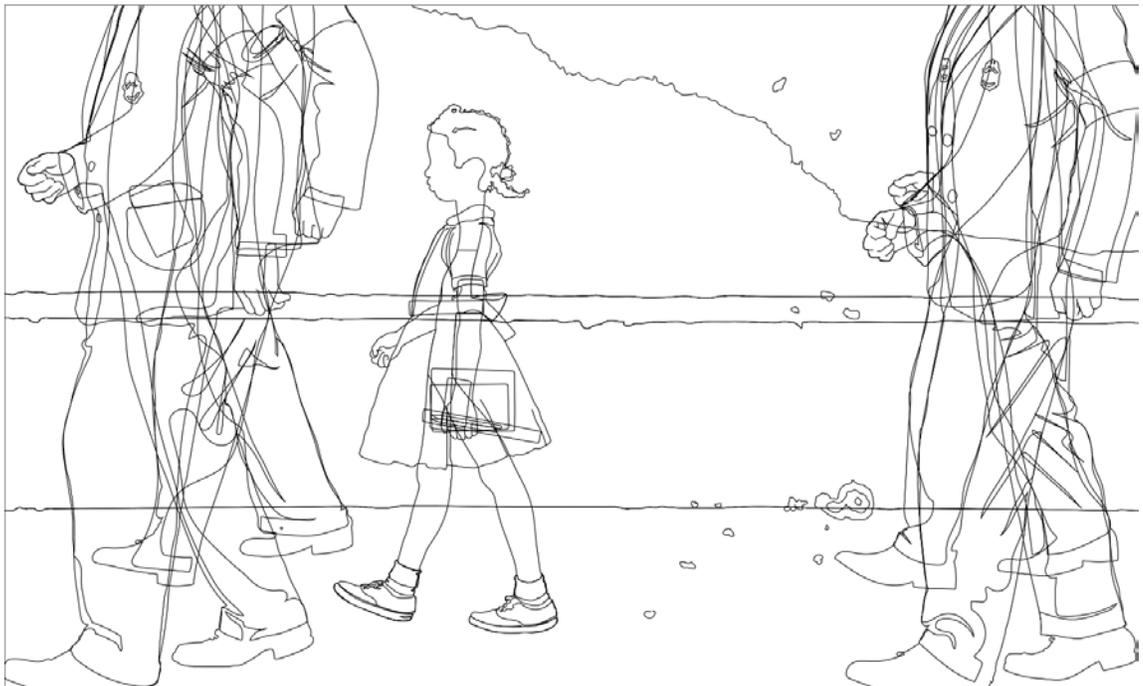


WALKING ON A PATH TOWARDS RACE UNITY AND ONENESS



Part II

BAHA'I NATIONAL OFFICE EDUCATION & SCHOOLS - 2020

To the Participants

Dear Friends:

The long and thorny road to eliminating racial prejudice from our social reality requires an ever-expanding number of individuals, communities and institutions who are committed not only to abolishing entrenched patterns and behaviors that tend to privilege one's self or group over others, but also to working together shoulder to shoulder, as we build the necessary spiritual and social capacities to bring humanity ever-closer in unity and oneness. To this noble goal, the Bahá'í community remains ever-committed, focusing its energies across a worldwide grassroots community building initiative centered on the study of the creative Word found in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and carried out through a systematic institute process that stimulates learning through individual and collective reflection, consultation and action.

In the turbulence and commotion in which society finds itself today one can see the fits and starts of humanity struggling to come of age. As Bahá'ís we hold the conviction that humanity is “approaching today the crowning stage in a millennia-long process which has brought it from its collective infancy to the threshold of maturity-- a stage that will witness the unification of the human race.” Outdated modes of thought, attitudes, habits, laws, practices and conventions that have oppressed and continue to oppress segments of our society are fast becoming obsolete.

In the Advent of Divine Justice, Shoghi Effendi states:

“Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should, at such a time as this when an increasingly large section of the human race is falling a victim to its devastating ferocity, be adopted as the watchword of the entire body of the American believers, in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and habits. . . . It should be deliberately cultivated through the various and everyday opportunities, no matter how insignificant, that present themselves, whether in their homes, their business offices, their schools and colleges, their social parties and recreation grounds, their Bahá'í meetings, conferences, conventions, summer schools and Assemblies.”

“Walking Together on the Path Towards Race Unity and Oneness – Part II,” portrays how, in the most unassuming settings, heroic efforts are being made to heal racial prejudice, illustrating the manner in which families and community members can engage in neighborhood devotionals, study circles, children's classes and junior youth groups to develop new capacities, attitudes and habits to replace outworn modes of thinking, particularly those founded on the falsehood that one group or population is superior to another.

As the program unfolds, we will take a closer look at how families and friends from a neighborhood “are striving to establish a pattern of activity and the corresponding administrative structures that embody the principle of the oneness of humankind and the convictions underpinning it, only a few of which are mentioned here as a means of

illustration: that the rational soul has no gender, race, ethnicity or class, a fact that renders intolerable all forms of prejudice . . . that the root cause of prejudice is ignorance, which can be erased through educational processes that make knowledge accessible to the entire human race, ensuring it does not become the property of a privileged few. . .” (Universal House of Justice 2 March 2013)

The Office of Schools and Education recognizes the family (no matter the size or make-up) as a critical protagonist in the advancement of community. The Institution of the Summer School, guided by this office, is the means by which families of all backgrounds can come together in joyful fellowship to engage in a process of collective learning on important spiritual and social matters of community life. Its goal is to provide a learning environment for the strengthening of the spiritual ties that bind together the family and community. Of course, everyone is welcome to join the educational process at a Summer or Winter School whether they come as an individual or with their whole family.

One can find a beautiful explanation of the family as a protagonist and the role the Institution of the summer and winter schools has in providing the assistance to strengthening family and community life at bahai.org:

Bahá’í families strive to nurture love for all people, tolerance of differences, an acute sense of justice, and empathy for others. Great efforts are made to raise children who understand the oneness of humanity and so view every soul, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or any other affiliation, as a fellow human being, and to give expression to Bahá’u’lláh’s invocation to regard one another as “the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.” The emergence of an “us and them” mentality—a damaging attitude that can emerge when excessive and narrow-minded emphasis is placed on the wellbeing of one’s own family, and the needs and interests of others are ignored—is to be assiduously avoided. For, in the final analysis, devotion to family interests cannot be permitted to diminish one’s commitment to justice and compassion for all.

At a time when one of the most obvious signs of moral decay is the deterioration of family ties, it is no small task to nurture the kind of family life envisaged in the Bahá’í teachings within the many cultures and traditions represented in the Bahá’í community. Throughout the world, in urban and rural settings alike, Bahá’í institutions use every means at their disposal—arranging courses and conferences, organizing summer and winter schools, offering counsel and advice when difficulties arise—to assist in strengthening family life.

Summer and winter schools have been features of Bahá’í community life for many years. In addition to providing an opportunity for participants to study the Bahá’í writings and to strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of their significance, these seasonal schools allow Bahá’í families to spend a period of time together in a joyful atmosphere conducive to learning and the strengthening of spiritual bonds. . . .”

In keeping with the spirit of strengthening family life, Walking Together on a Path towards Race Unity and Oneness allows for collective learning in settings where those

aged eight to one hundred and eight share their opinions and accompany one another in a group setting. There are also sessions in the program where adults and youth, older children and junior youth will have their own break-out sessions. Those seven and younger will be accompanied in age-appropriate break-out classes.

