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For centuries Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims have been building temples, synagogues, churches, cathedrals, and mosques. Around the world these places of worship have given expression to the cultural heritage of various peoples as they have interwoven their cultures with the forms of their particular religions. The building styles have changed with the ages, giving rise to distinctly recognizable periods of religious architecture.
Bahá'ís, like members of other religions, have also undertaken to build places of worship. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (the Most Holy Book), Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, exhorts the "people of the world" to:

Build… houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions. Make them as perfect as is possible in the world of being, and adorn them with that which befitteth them, not with images and effigies. Then, with radiance and joy, celebrate therein the praise of your Lord, the Most Compassionate.1.

Since the dawn of the twentieth century Bahá'ís have been attempting to fulfill Bahá'u'lláh's directive. In the past ninety-four years designs for at least ten Bahá'í Houses of Worship around the world have been selected, and eight of them built.
Although eight Houses of Worship is a small number, it is important to remember that the Bahá'í Faith was established in 1844; hence it is a relatively new world religion. As such, it has necessarily focused its

resources on establishing its administrative organization throughout the world, giving priority to community building rather than to erecting places of worship. However, to spread the spiritual benefits of these important structures as widely as possible, they have been strategically placed around the globe, beginning with roughly one per continent, except Antarctica. Thus far, Bahá'ís have erected Houses of Worship in 'Ishqábád (or Ashkhabad), Turkistan; Wilmette (near Chicago), Illinois; Mona Vale (near Sydney), Australia; Kampala, Uganda; Langenhain (near Frankfort am Main), Germany; Panama City, Panama; Apia, Western Samoa; and Bahapur (near New Delhi), India. A design was drawn up for a House of Worship in Marv, Turkistan, and designs for others in Tehran, Iran, and on Mount Carmel at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel, have been selected. Bahá'ís intend eventually to build a House of Worship in every locality.

The eight Bahá'í House of Worship that have been built were raised over a period spanning most of the twentieth century. During this time, building on the experience of earlier generations of Bahá'ís, and understanding to a greater measure the spiritual potential of the Houses of Worship, succeeding generations have risen to carry forward the building of "houses… as perfect as is possible in the world of being."

Paralleling efforts to create Bahá'í Houses of Worship has been an increasing understanding of what can be achieved by doing so. The ten formally selected designs for Houses of Worship reflect this gradual evolution in understanding, affirming Bahá'u'lláh's explanation of how all things progress and develop. Even His own revelation, He says, will become stronger and more evident over time; just as the sun progresses from dawn to morning and then reaches its zenith at noon.2.

In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi, head of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 until his death in 1957, alludes to the process of progressive unfoldment in the designs of Bahá'í Houses of Worship, saying that the "sacred architecture" created by the Bahá'í community "include elements of the previous schools of architecture in an ensemble that seems to present something new."3. This "ensemble" is a synthesis of old and new. As the Bahá'í community has designed more Houses of Worship, the synthesis of old forms with the new concepts of the Bahá'í revelation has resulted in ever more exquisite manifestations of the Bahá'í

Faiths central principle: the oneness of humanity. Evidence of such progress is most clearly evident in the
newest Bahá'í House of Worship, which was completed in 1986 in Bahapur, near New Delhi, India.
The oneness of humanity is expressed in the architecture of Bahá'í Houses of Worship by incorporating
indigenous cultural symbols and transforming them into universal symbols. This transformation
significantly affects the development of a global consciousness. The House of Worship in India offers an
example of how such indigenous cultural symbols can be transformed into universal symbols. Because it is
built in the form of a lotus blossom, an important ancient religious symbol of the Indian subcontinent, this
"Indian" symbol is now becoming a point of identification and common reference for all humankind. Hence
through the design of the Bahá'í House of Worship humanity is being united. This process of transforming
local symbols into universal ones can be traced through the twentieth century by examining the ten existing
designs.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

To appreciate the significance of the design of the Bahá'í Houses of Worship it is helpful to understand the
role of the Bahá'í House of Worship in the context of the community. Each Bahá'í House of Worship forms
the center of a complex of institutions that are to serve the needs of society. This complex is collectively
designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, meaning "the Dawning-place of the praise of God."4.
The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the preeminent medium of the Bahá'í concept of worship of God as service to
humanity.5. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's son and appointed successor, explains that:

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is one of the most vital institutions in the world, and it hath many subsidiary
branches. Although it is a House of Worship, it is also connected with a hospital, a drug dispensary, a
traveler's hospice, a school for orphans, and a university for advanced studies. Every Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is
connected with these five things.6.

