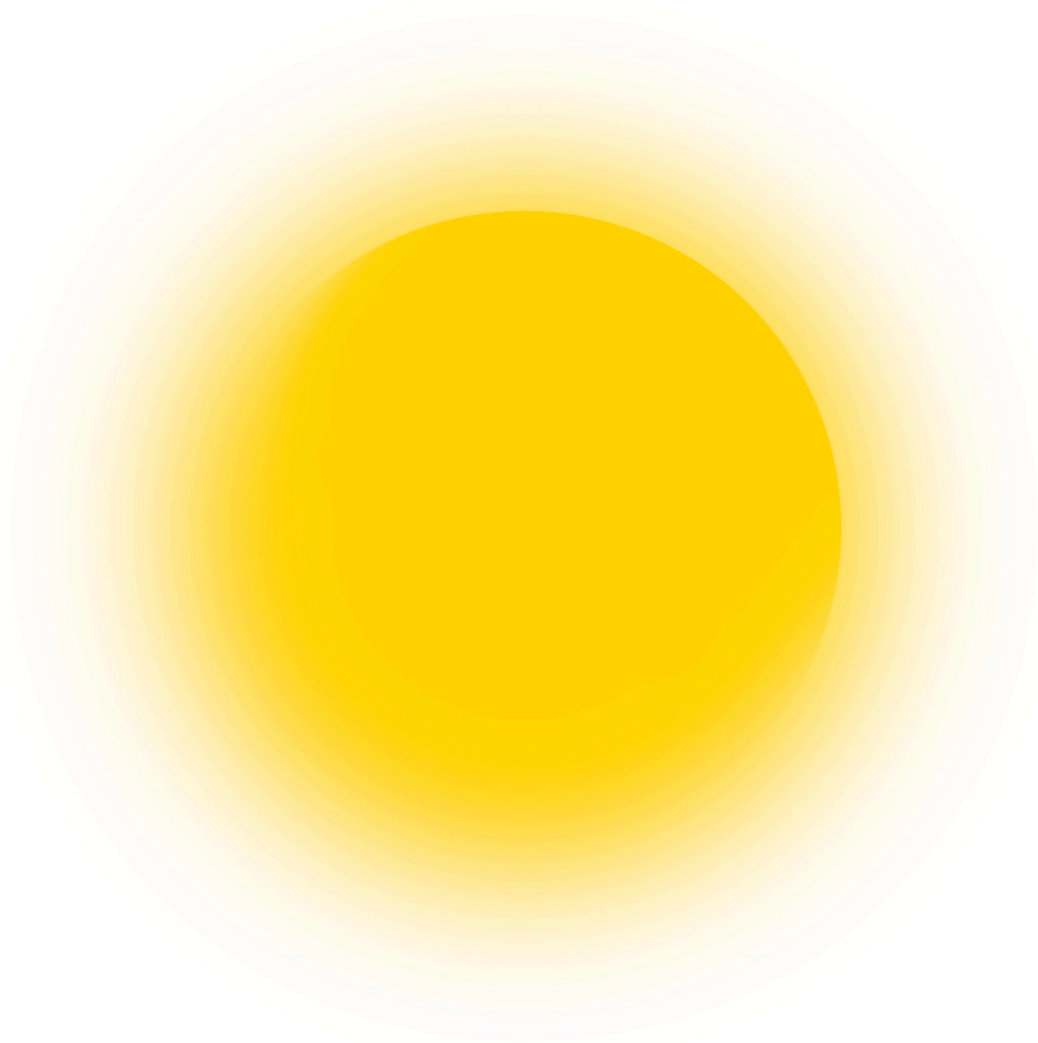


Soul Food

No Beginning, No End



February 2010

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**There is no end. There is no beginning.
There is only the infinite passion of life.
– Federico Fellini**

01. Creation Stories

In the beginning there was nothing but Nzame. This god is really three: Nzame, Mebere, and Nkwa. It was the Nzame part of the god that created the universe and the earth, and brought life to it. While the three parts of Nzame were admiring this creation, it was decided to create a ruler for the earth. So was created the elephant, the leopard, and the monkey, but it was decided that something better had to be created. Between the three of them they made a new creature in their image, and called him Fam (power), and told him to rule the earth. Before long, Fam grew arrogant, he mistreated the animals and stopped worshipping Nzame. Nzame, angered, brought forth thunder and lightning and destroyed everything that was, except Fam, who had been promised immortality.

Nzame, in his three aspects, decided to renew the earth and try again. He applied a new layer of earth to the planet, and a tree grew upon it. The tree dropped seeds which grew into more trees. Leaves that dropped from them into the water became fish, those that dropped on land became animals. The old parched earth still lies below this new one, and if one digs deep enough it can be found in the form of coal. Nzame made a new man, one who would know death, and called him Sekume. Sekume fashioned a woman, Mbongwe, from a tree. These people were made with both Gnoul (body) and Nissim (soul). Nissim gives life to Gnoul. When Gnoul dies, Nissim lives on.

