

A Message from the Bahá'ís of the United States

The Bahá'ís of the United States join our fellow-citizens in heartfelt grief at the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others whose lives were suddenly taken by appalling acts of violence. These heartbreaking violations against fellow human beings, due only to the color of their skin, have deepened the dismay caused by a pandemic whose consequences to the health and livelihoods of people of color have been disproportionately severe. This has come to pass against a backdrop of longstanding racial injustice in virtually every aspect of American life. It is clear that racial prejudice is the most vital and challenging issue we face as a country.

Yet, amidst these tragedies, there are also signs of hope. Countless citizens have arisen to proclaim the truth that we are one nation, and to demand specific actions to address the pervasive inequities that for too long have shaped our society. We have remembered who we aspire to be as a people, and are determined to make a change for the better. This moment beckons us to a renewed commitment to realize the ideal of *E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, one—the very ideal upon which America was founded.

To create a just society begins with recognition of the fundamental truth that humanity is one. But it is not enough simply to believe this in our hearts. It creates the moral imperative to act, and to view all aspects of our personal, social, and institutional lives through the lens of justice. It implies a reordering of our society more profound than anything we have yet achieved. And it requires the participation of Americans of every race and background, for it is only through such inclusive participation that new moral and social directions can emerge.

Whatever immediate results might come from the current demonstrations, the elimination of racism will require a sustained and concerted effort. It is one thing to protest against particular forms of injustice. It is a far more profound challenge to create a new framework for justice. Our efforts can only succeed when we learn to build relationships with each other based on sincere friendship, regard, and trust, which, in turn, become pillars for the activities of our institutions and communities.

It is essential for us to join hands in a process of learning how to create models of what we want to see in every dimension of American life, as we learn to apply the principle of oneness through practical engagement and experience. To this end, we offer the following thoughts. An essential element of the process will be honest and truthful discourse about current conditions and their causes, and understanding, in particular, the deeply entrenched notions of anti-Blackness that pervade our society. We must build the capacity to truly hear and acknowledge the voices of those who have directly suffered from the effects of racism. This capacity should manifest itself in our schools, the media, and other civic arenas, as well as in our work and personal relations. This should not end with words, but lead to meaningful, constructive action.

There are already significant efforts underway to learn how to create models of unity in neighborhoods and communities throughout the nation. Bahá'ís have been persistently engaged in such efforts for many years. The aim is not unity in sameness—it is unity in diversity. It is the recognition that everyone in this land has a part to play in contributing to the betterment of society, and that true prosperity, material and spiritual, will be available to us all to the degree that we live up to this standard. We should earnestly discover what is being done, what truly helps to make a difference, and why. We should share this knowledge throughout the country as a means of inspiring and assisting the work of others. If we do this, we could soon find ourselves in the midst of a mass transition toward racial justice.

Religion, an enduring source of insight concerning human purpose and action, has a key role to play in this process. All faith communities recognize that we are essentially spiritual beings. All proclaim some version of the “Golden Rule”—to love others as we do ourselves. Take, for example, the following passage from the Bahá'í Scriptures in which God addresses humankind:

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest.

To understand and firmly believe that we are all children of God provides us with access to vast spiritual resources, motivating us to see beyond ourselves and to work steadily and sacrificially in the face of all obstacles. It helps to ensure that the process is consistent with the goal to create communities characterized by justice. It gives us the faith, strength, and creativity to transform our own hearts, as we also work for the transformation of society.

We believe that the tribulations now encompassing much of the world are the symptoms of humanity's failure to understand and embrace our essential oneness. The inter-related threats of climate change, gender discrimination, extreme wealth and poverty, unfair distribution of resources, and the like, all stem from this deficiency and can never be resolved if we do not awaken to our dependence upon each other. The world has contracted to a neighborhood, and it is important to appreciate that what we do in America impacts not only our own country, but the entire planet.

We should also never forget that the richness of our diversity, and our founding ideals of liberty and justice, attract the eyes of the world to us. They will be influenced by what we achieve, or fail to achieve, in this regard. It is not an exaggeration to say that the cause of world peace is linked to our success in resolving the issue of racial injustice.

The oneness of humanity is the foundation of our future. Its realization is the inevitable next stage in our life on this planet. We will replace a world society based upon competition and conflict, and driven by rampant materialism, with one founded upon our higher potential for collaboration and reciprocity. This achievement will mark the universal coming of age of the human race. How soon we achieve this, and how easily, will depend upon the commitment we demonstrate to this cardinal principle.

We have come to a moment of great public awareness and rejection of injustice. Let us not lose this opportunity. Will we commit to the process of forming “a more perfect union”? Will we be guided by “the better angels of our nature” to choose the course of wisdom, of courage, and of unity? Will we choose to truly become that “city upon a hill” to serve as inspiration to all humanity? Let us then join hands with each other in commitment to the path of justice. Together we can surely achieve this.

Bahá'u'lláh said: “So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.”

May that light grow brighter with every passing day.

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