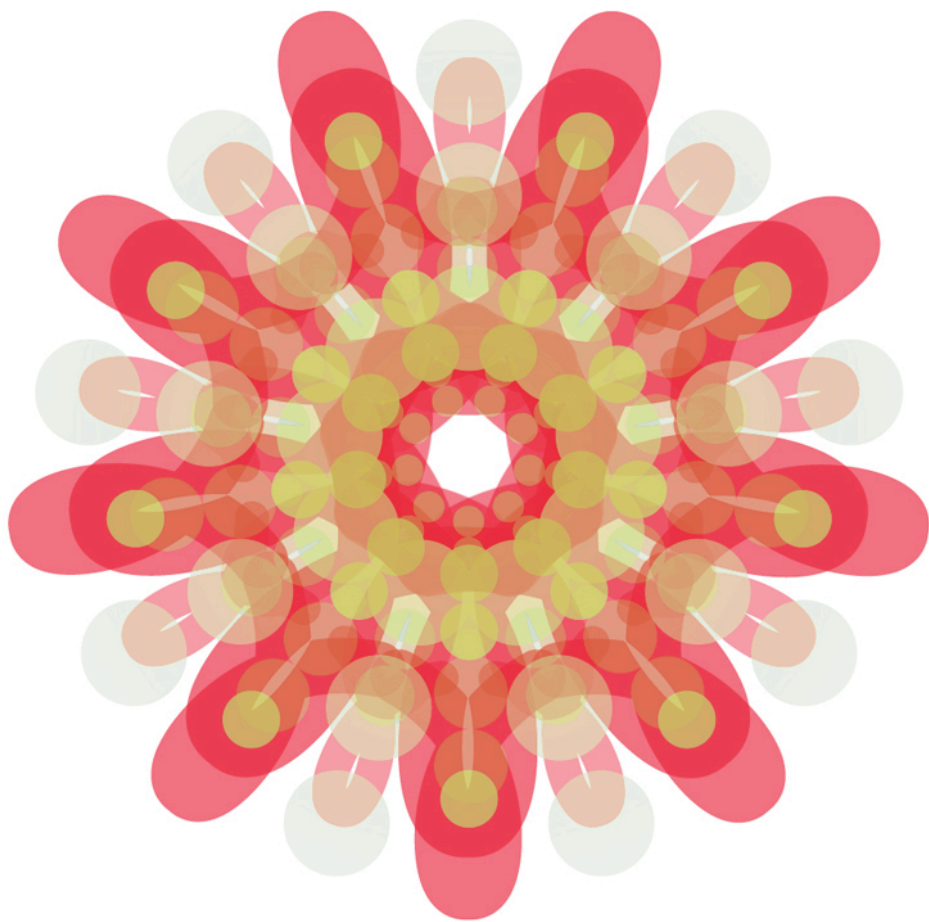


Soul Food

The Mountains of Life



August 2007

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Program

01. *Helen Keller*
02. *Richard M. Nixon*
03. *Buddhism, from the Dhammapada*
04. *Hinduism, from the Bhagavad Gita*
05. *`Abdu'l-Bahá, from the Bahá'í Writings*
06. *Life's Challenges*
07. *Ruhiyyih Rabbani, from Prescription for Living*
08. *Islam, from The Qur'an*
09. *Judaism, from The Old Testament*
10. *Bahá'u'lláh, from the Bahá'í Writings*
11. *Malal al-Din Rumi*
12. *Brian Adams, from 'How to Succeed'*
13. *`Abdu'l-Bahá, from the Bahá'í Writings*
14. *Mr. 'Ali Nakhjavani, The Story of Our Lives*
15. *Orison Swett Marden*
16. *Marie Stilkind, from The Book of Positive Quotations*
17. *`Abdu'l-Bahá, from the Bahá'í Writings*
18. *Samuel Smiles*
19. *M. Scott Peck*
20. *Walter Anderson, from the Sevens Steps to Self-Fulfillment*
21. *Michael Leunig, Short Notes from the Long History of Happiness*

Mountains cannot be surmounted except by winding paths.

– Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials.

– Confucius

01. The marvellous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome. The hilltop hour would not be half so wonderful if there were no dark valleys to traverse.

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

– Helen Keller

02. The greatness comes not when things go always good for you. But the greatness comes when you're really tested, when you take some knocks, some disappointments, when sadness comes. Because only if you've been in the deepest valley can you ever know how magnificent it is to be on the highest mountain.