As with every summer or winter school, whether inviting friends to come together at the regional or neighborhood level, individuals and families come in a spirit of joyful excitement to learn alongside other families and communities. To assist us in upholding the spirit of joy, our hearts should be filled with tender emotions for one another. What we think about our friends affects them, even if our thoughts are not expressed explicitly in words or deeds. Constant effort is needed to cleanse the mind from the slightest hint of paternalism or a desire to dominate, to remove all forms of estrangement or suspicion.

Beloved friends, let every word we choose to share be expressed with milk and honey, avoiding contention in expressing one's opinion, being always striving to be in a humble posture of learning. We are trained by the Exemplar of every Bahá'í ideal and virtue, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to walk in the ways of love and cooperation, and the standard He sets for us is high indeed.

Family Break-out Session I

Below is an account of a conversation between a few families in a neighborhood participating in their first study circle together, “Reflections on the Life of the Spirit.” Please read the following narrative, keeping in mind the main idea of “learning in action:”

How is the study circle enabling participants to talk with one another about oneness and nobility, racism and prejudice in an elevated and practical manner as they participate in this community building activity?

How does each individual, as well as the families portrayed in the case study, see themselves as protagonists, helping to eradicate racism by participating in the institute process and sharing the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh?

It was Maria, the mother of Esperanza, the children’s class teacher, who contributed selected readings from *The Hidden Words* of Bahá’u’lláh. These stimulated often difficult, but thought-provoking conversations. Maria invited those present, both youth and adults to share how the concepts from these verses might relate to oneness and help counter the divisive forces of prejudice. This led to a desire to better understand the writings of the Bahá’í Faith, and then to the decision to hold a study circle. The simple yet profound concepts found in “Reflections on the Life of the Spirit” offered an opportunity to study, consult, reflect and act on how the most vital and challenging issue facing America, racial prejudice, could be systematically eliminated.

“Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone; let your heart burn with loving-kindness for all who may cross your path.”¹

After re-reading the above passage to the group, Mr. Wilson, one of the fathers, was moved to say, “I have a question.”

“You always have a question,” Mrs. Wilson interrupted, bringing a few smiles from the group of grandparents, parents and youth.

“No, this is something that I have been meaning to share with you all for some time, but I didn’t have the right words to express myself.” He looked into the eyes of the family and friends in the neighborhood he had come to know better. “I get all the concepts we’ve been studying and thinking about together, like “nobility,” “oneness.” I think we are all better people from our being together. I sure see us as good friends, as a community. I think I am beginning to understand the message that Bahá’u’lláh is bringing, and how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is an example to humanity, especially for our children. I see the benefits to my family. We all do...” Mr. Wilson took a long deep breath. “But what is in my heart is pain... Deep pain. And I don’t know how to stop the pain.”

The honesty shown by Mr. Wilson in sharing his feelings caused everyone to pause, to gradually become filled with emotion and a sense of heartfelt reflection. There were no words, but little by little, hands joined together in silence, and the room of noble souls huddled in close embrace.

Mr. Turner was moved to lift his voice in song – a refrain which they had learned together previously. One by one the group joined in, singing:

“Come on, to the room. Come on, to the room.
Bahá’u’lláh is my doctor. He writes up all of my prescriptions.
He gives me all of my medicine. In the prayer room. In the prayer room.”

Esperanza and those in the children’s class sat nearby on the carpet in the adjoining room, busy memorizing and coloring. Hearing the rising melody, Mrs. Turner’s daughter, Tenisha, made her way silently across the room to her mother’s side and when all went quiet whispered, “Why is everyone so sad, Mama?”

Mrs. Turner wanted to tell her to immediately hush up, but as she looked into Tenisha’s eyes, she knew the question required a voice filled with love and understanding. She cleared her throat and said, so everyone in the room could hear, “When I was a little girl growing up in this city, black people lived on one side, and whites lived on the other. The only time we got together, was in schools, which happened because some people rose up and said we all should have the same opportunity in education. It took a lot of courage to stand up for equality.”

“And we won’t stop marching,” Mrs. Wilson added, staring with love at her husband.

Mrs. Turner continued, trying to explain it another way through her daughter’s eyes. “Tenisha, the world is full of selfless people working for oneness and unity but there are others who are unaware of the oneness of humanity and still have prejudice in their hearts.”

“Like bullies,” Tenisha interjected.

“Tenisha, selfishness and prejudice take many forms that divide us. Mr. Wilson experienced a lot of injustice in his life and he doesn’t want that world for his boys, nor do we want that for you or any child in this world.”

“Then we should just stop being prejudiced, Mama.”

“And just how do think we should do that, Tenisha?” Mrs. Turner probed.

Tenisha looked over to Esperanza for an answer. Esperanza encouraged her with a nod to share what was in her heart and thoughts.

“Justice and... Trust in God?”

“Now where did you learn that?” Mrs. Turner questioned with a smile.

“In our children’s class!” Tenisha hopped over to Esperanza and returned to drawing with the other children.

Maria shared, “You know friends, one of the unique bounties of being a Bahá’í is the connection of every heart to the flow of divine guidance from the supreme Institution, the Universal House of Justice seated on Mt. Carmel in Haifa, Israel. This Institution, which Bahá’u’lláh promised in His Writings would provide unerring guidance for all humanity, including not only an evolving framework for establishing oneness and unity, but allowing every soul to seek clarification on any issue that comes to his or her heart so that each may arise and serve the goals of the Divine Plan of God. Across the years in our country, many dedicated friends have sought to better understand how to respond to the issue of racism and racial prejudice by writing to the Supreme Body of our Faith. Often times in our country the National Spiritual Assembly answers and shares additional guidance with the friends and community to assist them. One compilation I think we could study together intensively is “Achieving Race Unity and Advancing the Process of Entry by Troops: Extracts from Letters Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Individual Believers in the United States”. And within that compilation there are some passages I think relate directly to the conversation we’ve just been having. For example:”

“You are encouraged to take heart from the Master’s assurance that racial prejudice will one day be eliminated from the face of the earth, although as the Guardian explained, the road to be travelled will be “long and thorny” and “beset with pitfalls”.

Mrs. Turner’s fifteen-year-old son, Louis, was listening intently. He looked over to Maria, having drawn an insight from the passage she just shared. “You mean the Bahá’ís are struggling with this issue too?”

Maria nodded, adding a Spanish phrase in agreement: “Claro que sí! We’re all walking together on a path towards race unity and oneness.”

Mr. Wilson closed his Ruhi workbook, reflecting, “I apologize for baring my soul earlier. Life in this country has not been easy for me, or for my brothers and sisters. I feel our pain, our history and our struggle. I know you feel me and you hear me. That’s why I keep coming here... because you people, my neighbors, my friends, my family, not only have a dream, but are, as you said, all marching on a path -- without stopping -- towards unity and oneness.”

A confirming “Amen” came from several of the neighbors present.

“Next week we will complete the final section in “Reflections on the Life of the Spirit” with a call to action for each individual and family,” Maria said to close the study circle, handing out a print-out for daily readings in the morning and evening. “Don’t worry, there are many other writings and Institute books to follow that share concepts whereby principles from the Revelation can be put into action. For example, from recognizing Bahá’u’lláh as the Manifestation of God for all humanity today, to building our capacity to serve our families and neighborhoods, both spiritually and materially, in every culture and community around the world.