The House of Worship is the heart and center of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár complex. It is dedicated to the
praise of God and is reserved for prayer and the reading of, and meditation on, the sacred scriptures of the

world's revealed religions. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a conduit for the spiritual energy that is regenerating, uniting, and transforming human society into a reflection of the divine. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that "the founding of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will mark the inception of the Kingdom of God on earth."7. Bahá'ís are enjoined to build one eventually in every community.

Design Considerations

Because of the central importance of the House of Worship in the life of the community, its design is a manner of special significance. During 'Abdu'l-Bahá's years as head of the Bahá'í Faith (1892-1921), He gave only two specifications regarding the form a Bahá'í House of Worship should take. He said that each House of Worship is to have nine sides and that it should have a circular shape.8. Shoghi Effendi later specified that each should also have a central dome.9.

The requirement of a dome is an example of an evolving design. In a letter dated 20 April 1955 regarding the House of Worship to be built in Germany, Shoghi Effendi's secretary said, "The Guardian has also indicated that there is nothing in the teaching requiring one dome for the building, in fact, any dome. It is of course more beautiful, generally to have a dome, or even domes, but that is not a necessary requirement of the Temple."10.

During the following months Shoghi Effendi came to a conclusion regarding this nebulous aspect of design. An undated letter written on his behalf that reached Germany in November 1955 explains that "The beloved Master has not given very many details concerning the House of Worship. He has written in tablets, however, that the building must be round, and be 9-sided. The Guardian feels that at this time all Bahá'í temples should have a dome."11.

The Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing and legislative body of the Bahá'í Faith, later specified that local cultural elements are to be part of a House of Worship's design.12.

Beyond the requirements of nine sides, a circular shape, and a dome, creativity and beauty are given free reign. In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi says that the temple designs should reflect "The delicate architectural beauty which the spirit of the Faith should engender."13. The role of beauty in the Bahá'í revelation is foundational. Many titles used in the Bahá'í

writings to refer to Bahá'u'lláh incorporate the concept of beauty. Some of the titles signify His relationship to God: "He Who is Thy Beauty," "the Manifestation of Thy Beauty," and "the Day-Star of Thy Beauty." Others have to do with His relationship to humanity: "the Ancient Beauty," "the Blessed Beauty," and "the Veilless Beauty."14. Such appellations suggest that beauty is a significant feature of the Bahá'í revelation.

Shoghi Effendi's choice for the design of the International Bahá'í Archives building at the Bahá'í World Center, in Haifa, Israel, provides a direct example of the importance of beauty. The design is modeled after the Parthenon and other classical Greek temples. By choosing this style of architecture, Shoghi Effendi set the style for all future buildings at the Bahá'í World Center. When asked why he had chosen the Greek style of architecture for the buildings of the world administrative center of the Bahá'í Faith, he replied that it was beautiful, it had withstood the test of time, and it had remained beautiful for more than two thousand years.

Many times he emphatically said, "I will always sacrifice utility to beauty."15.

The role of light in the design of Bahá'í Houses of Worship is also an important factor, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged the abundant use of light.16. Light makes beauty visible. Light banishes the darkness in which humanity has lived for too long. Light symbolizes knowledge, which dispels the darkness of ignorance.

Hence every Bahá'í House of Worship is filled with natural light. In many of the designs the light floods in through huge spaces on the ground floor or above; all have abundant windows. The Wilmette design admits light through numerous tail, arches windows at the clerestory and gallery levels as well as through the skin of arabesque tracery stop the dome. The Panama City design admits light thorough large, open spaces that are exposed directly to the air. The Kampala design incorporates a mix of colored and clear glass. The Bahapur design uses indirect light that is reflected down into the auditorium from the upward reaching petals of the lotus.

A Gradual Evolution

The first Bahá'í House of Worship and early drawings for two others were designed for Bahá'í communities living under restraints imposed by an antagonistic population in predominantly Muslim areas. The minarets

