

The Light of Unity



A NEWSLETTER ABOUT THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Vol. 1, Issue 1

"So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth." — Bahá'u'lláh

An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith

Founded in the mid-nineteenth century, the Bahá'í Faith has more than five million followers in 235 nations and territories.

The Word *Bahá'í* means "follower of Bahá'u'lláh." Bahá'u'lláh was the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. His name in Arabic means "The Glory of God." His followers believe that Bahá'u'lláh's writings are an expression of the Holy Spirit and are the Word of God.

Like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other great religions, the Bahá'í Faith began in the East. But the Bahá'í teachings are not Eastern or Western; they are universal, revealed for all the people of the planet. The Bahá'í Faith has spread throughout the world, gaining adherents from every nation, race, culture and class. More than 2,100 tribes, races and ethnic groups are represented in the Bahá'í world community. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are translated into 800 languages.

A growing number of people are becoming interested in the Bahá'í Faith, not only because it contains profound spiritual teachings, but also because it shows how spiritual principles can be put into action in effective ways. Bahá'u'lláh's message offers intelligent and practical solutions to the myriad issues faced by humanity in the modern age.



The House of Worship of the Bahá'í Faith in North America, located in Wilmette, Illinois. To see the House of Worship *Live* on the Internet, visit: <http://www.us.bahai.org>

Bringing the Races Together: The Power Of Race Unity

How can we overcome the racial conflicts facing us in America? The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith offer hope to all who seek a diverse, yet unified society.

The starting point of the Bahá'í solution is a clarified understanding of the nature of race. Bahá'u'lláh taught that God has "created all men from one same substance." All people belong to one "race" -- the human race. Anthropology, physiology, and psychology confirm this truth. Recognizing the "oneness" of humanity logically and morally requires that we abandon all prejudices (whether of race, class, creed, or sex), that form barriers between us.

Recognizing the oneness of humanity is the first step in bringing together Americans of all races. But what can motivate people to work for unity when they have experienced so much pain, frustration and disappointment in addressing issues of race?

(see Power of Race Unity, Page 2)

What's Inside

Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith.....	1
Bringing the Races Together.....	1
Making a Difference	2
Conversing with God	3
Featured Devotions from the Bahá'í Scriptures	4

Power of Race Unity (con't from Page 1)

Economic, legal, and political considerations are certainly important, but they lack the necessary force to inspire and sustain people in their efforts to overcome their prejudices.

Such considerations may affect external behavior, but they cannot change internal attitudes. At its core, racial prejudice is a problem of the heart. How can people be inspired to respect other human beings? How can they be moved to treat with dignity those of a different race? How can they be motivated to abandon suspicion and mistrust and welcome fellowship and harmony? As these questions illustrate, racial prejudice is essentially a spiritual problem, requiring a spiritual solution.



Watch The Power Of Race Unity on the internet at www.us.bahai.org or call a local Bahá'í Community to arrange to see this video presentation.

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that only the Word of God can bring about a spiritual change in human hearts. This Word, which is found in the religious traditions of humanity, differs from the words of men. It has the power to affect the will, the desire, and the motivation of people. It educates and inspires us to love that which is greater than ourselves. Through God's love it becomes possible to love people who were created in the image and likeness of God. This love allows us to value the spiritual worth and dignity of all people, to feel and express true concern for the welfare of others, to overlook and forgive shortcomings, and to address issues of racial prejudice with passion and conviction while maintaining our nobility.

Therefore, to suggest a focus on the Word of God is not to offer a vague, abstract, and irrelevant solution, but to recognize the existence of a potent and practical force that must be drawn upon if real and lasting change is to occur in the attitudes and perceptions of people.

By working to change his or her own heart through this spiritual power, the individual can move forward on the path of race unity and encourage others to take this new road. Such encouragement is most effectively given not through mere words, but through the power of example. No one is exempt from playing this role. All Americans, regardless of racial and ethnic heritage must be involved in the process of establishing unity. As the Bahá'í writings clearly state: "Let neither think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. Let neither think that such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved." The Bahá'í teachings explore in detail the responsibilities that each race must fulfill.

Through these and other principles offered by the Bahá'í Faith, racial conflict can be overcome in America. The Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly states that "To ignore the problem is to expose the country to physical, moral and spiritual danger."

Making a Difference

Angela Ewing-Boyd is making a difference. Angela, who is 24 years old, has been working for the last four years to uplift the lives of inner-city children. She and a friend have been putting their Faith into action by educating children and providing them role models.

The project is called "Campaign Hit the Streets," and it has been serving Columbia, South Carolina since 1995. In that year, Angela rented a house in the middle of a community plagued with such problems as drugs, violence, poverty, sub-standard education, and broken families.

Angela began virtues classes for the children of the community. The goal of these classes was to teach the children about spiritual virtues that can uplift all people and which give them a sense of their nobility. The classes teach such virtues and principles as respect, love, unity, conflict resolution, cultural awareness, the equality of men and women, self discipline, and prayerfulness.

