

The significance of the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb

How does one tell the story of the Terraces on Mount Carmel? It is a complex story, rooted in more than 150 years of turbulent history, resonating with prophetic traditions dating back thousands of years, and intimately associated with the fulfilment of God's promise for this age and the transformative forces at work in the world today. Here is one version of the storyline, told in contemporary language:

In Persia, in the middle years of the nineteenth century, the first of the two Founders of the Bahá'í Faith, a young man, known to His followers as the Báb ("the Gate"), declared that the long-promised age had dawned that will witness the unification of humankind. Although the Báb died in 1850, at the hands of Shi'ih fanatics who opposed His message, He left His followers with the emphatic promise of the imminent appearance of One Who would fulfil the work He had begun.

The second prophetic Figure, Bahá'u'lláh, inaugurated this mission in 1863. Throughout a lifetime of imprisonment, exile and privation, Bahá'u'lláh succeeded in bringing into existence a community dedicated to belief in the oneness of God, the oneness of all the great religions and the oneness of the human family. Today, this community embraces some five million members resident in every part of the world and representing the entire racial, religious and national diversity of the human race.

The community's international center is the broad expanse of properties surrounding the Bay of Haifa, where Bahá'u'lláh spent the closing years of His ministry. Rising above this complex of Shrines, administrative buildings and historical restorations is Mount Carmel, the "Vineyard of the Lord".

Through the efforts of Bahá'ís of every land, this historic mountain, sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, as well as Bahá'ís, has been transformed into a paradise of gardens, terraces, fountains and running streams – a metaphor of Bahá'u'lláh's message of unity in diversity.

On 22 May 2001, as the twentieth century draws to an end, Bahá'ís from around the planet, a cross-section of the earth's diverse peoples, will gather for the official opening of the project they have collectively achieved. The inauguration will pay tribute to the martyred Báb, whose golden-domed Shrine rises above the gardens, at the heart of the mountain.

For all who long to believe that our planet will eventually know lasting peace, the existence of the Bahá'í community provides convincing evidence that the peoples of the world, in all their infinite variety, can learn to live and work as one family, in one global homeland.

We are witnessing a miracle. When Bahá'u'lláh stood on the mountain, it was barren, unappealing and without significance. The revelation of the Tablet of Carmel, described by Shoghi Effendi as "the Charter of the World Spiritual and Administrative Centres of the Faith," set in motion a vast process of transformation, and we see now the mountain's splendor unveiled. Through this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh endowed Mount Carmel with a voice when He bade her to "Call out to Zion ... and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed."

By telling the story of the Terraces, we are amplifying the voice of the mountain and carrying out Bahá'u'lláh's wish when He stated, "Oh, how I long to announce unto every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the glad-tidings of this Revelation...."

In a letter dated 4 January 1994 to all National Spiritual Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice explained the profound significance of the projects on Mount Carmel: "They represent much more than the erection of buildings to meet the expanding needs of the Bahá'í World Centre." They are "an endeavour which is central to the work of the Faith in eradicating the causes of the appalling suffering now afflicting humanity." They are "a manifest expression of the emergence from obscurity of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and of the determining role it is ordained to play in the affairs of humankind.... When the buildings are completed, they will stand as the visible seat of mighty institutions whose purpose is no other than the spiritualization of humanity and the preservation of justice and unity throughout the world.... The beauty and magnificence of the Gardens and Terraces now under development are symbolic of the nature of the transformation which is destined to occur both within the hearts of the world's peoples and in the physical environment of the planet."

Now that the projects are completed, we must give the mountain her voice. We must amplify this voice and translate it into the language of the people. The Gardens and Terraces are a symbol of hope for humanity, an expression of our belief in its future, and of our enduring commitment to the task of building a peaceful world.