Mr. Turner noticed Louis busy on his cell phone and nudged him to put it away. Louis explained to his father and the study circle, “Sorry. I was looking up on the bahai.org website the letter the youth were studying together from the bicentenary celebration for the twin Holy Days. If it’s okay with you all, I think it makes sense to share a few paragraphs here:”

“The matter at hand is a challenging one, and requires candour. There are many noble and admirable causes in the world, and they arise from particular perspectives, each with its own merit. Is the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh merely one amongst them? Or is it universal, embodying the highest ideals of all humanity? After all, a Cause that is to be the wellspring of enduring justice and peace—not for one place or one people, but for all places and all peoples—must be inexhaustible, must possess a heavenly vitality that allows it to transcend all limitations and encompass every dimension of the life of humanity. Ultimately, it must have the power to transform the human heart. Then let us, like the Báb’s guest, observe attentively. Does not the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh possess these very qualities?”

“If the teachings brought by Bahá’u’lláh are what will enable humanity to advance to the highest levels of unity, then one must search the soul for the right response.

“... Let everyone who is awake to the condition of the world, and to the persistent evils that warp the lives of its inhabitants, heed Bahá’u’lláh’s call to selfless and steadfast service— heroism for the present age. What else will rescue the world but the efforts of countless souls who each make the welfare of humanity their principal, their dominating concern?”

(Universal House of Justice, October 2019)

Mr. Turner put his hand out for Louis’ cell phone. Louis was surprised to see his Dad interested in studying the passage for himself.

As Esperanza brought the children into the room to join their families, Mrs. Wilson had a quiet word with Mr. and Mrs. Turner, before turning back to consult her two sons and husband. Mrs. Wilson held her husband’s hand, and said loudly above the chatter. “Friends, if it’s alright with everyone -- I consulted with the Turners, and you’re all welcome to our house next week for lunch and prayers.” Then looking at Tenisha, she added, “And learning how we should all “trust in God.”

¹ (Reflections on the Life of the Spirit, Unit 1 Section 5)

² Achieving Race Unity and Advancing the Process of Entry by Troops: Extracts from Letters Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Individual Believers in the United States (From a letter dated 1 April 1996)

Please consult with your break-out group and reflect on the following questions. Each individual is encouraged to share her or his thoughts and perspective:

1. How does Tenisha’s example of striving to understand assist the study circle participants to deepen their knowledge, of the guidance from the Universal House of Justice in how every believer can contribute to freedom from racial prejudice?

2. The Universal House of Justice states that we should have no doubt that in America “race prejudice will finally be exorcised from the body politic”. Discuss the necessary precondition given in the quote to translate our community’s social vision into reality.

3. What are the characteristics that we need each of us might try to display to demonstrate Bahá’u’lláh’s call “to selfless and steadfast service— heroism”, especially in the current discourse about racial prejudice?

4. When incidents of prejudice or racism arise in the community, what tools do all the members of the family have to bring forward when discussing, openly and confidently, race unity as a process of growth?

Break-out Session I - A

After completing Session I as a family, please divide up by age groups for this next session and study, with your small group facilitator or an animator, the story of the magic mustard seed. This story is taken from the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment workbook, "Walking the Straight Path."

XI

We all experience disappointment and even tragedy in our lives. At such times it is difficult not to give in to grief and become paralyzed. But have we ever thought that there is a cure for sorrow available to all of us?



Long ago in China there was a young woman who married a wealthy man's son. She was gentle and kind and brought happiness to their home. With time, she and her husband were blessed with a son. But their joy was not to last. Soon the boy was taken ill and died. The woman was overcome with grief. From door to door she went asking her neighbors, "Is there no medicine, no magic, that will bring my son back to life?"

Seeing that she had lost her senses, they sent her to a man known for his wisdom.

"Do you have some medicine that will bring my son back to me?" she asked him.

"I will need a handful of mustard seed," was the answer.

Elated, the woman promised to bring it immediately. But then the wise man said, "The seeds must be taken from a house that has never known sorrow. I will use them to cure your grief."

So the woman went off in search of the magical mustard seed. Knocking on the door of a beautiful mansion, she thought that surely she had come to the right place. "Here is some mustard seed," the people inside said. "Take it. It's yours." But when asked if their home had ever known sorrow, they told her, "Please don't remind us of our sadness." As she heard them recount the story of the terrible things that had recently happened to them, she was moved to tears.

"Should not I, who have also known sorrow, stay and comfort these people?" she asked herself. She remained with them for a while and then began her search again. But nowhere, not in the cities or in the towns, on the mountain or on the plain, could she find a place that had not been touched by grief. And she became so busy helping others that, in the end, she forgot about her search for the magical mustard seed, never realizing that she had actually found the cure for sorrow.

8. What did she do next?

9. What did she find in her search?

10. How did the woman come to forget about her search for the magical mustard seed?

11. What is the cure for sorrow that the woman had actually found?

VOCABULARY

Complete each of the sentences below using one of the following words:

paralyzed, available, realized, disappointing, promised, elated, cure, search, recount, comfort

1. Hon Gau gathered all _____ information before making a decision.

2. When she saw the accident, she felt _____ by fear for a second, but then found the strength to go and help.

3. She enjoyed reading the book, but found the last chapter _____

4. When he left for school in the city, he _____ his parents to write once a week.

5. News of his success at school _____ everyone in the village, especially his parents.

6. Xia Ling was able to _____ her experience teaching children with great enthusiasm.

7. He looked around for his glasses but could not find them; then he _____ that he had left them at home on the table.
8. The police officer tried to _____ the sobbing child who had gotten separated from his mother in the busy marketplace.
9. While one police officer stayed with the lost child, the other went out in _____ of his mother.
10. The doctor told her that the best _____ for her headache would be a good night's sleep.

DISCUSSION

How can helping others assist us to overcome our own sorrow?

MEMORIZATION

"Happy the soul that shall forget his own good, and like the chosen ones of God, vie with his fellows in service to the good of all." -- 'Abdu'l-Baha, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 115

Family Break-out Session - II

Please read the case study below in your break-out group. This study recounts the story of how a community junior youth group strives to build the individual and collective capacities of its participants by enhancing their powers of self-expression and developing their spiritual perceptions, as they begin to understand the moral issues that underlie everyday decisions. In addition, they begin to identify the moral implications of their own speech and actions. As part of this process, they engage in artistic and extracurricular activities, and contribute to the life of the community by organizing small service projects.

As in the previous family break-out session, the main idea to keep in mind in this session is "learning in action." We ask that you read the narrative carefully and discuss together the questions that follow. Think how the process of study, consultation, action and reflection applies to this case study, while also considering points such as: How might the concepts being shared during the conversation help to remove estrangement and suspicion and promote understanding our inherent oneness? To inspire unity of thought and unity of action on a path of service?

Over the past few months, the neighborhood junior youth group studied their third text together, "Glimmerings of Hope". The first two junior youth texts, "Breezes of Confirmation" and "Wellspring of Joy", helped the group to strengthen the conviction that Divine assistance will descend on those who make efforts towards noble goals, while developing the capacity to articulate profound spiritual concepts. "Glimmerings of Hope" delves into the forces at work in the life of society. The story, which is set in Africa, follows the journey of a twelve-year-old boy, Kibomi, who searches to find his sister after his parents are killed in civil strife. The story helps the junior youth analyze two sets of forces operating in society, one destructive in nature and one constructive. As the junior youth read the story of Kibomi they come to understand that hope is found in one's conscious decision to align oneself, in both thought and action, with the constructive spiritual forces.

