Syncretic Visionaries Past and Present
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LOTUS is symbolic, visionary architecture, a message of mankind's spiritual oneness and God's indivisibility. Among God's most beautiful creations, the lotus flower emerges from the mud. So does Swami envision his LOTUS temple emerging amidst the strife and division of today's world: "When a visitor experiences LOTUS, he or she will take that experience home. That feeling of acceptance and love for all humanity is contagious."

The concept is vast and advanced - born of Hindu tolerance and all-inclusiveness. Some might even call it presumptuous, as did Dom Denys Rutledge (a Christian monk) view Swami Sivananda's (guru of Swami Satchidananda) "World Parliament of Religions" when he wrote "It is of no consequence to the founder...that these religions consider themselves to be mutually exclusive."

History has not seen a plethora of syncretic temples, but neither are they unknown. Sri N. Mahalingam, a devotee of Swami Satchidananda and promoter of LOTUS, told a gathering at Yogaville, "You may ask me whether there were not such efforts in the world prior to this. Certainly there were. Akbar the Great, in 1575, constructed the Ibadat Khana or Hall of Worship at Fathepur Sikhri to enable the members of the different religions to meet. The consequence was the "Din-Ilahi" or Universal Religion which embraced Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Jainism." The effort was short-lived, however, and fell to the reaction of Muslim orthodoxy.

More recently, in 1920, a Chinese Buddhist formed the Heavenly Virtue Holy Church (T'ien Te Sheng Hui), now a widespread syncretic religious movement in the Far East which attempts to combine Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam and Christianity.

The endeavors of Saint Ramalingaswami, a 19th-century Hindu savant, to mend religious differences culminated in his utter rejection of all faiths (including his own Saiva Siddhanta) and his formation of a new path called "Suddha Sanmarga, the pure Spiritual Path of Universal harmony." He, too, built a temple of light - the Jyothi Temple in Vadallur, South India - a lotus-shaped, octagonal building in which no rituals were allowed but the worship of light as a symbol of divine knowledge. The temple fell into disuse after his death but was recently rebuilt by N. Mahalingam and has served in important ways as a model for LOTUS.

Another close parallel is seen in the Baha'i movement, a fast-growing faith (but highly per secuted in the Mid-East) founded in the mid-19th century by Baha' Allah, a Persian prophet. Baha'i proclaims the necessity and inevitability of the unification of mankind. The Baha'i house of worship, the mashriq al-adhkar, is characterized by a nine-sided construction. The mashriq is free of ritual and clergy and is open to adherents of all religions. Each mashriq offers a simple service consisting of readings from the sacred Baha'i writing and the holy books of other faiths.

LOTUS - an ecumenical sculpture imbued with the spiritual potency of a Hindu temple - is a daring venture which strives to bring the ideals of world harmony into physical symbology. Swami Satchidananda explains: "LOTUS will be a storehouse of spiritual vibrations to recharge all those who enter...Let people come, see that under one roof there are all the chapels. Whichever you like, go and stand or sit there, pray, meditate. But if you turn back toward the center, you will see the One Light."

As a major element of the Yogaville community, LOTUS will undoubtedly serve the devotees of Swami living there and those who visit. Who else will come and how many are questions yet to be answered. Even Swami and his disciples don't know the practical impact of their Promethean effort. They are faithfully and joyfully fulfilling this vision of spiritual oneness.