

[AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM PERSIAN]

18 December 2014

To the Bahá'ís in Iran

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We hope that by now you have had occasion to study the message we addressed to the Bahá'ís of the World on 1 August 2014, in which the progress of the projects to establish Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs in eight locations throughout the world is described. In every case, these dawning places of His remembrance represent the rising influence of the Faith of God in society. The Bahá'ís of Iran are of course fully conversant with the concept of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. From the earliest days following the revelation of this law, the friends in the Cradle of the Faith became aware of its significance and committed to its realization within the limited means that their circumstances allowed them. In time, not only did they become the principal force for the construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in 'Ishqábád, but within Iran too the practice of regular dawn prayers took root and inspired service to humankind, with the vision that the seed they were planting would in time flower into tangible reality, yielding its fruit not only in the construction of these centres of worship, but in the creation of dependencies for humanitarian service which that worship would inspire.

And so it was that, under the guiding hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a pattern of communal worship—the unity it engenders and the desire to be of service that it inspires—became an integral part of many a local Bahá'í community in Iran. In this regard, the Master's vision provided for a variety of settings and circumstances in which the concept of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár could, in its embryonic form, be expressed. Consider His words in this regard:

As to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, it is of the utmost importance.... It may assume any form, for even if it be an underground pit, that pit shall become a sheltering paradise, an exalted bower, and a garden of delight. It shall become a centre wherein the spirits are gladdened and the hearts attracted to the Abhá Kingdom.

Indeed, as your own experience demonstrates, a broad range of possibilities for the expression of this law and its organic unfoldment in a particular locality can be imagined.

In the Bahá'í writings, the term “Mashriqu'l-Adhkár” has variously been used to designate the gathering of the believers for prayers at dawn; a structure where the divine verses are recited; the entire institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and its dependencies; and the central edifice itself, often also referred to as a “Temple” or a “House of Worship”. All these can be regarded as aspects of the gradual implementation of the law set out for humankind by Bahá'u'lláh in His Most Holy Book.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a unique concept in the annals of religion and symbolizes the teachings of the new Day of God. A collective centre of society to promote cordial affection, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár stands as a universal place of worship open to all the inhabitants of a locality irrespective of their religious affiliation, background, ethnicity, or gender and a haven for the deepest contemplation on spiritual reality and foundational questions of life, including individual and collective responsibility for the betterment of society. Men and women, children and youth, are held in its embrace as equals. This singular and integral universality is captured in the very structure of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, whose design as a nine-sided edifice conveys a sense of completeness and perfection symbolized by that number.

As the place from which spiritual forces are to radiate, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the focal point for dependencies to be raised up for the well-being of humanity and is the expression of a common will and eagerness to serve. These dependencies—centres of education and scientific learning as well as cultural and humanitarian endeavour—embody the ideals of social and spiritual progress to be achieved through the application of knowledge, and demonstrate how, when religion and science are in harmony, they elevate the station of the human being and lead to the flourishing of civilization. As your lives amply demonstrate, worship, though essential to the inner life of the human being and vital to spiritual development, must also lead to deeds that give outward expression to that inner transformation. This concept of worship—inseparable from service—is promulgated by the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. In this connection Shoghi Effendi states:

Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits centring around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervour, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshiper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote.

The Twin Luminaries of this resplendent age have taught us this: Prayer is the essential spiritual conversation of the soul with its Maker, direct and without intermediation. It is the spiritual food that sustains the life of the spirit. Like the morning's dew, it brings freshness to the heart and cleanses it, purifying it from attachments of the insistent self. It is a fire that burns away the veils and a light that leads to the ocean of reunion with the Almighty. On its wings does the soul soar in the heavens of God and draw closer to the divine reality. Upon its quality depend the development of the limitless capacities of the soul and the attraction of the bounties of God, but the prolongation of prayer is not desirable. The powers latent in prayer are manifested when it is motivated by the love of God, beyond any fear or favour, and free from ostentation and superstition. It is to be expressed with a sincere and pure heart conducive to contemplation and meditation so that the rational faculty can be illumined by its effects. Such prayer will transcend the limitation of words and go well beyond mere sounds. The sweetness of its melodies must gladden and uplift the heart and reinforce the penetrating power of the Word, transmuting earthly inclinations into heavenly attributes and inspiring selfless service to humankind.

Little wonder, then, that your community, whose members have from infancy been reared with the constant supplication to have “pure hearts like unto a pearl”, go through life and endure every manner of hardship but will not let their hearts be defiled with hatred, rancour, or vengeance lest that gleaming pearl lose its lustre. Ultimately, prayers must be lived in purposeful lives.

We have called upon the Bahá'ís to see in their endeavours of community building the creation of a new pattern of how society can be. Taken in its entirety, that pattern fosters capacity for service—for the education of young generations, for the empowerment of the youth, for the spiritual education of children, for the enhancement of the capacity to draw upon the influence of the Word of God in accompanying others into the field of service, and for the social and economic advancement of a people in the light of the divine teachings for the age. Essential to that pattern is the devotional meeting—a communal aspect of the godly life and a dimension of the concept of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár—which represents a marvellous opportunity for your community not only to worship the Almighty and seek His benedictions in your own lives, but to extend to your fellow citizens the spiritual energies of prayer, to restore for them the purity of worship, to kindle in their hearts faith in the confirmations of God, and to strengthen in them, no less than in yourselves, eagerness to serve the nation and humanity and to show constructive resilience in the path of justice.

Beloved friends: Gatherings dedicated to prayer throughout your blessed land, in every neighbourhood, town, village, and hamlet, and the increasing access that your compatriots are gaining to Bahá'í prayers are enabling your community to shine the light of unity in the assemblage of humanity, lending a share to the endeavours of your fellow believers throughout the world. Plant, then, the seeds of future Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs for the benefit of all, and ignite countless beacons of light against the gloom of hatred and inequity.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]