As animators, Mona and Aaron were exploring with the group how the twofold moral purpose of personal transformation and service to the community, contributes to the advancement of society. And how, in the face of prejudice and hostility, our thoughts and behavior can either aggravate or help to terminate a vicious cycle of violence.

Reading these conversations required loving patience and perseverance on the part of each junior youth so that they could understand how the concepts in the story might relate to their own reality, and how there are moral implications underlying their own everyday interactions with one another, even in their private use of language.

To better understand the shoes in which Kibomi found himself walking, the animators suggested they could visit their city's black history museum and learn how the disintegrative forces of society, such as prejudice, institutional racism and tribalism, manifested themselves both in past and also in the present in their community and across the nation. Mona and Aaron did all they could to prepare the junior youth for the visit, even spending time on a home visit to each family to talk about the nature and scope of

the moving experience to which the junior youth would be exposed.

Once actually in the museum, pausing at each exhibit, two of the junior youth, Gloria and Katie, became progressively more aware of the heart-wrenching horrors of slavery, the systemic prejudice and racism institutionalized over 400 years ago against those of African heritage in America. Beyond the overwhelming injustice presented, the junior youth also learned about courageous individuals, communities and institutions that demonstrated spiritual resilience and nobility of soul. They heard the stories of those who selflessly rose to the forefront of human rights to stand up against the endless tide of oppression and inequality, in order to help forge ahead towards freedom from prejudice, race unity and oneness.

After the exhibit, the junior youth group walked over to a nearby park, flopped down and reflected at great length about their experience, recalling the many images, stories, art and artifacts in the museum, trying to explain to each other how it affected them and their view of the society around them.

Mona asked, “Imagine how Kibomi experienced such heartbreaking despair and yet drew on his capacity to find a glimmering of hope. How do you see us contributing something right here and now in America, walking together on a path towards race unity and oneness?”

“I don’t know. It’s hard. This world is so crazy,” Gloria said reflecting with deeper appreciation. “My Grandpa told me a ton of stories about what he went through growing up. I didn’t believe him... till now...”

“I wish my parents would come to see this.” Katie shared.

“White people don’t care about black people.” Gloria declared abruptly. She quickly felt the heat of some of the junior youth thinking she said something she shouldn’t have. “It’s just a fact.”

Aaron encouraged Gloria to analyze what she was thinking and feeling in her heart, asking, “Then how do we change that perception?”

“That white people don’t care, or that I think white people don’t care?” Gloria questioned without pause.

“Both,” Aaron suggested.

Gloria took the time, seriously considering Aaron’s remark. “...We have to find a way to get them to come.”

Jamila, one of Gloria’s friends from school, who recently joined the JY group sparked at Gloria’s reflection, suggesting, “Maybe we could bring the museum to them.”

Katie and Gloria both stared at Jamila. “Huh?”

They all looked at Jamila, “I’m just saying that we maybe could make a museum and invite everybody to come to it.”

Excited by the idea, the group imagined what their museum might offer, what the invitations might look like, what place they might find to rent. After a few minutes, Mona asked, “I think it’s a great idea . . . , but how would our museum be different from what anyone can already see at the black history museum?”

It gave them pause to reflect with deep breaths. Katie and Gloria shrugged to each other, stumped. Then Jamila spoke out, thinking aloud, “What if they could see it through our eyes. I mean, from what we’re learning in our junior youth group?”

Aaron then added, promoting the line of thinking a little further, “So as a junior youth group, how would we help our families and our neighbors to understand we are all walking together on a path towards race unity and oneness?”

Gloria found her inspiration. “We just show them things. Like art and pictures and stuff, that can tell a story – make us all find hope in thinking about the constructive forces and actions that contribute to race unity, like we learned in “Glimmerings”!”

Mona quietly shared an idea with Aaron, who nodded as he heard her thoughts. Then she said, “This could be a really good service project. Aaron and I were thinking, maybe we could all meet with the Local Spiritual Assembly and ask them for their spiritual and material guidance and support. They are very concerned about the issue of race unity, as “freedom from prejudice” is the watchword of the Bahá’í Faith.

“What’s a Local Spiritual Assembly?” one of the group asked.

Aaron opened his cell phone and scrolled through some pages. “There are many Bahá’í institutions assisting and supporting the core activities in a neighborhood and community, like children’s classes and junior youth groups. Here’s what the Universal House of Justice, the supreme Institution of the Bahá’í Faith wrote about regarding some of the duties and functions of a Local Spiritual Assembly, the governing body of nine individuals elected by every adult Bahá’í in a community, once a year. Its duty is to . . .”

Then handing his cell phone to the junior youth next to him, she read:

“...properly assess and utilize resources, financial and otherwise, both in support of community activities and in discharging its administrative functions ... its ability to nurture an environment conducive to the participation of large numbers in unified action and to ensure that their energies and talents contribute towards progress. In all these respects, the spiritual well-being of the community remains uppermost in the Assembly’s mind. And when inevitable problems arise, whether in relation to some activity or among individuals, they will be addressed by a Local Spiritual Assembly which has so completely gained the confidence of the members of the community that all naturally turn to it for assistance. This implies that the Assembly has learned through experience how to help the believers put

aside the divisive ways of a partisan mindset, how to find the seeds of unity in even the most perplexing and thorny situations and how to nurture them slowly and lovingly, upholding at all times the standard of justice.”

Aaron took back the cell phone and scrolled down for the next junior youth to read:

“...Much will fall on the Local Assembly, not as an executor of projects but as the voice of moral authority, to make certain that, as the friends strive to apply the teachings of the Faith to improve conditions through a process of action, reflection and consultation...”

28 December 2010, Universal House of Justice

Later that day Mona and Aaron reached out to Mrs. Page, Katie’s mom, who was serving as the secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly. They requested to meet with the Assembly to seek its guidance, support and assistance. A few days later Mrs. Page, on behalf of the Assembly, invited the group to her home to meet with the “LSA” the following Sunday morning so that all the junior youth could attend.

The junior youth group agreed that Jamila would present the proposed service project. Jamila was very nervous but the opening time for prayers and singing helped to calm her soul. She had never been to a meeting with a Spiritual Assembly. She began, a little hesitantly, “To prepare for this meeting we learned about how a Local Spiritual Assembly is the voice of moral authority and supports the core activities and community life.”

Little by little as Jamila spoke about studying “Glimmerings of Hope”, and their experience with the black history museum, her powers of expression and confidence grew. After sharing the proposal, a few members of the Assembly had some questions, in particular, as to how the service project might be materially assisted.

Jamila spoke clearly, “The middle school gave us a quote to use the auditorium, so we need help to pay for that. And we need some funds to get art supplies and make a few posters. And ink so we can print our invitations to the families and school. We’re going to ask our families to provide the refreshments.” Then remembering, she added, “And you’re all invited too.” She turned to her group, asking, “Anything else?”

Gloria leaned over to Jamila and whispered, “Prayers!”

Jamila shared loudly, “And we need lots of prayers!”

Everyone in the room laughed, realizing this was the most important spiritual requisite for their project.

Mrs. Page assured them all, “We will definitely say prayers. Thank you Jamila, friends, for coming and sharing your vision. It sounds very exciting. As I am sure you know Bahá’ís in every community are very concerned about the issue of race unity. In all honesty, we are all trying to learn, as “freedom from prejudice” is our watchword.”

