



through all the various aspects of your own life and the life of the Bahá'í community (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pages 95-6). Various otherwise fragmentary bits of 'being Bahá'í' cohere together when related to one another as differing manifestations of the names of God, within the architecture of the 'kingdom of names', and this way of thinking opens up a metaphorical language of realities, levels and manifestations - and this is the kind of language we need to answer a simple question like "What is intended by Mashriqu'al Adkar?"

Terry already posted part of a most illuminating passage from `Abdu'l-Bahá:

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 p 678)

Your radiant heart is, in the first place, the Mashriq. Are the lights shining? are the doors open? is the voice of supplication continually rising? (which points towards a whole chapter on the remembrance of God as a key spiritual idea, on dhikr and other meditative and liturgical forms to express the remembrance of God, the importance of chanting the Allah'u'Abbas and so on. But I'll skip that chapter for now, it is too important for a note: "only in the remembrance of God can the heart find rest"). THEN, when the hearts are radiant and pure, and the voice of supplication is continually rising, "They will certainly exert the utmost endeavor and energy in the building of the Mashrak-el-Azcar; THUS MAY THE OUTWARD EXPRESS THE INWARD". Once there is an inward reality it naturally seeks its expression (manifestation is a universal law, not an exception-clause in the constitution of history). In the same way, when the friends understand the nature of the House of Justice and the role it should therefore play in human society, there will be a natural movement towards 'building' the House of Justice - both strengthening the institution and finding a suitable physical expression for it. So once the House of Worship exists as an inward reality, then its outward expression begins to flower, and the outward expression reinforces the inward.

So what are the outward expressions? Some which suggest themselves are the spiritual meetings, the mashriq-centred community, the dependencies of the Mashriq, and the sacred space of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar itself. These forms of the Mashriq may well begin to evolve in this sequence, since the Mashriq-centred community cannot logically begin to grow without the

spiritual meetings, and the dependencies of the Mashriq cannot begin to grow until the centre of gravity - or levity - in the community has shifted from the Feast and House of Justice to the Mashriq. But as we will see, the sacred space begins to flower at the level of the individual radiant heart, and is not complete until the realities of both the Mashriq and its dependencies are manifest.

Spiritual meetings:

Mashriqu'l-Adhkar means 'rising place of remembrance', where 'rising place' has connotations of the East and thus of the dawn, and 'remembrance' connotes dhikr and more broadly acts of worship which change our consciousness and being. So the same word is applied appropriately to the radiant heart, the physical building, and meetings for worship, particularly at dawn. Many western communities try in a disultory manner to organize dawn prayers, but few seem able to carry it through consistently. From the experience in our own community (South Limburg) it appears that it is difficult to sustain the dawn prayers as simply one activity among all those worthy activities that go with 'being Bahá'í', and that it becomes rather easier when they are understood as one form of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and thus as a response to the Aqdas' command: "Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions" and an integral part - in fact, the central part - of the whole structure of the community. Various kinds of Mashriq meeting are possible: community meetings for prayers and meditation, more experimental liturgies with chanting and the recitation of dhikr, 'firesides' which consist primarily of meditation and chanting and include the answering of questions as these arise, dawn prayers and after-work moments of silence, short lunchtime meetings to say the shorter obligatory prayer and share a smile and some fellowship, longer evening gatherings for the heavy meditation and the long obligatory prayer (see Jackson's book, and also a tablet of Abdu'l-Bahá to the Spiritual Assembly of Bushruih in Ganjinih Hudud va Ahkam p. 230), the meetings of orders of Bahá'í dervishes using particular devotional arts (Memorials of the Faithful p. 38), or meetings for particular liturgical forms (Gregorian morningsong, Vespers with 3-part harmony, Arabic chanting, African drumming). Each of these can be called a 'rising place' for praise and thus a Mashriqul-Adhkar, though perhaps the daily morning prayers have a particular priority in relation to the way in which the inspiration derived in the Mashriq is expressed in action during the day (God Passes By, pp. 339-340) and because they are specifically endorsed by Bahá'u'lláh in the Aqdas para 11 5:

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. From the above it follows that there can and

eventually should be multiple Mashriq meetings in one Bahá'í community. It is of the essence of the functioning of a House of Justice that there should be one and only one House of Justice in each community, but this is not so for the Mashriq, either as a meeting or as a building (Tablet from Abdu'l-Bahá to Mirza Ali-Asghar Faridi-yi Usku'i, quoted by Ishraq-Khavari in *Ganjinih Hudud va Ahkam* [p 230 +?]).

