

How can SOTE* (Sclera of the Eye) Baha'is create an environment more welcoming to POTES (Pupil of the Eye)?

What do we say, or not say?

What do we do, or not do?

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. 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, invest this problem, which the American believers are still far from having satisfactorily resolved, with an urgency and importance that cannot be overestimated.

ADJ pg. 28

Dear SOTE Friends,

While Shoghi Effendi completed the Advent of Divine Justice on December 25, 1938, the corrosion is still painfully present. Its systemic residue continues to permeate the structures of society. The foundation of racism was built into our institutions, safeguarded and maintained by SOTE majority, obstructing the attempts and denying equal opportunity for any advancement to be made by the POTE community. This “most vital and challenging issue” has been prolonged due to our apathetic approach to the guidance from Shoghi Effendi that was quite clear with his use of the term **vital**. The Bahai community has not only disregarded this clear directive for over 80 years, but in fact has mimicked some of the same systemic racially segregated spaces. We have failed in cultivating an environment welcoming to the POTE community, and this problem must be vitally addressed.

What are we doing or not doing?... An introspection on The Double Crusade

...The American believers can and must wield in their double crusade, first to regenerate the inward life of their own community, and next to assail the long-standing evils that have entrenched themselves in the life of their nation...ADJ pg.34

The Double Crusade, our first focus is the Inward life of the Baha'i community

Shoghi Effendi writes about the double crusade as both a collective and individual process of reflection, action and growth.

Shoghi Effendi talks about the “*inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority... towards the members of the other race.*” How does this sense of superiority manifest within ourselves and in the Baha'i community? Are our Baha'i spaces just as white/Persian-centric as the institutions outside the Baha'i community?

Some things that “SOTE Do or Don’t Do” causing harm, re-injuring, and halting the slow healing wounds of POTE’s”...

Intention vs impact

Having certain intentions without thinking about impact can be hurtful and undermining. The intention of our words may have a very different meaning on a community with a vastly different experience due to systemic racism, and causing POTEs to be triggered.

Same’ing

Comparing a SOTE experience to the POTE, and thinking they are the same. In order to connect, we share **our** story about how we can relate to what’s being shared. For example, thinking growing up poor white and poor black are the same without considering how at an institutional level, POTE are prevented from economic advancement. (**Institutional Racism SOTEs do not experience**)

- Institutional Racism- (also known as **systemic racism**) is a form of racism expressed in the practice of social and political institutions. It is reflected in disparities regarding wealth, income, criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, political power and education, among other factors.

Friending

Using one’s relationship with a POTE as a way to safeguard, protect, and justify we are not like the other SOTEs. This causes us to remain hidden behind our subconscious sense of superiority. For example, “I am not prejudiced, some of my friends are black.”

Tokenizing

Embracing POTE’s entering Baha’i spaces with an agenda, as “tokens”. POTEs are called upon when our SOTE spaces require a show of diversity, but rarely are **relationships** built outside the controlled and safeguarded SOTE spaces.

Centering Whiteness/Highjacking/Conversational Narcissism

Centering conversations about SOTEs and preventing the Most Vital and Challenging Issue, **Racism**, to be addressed within our Baha’i consultations. This is a reflex reaction to self protect, aka white fragility. With **deflecting** conversations, SOTE often make comments irrelevant to the discussion, but we justify our comments by sharing our racial resume and teaching stories involving the POTE.

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- **Cataracts** are cloudy areas in the Pupil of the Eye that can cause changes in vision. Symptoms include cloudy or fuzzy vision and sensitivity to light. **Cataracts** are treated with surgery.
 - By centering the approach of how SOTE would do things, we have cataracted our vision in the Bahai community. (For example: The Baha’i Faith in the United States is not growing)
- **Victim Blaming** occurs when the victim of oppression is held entirely or partially at fault for the harm that befell them.

- **ConsultTaking** Usurping the POTE that is speaking in order to share what's on one's mind. This is conversational bullying, controlling, and pulling focus to self.

Apathy

Not speaking up when an injustice has occurred, and not informing the SOTE about their racist behavior. Avoiding the teachable moment when someone is exemplifying racism/prejudice, because it creates discomfort to confront such behavior. Instead we choose complacency and **protect the SOTE centered spaces** from changing, willingly, or out of ignorance.

Unconscious Incompetence

Because of lack of understanding about the racism POTE's experience, statements are made without regard for those long and slow healing wounds, causing those wounds to remain raw and unaddressed. For example, "I don't see color", "All lives matter".

Colonizing mentality

It corresponds with the belief that the cultural values of the colonizer are inherently superior to one's own. Thus SOTE create an atmosphere that leads to an internalized attitude of ethnic, religious, or cultural **superiority** that is felt by POTE, i.e. them being colonized through our behaviors and teaching approaches. For example, the way we teach, build community in neighborhoods, define what a devotional should look like etc. Thinking that **we know better** than anyone else. This reflects the attitude of the colonizer.

- **Appropriation-** the action of taking something for one's own use, typically without the owner's permission. (Language/Slang/Culture/Music)

Whitesplaining

The explanation of something by a SOTE, typically to a POTE, in a manner regarded as condescending or **patronizing**.

- Interrupting
- Correcting
- Hearing the comments made by a SOTE, even if it was identical to what a POTE has already stated.
- Repeating what has been stated by a POTE, and acting as though a POTE was not clear enough.

Educational Asking

Asking and hoping the POTE's will guide and educate the discussion around race. Many resources exist to self educate about racism and the Black experience in America.