Everyone in the junior youth group nodded, knowing this principal from what

Mona had shared with them earlier.

Mrs. Page continued, “The Local Assembly will consult together on your proposal. When it makes a decision, can we call you? ...”

The next day, Aaron and Mona texted all the junior youth that they had heard that the Assembly unanimously approved their proposal and offered some guiding quotations to assist their thinking.

Everybody couldn’t wait to get together to begin thinking about all the work they would have in order to make this small social action meaningful for the group and those they hoped to reach and inspire through the service project.

Feeling inspired herself, Gloria confidently told Katie, “Know what? I think your parents are gonna attend!”

Katie was amazed at the confirming process unfolding before them all and said “For real! They even talked to our neighbors about coming!”

Please consult and reflect on the following questions with your break-out group. Each individual is encouraged to share his or her thoughts and perspective:

1. How did the junior youths’ earlier study of the junior youth materials help to elevate their understanding of spiritual concepts when they later explored the issues of racism and prejudice?

2. How might the concepts in the junior youth materials have helped illuminate the Local Spiritual Assembly’s consultation as it came to a consensus of understanding and a decision of how to guide, support and assist the junior youths’ initiative?

3. How might institutions and families be more systematically engaged in learning about and supporting junior youth groups in your community?

Break-out Session II - A

After completing family breakout Session II, please come together in this next group session II-A, dividing up by age groups, allowing the junior youth to be co-facilitators leading each group's study of Lesson 4 in "Glimmerings of Hope". Discuss how this junior youth material could be useful to your, and every other, community in the world, as they strive to eliminate estrangement and suspicion, and address the matter of freedom from prejudice?

LESSON 4

Kibomi walks at night and rests during the day. He has not eaten for two days and is weak. As he waits again for dark, he thinks about his parents. Why did the Kungu soldiers kill them? His heart is filled with pain.

Kibomi hears footsteps and hides down in the grass. An old man walks by. He is using a traditional Kungu walking stick. Kibomi is afraid, but he follows the man at a distance, hoping he might find food.



The old man walks to a small hut deep in the bush. Kibomi sees him go inside the hut and sit down to eat. His back is to the door. Kibomi picks up a rock and slowly walks to the door. Just as he is about to enter, the man speaks. "I know you are hungry, boy. Why don't you sit down and eat with me?"

Kibomi stops in fear. The man speaks kindly again, "Come and eat. I will not hurt you."

Kibomi sits beside the man but keeps the rock next to him. The old man gives him sweet potato. Kibomi quickly takes the food and eats it.

After a few minutes, Kibomi looks up at the man: "Sir, why are you being kind to me?"

The man smiles and says, "You wonder why a Kungu should be kind to an Adumbu? It is true we are of different tribes. But we are the same inside. We each have a heart, we each have a soul, and we want happiness for those we love."

Kibomi pushes the rock away and asks, "Why do tribes fight then?"

"Belonging to a tribe helps us to feel part of a group and also to organize ourselves,"

answers the old man. "But we must not fight and harm one another because we are from different tribes. We were created to love, not to hate." The man stops talking and looks into Kibomi's eyes. "We all have choices to make in our lives," he says gently. "We can work together to build a better world, or we can hate and destroy each other."

There is a noise outside and the old man is worried. "It is not safe here. You must go," he whispers. He wraps some sweet potato in a leaf and gives it to Kibomi. Kibomi thanks him and runs into the forest.

Questions

1. What thoughts and feelings fill Kibomi's heart when he thinks about his parents?
2. Why does Kibomi follow the old man?
3. How does the old man treat Kibomi?
4. What does he give Kibomi to eat?
5. What does the old man tell Kibomi about the choices we make in our lives?

Activities

1. The old man is a Kungu, but he is kind to Kibomi. To change this world, we must love all people and work with them in unity. Read and think about the following prayer:

"O my God! O my God! Unite the hearts of Thy servants, and reveal to them Thy great purpose. May they follow Thy commandments and abide in Thy law. Help them, O God, in their endeavor, and grant them strength to serve Thee. O God! Leave them not to themselves, but guide their steps by the light of Thy knowledge, and cheer their hearts by Thy love. Verily, Thou art their Helper and their Lord."¹

You may now wish to memorize the above prayer.

¹ Compilations, Baha'i Prayers, p. 203

2. In this prayer, we ask God to unite the hearts of the people. We need to be united in our families, in our schools, and in our communities.

a. Which of the following might we see in a family whose members love one another and are united?

- The husband and wife discuss important matters and make decisions together.
- The family makes sure that both the girls and the boys go to school.
- Everyone joyfully shares in the work around the house.
- The children constantly quarrel.

b. Which of the following might we see in a school where the students are united?

- The students work together to beautify the school garden.
- The boys and girls clean the classrooms together each day.
- The students make no effort to get to know a newcomer to the school.
- The older students help the younger ones with their studies.

c. Which of the following might we see in a community whose members are united?

- People of one race have good friends belonging to another race.
- Neighbors help each other in times of need.
- People from different tribes attend prayer meetings together.
- People gossip and talk about one another behind each other's back.

d. Which of the following might we see in a country that enjoys peace and unity?

- There is equal opportunity for all children to go to school.
- Both men and women hold responsible positions.
- As part of their education, youth are engaged in community-service projects.
- Some people are very wealthy, while others do not have enough to eat.

Family Break-out Session III

Your break-out group has received an invitation to visit and experience the junior youth group's museum exhibit: "Walking Together on a Path towards Race Unity and Oneness." In this two-hour session, please read the invitation materials below prepared for the visit to the museum. Then please use the Museum Program Sheets to keep personal notes as you discuss together with your break-out group the questions associated with each exhibit, allowing each family member and individual in the group to express from their heart their current understanding and perceptions as they study, consult and reflect on the images and art displayed.

Before entering the museum please read the following introduction and welcome from the junior youth group's invitation below.

Handout to Participants:

To our friends and family,

Welcome! We are very happy you have accepted our invitation to come and participate in our museum exhibit: "Walking Together on a Path towards Race Unity and Oneness." We hope that you will also take the time to visit and learn about the other museums in our community and country, especially those dedicated to understanding the reality of racial prejudice, racism, colorism, inequality, injustice and oppression, to which many in our community have been exposed and suffered from in the past and in society today. We felt from our study, consultation and reflection in our Bahá'í-inspired Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program we could create a space not necessarily concentrated on the forces of disintegration, as important as this is to understand and learn from, but to focus here on the forces of integration that help unite our families and community and advance the reality of the oneness of humanity.

This exhibit is the result of a combined effort by our entire junior youth group, for which it did a ton of research – scientific and artistic – to decide what images and quotes would help us to better our understanding of race unity and oneness. This was not an easy process. There were many different opinions and we had to keep going back to the Bahá'í-inspired guidance to clarify our vision and purpose. In consulting our community's Local Spiritual Assembly, they shared the following guidance from the Bahá'í writings to help advance the thinking of our junior youth group initiative:

“Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should, at such a time as this when an increasingly large section of the human race is falling a victim to its devastating ferocity, be adopted as the watchword of the entire body of the American believers, in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and habits. It should be consistently demonstrated in every phase of their activity and life, whether in the Bahá'í community or outside it, in public or in private, formally as well as informally, individually as well as in their official capacity as organized

groups, committees and Assemblies. It should be deliberately cultivated through the various and everyday opportunities, no matter how insignificant, that present themselves, whether in their homes, their business offices, their schools and colleges, their social parties and recreation grounds, their Bahá'í meetings, conferences, conventions, summer schools and Assemblies. It should, above all else, become the keynote of the policy of that august body which, in its capacity as the national representative, and the director and coordinator of the affairs of the community, must set the example, and facilitate the application of such a vital principle to the lives and activities of those whose interests it safeguards and represents."

