

Racism

Hamed Eshraghian

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“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 may be made manifest.” – Baha’i Scripture

The recent social-justice protests have once again highlighted the destructive nature of racism and the importance of the recognition of the oneness of humanity.

“Racism is a profound deviation from the standard of true morality,” the Baha’i writings say. “It deprives a portion of humanity of the opportunity to cultivate and express the full range of their capability and to live a meaningful and flourishing life, while blighting the progress of the rest of humankind.”

Stanford University’s professor Robert Sapolsky states, “Considerable evidence suggests that dividing the world into Us and Them is deeply hard-wired in our brains, with an ancient evolutionary legacy.... Briefly flash up the face of someone of a different race (compared with a same-race face) and, on average, there is preferential activation of the amygdala, a brain region associated with fear, anxiety, and aggression.... Critically, this comes long before (on the time scale of brain processing) more cognitive, cortical regions are processing the Them. The emotions come first.”

Sapolsky then, based on other research, concludes that “the surest way to weaken automatic categorization of someone as a Them” is to think of him or her as an individual, and not as part of a group.

The Baha’i writings foster this way of thinking by encouraging us to associate with a diverse set of people:

“The various races of humankind lend a composite harmony and beauty of color to the whole. Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them. The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord.”

These writings also point out that “racism cannot be rooted out by contest and conflict. It must be supplanted by the establishment of just relationships among individuals, communities, and institutions of society that will uplift all and will not designate anyone as ‘other’. The change required is not merely social and economic, but above all moral and spiritual.” And that “ultimately, the power to transform the world is effected by love, love originating from the relationship with the divine, love ablaze among members of a community, love extended without restriction to every human being.”

Let us then strive to assist one another toward mutual advancement so that, as the Baha’i writings say, “love and unity will be fostered between you, thereby bringing about the oneness of humankind.”