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5

6 January 2022 Transmitted by email: U.S.A.
7

8 Dear Bahá'í Friend,

9 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of _____, in which

- 10 • you express concern about the dissemination of certain race-related ideas
11 within the American Bahá'í community and what
12 • you feel is the unwarranted interpretation of some references from the Bahá'í
13 Writings with respect to such theories.
14 • Also received was your email letter of _____ related to the same matter,
15 enclosing your correspondence
16 • with your National Spiritual Assembly. We have been asked to convey the
17 following.

18 It is evident that, currently, there is in the wider society no consensus on

- 19 • how to assess the problem related to race in America or
20 • how to resolve it, even among those well-meaning, fair-minded participants in
21 the discourse on race.

22 In the Bahá'í community as well,

- 23 • individual Bahá'ís may express personal, and sometimes conflicting, views on
24 the subject of race;
25 • other friends are welcome to respond to such views.

26 If approached with the necessary spiritual qualities,

- 27 • this exchange can help to gradually create unity of thought and action around
28 the concepts presented in the Bahá'í teachings.

29 Of course, individuals should not

- 30 • represent or
31 • convey

32 the impression that

- 33 • their personal ideas constitute the Bahá'í teachings, and correspondingly,
34 • Bahá'ís who hear such expressions should distinguish between the authoritative
35 Bahá'í texts and individuals' attempts to explore the concepts contained
36 therein.

37 As you are surely aware, the House of Justice has encouraged

Words Create Worlds.

1. What race related ideas do you think were being disseminated in the American Bahai Community that caused the individual concern?
2. What are your thoughts about "theories" and "unwarranted interpretations of some references?"
3. What do you feel are the necessary spiritual qualities required to gradually create unity of thought and action around the concepts presented in the Bahai teachings?
4. How can individuals distinguish between authoritative texts and an individual's attempts to explore the concepts contained therein?
5. The House of Justice has encouraged the development of communities characterized by tolerance, that implies Assemblies' allowing for the interchange of ideas, including those that some may find uncomfortable. What thoughts come to mind about "uncomfortable?"

- 38 • the development of communities characterized by **tolerance**;
- 39 • that implies Assemblies' **allowing for the interchange of ideas**, *including*
- 40 *those that some may find uncomfortable.*

41 **Naturally, if the promotion of a particular idea leads to disunity within the Bahá'í**

42 **community, then an Assembly must act. It is noted that**

- 43 • **you feel** that *some views*, drawing on ideas from the wider society, are
- 44 *harmfully taking root in Bahá'í discourse*, and it was reasonable for
- 45 • **you to bring** your *concerns* to the attention of your National Assembly.

46 **However, it would seem from the response that**

- 47 • **you received** from that body that **it does not feel, from its national**
- 48 **perspective**, *that the situation to which you refer extends beyond the*
- 49 *individual expression of opinions.*

50 No doubt, sensitive to the points you have raised, it will continue to follow the

51 evolution of the discussion in the community.

52 Of course, *if*

- 53 • **you feel** your perspective was not fully appreciated,
- 54 • **you can** try to offer further clarification for the Assembly,

55 **but** then it is necessary to leave the matter to the judgment of that institution.

56 **Without feeling discouraged, you should**

- 57 • **continue your own exploration of the issues and**
- 58 • **work with others in your area to learn to**
- 59 • **create ever more effective approaches.**

60 Regarding the issue of interpretations of the phrase **"pupil of the eye"**, 'Abdu'l-

61 Baha's statements comparing Black people to the "pupil of the eye" repudiated the

62 pernicious and completely untenable scientific and social assertions circulating **at the**

63 **time** that promulgated the odious view that Black people were inferior to white

64 people and, indeed, to all other races.

65 **Today**, His statements about the pupil of the eye, **part of the Bahá'í Sacred Texts**,

66 serve as a metaphor that invites the reader to

- 67 • **reflect** upon and
- 68 • **discover** a range of meanings from an image that contains profound spiritual
- 69 import.
- 70 • It points to potentialities that have to **find expression** in acts of selfless
- 71 service.

