

Soul Food

The Sacred Balance



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June 2008

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**May our ancestors breathe blessing onto us for our eyes to
open, and our life purpose to become clear.**

– *Dagara prayer, West Africa*

01. Aboriginal Creation Dreaming

Two such beings, self-created out of nothing, were the Ungambikula. Wandering the world, they found half-made human beings. They were made of animals and plants, but were shapeless bundles, lying higgledy-piggledy, near where water holes and salt lakes could be created. The people were all doubled over into balls, vague and unfinished, without limbs or features.

With their great stone knives, the Ungambikula carved heads, bodies, legs, and arms out of the bundles. They made the faces, and the hands and feet. At last the human beings were finished. Thus every man and woman was transformed from nature and owes allegiance to the totem of the animal or the plant that made the bundle they were created from – such as the plum tree, the grass seed, the large and small lizards, the parakeet, or the rat.

This work done, the ancestors went back to sleep. Some of them returned to underground homes, others became rocks and trees. The trails the ancestors walked in the Dreamtime are holy trails. Everywhere the ancestors went, they left sacred traces of their presence – a rock, a waterhole, a tree.

For the Dreamtime does not merely lie in the distant past, the Dreamtime is the eternal now. Between heartbeat and heartbeat, the Dreamtime can come again.

02. In the beginning there was darkness covered in darkness;

There was no existence, and no non-existence,

There was no earth, no sky above,

There was no death, and no immortality.

There beginning of life floated on the waters of empty space.

And from fire came the wind,

and from the wind the waters,

from the waters came the earth

and from the earth the seeds of man were created...

– An ancient song of India

03. A Behold! Our Mother Earth is lying here.
Behold! She gives of her fruitfulness.
Truly, her power gives she us.
Give thanks to Mother Earth who lies here.
Behold on Mother Earth the growing fields!
Behold the promise of her fruitfulness!
Truly, her power gives she us.
Give thanks to Mother Earth who lies here.
Behold on Mother Earth the spreading trees!
Behold the promise of her fruitfulness!
Truly, her power gives she us.
Give thanks to Mother Earth the running streams;
We see the promise of her fruitfulness.
Truly, her power gives she us.
Our thanks to Mother Earth who lies here!

– *Native American, Pawnee hymn*

04. We should understand well that all things are the work of the Great Spirit. We should know the Great Spirit is within all things: the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, and the four-legged and winged peoples; and even more important, we should understand that the Great Spirit is also above all these things and peoples. When we do understand all this deeply in our hearts, then we will fear, and love, and know the Great Spirit, and then we will be and act and live as the Spirit intends.

– *Black Elk, a famous Wichasha Wakan (Medicine Man or Holy Man)*

05. Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. Were anyone to affirm that it is the Will of God as manifested in the world of being, no one should question this assertion. It is endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp. Indeed a man of insight can perceive naught therein save the effulgent splendour of Our Name, the Creator. Say: This is an existence which knoweth no decay, and Nature itself is lost in bewilderment before its revelations, its compelling evidences and its effulgent glory which have encompassed the universe.

– *Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*

**We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow
it from our children.**

– Native American Proverb

06. Fifty-to-One

Driving in my car all alone I am one.
Entangled on the pick-up truck sit another twenty one.
Inside it's air-conditioned, sanitised, the music sounds so sweet.
Other's taste the dust, feel the heat, engine groans and misses a beat.
At home in the cool, we are only four. A room for everyone one of us, and more.
Eight are elsewhere sitting all around.
They are by their single room that sleeps them on the ground.
The refrigerator is open revealing supermarket food inside.
Each day a new taste sensation, scraps tossed aside.
Others eating from the garden, only once the rains have come.
The same food daily, only less with each new sun.
The gap is wide, getting wider every day.
It makes me think, it makes me wonder, but can I say.
It's fifty-to-one, fifty-to-one.
That's the difference between us, it's not just a sum.

–Malawi Times, Publishers Ian and Wendy Dicks

07. They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot
With a pink hotel, a boutique
And a swinging hot spot
They took all the trees
Put them in a tree museum
And they charged the people
A dollar and a half just to see them
Hey farmer, farmer put away that DDT now
Give me spots on my apples
But leave me the birds and the bees
Please! Don't it always seem to go?
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot.

– Joni Mitchell From 'Big Yellow Taxi' song

08. We men of Earth have here the stuff
Of Paradise – we have enough!
We need no other stones to build
The stairs into the unfulfilled –
No other ivory for the doors –
No other marble for the floors –
No other cedar for the beams
And dome of man’s immortal dreams.
Here on the paths of every day –
Here on the common human way
Is all the stuff the gods would take
To build a Heaven, to mould and make
New Edens, Ours the stuff sublime
To build eternity in time!

– *Edwin Markham, Earth Is Enough*

09. A The Sacred Balance

There is no environment “out there” that is separate from us. We can’t manage our impact on the environment if we are our surroundings. Indigenous people are absolutely correct: we are born of the earth and constructed from the four sacred elements of earth, air, fire and water. (Hindu’s list these four and add a fifth element, space.)

Once I had finally understood the truth of these ancient wisdoms, I also realized that we are intimately fused to our surroundings and the notion of the separateness or isolation is an illusion. Through reading I came to understand that science reaffirms the profundity of these ancient truths over and over again. Looked at as biological beings, despite our veneer of civilization, we are no more removed from nature than any other creature, even in the midst of a large city. Our animal nature dictates our essential needs: clean air, clean water, clean soil, clean energy. This led me to another insight, that these four “sacred elements” are created, cleansed and renewed by the web of life itself. If there is to be a fifth sacred element it is biodiversity itself. And whatever we do to these elements, we do directly to ourselves.

As I read further, I discovered the famed psychologist Abraham Maslow, who pointed out that we have a nested series of fundamental needs. At the most basic level, we require the five sacred elements in order to live rich, full lives. But when those basic necessities are met, a new set of needs arises. We are social animals, and the most profound force shaping our humanity is love. And when that vital social requirement is fulfilled then a new level of spiritual need arises as an urgent priority.

– *David Suzuki, The Sacred Balance*

Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.

– *Chief Seattle, 1855*

10. How the Fly Saved the River

Many, many years ago when the world was new, there was a beautiful river. Fish in great numbers lived in this river, and its water was so pure and sweet that all the animals came there to drink.

A giant moose heard about the river and he too came there to drink. But he was so big, and he drank so much, that soon the water began to sink lower and lower.

The beavers were worried. The water around their lodges was disappearing. Soon their homes would be destroyed.

The muskrats were worried, too. What would they do if the water vanished? How could they live?

The fish were very worried. The other animals could live on land if the water dried up, but they couldn't.

All the animals tried to think of a way to drive the moose from the river, but he was so big that they were too afraid to try. Even the bear was afraid of him.

At last the fly said he would try to drive the moose away. All the animals laughed and jeered. How could a tiny fly frighten a giant moose? The fly said nothing, but that day, as soon as the moose appeared, he went into action.

He landed on the moose's foreleg and bit sharply. The moose stamped his foot harder, and each time he stamped, the ground sank and the water rushed in to fill it up.

Then the fly jumped about all over the moose, biting and biting and biting until the moose was in a frenzy. He dashed madly about the banks of the river, shaking his head, stamping his feet, snorting and blowing, but he couldn't get rid of that pesky fly. At last the moose fled from the river, and didn't come back.

The fly was very proud of his achievement, and boasted to the other animals, "Even the small can fight the strong if they use their brains to think".

– *A Native American Lore*

11. In today's highly interdependent world, individuals and nations can no longer resolve many of their problems by themselves. We need one another. We must therefore develop a sense of universal responsibility... It is our collective and individual responsibility to protect and nurture the global family, to support its weaker members, and to preserve and tend to the environment in which we all live.

– *The Dalai Lama*

12. Earth Charter

In order to reorient individuals and societies toward a sustainable future, we must recognize the following:

The unrestrained exploitation of natural resources is merely a symptom of an overall sickness of the human spirit. Any solutions to the environment/development crisis must, therefore, be rooted in an approach which fosters spiritual balance and harmony within the individual, between individuals, and with the environment as a whole. Material development must serve not only the body, but the mind and spirit as well.

The changes required to reorient the world toward a sustainable future imply degrees of sacrifice, social integration, selfless action, and unity of purpose rarely achieved in human history. These qualities have reached their highest degree of development through the power of religion. Therefore, the world's religious communities have a major role to play in inspiring these qualities in their members, releasing latent capacities of the human spirit and empowering individuals to act on behalf of the planet, its peoples, and future generations...

Consultation must replace confrontation and domination in order to gain the cooperation of the family of nations in devising and implementing measures that will preserve the earth's ecological balance.

Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour, including environment and development, will the moral and psychological climate be created in which a peaceful, harmonious, and sustainable civilization can emerge and flourish.

– *Extract from the Bahá'í International Community to the Preparatory Committee of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1991)*

13. We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

– *Bahá'í Writings*

14. From heaven We have sent down the blessed rain whereby We made the gardens grow, and grain of harvest and tall palm trees laden with clustered dates, in provision for men, thereby bringing again to life a land that was dead. Thus will be the Resurrection.

– *Qur'an: Surah 50*

15. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness,
Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low:
and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together:
The voice said, cry.
And he said, What shall I cry?
All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field:
The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.
The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever.

– *Isaiah, Chapter 40. 3-8*

The ultimate test of man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard.

– Gaylord Nelson, co-founder of Earth Day

16. All things in this creation exist within you, and all things in you exist in creation; there is no border between you and the closest things, and there is no distance between you and the farthest things, and all things, from the lowest to the loftiest, from the smallest to the greatest, are within you as equal things.

In one atom are found all the elements of the earth; in one motion of the mind are found the motions of all the laws of existence; in one drop of water are found the secrets of all the endless oceans; in one aspect of you are found all the aspects of existence.

– *Khalil Gibran*

17. Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven,
I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness,
And Thine incomparable glory and greatness;
And every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth,
I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power
And the tokens of Thy bounty.
And when I behold the sea,
I find that it speaketh to me of thy majesty,
And of the potency of Thy might,
And of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur
And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains,
I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory
And the standards of Thine omnipotence.

– *Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations*

18. I call upon the four winds,
Earth to ground me,
Air to teach me,
Fire to empower me,
Water to uplift me,
I honor Grandmother Earth who bore me,
Grandfather Sky who watches over me,
And the Creator whose spark
Is within me and all things.

– *Celtic Invocation*

19. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better everyday. And you will come to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.

– *Fyodor Dostoyevsky, from The Brothers Karamazov*

You must be the change you wish to see in the world.

– *Mahatma Gandhi*

Kindly leave this planet as you would wish to find it.

– *Anon*

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 July 6th, 2008

Sunday August 3rd, 2008

Sunday September 7th, 2008

Sunday October 5th, 2008

Sunday November 2nd, 2008

Sunday December 7th, 2008

Further Information

For further information about Soul Food events in Victoria, South Australia or Western Australia please call 0411 137 187 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 0411 137 187 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.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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