of these designs would be somewhat inconspicuous in the often hostile cultures in which they were to be
built. Of the early Western buildings, Mona Vale and Kampala are conservative in style, partially due to the
financial restrictions under which they were erected. The later, more contemporary buildings tend to reflect
more obviously the emerging synthesis of local cultural symbols with the concept of the oneness of
humanity. The most recent design – that of Bahapur – transforms a local symbol into a new universal one.
Since 1902 – for over half of the one hundred-and-fifty-year Bahá'í Era – the Bahá'í community has been
designing and building Houses of Worship on virtually every continent. As these buildings have been raised,
they have increasingly reflected the central principle of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation: the oneness of humanity.
This principle has come to be more clearly demonstrated with each new House of Worship as elements of
local indigenous culture are combined with a new vision of unity and the resulting synthesis is presented to
the world as a gift.
Examined chronologically, the designs of the Bahá'í Houses of Worship show an evolution in the degree
to which the synthesis of local symbols and universal concepts is achieved. The following table lists the
location of each House of Worship, the date it was designed, the date it was completed, and the architect's
name where known. The designs appear to fall into four categories: Islamic Restraint, western Synthesis,
Transitional, and Indigenous/Universal.
Although the categories may be somewhat arbitrary, they are useful for the purposes of discussion. The
designs for the earliest Houses of Worship were for ones located in areas where a large Bahá'í community
existed within an antagonistic Muslim population. Hence the designs needed to blend with the surrounding
architecture. These designs are labeled "Islamic restraint." In the Euro-American West, where greater
freedom of expression has been possible, the designs for Houses of Worship have varied while sharing a
common silhouette and proportional scheme. These designs can be called "Western Synthesis." When
Shoghi Effendi specified that each Bahá'í House of Worship must reflect the local culture surrounding it, the
next three designs began to demonstrate a perceptual shift toward a futuristic style what incorporates local
flavor. As a result, the silhouette changed. These designs show a transition

and are, therefore, referred to as
“Transitional.” With the most recent design (in Bahapur); the local element
is inseparable from the building
as a whole. It can be called “Indigenous/Universal.”

Period	Location	date of design	date of completion	architect
Islamic Restraint	‘Ishqábád (now Ashkhabad) Turkistan	1902	1921	Valkoff
	Marv, Turkistan	190?	Unknown	
	Tehran, Iran	1955		C.M. Remey
Western Synthesis	Wilmette, Illinois	1919	1953	Louis Bourgeois
	Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel	1952		C.M. Remey
	Mona Vale, Australia	1956	1961	C.M. Remey
	Kampala, Uganda	1956	1961	C.M. Remey
Transitional	Langenhain, Germany	1956	1964	Teoto Rocholl
	Panama City, Panama	1966	1972	Peter Tillotson
	Apia, Western Samoa	1978	1984	Husayn Amanat
Indigenous/ Universal	Bahapur, India	1977	1986	Fariburz Sahba

A Period of Islamic Restraint

The designs for the Houses of Worship in ‘Ishqábád and Tehran clearly
reflect the restraints of the primarily
Muslim society within which they were intended to serve. Although both designs
draw on the prevailing
local culture, each represents an attempt to demonstrate a physical form of
unity. Yet in several ways both
imitate the past. The designs blend somewhat with the architecture of the
dominant society. Both are either
built or intended to be built in areas where Muslim hostility towards
Bahá’ís ran high. This is most obvious
in the prominent entrance portals, which are reminiscent of the grand entrances
of Muslim sacred
architecture. The ‘Ishqábád and Tehran Houses of Worship are the only
designs that have a main entrance

façade with twin minarets flanking it.
A design was created for a House of Worship that was to be built in Marv, Turkestan, where a large Bahá'í population was located at the turn of the century, but it was never built, and no rendering of it is available.
The 'Ishqábád House of Worship. Construction of the first Bahá'í House of Worship began in 1902 in 'Ishqábád, Turkistan, in an area that eventually became part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The design of the 'Ishqábád House of Worship contains many elements of Iranian religious architecture, combining elements common to Iranian sacred tombs and mosques. The main entrance is centered in an arch flanked on both sides by lofty minarets. The entrance arch is similar to that in the main entrance of the central open courtyard of a Muslim mosque. The minarets that flank the entrance feature balconies and shelters for a muezzin, structures that have no practical use in a Bahá'í House of Worship, for there are no muezzins in the Bahá'í Faith.
The only outward features that distinguish the edifice as a Bahá'í structure are its nine sides, nine avenues, and nine ornamental plaques and exterior inscriptions. The nine plaques that encircle the pinnacle of the dome, each inscribed with the Greatest Name rendered in script, appear to be an after-thought, not a permanent part of the structure.17. Wires stream out from the pinnacle of the dome to hold the plaques in place. If they were to be removed, the overall design would not be changed significantly. The Arabic inscription above the entrance is from the Bahá'í sacred texts, but only a person who is familiar with Bahá'u'lláh's writings would identify it as a passage from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.
The design for the 'Ishqábád House of Worship represents a beginning effort to create new physical forms symbolizing a new revelation from God. it combines and unites Bahá'í elements with elements of Iranian sacred architecture. The borrowing is so strong, however, that an uninformed observer simply glancing at the design for this edifice is not likely to identify it as a Bahá'í House of Worship. Thus the similarity to Iranian sacred architecture appears more to be an attempt to blend with the surrounding architecture than a new vision of unity.
Nevertheless, the 'Ishqábád House of Worship is significant for a number of