A Mashriq meeting, if it is held frequently and consistently, will build up a mashriq community consisting of the people who regularly worship together. This community of hearts bound in worship could be considered another form of the mashriq: "Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions. Make them as perfect as is possible..." Each mashriq community is open to all, including non-Bahá'ís and people without voting rights. They are the home for all mankind, not just for the Bahá'ís: "Temples are symbols of the reality and divinity of God - the collective center of mankind. Consider how within a temple every race and people is seen and represented. (PUP 163) If as I have said western societies are generally characterized by spiritual malnourishment, then one might expect that offering an open mashriq community in a form accessible to the people of a neighbourhood (such as Sunday morning prayers) might be an appropriate form of social & economic development. In Europe, the young people today are the generation whose grandparents turned their backs on the church, so those who want to learn to pray have to learn it, and this itself is most important service: What "oppression" is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it? (Kitab-i-Iqan p 31)

Western communities who have begun this form of the Mashriq have reported positive results in terms of gradually attracting a circle of people who will join the Bahá'ís in worship (in addition to more immediate results in revitalizing their own communities and Local Spiritual Assemblies and Feasts). I have not heard of a community which began to build the Mashriq as an institution and did not note any effects in attracting others to join them. We have also found that meditation evenings, devoted to prayers, meditations, and reading the mystic writings and poetry of Bahá'u'lláh are both more effective and more sustainable than firesides on the old model. Spiritual gatherings such as Sunday morning worship and mystic firesides may attract a different group of people (Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís) than those who come to public meetings and firesides. One community reported that the mashriq community at its Sunday morning prayers had a higher proportion of non-European and working-class people, while the firesides attracted largely European and middle-class people (incidentally, I would like to collect your experiences, good or bad, and what you have learned from them). In this particular community that may reflect a preponderance of people of Catholic background among the non-European and working class

population, as compared to a broadly Protestant culture and ethic in the middle-class and white population. How this will work out will depend on the particular forms of Mashriq meeting which develop and what the needs are in the neighbourhood in which they take place. `Abdu'l-Bahá has linked the building of the Mashriq to entry by troops in America:

... 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 page 681)

But in my observation of western communities, when a community redirects its attention to 'building the mashriq' the largest effect is not attracting very large numbers of people but retaining people - both new declarants and existing believers. There are various ways of obtaining groups of declarations, which may even be more effective than putting the emphasis on the Mashriq. What is unique about the Mashriq meetings is that they are a way of forming and sustaining a sense of community:

Although to outward seeming the Mashriq'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 Mashriq'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, pp. 95-6)

Thus the Mashriq structure strengthens the bonds of unity from heart to heart, with obvious effects on the functioning of the Feast and administrative organs and on the relationship between individual members of the community and the administrative personnel (who may well find themselves part of the same mashriq community, perhaps saying their obligatory prayers together). It also helps to retain people, and people of more different types, by providing another space to 'be' in the community. Not everyone is madly keen on Feast consultations and serving on the Assembly or its committees, or for that matter on the formulation of plans and the execution of teaching campaigns or organization of public meetings. Too many people enter the Faith, look around, and finding no place in the community which reflects their own particular spiritual calling, they 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 Mashriq to relate to the teaching work not only as a magnet in its own right but also as a sort of waiting-room. The meetings for worship (and sacred space where this is possible) are symbolized by a building open on all sides, which Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, and the socially marginalized and wounded of every type, can enter to become part of the worshipping community. 'Membership' here 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. From the Mashriq are doors leading outward in various directions. One leads to the Bahá'í administrative order, and there's a lot of good to be done through that archway. Formal declaration of belief is a pre-requisite, because systems such as majority voting don't work without clearly defined memberships. Other doors lead to humanitarian and spiritual activities and to the 'dependencies' - eg care for the aged, medical care, education etc - which again are in the first place an individual attitude of concern, in the second place community activities and ultimately also an institutional expression. Some people may be content to spend all their time 'in' the House of Worship, most will be driven to express the God-centred consciousness in the activities going on through one or more of those doors.

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