



## TERRACES OF THE SHRINE OF THE BÁB

The official opening of the nineteen magnificent terraced gardens that stretch from the base to the crest of Mount Carmel, in Haifa, Israel, will take place on the evening of 22 May 2001—the 158th anniversary of the declaration by the Báb of His mission. The Báb, the first of the two Founders of the Bahá'í Faith, is buried in the golden-domed Shrine located at the Terraces' heart on “the mountain of the Lord.”

For Bahá'ís worldwide, this event marks a culminating point in a process of development at their World Centre that began more than a century ago. In 1891, during the Ottoman regime, Bahá'u'lláh pointed out to His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá the location of the permanent resting-place for the remains of the Báb, His martyred Forerunner. 'Abdu'l-Bahá erected a modest mausoleum and interred the remains of the Báb there in 1909, under extremely difficult circumstances.

The subsequent growth and development of the surrounding gardens mirrored the evolution and expansion of the Bahá'í community. Planning was systematic, phased and strategic. As the gardens were tended and nurtured, so the global community emerged under the guiding hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's appointed successor, Shoghi Effendi. The golden-domed superstructure, which makes the Shrine Haifa's best-known landmark, was completed in 1953 under his supervision. Its completion gave spiritual impetus to the Bahá'í community to plant the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in new lands and territories, branching out from its firmly rooted center.

Nine rudimentary terraces below the Shrine were constructed in the 1930s, and throughout the years other parcels of land were purchased until all the necessary property had been acquired. Extending beyond the immediate area of the Shrine, the gardens transformed the barren mountain slope into a natural sanctuary in the middle of the growing city of Haifa. Like thousands of Bahá'í communities in cities, towns, and villages around the world, the gardens offer a vision of confidence in the future.

The decision in 1987 to complete the gardens and administrative buildings galvanized the millions of Bahá'ís, by then established in more than 150 countries. In 1990, the latest phase of development commenced, with the construction of the nineteen terraces designed by Canadian architect Fariborz Sahba, who has also served as project manager for the entire complex.

In the face of renewed persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran during this period, the worldwide community gathered the necessary financial and human resources, and the mountain was reshaped. The Terraces now stretch a kilometer up the mountain, reaching a height of 225 meters (738 feet), and their landscape spans the mountain from 60 meters (197 feet) to 400 meters (1,312 feet). In order to create a continuous pedestrian pathway, two bridges have been constructed over cross streets.

The terraced gardens magnify the spiritual significance of the Shrine of the Báb, Who foretold the coming of Bahá'u'lláh and Whose life and death marked the inception of the modern age. “The Terraces have been designed to create an appropriate setting and approach for the Shrine of the Báb,” explains Mr. Sahba. “The Shrine is envisaged as a precious gem, for which the Terraces provide the setting, like a golden ring for a precious diamond.”

Designed as nine concentric circles, the Terraces appear to radiate outwards from the Shrine, and all of their lines and curves direct attention towards the building at their heart. Harmony, symmetry, and order are important aesthetic principles from which the gardens take their form, as an expression of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words: “It is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony, and perfection.”

To achieve symmetry, a large section of the mountain was literally moved, as thousands of cubic meters of rock were excavated and relocated to even out the contours of its face. More than 10,000 cubic meters of earth were removed from the eleventh and twelfth terraces alone. At the foot of the Terraces, as part of the restoration of the German Templar Colony, the municipality moved a section of Ben Gurion Avenue 1.86 meters and brought it into alignment with the Terraces’ central stairs.

Perhaps the most difficult and hazardous phase of the work on the Terraces was the lowering of Hatzionut Avenue—one of Haifa’s busiest thoroughfares—to accommodate a broad pedestrian bridge over the street. The bridge itself is a garden and its construction enables visitors to walk the entire length of the gardens without interruption. Extraordinarily, it was accomplished with no disruption of traffic flow. At one end, a 2,000-square-meter building, including a visitors’ center, was built into the mountain below terrace-level.

Throughout the length of the Terraces, a sense of continuity is maintained and the noise of the city is masked by the gentle sound of water, which flows in runnels down the sides of the staircases and through a series of fountains. The Sajur and Jatt stone that was used on the Terraces was chosen to reflect the ancient architectural heritage of the Holy Land. It was quarried in Israel and prepared in Nazareth. Three generations of the family that owns the factory that prepared the Sajur stone have worked on Bahá’í projects, since the time the Shrine was originally built. The balustrades and some of the fountains were carved in Italy. Unique hand-carved motifs and different designs of the paving stones used in the central area of each terrace add distinctiveness in the midst of a harmonious overall design. The entrance plaza at Ben Gurion Avenue is also distinctive, with its marble cascade, runnels, and a unique star-shaped fountain at the heart of sixteen diamond-shaped silent, crystalline pools of water that create two levels of glassy surfaces.

The Terraces are not only rich in beauty; they are rich in symbolism. The nineteen Terraces represent the Báb and His first eighteen followers. The extensive lighting of the Terraces and of the Shrine itself contrasts dramatically with the conditions in which the Báb was imprisoned in a remote fortress in northern Iran, where He was denied even a single candle by which to see at night. Even some of the flora on the Terraces is deeply symbolic to Bahá’ís. On the ninth terrace, just below the Shrine, stand two young orange trees that were propagated from seeds taken from an orange tree in the courtyard of the Báb’s house in Shiraz, Iran, before it was destroyed by Islamic revolutionary authorities in that country.

