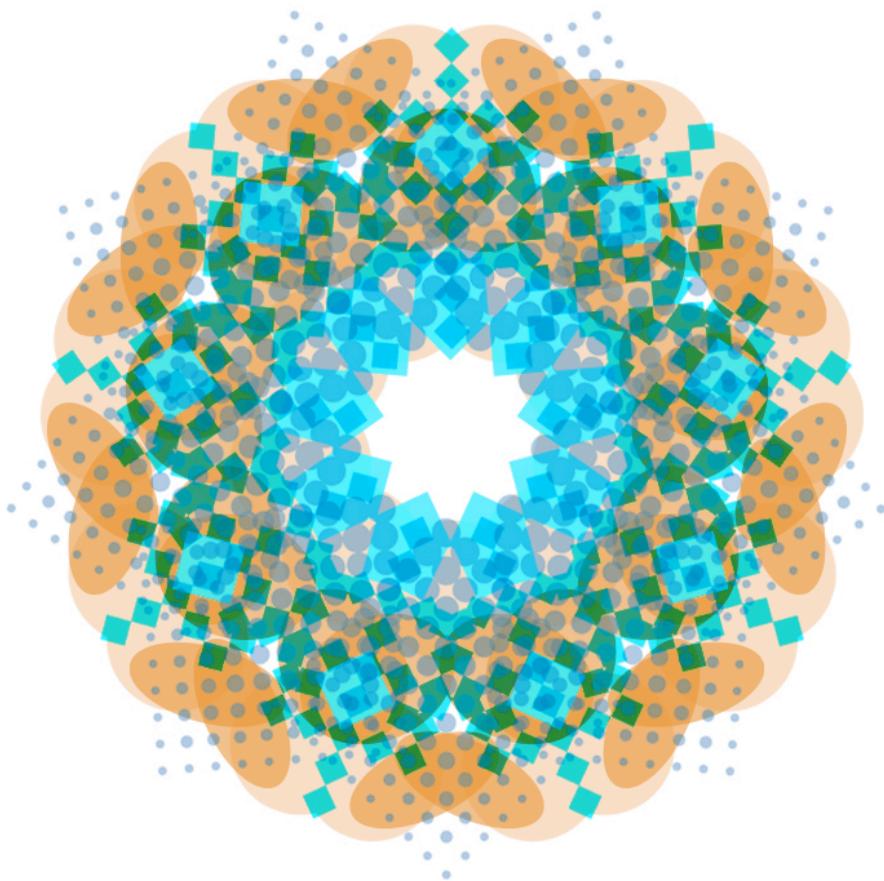


Soul Food

Lights of the World



Lights of the World

Exploring the profound impact that children, and childhood, has in illuminating our lives.

Program

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Give light, and the darkness will disappear of itself.

– *Desiderius Erasmus*

01. On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.

They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.

They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

The sea surges up with laughter and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach. Death dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.

– Rabindranath Tagore

02. **O 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, the Bahá'í Writings*

***Our acts make or mar us,
we are the children of our own deeds.***

– *Victor Hugo*

03. **My Name is Today**

We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer “Tomorrow”. His name is “Today”.

–*Gabriela Mistral, Nobel Prize-winning poet from Chile*

04. **For My Baby**

O Lord, my God, shine the warm light of Your love on my child.

Hold her safe from all illness and harm.

Come into her little soul and comfort her with Your happiness.

Let her feel your peace.

She is too tiny to speak to me, and her cooing and gurgles are hard to translate into human words.

But to You, her little sounds are prayers.

Her cries are cries for Your blessing and grace.

Let her learn Your ways while she is still a child.

In adulthood, let her live the whole span of a human life, fulfilling Your purposes.

And in her old age, let her die joyfully, secure in the knowledge of Your eternal love.

I am not asking that she should be wealthy or famous, but I do ask that she will live prayerfully, serve others in true humility, loving You.

Smile on her, my God. Amen.

– *Johann Starck*

05. The suckling babe passeth through various physical stages, growing and developing at every stage, until its body reacheth the age of maturity. Having arrived at this stage it acquireth the capacity to manifest spiritual and intellectual perfections. The light of comprehension, intelligence and knowledge become perceptible in it and the powers of the soul unfold.

– ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *the Bahá’í Writings*

***Love, with little hands, comes and touches you
With a thousand memories and asks you
Beautiful, unanswerable questions.***

– **Carl Sandburg**

06. **A World Fit For Us**

We are the world's children.

We are the victims of exploitation and abuse.

We are street children.

We are the children of war.

We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS.

We are denied good quality education and health care.

We are victims of political, cultural, religious and environmental discrimination.

We are children whose voices are not being heard: it is time we are taken into account.

We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone.

07. Encourage the children from their earliest years to master every kind of learning, and make them eager to become skilled in every art – the aim being that through the favouring grace of God, the heart of each one may become even as a mirror disclosing the secrets of the universe, penetrating the innermost reality of all things; and that each may earn worldwide fame in all branches of knowledge, science and the arts.

