

Soul Food

Infinite Worlds



June 2007

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Program

01. *Sogyal Rinpoche*
02. *Kevin Williams*
03. *Native American tradition, From The Voices of Our Ancestors*
04. *The Old Testament, Genesis 2: 6-8*
05. *Buddhism, Dhammapada*
06. *Native American*
07. *African Traditional Religions*

08. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace, from Bahá'í Writings*

09. *'Abdu'l-Baha', from the Bahá'í Writings*
10. *J.A. McLean, A reflection on Gravity and Flight*
11. *William Faulkner*
12. *Hinduism, from the Katha Upanishad, Part 3*
13. *'Abdu'l-Baha', from the Bahá'í Writings*

14. *Ibn Al-'Arabi*
15. *Bahá'u'lláh , from the Bahá'í Writings*
16. *Norman Vincent Peale*
17. *Khalil Gibran*
18. *Ernst Toller, from Poems of War*
19. *Richard Bach*
20. *'Abdu'l-Baha', from the Bahá'í Writings*

01. Normally we do not like to think about death. We would rather think about life.

Why reflect on death? When you start preparing for death you soon realize that you must look into your life... now... and come to face the truth of your self. Death is like a mirror in which the true meaning of life is reflected.

– *Sogyal Rinpoche*

02. Cardiologist Michael Sabom, in his study of patients having had brushes with death, found that for the 43 percent who had near-death experiences, the experience did more to change the depth and direction of their approach to life than had any other life event.

– *Kevin Williams*

03. According to Tsalagi [Cherokee] teaching, we have spun down from the realm of Galunlati, the realm of light, through the grace of Star Woman falling to Earth...

The star energy came to spark the fire of mind, that all might return again to the Mystery. The human being is much like the salmon; we all come forth from the lake of clear mind; we swim out into the ocean of experience, with its many lessons and opportunities and illusions—and as the salmon finds again the stream that leads it back to its spawning ground, so too must human beings find and follow the stream that will bring them again to the vast clear light.

– *Native American tradition, from The Voices of Our Ancestors, pp. 29, 11*

04. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

– *The Old Testament, Genesis 2: 6-8*

05. Behold this beautiful body, a mass of sores, a heaped up lump, diseased, much thought of, in which nothing lasts, nothing persists. Thoroughly worn out is this body, a nest of diseases, perishable. This putrid mass breaks up. Truly, life ends in death. Like gourds cast away in autumn are these dove-hued bones. What pleasure is there in looking at them? Of bones is this house made, plastered with flesh and blood. Herein are stored decay, death, conceit, and hypocrisy.

Even ornamented royal chariots wear out. So too the body reaches old age. But the Dhamma of the Good grows not old. Thus do the Good reveal it among the Good.

– *Buddhism, Dhammapada 147-151*

06. O Great Spirit,
Whose voice I hear in the winds,
And whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me!
Let me walk in beauty, and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset. Make my hands respect the things you have made and my ears sharp to hear your voice.
Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.
I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother, but to fight my greatest enemy – myself.
Make me always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes.
So when life fades, as the fading sunset, my spirit may come to you without shame.

– *Native American*

07. Those who are dead are never gone: they are there in the thickening shadow. The dead are not under the earth: they are there in the tree that rustles, they are in the wood that groans, they are in the water that runs, they are in the water that sleeps, they are in the hut, they are in the crowd, the dead are not dead.

Those who are dead are never gone: they are in the breast of the woman, they are in the child who is wailing, and in the firebrand that flames. The dead are not under the earth: they are in the fire that is dying, they are in the grasses that weep, they are in the whimpering rocks, they are in the forest, they are in the house, the dead are not dead.

– *African Traditional Religions, Birago Diop, Poem (Mali)*

- o8. Within the last few days a terrible event has happened in the world, an event saddening to every heart and grieving every spirit. I refer to the Titanic disaster, in which many of our fellow human beings were drowned, a number of beautiful souls passed beyond this earthly life. Although such an event is indeed regrettable, we must realize that everything which happens is due to some wisdom and that nothing happens without a reason. Therein is a mystery; but whatever the reason and mystery, it was a very sad occurrence, one which brought tears to many eyes and distress to many souls.

I was greatly affected by this disaster. Some of those who were lost voyaged on the Cedric with us as far as Naples and afterward sailed upon the other ship. When I think of them, I am very sad indeed. But when I consider this calamity in another aspect, I am consoled by the realization that the worlds of God are infinite; that though they were deprived of this existence, they have other opportunities in the life beyond, even as Christ has said, "In my Father's house are many mansions." They were called away from the temporary and transferred to the eternal; they abandoned this material existence and entered the portals of the spiritual world. Foregoing the pleasures and comforts of the earthly, they now partake of a joy and happiness far more abiding and real, for they have hastened to the Kingdom of God. The mercy of God is infinite, and it is our duty to remember these departed souls in our prayers and supplications that they may draw nearer and nearer to the Source itself.