While designing gardens to enhance the beauty of the Shrine, convey some of the richness of its history, and symbolize its essential spiritual truths, the architect also paid close attention to the ecology of the area.

Each terrace has three garden zones. The central area is formal in layout, with lawns of Zoysia grass, annual flowerbeds, santolina and duranta hedges, bushes, and carefully pruned trees.

The side zone is more informal, with flowering trees and perennial bushes characteristic of the Middle East, including drought-tolerant, low-maintenance succulents, oleanders, rosemary, lantana, olive, jacaranda, coral, and plumeria. Wildflowers and bulbs blossom in profusion from December to April, while flowering trees and shrubs assume prominence during the spring and summer.

The third zone has been left free to develop into natural forests that serve as wildlife corridors.

Native animals such as mongooses, hedgehogs, land tortoises, and reptiles have returned to the wildlife corridors created on the border of the Terraces. Birds native to the area, including blue kingfishers, ravens, Palestinian sunbirds, finches, quail, Hoopoe birds, hawks, owls, doves, bulbuls, and jays, have also found a home there. Beneficial birds and insects such as ladybugs, praying mantises, and spiders, which eat other insects, have been introduced to provide natural pest control and reduce the use of pesticides.

The gardens use a combination of ancient and modern gardening practices, from mulching and composting to computerized irrigation systems. The 'Terraces' irrigation system, which places high priority on water conservation, is an example of this blend of old and new. Sprinklers, sprayers, and drippers cater to the water requirements of various plants, and water in the fountains is recycled, while practices such as mulching, drought pruning in early summer, and under-lawn drip irrigation allow for minimal evaporation. On the steeper slopes, which range from 30 to 60 degrees, drought-resistant groundcovers such as ivy, juniper, and lippia minimize erosion during the rains and preserve slope geometry with minimal maintenance.

The transformation of Mount Carmel marks the culminating point of its long history, during which it has witnessed the presence of prophets and those expecting the return of prophets. The German Templar Colony at the foot of the mountain, dating from the nineteenth century, is evidence of one such group. The first phase of the restoration and development of the Colony, from Haifa's port to the first terrace's entrance plaza, has been finished by the Municipality of Haifa. Together these projects create one of the longest and most attractive urban developments in the Mediterranean region. With their completion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision that "A person standing on the summit of Mount Carmel...will look upon the most sublime and majestic spectacle of the whole world" will be realized.

While the gardens of the Bahá'í World Centre are of great religious significance to Bahá'ís, it is likely that they will increasingly become a focus of attention for other visitors to Israel. With the opening of the Terraces, the flow of such visitors is expected to increase substantially and to contribute to the local economy by increasing the demand for services in the tourism and retail sectors. The golden-domed Shrine in Haifa is now the sixth or seventh most visited spot in Israel, and it is certain to become an even more popular destination for visitors and pilgrims of all faiths.

The Faith's administrative buildings, also just completed, harmonize rational and spiritual purposes and aesthetics. The buildings were designed by Canadian architect Hossein Amanat. Their presence on the mountainside testifies to the permanence of the Bahá'í World Centre and the Faith's conviction in the renewal of civilization. Together with the Terraces, they signal the full establishment of this newest of the world's religious centers.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

- 19 Terraces stretch 1 km up Mount Carmel, with a maximum span of 400 m (1,312 feet).
- A section of Ben Gurion Avenue was moved by the Municipality of Haifa by 1.86 m to align with the Terraces.

### **Bridges to Unity**

- Hatzionut Avenue was lowered by 5 m in some locations for the construction of a pedestrian bridge over the street.
- 150 tons of steel reinforcement and 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> of concrete were used in the bridge's construction.
- The bridge over Abbas Street was demolished in one night and a new bridge structure was put in its place.
- Two pedestrian tunnels were constructed under Hatzionut Avenue and Yefe Nof Street to provide a safe crossing for the public.

## Flora and Fauna

- The central zone of each terrace has been planted with Zoysia grass, annual flowerbeds, santolina and duranta hedges, bushes, and pruned trees.
- The side zone of each terrace features drought-tolerant, low-maintenance succulents, oleanders, rosemary, lantana, olive, jacaranda, coral, and plumeria.
- The third zone has been left as natural forest that serves as wildlife corridors.
- Drought-resistant groundcovers such as ivy, juniper, and lippia have been used on steeper slopes.
- Birds such as blue kingfishers, ravens, Palestinian sunbirds, finches, quail, Hoopoe birds, hawks, owls, doves, bulbuls, and jays; insects such as ladybugs, praying mantises, and spiders; and animals such as mongooses, hedgehogs, land tortoises, and reptiles are all found on the Terraces.

## Tending the Garden

- Some 70 local workers from all cultures and religions and 30 Bahá'í volunteers from about 12 countries compose the gardening staff at the Bahá'í World Centre.
- The gardens use a blend of ancient and modern gardening practices, from mulching and composting to computerized irrigation systems.
- Natural pest control is promoted through the introduction of beneficial birds and insects.

## Water

- Sprinklers, sprayers, and drippers cater to water requirement of different plants.
- Water in the fountains is recycled.
- Kilometers of pipes have been laid for drainage of rainwater and prevention of waterlogging.
- Fully automated, pressure reduced “back-flow preventer” devices in all irrigation supply lines allow for use of ‘grey water’ (effluent water recycled for irrigation purposes) and can inject fertilizer through the irrigation system.
- Restricted water use practices include mulching, drought pruning in early summer, and under-lawn drip irrigation for minimal evaporation.