Angela says that her goal has been to teach the children that they are each created "noble," and

that they should interact with each other in a way that reflects their nobility, as human beings created by God. We are trying to give the children "spiritual survival skills," she states, that are needed for them to be "successful in their environments."

The virtues and principles are taught through performance, writing, graphic arts and other means. Inspired by these virtues, the children have created several dances and skits which they perform at local events to teach others about the same virtues.

The project has had a number of other concrete results. These have included the development by the children of positive attitudes, such as the desire to be of service to others. The children help and serve one another. Angela says that the children once spontaneously decided to collect clothing from their own homes and to donate them to a homeless man in their neighborhood. Another outcome of the project is that some of the children have improved their reading skills.

When asked why she initiated the project, Angela said that the Bahá'í Faith has taught her about the potential of all human beings. "The Faith has allowed me to recognize peoples' worth." The motivation is not charity, it is helping children to release their potential that is obscured by their circumstances and environment. Angela is putting her Faith into action and making a difference.

Conversing with God: The Power of Prayer

Prayer is one of the most important practices of the spiritual life. The Bahá'í Writings declare that prayer is "absolutely indispensable" to "inner spiritual development."

"It is not sufficient for a believer merely to accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer."

The Faith has "the spiritual power to recreate us if we make the effort to let that power influence us, and the greatest help in this respect is prayer."

What is prayer? Prayer is "Conversation with God." It is a state of spiritual communion

between the worshiper and his Creator. If two people love one another, their greatest desire is to be in the presence of the other, to converse with their beloved. Similarly, the lovers of God desire to be in God's presence, to converse with Him. We can fulfill this desire through the practice of prayer.

What is the wisdom of prayer? The Bahá'í Scriptures teach: "The wisdom of prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because in that state man with all heart and soul turneth his face towards His Highness the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and compassion. The greatest happiness for a lover is to converse with his beloved, and the greatest gift for a seeker is to become familiar with the object of his longing; that is why with every soul who is attracted to the Kingdom of God, his greatest hope is to find an opportunity to entreat and supplicate before his Beloved, appeal for His mercy and grace and be immersed in the ocean of His utterance, goodness and generosity."

"Besides all this, prayer and fasting is the cause of awakening and mindfulness and conducive to protection and preservation from tests...."

For what should we pray? According to Bahá'í Writings, "The true worshiper, while praying, should endeavor not so much to ask God to fulfill his wishes and desires, but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only through such an attitude can one derive that feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer."

Does God answer all prayers? The Bahá'í Writings say that God "answers the prayers of all His servants when according to His supreme wisdom it is necessary." If we ask for things which God does not desire for us, there is no answer to our prayer. "We pray, 'O God! Make me wealthy!' If this prayer were universally answered, human affairs would be at a standstill. There would be none left to work in the streets, none to till the soil, none to build, none to run the trains.... The affairs of the world would be interfered with, energies crippled and progress hindered. But whatever we ask for which is in accord with divine wisdom, God will answer. Assuredly!"

If God does answer our prayers, how do we

(see *Conversing with God*, Page 4)

Conversing with God (con't from Page 3)

know what the answer is? The Bahá'í Writings state that prayers are answered through action: "It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and then action itself. Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because prayers can only be answered through action and if someone's action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right."

Featured Devotions from the Bahá'í Scriptures

(In each issue of *The Light of Unity*, select prayers and devotional passages from the Bahá'í Scriptures are presented. The focus of this issue is children: prayers for children and passages about their education.)



"O God! Educate these children. These children are the plants of Thine orchard, the flowers of Thy meadow, the roses of Thy garden. Let Thy rain fall upon them; let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with Thy love. Let Thy breeze refresh them in order that they may be trained, grow and develop, and appear in the utmost beauty. Thou art the Giver. Thou art the Compassionate."

(Bahá'í Prayers)



"O God, guide me, protect me, make of me a shining lamp and a brilliant star. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful."

(Bahá'í Prayers)

"The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please."

(Family Life)



"Among the safeguards of the Holy Faith is the training of children, and this is among the weightiest of principles in all the Divine Teachings. Thus from the very beginning, mothers must rear their infants in the cradle of good morals -- for it is the mothers who are the first educators -- so that, when the child cometh to maturity, he will prove to be endowed with all the virtues and qualities that are worthy of praise....

"The purport is this, that to train the character of humankind is one of the weightiest commandments of God, and the influence of such training is the same as that which the sun exerteth over tree and fruit. Children must be most carefully watched over, protected and trained; in such consisteth true parenthood and parental mercy."

(Bahá'í Education)



The Light of Unity is a newsletter that discusses the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. It is offered for free to those who would like to learn about the Bahá'í Faith. There is no obligation. Those wishing to receive a free subscription should contact their local Bahá'í Community: