

THE ADVENT OF DIVINE JUSTICE: *The Most Vital and Challenging Issue* by Shoghi Effendi (December 25, 1938)

To the beloved of God and the handmaids of the Merciful throughout the United States and Canada.

As to racial prejudice, the corrosion of which, for well-nigh a century, has bitten into the fiber, and attacked the whole social structure of American society, it should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution.

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- The ceaseless exertions which this issue of paramount importance calls for,
 - the sacrifices it must impose,
 - the care and vigilance it demands,
 - the moral courage and fortitude it requires,
 - the tact and sympathy it necessitates,
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invest this problem, which the American believers are still far from having satisfactorily resolved, with an urgency and importance that cannot be overestimated.

White and Negro, high and low, young and old, whether newly converted to the Faith or not, all who stand identified with it must participate in, and lend their assistance, each according to his or her capacity, experience, and opportunities, to the common task of fulfilling the instructions, realizing the hopes, and following the example, of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Whether colored or noncolored, neither race has the right, or can conscientiously claim, to be regarded as absolved from such an obligation, as having realized such hopes, or having faithfully followed such an example. A long and thorny road, beset with pitfalls, still remains untraveled, both by the white and the Negro exponents of the redeeming Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. On the distance they cover, and the manner in which they travel that road, must depend, to an extent which few among them can imagine, the operation of those intangible influences which are indispensable to the spiritual triumph of the American believers and the material success of their newly launched enterprise.

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1. **Let them call to mind**, fearlessly and determinedly, the example and conduct of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá while in their midst.
2. **Let them remember**
 - *His courage,*
 - *His genuine love,*
 - *His informal and indiscriminating fellowship,*
 - *His contempt for and impatience of criticism, tempered by*
 - *His tact and wisdom.*
3. **Let them revive and perpetuate the memory of those unforgettable and historic episodes and occasions on which:**
 - *He so strikingly demonstrated His keen sense of justice,*
 - *His spontaneous sympathy for the downtrodden,*
 - *His ever-abiding sense of the oneness of the human race,*
 - *His overflowing love for its members, and*
 - *His displeasure with those who dared to flout His wishes, to deride His methods, to challenge His principles, or to nullify His acts.*

To discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority, is a flagrant violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

The consciousness of any division or cleavage in its ranks is alien to its very purpose, principles, and ideals. Once its members have fully recognized the claim of its Author, and, by identifying themselves with its Administrative Order, accepted unreservedly the principles and laws embodied in its teachings, every differentiation of class, creed, or color must automatically be obliterated, and never be allowed, under any pretext, and however great the pressure of events or of public opinion, to reassert itself.

If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise.

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Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist, whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction,

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every organized community enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.

So great and vital is this principle that in such circumstances, as when an equal number of ballots have been cast in an election, or where the qualifications for any office are balanced as between the various races, faiths or nationalities within the community, priority should unhesitatingly be accorded the party representing the minority, and this for no other reason except to stimulate and encourage it, and afford it an opportunity to further the interests of the community.

In the light of this principle, and bearing in mind the extreme desirability of having the minority elements participate and share responsibility in the conduct of Bahá'í activity, it should be the duty of every Bahá'í community so to arrange its affairs that in cases where individuals belonging to the divers minority elements within it are already qualified and fulfill the necessary requirements, Bahá'í representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these divers elements, racial or otherwise, as possible.

The adoption of such a course, and faithful adherence to it, would not only be a source of inspiration and encouragement to those elements that are numerically small and inadequately represented, but would demonstrate to the world at large the universality and representative character of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and the freedom of His followers from the taint of those prejudices which have already wrought such havoc in the domestic affairs, as well as the foreign relationships, of the nations.

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Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should, at such a time as this when an increasingly large section of the human race is falling a victim to its devastating ferocity, be adopted as the watchword of the entire body of the American believers, in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and habits. It should be consistently demonstrated in every phase of their activity and life, whether in the Bahá'í community or outside it, in public or in private, formally as well as informally, individually as well as in their official capacity as organized groups, committees and Assemblies.

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It should be deliberately cultivated through the various and everyday opportunities, no matter how insignificant, that present themselves, whether in their homes, their business offices, their schools and colleges, their social parties and recreation grounds, their Bahá'í meetings, conferences, conventions, summer schools and Assemblies. **It should, above all else, become the keynote of the policy of that august body which, in its capacity as the national representative, and the director and coordinator of the affairs of the community, must set the example,** and facilitate the application of such a vital principle to the lives and activities of those whose interests it safeguards and represents.

“O ye discerning ones!” Bahá'u'lláh has written, “Verily, the words which have descended from the heaven of the Will of God are the source of unity and harmony for the world. Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness.” “We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations,” He proclaims, “...that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled.” “Bahá'u'lláh hath said,” writes ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, “that the various races of humankind lend a composite harmony and beauty of color to the whole.

Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them.”