reasons. Shoghi Effendi
indicates that its construction is among the major accomplishments of
‘Abdu’l-Bahá‘s ministry.18. it was the
first Bahá’í House of Worship ever to be built; the first to be confiscated
by an inimical regime; and, sadly,
the first to be destroyed. On October 5, 1948, an earthquake with a magnitude
of 7 and an intensity of 9 on
the MSK-64 international seismic scale damaged the building so severely that it
had to be razed (much of the
city was destroyed in twenty seconds). Perhaps most significant is its status
as part of the most complete
Mashriqu’l-Adhkár complex the Bahá’ís have yet constructed, for it was
surrounded by a number of the
ancillary facilities that comprise the institution of the
Mashriqu’l-Adhkár.19. These included a school, a
travelers’ hospice, and a library. A hospital was also planned.
The Tehran House of Worship. The Tehran House of Worship was the fourth
Bahá’í House of Worship to
be designed, but it has not yet been erected because of local disturbances and
because of the severe and
continuing persecution of the Iranian Bahá’í community. The architect’s
drawing, which does not include
any comments or notes, provides all of the information that is presently
available in English about the
design.20. The erection of this House of Worship has been a deferred goal for
the Bahá’ís since 1953. From
time to time small measures have been undertaken to prepare for the
building’s eventual construction, yet it
remains unbuilt due to the unfavorable conditions.
The front entrance of the Tehran design is distinguished from the eight other
sides of the building by its
twin minarets and three sets of doors. Every other side of the building appears
to have a columned bay.
Nine minarets anchor each corner of the structure. All of the minarets rise
only slightly above the exterior
walls, with those flanking the entrance being larger and taller than the others
– a common feature of
mosques. The crown of the dome resembles that of the Shrine of the Báb in
Haifa, Israel, even in such
details as the pinnacles and railings.21. The dome of the Tehran House of
Worship is unadorned but topped
with a large lantern, which, along with the columned bays, is its most unique
feature.

A Period of Western Synthesis

The next four Houses of Worship to be designed – those of Wilmette, Illinois;
Mount Carmel, Israel; Mona

Vale, Australia; and Kampala, Uganda – are similar in form, for they each include an auditorium, a clerestory level, and a dome. These three components echo some of the main components of Christian cathedrals, such as the ground floor, the clerestory, and the spire or dome. All four Houses of Worship were designed by Western architects, and all give evidence of aspirations to universality. The designs for the Wilmette and Mount Carmel Houses of Worship appear to merge elements or symbols from various cultures into one form.

This universalizing aim seems to take a different and perhaps more successful direction in later designs that facilitate the oneness of humanity in more concrete ways.

The Wilmette House of Worship. The designs for the Wilmette and Mount Carmel Houses of Worship reflect a universality that does not mirror a specific local culture but reaches back in time to blend details from around the world to create a new vision of the oneness of humankind. This is especially true of the Wilmette House of Worship. Louis Bourgeois, the architect, said of his model, "Into this new design, then, of the Temple is woven, in symbolic form, the great Bahá'í teaching of unity – the unity of all religions and of all mankind."22. Among the exterior decorative elements he incorporated are the circle, a universal symbol of eternity and the divine; the Zoroastrian swastika; the Christian cross; the Muslim star and crescent; and the five-pointed and nine-pointed stars symbolizing the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths.

When the design for the Wilmette House of Worship was created, American architecture had recently witnessed dramatic changes centered in Chicago with the work of Louis Sullivan, a pioneer in skyscraper construction. Though there is no evidence that Sullivan was involved in designing the Wilmette House of Worship, his influence can be seen in the flowing lines reflecting the simultaneous motion and permanence of nature. Recent technical advances in architecture and engineering had produced the first modern skyscrapers and buildings that could be more open to light than ever before. The Wilmette House of Worship is a direct heir to these new forms of architecture. The new use of steel as a supporting framework or structural skeleton eliminated the need for massive lower masonry walls to support the weight of tall buildings. Structurally, the Wilmette edifice resembles a skyscraper more than any traditional place of

worship in that it has a steel skeleton covered by a thin skin of precast concrete panels. This supporting steel framework allows for its bell-like silhouette and height.