72 **Like any artistic or spiritual literary device, however, it must not be taken to**

73 **extremes in one's personal interpretation.**

74 **A metaphor is not to be taken literally.**

Words Create Worlds. A few questions to ponder.

6. What harmful *views* do you think the individual was referring to that they felt were **taking root in Bahai discourse?**
7. What can you glean about the relationship between the House and the NSA based on **"you received from that body, that it does not feel, from its national perspective, that the situation to which you refer extends beyond the individual expression of opinions?"**
8. Instead of *feeling discouraged*, what does the House of Justice, ask the person to do?
9. There was a question around the *issue of interpretations of the phrase "pupil of the eye"*, how does the House explain the need for this comparison of the eye to black people?
10. What three things does the "The pupil of the eye" which is part of the **Bahá'í Sacred Texts**, and serves as a metaphor invite the reader to do?
11. What is a metaphor and what are your thoughts about the metaphor being taken literally?

75 As indicated by **your thoughtful insights** on the matter, **a Bahá'í cannot attribute some**
76 **meaning to such brief passages that would stand in contradiction to Bahá'u'lláh's**
77 **vision of the oneness of humanity.**

78 **It would also be unproductive and even potentially harmful**

- 79 • to **extrapolate** beyond the evident meaning of the metaphor or
- 80 • to **interpolate** the Text by assigning meanings that do not exist in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's
- 81 specific statements or anywhere in the Bahá'í writings—for example,
- 82 • by **imputing characteristics to white people or other races.**

83 Racial prejudice—and specifically **anti-Black prejudice**—has existed in some form in the
84 United States for more than four centuries. The problem did not appear overnight, and
85 the **process of healing centuries-old wounds** will also take time. **The friends should**
86 **have no illusions about the immensity of what they have been called to do in**
87 **the writings of the Faith.**

88 All Bahá'ís in the United States, whatever their background or country of origin, naturally
89 accept Bahá'u'lláh's principle of the oneness of humanity.

90 **For a Bahá'í, therefore, there is no basis for any suggestion of the superiority or the**
91 **inferiority of any race.**

92 Indeed, the oneness of humanity is the sine qua non of any conception that seeks to
93 overcome racism.

94 **But it is**

- 95 • one thing **to hold a belief** in humanity's oneness and
- 96 • another **to build a world** that manifests this principle in all its dimensions—

97 particularly in a society that has *experienced* the

- 98 • **intractable** and
- 99 • continually **mutating forms that racism has taken** in response to every effort to
100 eliminate it.

101 Such a complete transformation can only be witnessed in the fullness of time in the
102 spiritual civilization envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh.

103 **In pursuit of this objective, then, all Bahá'ís are called**

- 104 • to *persistently act*, little by little,
- 105 • to *deliberately cultivate freedom from racial prejudice* within
 - 106 ○ their *daily* lives,
 - 107 ○ their *families*,
 - 108 ○ their *community-building activities*,
 - 109 ○ their involvement with *society*, and
 - 110 ○ all the *social spaces* in which they participate, so that they increasingly
 - 111 evince the Bahá'í teachings, especially the oneness of humanity.

112

Discover the pearls of hidden wisdom.

12. What might be an example attributed to the **"pupil of the eye"** that would stand in contradiction to **Bahá'u'lláh's vision of the oneness of humanity.**
13. The House of Justice notes that it would be unproductive and even potentially harmful to do **"extrapolate beyond the evident meaning of the metaphor"**? **What is the evident meaning of the metaphor?**
14. We are guided to not **"interpolate the text by assigning meanings that do not exist in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's specific statements or anywhere in the Bahá'í writings—**for example, by **imputing (or assigning) characteristics to white people or other races.** What characteristics do you think could have been perceived to be **imputing or attributed to white people or other races** that were reported that may have upset the individual?
15. Although it may take heal "centuries old wounds", what can be done now to start the process?

113 If the friends

- 114 • **become fountains of love** and
- 115 • **create environments** wherein the *spirit and practice* of race unity are
- 116 prevalent,

117 every trace of race prejudice will ultimately be removed.

118 **Yet, to concentrate only on**

- 119 • *correcting the manifestations of racial prejudice,*
 - 120 • with an *inseparable tendency to focus on the faults of others,*
 - 121 • rather than on how to
 - 122 • *work together to create race unity,* will invariably lead to a deepening of
 - 123 the differences so widespread in American society.
- 124 1. **Let no one suggest**
 - 125 a. that the Bahá'í community *stands completely apart and immune*
 - 126 *from the ills of society.*
 - 127 2. **Let no one imagine**
 - 128 a. that it is possible to eliminate every vestige of the impact of racial
 - 129 prejudice on the Bahá'í community *before fully engaging in the*
 - 130 *work of teaching and community building within the wider society.*

131 And while there is *currently a priceless opportunity for African American believers*

132 *to reach out to the African American population in the United States, let it not be*

133 **presumed that in some way this opportunity is closed to Bahá'ís of other racial**

134 **backgrounds.**

135 **Rather, the friends should make every effort to**

- 136 • *reach out* to all people,
- 137 • *offer* the healing remedy of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to everyone, and
- 138 • *invite* all to participate in the challenging, but rewarding, process of
- 139 learning to translate what He has written into reality and action.

140 **For it is only**

- 141 • *through an ever-swelling mass of active workers,* and
- 142 • their *ever-growing capacity to expand the reach of their activities,*
- 143 • that the *process of creating the expression of race unity in more and more*
- 144 *social spaces* and of
- 145 • *eliminating all forms of prejudice* within them can unfold.

146 To assist in your further reflections on this subject, kindly find enclosed an extract

147 from a letter dated 9 February 1942 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an

148 individual believer. May you be blessed in your endeavors to serve the Cause.

149 With loving Bahá'í greetings,

150 *Department of the Secretariat Enclosure*

151 *cc: National Assembly of the United States (with enclosure)*

Discover the pearls of hidden wisdom.

16. Why do you think some might think the reference "*pupil of the eye*" suggests "superiority or inferiority of any race?"
17. *We are experiencing the intractable and continually mutating forms that racism has taken in response to every effort to eliminate it. What do you think are some of the mutating forms?*
18. *Why do you feel the House of Justice felt the need to remind the Bahá'í community that it does not stand completely apart and immune from the ills of society?*
19. **Why are we cautioned not to concentrate ONLY on the faults? And, why do you think the word "only" was used?**
20. **Since this is a response to letters, why do you think an emphasis was put on "let it not be presumed that in some way this opportunity is closed to Bahá'ís of other racial backgrounds?"**
21. **What can we do now to build a world** that manifests this principle (Oneness of Humanity) in all its dimensions? What are some of those dimensions?

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

154 *In the sight of God colour makes no difference at all, He looks at the hearts of men. That which God desires from*
155 *men is the heart. A black man with a good character is far superior to a white man with a character that is less*
156 *good.*

157 **(Abdu'l-Baha, Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 68)**

158 *“As to Robert, Alice and Louise: Verily, the faces of these are as the pupil of the eye. Although the pupil is created*
159 *black, yet it is the source of light. I hope God will make these black ones the glory of the white ones, and as a*
160 *depository of the lights of the Love of God. And I beg of God to assist them in all circumstances, that they may be*
161 *encompassed with the Favors of their Loving Lord throughout centuries and ages.” – Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet to Sarah*
162 *Farmer, translated by Ali-Kuli Khan, September 13, 1902. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. II, p. 292)*

163 *76. O thou who hast an illumined heart! Thou art even as the pupil of the eye, the very wellspring of the light, for*
164 *God's love hath cast its rays upon thine inmost being and thou hast turned thy face toward the Kingdom of thy*
165 *Lord.*

166 *Intense is the hatred, in America, between black and white, but my hope is that the power of the Kingdom will bind*
167 *these two in friendship, and serve them as a healing balm.*

168 *Let them look not upon a man's colour but upon his heart. If the heart be filled with light, that man is nigh unto the*
169 *threshold of his Lord; but if not, that man is careless of his Lord, be he white or be he black.*

170 **(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 113)**

171

172 ***The Negroes Should be Proud and Happy in the Praises which Bahá'u'lláh Bestowed upon Them and Other***
173 ***Down-Trodden Races***

