

Study questions to Advent of Divine Justice

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In many ways The Advent of Divine Justice explains the unprecedented role of youth in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. This letter, addressed to the American Bahá'í Community as a whole, repeatedly cites the special responsibilities of youth in the building of a new civilization and the youthful qualities of American society which are among its most meritorious characteristics.

Fifty years after Shoghi Effendi wrote this stirring call to action, we can have an even greater perspective of the divine processes confidently asserted by him as the guideposts of our age. He outlines essential steps of growth and development, personal and societal, many of which have already taken place. He cites warnings which must be urgently noted as the end of the twentieth century approaches. But most importantly of all, he focuses our attention on the primacy of the spiritual prerequisites in our lives if we are to be worthy of the divine tasks entrusted to us. He declared in a letter written on his behalf: 'Too much emphasis is often laid on the social and economic aspects of the Teachings; but the moral aspect cannot be overemphasised.'

A study of The Advent of Divine Justice will not exempt us from the travails of the world around us as mankind struggles to achieve the ascendancy of its spiritual nature. If we aspire to become a part of the new race of men the book will chart for us the inevitable processes in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth, heralded by the advent of divine justice which we must struggle to achieve.

Page numbers in this chapter refer to the 1984 and 1990 editions published by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of the United States.

Why do you think this letter (The Advent of Divine Justice) was written to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada? (p. 1)

It was a feeling of joy that the Guardian celebrated in writing this letter.

What gave Shoghi Effendi this joy? (p. 1)

What is the 'resourcefulness' demonstrated by the American believers? (p. 1)

What is meant by the 'declining institutions' of a decadent age? (p. 2)

What is 'Providence'? (p. 2)

What are the 'recurrent crises' mentioned on page 2?

How will the recurrent crises of the world directly affect the American Bahá'í community? (pp. 3-4)

Shoghi Effendi reminds the American Bahá'í community in 1938 of its world context. Describe the milieu in which the Faith then operated in Europe, Central Asia, Iran, and the Holy Land. (pp. 2-3)

On pages 3 to 5, examples of opposition against the Bahá'í Faith are mentioned. Which countries are referred to? What do you know about the

opposition in these countries?

How was the Faith affected by the world conditions of 1938? (p. 5)

What is a 'citadel'? (p. 6)

What does it mean that the American Bahá'í community 'bids fair to be universally regarded as the cradle, as well as the stronghold, of that future New World Order, which is at once the promise and the glory of the Dispensation associated with the name of Bahá'u'lláh'? (p. 6)

In World War I, what did `Abdu'l-Bahá forecast for the continent of America? (p. 6)

What does it mean to be 'the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of an heroic Age'? (p. 7)

What is a 'living sacrifice'? (p. 7) Think of some examples of 'living sacrifice' and consider how they might affect your own life.

What are 'the Tablets of the Divine Plan'? (p. 7) What is the purpose of the Divine Plan? How far has the unfoldment of this Plan come today?

What were some of the notable disabilities of the American Bahá'í community in 1938? (pp. 7-8) What, if any, substantial aid did the American Bahá'í community get from its sister communities in the East and West?

What have been the accomplishments of the American Bahá'í community in its first half century, most particularly in the last two decades of that half century? (pp. 8-10)

On pages 8 and 9, it is mentioned that one of the 'humble members' of the American Bahá'í community has secured the 'spontaneous allegiance of Royalty' to the Cause. Who was (a) this Bahá'í, and (b) this royal personage? What do you know about these two historic figures? (see GPB, pp. 386-389)

In which ways have the American Bahá'í community intervened for 'the safeguarding of Bahá'í edifices and institutions in countries such as Persia, Egypt, Iráq, Russia, and Germany'? (p. 10)

What is the function of catastrophic upheaval in the world in the twentieth century? (p. 11) What have been the noticeable effects of the 'rumblings of that catastrophic upheaval, which is to proclaim, at one and the same time, the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new'?