Certainly, certainly neglect not the education of the children. Rear them to be possessed of spiritual qualities, and be assured of the gifts and favours of the Lord.

– *‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Bahá’í Writings*

08. O God,

Guide me, protect me,

Illumine the lamp

Of my heart

And make me

A brilliant star.

Thou are the Mighty and Powerful.

– *Bahá’í Prayer*

09. Your children are not your children,
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even
in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
And He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as he loves the arrow that flies,
So He loves the bow that is stable.

– *Khalil Gibran*

10. A child learns what she Lives

If a child lives with criticism, she learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility, she learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule, she learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame, she learns to feel guilt.
If a child lives with tolerance, she learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement, she learns confidence.
If a child lives with fairness, she learns justice.
If a child lives with security, she learns to have faith.
If a child lives with approval, she learns to like herself.
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, she learns to find love in the
world.

– *Anon*

11. The individuality of each created thing is based upon divine wisdom, for in the creation of God there is no defect. However, personality has no element of permanence. It is a slightly changeable quality in man which can be turned in either direction. For if he acquire praiseworthy virtues, these strengthen the individuality of man and call forth his hidden forces; but if he acquire defects, the beauty and simplicity of the individuality will be lost to him and its God-given qualities will be stifled in the foul atmosphere of the self.

– ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *the Bahá’í Writings*

***Happiness will flee whosoever is not trained
from childhood. Reflect: The green branch can be guided,
but the dry twig is straightened only by fire.***

– Sa’di, Persian poet

12. A Recollection by Dr Arun Gandhi...

Dr Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and founder of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for non-violence, has shared the following story as an example of non-violence in parenting.

‘I was 16-years-old and living with my parents at the institute my grandfather had founded 18 miles outside of Durban, South Africa, in the middle of the sugar plantations. We were deep in the country and had no neighbours, so my two sisters and I would always look forward to going to town to visit friends or go to the movies.

One day my father asked me to drive him to town for an all day conference, and I jumped at the chance. Since I was going to town, my mother gave me a list of groceries she needed and, since I had all day in town, my father asked me to take care of several pending chores, such as getting the car serviced.

When I dropped my father off that morning, he said, “I will meet you here at 5.00pm and we will go home together”. After hurriedly completing my chores, I went straight to the nearest movie theatre. I got so engrossed in a John Wayne double-feature that I forgot the time. It was 5.30 before I remembered. By the time I ran to the garage and got the car and hurried to where my father was waiting for me, it was almost 6.00pm.

He anxiously asked me, “Why were you late?” I was so ashamed to tell him I was watching a John Wayne western movie that I said, “The car wasn’t ready, so I had

to wait,” not realizing he had already called the garage.

When he caught me in the lie he said, “There’s something wrong in the way I brought you up that didn’t give you the confidence to tell me the truth. In order to figure out where I went wrong with you, I’m going to walk home 18 miles and think about it.”

So dressed in his suit and dress shoes, he began to walk home in the dark on mostly unpaved, unlit roads. I couldn’t leave him, so for five and a half hours I drove behind him, watching my father go through agony for a stupid lie that I uttered.

I decided then and there that I was never going to lie again. I often think about that episode and wonder, if he had punished me the way we punish our children, whether I would have learned a lesson at all. I don’t think so. I would have suffered the punishment and gone on doing the same thing. But this single non-violent action was so powerful that it is still as if it happened yesterday. That is the power of non-violence.’

13. **A Father's Reflection**

While they are at your side, love these little ones to the utmost. Forget yourself. serve them; care for them; lavish all your tenderness on them. Value your good fortune while it is with you, and let nothing of the sweetness of their babyhood go unprized. Not for long will you keep the happiness that now lies within your reach. You will not always walk in the sunshine with a little warm, soft hand nestling in each of yours, nor hear little feet pattering beside you, and eager baby voices questioning and prattling of a thousand things with ceaseless excitement. Not always will you see that trusting face upturned to yours, feel those little arms about your neck, and those tender lips pressed upon your cheek, nor will you have that tiny form to kneel beside you, and murmur baby prayers into your ear.

Love them, and win their love, and shower on them all the treasures of your heart. Fill up their days with happiness, and share with them their mirth and innocent delights. Childhood is but for a day. Ere you are aware it will be gone with all its gifts for ever."

– *Quoted in the book George Townshend, by David Hofman*

14. **An Uncommon Thought**

All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sand pit at Sunday School.

These are the things I learned:

- Share everything.
- Play fair.
- Put things back where you found them.
- Clean up your own mess.
- Don't take things that aren't yours.
- Say sorry when you hurt somebody.
- Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
- Live a balanced life – learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.
- Take a nap every afternoon.
- When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.
- Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: the roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.
- Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup – they all die. So do we.
- And then remember Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned – the biggest word of all – LOOK.

