

SOULFOOD

reflective moments

live

simply,
so others may

simply

live.

- Mahatma Gandhi

IN THE GARDEN

Celebrating World Environment Day, June 5th

Proudly presented by the Baha'i community of Adelaide

The Baha'i Faith celebrates the unity and diversity of the human family,
the essential harmony of all religions and the oneness of the Universal Creator

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Opening Music

MOTHER NATURE

A drop of the billowing ocean of His endless mercy hath adorned all creation with the ornament of existence, and a breath wafted from His peerless Paradise hath invested all beings with the robe of His sanctity and glory. A sprinkling from the unfathomed deep of His sovereign and all-pervasive Will hath, out of utter nothing-ness, called into being a creation which is infinite in its range and deathless in its duration. The wonders of His bounty can never cease, and the stream of His merciful grace can never be arrested. The process of His creation hath had no beginning, and can have no end.

—*Baha'u'llah, From the Baha'i Writings*

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!

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 writings*

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*

Musical Reflection

TREES FOR LIFE

Larger and finer meanings are read into the older legends of the plants, and the universality of certain myths is expressed in the concurrence of ideas in the beginnings of the great religions. One of the first figures in the leading cosmologies is a tree of life guarded by a serpent. In the Judaic faith this was the tree in the garden of Eden; the Scandinavians made it an ash, Ygdrasil; Christians usually specify the tree as an apple, Hindus as a soma, Persians as a homa, Cambodians as a talok; this early tree is the vine of Bacchus, the snake-entwined caduceus of Mercury, the twining creeper of the Eddas, the bohidruma of Buddha, the fig of Isaiah, the tree of Aesculapius with the serpent around his trunk.

— *Charles M. Skinner, "Myths and Legends of Flowers, Trees, Fruits and Plants" 1911*

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see Nature all ridicule and deformity, and some scarce see Nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, Nature is Imagination itself.

— *William Blake, "The Letters" 1799.*

Though a tree grows so high, the falling leaves return to the root.

—*Malay proverb*

Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come.

—*Chinese proverb*

He that planteth a tree is a servant of God, he provideth a kindness for many generations, and faces that he hath not seen shall bless him.

—*Henry Van Dyke*

Happy is the man ... his delights is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

—*Psalms 1: 1-3*

Suburbia is where the developer bulldozes out the trees, then names the streets after them.

—*Bill Vaughan*

As the poet said, "only God can make a tree," probably because it's so hard to figure out how to get the bark on.

—*Woody Allen*

When you enter a grove peopled with ancient trees, higher than the ordinary, and shutting out the sky with their thickly inter-twined branches, do not the stately shadows of the wood, the stillness of the place, and the awful gloom of this doomed cavern then strike you with the presence of a deity?

—*Seneca*

RICHARD ST BARBE BAKER

Richard St Barbe Baker, O.B.E. was a man of vision who foresaw and strove all his life for a return to a green Earth covered in trees and peopled by nations who lived in harmony.

Richard St Barbe Baker was born in a country house in the South of Hampshire, England, on 9 October 1889 and, from his earliest days, developed a keen awareness of the beauty of the forests and trees and the creatures therein.

In 1924 Baker founded The Men of Trees, now called Trees for Life, in England. In 1931 Baker went to Palestine at the invitation of Sir John Chancellor, the Governor, to assist in establishing a tree planting program in the hope of uniting warring factions. He spent some time in Jerusalem, coordinating a meeting of the heads of the Arab, Hebrew and Catholic communities to plant trees under the banner of Men of Trees. In 1979 Baker again visited the Holy Land, this time as a member of the Baha'i Faith, to present a large variety of rare seeds for the beautification of the renowned Baha'i gardens on Mount Carmel.

As a young reporter for the Southeast Missourian Sam Blackwell told the following story when he was asked who the most memorable person he'd ever interviewed was.

“The name that immediately came to mind was Richard St. Barbe Baker. If any single person deserves credit for saving California's ancient redwood trees from becoming patio furniture, he does. He was an Englishman but more of a citizen of the world. He helped found one of the early conservation groups, The Men of the Trees, and became known as "The Man of the Trees.” A forester and writer who devoted his life to preserving trees, he was particularly taken with redwoods. He began the “Save the Redwoods Fund”. After many decades, his work and that of many others led to the creation of Redwood National Park, where 2,000-year-old redwood trees live in safety.

“He was about to be honored. The park was being dedicated as a World Heritage Site, one of a few hundred places on Earth recognized for their global significance. Australia's Great Barrier Reef, Peru's Machu Picchu . . . are on the list too.

“St. Barbe Baker was staying in a cabin on the Smith River, the last wild river in Northern California. He was very old and frail. The young environmentalists taking care of him said I could speak with him as soon as he awoke. They treated him with respect and awe.

“When he did wake up he could barely speak, and the words he said were difficult to understand. It didn't matter. He had a presence that made you happy to be in his company. His was a great soul.

“We went outside to take his photograph. Spontaneously, he did what people who scorn environmentalists make jokes about: He hugged a tree. I don't mean he put his arms around it. He hugged it like I hug my old friend Carolyn, like he never wanted to let go. I began to understand.

