

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

24 April 2022

Transmitted by email: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
U.S.A.

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your email letter of 26 March 2021 asking several probing questions about statements made in *The Advent of Divine Justice* has been received by the Universal House of Justice. We have been directed to convey to you the following. The delay in our reply, which is due to the pressure of work at the Bahá'í World Centre, is very much regretted.

With regard to Shoghi Effendi's advice to African-American Bahá'ís that they "show by every means in their power ... their readiness to forget the past", it is evident from both a close reading of the passage in which this statement is made and similar statements made by the Guardian and on his behalf that he was urging the believers to put past differences aside for the sake of unity within the Bahá'í community. It is not a general statement to African-Americans about the historical pattern of racial prejudice in American society. In the passage in question, the exhortation to forget the past is one of the several symmetrical and mutually reinforcing elements of his prescription for black and white American Bahá'ís in their relations with one another. The purpose of these statements is to pave the way for the black and white believers to achieve the "mutual understanding", "amity", and "sustained cooperation" required to deflect their fellow citizens from "that dangerous course so greatly feared by 'Abdu'l-Bahá" and to fulfill "the hopes He cherished for their joint contribution to the fulfillment of that country's glorious destiny."

Of particular interest in this regard is the beloved Guardian's advice to Elsie Austin in a letter dated 23 November 1941 written on his behalf:

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

Further, the advice to forgive and forget matters that were the source of disagreement and hard feeling was given by the Guardian in other than racial differences. For example, in a letter dated 22 July 1947 written on his behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly he advised that the

friends “forgive and forget the entire matter.... Their duties to humanity are too sacred and urgent in these days, when the Cause is struggling to spread and assert its independence, for them to spend their precious time, and his precious time, in this way. Ask them, therefore, to unite, forget the past, and serve as never before.”

With regard to black people being likened to the pupil of the eye, the Research Department has prepared for your study the enclosed memorandum that discusses how this metaphor has been used in the Bahá’í writings. It is instructive to consider that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s use of this metaphor repudiated the pernicious and completely untenable scientific and social assertions circulating at the time that promulgated the odious view that black people were inferior to white people and, indeed, to all other races. Today, His use of the metaphor of the pupil of the eye invites one to reflect upon and discover a range of meanings from an image that contains profound spiritual import. It points to potentialities that have to find expression in acts of selfless service. Like any artistic or spiritual literary device, however, it must not be taken to extremes in one’s personal interpretation.

Be assured of the ardent supplications of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that you and the members of your family may be surrounded by the tender mercies and loving protection of the Blessed Beauty at all times.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Enclosure