

Arrival in Haifa, March 11, 1927

Sadie Oglesby

These notes of Sadie Oglesby's pilgrimage are previously unpublished.

During our first visit with Shoghi Effendi, which was a few hours after our arrival in Haifa, Shoghi Effendi having greeted us (the American pilgrims, five in the party) and having asked of the American believers as to health, unity, etc., he turned to me and said he was very pleased that I had come to visit Haifa, that I was the first colored believer to visit there during his time, etc. Then proceeded to ask how many colored believers there are in America.

I told him we were very few. He then asked about the number of colored believers in Boston, New York, and other centers. He said the Master¹ loved the colored people very much and that the Cause needs the colored people and cannot be established without them.

He said, "The believers should practice great kindness and show great love so that the colored people may be attracted to the Cause. Until the doors are opened and the colored people are attracted into the Cause the white people who are not believers will not have confidence in the sincerity of the friends and will not enter the Cause. The friends should practice all the teachings and not only a part, and this will draw the colored people to the Cause."

At another time he said, "He is not pleased that so few colored people are in the Cause," and that special effort must be made to attract them. He asked if I had been urgent in this matter, if I had been forceful in explaining this feature of the teachings to the understanding of the believers.

I told him I had thought that if we should meet together, read the teachings, and practice great love, doing all possible at the same time to draw others into the Cause all other matters would adjust themselves and perfect amity among the believers would ultimately be attained.

He said I should be insistent and urgent upon this matter. That I should be persistent and not quiet so that the believers may learn of this great need. He told me I had been negligent, indifferent, and had not done my duty upon this subject.

I told him Mr. Oglesby had often been persistent in speaking to the friends upon this subject but that I had just as often tried to keep him quiet. He said, "Mr. Oglesby's way is the better way."

I told him I had tried all I could to be in harmony and amity with friends, that I had understood the Master to say we must give up even the right and accept the wrong for the sake of harmony and unity. He then said, "Yes, the Master said that and the Master wrote that, but that was then. This is another time. It is important that we have a center in America composed of colored and white believers, where all differences are removed. A center established upon the teachings of the Master. This is most important."

Continuing, he said, "Racial unity and harmony, cooperation and freedom from racial prejudice is the first principle. If we will not keep the first principle, how can we hope to keep the following principles? We must find unity and harmony upon the principles. If we find unity and harmony other than upon the principles, we will establish that which is not the Cause."

I told Shoghi Effendi that I thought the friends of America loved him very much, and I believed if they know how anxious he was upon this matter that they would do all they could to satisfy his desire.

He said when I returned to America, I should seek no rest but be constant and urgent. That the importance of this matter should be

understood by the friends. That I should be fearless and compelling. I expressed my great sorrow to him and told him I was quite unprepared, unqualified for the work he wished me to do. I said to him, "I have no strength or importance in America. I am so sorry."

To this, Shoghi Effendi said, "When you return to America, do as I have told you. Be fearless and know that the invisible concourse will assist you and I will supplicate at the Holy Shrine in your behalf."

Another day when Shoghi Effendi had talked upon this subject, I said to him, "Shoghi Effendi, it presents itself to me thuswise: since the infancy of the human family, races and nations one after another have arisen and fallen in their long march around the cycles and to maturity and at this time, the oldest race represented upon the earth is the colored race, while the youngest or last to have attained a high civilization is the white race, and in order to close this cycle and save the civilization of this day, the oldest and youngest or first and last, that is the white and colored, or outer ends of the cycle must link together, then the inner, or intermediate races will automatically take their places in the circle. Thus the family of Bahá'u'lláh will be established."

Shoghi Effendi said, "That is true, but if we fail to do this, we will be dispersed."

Again, Shoghi Effendi said, "The believers must establish in America a center composed of white and colored people who are living in perfect harmony and unity, having settled all their differences through the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. When the people have suffered and are tired and weary, ready to seek hope and comfort, the attention of the ruling heads of the nations may be called to this center in America and establish the world of Bahá'u'lláh, but if we fail to establish such a center, the people will find no hope anywhere."

One day at dinner with the pilgrims, both Eastern and Western, Shoghi Effendi, as he discoursed upon the matter of unity between the white and colored people, was interrupted several times and to each of those who sought information upon other matters he said, "That is not important," but urged the need of a center in America composed of the two races saying, "India has her problem, Germany has her problem, Persia has her problem, the other nations each has its problem, but

America's problem is the establishment of unity and harmony between the white and colored people." He said, "Racial prejudice and differences on the part of non-believers is a problem, but there should be no racial problem on the part of the believers."

He said the believers should astonish the world by their fellowship and cooperation with the colored people. This, he said, is an open door of service in which the Bahá'is will not be molested.

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During the dinner period, Shoghi Effendi said a colored believer should be elected upon each committee even if it required that the same one be elected upon each committee. I then asked him this question. "If after having gone into the meeting for election, we prayed for spiritual guidance, proceeded to vote and no colored believer was elected, what should we do in such a case?" He said, "To pray for spiritual guidance is not sufficient, we should also study the needs of the Cause, discuss the needs of the Cause at the Nineteen Day Feasts, speak of the needs and the qualifications the committees require (not at the time of election), discuss it during the year so that the friends may be informed. At present, the colored are overwhelmed by the white."

Shoghi Effendi asked, "Have the friends read the Master's teachings upon racial amity? Have they enough teaching upon this feature of the Cause? Do they understand its great importance? Do they know of the Master's fearless example in His attitude toward Mr. Gregory in Washington and elsewhere?"

I told Shoghi Effendi I had often heard the friends read the Master's teachings upon this subject in the meetings. Then he said, "I have never written upon it; I will write."

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As I sat with Shoghi Effendi in the Master's parlor, he said to me, "My charge to you is that when you go back to America, tell the friends to look within themselves and find there the reason of so few colored people

being in The Cause. Until this is removed, the Cause cannot grow. If we wish The Cause to grow in America, that which is the Cause of so few colored believers must be removed. This is vital."

I told Shoghi Effendi I had believed that since the colored people were not responsible for this breach or chasm, never having desired a separation from the whites, that the white believers would be the ones to work this feature of The Cause. Shoghi Effendi said, "Yes, but we must help them."

I asked Shoghi Effendi if it would not be well for us to have prayer meetings. Answer: "Yes it would be very effective if the believers should gather and engage in prayers from different friends even as many as would take part. It would no doubt be of much benefit in bringing out amity and harmony, but this should not be forced upon any one."

One day I asked Shoghi Effendi if a Bahá'í should have a last will and testament [and] a desire to be cremated, [but] it [was] within the power of the friends reasonably to deny this request and inter according to the teachings, should this be done. Answer: "Undoubtedly, to inter according to the teachings is most important and will be a favor to the departed."

Shoghi Effendi said that when I felt I had done all I could upon the feature of racial amity among the believers, to take trips south and teach there. The South is in great need of the teachings.

During my last interview with Shoghi Effendi he said, "You must be earnest and constant in your effort to press to the understanding of the believers the vital need of a perfect unity between the white and colored people. Be eager, earnest and forceful in this matter, and be assured that the invisible concourse will assist you in your work and we will support you, I will pray for you, I will pray for you at the Holy Shrine. I will pray for you. Be confident."

Having spent twenty days in Haifa and having had many private interviews with Shoghi Effendi and listened to his daily dinner talks during each of which he emphasized and urged upon racial amity, yet the one impression that stands out most paramount is that Shoghi Effendi wishes nothing done in regards to the Cause that is not according to the will of the National Spiritual Assembly and sanctioned by that body.