Take any one of those items and extrapolate it into sophisticated adult terms and apply it to your family life or your work or your government or your world and it holds true and clear and firm. Think what a better world it would be if we all – the whole world – had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap. Or if all governments had as a basic policy to always put things back where they found them and to clean up their own mess

And it is true, no matter how old you are – when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

– *Robert Fulghum*

15. **Ode to a Girl**

Take her hand and show her the sun,
Teach her the beauty of a reasoning mind,
Show her the strength of a courageous eye,
Touch her with gentle favour and courtesy,
And she will yield for you children of peace,
Who bring light to the dark side of day.

16. O God!

Educate these children.

These children are the plants of Thine orchard, the flowers of Thy meadow, and roses of Thy garden.

Let Thy rain fall upon them; let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with Thy love.

Let Thy breeze refresh them in order that they may be trained, grow and develop and appear in the utmost beauty. Thou art the Giver! Thou art the Compassionate!

– ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Prayer*

***Cherish your vision and your dreams as they
are the children of your soul; the blueprints of your
ultimate achievements.***

– Napoleon Hill

17. **The Little Soul and The Sun**

Once upon no time, there was a little Soul who said to God, "I know who I am."

And God said, "That's wonderful! Who are you?"

And the Little Soul shouted, "I'm the Light!"

God smiled a big smile. "That's right!" God exclaimed. "You are the Light."

The Little Soul was so happy, for it had figured out what all the souls in the Kingdom were there to figure out.

"Wow," said the Little Soul, "this is really cool!"

But soon, knowing who it was was not enough. The Little Soul felt stirrings inside, and now wanted to be who it was. And so the Little Soul went back to God (which is not a bad idea for all souls who want to be Who They Really Are) and said,

"Hi, God! Now that I know Who I am, is it okay for me to be it?"

And God said, "You mean you want to be Who You Already Are?"

"Well," replied the Little Soul, "it's one thing to know Who I Am, and another thing altogether to actually be it. I want to feel what it's like to be the Light!"

"But you already are the Light," God repeated, smiling again.

"Yes, but I want to see what that feels like!" cried the Little Soul.

"Well," said God with a chuckle, "I suppose I should have known. You always were the adventuresome one."

Then God's expression changed. "There's only one thing..."

"What?" asked the Little Soul.

"Well, there is nothing else but the Light. You see, I created nothing but what you are; and so, there is no easy way for you to experience yourself as Who You Are, since there is nothing that you are not."

"Huh?" said the Little Soul, who was now a little confused.

"Think of it this way," said God. "You are like a candle in the Sun. Oh, you're there all right. Along with a million, gazillion other candles who make up the Sun. And the sun would not be the Sun without you. Nay, it would be a sun without one of its candles...and that would not be the Sun at all; for it would not shine as brightly. Yet, how to know yourself as the Light when you are amidst the Light, that is the question."

"Well," the Little Soul perked up, "you're God. Think of something!"

Once more God smiled. "I already have," God said. "Since you cannot see yourself as the Light when you are in the Light, we'll surround you with darkness."

"What's darkness?" the Little Soul asked.

God replied, "It is that which you are not."

"Will I be afraid of the dark?" cried the Little Soul.

"Only if you choose to be," God answered. "There is nothing, really, to be afraid of, unless you decide that there is.

"Oh," said the Little Soul, and felt better already.

Then God explained that, in order to experience anything at all, the exact opposite of it will appear. "It is a great gift," God said, "because without it, you could not know what anything is like. You could not know Warm without Cold, Up without Down, Fast without Slow. You could not know Left without Right, Here without There, Now without Then."

"And so," God concluded, "when you are surrounded with darkness, do not shake your fist and raise your voice and curse the darkness. Rather be a Light unto the darkness, and don't be mad about it.

Then you will know Who You Really Are, and all others will know, too. Let your Light shine so that everyone will know how special you are!"

"You mean it's okay to let others see how special I am?" asked the Little Soul.

"Of course!" God chuckled. "It's very okay! But remember, 'special' does not mean 'better.' Everybody is special, each in their own way! Yet many others have forgotten that. They will see that it is okay for them to be special only when you see that it is okay for you to be special."

"Wow," said the Little Soul, dancing and skipping and laughing and jumping with joy. "I can be as special as I want to be!"

"Yes, and you can start right now," said God

– Neale Donald Walsch, *“Conversations With God”*

Every child is potentially the light of the world.

– From the Bahá'í Writings



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's purpose is to inspire us to transform our lives, our neighbourhoods and communities, with actions that promote the unity and betterment of society.

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

11.00am – 12.00pm

First Sunday of every month

October 6th
November 3rd
December 1st

Further Information

For further information about Soul Food events in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania or Western Australia please call 03 9415 6007 or visit www.soulfood.com.au.

Study Circles

The Bahá'í community offers 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.

Supporters

Soul Food is proudly supported by the Baha'i Council of South-Eastern Australia.