The strength of steel also allowed for an abundant use of glass in the Wilmette House of Worship, permitting the inclusion of more window space than would otherwise have been possible. The many large windows and the use of electric lights bring full illumination into the building day and night. This is the "century of light," ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. American innovation and technology brought the use of light to fulfillment in the Wilmette House of Worship.

The 1890s inaugurated not only a new era in American architecture but a new era in world architecture as well. It was a time when many felt that the form of a building should follow its function. In its liberation from the past, architecture began to incorporate an eclectic mix of expressions to achieve unusual configurations and appearances. Before this time, Sullivan considered architectural art to have been incompletely developed because it had not harmoniously united emotion with intellect. He considered that "only the spiritual results of architecture are really important."23.

Thus it was intellectually easy and logical to incorporate various divergent religious symbols into the design of the Wilmette House of Worship for a new religion whose central principle is the oneness of humanity. The resulting synthesis, uniting various symbols in a nine-sided circular form, produced an overall effect that was unique in human history: a bell-like structure with the appearance of lace. The design represents a universal cultural appreciation, as it takes elements rooted in the world’s past and unifies them in a harmonious vision of the future.

The Mount Carmel House of Worship. The design for the House of Worship planned for Mount Carmel reflects a number of details that can be seen in the Shrine of the Báb. The similarity is most apparent in the arched windows and in the domes of the minarets.24. The arches and minarets show Eastern influence, while the dome resembles that of Saint Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. The architect, Charles Mason Remey, gave credit to Shoghi Effendi for the design explaining, "I must say that the architecture, the architectural motifs, are really his rather than mine."25. The resemblance between the design for the Mount Carmel House of Worship and the Shrine of the Báb was intentional.

The Mona Vale and Kampala Houses of Worship. The Houses of Worship built in Mona Vale, Australia,
and Kampala, Uganda, are the most conservative and Western in design. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi
Effendi in 1956 to a National Spiritual Assembly explains that Shoghi Effendi felt “that as this is the Mother
Temple of Europe, and an institution which will be supported by contributions from Bahá’ís all over the
world, it has a very great importance, and must under all circumstances be dignified, and not represent an
extremist point of view in architecture. No one knows how the styles of the present day may be judged two
or three generations from now, but the Bahá’ís cannot afford to build a second Temple if the one that they
build at the present time should seem too extreme and unsuitable at a future date.”26.
In many ways the designs for the Mona Vale and Kampala Houses of Worship could be considered twins.
They were built at about the same time for the same reason, as recompense to the Iranian Bahá’ís who were
suffering continued persecution in the 1950s. Both buildings were designed by Charles Mason Remey, with
the same considerations of design, style, size, and cost. Rúhíyyih Khánum, the wife of Shoghi Effendi and
an eminent Bahá’í in her own right, recounts that Shoghi Effendi “extracted from the architect he had at hand
the designs he felt were suitable for the Sydney and Kampala Houses of Worship. These were dignified,
pleasing in proportion, conservative in style and relatively modest in cost.”27. Both Houses of Worship were
erected under severe financial restraints.28.
Some decorations were omitted from the Mona Vale edifice to reduce the cost, which explains why the
gallery windows appear surprisingly plain and not like the model, in contrast to the latter’s tall clerestory
windows and the entrances.29. The ribs flowing down from the top of the dome and the pinnacles relieve the
angular features.
The simple, straightforward lines of the Kampala House of Worship reflect, in a way, the purity of the
hearts of the African believers. The structure’s lines and colors blend and merge with the African spirit and
countryside. Rúhíyyih Khánum, in a speech given at the dedication of the Kampala temple, said, “The
simplicity, dignity and beauty of the design, the soft green of dome and roofs, the sand tones of the outer
walls, the coarse texture of its finish – all blend in perfect accord with

the ironstone soil, the dry savanna
grasses and the tropical green of bush and tree.”30. Beyond its simplicity
and its multiple wide, embracing,
and protecting eaves, the Kampala design does not look African and would not be
out of place in any
Western city.