– Richard M. Nixon

03. Driven by fear, men take to many a refuge, in mountains, forests, parks, sacred groves and shrines, but these are not a secure kind of refuge. By taking to this sort of refuge one is not released from suffering. He who has gone to Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha for refuge, though... this is a secure refuge, this is the ultimate refuge; by taking to this refuge one is indeed released from all suffering.

– Buddhism, from the Dhammapada

04. This that irks – thy sense life, thrilling to the elements – Bringing thee heat and cold, sorrows and joys, 'tis brief and mutable! Bear with it...! The soul which is not moved, the soul that with a strong and constant calm takes sorrow and takes joy indifferently, lives in the life undying!

– *Hinduism, from the Bhagavad Gita*

05. To the loyal soul, a test is but God's grace and favour; for the valiant doth joyously press forward to furious battle on the field of anguish, when the coward, whimpering with fright, will tremble and shake. So too, the proficient student, who hath with great competence mastered his subjects and committed them to memory, will happily exhibit his skills before his examiners on the day of his tests. So too will solid gold wondrously gleam and shine out in the assayer's fire. It is clear, then, that tests and trials are, for sanctified souls, but God's bounty and grace, while to the weak, they are a calamity, unexpected and sudden. These tests, even as thou didst write, do but cleanse the spotting of self from off the mirror of the heart, till the Sun of Truth can cast its rays thereon; for there is no veil more obstructive than the self, and however tenuous that veil may be, at the last it will completely shut a person out, and deprive him of his portion of eternal grace.

– *'Abdu'l-Bahá, from the Bahá'í Writings*

06. **Life's Challenges**

Rob is the kind of guy you love to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!"

He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Rob was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation. Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up to Rob and asked him, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?" Rob replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or you can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood.

Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life.

"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," I protested.

"Yes, it is," Rob said.

"Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood.

The bottom line: It's your choice how you live your life."

I reflected on what Rob said. Soon thereafter, I left the Tower Industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it. Several years later, I heard that Rob was involved in a serious accident, falling some 60 feet from a communications tower.

After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, Rob was released from the hospital with rods placed in his back. I saw Rob about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied. "If I were any better, I'd be twins. Wanna see my scars?" I declined to see his wounds, but I did ask him what had gone through his mind as the accident took place.

"The first thing that went through my mind was the well-being of my soon to be born daughter," Rob replied. "Then, as I lay on the ground, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live or I could choose to die. I chose to live."

"Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?" I asked. Rob continued, "...the paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the ER and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read "he's a dead man. I knew I needed to take action."

"What did you do?" I asked.

Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me," said Rob. "She asked if I was allergic to anything...

"Yes, I replied." The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, "Gravity." Over their laughter, I told them, "I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead." Rob lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully.

Attitude, after all, is everything. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow has troubles of its own." After all today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. Enjoy each day, each breath and mostly – each and every friend.

– *Anonymous*

07. This is indeed a power world. Great forces are at play – the sun, the wind, night, day – they are big things and do big things in nature. Electricity, gravitation, are strong forces that forge the earth, with all its beauty, its life, its growth. We humans are subjected to strong forces too. Love, hate, passion, sorrow, pain – they act on us and spur us on, that develop our qualities and give us colour and individuality. Why should we want to shun and abolish some of the factors that bring out the best in us, that temper our steel, that teach us to value happiness at its true worth? Can a man who had never been hungry in all his life know what a piece of bread means, and savour all its sweetness, as a man who has starved can? If we must go through life denying the existence of pain and suffering, or refusing to experience their keenness because we pad ourselves with foolish mental attitudes of psychological opiates, we shall grow to be a race lacking depth, lacking sensitivity, devoid of strong moral fibre. The blade of our soul will become dull.

– *Ruhiyiyih Rabbani, from Prescription for Living*

08. We will surely prove you by afflicting you in some measure with fear, and hunger, and decrease of wealth, and loss of lives and scarcity of fruits...

Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure.
On no soul do We place a burden greater than it can bear.

– *Islam, from the Qur'an*

09. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.

...They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Thou shalt forget thy misery and remember it as waters that pass away.

...Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

...Yea, in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.

– *Judaism, from the Old Testament*

10. **O SON OF MAN!**

For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials.

If adversity befall thee not in My path, how canst thou walk in the ways of them that are content with My pleasure? If trials afflict thee not in thy longing to meet Me, how wilt thou attain the light in thy love for My beauty?

My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.

– *Bahá'u'lláh, from the Bahá'í Writings*

11. This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival; a joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and attend them all! Even if they're a crowd of sorrows who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honourable. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the same, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in. Be grateful for whoever comes, because each guest has been sent as a guide from beyond.