Tremendous work is required to purge SOTE superiority from our hearts and institutions. "...**Nothing short of utter, of continuous consecration to His Will and Purpose can enable them...**"

- Signing a Declaration Card does not remove our subconscious sense of superiority.

White Fragility/Tears

How SOTE can take offense to someone else's offense, while the SOTEs were the ones causing the offense in the first place. SOTEs cry in response to the POTE's reaction to our comments. In this defensive tactic, we are proving to ourselves that we are not racist/prejudice

Otherizing

Us and them, you people, othering. (A tone of separation is behind this language and SOTEs label the POTE community, individually or as a group) Søren Kierkegaard wrote, "Once you label me, you negate me. When the individual must live up to the label, the self ceases to exist."

White Flight

When SOTE egos are challenged, rather than stay with the discomfort, we leave. While this is usually a term used to describe the flight from neighborhoods that are diversifying, it can also be seen on a micro level in SOTE spaces when conversations challenge our behaviors and actions.

Cognitive Dissonance

The state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioral decisions and attitude change.

Examples:

- We have clear guidance on what is required to unify a community, instead we still created SOTE centered spaces that are unwelcoming to POTE.
- We have built beautiful Baha'i institutions, but have created environments that are limited in heartfelt connections.

The impact of such behavior as listed above, has led POTE to leaving the Faith, being uninvolved in activities/events, and not entering Baha'i spaces at all. More importantly, Baha'u'llah's call for justice and unity is stifled. This corrodes the Baha'i Community and reflects the hypocrisy of our actions. Our hypocrisy is quickly seen and felt by the POTEs, which has led to the social distancing. Unless we resolve this vital issue within, the painful realities of "such grievous and slow-healing wounds" will remain and the community will be disbursed.

*Let the white make a **supreme effort** in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to **abandon** once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious **sense of superiority**, to **correct** their tendency towards revealing a **patronizing attitude** towards the members of the other race, to **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 **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 wounds. ADJ pg. 33*

Moving into the Realm of Action- How can we fulfill these words of the Guardian?

Call to action - some ideas:

- Centering the conversations about racism at Feast and in our Baha'i Communities. It is the **most vital and challenging issue**. Then, as a community we move away from merely consultation, into a plan of action. Further we reflect on our efforts, make necessary changes, and put those evolved plans back in action.
- Learning from the Foundation Hall model, and bringing it to our local Baha'i community.
- Involve our LSA's in addressing racism in our community.
- Read independently and study in groups the Writings directly addressing the most vital issue of racism.
- Start study circles based on rooting out racism from the Baha'i community
- Calling each other out on our behaviors/statements made - we will create a culture motivated to transform our Baha'i spaces.
- The "majority" must make certain the needs of the "minority" are being addressed.
Do you see me, hear me, and does what I say matter to you?
- Be conscious, and continually check our inherent and subconscious sense of superiority.
- Socialize with POTE outside of the Baha'i spaces. Get to know each other at the heart level.

Are our behaviors true to the mandate given by the Guardian to protect, guard, and defend "the Pupil of the Eye"?

"Many will be the setbacks, the shocks and the disturbances, which the commotions of a convulsive age must produce; yet no force, however violent and world-wide in its range and catastrophic in its immediate consequences, can either halt these processes or deflect their appointed course. How great, then, the privilege, and how staggering the responsibility, of those who are destined to guard over them and to bring them eventually to full fruition. Nothing short of utter, of continuous consecration to His Will and Purpose can enable them to fulfill their high destiny." ~ Shoghi Effendi, 15 May 1940

*SOTE, Sclera of the Eye, is not a distinguishing title given by Baha'u'llah like POTE, Pupil of the Eye". We are merely using SOTE to reference everyone else besides the Black community.

An 'Unconscious Incompetent' Letter

From a SOTE to a POTE

You know I love you dearly as well as the prayer call... (token relationship, friended)

But my friend, you know I can't speak clearly to express my thoughts without having my anger takeover me. It has taken me all this time to graduate from the horrible attack from some of the folks on the prayer call. (Intention vs Impact, white fragility,)

I don't have hate but as a human I do have feeling of depressions when I'm attacked (white fragility, Hijacking, centering whiteness, and conversational narcissism).

Please don't ask me to join a group that causes me heartache(white flight, victim mentality).

I or any white Bahá'í did not cause the black communities in this country to remain at the stagnate stage (victim-blaming, Cognitive dissonance, othering)

I feel the black community neglected itself from the conditions they are suffering from. (Victim blaming, commitment to ignorance)

Many of the blacks have risen above these conditions by doing something for themselves. But they have not done anything for their communities as a whole. Or very limited. (Tokenization, centering whiteness, same'ing)

They have remained welfare dependent, families breakup, and they are not looking after their children. (Victim blaming, commitment to ignorance)

Your group is blaming others as a remedy. (otherizing, victim blaming)

It is true the Writings have written about interfacing the two races. But it did not leave the work in the hands of nonwhite or Persian or Chinese. Each group has shoulder to shoulder helped their own community. On the other hand blacks are, in my opinion, blaming everyone else for their conditions. (Cognitive dissonance, victim-blaming, whitesplaining, white fragility)

When the Persians came in large numbers they advanced quickly (50) years because they pursued higher education for their children while they worked or purchased gas stations, car washes, cleaning house... they brought and implemented their trade. (commitment to ignorance...institutional racism)

Many also suffer due to lack of spiritual teaching and education. You already know this.)(Friending, saming, otherizing, cognitive dissonance)

Be well...(Hypocrisy)