

# Soul Food

No Man is an Island



December 2008

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**If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world, and that his heart is no island cut off from other lands, but a continent that joins to them.**

*– Francis Bacon*

**We have flown the air like birds and swum the sea like fishes, but have yet to learn the simple act of walking the earth as brothers.**

*– Dr Martin Luther King (1967)*

01. Ye observe how the world is divided against itself, how many a land is red with blood and its very dust is caked with human gore. The fires of conflict have blazed so high that never in early times, not in the Middle Ages, not in recent centuries hath there ever been such a hideous war, a war that is even as millstones, taking for grain the skulls of men. Nay, even worse, for flourishing countries have been reduced to rubble, cities have been levelled with the ground, and many a once prosperous village hath been turned into ruin. Fathers have lost their sons, and sons their fathers. Mothers have wept away their hearts over dead children. Children have been orphaned, women left to wander, vagrants without a home.

From every aspect, humankind hath sunken low. Loud are the piercing cries of fatherless children; loud the mothers' anguished voices, reaching to the skies. And the breeding-ground of all these tragedies is prejudice: prejudice of race and nation, of religion, of political opinion; and the root cause of prejudice is blind imitation of the past – imitation in religion, in racial attitudes, in national bias, in politics. So long as this aping of the past persisteth, just so long will the foundations of the social order be blown to the four winds, just so long will humanity be continually exposed to direct peril.

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

02. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

*– Martin Luther King Jr, letter from Birmingham City Jail, 12 April 1963*

**Grandfather, Great Spirit, all over the world the faces of living ones are alike... Teach us to walk the soft earth as relatives to all that live.**

*– Native American, Sioux prayer*

**03. Excerpt from ‘The Promise of World Peace’**

The endowments which distinguish the human race from all other forms of life are summed up in what is known as the human spirit; the mind is its essential quality. These endowments have enabled humanity to build civilizations and to prosper materially. But such accomplishments alone have never satisfied the human spirit, whose mysterious nature inclines it towards transcendence, a reaching towards an invisible realm, towards the ultimate reality, that unknowable essence of essences called God. The religions brought to mankind by a succession of spiritual luminaries have been the primary link between humanity and that ultimate reality, and have galvanized and refined mankind's capacity to achieve spiritual success together with social progress...

If, therefore, humanity has come to a point of paralysing conflict it must look to itself, to its own negligence, to the siren voices to which it has listened, for the source of the misunderstandings and confusion perpetrated in the name of religion. Those who have held blindly and selfishly to their particular orthodoxies, who have imposed on their votaries erroneous and conflicting interpretations of the pronouncements of the Prophets of God, bear heavy responsibility for this confusion – a confusion compounded by the artificial barriers erected between faith and reason, science and religion.

*– Excerpt from ‘The Promise of World Peace’, the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í World Centre.*

**To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream;  
not only plan, but also believe.**

*– Anatole France*

04. **No Man Is An Island**

No man is an island, entire of itself,  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less,  
As well as if a promontory were,  
As well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were.  
Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.  
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls.  
It tolls for thee.

– *John Donne*

05. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

– *Matthew 5, from the Holy Bible*

**Human Right No. 3**

**Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.**

## 06. The Story of Henri Dunant

Henri Dunant, at the age of 30 was a wealthy Swiss banker and financier. His life would probably have continued much as it had except for one fateful day, June 24, 1859, that changed everything. Dunant had been sent by his government to talk to Napoleon III. He was to discuss a business deal between the Swiss and the French that would benefit both. But Napoleon was not in Paris; he was on the plain of Solferino about to do battle with the Austrians.

Henri Dunant tried to reach the scene before the battle began, but he was too late. His carriage came to a halt on top of a hill that overlooked the battlefield. Suddenly trumpets blared, muskets cracked, cannons boomed. The two cavalries charged and the battle was on. Henri Dunant, as if in a box seat at the theatre, sat transfixed. He could see the dust rising, hear the screams of the injured, the dying. Dunant sat as if in a trance at the horror below him. But the real horror was later — when he entered the small town after the battle was over. Every house, every building was filled with the mangled, the injured, the dead. Driven by pity at the suffering he saw all around him, Dunant stayed in the town for three days doing everything he could to help.

He was never the same man again. War was barbarous. The world should abolish it. This was not the way to settle differences between nations. And most of all, there ought to be a worldwide organization to help people in times of suffering and chaos. Henri Dunant returned to Switzerland. In the next few years he became a fanatic on the subject of peace and mercy. He began to travel all over Europe preaching his message. Eventually his business suffered in the effort and he was soon broke. But he persisted.

At the first Geneva Conference he carried on a one-man assault against war. As a result, the Conference passed the first international law against war — a movement that was to give birth eventually to both the League of Nations and the U.N.

In 1901, Dunant was awarded the first Nobel Peace prize. And though he was penniless and living in a poor house, he gave the entire prize to the worldwide movement he had founded. Henri Dunant died in 1910 almost totally forgotten by the world. But Dunant needed no monument to mark his grave. As a symbol of the organization he had fathered, he had taken the Swiss flag, a white cross on a red background and reversed it: a red cross on a white background. The organization that became his everlasting monument was the Red Cross.

**I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability  
of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavour.**

*– Henry David Thoreau*

07. To develop a sense of universal responsibility — of the universal dimension of our every act and of the equal right of all others to happiness and not to suffer — is to develop an attitude of mind whereby, if we see an opportunity to benefit others, we will take it in preference to merely looking after our own self-interests. But, though, of course, we care about what is beyond our scope, we accept it as part of nature and concern ourselves with doing what we can.

An important benefit of developing such a sense of universal responsibility is that it helps us become sensitive to others — not just those closest to us. We come to see the need for caring, to care for those members of the human family who suffer most. We recognize the need to avoid causing divisiveness among our fellow beings. And we become aware of the overwhelming importance of contentment.

*– The Dalai Lama, from Buddhist sentiment*

08. There must be an equality of rights between men and women. Women shall receive an equal privilege of education. This will enable them to qualify and progress in all degrees of occupation and accomplishment. For the world of humanity possesses two wings: man and woman. If one wing remains incapable and defective, it will restrict the power of the other, and full flight will be impossible. Therefore, the completeness and perfection of the human world are dependent upon the equal development of these two wings.

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

**The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord.**

**– Bahá'í Writings**

09. A Song of Hope

Look up, my people,  
The dawn is breaking,  
The world is waking  
To a new bright day  
Where none defame us,  
No restriction tame us,  
No colour shame us,  
No sneer dismay.

*– Oodgeroo Noonuccal, A Song of Hope*

### **Human Right No. 18**

**Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.**

## 10. Excerpt from ‘Who is Writing the Future?’

Intimately related to the issue of unity is a second moral challenge that the past century has posed with ever increasing urgency. In the sight of God, Bahá'u'lláh insists, justice is the “best beloved of all things”. It enables the individual to see reality through his or her own eyes rather than those of others and endows collective decision making with the authority that alone can ensure unity of thought and action.

However gratifying is the system of international order that has emerged from the harrowing experiences of the twentieth century, its enduring influence will depend on acceptance of the moral principle implicit in it. If the body of humankind is indeed one and indivisible, then the authority exercised by its governing institutions represents essentially a trusteeship. Each individual person comes into the world as a trust of the whole, and it is this feature of human existence that constitutes the real foundation of the social, economic and cultural rights that the United Nations Charter and its related documents articulate. Justice and unity are reciprocal in their effect. “The purpose of justice,” Bahá'u'lláh wrote, “is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance.”

As society commits itself – however hesitantly and fearfully – to these and related moral principles, the most meaningful role it will offer the individual will be that of service. One of the paradoxes of human life is that development of the self comes primarily through commitment to larger undertakings in which the self – even if only temporarily – is forgotten.

“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in,” is Bahá'u'lláh's counsel, “and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”

– *Excerpt from ‘Who is Writing the Future?’, from the Bahá'í International Community*

11. CHILDREN OF MEN!

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.

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

12. One day our descendants will think it incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skin or the shape of our eyes or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings.

– *Franklin Thomas*

13. Seek for mankind that of which you are desirous for yourself, that you may be a believer;

Treat well as a neighbour the one who lives near you, that you may be a Muslim.

That which you want for yourself seek for mankind.