“We do need to care, of course, for everything and everyone. In the stillness of the mighty woods, man is made aware of the divine”

—*Richard St. Barbe Baker, OBE*

Musical Reflection

CARE FOR THE EARTH

If we were to invent a time machine, I would want to see what it was like in Africa, 100,000 years ago when our species was just born. If you have been to the Serengeti, you know how impressive the variety and abundance of animals are, even today. A hundred millennia ago, the diversity and concentration would have been far greater. In that context, the small groups of naked apes who were our ancestors would not have been very impressive. After all, there weren't many of us, we weren't very big, fast or strong, nor was our vision, smell or hearing very acute.

But we did have a special advantage - the most complex brain ever known. That brain compensated for our lack of sensory and physical prowess, conferring a massive memory, curiosity and inventiveness. And one of that brain's inventions was the concept of a future. Our ancestors recognized that they could shape that future by making deliberate choices in the present. Foresight was the great leg up that enabled our species not only to survive but to flourish. We are now the dominant species on the planet, the most numerous mammal in the world and so powerful that we are affecting the biological, physical and chemical makeup of the biosphere.

And that is why climate change has become a major issue. It is astounding to me that today, with all the increased brainpower to give us greater predictive powers, we no longer use foresight as our forebearers did. For decades now, the leading scientists of the world have been telling us that we are on a dangerous path, that we are compromising the air, water, soil and energy by our activities, and that we are undermining the diverse creatures that make this planet habitable by cleansing, capturing, replenishing and creating air, water, energy and soil.

We are upsetting the atmosphere upon which all life depends. In the late '80s when I began to take climate change seriously, we referred to global warming as a "slow-motion catastrophe" - one we expected to kick in perhaps generations later. Instead, the signs of change have accelerated alarmingly.

Detractors often point to the variability of analytic models and the lack of absolute certainty. Well, foresight was never absolutely certain. Climatologist Stephen Schneider of Stanford University says, "If the sandwich on the table in front of you has even a 10 per cent chance of having food poisoning, would you eat it?" I know I wouldn't.

Yet here we are playing Russian roulette with features of the planet's atmosphere that will profoundly impact generations to come. How long are we willing to gamble? It's time to take back the critical faculty for survival - foresight - and begin to act as our ancestors did to get us here in the first place.

- *Dr. David Suzuki, 2005*

The world community must... learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability into the distant reaches of time. This does not, however, mean that Baha'is advocate a "hands-off, back to the woods" policy. On the contrary, the world civilization that Baha'is believe will eventually emerge will be animated by a deep religious faith and will be one in which science and technology will serve humanity and help it to live in harmony with nature. The oneness of humanity is, for Baha'is, the operating principle and ultimate goal of humankind's collective life on the planet. It is applicable not only to the individual, but also to the relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family:

The oneness of mankind... implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world - a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units...

Bahá'í Scriptures maintain that adherence to the principle of the oneness of humanity will have a direct and enduring impact on man's spiritual, social and physical environments. Universal acceptance of this principle will entail a major restructuring of the world's educational, social, agricultural, industrial, economic, legal and political systems. This restructuring will facilitate the emergence of a sustainable, just and prosperous world civilization. Ultimately only a spiritually based civilization - in which science and religion work in harmony - will be able to preserve the ecological balance of the earth, foster stability in human population, and advance both the material and the spiritual well-being of all peoples and nations.

—from the Baha'i presentation to the United Nations on 'Conservation and Sustainable Development', 1995

Musical Reflection

LIVE SIMPLY

O Ye Rich Ones on Earth!

The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease.

O Son of Being!

Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test Our servants.

O Son of Passion!

Cleanse thyself from the defilement of riches and in perfect peace advance into the realm of poverty; that from the well-spring of detachment thou mayest quaff the wine of immortal life.

—*Baha'u'llah, from the Baha'i writings*

What misleads citizens in the richer nations is that we in the industrialized North are very well provided for indeed: with some notable exceptions, we either don't see, don't experience, or choose to ignore the impact our lives have. It is difficult for us to imagine that the ecological principle of carrying capacity can significantly affect us. Between the advertisements for Eddie Bauer, jeeps, the suburbs, and the mall, we assume that we're not taking too much from our environment, or we would see more signs of stress and deterioration around us.

Our comfort and abundance is the foundation for the great differences we see in public debate and private discussions about the environment . . . We confuse our rate and ability to consume with the capacity of living systems to provide for those wants.

—*The Ecology of Commerce, by Paul Hawkin*

O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household. In Thy Holy Presence they are all Thy servants, and all mankind are sheltered beneath Thy Tabernacle; all have gathered together at Thy Table of Bounty; all are illumined through the light of Thy Providence. O God! Thou art kind to all, Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all. Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy.

O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony. O God! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind. O God! Establish the Most Great Peace. Cement Thou, O God, the hearts together. O Thou kind Father, God! Gladden our hearts through the fragrance of Thy love. Brighten our eyes through the Light of Thy Guidance. Delight our ears with the melody of Thy Word, and shelter us all in the Stronghold of Thy Providence. Thou art the Mighty and Powerful, Thou art the Forgiving and Thou art the One Who overlooketh the shortcomings of all mankind.

—*Abdu'l-Baha, from the Baha'i writings*

Musical Finale

join us for the next program

Sunday the 20th July, 11am
*Radford Auditorium,
Art Gallery of South Australia*