– *Malal al-Din Rumi*

12. Difficulties are opportunities to better things, they are stepping stones to greater experience. Perhaps some day you will be thankful for some temporary failure in a particular direction. When one door closes, another always opens, as a natural law it has to be, to balance.

– *Brian Adams, from 'How to Succeed'*

13. The darkness of this gloomy night will pass away. Again the Sun of Reality will dawn from the horizon of the hearts. Have patience – wait, but do not sit idle; work while you are waiting; smile while you are wearied with monotony; be firm while everything around you is being shaken; be joyous while the ugly face of despair grins at you; speak aloud while the malevolent forces of the nether world try to crush your mind; be valiant and courageous while men all around you are cringing with fear and cowardice.

– *'Abdu'l-Bahá, from the Bahá'í Writings*

14. **The Story of Our Lives**

Think of yourself as a river, one which flows not through a desert where the water might gather a little dust, detracting from its purity, and not through flat land where the banks are beautiful meadows filled with wild flowers, but rather this river, which is you, flows through a dense and overgrown forest, where the trees grow thick. Dead leaves in large quantities, and all kinds of dirt and debris, fall into the river of your life and are carried along by the flowing water. The dead leaves symbolize the difficulties that life presents us with – the need to discipline our emotions, to develop loving and creative relationships, our social interaction, relations with other people, the various physical and psychological handicaps and obstacles and tests and difficulties that we are confronted with and which, if we overcome them, strengthen and purify us. Where there are trees, where there is life, there are dead leaves.

There are many things which, like the dead leaves, "fall into" our lives without our doing anything to attract them or draw them to us. So it might be said, the dead leaves are utterly innocent. It is in the nature of life that leaves should fall into the river and be carried away by the flowing water. The leaves also represent negative thoughts. They come to us, but we are capable of letting them flow away with the water of life. They cannot hurt us, and we are blameless unless we cling to the evil thoughts, nourish them, and then act upon them. When bad or destructive thoughts come, simply let go of them, let them be carried away by the running water. If the bad thought lingers, grows strong and thick as a dead branch, it becomes a problem and is potentially harmful to you and to society.

God is responsible for our lives being like a river and having to flow through the tangled forest, and we have to accept it and realize that this is an example of His loving providence. If He had wanted, He could have arranged that the lives of human beings flow through flat land where no leaves would fall into the water, or He could have arranged for us to be protected from falling leaves, and if He had there would be no growth or challenge or realization of spiritual potential. As the river flows more deeply into the forest, dead branches now fall into the water, and being twisted and gnarled, they get stuck in the riverbed. And as they accumulate, the progress of the water is impeded. The leaves collect in masses, sticking to the branches. More and more accumulate until a barrier results, a dam is built, and the riverbed is clogged. After a time, the water cannot reach its destination, flowing swiftly and clearly, but instead divides itself into two channels, left and right, which trickle and sputter, with only a very little water arriving at its destination. The destination of the water, our lives, is the realization of our full human and spiritual potential, the development of those gifts and attributes which God has deposited in us, and ultimately the attainment of eternal life. Where does the river of life flow but into the Most Great Ocean?

The trickling water depicts the depletion of our mental and spiritual powers, our increasing weakness to assume responsibility for our own development, our inability to flow freely in the riverbed of life. The branches, it could be said, are prejudice, selfishness, shortcomings of all kinds, pride, arrogance, neglect of responsibility, forgetfulness of spiritual duty, suspicion and mistrust, to mention but a few. It is our punishment that the water flows, but loses sight of its destination, and is incapable of reaching it. What can be done about the dam? Expressed briefly, "We can give it a good kick." In other words, we can dismantle the obstacles that is interfering with the flowing of our river by administering the "kick" of firm resolution, determination, prayer, meditation, obedience to the laws, service, and teaching...

When we destroy the dam, the water flows again. Our troubles begin if we do not tear down the dam, for the accumulation of the negative elements that comprise it will find expression in destructive deeds harmful to ourselves and others. It is the purity of the water of our lives that attracts others to us, and which enables us to spiritually nourish them. Life will be a process of building up and tearing down dams. This is the story of our lives!

– *Mr. 'Ali Nakhjavani*

15. Obstacles are like wild animals. They are cowards but they will bluff you if they can. If they see you are afraid of them... they are liable to spring upon you; but if you look them squarely in the eye, they will slink out of sight.

