

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

July 11, 2020

To the American Bahá'í community
for the Feast of Kalimát

Dearly loved Friends,

Our hearts continue to be uplifted by news we are receiving of the energy, creativity, and resourcefulness you are displaying in your work to further the aims of the current Five Year Plan at this critical moment in our nation's history. Across the country, friends of the Faith and contacts are showing a greater level of appreciation for Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and are evincing increased desire to join in our efforts to build a new and all-embracing kind of community life.

In our message at Ridván, we called on the members of every Bahá'í household to hold a regular devotional gathering and we are pleased to report the goal has already met with an enthusiastic response. By exploring two dimensions of these gatherings, their importance to all our services can clearly be seen.

One dimension comes sharply into focus when we think of devotionals as integral to the work of community building and not as unrelated activities. When we come together with our friends in a home or a meeting place imbued with a reverent spirit, sharing the sacred texts and seeking to draw closer to God, a special environment is created that promotes a binding of hearts with deep spiritual ties. Feelings of love and unity are generated, inspired by a common love for the Creator and through recognition of our oneness. Opportunities are opened up for rich conversations inspired by the Word of God. Such conversations can lead to greater understanding of spiritual verities and their application in the world, then to unified practical action born from earnest desire for the betterment of society.

Friends and contacts interested in the spiritual welfare of children, for example, or in the moral education of junior youth can be encouraged to permit their sons and daughters to participate in children's classes or junior youth groups or to serve as teachers or animators. Others might be inspired to undertake service projects or to engage in discourse founded on insights they have discovered in the Bahá'í teachings. Still others might wish to join a study circle or to further investigate the Faith. Devotional gatherings, then, can and often do serve as a portal of entry to our core activities and other features of the Plan's framework. They can also strengthen activities that already exist. We thus can think of devotional gatherings as a spur to the development of several capacities, among them the capacity to gather regularly for prayer and study of the Writings; the capacity for elevated conversations on issues of importance; and the capacity to invite others to join with us in meaningful service. Each of these is addressed in the sequence of institute courses, an essential resource as we accompany and encourage each other.

A second dimension has to do with conditions in America at this time—particularly as they continue to heighten awareness of the longstanding racial injustice that afflicts us. Our proper response as Bahá'ís to these conditions has been described in the guidance we have been receiving from the Universal House of Justice in the recent series of Plans, a compilation of which was made available to you on May 15 for the Feast of 'Azamat. Devotional gatherings can be one of many means of addressing the issue of racial justice if we act on their potential to bring together people of diverse backgrounds to carry on meaningful conversations in safe, loving environments and to engage in service with the aim of creating a more just society. We should also consider the manner in which our devotion to God is expressed. Different cultures draw upon rich musical and artistic

traditions. Each has great value and meaning. If we truly wish to manifest the oneness of humanity and to express the importance to our community life of people of color, we must be extremely careful not to allow the cultural expression of the majority to dominate others. As in all our activities, the participation of community members of all cultures should be encouraged in our devotions, whether as significant contributors to a diverse program or in programs devoted to a single cultural tradition. If we wish to attract people of all cultures to join in our community-building efforts, we must ensure they will see themselves represented in the way we worship and be invited to serve both as planners and participants.

Taking African American friends as an example, hundreds of these stalwart believers participated last year in the Pupil of the Eye Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, and again, in late June, via videoconference. Both gatherings fortified their desire to further the progress of the Plan in their home communities. This will no doubt occur in a host of ways, but one will assuredly be through holding devotional gatherings drawing on the richness of their spiritual traditions. It would be a wonderful gesture for Local Spiritual Assemblies to encourage these friends as well as others to take the lead in facilitating community devotionals where both believers and the public are welcome, and to bring that spirit into neighborhoods where large concentrations of African Americans reside. Such devotional gatherings can powerfully express the great truth of the oneness of humanity and our solidarity with people of color across the nation and across the globe.

With these thoughts in mind, we encourage you to think of devotional gatherings as occasions in which, drawing upon powers inherent in the Word of God, we gather with people of different backgrounds with the aim of eliminating racism from our society. As we do so, let us ask ourselves: Are we building the capacity to invite diverse people to come together, to pray and to serve side by side? Are we creating safe and loving environments for the sharing of perspectives and insights on the issue of race? Are we sincerely striving to learn from each other and to take effective action together?

'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "Ye observe to what a degree the world is in continual turmoil and conflict, and to what a pass its nations have now come. . . . It is your duty to be exceedingly kind to every human being, and to wish him well; to work for the upliftment of society; to blow the breath of life into the dead; to act in accordance with the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh and walk His path—until ye change the world of man into the world of God."

We eagerly look forward to news of the results of your efforts, and hope that you will share your experiences on our national Race Unity Action webpage ([accessible here](#)). Be assured of our deepest gratitude and our abiding affection and constant prayers for each and every one of you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

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Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary