

Unity and Diversity in Conflict Resolution

By Trip Barthel

Religious, patriotic, racial prejudices must disappear, for they are the destroyers of human society. We must become the cause of the unity of the human race.

—*Abdu'l-Baha, son of Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith*

The Baha'i Faith believes in the oneness of God, oneness of religion and the oneness of mankind. The leading principle of the Baha'i Faith is unity, which plays a unique role in conflict resolution. According to Baha'i Faith, humankind is intertwined in a single spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical reality. In the spiritual world we are united; it is only in the physical world that we see our differences. If these differences are appreciated, they lead to joy and happiness; if they are feared, they lead to suspicion and violence.

Followers of the Baha'i Faith strive to incorporate seven qualities into their daily life and spiritual practice: 1) purity of motive; 2) radiance of spirit; 3) detachment from everything except God; 4) attraction to God; 5) humility; 6) patience; and 7) servitude to God. If we follow these guidelines, we believe our unity will be maintained and our spirit will grow.

Based on the vision of a just, united and sustainable global civilization, the Baha'i International Community has also proposed five guiding spiritual principles: 1) unity in diversity; 2) equity and justice; 3) equality of the sexes; 4) trustworthiness and moral leadership; and 5) independent investigation of truth.

The Baha'i mediator brings this world view to the job of helping people resolve conflict. By working within this frame-

work of understanding, the mediator is able to ask questions that encourage clients to reflect on their own spiritual goals and acknowledge their common humanity. Unity is the essential truth of our reality and encompasses all the virtues of the human world. From a Baha'i perspective, it is our spiritual nature that gives us the ability to reach out beyond our physi-



cal reality and connect at a deeper level. Our job as mediators then becomes one of helping the parties to build on points of unity—shared stories, shared interests, shared choices and shared outcomes.

Finally, a Baha'i model is more about unity than process or outcome. Parties are asked to speak from their own experience, be detached from a fixed position, strive to understand the truth of a situation, listen with an open heart, consider the spiritual principles and come together around the agreement. The ideal outcome is consensus, however if consensus cannot be reached, a vote is taken. To maintain unity, all parties are expected to abide by

the decision of the group. If the unity of the parties can be maintained and improved, then any resolution can be amended and improved in the future. However, if the unity decreases or is non-existent, then any agreement may be short lived.

The object of conflict resolution, and of our lives, is to turn on the light of unity and see our inter-connectedness. When we realize how we are all related, we develop true empathy for each other. Helping each person grow through interacting with each other seems to be our highest goal and our greatest challenge in conflict resolution.

We need to build from what we share and embrace, and not from what we tolerate or fear. In conflict resolution we give meaning to our lives and to the lives of others through the connections we share.

Unity in diversity within the realm of conflict resolution is about allowing our spiritual selves to assist our physical selves in resolving difficult issues. Combining the spiritual unity that the parties share with their physical diversity leads to the concept of unity in diversity. When we realize that we have a spiritual nature, we can look outside of this time and place, and recognize our role in a larger reality. We can start to appreciate all of the contributions that each party can make toward resolution.



Trip Barthel, M.A., is the founder and executive director of the Neighborhood Mediation Center in Reno, Nevada. Trip is an ACR member and adjunct faculty member of National Judicial College and the University of Nevada, Reno.