

Sadie Oglesby's Address to the 1927 NSA Sharing Her Pilgrimage Conversation with Shoghi Effendi

MRS. OGLESBY:- We had a most glorious visit with Shoghi Effendi, and I can never express it to you. Of course, those of you who have visited that holy shrine, know that it is beyond my power to describe it. We are not the same people we were before we went away; we don't feel the same about anything – and that is natural.

Since I have so few minutes to spare, and there are so many things to tell you, I will have to go at it.

Shoghi Effendi asked so many questions about this Colored Problem, and always, it seemed as though he was trying to find why there were not more colored believers. We have beautiful reports – he reads them and finds what we are doing, but he asks, **“How many colored believers are in this centre, or the other centre. He says, “Why is it they are not there? Is it because they don't feel welcome – because they are not kindly received?”**

I said, finally, “Shoghi Effendi, we have felt hurt, for many years, and we are a sensitive people; we approach the Cause looking for trouble; we are looking to find flaws –that seems natural, because all the churches stand for universal brotherhood; this is proclaimed in every church, and the Christian world stands for universal brotherhood, and yet, the colored group has knocked on so many doors to try to find the spirit of universal brotherhood.

They hear another call, and listen, and they are looking to see it in practice; they are looking for light, and the minute they see the light, they will turn and go the other way.”

Shoghi Effendi: **“Mrs. Oglesby, if the Bahai's of America would simply remove from their hearts every trace of prejudice, it would draw the colored people, in great numbers, to the Cause— Do you think it would deter the white people from coming in?”**

I said: “Undoubtedly, the colored people know that in America they have thousands of staunch white friends who would be delighted to see a group willing to practice absolute justice to the colored people, and they would be glad to join hands with them.”

Shoghi Effendi said, **“Mrs. Oglesby, whatever is the cause, whether it is the black man’s cause, whether it is his shortcomings; whether it is the white people’s cause, does not matter. What matters is that it is vital, that he enters the Cause. Whatever it is, you must remove the thing that keeps the black man out, and bring him into the Cause--- Not for the sake of the Colored Group, but, for the sake of the world, and for the sake of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.”**

Shoghi Effendi, I said, “it appears to me, and has for some years, that these two groups, the White and the Black races, are the outer ends of the great circle that is coming together, and, if we could join these two groups, all the other groups would come in.”

He said, **“Just so – you have analyzed it perfectly. When these two groups join hands, the circle is rounded, and everything will adjust itself.”**

He said, **“I want to see many colored people coming to Haifa,”** and he said, **“the blacker they are, the better we will be pleased.”**

He said, **“No doubt the white people of America are watching to see what the Bahai’s are doing with the colored people, and when they see the white Bahai’s accepting the colored people as brothers, in every sense of the word, it will give them confidence in your religion, and they will join with you, helping to establish universal brotherhood, but, as long as we don’t absolutely practice this, we are keeping the White Bahai’s out of the Cause.”**

He asked me this question, **“Do you think Mrs. Oglesby, if the Bahai’s of America would simply remove from their hearts every trace of prejudice, it would draw the colored people, in great numbers to the Cause --- Do you think it would deter the white people from coming in?”**

I said, “Undoubtedly, the colored people know that in America they have thousands of staunch white friends who would be delighted to see a group willing to practice absolute justice to the colored people, and they would be glad to join hands with them.”

Again, he said; **"The world is looking to see what the Bahai's of America are going to do for the colored man, and the peace and tranquility**

of the world depend on that one thing. In this great hour of turmoil, when everybody and every group of people are talking about universal brotherhood and justice, we, Bahai's must be that centre that is not living in the realm of thinking about it, but the ones who actually have it in practice".

He laid so much emphasis on this-- At the table we intended to talk about this, but someone would talk of something else, and he would say: "That is not vital", and then he would go back to this subject. "Every country has its problem, and America's vital problem today is the Colored problem."

He asked me if we had the teachings on that, and if we read them, and I said yes, they read them. Then he asked "**Do the American Bahai's realize the vital need of this?**", and I said "Shoghi Effendi, I am afraid not; I think the Bahai's of America love Shoghi Effendi very much, and when they feel the depth of his desire, along this line, they will carry out his desire. When I said that to him, I felt it was true."

Here is one thing that Shoghi Effendi said: "**Nobody can solve somebody else's problem.**"

You cannot see with the colored man's eyes; you see our complexion, but you don't know our hearts, our difficulties, and if I am bombed in Somerville— you don't believe Boston could do such a thing— Our family passed through that. You don't know the colored man's problems-- if you don't, how can you solve them alone.