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*

"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."

"... Let the negroes through a corresponding effort on their part, show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget the past, and their ability to wipeout every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds."

Shoghi Effendi: *The Advent of Divine Justice*

Sometimes the historic events were very painful for us to view and hear about, yet we also read stories and found images that were inspiring beyond words. These are not the only exhibits we could have shared, just a small sample to inspire those visiting our museum among our friends and family. Hopefully it will assist all of us to arise in our homes, schools, at work and in our neighborhoods to light, together with those of diverse backgrounds, a fire of love and service that gradually brings about oneness and justice and peace for all.

The museum is separated into four sections with three pieces of art in each section: I. History and Heroes of Resilience; II. Consciousness and Freedom from Estrangement; III. Grassroots Action, Cooperation and Accompaniment; and IV. Arising to Serve – Community Building and Freedom from Prejudice.

We ask that every individual who experiences these image or artwork, allow their voice to be heard and their feelings expressed, regardless of age, education, or heritage. The key concept to consider is: What does the image or artwork set out to share? How does the exhibit elevate my current understanding of the issue of race unity in my home, community and country?

Please take one of the Program Sheets.

We hope that this experience inspires your hearts as it has ours, to further this discussion with others -- as arising protagonists and champions of true understanding, genuine love and oneness.

Sincerely, City Neighborhood Junior Youth Group

City Neighborhood Junior Youth Group
MUSEUM PROGRAM SHEET

PLEASE NOTE: Please use the following reference page for your personal notes as you experience each museum exhibit. The order of the exhibits may be different than the order your group may follow. Also kindly note that the exhibit images and questions might also change from time to time, as we strive to learn and improve the experience based on those who have visited before you.

-- City Neighborhood Junior Youth Group

I. PART ONE: History and Resilience

Exhibit I: Statue of Liberty

For what purpose was the statue of liberty created?

Exhibit II: Ruby Bridges

Studying the details of this artwork, how do we understand and perceive Ruby Bridges as an example of courage for all children and humanity?

Exhibit III: Historical Figures

Identify these individuals and discuss together:

How did these individuals work towards human rights? Towards minority rights? Towards God and oneness? Name one of your heroes who demonstrates selfless and steadfast service to all humanity.

II. PART TWO: Consciousness and Freedom from Estrangement

Exhibit IV: Graph on Perceptions of How Blacks are treated in the U.S.

How might we discern from this graph which subjects and themes could unify our diverse individual and cultural points of view in order to help build consensus?

Exhibit V: Colorblind

How might this artistic expression help to open our eyes and hearts to appreciating the beauty of diversity in our daily lives, even when there appears to be little diversity in our family or community?

Exhibit VI: Silent Majority and Social Media

In answering the question written on this image, you may want to do some research by looking up on your cell phone at www.bahai.us a recent letter from the Universal House of Justice, and studying the recent guidance therein on individual participation in social media (dated December 01, 2019)

III. PART THREE: Grassroots Action - Cooperation and Accompaniment

Exhibit VII: Pictures from our Region of a Local Neighborhood Children’s Class

What can the children visiting this exhibit tell us about images of their children’s class? About what they are learning in their home and community about the oneness of humanity?

Exhibit VIII: Pictures from our Region of a Local Neighborhood JY Group

What can the junior youth visiting this exhibit share about these images and how they see themselves contributing together to race unity and oneness within their families, schools and communities?

Exhibit IX: Images from our Region of Study Circles and Devotionals

Please share in what ways the youth and adults are contributing to cultural and racial diversity by their participation in the devotionals and study circles in your community?

A. PART FOUR: Arising to Serve – Community Building & Freedom from Prejudice

Exhibit X: Rockwell - Moving In

Art can convey both external and internal realities that we experience in our daily lives. What do you think the artist is trying to portray in this image and why?

Exhibit XI: The Beauty of Interracial Marriage

What would you do if you loved someone from a different culture, religion or race and this love caused you to lose your job, your friends, the love of your siblings and family, your inheritance, your home?

Exhibit XII: UHJ then and now

Looking at these two historic images, describe how you see the maturation of the Bahá’í Institutions contributing to the universal participation in the world on the discourse on human rights and race unity? “How does this gathering give us hope for the future?”

Break-out Session III - A

For this break-out session please divide up by age groups. The junior youth, youth and adults are asked to read and reflect deeply on the spiritual concepts unveiled in the Fire Tablet below. Please study together in small teams of two to four individuals.

The Fire Tablet was revealed in 1871 during Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in 'Akká when great afflictions and sorrows had surrounded the Blessed Beauty. This Tablet takes the form of a conversation: Bahá'u'lláh first speaks as a human soul addressing God, and then as the Voice of God which replies.

One historian writes: "Bahá'u'lláh has revealed this Tablet in a very special way. It seems as if it is His human Person, as distinct from the Manifestation of God, that recounts His afflictions and dwells on the iniquities perpetrated by His enemies. Then comes the voice of God and Bahá'u'lláh's response to it." Under great tribulations, sorrow and pain Bahá'u'lláh unburdens His sorrows to God, heeds His response and bursts through despair to the station of sacrifice.

The intention of this session is to enkindle within the hearts of those studying this Tablet a fire that will burn away the veils which separate our souls from His Presence and, trusting in God, to arise with expanding courage to bring the healing message of this Revelation, oneness and justice, to all humanity.

THE FIRE TABLET

In the Name of God, the Most Ancient, the Most Great.

Indeed the hearts of the sincere are consumed in the fire of separation: Where is the gleaming of the light of Thy Countenance, O Beloved of the worlds?

Those who are near unto Thee have been abandoned in the darkness of desolation: Where is the shining of the morn of Thy reunion, O Desire of the worlds?

The bodies of Thy chosen ones lie quivering on distant sands: Where is the ocean of Thy presence, O Enchanter of the worlds?

Longing hands are uplifted to the heaven of Thy grace and generosity: Where are the rains of Thy bestowal, O Answerer of the worlds?

The infidels have arisen in tyranny on every hand: Where is the compelling power of Thine ordaining pen, O Conqueror of the worlds?

The barking of dogs is loud on every side: Where is the lion of the forest of Thy might, O Chastiser of the worlds?

Coldness hath gripped all mankind: Where is the warmth of Thy love, O Fire of the worlds?

Calamity hath reached its height: Where are the signs of Thy succor, O Salvation of the worlds?

Darkness hath enveloped most of the peoples: Where is the brightness of Thy splendor, O Radiance of the worlds?

The necks of men are stretched out in malice: Where are the swords of Thy vengeance, O Destroyer of the worlds?

Abasement hath reached its lowest depth: Where are the emblems of Thy glory, O Glory of the worlds?

Sorrows have afflicted the Revealer of Thy Name, the All-Merciful: Where is the joy of the Dayspring of Thy Revelation, O Delight of the worlds?

Anguish hath befallen all the peoples of the earth: Where are the ensigns of Thy gladness, O Joy of the worlds?

Thou seest the Dawning Place of Thy signs veiled by evil suggestions: Where are the fingers of Thy might, O Power of the worlds?

Sore thirst hath overcome all men: Where is the river of Thy bounty, O Mercy of the worlds?

Greed hath made captive all mankind: Where are the embodiments of detachment, O Lord of the worlds?

Thou seest this Wronged One lonely in exile: Where are the hosts of the heaven of Thy Command, O Sovereign of the worlds?

I have been forsaken in a foreign land: Where are the emblems of Thy faithfulness, O Trust of the worlds?

The agonies of death have laid hold on all men: Where is the surging of Thine ocean of eternal life, O Life of the worlds?

The whisperings of Satan have been breathed to every creature: Where is the meteor of Thy fire, O Light of the worlds?

The drunkenness of passion hath perverted most of mankind: Where are the daysprings of purity, O Desire of the worlds?

Thou seest this Wronged One veiled in tyranny among the Syrians: Where is the radiance of Thy dawning light, O Light of the worlds?

Thou seest Me forbidden to speak forth: Then from where will spring Thy melodies, O Nightingale of the worlds?

Most of the people are enwrapped in fancy and idle imaginings: Where are the exponents of Thy certitude, O Assurance of the worlds?

Bahá is drowning in a sea of tribulation: Where is the Ark of Thy salvation, O Savior of the worlds?

Thou seest the Dayspring of Thine utterance in the darkness of creation: Where is the sun of the heaven of Thy grace, O Light-Giver of the worlds?

The lamps of truth and purity, of loyalty and honor, have been put out: Where are the signs of Thine avenging wrath, O Mover of the worlds?

Canst Thou see any who have championed Thy Self, or who ponder on what hath befallen Him in the pathway of Thy love? Now doth My pen halt, O Beloved of the worlds.

The branches of the Divine Lote-Tree lie broken by the onrushing gales of destiny: Where are the banners of Thy succor, O Champion of the worlds?

This Face is hidden in the dust of slander: Where are the breezes of Thy compassion, O Mercy of the worlds?

The robe of sanctity is sullied by the people of deceit: Where is the vesture of Thy holiness, O Adorner of the worlds?

The sea of grace is stilled for what the hands of men have wrought: Where are the waves of Thy bounty, O Desire of the worlds?

The door leading to the Divine Presence is locked through the tyranny of Thy foes: Where is the key of Thy bestowal, O Unlocker of the worlds?

The leaves are yellowed by the poisoning winds of sedition: Where is the downpour of the clouds of Thy bounty, O Giver of the worlds?

The universe is darkened with the dust of sin: Where are the breezes of Thy forgiveness, O Forgiver of the worlds?

This Youth is lonely in a desolate land: Where is the rain of Thy heavenly grace, O Bestower of the worlds?

O Supreme Pen, We have heard Thy most sweet call in the eternal realm: Give Thou ear unto what the Tongue of Grandeur uttereth, O Wronged One of the worlds!

Were it not for the cold, how would the heat of Thy words prevail, O Expounder of the worlds?

Were it not for calamity, how would the sun of Thy patience shine, O Light of the worlds?

Lament not because of the wicked. Thou wert created to bear and endure, O Patience of the worlds.

How sweet was Thy dawning on the horizon of the Covenant among the stirrers of sedition, and Thy yearning after God, O Love of the worlds.

By Thee the banner of independence was planted on the highest peaks, and the sea of bounty surged, O Rapture of the worlds.

By Thine aloneness the Sun of Oneness shone, and by Thy banishment the land of Unity was adorned. Be patient, O Thou Exile of the worlds.

We have made abasement the garment of glory, and affliction the adornment of Thy temple, O Pride of the worlds.

Thou seest the hearts are filled with hate, and to overlook is Thine, O Thou Concealer of the sins of the worlds.

When the swords flash, go forward! When the shafts fly, press onward! O Thou Sacrifice of the worlds.

Dost Thou wail, or shall I wail? Rather shall I weep at the fewness of Thy champions, O Thou Who hast caused the wailing of the worlds.

Verily, I have heard Thy call, O All-Glorious Beloved; and now is the face of Bahá flaming with the heat of tribulation and with the fire of Thy shining word, and He hath risen up in faithfulness at the place of sacrifice, looking toward Thy pleasure, O Ordainer of the worlds.

O 'Alí-Akbar, thank thy Lord for this Tablet whence thou canst breathe the fragrance of My meekness, and know what hath beset Us in the path of God, the Adored of all the worlds.

Should all the servants read and ponder this, there shall be kindled in their veins a fire that shall set aflame the worlds.

Bahá'u'lláh

Family break-out session IV

In the case studies reflected on thus far, we read about families, institutions and community members who have been working for some time to build trust and an environment of learning where individuals can exercise freedom of self-expression in a responsible manner, while also contributing to collective learning. Each case study dealt in a direct way with the issue of prejudice and racism in a local setting. All efforts carried out with the principle of oneness in mind, and the steadfast conviction that the rational soul has no gender, race, ethnicity or class -- a fact that renders intolerable all forms of prejudice -- directly advance the eradication of racism in America. When we act within the framework for action of our current stage of the Divine Plan, our every effort contributes to one common and noble goal: to bring souls under the banner of oneness and justice.

In our final break-out session we will review the 2 March 2013 letter, which the Universal House of Justice, in its recent letter dated 1 December 2019, has encouraged us all to study. The following selected paragraphs describe how, in the most unassuming settings, the humble beginnings of a pattern of activity (study circles, devotional gatherings, children's classes and junior youth groups), which results in growth in the number of friends and families we invite to collaborate and walk (with us?) on the path of service, begins to affect a deep transformation at the very heart of society.

Please study, consult and reflect on the following excerpts from the 2 March 2013 letter from the Universal House of Justice:

“As you know from your study of the Bahá’í writings, the principle that is to infuse all facets of organized life on the planet is the oneness of humankind, the hallmark of the age of maturity. That humanity constitutes a single people is a truth that, once viewed with scepticism, claims widespread acceptance today. The rejection of deeply ingrained prejudices and a growing sense of world citizenship are among the signs of this heightened awareness. Yet, however promising the rise in collective consciousness may be, it should be seen as only the first step of a process that will take decades—nay, centuries—to unfold. For the principle of the oneness of humankind, as proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh, asks not merely for cooperation among people and nations. It calls for a complete reconceptualization of the relationships that sustain society. The deepening environmental crisis, driven by a system that condones the pillage of natural resources to satisfy an insatiable thirst for more, suggests how entirely inadequate is the present conception of humanity’s relationship with nature; the deterioration of the home environment, with the accompanying rise in the systematic exploitation of women and children worldwide, makes clear how pervasive are the misbegotten notions that define relations within the family unit; the persistence of despotism, on the one hand, and the increasing disregard for authority, on the other, reveal how unsatisfactory to a maturing humanity is the current relationship between the individual and the institutions of society; the concentration of material wealth in the hands of a minority of the world’s population gives an indication of how fundamentally ill-conceived

are relationships among the many sectors of what is now an emerging global community. The principle of the oneness of humankind implies, then, an organic change in the very structure of society.”

1. How do the case studies in this program contribute to reconceptualizing the conversations around race and prejudice in homes and neighborhoods?

