecture of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar should tend to converge as they approach perfection. Would all Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, ideally, look the same? There is one physical design which might in fact be taken as a model form: the design for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in Ishqabad, which was conceived by `Abdu'l-Bahá and which he hoped would be used as the model for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in Wilmette, and which was in fact used as a model for at least one smaller replica near Tehran. However the material in which the divine ideas are manifest is not simply an infinitely plastic potential: the material itself has its own nature and limitations, and the material available is everywhere different. Thus there are variations between individuals of one species which are at different stages of growth (for example between seed, seedling and mature tree), but there are also differences between mature trees of the same species:

... the forms and organisms of phenomenal being and existence in each of the kingdoms of the universe are myriad and numberless. ... Each leaf has its own particular identity so to speak, its own individuality as a leaf. (Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 285)

In contrast to platonic thought and, as Popper has noted, the authoritarian political systems which have been based on platonic ideas, in the Bahá'í writings the individuality of things is valued for itself:

When ... thou dost contemplate the innermost essence of all things, and the individuality of each, thou wilt behold the signs of thy Lord's mercy in every created thing, and see the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout all the realm of being ..." (Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l Bahá, p. 41).

In the case of Mashriqu'l-Adhkar buildings, the material matrix in which the idea of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar must be realized includes not only materials and a site, which will vary from place to place, but also cultural materials. The architectural motifs and building techniques of a culture are resources on which the architect can draw. Even where they confront the architect with limitations rather than possibilities, they contribute to the individuality of each Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and are to be valued for that reason. There is therefore no reason to think that Mashriqu'l-Adhkar buildings which are more perfect expressions of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar concept should come to look alike.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as a building or sacred space has a particularly significant effect. Lora McCall, who is a member of one local Bahá'í community in Nebraska which has purchased Mashriqu'l-Adhkar land, describes it like this:

Whenever I avail myself of the opportunity to walk on our near acre of land where we will build our House of Worship, I find that whatever problems I thought I had in my life fade into the background. I go to the land at least a couple of times a week, and find the pattern of my life changing. It used to be that when I was angry or upset about something I'd fuss and fume and try to

distract myself. It is getting so that now I think, "I'll go walk on the land, maybe hum a few lines of the Halih, pick up a little trash or pull a thistle. I know I'll feel better." And sometimes it isn't even conscious, I just find myself there. I've wondered about this phenomenon. Is it magical thinking to believe that our problems will be solved just by going to some little piece of land? I guess the answer is partly in this: not every problem has a direct solution. The resolution lies in reframing the situation by remembering God first, and the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is the Dawning Place of the Remembrance of God. I go there to remember. This doesn't mean that I don't remember my God in other places and under other circumstances. Most certainly, I do. The goal is to live a life of constant remembrance. But there is something about the outward expression of the inner reality it's that hidden treasure desiring to be known. It can't help it, it's just in the nature of things. We need these physical structures to be built in the world. It isn't enough to carry the remembrance of God in our hearts the hidden treasure desires to be known! ...

My heart aches to stand within the sacred space of the Mashriq and lift up my voice in praise of the one true God. When I walk on that land, I can see it and hear it, and I stand in awe before my Lord. In this way, everything gets reframed, and the very pattern of my life begins to change.

Notes (numbering lost in this draft document)

Kitab-i-Aqdas, paragraph 31. This may be a reflection of the Bayan (Persian Bayan, VI 3, as summarized in Selections from the Writings of the E.G. Browne, M. Momen (ed.), page 376). `Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, pages 71 72, and Shoghi Effendi, Light of Divine Guidance Vol.1, pages 247 248. Other elements such as having nine doors or a dome are not requirements (Light of Divine Guidance Vol. 1, page 229). See Bahá'í Administration, page 77. In a Tablet to Aqa Ni`matu'llah Naraqí quoted by Ishraq Khavari's in Ganjinih-i-Hudd va Akham, `Abdu'l-Bahá has said that the Universal House of Justice will have to rule on this question. paragraph 115. Tablets of `Abdu'l Bahá Abbas, page 149. For further passages on the effect of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, see `Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l Bahá, pages 94 95; Promulgation of Universal Peace, pages 65 66; and Bahá'í World Faith, pages 414-419. Its particular effects on the administrative organs and on the process of large-scale conversion known as entry by troops will be discussed later in the article. Selections from the Writings of the Bab, page 61. That is, there is a double teleology: creation is both driven to increasingly diverse and perfect manifestations (the Many, in platonic thought) and drawn to unity with the Godhead (the One). This feature would appear to be unique to Bahá'í theology. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, page 268. Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 71 72. According to a letter from Susan Moody to the Chicago Bahá'í community c. 1910-1911. Moody describes the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as under construction in a village with a fairly small Bahá'í community.

I am grateful to Jackson Armstrong-Ingram for providing this information. See for example Light of Divine Guidance Vol.1, pages 245 246, Unfolding Destiny,

page 356. See Stephen Lambden, 'A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh of the Late Baghdad Period: Lawh i Halih Halih Halih, Ya Bisharat, Bahá'í Studies Bulletin 2:3 (pp. 105 112), December 1983 (since revised).

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