A Period of Transition

Of the designs discussed so far, the three Houses of Worship that were most
often seen throughout the 1960s
– those in Wilmette, Mona Vale, and Kampala – became somewhat of a
“standard” for Bahá’ís of that time.
The Wilmette, Mona Vale, and Kampala designs were comfortable, and, with
similar silhouettes, may have
seemed to have established a pattern for future Houses of Worship. When the
design for the next House of
Worship was unveiled, many Bahá’ís were unsure how to react to it. It
certainly did not look like the others;
but it was going to be theirs. Some continued to feel this ambivalence for the
next decade.31.
The Langenhain House of Worship. A dramatic break with the past occurred with
the selection of the
design for the House of Worship near Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The architect,
Teuto Rocholl, ignored
the “standard” silhouette of the previous Bahá’í temples and set the
dome directly on top of the auditorium,
eliminating the clerestory level found in other designs. Here was a new shape
for a Bahá’í House of
Worship.
The German House of Worship is the last design to be approved by Shoghi
Effendi, a point that raises a
few questions. Is it significant that this design is also the first done in a
very contemporary style? If Shoghi
Effendi, as head of the Bahá’í Faith, had not chosen a contemporary design,
might the Houses of Worship
designed after his passing have followed more conservative lines? The design
Shoghi Effendi originally
selected for Germany was much more conservative. Did his selection of a more
modern design make it
easier for the Bahá’í community to accept the very different designs that
followed it?
The design for the Langenhain House of Worship was the first of the
contemporary, nontraditional styles
that began to show evidence of the emerging synthesis of local culture and
universal faith. Shoghi Effendi
clearly emphasized the need for compatibility with local culture in his
communications with the National

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria, when, through a letter written on his behalf, he said that the architect should be instructed to "create something that will be desirable and appropriate for your area."32.

Why was the design for the German House of Worship so different from all the preceding ones? In her biography of Shoghi Effendi, Rúhíyyih Khánum tells how the selection of the design was made:

He himself [Shoghi Effendi] had chosen a design and sent it to the National Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria, but there was already so much strong church-aroused opposition to the erection of a Bahá'í House of Worship that the National Assembly had informed him they felt the conservative nature of the design he had chosen would, in a land favoring at the moment extremely modern-style buildings, complicate its erection, as a building permit might be refused on this pretext. Shoghi Effendi therefore permitted them to hold a competition and of the designs sent him he favored the one which was later built."33.

The Langenhain House of Worship is a strikingly modern building made of concrete and glass, a reflection of a contemporary society. The designs for the Houses of Worship later built in Panama and Samoa continue this modern style and silhouette, though each exhibits more progressively than the last the emerging synthesis in which elements of native culture are blended with a new vision of the future and the oneness of humanity.

The Panama City House of Worship. When the design for the Panama City, Panama, was selected, the Universal House of Justice stipulated that the design of a House of Worship must reflect the indigenous culture of the area in which it was to be built. The House of Justice informed the Bahá'ís of the world that it had asked the architect "to submit a final design, based on his original conception but embodying pre-Columbian motifs and making use of local materials."34. Thus the incorporation of cultural elements became a central concern. The wing-walls of the Panama House of Worship are covered with patterned brickwork inspired by Mesoamerican designs, and their points are stepped like the pyramids of the ancient local cultures.

The Apia House of Worship. The design of the House of Worship in Apia, Western

Samoa, features its
Polynesian heritage. The overall configuration of that edifice resembles a
“fale,” the style of grass-roofed
house built by the indigenous people of Samoa. Large spaces on the exterior,
above the entrances and
between the side walls, are to be filled in the future with panels of
Polynesian style artwork. The artwork is
not yet in place, as it is being hand-carved in the traditional way, a process
that will take years.
The Houses of Worship in Panama and Samoa are most significant for their
expression of the cultural
heritage of their native peoples. The native cultural-elements are not merely
reflected, but are thoroughly
integrated into the designs. The Panama design is definitely Mesoamerican,
while the Samoan design is
decidedly Polynesian. This kind of cultural identity is not as apparent in the
Mona Vale, Kampala, or
Langenhain designs. This synthesis is the essence of the Bahá’í principle
of unity in diversity, according to
which all peoples will be united while preserving the integrity and diversity
of each. Bahá’ís have brought
forth a visible expression of this spiritual reality in the designs for the
Houses of Worship in Panama and
Samoa. Both are obviously modern, for while they are firmly rooted in the local
culture, they are not ghosts
of the past. They are an intimation of what is to come.

