

The Baha'i House of Worship

On May 1, 1912, with His own hands 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid the cornerstone for the House of Worship. Later he would describe the creation of the Temple as marking "the inception of the Kingdom of God on earth."

The Master guided the early believers in the development of the "Holiest House of Worship", calling it "the most important matter and the greatest divine institute". The Beloved Guardian directed the completion of the Temple, naming it "the most important teacher of the Faith" and wrote of "the vast, the immeasurable potentialities with which this Mother Temple of the West ... has been endowed".

Sadly, however, due to harsh weather conditions and decades of insufficient funds, our glorious teacher is truly endangered.

- The white shell has been damaged by wind and weather
- The 974 monumental stairs are damaged and crumbling
- The terrace, or walkway, around the bottom of the stairs has been the victim of water damage
- Water damage has, in turn, eaten away at the foundation of the Temple itself
- The lacy surface of the dome, rising high above the lakefront, has also deteriorated
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The Development Plan is:

- Allowing for the restoration of the major structural elements and repair of the water-damaged terrace and load-bearing walls
- Returning the beautiful gardens which surround the Temple to the Guardian's own approved design.
- Putting steps into place for the long-term care of the Temple

The Vision of the Kingdom Project

Emboldened by the vision of Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, the Kingdom Project plans include restoration and enhancement of several major components of the House of Worship. Work on the monumental stairs, and the terrace will be complemented by returning the gardens to their original design, and by relocating the Visitors Center to a new building. Several features, that were omitted in the 1950's due to lack of funds, will augment the beauty of the site and aid in maintaining an atmosphere conducive to prayer and meditation.

The Monumental Stairs and Terrace

After decades of harsh weather conditions, and normal wear-and-tear, the steps and terrace surrounding the House of Worship are now deteriorating. With the terrace serving as a transition zone from the gardens to the circular stairs, it provides a wonderful vantage point from which to appreciate the gardens. Because the original terrace structure was built over poorly draining fill, it settled and has leaked for many years. To eliminate this problem, the old terrace was demolished and the original fill removed. The demolition has been done on six of the nine sections, and reconstruction of these bays has begun. The removal of the original fill dirt has allowed for the construction of a concrete vault structure underneath the terrace. The vault serves many purposes. It provides a workspace for any future Temple work, as well as houses the new gardens' fountain pump, electrical, and computer systems in a climate controlled area protecting them from the elements and providing for their long-term sustainability. With the main terrace structure completed, it will then be covered with quartz concrete pavers and ornamental cladding panels, reflecting patterns and materials of the House of Worship.

The Gardens

With direction from Shoghi Effendi that the Temple would not be complete until the gardens were in place, it is clear that they are an integral part of the House of Worship. These outdoor areas act as a buffer between the busy surrounding streets and the building, and provide a natural setting for prayer and meditation. However, over the past fifty years, many elements have shifted away from the original design intent. With the Kingdom Project, we have the opportunity to give new life to this purpose of the gardens.

The addition of a reflecting pool from the original plan will begin the transition from public space to worship space for those who approach from Linden Avenue. Once inside the gardens, the noise of the street will be filtered out by the sound of the softly flowing water of the reflecting pool and fountains. The fountains serve as the centerpiece for each of the gardens, and they will be completely re-built, including new tile, plumbing and lighting to allow the visitor to enjoy the restored fountains at night, as well.

Comparable to this will be the installation of a new irrigation system, and the planting of hardier disease resistant species of trees and plants allowing us to re-create the spirit of peace and beauty that was the hallmark of the initial design. Garden seating, never implemented but part of the original plan, is also being installed providing a semi-circular bench, finished with ornamental elements reflecting designs from the House of Worship. At the long approach from Sheridan and Linden Avenue, visitors will be able to pause and meditate with the addition of a small fountain, seating, and a reflecting pool, again features that were part of the original design, which we are now able to implement.

New Visitors Center

Work on the new Visitors Center is planned to occur at the end of the Five Year Plan. By relocating to a building outside of the Foundation Hall Level of the Temple, the new Visitors Center will comply with the Guardian's instructions that the Temple structure be used solely for prayer and meditation. This new location will serve as a gateway to better educate and prepare visitors for the experience of entering the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. It will also create a new home for the House of Worship Bookstore and administrative offices and improve access to the Temple for the disabled and elderly.