



BAHAISM VIII. BAHAI SHRINES

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viii. Bahai Shrines

Of the Bahai sites of pilgrimage and visitation, the most important are the tombs of Bahā'-Allāh and the Bāb in Israel and the houses of the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh in Shiraz and Baghdad.

Shrines and holy places in Israel. Since Bahā'-Allāh's exile to Palestine in 1868, the Bahai world spiritual and administrative center has been in the Acre ('Akkā)/Haifa area. The most important Bahai holy places there are: (1) The shrine of the Bāb, halfway up Mt. Carmel in Haifa. 'Abd-al-Bahā' had the Bāb's remains secretly brought from Iran in 1899 and built a stone building in traditional Levantine style in 1909, where the Bāb's remains were placed. 'Abd-al-Bahā' himself was buried there in 1921. In 1948-53 Shoghi Effendi added a white marble superstructure, consisting of a columned arcade topped by a drum and gold dome, designed by the Canadian Bahai architect William Sutherland Maxwell (1874-1952). The Shrine of the Bāb is surrounded by extensive gardens. (2) The Monument Gardens, also in the area of the shrine, are the white marble tombs of several members of 'Abd-al-Bahā's family: his sister Bahā'īya (Bahīya) Kānom, his brother Mīrzā Mahdī, his mother Nawwāb, and his wife Monīra. Each tomb is in the form of a small dome supported by columns. (3) The International Bahai Archives, built above the shrine of the Bāb by Shoghi Effendi in 1954-57 to exhibit historic relics and documents. It is constructed of white marble in the style of a Greek temple. (4) The seat of the



Universal House of Justice, a large columned white marble building of classical style completed in 1983. (5) The mansion of Mazra‘a, a house used by Bahā’-Allāh in 1877-79. This was a summer house of ‘Abd-Allāh Pasha about 6 km north of Acre that ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ rented for Bahā’-Allāh once the authorities no longer insisted on his close confinement in the city. A stone house set amid the fields and orchards of the coastal plain, it was leased by the Bahais in 1950 and purchased in 1973. (6) The mansion of Bahjī, a large house 2 km northwest of Acre, built by ‘Abd-Allāh Pasha for his mother in 1821. Bahā’-Allāh moved to the house in 1879 and remained there the rest of his life. After Bahā’-Allāh’s death the house fell into disrepair. Shoghi Effendi gained custody of the house in 1929 and restored it. He eventually acquired large parcels of land around the house, which have gradually been developed into a circular park. (7) The shrine of Bahā’-Allāh, a small stone building next to the mansion of Bahjī. Bahā’-Allāh was buried in a house used by his son-in-law adjacent to Bahjī. Eventually a monumental superstructure is planned for this shrine as well, which is the Bahai *qebla*.

A number of other historic sites are owned or controlled by the Bahais in the Acre/Haifa area. These include the cell in the prison barracks where Bahā’-Allāh was confined, the houses of ‘Abbūd and ‘Abd-Allāh Pasha in Acre, the house of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ in Haifa, and several gardens near Acre used by Bahā’-Allāh. For the most part these have been restored and are visited by Bahai pilgrims.

The two other sites of Bahai pilgrimage are no longer in Bahai hands. The house of Bahā’-Allāh in the Karḳ district of Baghdad was seized by the Iraqi government in 1925. This was the house Bahā’-Allāh lived in for most of his stay in Iraq. Bahā’-Allāh declared it a site of pilgrimage in his book of laws, the *al-Ketāb al-aqdas* (*Ketāb-e aqdas*). The house of the Bāb in Shiraz—a beautifully preserved nineteenth-century middle-class home in the old part of the city—was seized by the authorities and demolished in 1980. This was ordained to be a place of pilgrimage both by the Bāb in the *Bayān* and by Bahā’-Allāh.

Bahais also consider a number of historic sites elsewhere to be holy places—places visited by the Bāb, Bahā’-Allāh, or ‘Abd-al-Bahā’; sites of martyrdoms; and tombs of martyrs and important believers. These include a number of places in the West visited by ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ and a large number of places in Iran—notably the houses of Bahā’-Allāh in Tehran and Māzandarān; houses associated with the Bāb in Shiraz, Būšehr (Bushire), Isfahan, and



Urmia; the site of the conference of Badašt; and the cell where Bahā'-Allāh was imprisoned in 1852-53. These were expropriated following the revolution in 1979.

A Bahai who is able is obligated to make a pilgrimage once in his lifetime to pray at the shrine of Bahā'-Allāh or at the house of the Bāb in Shiraz or the house of Bahā'-Allāh in Baghdad. In addition, it is considered spiritually uplifting to visit places associated with holy souls and martyrs. There is little ritual associated with visiting the Bahai shrines. Visitors are expected to remove their shoes and maintain an atmosphere of quiet reverence but are otherwise free to do as they wish. Bahais commonly wear their national dress on formal occasions while on pilgrimage.

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