These human conditions may be likened to the matrix of the mother from which a child is to be born into the spacious outer world. At first the infant finds it very difficult to reconcile itself to its new existence. It cries as if not wishing to be separated from its narrow abode and imagining that life is restricted to that limited space. It is reluctant to leave its home, but nature forces it into this world. Having come into its new conditions, it finds that it has passed from darkness into a sphere of radiance; from gloomy and restricted surroundings it has been transferred to a spacious and delightful environment... Its new life is filled with brightness and beauty; it looks with wonder and delight upon the mountains, meadows and fields of green, the rivers and fountains, the wonderful stars; it breathes the life quickening atmosphere; and then it praises God for its release from the confinement of its former condition and attainment to the freedom of a new realm.

This analogy expresses the relation of the temporal world to the life hereafter the transition of the soul of man from darkness and uncertainty to the light and reality of the eternal Kingdom. At first it is very difficult to welcome death, but after attaining its new condition the soul is grateful, for it has been released from the bondage of the limited to enjoy the liberties of the unlimited. It has been freed from a world of sorrow, grief and trials to live in a world of unending bliss and joy... Therefore, the souls of those who have passed away

from earth and completed their span of mortal pilgrimage in the Titanic disaster have hastened to a world superior to this. They have soared away from these conditions of darkness and dim vision into the realm of light. These are the only considerations which can comfort and console those whom they have left behind.

– *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 46-48, from the *Bahá'í Writings*

09. In the beginning of this human life man was embryonic in the world of the matrix. There he received capacity and endowment for the reality of human existence. The forces and powers necessary for this world were bestowed upon him in that limited condition. In this world he needed eyes; he received them potentially in the other. He needed ears; he obtained them there in readiness and preparation for his new existence. The powers requisite in this world were conferred upon him in the world of the matrix...

Therefore, in this world he must prepare himself for the life beyond. That which he needs in the world of the Kingdom must be obtained here. Just as he prepared himself in the world of the matrix by acquiring forces necessary in this sphere of existence, so, likewise, the indispensable forces of the divine existence must be potentially attained in this world.

What is he in need of in the Kingdom which transcends the life and limitation of this mortal sphere? That world beyond is a world of sanctity and radiance; therefore, it is necessary that in this world he should acquire these divine attributes. In that world there is need of spirituality, faith, assurance, the knowledge and love of God. These he must attain in this world so that after his ascension from the earthly to the heavenly Kingdom he shall find all that is needful in that eternal life ready for him. That divine world is manifestly a world of lights; therefore, man has need of illumination here. That is a world of love; the love of God is essential. It is a world of perfections; virtues, or perfections, must be acquired. That world is vivified by the breaths of the Holy Spirit; in this world we must seek them. That is the Kingdom of everlasting life; it must be attained during this vanishing existence.

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

10. **A reflection on Gravity and Flight by J.A. McLean**

Everyone has two contending tendencies of soul. One is to fly. The other is to remain grounded. The desire for flight is a longing for spiritual freedom, a yearning after brilliance, to know fire and light, to soar in the rarest of climes. It is to be Icarus. When we experience gravity, we seek the cool darkness of the night season. We experience desire. We want to be held down, to mix with the earth and the elements, to remember that we are made of blood and bone, to take delight in the flesh.

Gravity is not materialism or gross sensuality. It is connectedness to earth mother. It is recalling our origins in the womb, of being nurtured at our mother's breast, remembering that we have come from the matrix of life. It is a desire to return to the source and as medieval pilgrims once did in the great cathedrals of Europe, seek sanctuary and protection. Gravity is knowing that only through the body and the senses can the spirit express itself. Gravity says that the body takes on qualities of soul, that the soul becomes flesh, that it seeks the heart's other half, the animus/anima.

But gravity can become a prison. We can easily become enmeshed in gravity. If the bird of the soul flies too low, it becomes trapped in the fowler's net. Then it flutters helplessly until it is either consumed or released by the fowler. Gravity can become addiction in its many forms, 'the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire' in the frenetic, inverted search for peace.

We must learn to walk a tightrope between two worlds, to dance between heaven and earth, to walk on air and return gently to terra firma. We must learn to raise aspiring, upraised hands to the sky while moving carefully over ground. We must glance heavenward even as we dip our feet into the fast-flowing stream of the source of life. For if we linger too long on earth, our wings will become sullied and we may find ourselves forced to dwell in the dust, unable to take flight again.

We know when gravity becomes life-threatening, for we hear an ominous note of caution being sounded. If the joy that we have sought is followed by sorrow, then we know that we are being overpowered by gravity. If we find ourselves caught in a tournament of fears, when sorrow jousts repeatedly with joy and passion altercates with pain, we are being held fast by gravity. Then we must fly upward again where the air is pure and sweet, and where the sky is clean and blue. As we learn to defy gravity and fly, even as we welcome the return to earth, we shall no longer be forced to dwell in the dust, but shall spread our wings and fly again with ease.

– *J.A. McLean, A reflection on Gravity and Flight*

11. I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among the creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of kindness and compassion.

– *William Faulkner*

12. The Atman [Spirit] is beyond sound and form, without touch and taste and perfume. It is eternal, unchangeable, and without beginning or end; indeed above reasoning. When consciousness of the Atman manifests itself, man becomes free from the jaws of death.

– *Hinduism, from the Katha Upanishad, Part 3*

13. As to the question whether the souls will recognize each other in the spiritual world: This fact is certain; for the Kingdom is the world of vision where all the concealed realities will become disclosed. How much more the well-known souls will become manifest. The mysteries of which man is heedless in this earthly world, those he will discover in the heavenly world, and there will he be informed of the secret of truth; how much more will he recognize or discover persons with whom he hath been associated. Undoubtedly, the holy souls who find a pure eye and are favored with insight will, in the kingdom of lights, be acquainted with all mysteries, and will seek the bounty of witnessing the reality of every great soul. Even they will manifestly behold the Beauty of God in that world. Likewise will they find all the friends of God, both those of the former and recent times, present in the heavenly assemblage.

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

14. All is contained in the Divine Breath,
As is light in the darkness before dawn.
Knowledge transmitted by proof
Is like the dawn to one half drowsing.
He perceives what we speak of as in a dream,
But that gives him a clue to the Breath.

– *Ibn Al-‘Arabi*

15. Indeed, O Brother, if we ponder each created thing, we shall witness a myriad perfect wisdoms and learn a myriad new and wondrous truths. One of the created phenomena is the dream. Behold how many secrets are deposited therein, how many wisdoms treasured up, how many worlds concealed. Observe, how thou art asleep in a dwelling, and its doors are barred; on a sudden thou findest thyself in a far-off city, which thou enterest without moving thy feet or wearing thy body; without using thine eyes, thou seest; without taxing thine ears, thou hearest; without a tongue, thou speakest. And perchance when ten years are gone, thou wilt witness in the outer world the very thing thou hast dreamed tonight.

Now there are many wisdoms to ponder in the dream...

First, what is this world, where without eye and ear and hand and tongue a man puts all of these to use? Second, how is it that in the outer world thou seest today the effect of a dream, when thou didst vision it in the world of sleep some ten years past? Consider the difference between these two worlds and the mysteries which they conceal, that thou mayest attain to divine confirmations and heavenly discoveries and enter the regions of holiness.

God, the Exalted, hath placed these signs in men, to the end that philosophers may not deny the mysteries of the life beyond nor belittle that which hath been promised them.

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

16. I believe there are two sides to the phenomenon known as death, this side where we live, and the other side where we shall continue to live. Eternity does not start with death. We are in eternity now.

– *Norman Vincent Peale*

17. Then Almitra spoke, saying, "We would ask now of Death."

And he said:

You would know the secret of death.

But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?

The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light. If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life.

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond;

And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring.

Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.

Your fear of death is but the trembling of the shepherd when he stands before the king whose hand is to be laid upon him in honour.

Is the shearer not joyful beneath his trembling, that he shall wear the mark of the king?

Yet is he not more mindful of his trembling?

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?

And what is to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.

And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb.

And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.

– *Khalil Gibran*

18. **To the Living**

Not for you
Is mourning
Not for you
Is rest,
The legacy's yours
That is soaked
In the blood from the hearts of your Brothers,
For you
Is the future-creating Deed.
Time
Presses you down
In the depths
Fling wide
To a joyfuller morning
The gates!

– *Ernst Toller, from Poems of War*

19. What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.

– *Richard Bach*

20. These days are very precious; grasp the present opportunity and ignite a candle that shall never be extinguished, and which shall pour out its light eternally illuminating the world of mankind!

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

Please join us for refreshments



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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

Village Roadshow Theatrette
State Library of Victoria
Corner Swanston St & La Trobe St
(Entry 3, La Trobe Street)

Time

10.30am – 11.30am

Date

First Sunday of every month:
Sunday, July 1st, 2007
Sunday, August 5th, 2007
Sunday, September 2nd, 2007
Sunday, October 7th, 2007
Sunday, November 4th, 2007
Sunday, December 2nd, 2007

Further Information

For further information about Soul Food please contact 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 soulfood@netspace.net.au

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. 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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