– African Bantu

02. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night..

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven...

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

– *From the Old Testament*

The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.

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

Say: O bretheren! Let deeds, not words, be your adorning.

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

03. We declare that Love is the cause of the existence of all phenomena and the absence of love is the cause of disintegration or non-existence. Love is the conscious bestowal of God, the bond of affiliation in all phenomena!

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

04. Before the soul is given residence in the body of a child about to be born, the kernel of the body is brought to the Heavenly Tribunal, where it receives its fate: whether the child will enjoy riches or poverty; whether it be male or female, heroic or cowardly, tall or short, handsome or homely, fat or thin, respected or ignored. One thing, however, is not subject to predestination, namely whether the child will be good or bad, since it must have freedom of will. A soul is given residence despite any protestations in the body to be born. It is given over to an angel who endows it with the capacity of learning the whole Torah, and of performing all the Mitzwot. It is taken to Paradise, and the angel says “These were souls with bodies like yours, and because they did well in life, they are now enjoying their reward.” Next it is taken to Gehenna, and the angel declares: “These were like you, and they did evil. Do not imitate them.” Then the soul is returned to the womb.

– *Judaism Tantuma to Tazria*

05. The Universe is Without Beginning

Know that it is one of the most abstruse spiritual truths that the world of existence—that is to say, this endless universe—has no beginning. The names and attributes of the Divinity themselves require the existence of beings... Therefore, as the Essence of Unity (that is, the existence of God) is everlasting and eternal—that is to say, it has neither beginning nor end—it is certain that this world of existence, this endless universe, has neither beginning nor end. Yes, it may be that one of the parts of the universe, one of the globes, for example, may come into existence, or may be disintegrated, but the other endless globes are still existing; the universe would not be disordered nor destroyed. On the contrary, existence is eternal and perpetual.

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

06. Lo, I am with you always means, that when you look for God, God is in the look of your eyes,
In the thought of looking, nearer to you than your self,
There is no need to go outside.
Be melting snow.
Wash your self.
A white flower grows in the quietness.
Let your tongue become that flower.

– *Jalal al-Din Rumi, Islamic Meditation*

07. Ferocity and savagery are natural to animals, but men should show forth the qualities of love and affection. God sent all his Prophets into the world with one aim, to sow in the hearts of men love and good will, and for this great purpose they were willing to suffer and to die. All the sacred Books were written to lead and direct man into ways of love and unity; and yet in spite of all this, we have the sad spectacle of war and bloodshed in our midst. When we look in the pages of history, past and present, we see the black earth reddened by human blood. Men kill each other like the savage wolves, and forget the laws of love and tolerance. Now this luminous age has come, bringing with it wonderful civilization and material progress. Men's intellects have widened, their perceptions grown but alas, in spite of all this, fresh blood is being spilt day by day...

This all shows that material progress alone does not tend to uplift man. On the contrary, the more he becomes immersed in material progress, the more does his spirituality become obscured. I want to make you understand that material progress and spiritual progress are two very different things, and that only if material progress goes hand in hand with spirituality can any real progress come about, and the Most Great Peace reign in the world.

If men followed the Holy Counsels and Teachings of the Prophets, if Divine Light shone in all hearts and men were really religious, we should see peace on earth and the Kingdom of God among men. The laws of God may be likened unto the soul and material progress unto the body. If the body was not animated by the soul, it would cease to exist. It is my earnest prayer that spirituality may ever grow and increase in the world, so that customs may become enlightened and peace and concord may be established...

Oh, peoples and nations! Arise and work and be happy! Gather under the tent of the unity of mankind!

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

08. The disciples said to Jesus, “Tell us how our end will be.” Jesus said, “Have you discovered, then, the beginning, that you look for the end? For where the beginning is, there will the end be. Blessed is he who will take his place in the beginning; he will know the end and will not experience death.”

“Blessed is he who came into being before he came into being. If you become my disciples and listen to my words, these stones will minister to you. For there are five trees for you in Paradise which remain undisturbed summer and winter and whose leaves do not fall. Whoever becomes acquainted with them will not experience death.”

– *Nag Hammadi Library, The Gospel of Thomas*

09. Ah, Love! Could thou and I with Fate conspire to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire, would not we shatter it to bits – and then re-mould it nearer to the heart’s desire?

Ah, Moon of my Delight who knowest no wane, the Moon of Heav’n is rising once again: how oft hereafter rising shall she look through this same Garden after me – in vain!

