



Baha'i gathering to talk peace in S.F.

Conference to address world harmony
as next step in the planet's evolution

by Bill Davis
The Examiner
1986

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SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

It's one thing to suggest that world peace is possible, but quite another to say it is inevitable.

That's the message members of the Baha'i Faith are sharing with representatives of a peace groups as they meet this weekend in San Francisco.

Amid numerous wars, rising global uneasiness, economic and social turmoil, Baha'is are rising to proclaim the promise of peace given by the prophet-founder of the faith, Baha'u'llah. Baha'is believe world peace is the next step in the evolution of the planet, and a step that mankind must now prepare to take.

What the conference demonstrates is that the peace-making process is not just for the white middle class or for people with university degrees. More than 8,000 people of all ages, from all walks of life and from every corner of the globe, have gathered to celebrate the unity of their diversity and their desire to create a new civilization based on spiritual principles.

The purpose of the gathering is to investigate causes of disharmony and to pinpoint steps that individuals and institutions can take to create lasting peace on our planet. This means identifying the root causes of war and strife — racism, the inequality of men and women, the absence of spiritual values, the growing disparity between rich and poor people.

To eliminate these obstacles to peace, we must begin applying spiritual solutions to today's problems. The process starts on an individual level with the belief that mankind's inherent nature is good, not evil, and that nations are capable of living peacefully.

For a Baha'i, living according to spiritual principles means a belief in the oneness of mankind, a loyalty to man that transcends national boundaries and the acknowledgment that members of all the world's major religions worship the same, one god.

Baha'is don't claim to have all the answers. We want to find other people who are breaking down the barriers to peace so that we can learn from them.

What conference participants are sharing are "spiritual success stories":

- How a Native American Baha'i in Arizona helped his Indian reservation eliminate alcoholism.

- How 100,000 villagers in a poverty-stricken portion of India have learned to become self-sufficient.



Bill Davis

S.F. attorney and a Menlo Park Baha'i member

COMMENTARY

- How a non-profit organization in San Francisco helped neighborhood and school groups learn to resolve their conflicts.

Differences of opinions challenge us to find ways to channel our energy to outcomes that are positive for everyone involved. The Baha'is call this give-and-take process consultation, a learned skill that yields peaceful solutions to difficult problems.

In today's society, often the person who wins a dispute is the one with the most money or the most power. This must change.

In a Baha'i system of consultation, it is purity of motive that solves disputes, whether personal or public in origin. And the overriding motive is service to mankind. This global allegiance supersedes loyalty to an individual, political party or nation.

There could hardly be a more appropriate place to gather to discuss peace issues than in San Francisco. The United Nations, which has designated 1986 as the International Year of Peace, was chartered in The City (The son of the founder of the Baha'i Faith, Abdu'l Baha, during a visit in 1912, foretold of the forming of the U.N. in San Francisco.)

But in this "Year of Peace," it's not just enough for world leaders to say they want peace, that they will lay down arms or ban the bomb. These are preliminary steps.

The Baha'is want to create a different world, a world where people with different value systems can live in harmony and support each other.

Peace is inevitable. But reaching mankind's next stage of development is not a matter that can be left solely to leaders of state. Establishing world peace is contingent upon an individual's willingness and ability to take action.

Bill Davis lives in Menlo Park and works as an attorney in San Francisco. He is a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States.