174 *“As we neither feel nor acknowledge any distinction between the duties and privileges of a Bahá'í, whoever he may*
175 *be, it is incumbent upon the negro believers to rise above this great test which the attitude of some of their white*
176 *brethren may present. They must prove their innate equality not by words but by deeds. They must accept the*
177 *Cause of Bahá'u'lláh for the sake of the Cause, love it, and cling to it, and teach it, and fight for it as their own*
178 *Cause, forgetful of the shortcomings of others. Any other attitude is unworthy of their faith.*

179 ***“Proud and happy in the praises which even Bahá'u'lláh Himself has bestowed upon them, they must feel He***
180 ***revealed Himself for them and every other downtrodden race, loves them, and will help them to attain their***
181 ***destiny.***

182 *“The whole race question in America is a national one and of great importance. But the negro friends must not*
183 *waste their precious opportunity to serve the Faith, in these momentous days, by dwelling on the admitted*
184 *shortcomings of the white friends. They must arise and serve and teach, confident of the future they are building, a*
185 *future in which we know these barriers will have once and for all been overcome!” (From a letter written on behalf*
186 *of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 9, 1942)*

187

188

189

190 **1786. Pure-hearted, Spiritually Receptive Negro Race**

191 "I welcome with open arms the unexpectedly large number of the representatives of **the pure-hearted and the**
192 **spiritually receptive Negro race, so dearly loved by 'Abdu'l-Bahá**, for whose conversion to His Father's Faith He so
193 deeply yearned and whose interests He so ardently championed in the course of His memorable visit to the North
194 American continent. I am reminded, on this historic occasion, of the significant words uttered by Bahá'u'lláh
195 Himself, Who, as attested by the Center of the Covenant, in His Writings, 'compared the coloured people to the
196 black pupil of the eye', through which 'the light of the spirit shineth forth'."

197 (Shoghi Effendi: *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, pp. 135-136)

198

199 **Addressed to Members of the White Race**

200 "... I hope that ye may cause that downtrodden race to become glorious, and to be joined with the white race, to
201 serve the world of man with the utmost sincerity, faithfulness, love, and purity. This opposition, enmity, and
202 prejudice among the white race and the coloured cannot be effaced except through faith, assurance, and the
203 teachings of the Blessed Beauty... **This question of the union of the white and the black is very important, for if it is**
204 **not realized, ere long great difficulties will arise, and harmful results will follow... enmity will be increased day by**
205 **day, and the final result will be hardship and may end in bloodshed."**

206 ('Abdu'l-Bahá: *Ibid.*, p. 39)

207

208 **1810. The Negro Race and the White Race Must do All in Their Power to Destroy the Prejudice Which Exists on**
209 **Both Sides**

210 "The negro race has been, and still is, the victim of unjust prejudice, and it is obviously the duty of every Bahá'í,
211 negro or white, to do all in their power to destroy the prejudices which exist on both sides. They can do this not
212 only by exemplifying the true Bahá'í spirit in all their associations and acts, but also by taking an active part in any
213 progressive movements aimed at the betterment of the lot of those who are underprivileged, as long as these
214 movements are absolutely non-political and non-subversive in every respect.

215 "Movements for social progress and social justice, as long as they are disassociated from both political and
216 religious partisanship, should be supported by those Bahá'ís who feel urged to undertake such work. Consequently
217 there is no reason why you should not work for the betterment of your race through channels that in no way
218 conflict with our Bahá'í attitude."

219 (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 23, 1941)

220

221 **1811. The Negro Bahá'ís Have a Great Responsibility Towards Their Own Race and Fellow Believers**

222 "The Guardian feels very strongly that the negro Bahá'ís have great responsibilities, both towards their own race
223 and towards their fellow-believers. They must not only arise to teach the Cause to the members of their own race,
224 but must do all in their power to ensure that within the Bahá'í Community itself the negro and white believers
225 understand and love each other and are truly as one soul in different bodies. Our allegiance as believers is to
226 Bahá'u'lláh; we must fix our attention and devotion on Him and His will and, heedless of the shortcomings of our
227 fellow-Bahá'ís, act as He would have us towards them." (Ibid.)