What were the first three tasks given to the American Bahá'í community after it was organized? (pp. 11-12)

What were the twin objectives of the First Seven Year Plan? (pp. 11-12)

What is the 'Temple' mentioned on page 12? How many Bahá'í Temples are there today? When were they built?

What is an 'era'? What do you understand by 'the Bahá'í era'? (p. 12) Why is it useful to think in terms of 'eras', 'epochs' and 'Plans'? Why do you think specific goals and milestones are important?

When will the American Bahá'í community find itself securely established upon the throne of an everlasting dominion? (p. 13)

Shoghi Effendi envisages turmoil and tribulations for the American Bahá'í community in the 'latter years' on pages 13-14. To what time in history (or in the future) does this refer? What will be born out of these 'turmoil and tribulations'?

What are the 'successive stages' in the development of the Faith mentioned on

page 15? Discuss the significance of these different stages in the evolution of the Cause of God and explain the relationship between them.

What are the 'invisible Hosts'? (p. 16)

The American Bahá'í community must not be confused with the characteristics and nature of what people? (p. 16) What are the practical implications of the 'sharp distinction' mentioned?

What is 'a new race of men'? (p. 16) Why is so difficult for us to demonstrate the transmuting power of our Faith even when we know so much is at stake?

Why do you think the Prophets of God choose 'to appear, and deliver their message in countries and amidst peoples and races, at a time when they were either fast declining, or had already touched the lowest depths of moral and spiritual degradation'? (p. 17)

How does Shoghi Effendi describe the condition of Iran at the time of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh? (pp. 18-19)

Why has Bahá'u'lláh conferred upon America the distinction of being 'the standard-bearer of the New World Order'? (p. 19)

How are the people of America described? (pp. 19-20)

The American Bahá'í community offers a striking contrast to the society in which it is imbedded. Why? (p. 20)

What are the meritorious characteristics of American society? (p. 20)

What are the 'faults, habits, and tendencies' mentioned on page 20?

How do you understand the sentence: '. . . let them focus their attention, for the present, on their own selves, their own individual needs, their own personal deficiencies and weaknesses. . .' (pp. 20-21)

What is a spiritual prerequisite? (p. 21) Spiritual prerequisites apply to what three areas of life according to Shoghi Effendi? (p. 23)

To whom are the different spiritual prerequisites directed? (p. 22)

What:

obscures a rectitude of conduct;

sullies and clouds a chaste, pure and holy life;

is fraternity? (p. 23)

What are some of the implications of rectitude of conduct? (p. 23)

How do you understand the metaphor 'the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world'? (p. 23)

What is the purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself? (p. 24)

What is 'the most fundamental among human virtues'? (p. 25) Why?

What does it mean to be 'the trustees of God amongst His creatures'? (p. 25)

What does it mean that our words must not differ from our deeds? (p. 25)

How can we as Bahá'ís distinguish ourselves from others? (p. 25)

Bahá'ís can become 'centres of attraction'. What are some of the attributes that can make us centres of attraction? (p. 26)

What is 'the foundation of all human virtues'? (p. 26) What do you understand by 'truthfulness'?

How do you understand the following norms:

'nonacceptance of political posts';

'nonidentification with political parties';
'nonparticipation in political controversies';
'nonmembership in political organizations'? (p. 26)

What aspects of our life must reflect the attributes of the Bahá'ís? (p. 26)

What is the purpose of justice? (p. 28) How will justice promote unity?

How can the forces of irreligion weaken 'the moral fiber, and [undermine] the foundations of individual morality'? (p. 29) Can 'the forces of irreligion' be measured? What difference is there between bad morals and no morals?

How can one 'pause to examine' oneself? (p. 29)

What are some of the implications of a chaste and holy life? (p. 30) How do you understand the different implications? Try to relate the implications to your own social reality.

How do you understand the sentence 'A race of men . . . from water and clay.'? (p. 31)

What are 'the bounds of moderation' of a civilization? (p. 31)

To what can an 'excess' of civilization lead? (p. 31)

What has God out of all creation chosen for Himself? (p. 31) What does this mean?

What are the most great ornaments for the handmaidens of God? (p. 32)

Why have the Manifestations of God sustained the weight of all calamities? (p. 32)

Why is the drinking of wine forbidden? (p. 33)

With what is a high standard of moral conduct confused? (p.33) What do you understand by 'asceticism' and 'excessive and bigoted puritanism'?

Does man have a right to enjoy the joys, beauties and pleasures of the world? (p. 33) What are the limits to the enjoyment of 'the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched'?

What does it mean to allow 'nothing whatever to intervene between [oneself] and God'? (p. 33) What are some of the evidences in your life of 'true belief in God'?

What is the most challenging issue facing the American Bahá'í community? (p. 33) Why?

Who can conscientiously claim to have faithfully followed the example of `Abdu'l-Bahá in achieving the goal of racial harmony? (p. 34)

On what will the spiritual triumph and material success of the American Bahá'í community depend heavily? (p. 34)

What are some of the characteristics of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which we should particularly acquire as we try to deal with racial prejudice?, (p. 34)

How do you understand the phrase 'His contempt for and impatience of criticism, tempered by His tact and wisdom'? (p. 34)

What form of discrimination may be tolerated within the Bahaâi community? (p. 35)

What is the first and inescapable obligation of Bahá'í communities to all minorities within their jurisdiction? (p. 35)

What happens in Bahaâi elections when a tie occurs? (p. 35)

What are some of the examples Shoghi Effendi gives of opportunities for

Bahá'ís to demonstrate their freedom from racial prejudice? (pp. 36-37)

How do you understand the norms in this sentence by Bahá'u'lláh: 'Close your eyes to racial differences [(a)], and welcome all with the light of oneness [(b)],'? (p. 37)

The following is a quotation from `Abdu'l-Bahá: 'In the estimation of God, all men are equal.' (p. 37) How do you understand this sentence?

`Abdu'l-Bahá pointed to some significant points of unity between white and black in the United States. What are they? (p. 38)

Why should we welcome and encourage 'the intermixture of races'? (pp. 39-40)

What is the consequence of the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority? (p. 40)

What are some of the qualities needed to solve the problem of racial antagonism? (p. 40)

What is the 'usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority' mentioned on page 40?

What is 'a patronizing attitude'? (p. 40)

What does Shoghi Effendi refer to as the double crusade facing the American Baha'í community? (p. 41)

What are the weapons that the Bahá'í community has for use in their double crusade 'to regenerate the inward life of their own community' and assist the life of their nation? (p. 41)

What kinds of problems can the Bahá'ís expect in such a crusade? (pp. 41-42)

What does it mean that 'the valiant warriors struggling in the name and for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh must of necessity, encounter stiff resistance, and suffer many a setback'? (p. 41) What are some of the strategies we can use to resist our own instincts?

'Because of `Abdu'l-Bahá', what can the American Bahá'í community expect to happen? (p. 42)

How should the Baha'í community respond to any criticism that may be directed against it? (p. 42)

How do you understand the sentence: 'The voice of criticism is a voice that indirectly reinforces the proclamation of its Cause'? (p. 42)

What can we do to achieve even a startling transformation of our enemies? (pp. 42-43)

Why can no previous age rival this age in its glory? (p. 43)

What is the main function of the Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette? (p. 44)

For what purpose have the administrative institutions of the Faith been designed? (p. 45)

What institution or individual must be responsible to teach the Cause and defend its interests? (p. 45)

By whom have the most brilliant achievements of the learned sometimes been surpassed? (pp. 45-46)

What do you know about 'Peter' mentioned on page 46?

How do you understand the sentence: 'a Force which . . . through its "vibrating influence [has] upset the equilibrium of the world and revolutionized its ordered life" '? (p. 47) How does this Force act as a two-edged sword?

