

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

June 3, 2021

To the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States

Cherished Friends and Co-workers,

Well over a hundred years ago, at virtually the same moment that history would record the birth of “the American century,” an event of pivotal importance to its destiny took place. A band of North American travelers arrived, after a long journey, in the Holy Land’s port city of Haifa, and, after proceeding a short distance to the nearby city of ‘Akká, joyously attained the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the eldest Son of Bahá'u'lláh and the Center of His Covenant and Perfect Exemplar of His teachings. The event was little noted by a world oblivious to the birth, let alone the implications, of a new revelation from God, yet the impact upon these few souls of meeting the One they adored as “Master” and in Whom they experienced the very incarnation of divine love was to have incalculable consequences for the future of their nation and for humanity itself.

America at the time was a nation young, dynamic, and growing in material strength as it rapidly emerged on the world stage. In 1912, only a few years after He received the first group of American visitors in the Holy Land, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in North America for an eight-month sojourn, heralding a new narrative of history—the divine narrative that had now reached its consummation with the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One of All Ages. It was a narrative not of excessive national pride, but of universal justice, of love and unity. The Master acknowledged the material attainments and the high ideals of the American nation and its people, affirming that America had a special mission and a distinctive contribution to make in world affairs. At the same time, He was uncompromising in asserting that this destiny would be founded on a far more profound basis than anything the citizens of the country had previously imagined—it would be a destiny propelled by the transformative spirit of the Bahá'í teachings.

Throughout the remaining years of His ministry, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá patiently helped His devoted American followers to see and face the challenges of purging themselves and their nation of the corrosive influence of materialism, moral corruption, and racial prejudice. Repeatedly and unequivocally, He stated that only by doing so would America be fitted to fulfill its special destiny to “*lead all nations spiritually*” and to usher in the Most Great Peace. In response—through their boundless love for their Master, their fidelity to the Covenant, and their unity of purpose in service to the Cause of God—the tiny community of American believers slowly began to grow and mature.

It would be an impossible task to befittingly recount within the limited scope of a single letter all the many crises and victories, the challenges and accomplishments that, taken together, comprise the storied history of this community over the course of the century since the Master’s passing. Suffice it to say that we have continually been in a process of learning and building capacity. Through our efforts during the 25-year series of Plans devised by the Universal House of Justice and now recently concluded, we have established the instruments necessary to embrace and nurture multitudes of souls, and to welcome countless numbers of them, in the coming years, to the sheltering shade of the Cause of God. As the Supreme Body’s magnificent Ridván message this year made abundantly clear, the patterns of action now emerging will empower masses of people in steadily expanding numbers to seize control of their spiritual destinies; they need only to be pursued with unabated vigor and determination.

A new One Year Plan has just been launched, and during these same 12 months we will commemorate the Centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Without a doubt, we will call to mind His summons to each of us to be unwavering in our faithfulness to the Covenant—manifesting this, among other ways, in our fidelity to the guidance of the Universal House of Justice and in our determination to prosecute with energy, focused attention, and to the last detail the current stage of the Divine Plan. Beyond this, we will remember His admonitions to us to strive to become the very embodiments of divine love to one another and towards all people, mindful that lines and boundaries of race, ethnicity, or class among members of the human family are imaginary and not in the Plan of God. We will certainly strive to reflect that love in our efforts to share the unifying Cause of God with the diverse people of our nation.

Nearly 80,000 people are currently taking part in core activities across the United States, about a third of whom have not formally embraced the Faith. In patterns of activity now emerging in hundreds of clusters, with a steady and strong institute process at its heart, an ideal environment is being created for multitudes to be influenced by and attracted to the Bahá'í revelation. An openness to forthright sharing of the mission and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is taking hold, as are opportunities to invite those who are so inclined to investigate, even to embrace, His Cause. We hope that in our individual and collective efforts in all settings—devotional gatherings, firesides, study circles, wherever we are interacting with others, whether online or in person—substantial progress will be made in welcoming new souls into the Faith. This will require continuing attention in those neighborhoods where intensive activity is taking place, where, in some cases, hundreds of souls have come into contact with the spirit of the Faith. Just as importantly, this work should go on wherever Bahá'ís live and serve throughout our hundreds of clusters.

