

CLINICS and TASK FORCE DISCUSSIONS
Thursday - April 27, 1967

17 - Reaching and Teaching the Indians.
Prepared by Mr. Franklin Kahn

If we are to be successful and fulfill the Master's Plan and the Guardian's instructions, we must reach and teach the Indians. Love is the magnet!

'Abdu'l-Baha, in His admonition to the entire body of the believers in the United States and the Dominion of Canada, wrote "We must attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. For these souls may be likened unto the ancient inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, who prior to the Mission of Muhammad, were like unto savages. When the light of Muhammad shone forth in their midst, however, they became so radiant as to illumine the world. Likewise, these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world." (Citadel of Faith), p. 16).

1) In order to speed the teaching among the American Indians, go where they are on the Reservations or in the Cities. A Baha'i couple, or teaching team should make a systematic survey where mass teaching is possible in their Community or State. Go where the Indian resides; to the Center of his activities, the home and the Community. Their profound interest in symbolic Traditional Teachings and system of life, we should try to understand. A special interest and effort should be made in finding out their system (method) of teaching.

How you will get the Traditional Indians' attention by applying their system in your teaching. We must be patient and be ourselves; we must have love and understanding. Our explanations, when giving the Message of Baha'u'llah, must be simple and straightforward; no fast talk. Tune in and be in harmony with their interests. Carefully unfold the Teachings, and, live the Life.

2) Those in the Cities may have different interests. Usually it is the younger ones who are away from home, and their interests may be in education and economic development. We can help them with education. Our keen interest with them should be to lead them to Baha'i activities, to firesides and draw them into participation in the discussions.

3) Special effort should be made in teaching the Baha'i children on the Reservations and in the Cities. Baha'i children can help in teaching other Indian children. We have a Baha'i Teaching Guide for teaching children. Establish Baha'i children's classes and hold them regularly. Remember Baha'i children will be the welfare of our homes, Communities and nation. They will be the future Baha'i teachers.

(4) Should the National Youth Committee come into being, the Youth could concentrate on Summer Indian Teaching projects. Their enthusiasm, their looking forward for happiness in life for all, and their singing could be enjoyed by the Indian people, as has already been done on several Reservations. It is very important that the Youth Committee has this experience of their participation in Indian teaching. Then their experience, knowledge and action will speak for itself.

(5) There is an extremely urgent need for Baha'i pioneers to go on or near the Reservations. It is especially good for non-Indian Baha'is to go and reside among the Indians on the Reservation. It will require at least six months to get to know them and slowly unfold the Teachings to them. It is a rich and rewarding opportunity to forward the Faith of God. The request for pioneers is so important that whatever assistance could be made through Spiritual Assemblies and various Committees should be considered. We must thoroughly examine, discuss and make systematic plans, and then take action! Let our deeds and actions speak! A man and wife, or a team of two, to spread, to consult with and accompany Indians on teaching trips is a most desirable arrangement.

(6) Follow-up is most important. We have had several Great Council Fires with the American and Canadian Indians across the Continent. Many have become Baha'is, and many of these were left isolated with very little knowledge of the Teachings. Just because an Indian says he wants to become a Baha'i, and signs a card, does not mean he will follow through and become mature or deeper in the Faith on his own. It is incumbent for the Baha'is teaching to deepen them in the Faith. The sooner the better. Teach them to live the Baha'i life.

(a) He must understand, and know and love God.

(b) He must love the Bab, Baha'u'llah and the Teachings.

(c) He must know himself and live the Baha'i life.

(d) He must unfold the Teachings of the Blessed Beauty to all.

Our goal should be to establish Spiritual Assemblies, and to help them become dedicated Baha'i teachers. "...These Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world".

(7) Teaching teams should be established on or near the Reservations. Mixed groups of three or more will make wonderful Baha'i teachers. They should go where the minority groups are. They must remember the minority groups feel they have been let down through out history. They have greater sensitivity to our actions, reactions, thought and speech, therefore we must be at our happiest; with twice as much love and understanding to love them and their nature. Accept them as they are. Never make them feel inferior by having a superior attitude. When offered food, do not refuse to accept. Be sincere; do not pretend to be something you are not, as the Indians usually see through this. Tell them about the Faith in a simple, profound way.

Don't give them an intellectual talk. Speak to the heart. Do not talk too long. Give them a chance to talk about their belief. The Faith needs room in the minds and hearts of men. Teaching trips should be regularly two days a week. We must ready ourselves, pray and meditate.

- (8) A matter which is of great importance is to reach and teach the Indians in the midst of all major cities. There are six Cities which were used as re-location centers by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Therefore these Cities have a large Indian population. They are: Cleveland; Chicago; Dallas; Denver; Oakland and Los Angeles. Also, there are nine off-Reservation Indian Boarding Schools. Today, in cities from the east coast to the west coast, there are as many Indian families living as city neighbors as there are Indians on the Reservations. Very few of them have become acquainted with the Faith.

The most effective action for reaching American Indians in the cities will have to come out of Consultation within the Spiritual Assemblies. Special effort should be made to reach and encourage those who wish to teach. Baha'i children in schools can help locate Indians in the city. A systematic survey should be made. Then plans to reach and teach them.

- (9) Since most Indian Tribes have no written language, their legends of creation, their folk-lore, history, Traditions, accumulated knowledge and discoveries have been passed down from generation to generation by the Medicine Men. In their folk-lore they have been told of "the coming of the Promised One". The message of "oneness of mankind" is so deep in their minds and hearts, they are expecting the Baha'i Message. They have many beautiful legends and poems leading up to the Message of Baha'u'llah. So much of their legend and folk-lore could be enjoyed by the Baha'i non-Indian teacher.
- (10) We should concentrate through publicity to arouse the curiosity and interest among the Indians through radio, newspapers, posters, etc., etc.

Baha'i's in general are unaware of the needs and problems of Indian teaching on the Reservations and in the cities. Above all, we have to go to the Writings and study them thoroughly, take action and participate. We must live the Baha'i life. We really have to believe and love Baha'u'llah, the Blessed Beauty, with our whole heart and soul. All Baha'is should pray and meditate for our success.