

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

29 July 2021

Transmitted by email:

U.S.A.

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 7 May 2021, in which you share your views on the challenges you perceive in the American Bahá'í community in relation to the issue of race and raise a number of questions in this regard. The House of Justice appreciates your desire to see the Bahá'í community address this important issue in a way that is consistent with the teachings of the Faith; it is also aware of the distress the friends feel when this does not occur. We have been asked to convey the following.

Sadly, at the current time, instead of a united effort to resolve the remaining challenges pertaining to racial prejudice in America, the matter all too often takes the form of political or contentious debate—whose aim is contest and the effort to defeat opposing views. In this perspective, thoughtful ideas that may provide insights useful to effecting lasting social change are distorted and exaggerated to emphasize divisions and make constructive exchange of views impossible. This has occurred with certain concepts and with ideas of particular thinkers, making it difficult to evaluate any merit they may contain without being drawn into a polarizing debate. Bahá'u'lláh has counselled His followers “not to view with too critical an eye the sayings and writings of men. Let them rather approach such sayings and writings in a spirit of open-mindedness and loving sympathy.” Therefore, the friends are advised to avoid two extremes: either uncritically accepting every theory put forward, or dismissing entirely every theory because it falls short of the Bahá'í teachings or has flaws within it. Rather, it would be more helpful for the believers to consider such ideas as contributions to a public consultation that seeks to identify solutions to the problem of racial prejudice. Insights could then be drawn by the friends which they find to be compatible with the teachings to enhance their own efforts.

While the methods and approaches adopted by believers may vary—some seeing value in certain ideas from the wider society with which others may disagree—the friends should not allow differing opinions to become a point of dispute and contention in the community. And of course, there is no justification for the vilification of any group of people. What is clear, and has been emphasized by both ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, is the imperative that the races work together to eradicate racial prejudice. As mentioned in our letter to you dated . . . 2020, the House of Justice has advised the friends in your country that, in the process of learning how to respond to the challenge of racial prejudice, it is not possible for them to “effect the transformation envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh merely by adopting the perspectives, practices, concepts, criticisms, and language of contemporary society.” Instead, their approach “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.”

As the friends work together to remove the blight of racism from society, challenges will no doubt arise; however, through patience as well as love for one another, it will be possible for them to encourage and support each other to reflect deeply on their own obligation to deal with the issue of racial prejudice. In such a culture, each individual can personally assess, in an atmosphere of uncensorious forbearance, his or her own condition and possibilities for improvement. In this way, all can grow together and develop their capacities in an environment characterized by tender affection, reciprocity, and cooperation, in which the friends do not sit in judgment of their fellow believers but, rather, urge each other to contribute their share to the establishment of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

It is also important to remember that this is the Formative Age of the Faith and, as Shoghi Effendi stated, “the promised glories” envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh “can be revealed only in the fullness of time”; it is our test and privilege at this juncture to learn how to systematically propagate His teachings and translate them into effective action as a remedy for the world’s multiplying ills. You are therefore encouraged not to become disheartened or discouraged by any problems you may encounter but, rather, see them as opportunities for learning and progress. This can be challenging, especially if we feel that our fellow believers are not living up to the teachings in the way we understand them. However, we should bear in mind that, despite any general difficulties, each believer has the obligation to strive to do what is right. Thus, as Shoghi Effendi explained:

You must not make the great mistake of judging our Faith by one community which obviously needs to study and obey the Bahá'í teachings. Human frailties and peculiarities can be a great test. But the only way, or perhaps I should say the first and best way, to remedy such situations, is to oneself do what is right. One soul can be the cause of the spiritual illumination of a continent. Now that you have seen, and remedied, a great fault in your own life, now that you see more clearly what is lacking in your own community, there is nothing to prevent you from arising and showing such an example, such a love and spirit of service, as to enkindle the hearts of your fellow Bahá'ís.

He urges you to study deeply the teachings, teach others, study with those Bahá'ís who are anxious to do so, the deeper teachings of our Faith, and through example, effort and prayer, bring about a change.

(From a letter dated 30 September 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)

The House of Justice hopes that you will continue to strive, with forbearance and determination, to apply the divine teachings to address the challenges facing your community and society at large....

Be assured of the supplications of the House of Justice at the Sacred Threshold on your behalf as well as for the progress and unity of your community.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

cc: National Assembly of the United States