A Blossoming Synthesis

The most recently constructed Bahá’í House of Worship is that of Bahapur
(the ancient name of the site),
near New Delhi, India. Its design offers concrete evidence of the blossoming
synthesis of cultural and
religious symbols thorough the power of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation. The
transformation appears complete.
The indigenous symbol – the lotus – is not just a decoration or a component
of the overall design. It is the
House of Worship. Who else have ever made a building in the form of a flower?
What is more deeply
rooted in the heritage of India than the lotus blossom?
The lotus blossom is richly symbolic in Indian religious tradition. Because the
flower rises out of mud
and slime toward fresh air, it symbolizes mediation – a bridge from the
earthly world to the heavenly one.
Hindus see the lotus, in its growth and unfolding as the vehicle for the
generation of Brahma, the agent of
creation; it epitomizes the coming forth of creation from the mind of Vishnu.
In both the Hindu and

Buddhist religions the lotus is thought to envelop the center of one's being; it is considered the home of the soul. In the Indo-Tibetan mandalas, the opening lotus indicates the evidence of divine powers. The qualities most closely linked with the lotus are prosperity and good fortune, which are conceptually linked to creation and the bounties of the created world. The lotus is also associated with birth, beauty, and sensuality and is considered sacred in China and Egypt.

Rúhíyyih Khánum, in a speech given before the laying of the cornerstone of the New Delhi House of Worship, explained the significance of the lotus as a symbol:

> the lotus, par excellence, is a symbol of the Manifestation of God. The lotus is probably the most perfect flower in the world. It is symmetrical, it is exquisitely beautiful. And how does it grow? It grows in a swamp. It comes out of mud and raises its head from the slime absolutely clean and perfect.
>
> Now this is what the Manifestation of God of God is in the world. He comes out of the slime of this planet. He comes from the worst place on the planet. He appears among the worst people on the planet, so that no one can say that we made Him. They say that only God can bring forth such a being from such an environment.35.

In this flower of India – the "Lotus of Bahapur," as it has come to be known – an important element of the ancient religious heritage of the peoples of India is completely merged with the fundamental Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humanity. The lotus cannot be removed from the design of the building without eliminating the entire structure. The ancient symbol has become a modern expression that speaks to the entire world; an indigenous symbol has become a universal one. For many people around the world the ancient lotus of India is now inseparably associated with a new universal faith. At the same time, the Bahapur House of Worship is inextricably associated with the peoples of India. When the indigenous becomes indistinguishable from the universal, the oneness of humanity has begun. The day of unity is here.

Conclusion

The revelation of Bahá'u'lláh transforms human society at all levels and in all forms. The change first becomes evident in the lives of individuals, then in their communities, and

finally in the structures those communities erect. Eventually such changes will be felt in greater and greater measure in society as a whole.

In less than one hundred years the architectural styles of Bahá'í Houses of Worship have progressed from an imitation of the past, to a blending of various indigenous cultural elements, to a style that completely transforms an indigenous symbol into a universal one. The uniting of humankind in concrete symbols as well as in the hearts of more and more people is now fully under way.

As the Bahá'í community begins to reflect a new spiritual and cultural synthesis, so will the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and its central edifice, the Bahá'í House of Worship. As time goes on, and the Bahá'í community increases in strength and responsibility, further physical evidence of beauty and unity will increasingly transform the human environment. The designs for Bahá'í Houses of Worship can lead the way.

The spiritual transformation of the peoples of the world will change a divisive and hostile planet into one in which unity in diversity is the prevailing norm. Individual cultures will be neither lost nor buried under some global cultural, spiritual, economic, or political tyranny but will be reinvigorated and will rise to new heights of harmony and beauty. The heritage of native peoples will not be despised, ignored or destroyed, as has happened all too often in history, but will be elevated and transformed into a permanent, integral part of the future. Houses "as perfect as is possible in the world of being" will be raised in all corners of the globe.

Notes:

1. Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: the Most Holy Book, ps ed (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993) ¶31.
2. Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 1st ps ed, (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983) 87-88.
3. Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria (Langenhain, West Germany: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany, 1982) 246.
4. See The Kitáb-i-Aqdas 253.
5. See Horace Holley, "Foreword," in "The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár," in The Bahá'í World (Formerly: Bahá'í Year Book): A Biennial International Record, Volume II, 1926-1928, comp.