– *Orison Swett Marden*

16. Today I know that I cannot control the ocean tides. I can only go with the flow... When I struggle and try to organize the Atlantic to my specifications, I sink. If I flail and thrash and growl and grumble, I go under. But if I let go and float, I am borne aloft.

– *Marie Stilkind, from The Book of Positive Quotations*

17. Men who suffer not, attain no perfection. The plant most pruned by the gardeners is that one which, when the summer comes, will have the most beautiful blossoms and the most abundant fruit. The labourer cuts up the earth with his plough, and from that earth comes the rich and plentiful harvest. The more a man is chastened, the greater is the harvest of spiritual virtues shown forth by him. A soldier is no good General until he has been in the front of the fiercest battle and has received the deepest wounds.

Be thou not unhappy; the tempest of sorrow shall pass; regret will not last; disappointment will vanish; the fire of the love of God will become enkindled, and the thorns and briars of sadness and despondency will be consumed! Be thou happy; rest thou assured upon the favors of Baha', so that uncertainty and hesitation may become non-existent and the invisible outpourings descend upon the arena of being!

– `Abdu'l-Bahá, *from the Bahá'í Writings*

18. The very greatest things – great thoughts, discoveries, inventions – have usually been nurtured in hardship, often pondered over in sorrow, and at length established with difficulty.

– *Samuel Smiles*

19. To live in the moment, each day as it comes, requires a discipline and a cleanliness: its not quite giving up hope, but hope becomes an extension, merely, of the day's awareness, not something set apart like a bank account or accumulation of pledges falling due.

– *M. Scott Peck*

20. I am responsible. Although I may not be able to prevent the worst from happening, I am responsible for my attitude toward the inevitable misfortunes that darken life. Bad things do happen; how I respond to them defines my character and the quality of my life. I can choose to sit in perpetual sadness, immobilized by the gravity of my loss, or I can choose to rise from the pain and treasure the most precious gift I have – life itself.

– *Walter Anderson, from the Sevens Steps to Self-Fulfillment*

21. Go to the end of the path until you get to the gate.
Go through the gate and head straight out towards the horizon.
Keep going towards the horizon.
Sit down and have a rest every now and again.
But keep on going. Just keep on with it.
Keep on going as far as you can.
That's how you get there.

– *Michael Leunig, Short Notes from the Long History of Happiness*

Impossibilities are merely things which we have not yet learned.

– Charles W. Chesnutt

The true way to soften one's troubles is to solace those of others.

– Mme. de Maintenon

There are no great people in this world, only great challenges which ordinary people rise to meet.

– William Frederick Halsy, Jr.

When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it.

– Henry Ford

Should prosperity befall thee, rejoice not, and should abasement come upon thee, grieve not, for both shall pass away and be no more.

– Bahá'u'lláh

Never measure the height of a mountain, until you have reached the top. Then you will see how low it was.

– Dag Hammarskjöld

Please join us for refreshments



All Soul Food programs are available for free download from
www.soulfood.com.au

About Soul Food

Soul Food is a monthly event held at the State Library of Victoria, providing an opportunity to relax in a tranquil environment and reflect on inspiring themes. It features music, audio-visual pieces and readings from various Faiths; indigenous, ancient and modern, from all over the world. Soul Food is a free community event open to all.

Venue

State Library of Victoria
Village Roadshow Theatre
Corner Swanston St & La Trobe St
(Enter via La Trobe Street)

Time

10.30am – 11.30am

Dates

First Sunday of every month:
Sunday September 2nd, 2007
Sunday October 7th, 2007
Sunday November 4th, 2007
Sunday December 2nd, 2007

Further Information

For further information about Soul Food events in Victoria, South Australia or Western Australia please call 0402 245 752 or visit www.soulfood.com.au.

Study Circles

In response to interest from Soul Food guests, the Bahá'í community is now offering a series of regular 'Study Circles' – as an opportunity to further explore subjects related to spiritual development. Study Circles are small, informal groups, and provide an environment in which to discuss meaningful topics with like-minded people. The first Study Circle is titled "Reflections on the Life of the Spirit", from the Ruhi Study Circle series. It is a three unit study on; Understanding the Bahá'í Writings, Prayer & Meditation, and Life & Death.

If you enjoy Soul Food then a Study Circle may also appeal to you. For more information please contact 0402 245 752 or email soulfoodvic@gmail.com.

The Bahá'í Community of Victoria

Soul Food is an initiative of the Bahá'í Community of Victoria. For further information about the Bahá'í Faith please visit www.bahai.org.au. For books on the Bahá'í Faith and related subjects such as spiritual development, world religion, education and more please visit:

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