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“Bahá’u’lláh,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá moreover has said, “once compared the colored people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the spirit shineth forth.”

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“God,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself declares, “maketh no distinction between the white and the black. If the hearts are pure both are acceptable unto Him. God is no respecter of persons on account of either color or race. All colors are acceptable unto Him, be they white, black, or yellow. Inasmuch as all were created in the image of God, we must bring ourselves to realize that all embody divine possibilities.” **“In the estimation of God,” He states, “all men are equal. There is no distinction or preference for any soul, in the realm of His justice and equity.” “God did not make these divisions,” He affirms; “these divisions have had their origin in man himself.** Therefore, as they are against the plan and purpose of God they are false and imaginary.” “In the estimation of God,” He again affirms, “there is no distinction of color; all are one in the color and beauty of servitude to Him. Color is not important; the heart is all-important. It mattereth not what the exterior may be if the heart is pure and white within. **God doth not behold differences of hue and complexion. He looketh at the hearts. He whose morals and virtues are praiseworthy is preferred in the presence of God; he who is devoted to the Kingdom is most beloved. In the realm of genesis and creation the question of color is of least importance.”**

“Throughout the animal kingdom,” He explains, “we do not find the creatures separated because of color. They recognize unity of species and oneness of kind. If we do not find color distinction drawn in a kingdom of lower intelligence and reason, how can it be justified among human beings, especially when we know that all have come from the same source and belong to the same household? In origin and intention of creation mankind is one. Distinctions of race and color have arisen afterward.” **“Man is endowed with superior reasoning power and the faculty of perception”; He further explains, “he is the manifestation of divine bestowals. Shall racial ideas prevail and obscure the creative purpose of unity in his kingdom?”**

“One of the important questions,” He significantly remarks, “which affect the unity and the solidarity of mankind is the fellowship and equality of the white and colored races. Between these two races certain points of agreement and points of distinction exist which warrant just and mutual consideration. The points of contact are many.... In this country, the United States of America, patriotism is common to both races; all have equal rights to citizenship, speak one language, receive the blessings of the same civilization, and follow the precepts of the same religion. In fact numerous points of partnership and agreement exist between the two races, whereas the one point of distinction is that of color. Shall this, the least of all distinctions, be allowed to separate you as races and individuals?” “This variety in forms

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and coloring," He stresses, "which is manifest in all the kingdoms is according to creative Wisdom and hath a divine purpose."

"The diversity in the human family," He claims, "should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord." "If you meet," is His admonition, "those of a different race and color from yourself, do not mistrust them, and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness." **"In the world of being," He testifies, "the meeting is blessed when the white and colored races meet together with infinite spiritual love and heavenly harmony. When such meetings are established, and the participants associate with each other with perfect love, unity and kindness, the angels of the Kingdom praise them, and the Beauty of Bahá'u'lláh addresseth them, 'Blessed are ye! Blessed are ye!'" "When a gathering of these two races is brought about," He likewise asserts, "that assemblage will become the magnet of the Concourse on high, and the confirmation of the Blessed Beauty will surround it."**

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"I hope," He thus addresses members of the white race, **"that ye may cause that downtrodden race to become glorious, and to be joined with the white race, to serve the world of man with the utmost sincerity, faithfulness, love, and purity."** This opposition, enmity, and prejudice among the white race and the colored cannot be effaced except through faith, assurance, and the teachings of the Blessed Beauty."

*"This question of the union of the white and the black is very important," He warns, "for if it is not realized, ere long great difficulties will arise, and harmful results will follow." **"If this matter remaineth without change," is yet another warning, "enmity will be increased day by day, and the final result will be hardship and may end in bloodshed."***

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. Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should each endeavor, day and night, to fulfill their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them.

Let them, while each is attempting to contribute its share to the solution of this perplexing problem, call to mind the warnings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and

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visualize, while there is yet time, the dire consequences that must follow if this challenging and unhappy situation that faces the entire American nation is not definitely remedied.

Let the white

1. **Make a supreme effort** in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to
2. **Abandon** once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to
3. **Correct** their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to
4. **Persuade** them through their intimate, spontaneous and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to
5. **Master** their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wound

Let the Negroes, **through a corresponding effort on their part,**

6. **Show by every means in their power the warmth of their response,**
7. [Show] their **readiness to forget the past,** and
8. [Show] **their ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion** that may still linger in their hearts and minds.

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.**
- Let neither think that they **can wait confidently for the solution** of this problem until the initiative has been taken, and the favorable circumstances created, by agencies that stand outside the orbit of their Faith.
- **Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort, can succeed in blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name of their common country.**
- Let them rather believe, **and be firmly convinced, that on their mutual understanding, their amity, and sustained cooperation, must depend, more than on any other force or organization operating outside the circle of their Faith,** the deflection of that dangerous course so greatly feared by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the materialization of the hopes He cherished for their joint contribution to the fulfillment of that country's glorious destiny.