Shoghi Effendi has laid great emphasis on that point, and he said, finally: "**Because of this one fact, every Committee should have some one, at least, Colored Bahai, even though you have to use one over and over again, because you don't know the Colored Man's problems**".

In the times of Slavery, there were good people who solved these problems, but, in this day, the colored Man wants to have something to say about his problems, and, when he finds he can come and talk to you about his problems, then, and only then, will you be able to adjust them.

Shoghi Effendi talked much about that, and he said he hoped that on every committee there would be a colored person.

I said: "But, Shoghi Effendi, when we get together to elect these members, we assemble in prayer, seeking Divine Guidance, and we cast our votes, and we try to follow and obey— what else can we do?" He said: **"Study the needs of the Cause, and then you will know that the need of the Cause is that the Negro be represented, that he might express his viewpoint, that you might understand his position; that we might reach across this chasm and study it, and know the needs-- don't go at things blindly."**

I saw it differently from what I ever saw it before. As I looked around today, knowing that this group represents all the Bahai Centres over the United States and Canada, and I see just about one drop of Negro blood-- and if I asked you who that Black Woman was, you could hardly place her— Shoghi Effendi said: **"I want to see many of them, and, the blacker, the better."**

If we are not able to do something about this question, it will be like Boston. A few years ago, we could go around and see sixteen or seventeen at a meeting; today, my husband and myself, only, attend. It is much better in New York— Washington is about the same.

The cause is not at the Colored Man's door, but the problem of removing the cause belongs to the White Man.

Shoghi Effendi said to me: **"Mrs. Oglesby, my commission to you is to use all your force and power, and strength to force an understanding of the paramount importance of the Bahai's turning their attention to this one issue immediately"**. And, he said, **know that, as you do this, you are standing on the strength of my prayers"**.

I said: "Shoghi Effendi, I feel it is such a delicate matter for me to try to force this on the Bahai's. I am a member of that group, myself, and it is such a delicate matter", and he said: **"Give them that message, with all of your power; try to make them understand the vital need of it; I commission you to travel south, all you can; work with Mrs. Smythe, in her centre and outside among the colored groups"**.

So, I know what my work is now, as I never knew it before.

Another thing he said; **"Since we are so full of faults, the colored people are looking for them".**

If it had not been through the divine gift of God, through Mr. and Mrs. Ober, our spiritual teachers— if it had been that I found them off duty once, we would have turned our faces in another direction; we were guilty of looking for shortcoming, but we have never seen them off duty with us, or with anybody else, at any time. If they had not remained in Boston until my husband and myself were strong enough to turn our eyes towards God, I assure you, dear souls, we still would have been looking in the dark.

So, I talked to Shoghi Effendi about them— I could not help it, because they were my salvation--and he said; **"When our Bahai's can hold up a light like that, that will draw souls from darkness, against their wills, then, that is the Bahai light".**

So, it comes down to this; Shoghi Effendi has said that **"we have to hold the light up; we have to hold it high, and if they see you off duty a minute, they will go another way."** Shoghi Effendi says **"this is not because of the colored people that he is making the emphasis, but it is for the whole Cause."**

He said to me; **"Perhaps we don't realize the importance of it, because there are only a small number of colored people in America, and it is of no concern, but, in the eyes of God it is of paramount concern."**

Then, he said, **"One time Muhammed had appointed a crier to call to prayers, a colored man, and he was ignorant and had a malformation on the roof of his mouth, and he bungled the words, and the people complained to Muhammed about this, and Muhammed said 'I would rather have that colored man, with all his ignorance and all his defects, than you, with all of your eloquence and learning, because he has the spirit of the love of God in his heart'".**

He said, **"The need of the Cause in America is the call of the heart, as it can be given by no one, save those who have suffered and been trained in the road of sacrifice and humility.** I hope, soon, that the cause, whether

it is in the heart of the White Man or the Black man, it does not matter where the cause is— the thing that keeps him out— get rid of it and save this world situation".

Oh, friends, he showed us so much. He wanted to know if we realized the importance of this, and I said, "I fear, not. Certainly, we don't realize it deeply, like you expressed it, but I think and I feel sure, Shoghi Effendi, when the friends of America know the depth of your feeling along this line, they will adjust themselves and do everything in their power to remove this cause and establish tranquility in the world."

Finally, he said, **"Mrs. Oglesby, I know that you and Mr. Oglesby will do your duty to the utmost, but this is really the White Man's problem; it is his difficulty, and he must get rid of it; unless the people of America adjust themselves and establish this Centre, there is nowhere, in this great day of cataclysm for the hearts of humanity to turn. This is the great challenge— Will they do it?"**

He talked of this day after day, all the time, and the very last night I was there, he was still talking it.

