

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** The Universal House of Justice

**Date:** 24 April 2022

**From:** Research Department

### **The metaphor of the black pupil of the eye in *The Advent of Divine Justice***

In her email letter of 26 March 2021, \_\_\_\_\_ inquires about a passage in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, asking to whom Bahá'u'lláh refers in the statement that “colored people” can be compared to “the black pupil of the eye”. The Research Department offers the following comments.

Although nothing has yet come to light in the writings held at the Bahá'í World Centre which specifically addresses \_\_\_\_\_ questions, the statements in the Bahá'í writings that employ the metaphor of the pupil of the eye refer to African people and their descendants. Some were addressed to those descended from enslaved people, such as the extract from a Tablet addressed to Robert Turner that appears in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.<sup>1</sup> Others are addressed to Africans living on the continent and to people of African descent. As Shoghi Effendi indicates in his message to the Intercontinental Conference held in Kampala in 1953, Bahá'u'lláh's statement refers to black people generally.<sup>2</sup> The Universal House of Justice has observed that “Bahá'u'lláh favored the black peoples by making a specific reference to them when, as the Master testified, He compared them to the ‘black pupil of the eye’ through which ‘the light of the spirit shineth forth’.”<sup>3</sup> In various letters, the House of Justice has drawn on the same metaphor in reference to African people.<sup>4</sup> These Tablets and letters emphasize the oneness of the human race, foresee bounties and blessings for black people, and allude to a mystical spiritual power released when the recipients make efforts to bring Bahá'u'lláh's message to both black and white. For example, Shoghi Effendi described the enrollment of significant numbers of Africans that was just beginning in 1953 as “destined to exert an incalculable influence on the fortunes of the Faith throughout the world” and suggested that it “may well have far-reaching repercussions among the two chief races dwelling in the North American continent.”<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting to note that in several Tablets in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá likens black people, including the individuals to whom the Tablets were addressed, to the black pupil of the eye, He refers to the eye as being “the very wellspring of the light”,<sup>6</sup> “the source of light”,<sup>7</sup> and the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, selection 78, bahai.org/r/598573735.

<sup>2</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950–1957* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, 1995 printing), p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> The Universal House of Justice to the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Africa, Riḍván 153 (1996), bahai.org/r/894343687.

<sup>4</sup> The Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assemblies in Africa, 8 February 1970, bahai.org/r/731193022 and to the Friends gathered at the International Conference in Nairobi, 26 September 1976, bahai.org/r/052041269.

<sup>5</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950–1957*, pp. 136–37.

<sup>6</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, selection 76, bahai.org/r/264394289.

fountain of light,<sup>8</sup> which conduces to happiness. In two such Tablets, the Master praises the spiritual awakening of the recipients, in one indicating that the believer had attained unto divine guidance and heavenly illumination and in the other affirming that he had received God's love which had cast its rays upon his inmost being.

A few sources for exploring how others have thought about the metaphor of the pupil of the eye are the following:

- Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum's letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada in 1961, published in *Bahá'í News US Supplement 40*, June 1961
- Derik Smith, "Centering the 'Pupil of the Eye': Blackness, Modernity, and the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh"<sup>9</sup>
- A special issue of *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* entitled "Constructive Resilience"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Women*, a compilation prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, selection 10, [bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/women/women.pdf?156d4907](http://bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/women/women.pdf?156d4907).

<sup>8</sup> *Star of the West*, vol. 12, no. 5 (5 June 1921), p. 106, [bahai.works/index.php?title=File:SW\\_Volume12.pdf&page=104](http://bahai.works/index.php?title=File:SW_Volume12.pdf&page=104).

<sup>9</sup> *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 29, nos. 1–2 (2019), pp. 7–28, [bahaistudies.ca/uploads/2019/09/29.12Smith.pdf](http://bahaistudies.ca/uploads/2019/09/29.12Smith.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 30, no. 3 (2020), [journal.bahaistudies.ca/online/issue/view/72](http://journal.bahaistudies.ca/online/issue/view/72).