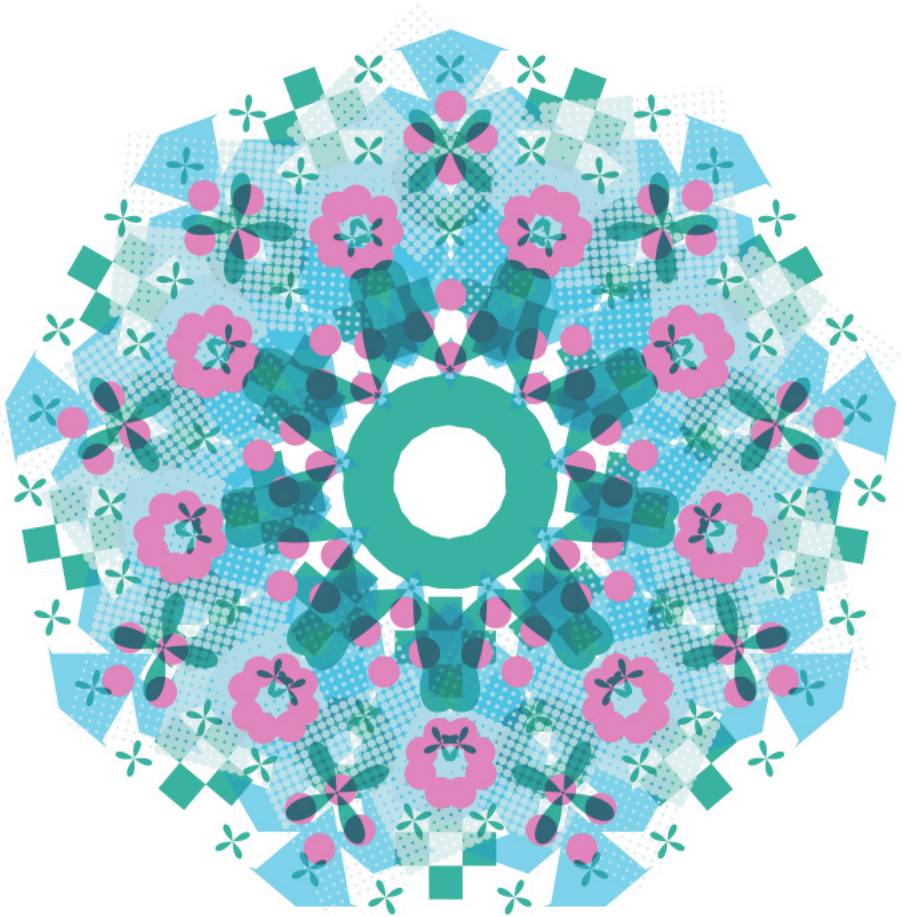


Soul Food

Ode to Giving



Ode to Giving

This month's program will explore the mysteries and wonders of the simple act of giving, and how this act can spiritually nourish those who give, and those who are given to.

Program

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A man of humanity is one who, in seeking to establish himself, finds a foothold for others and who, desiring attainment for himself, helps others to attain.

– *Confucius*

01. There are three kinds of persons existing in the world:

One is like a drought, one who rains locally,
and one who pours down everywhere.

How is a person like a drought?

He gives nothing to all alike, not giving food and drink,
clothing and vehicles, flowers, scents, and unguents,
bed, lodging, and light, neither to recluses and Brahmins
nor to wretched and needy beggars.

In this way, a person is like a drought.

How is a person like a local rainfall?

He is a giver to some, but to others he gives not...

In this way, a person is like a local rainfall.

How does a person rain down everywhere?

He gives to all be they recluses and Brahmins or wretched,
needy beggars; he is a giver of food and drink, clothing...

Lodging and lights. In this way a person rains down everywhere.

If beings knew as I know, the result of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would they allow the stain of meanness to obsess them and take root in their minds. Even if it were their last morsel, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared it, if there were someone to share it with. But, Bhikkhus, as beings do not know, as I know, the result of giving and sharing, they eat without having given, and the stain of meanness obsesses them and takes root in their minds.

– *Confucius*

02. Whatsoever good you expend is for parents and kinsmen, orphans, the needy, and the traveller; and whatever good you may do, God has knowledge of it.

– *Islam, Qu'ran*

03. Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist. How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him. Even as He hath said: “Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery.” Manifold are the verses that have been repeatedly revealed in all the Heavenly Books and the Holy Scriptures, expressive of this most subtle and lofty theme. Even as He hath revealed: “We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves.” Again He saith: “And also in your own selves: will ye not, then, behold the signs of God?”