– *Omar Khayyam*

10. Be happy! Be happy!
The Sun of Truth has Shone!
Be happy! Be happy!
The Light of the Spirit has surrounded the world!
Be happy! Be happy!
The doors of the Kingdom are opened!
Be happy! Be happy!
The song of the Supreme Concourse is raised!
Be happy! Be happy!
The breaths of the Holy Spirit are life-giving and the world of man is being quickened.

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

11. We return thanks to our mother, the earth, which sustains us.
We return thanks to the rivers and streams, which supply us with water.
We return thanks to all herbs, which furnish medicines for the cure of our diseases.
We return thanks to the corn, and to her sisters, the beans and squashes, which give us life.
We return thanks to the bushes and trees, which provide us with fruit.
We return thanks to the wind, which, moving the air, has banished diseases.
We return thanks to the moon and stars, which give us their light when the sun has gone.
We return thanks to our grandfather, that he has protected his grandchildren from witches and reptiles, and has given to us his rain.
We return thanks to the sun, that he has looked upon earth with a beneficent eye.
Lastly, we return thanks to the Great Spirit, in whom is embodied all goodness, and who directs all things for the good of his children

– *Native American Iroquois Prayer*

**I thank you, Lord for knowing me better than I know myself,
and for letting me know myself better than others know me.
Make me, I pray to You, better than they suppose, and forgive
me for what they do not know.**

– *Islam: Abu Bakr*

Conquer anger by love.

– *Buddhism*

12. Love & Time

Once upon a time, there was an island where all the feelings lived:

Happiness, Sadness, Knowledge, and all of the others, including Love. One day it was announced to the feelings that the island would sink, so all constructed boats and left. Except for Love. Love was the only one who stayed. Love wanted to hold out until the last possible moment. When the island had almost sunk, Love decided to ask for help.

Richness was passing by Love in a grand boat. Love said, "Richness, can you take me with you?" Richness answered, "No, I can't. There is a lot of gold and silver in my boat. There is no place here for you." Love decided to ask Vanity who was also passing by in a beautiful vessel. "Vanity, please help me!" "I can't help you, Love. You are all wet and might damage my boat," Vanity answered. Sadness was close by so Love asked, "Sadness, let me go with you."

"Oh... Love, I am so sad that I need to be by myself!" Happiness passed by Love, too, but she was so happy that she did not even hear when Love called her. Suddenly, there was a voice, "Come, Love, I will take you." It was an elder. So blessed and overjoyed, Love even forgot to ask the elder where they were going. When they arrived at dry land, the elder went her own way. Realizing how much was owed the elder, Love asked Knowledge, another elder, "Who Helped me?"

"It was Time," Knowledge answered.

"Time?" asked Love. "But why did Time help me?"

Knowledge smiled with deep wisdom and answered, "Because only Time is capable of understanding how valuable Love is."

– *An Indian Story*

13. We can still celebrate the world today in spite of its dire threat to human happiness. The Bahá'í Faith, as is true of the other great religions, calls for a rejection of the world. But in doing so, it defines the 'world' only as anything which prevents us from loving God. Following this definition, the world actually enables us to love God more completely through a deeper appreciation of His many beautiful names and attributes revealed in all of creation. We can still celebrate the world today by celebrating ourselves. We can rejoice in the realization that there is still much left in the soul to be loved and because wherever we are in our spiritual journey, we have been able to endure our lives up to this moment and because we are still here learning to live and to love, to understand, to suffer and to forgive, to work and to praise—with this end in mind: that we might make a difference in the world and become a cause of healing. We can still celebrate the world today by admiring the soul beauty in others. A myriad faces of joy are still to be seen, faces of bliss mirroring mystery, individual waves that have emerged from that vast unknown Sea of Reality. For that greatest of all mysteries, the endless, unfathomable Sea of Being, in its profound mystery, in its heights and depths, contains us one and all. In that Great Sea, we may all learn to swim secure and be confident in the realization that its salutary waters' will carry us safely to the farthest shore.

– *J. A. Mclean Under the Divine Lote Tree*

**Life is short and we do not have much time for gladdening
the hearts of those who are travelling the dark way with us.
Oh, be swift to love! Make haste to be kind!**

– *Henri F. Amiel, Journal*

14. “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”

– *Matthew 22.36, from the Bible*

15. Know thou of certainty that love is the secret of God's holy dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven's kindly light, the Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul. Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. Love is the one means that ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next. Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man that assureth the progress of every illumined soul. Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation.

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

Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty.

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

Let your eyes be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened.

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

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 for 2010

February 7th	March 7th
April 4th	May 2nd
June 6th	July 4th
August 1st	September 5th
October 3rd	November 7th
December 5th	

Further Information

For further information about Soul Food events in Victoria or South Australia please call 03 9415 6007 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 03 9415 6007 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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Soul Food is proudly supported by the Victorian Multicultural Commission.