What are some of the symptoms of disintegration of the old world order

according to Shoghi Effendi? (p. 47)

What are 'the false theories and doctrines' mentioned on page 47?

What is the proper response of Bahá'ís to the forces disintegrating the old world order? (pp. 47-48)

Cite some of the sorrows and opportunities which the turmoil of the present age present. (p. 48)

How must we prepare ourselves to participate in the teaching campaigns of the Bahá'í Faith? (p. 49)

How do you understand that 'the history and tenets of Islam [are] the source and background of [our] Faith'? (p. 49)

What is 'an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God'? (p. 49)

Where does the initiative for teaching lie? (p. 50)

What is the best preparation for pioneering? (pp. 50-51) What would be some of the effects of putting one's trust wholly in God?

What are some of the methods a pioneer might well devise to win believers? (pp. 51-52)

What advice does Shoghi Effendi give about using direct and indirect methods of teaching? (pp. 51-52)

What is our responsibility to our spiritual children? (p. 52)

What can be done to avoid confusion, delay and the dissipation of energy in the teaching work? (p. 53)

What is the proper role of teaching in the life of a Bahá'í? (pp. 53-54)

What is one of the most important ways to foster 'the enrichment and glory of Bahá'í community life'? (p. 54)

How do you explain the sentence: 'When diverse shades of thought, temperament and character are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest.'? (p. 55)

Who can be educated and guided to such enlightenment that the whole earth will be illumined? (p. 55) What is said about the Indians and Eskimos on page 55?

Can you think of any examples of the sentence: 'one blessed soul has become the cause of the guidance of a nation'? (p. 57)

What is 'the Standard of Unity'? (p. 58)

What is said about the future of Canada on page 58?

What is your understanding of 'Central and Southern America . . . are destined to play an increasingly important part in the shaping of the world's future destiny'? (p. 59)

What are some of the eloquent descriptions Shoghi Effendi has chosen to use in describing those who 'bend their energies to capture the citadels of men's hearts'? (pp. 59-62)

Whose responsibility is the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order in each country? (pp. 62-63)

What features are included in the necessary foundation for the establishment of local and national Bahá'í institutions as described by Shoghi Effendi? (pp. 63-65)

What is the chief and most urgent measure to be taken simultaneously with the arrival of pioneer workers in Latin America? (pp. 64-65)

What are the practical implications of the sentence: 'Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation, whose power hath caused the foundations of the mightiest structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be dumbfounded'? (p. 67) Shoghi Effendi gave two special duties to those pioneers who arose to serve. What were they? (p. 67)

What is said about 'the handmaidens of Baha'u'llah' on pages 68 and 69?

How are Bahá'í youth described on pages 69 and 70?

What can be the greatest demonstration of the youthful vitality and vibrant power animating the life and institutions of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh? (pp. 69-70)

What magnificent promises are made to those who establish an outpost in the heart of Panama? (p. 71)

What must we always keep in mind when buffeted by circumstances of strife, confusion, tribulation and denunciation? (p. 72)

What is the ultimate objective of such simultaneous world-encompassing processes as integration and disintegration? (pp. 72-73)

When will the moment arrive when the whole earth will resound with the praises of the greatness of the American Bahá'í community? (p. 74)

What role does `Abdu'l-Bahá envisage for America? (pp 85-86)

What do you understand by 'the Tabernacle of the Great Peace'? (p. 85)

In what two ways have the powers and capacities of America simultaneously manifested themselves? (p. 86)

What are the 'creative energies' referred to on page 86?

Whose high endeavours signalled the dawn of the Most Great Peace according to Abdu'l-Bahá? (p. 88) What do you know about 'America's tragically unappreciated president'?

How does Shoghi Effendi characterise the immediate future of America? (p. 90)

What does Shoghi Effendi imply to be 'the greatest curse' to afflict the human race from time immemorial? (p. 90)