The most righteous of men is the one who is glad that men should have what is pleasing to himself, and who dislikes for them what is for him disagreeable.

Whatever you abhor for yourself, abhor it also for others, and whatever you desire for yourself desire also for others.

– *Attributed to Muhammad, Sukhanan-i-Muhammad*

**We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic.  
Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings,  
different hopes, different dreams.**

*– Jimmy Carter*

14. Reconciliation requires that we work together to defend our democracy and the humanity proclaimed by our constitution. It demands that we join hands..., to eradicate the poverty spawned by a system that thrived on the deprivation of the majority. Reconciliation requires that we end malnutrition, homelessness and ignorance,... It demands that we put shoulders to the wheel to end crime and corruption...

The wounds of the period of repression and resistance are too deep to have been healed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission alone, however well it has encouraged us along that path.

Consequently, the report that today becomes the property of our nation should be a call to all of us to celebrate and to strengthen what we have done as a nation as we leave our terrible past behind us forever.

Let us celebrate our rich diversity as a people, in the knowledge that when the TRC in its wisdom apportions blame, it points at previous state structures; political organizations; at institutions and individuals, but never, and I want to repeat, never at any community.

Now the challenge is for all of us to protect our democratic gains like the apple of our eye. It is for those who have the means, to contribute to the efforts to repair the damage brought by the past. It is for those who have suffered losses of different kinds and magnitudes to be afforded reparation, proceeding from the premise that freedom and dignity are the real prize that our sacrifices were meant to attain.

Free at last, we are all masters of our destiny. A better future depends on all of us lending a hand – your hand, my hand.

*– Nelson Mandela*

15. The person who doesn't fit in with our notions of who is worthy of our love — the bag lady at the corner, the strange old man who rides through town on a three-wheel bike all strung up with flags—is just the person who, by not fitting into our patterns, insists that we expand not only our views but also our capacity to love. Today, see if you can stretch your heart and expand your love so that it touches not only those to whom you can give it easily, but also to those who need it so much.

– *Daphne Rose Kingman*

**Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow creatures. Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind.**

– *Bahá'u'lláh*

16. Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home — so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

– *Eleanor Roosevelt*

17. This is the hour when ye must associate with all the earth's peoples in extreme kindness and love, and be to them the signs and tokens of God's great mercy. Ye must become the very soul of the world, the living spirit in the body of the children of men. In this wondrous Age, at this time... the Word of God hath infused such awesome power into the inmost essence of humankind that He hath stripped men's human qualities of all effect, and hath, with His all conquering might, unified the peoples in a vast sea of oneness.

Now is the time for the lovers of God to raise high the banners of unity, to intone, in the assemblages of the world, the verses of friendship and love and to demonstrate to all that the grace of God is one.

In every dispensation, there hath been the commandment of fellowship and love,... praised be God, the commandments of God are not delimited, not restricted to any one group of people, rather have all the friends been commanded to show forth fellowship and love, consideration and generosity and loving-kindness to every community on earth... He hath guided all the peoples of the earth to oneness... He hath lit man's world and made this earth of dust to send forth streams of light.

– *‘Abdu’l-Baha, from the Bahá’í Writings*

## 18. **Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance...

**Please join us for refreshments**



All Soul Food programs are available for free download from  
**[www.soulfood.com.au](http://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 Theatrette  
Corner Swanston St & La Trobe St (Enter via La Trobe Street)

### Time

10.30am – 11.30am

### Dates for 2009

First Sunday of every month:

Sunday, February 1<sup>st</sup>

Sunday, March 1<sup>st</sup>

Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup>

Sunday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>

Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup>

Sunday, July 5<sup>th</sup>

Sunday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>

Sunday, September 6<sup>th</sup>

Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup>

Sunday, November 1<sup>st</sup>

Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>

### Further Information

For further information about Soul Food events in Victoria, South Australia or Western Australia please call 03 9415 6007 or visit [www.soulfood.com.au](http://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 03 9415 6007 or email [soulfoodvic@gmail.com](mailto: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](http://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:

### **Hidden Words – Bahá'í Books & Information**

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11.00am every Sunday at Hidden Words Bookshop. For more information please call Hidden Words on 03 9815 2020.