

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

22 July 2020

To the Bahá'ís of the United States

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

A moment of historic portent has arrived for your nation as the conscience of its citizenry has stirred, creating possibilities for marked social change. It holds significance not only for the destiny of America anticipated in the Sacred Writings, but also for the mission entrusted to your community by the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who cherished you dearly and called you to a path of sacrifice and high endeavor. We are pleased to see that, led by your National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, you are seizing opportunities—whether those thrust upon you by current circumstances or those derived from your systematic labors in the wider society—to play your part, however humble, in the effort to remedy the ills of your nation. We ardently pray that the American people will grasp the possibilities of this moment to create a consequential reform of the social order that will free it from the pernicious effects of racial prejudice and will hasten the attainment of a just, diverse, and united society that can increasingly manifest the oneness of the human family.

Sadly, however, your nation's history reveals that any significant progress toward racial equality has invariably been met by countervailing processes, overt or covert, that served to undermine the advances achieved and to reconstitute the forces of oppression by other means. Thus, whatever the immediate outcome of contemporary events, you need not be deterred, for you are cognizant of the “long and thorny road, beset with pitfalls” described by the Guardian that still lies ahead. Your commitment to tread this road with determination and insight, drawing upon what you have learned in recent years about translating Bahá'u'lláh's teachings into reality, will have to be sustained until the time, anticipated by Shoghi Effendi, when you will have contributed your decisive share to the eradication of racial prejudice from the fabric of your nation.

The principles and exhortations that guide your steps are well known to you from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. The concepts and approaches for social transformation developed in the current series of Plans that can be utilized to promote race unity in the context of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society have been set out in our messages. Every believer, as the promulgator of Bahá'u'lláh's central principle of the oneness of humanity, should deeply meditate upon it and weigh its demanding implications for the profound alteration of thought and action required at this time. “The American Bahá'í Community, the leaven destined to leaven the whole,” the Guardian admonished, cannot hope “to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character.” “A tremendous effort is required by both races if their outlook, their manners, and conduct are to reflect, in this darkened age, the spirit and teachings of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh,” he also stated. “Let neither think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. Let neither think that such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved.” “Each one should endeavor to develop and assist the other toward mutual advancement,” 'Abdu'l-Bahá

explained. “Love and unity will be fostered between you, thereby bringing about the oneness of mankind.”

Racism is a profound deviation from the standard of true morality. It deprives a portion of humanity of the opportunity to cultivate and express the full range of their capability and to live a meaningful and flourishing life, while blighting the progress of the rest of humankind. It cannot be rooted out by contest and conflict. It must be supplanted by the establishment of just relationships among individuals, communities, and institutions of society that will uplift all and will not designate anyone as “other”. The change required is not merely social and economic, but above all moral and spiritual. Within the context of the framework governing your activities, it is necessary to carefully examine the forces unfolding around you to determine where your energies might reinforce the most promising initiatives, what you should avoid, and how you might lend a distinctive contribution. It is not possible for you to effect the transformation envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh merely by adopting the perspectives, practices, concepts, criticisms, and language of contemporary society. Your approach, instead, will be distinguished by maintaining a humble posture of learning, weighing alternatives in the light of His teachings, consulting to harmonize differing views and shape collective action, and marching forward with unbreakable unity in serried lines.

Ultimately, the power to transform the world is effected by love, love originating from the relationship with the divine, love ablaze among members of a community, love extended without restriction to every human being. This divine love, ignited by the Word of God, is disseminated by enkindled souls through intimate conversations that create new susceptibilities in human hearts, open minds to moral persuasion, and loosen the hold of biased norms and social systems so that they can gradually take on a new form in keeping with the requirements of humanity's age of maturity. You are channels for this divine love; let it flow through you to all who cross your path. Infuse it into every neighborhood and social space in which you move to build capacity to canalize the society-building power of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. There can be no rest until the destined outcome is achieved.

Ahead of you lie times of trial and promise, of hardship and progress, of anguish and joy. Under all conditions, the Master is your solace and support. For those who aspire to lasting change, His example guides the way—tactful and wise in His approach, penetrating in utterance, indiscriminating in fellowship, unfailing in sympathy for the downtrodden, courageous in conduct, persevering in action, imperturbable in the face of tests, unwavering in His keen sense of justice. And to all who arise to emulate Him, He offers this unfailing assurance: “that which is confirmed is the oneness of the world of humanity. Every soul who serveth this oneness will undoubtedly be assisted and confirmed.”

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cc: International Teaching Centre
Board of Counsellors in the Americas
Counsellors in the United States (5)