

GARDENS OF LOVE

One evening in April 1952, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, looked around the dinner table at his guests in Haifa, Israel. With a joyful expression, he said, "Early tomorrow morning we all shall go to Bahjí; I am asking every available man to be there, as we have some very important work to do."

Bahjí, the location of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, is the holiest spot on Earth for Bahá'ís. It stands near the mansion where Bahá'u'lláh lived for His last 12 years. As His great-grandson and the Faith's leader, Shoghi Effendi longed to beautify the sacred area. But the land had been owned by enemies of the Faith, preventing him from carrying out his plan. Finally, after over 20 years, the property was in his hands.



The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh is the sacred spot toward which Bahá'ís turn in prayer each day.

One guest that night was Dr. Ugo Giachery, a Bahá'í chemist from Italy. Like the others, he was happy to assist the Guardian. At the time, only a few trees had been planted near the shrine. Ugo described most of the grounds as "a sea of sand."

The next morning, Shoghi Effendi and his helpful companions gathered at Bahjí. Ugo helped him trace nine paths that radiated in an arc from the shrine. These were



marked with string and wooden stakes. Along the paths, gardeners dug trenches for hedges of thyme. The widest path led to the door of the shrine. Shoghi Effendi looked elated as he said, "Finally we have a dignified way to reach the Shrine, the approach to which I shall further beautify."

Rain fell in the afternoon, but the team persevered. They wanted to accomplish as much as possible before sunset. Young trees were planted along the paths. Flowering plants, topsoil, and

grass seeds were brought from Haifa.

That night, Shoghi Effendi developed a cold, but in the morning, he managed to return to work. Over the next three days, the group planted trees, borders, hedges, and star-shaped flower beds. They installed iron gates, steps, pedestals, and stone decorations.

Though he had no formal training in landscaping, Shoghi Effendi had a "truly extraordinary artistic sense" and a "perfect sense of proportion," said his wife, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum. Together they had visited many gardens around the world.

Determined to grow lawns in Israel's desert climate, Shoghi Effendi imported grass seeds from Europe. "I am a lover of flowers and gardens," he wrote to one company. He asked them to send "any pictorial plant you may think suitable to my purpose."

During the days at Bahjí, Ugo said, the land near the shrine became "a beauteous, entrancing garden, looking as if it had been there from ancient times . . ."

Shoghi Effendi nurtured the gardens until his passing in 1957. Ugo wrote, "My heart is deeply moved whenever I walk around the gardens and see all the things he accomplished with so much love and such boundless eagerness: a living reminder of the happy days when he was on this earth."

Today, Bahá'ís from around the globe visit Bahjí as part of a pilgrimage to the Faith's holy sites, where they can be uplifted by the Guardian's imaginative vision.