We affirm once again the vital necessity of teaching African Americans and Indigenous peoples, groups whose capabilities and ultimately indispensable contributions to the advancement of this Cause have been attested to in the writings of our Faith. Of people of African descent, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated:

Bahá'u'lláh once compared the coloured people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil you see the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the Spirit shines forth.

About the Indigenous peoples of the American continent, we find the following in one of the Master's Tablets of the Divine Plan:

Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. . . . [S]hould they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.

Although teaching is incumbent on all believers without restriction, it is crucial that, in particular, the African-American and Indigenous believers of this country arise and take their rightful place at the forefront of this work. Further, we must not fail to call for the contributions of the vast and diverse immigrant populations who have come to these shores in recent decades and demonstrated a great receptivity to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. The services of these souls, together with their African-American and

Indigenous brothers and sisters, will be instrumental to the growth and development of a truly just, inclusive, and unified society in this land. Their success will depend in part on the loving encouragement they initially receive from their fellow-believers, as well as from the institutions of the Faith at every level.

We recall the statement of the beloved Guardian in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, as relevant today as when it was first penned more than 80 years ago:

No more laudable and meritorious service can be rendered the Cause of God, at the present hour, than a successful effort to enhance the diversity of the members of the American Bahá'í community by swelling the ranks of the Faith through the enrollment of the members of these races. A blending of these highly differentiated elements of the human race, harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of an all-embracing Bahá'í fraternity, and assimilated through the dynamic processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, and contributing each its share to the enrichment and glory of Bahá'í community life, is surely an achievement the contemplation of which must warm and thrill every Bahá'í heart.

The deeds and accomplishments of the Bahá'í community of the United States, demonstrating the power of "unity in diversity," will provide a luminous example to all humanity of the might of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Observers will be sure to realize that if His teachings are capable of quelling the contention and reconciling the divisiveness and fragmentation of the American people, they must surely have the power to unite the entire world.

The spirit of the Divine Plan is one of sincere love, of humble assistance to one another, of walking side by side and learning together in the path of service. As we together serve, earnestly seeking divine pleasure and blessings, we will gradually discover ways to surmount any obstacle. Above all, an environment suffused with the spirit of teaching will attract the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty and the mystic powers and potentialities latent in His revelation. The spirit of teaching will give us joy, energy, and the spiritual resources necessary to persevere as we transform ourselves and our communities.

We, the children of the Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, are the inheritors of His mission. What remains for us is to do our part, to exert every effort to share the divine message with our fellow citizens and to invite them to join hearts and hands with us in the glorious work of reconstructing society to a new design founded in spiritual truth. It requires us truly to believe that the Cause of God belongs to all, to understand that it is the Word of God that empowers the masses of humanity and ensures their future. In Bahá'u'lláh, His revelation, His Covenant, and His new World Order—now emerging in every corner of the globe—we find the ultimate vindication of the promise of Christ that "*the meek shall inherit the earth*," and that the Almighty's Will shall be done "*on earth as it is in heaven*."

Our tasks are no less monumental and no less sacred than those that faced the first souls to embrace the Cause in the Cradle of its birth. Of this we were reminded by the beloved

Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, who called us to deeds for the sake of the Cause inspired by the highest levels of consecration and sacrifice:

The community of the organized promoters of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the American continent—the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of an heroic Age, who by their death proclaimed the birth of that Faith—must, in turn, usher in, not by their death but through living sacrifice, that promised World Order, the shell ordained to enshrine that priceless jewel, the world civilization, of which the Faith itself is the sole begetter.

Be assured of the constancy of our prayers for you, of the warmth and sincerity of our affection for you, and of the boundlessness of our confidence in your efforts to advance this sacred and unifying Cause.

With our deepest love,

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