And yet again He revealeth: “And be ye not like those who forget God, and whom He hath therefore caused to forget their own selves.” In this connection, He Who is the eternal King—may the souls of all that dwell within the mystic Tabernacle be a sacrifice unto Him—hath spoken: “He hath known God who hath known himself.

– *Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'í Writings*

04. If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.

For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

– *Old Testament, Bible*

**Although the world is full of suffering,
it is also full of the overcoming of it.**

– Helen Keller

05. Then said a rich man: Speak to us of Giving.

And he answered:

You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

For what are your possessions but things you keep and guard for fear you may need them tomorrow?

And tomorrow, what shall tomorrow bring to the over-prudent dog burying bones in the trackless sand as he follows the pilgrims to the holy city?

And what is fear of need but need itself?

Is not dread of thirst when your well is full, the thirst that is unquenchable?

There are those who give little of the much which they have – and they give it for recognition and their hidden desire makes their gifts unwholesome.

And there are those who have little and give it all.

These are the believers in life and the bounty of life, and their coffer is never empty.

There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward.

And there are those who give with pain, and that pain is their baptism.

And there are those who give and know not pain in giving, nor do they seek joy, nor give with mindfulness of virtue;

They give as in yonder valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into space.

Through the hands of such as these God speaks, and from behind their eyes He smiles upon the earth.

It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked, through understanding;

And to the open-handed the search for one who shall receive is joy greater than giving.

And is there aught you would withhold?

All you have shall some day be given;

Therefore give now, that the season of giving may be yours and not your inheritors'.

You often say, "I would give but only to the deserving."

The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture.

They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish.

Surely he who is worthy to receive his days and his nights is worthy of all else from you.

And he who has deserved to drink from the ocean of life deserves to fill his cup

from your little stream.

And what desert greater shall there be, than that which lies in the courage and the confidence, nay the charity, of receiving?

And who are you that men should rend their bosom and unveil their pride, that you may see their worth naked and their pride unabashed?

See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver, and an instrument of giving.

For in truth it is life that gives unto life – while you, who deem yourself a giver, are but a witness.

And you receivers – and you are all receivers – assume no weight of gratitude, lest you lay a yoke upon yourself and upon him who gives.

Rather rise together with the giver on his gifts as on wings;

For to be over-mindful of your debt is to doubt his generosity who has the free-hearted earth for mother, and God for father.

– *Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet*

06. The gift which is given without thought of recompense, in the belief that it ought to be made, in a fit place, at an opportune time, and to a deserving person—such a gift is Pure.

That which is given for the sake of the results it will produce, or with the hope of recompense, or grudgingly—that may truly be said to be an outcome of Passion.

– *Hinduism, Bhagavad Gita*

07. What great poverty!

Are we aware of that?

Do we know what fear is?

Do we know the lonely?

Do we know the unwanted and the unloved?

Do we know the hungry?

Do we really know what hunger is?

I'll give you an example of what hunger is.

A child got a piece of bread from a Sister.

(He had not eaten for some time.)

I saw that child eating the bread slowly, crumb by crumb.

I said to him, "I know you are hungry.

Why don't you eat the bread up?"

The little one answered, "I want it to last longer!"

He was afraid that when he finished the bread,

his hunger would come back again.

And so he ate it crumb by crumb!

The other child next to him, was not even eating.

I thought that he had finished his bread.

But the little one said, "But my father is sick, I'm very hungry, but my father is sick, and I think he would love to have this piece of bread."

That good little child was willing to go without food to be able to give his father the joy of having a little piece of bread.

The poor are great people!

They don't need our sympathy.

They aren't asking us to feel sorry for them.

They are great people! They deserve our love!

Not long ago, some sisters and I went out and

picked up four or five people off the streets. One of them was in terrible condition, so I told the sisters, "I'll take care of her." And I tried to do all that I could for her, all that my love of Jesus could do.

When I put her in bed, she took hold of my hand.

There was a beautiful smile on her face.

She said only, "Thank you!" And then she died.

She gave me much more than I had ever given her.

She gave me her grateful love. I couldn't help but examine myself. I said, "If I were she, what would I have done?" And my answer was sincere, "I would have tried to draw some attention to myself by saying, 'I'm hungry, I'm cold, I'm dying!'" But she had courage, and she had love to give to me, instead of keeping it to herself, instead of being focused on herself. These are very admirable things!

– Mother Teresa of Calcutta

o8. O Son of My Handmaid!