Shoghi Effendi says it is his conviction that, **"Once the doors are open—[and] the hearts of the friends yearn for the spirit of the Colored Man in these Groups, he will flock to you."**

The only things I do not speak of are rather personal, and all that I do say, are things that he has told me to pass on to you and to press them on your understanding; he said to **be forceful with it.**

I said, "I have tried to go among the Bahai's and manifest love, obedience, forgiveness and charity, that we might see that it is possible for us to live together, because I have read the words of the **Master, when he said "we must even give up the right and accept the wrong, for the sake of harmony"**, and he said **"Yes, that is right, but this is a different time; this is a vital moment, and the issue is to bring the White and Colored people together in heart, that they might pulsate as one and know themselves as absolute brothers"**.

Now then, if I could say enough to make you feel, not just to understand it, but to yearn for the fulfilment of this, to yearn for it so much that you will do what you would do if you were hungry and thirsty, what you would be willing to do just for a drop of water, if you wanted it so badly.

Then you would look over the shortcomings of the Negro; you would visit him in his home; you would take every means to bring him in. It is so important for the well-being of all the peoples of the earth, because Shoghi Effendi says that the tranquility of all the people of the earth depends on this one thing, the coming together of the White and the Black. That, he says, **is the vital issue facing the Bahai's today in America**. When we do this; when we adjust ourselves to the Cause, then the White people, from all angles of the earth, will flock to the Cause. Whatever is the reason, we must remove what is blocking the way. The Black Man will associate with you like a brother and you will love him. If he does not love you, you must teach him to.

Someone said, while I was there, that the Colored people had their own prejudices they were prejudiced also against the White people.

I know the colored people so well; I have lived, colored, all my life, most of my days with colored people, and I know a great deal about them, and I have never yet met a colored person that he was not ready to open his arms and his heart to any white person in whom he had confidence, and receive him as a brother.

Colored people are not prejudiced against the White, but they don't like to be treated other than as brothers; when you are ready to treat him like a brother, and he knows it— you have to prove it to him, because he has lost confidence— but, when you prove it to him, you will find he will love you like a brother.

And so, Shoghi Effendi says that the Bahai's must remove this cause; the door must be open, and **now is the time— it is late**— we must raise this Centre, that the eyes of the world might look towards this Centre.

Shoghi Effendi asked me if we read the message, and I said Yes, but perhaps we don't just realize the vital necessity of it, but when the people realize it, I said, I am certain they will adjust themselves to it, and he urged me so, that we were continually repeating this one thing.

I would tell Shoghi Effendi that the cause was not in the hearts of the friends, it was just force of habit—I feel that I am very much loved by the Bahai's.

He said, **"Mrs. Oglesby, you are too lenient; you look over things too much; you must force this, an understanding of the vital necessity of them bestirring themselves right away to heal this breach"**.

I asked him if he would write something so that they might know his position, and he said he would, and then he said: **"Remember that I am at the tomb, and in the Master's home, and all the time I will be praying for you in your effort to emphasize this one point on the hearts and minds of the Bahai's of America"**, and I said, "Shoghi Effendi, I will do my best".

I have done my best. I hope and feel there is nothing left now for me to do but to beg your pardon for having had to give this message in such a crude way. It is said that a sharp sword needs no polishing, and this wonderfully powerful message, I dare hope, will be received because of the source from which it comes, regardless of the fact that I have given it in a very crude way and couched in very crude, ordinary words.

Don't think of the words, or my inadequacy, but just turn your heart and see that great centre of love that is yearning, yearning that you and I shall become like one body, that we will sacrifice our very lives, our very souls, our very existence, until we have absolutely no self and no will, but the self of God and the will of God, and that we might exercise that will so strongly that people shall see the things we do, and they will see that bright light, shining so strongly, as I saw it in my spiritual mother and father; it was compelling me, against my will, when I pulled the other way; I was compelled to come back, to come into the Cause.

And so, Shoghi Effendi tells you, compel the Black Man to enter this Cause, for the sake of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

This address to the National Spiritual Assembly in 1927 was transcribed from the scanned typed pages 92-104 by Barbara Talley of Sarah Oglesby's Pilgrimage. Spellings and descriptions were the norm of the time. Most punctuation was left as typed, except things that were crossed out by hand or hyphenated words that no longer needed the hyphen or for better clarity. Sometimes, additional punctuation was added for clarity. Most of her conversation is paraphrased, in her words. When in blue in blue is a direct quote from Shoghi Effendi and in quotes.