“What should be stated plainly here is that Bahá’ís do not believe the transformation thus envisioned will come about exclusively through their own efforts. Nor are they trying to create a movement that would seek to impose on society their vision of the future. Every nation and every group—indeed, every individual—will, to a greater or lesser degree, contribute to the emergence of the world civilization towards which humanity is irresistibly moving. Unity will progressively be achieved, as foreshadowed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in different realms of social existence, for instance, “unity in the political realm”, “unity of thought in world undertakings”, “unity of races” and the “unity of nations”. As these come to be realized, the structures of a politically united world, which respects the full diversity of culture and provides channels for the expression of dignity and honour, will gradually take shape.”

2. Why is it so important for each of us to work within a nucleus of friends and families to keep our circle of friends open and ever growing?

“The question that occupies the worldwide Bahá’í community, then, is how it can best contribute to the civilization-building process as its resources increase. It sees two dimensions to its contribution. The first is related to its own growth and development, and the second to its involvement in society at large.

Regarding the first, Bahá’ís across the globe, in the most unassuming settings, are striving to establish a pattern of activity and the corresponding administrative structures that embody the principle of the oneness of humankind and the convictions underpinning it, only a few of which are mentioned here as a means

of illustration: that the rational soul has no gender, race, ethnicity or class, a fact that renders intolerable all forms of prejudice, not the least of which are those that prevent women from fulfilling their potential and engaging in various fields of endeavour shoulder to shoulder with men; that the root cause of prejudice is ignorance, which can be erased through educational processes that make knowledge accessible to the entire human race, ensuring it does not become the property of a privileged few; that science and religion are two complementary systems of knowledge and practice by which human beings come to understand the world around them and through which civilization advances; that religion without science soon degenerates into superstition and fanaticism, while science without religion becomes the tool of crude materialism; that true prosperity, the fruit of a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life, will recede further and further out of reach as long as consumerism continues to act as opium to the human soul; that justice, as a faculty of the soul, enables the individual to distinguish truth from falsehood and guides the investigation of reality, so essential if superstitious beliefs and outworn traditions that impede unity are to be eliminated; that, when appropriately brought to bear on social issues, justice is the single most important instrument for the establishment of unity; that work performed in the spirit of service to one’s fellow human beings is a form of prayer, a means of worshipping God. Translating ideals such as these into reality, effecting a transformation at the level of the individual and laying the foundations of suitable social structures, is no small task, to be sure. Yet the Bahá’í community is dedicated to the long-term process of learning that this task entails, an enterprise in which increasing numbers from all walks of life, from every human group, are invited to take part.”

3. Discuss: “...the root cause of prejudice is ignorance, which can be erased through educational processes that make knowledge accessible to the entire human race, ensuring it does not become the property of a privileged few...”

4. “What materials are you currently studying in the core activities, with families and all age groups -- in a neighborhood or community -- with the aim of eliminating the root cause of prejudice?”

CLOSING PLENARY:

To the Participants

Dear friends,

We hope that having participated in this two-part program, it has become clearer to us all how ever-expanding nucleus of families and friends can contribute to the discourse on race unity and the oneness of humanity, as a part of the Divine Plan and the community building process. Parts I & II of “Walking Together on a Path towards Race Unity and Oneness”, are now available from the National Office of Education and Schools as well as from the Regional Bahá’í Councils. They thus serve as an additional tool to help you facilitate elevated conversations or organize intense study sessions, to which you may invite a small number of families and friends from your neighborhood and community, reaching out to those from diverse cultural backgrounds, and in particular to minority and immigrant populations.

A prominent, early African American believer, Sadie Oglesby, had the bounty of being on Pilgrimage during the time of the Guardian in the 1950’s. She shared a story which clarified her vision and inspired her lifelong service:

“The Guardian repeated his prediction of what could happen if the black and white Bahá’ís became united:

“When the believers get their hearts free from prejudice the colored believers will come into the Cause, and when the colored people come in and are made welcome, then the whites will come flocking in. The white people of America are watching to see what the Bahá’ís are going to do with the colored people; when they see the white Bahá’ís treating the colored Bahá’ís as themselves, then they will believe they are sincere. The people of the East are watching to see what the Bahá’ís of America are going to do with the colored people, and unless the Bahá’ís remove the prejudice and establish a center where brotherhood and justice is practiced toward colored people, there will be no center to which to turn when the world is in its great turmoil...”

“Sadie still felt reluctant to take on the role that Shoghi Effendi proposed, but he didn’t let up. On 27 March, he again brought up his challenge to her: “My charge to you is that when you go back to America, tell the friends to look within themselves and find there the reason so few colored people are in the Cause, and remove this reason; until this is removed, the Cause cannot grow... This is vital.”

Shoghi Effendi: Through the Pilgrim’s Eye, Vol 1, p. 143-144

Friends, we have now reached the final precious cycles of the current Five Year Plan. The growing tumultuous conditions that surround us today impress upon our hearts the urgency of the call to action. What courageous actions will you and your family contribute in the remaining months of this Plan?

To remove this reason “why so few colored people are in the Cause” and to inspire us all to courageously arise to serve in our communities with new eyes and ears, we close this session, with a special prayer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, He Whom Bahá’u’lláh identified as the Perfect Exemplar of every Bahá’í virtue in service to God and humanity. It was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who, in 1912 traversed the shores of the United States for 239 days, speaking with courage and conviction, summoning every Bahá’í to expend the utmost energy in his or her individual and family life to eliminate racial prejudice. Trusting in God the beloved friends were to come fearlessly together and eradicate all forms of racism through the healing powers of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, working together toward the supreme and cherished goal, that long-awaited promise to all humanity, the golden age of oneness and justice, the Kingdom of God on Earth.

“I am waiting, waiting, to hear the joyful tidings that the believers are the very embodiment of sincerity and truthfulness, the incarnation of love and amity, the living symbols of unity and concord. Will they not gladden my heart? Will they not satisfy my yearning? Will they not manifest my wish? Will they not fulfil my heart's desire? Will they not give ear to my call? I am waiting, I am patiently waiting.”

(Shoghi Effendi and Lady Blomfield, The Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá)

* * * * *

Whoso reciteth this prayer with lowliness and fervor will bring gladness and joy to the heart of this Servant; it will be even as meeting Him face to face.

He is the All-Glorious!

O God, my God! Lowly and tearful, I raise my suppliant hands to Thee and cover my face in the dust of that Threshold of Thine, exalted above the knowledge of the learned, and the praise of all that glorify Thee. Graciously look upon Thy servant, humble and lowly at Thy door, with the glances of the eye of Thy mercy, and immerse him in the Ocean of Thine eternal grace.

Lord! He is a poor and lowly servant of Thine, enthralled and imploring Thee, captive in Thy hand, praying fervently to Thee, trusting in Thee, in tears before Thy face, calling to Thee and beseeching Thee, saying:

O Lord, my God! Give me Thy grace to serve Thy loved ones, strengthen me in my servitude to Thee, illumine my brow with the light of adoration in Thy court of holiness, and of prayer to Thy kingdom of grandeur. Help me to be selfless at the heavenly entrance of Thy gate, and aid me to be detached from all things within Thy holy precincts. Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me, and in its ocean immerse me. Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones, and grant that I may offer up my soul for the earth ennobled by the footsteps of Thy chosen ones in Thy path, O Lord of Glory in the Highest.

With this prayer doth Thy servant call Thee, at dawntide and in the night season. Fulfill his heart's desire, O Lord! Illumine his heart, gladden his bosom, kindle his light, that he may serve Thy Cause and Thy servants.

Thou art the Bestower, the Pitiful, the Most Bountiful, the Gracious, the Merciful, the Compassionate. **‘Abdu’l-Bahá**