Be not troubled in poverty nor confident in riches, for poverty is followed by riches, and riches are followed by poverty. Yet to be poor in all save God is a wondrous gift, belittle not the value thereof, for in the end it will make thee rich in God and thus thou shalt know the meaning of the utterance, “In truth ye are the poor,” and the holy words, “God is the all-possessing,” shall even as the true morn break forth gloriously resplendent upon the horizon of the lover’s heart, and abide secure on the throne of wealth.

– *Bahá’u’lláh, Bahá’í Writings*

**I want to fashion a rainbow that arcs through the sky
and iron out the dilemmas between you and I.**

– *Jack Davis*

- o9. Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind... is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater... Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds—creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way... It calls for no less than the reconstruction... of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life... yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units. It represents the consummation of human evolution—an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind... carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment of

this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it.

– *Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Writings*

10. A Story

As the old man walked the beach at dawn he noticed a young man ahead of him picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Catching up with the youth he asked him why he was doing this. The answer was that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun. “But the beach goes on for miles and there are millions of starfish” countered the other. “How can your efforts make any difference?” The young man looked at the starfish in his hand and threw it to the safety of the waves.

“It makes a difference to this one.”

Compassion is not simply a sense of sympathy or caring for the person suffering, not simply a warmth of heart toward the person before you, or a sharp clarity of recognition of their needs and pain—it is also a sustained and practical determination to do whatever is possible and necessary to help alleviate their suffering.

– *Sogyal Rinpoche*

11. When humanity is in chaos like it is now, the simplest teaching given by the Aboriginals is to respect each other. Nobody is better than anybody else. Love one another, especially in these times of chaos. And I don't just mean the love between husband and wife. I mean the humanity love as well. And just the caring towards each other. No discrimination. No racism. Everybody is equal. And that is what God wants us to do.

You see we believe there is a God in heaven, just like everybody else. But we believe that God is the pure illuminating light of love. It's a Being. God's not a man or a woman. It's a Beautiful Being of love. And all humanity should know that and love each other that's the ultimate aim of humanity.

– *Lorraine Mafi Williams, Aboriginal elder*

12. This is the hour when ye must associate with all the earth's peoples in extreme kindness and love, and be to them the signs and tokens of God's great mercy. Ye must become the very soul of the world, the living spirit in the body of the children of men. In this wondrous Age, at this time... the Word of God hath infused such awesome power into the inmost essence of humankind that He hath stripped men's human qualities of all effect, and hath, with His all conquering might, unified the peoples in a vast sea of oneness.

Now is the time for the lovers of God to raise high the banners of unity, to intone, in the assemblages of the world, the verses of friendship and love and to demonstrate to all that the grace of God is one.

In every dispensation, there hath been the commandment of fellowship and love,... praised be God, the commandments of God are not delimited, not restricted to any one group of people, rather have all the friends been commanded to show forth fellowship and love, consideration and generosity and loving-kindness to every community on earth... He hath guided all the peoples of the earth to oneness... He hath lit man's world, and made this earth of dust to send forth streams of light.

– *'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Writings*

13. If you sit down at set of sun
And count the acts that you have done,
And, counting, find
One self-denying deed, one word
That eased the heart of him who heard,
One glance most kind
That fell like sunshine where it went -
Then you may count that day well spent.
But if, through all the livelong day,
You've cheered no heart, by yea or nay -
If, through it all
You've nothing done that you can trace
That brought the sunshine to one face -
No act most small
That helped some soul and nothing cost -
Then count that day as worse than lost..

– *George Eliot*

Let deeds, not words, be your adorning.

– *Bahá'u'lláh*

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 Theatrette
Corner Swanston St & La Trobe St
(Enter via La Trobe Street)

Time

11.00am – 12.00pm

Dates for 2015

July 5th
August 2nd
September 6th
October 4th
November 1st
December 6th

Further Information

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

Facebook & Meetup

Join us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/soulfoodvic

Join us on Meetup: www.meetup.com/Soul-Food-Melbourne/

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.

Virtues Parenting Workshops

We are very excited to announce an initiative supported by Soul Food. Based on the Virtues Project, which is honoured by the United Nations and endorsed by the Dalai Lama, the *Virtues Parenting Workshops* introduce a practical and effective approach to speaking the language of the virtues in the home – to develop confidence, self-esteem, excellence and courage in your children. Presented by Mojgan Tosif (BA Ed) a Master Facilitator for the Virtues Project.

The first sessions of workshops have commenced, but if you are interested in future sessions in the new year, please contact us to express your interest.

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.