National Spiritual Assembly of
the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í
Publishing Committee, 1928) 114, and
Shoghi Effendi, "The Spiritual Significance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár,"
in The Bahá'í World (Formerly:
Bahá'í Year Book): A Biennial International Record, Volume III, 1928-1930,
comp. National Spiritual
Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York:
Bahá'í Publishing Committee) 161,
163.
6. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, comp.
Research Department of the
Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá'í World Center and
Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá'í
World Center, 1978) 99-100.
7. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in The Kitáb-i-Aqdas n53; 'Abdu'l-Bahá,
quoted in "The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár:
'The Dawning Place of God's Praise,'" in Bahá'í Year Book, Volume
One, 1925-1926, comp. National
Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New
York: Bahá'í Publishing
Committee, 1926) 61.
8. See on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 25 June 1954, In Light of
Divine Guidance: Messages 216.
9. See on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, undated letter, in Light of Divine
Guidance: Messages 247.
10. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 20 April 1955, in Light of Divine
Guidance: Messages 232.
11. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, undated letter, in Light of Divine Guidance:
Messages 247.
12. See "News from the World Centre," in Bahá'í News, no 431(February
1967): 3.
13. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 10 November 1955, in Light of
Divine Guidance: Messages
245-46.
14. Bahá'u'lláh, The Desire of the World: Materials for the contemplation
of God and His Manifestations
for this Day, comp. Rúhíyyih Rabbani (Oxford: George Ronald, 1982) 177.
15. See Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, "The Completion of the
International Archives," in The Bahá'í
World: An International Record, Volume XIII, 1954-1963, comp. the Universal
House of Justice (Haifa: The
Universal House of Justice, 1970) 424; Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Bahá'í
World, Vol. XIII 422.
16. H.M. Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of
Bahá'u'lláh (London: George Ronald,
1971) 157.

17. The Greatest Name refers to the name Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God) and its derivatives, such as Alláh-u-Abhá (God is Most Glorious), Bahá (glory, splendor, or light) and Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá (O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!).
18. Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.; Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974) 296, 314.
19. For fuller descriptions and accounts of the 'Ishqábád House of Worship, see "The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár " in Bahá'í World, Vol. II 121-22; "The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of 'Ishqábád," in Bahá'í World, Vol. III 168-69; "The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár ," in The Bahá'í World: An International Record, Volume XIV, 1963-1968, comp. the Universal House of Justice, 1974) 479-80; Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá 109-10; and A.A. Lee, "The Rise of the Bahá'í Community of 'Ishqábád," in Bahá'í Studies 5 (January 1979): 1-13.
20. The architect's drawing of the Bahá'í House of Worship for Tehran, Iran, can be found in Bahá'í World, Vol. XIV 495. For the announcement of the selection of the design for the Tehran House of Worship, see Shoghi Effendi's cable dated 20 March 1955, in Bahá'í News, no. 290 (April 1955): 1.
21. Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad (1819-50), titled the Báb, or Gate, was the Prophet-Herald of Bahá'u'lláh. The Báb's mortal remains are interred on the slopes of Mount Carmel within a mausoleum that was built by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and later enclosed by a superstructure built by Shoghi Effendi.
22. Louis J. Bourgeois, "The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár : Visible Embodiment of the Universality of Bahá'u'lláh," in The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume IV, 1930-1932, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1933) 206.
23. Louis Sullivan, quoted in Hugh D. Duncan, Culture and Democracy (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press, 1965) 242, 235.
24. for further details about the House of Worship planned for Mount Carmel, see "Events connected with the Holy Land and the Growth of the International Center" and Charles Mason Remey, "Unveiling the Model of the Temple to be Constructed on Mount Carmel," in The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume XII, 1950-1954, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States (Wilmette,

Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956) 37, 548.
25. Charles Mason Remey, "Unveiling the Model of the Temple to be Constructed on Mount Carmel," in
Bahá'í World, Vol. XII 550.
26. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 21 June 1956, in Light of Divine Guidance: Messages 263.
27. Rúhíyyih Khánum, The Priceless Pearl (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969) 434, 131.
28. See "The Mother Temple of Africa," in Bahá'í World, Vol. XIII 708-09, and "The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of
the Antipodes," in Bahá'í World, Vol. XIII 721, 723.
29. To compare the model and the completed House of Worship, see Bahá'í News, no. 324 (February 1958):
5; see also Bahá'í World, Vol. XIV 478.
30. Rúhíyyih Khánum, "Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum Dedicates Mother Temple of
Africa," in Bahá'í World, Vol. XIII 713.
31. Comments heard by the author in the early 1970s from older Bahá'ís who had been active members of
the Bahá'í community since the 1950s.
32. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 10 February 1955, in Light of Divine Guidance: Messages 228.
33. Rabbaní, Priceless Pearl 433.
34. "News from the World Centre," in Bahá'í News, no. 431 (February 1967): 3.
35. Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, "A Very Special Gift," in
Bahá'í News, no. 564 (March 1978): 6.

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