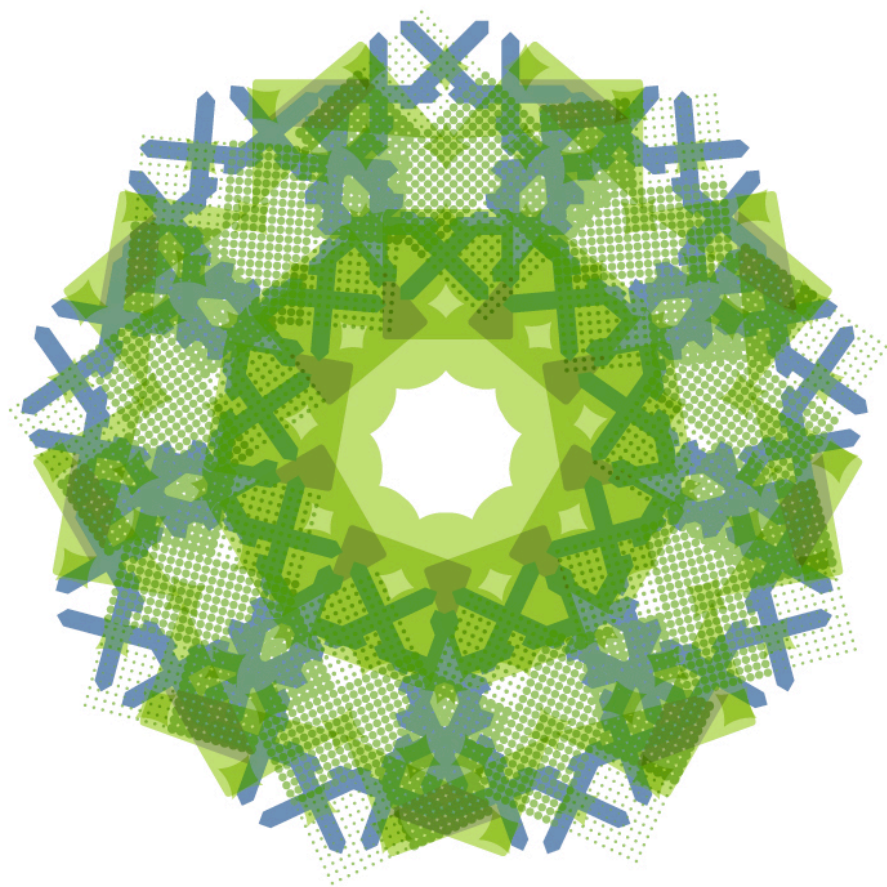


# Soul Food

In the Garden



# In the Garden

This program is dedicated to the celebration of two momentous events, two millennia apart, in two gardens.

## Program

01. *The Meditative Rose*
02. *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*
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05. *Jalal al-Din Rumi Muslim Sufi Tradition*
06. *Thomas Merton: Red Rose of Sorrow*
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08. *Bahá'u'lláh, from the Bahá'í Writings*
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**Mystery glows in the rose bed,  
the secret is hidden in the rose.**

*– Farid un-din Attar*

**01. The Meditative Rose**

The rose, probably the most celebrated and persistently used adornment of human civilization, existed long before the advent of man. Fossils of rose plants millions of years old have been found in America, Europe and Asia. Evidence suggests that all roses were originally native to the northern hemisphere; they were taken south of the equator by man.

Nearly every culture seems to have had its own folklore about the rose, and almost all regarded it as the queen of flowers. According to one Roman poet, 'the rose was either born from a smile of Cupid or else it fell from the hair of Aurora as she combed it'. The Greeks provide some of the most picturesque myths, many of them associated with Aphrodite, or Venus, as the Romans called the goddess of love. In one story Venus was hurrying through a thicket when she stepped on a thorn. From her blood sprang the first red roses.

**02. O ye dwellers in the highest paradise!**

Proclaim unto the children of assurance that within the realms of holiness, nigh unto the celestial paradise, a new garden hath appeared, round which circle the denizens of the realm on high and the immortal dwellers of the exalted paradise. Strive, then, that ye may attain that station, that ye may unravel the mysteries of love from its wind-flowers and learn the secret of divine and consummate wisdom from its eternal fruits. Solaced are the eyes of them that enter and abide therein!

*– The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*

### 03. **In The Garden**

At the gate of the garden some stand and look within, but do not care to enter. Others step inside, behold its beauty, but do not penetrate far. Still others encircle this garden inhaling the fragrance of the flowers, having enjoyed its full beauty, pass out again by the same gate. But there are always some who enter and becoming intoxicated with the splendour of what they behold, remain for life to tend the garden.

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

04. As many kinds of wreaths can be made from a heap of flowers, so many good things may be achieved by a mortal when once he is born.

The scent of flowers does not travel against the wind, nor that of sandal-wood, or of Tagara and Mallika flowers; but the odour of good people travels even against the wind; a good man pervades every place.

– *Dammapada, Hindu Scriptures*

### 05. **The Truth Within Us**

It was a fair orchard, full of trees and fruit.  
And vines and greenery.  
A Sufi there sat with eyes closed,  
His head upon his knee,  
Sunk deep in mystical meditation.  
“Why, asked another, “do you not behold these  
Signs of God the Merciful displayed around you,  
Which he bids us contemplate?”  
“The signs,” He answered, “I behold within;  
Without is naught but symbols of the signs.”  
What is all beauty in the world?  
The image,  
Like quivering boughs reflected in a stream,  
Of that eternal Orchard which abides  
Unwithered in the hearts of perfect men.

– *Jalal al-Din Rumi, Muslim Sufi Tradition*

**O ye people that have minds to know and ears to hear!**

**The first call of the beloved is this: O mystic nightingale!**

**Abide not but in the rose-garden of the spirit.**

**O messenger of the Solomon of love! Seek thou no shelter  
except in the Sheba of the well-beloved, and O immortal phoenix!**

**Dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness. Therein is thy  
habitation, if on the wings of thy soul thou soarest to the realm  
of the infinite and seekest to attain thy goal.**

*– The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*

Two momentous events,  
two millennia apart,  
in two gardens.

#### **06. Red Rose of Sorrow**

About 2,000 years ago this Easter day Mary Magdalen had brought spices to anoint the body of Jesus the Christ. She went to the sepulchre in the garden and found it empty. The linen that had wrapped Him lay in the tomb, and the cloth that had bound His head – but His body was gone.

The light that leaps out of darkness, the fire that comes from stone, symbolizes Christ's conquest of death. He, who is the source of all life, could never remain in death, could not see corruption. Death is not a reality, but the absence of a reality. And in Him there is nothing unreal.

The blessing of new fire is then a keynote of the whole Easter Vigil – the new fire (says the prayer) is to enflame our hearts with heavenly desires, in order that we may be able with pure minds to enter into the feast of eternal light.

*– Thomas Merton*

## 07. The Most Great Festival

The Festival of Ridvan (April 21-May 2) termed by Bahá'u'lláh the “Most Great Festival” and the “King of Festivals” provides the occasion for the holiest days of the Bahá'í year. In 1863 Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed His mission – in a garden of Baghdad, called by Bahá'ís the garden of Ridvan. This period signals the commencement of what has come to be recognised as the holiest and most significant of all Bahá'í festivals. During the twelve days that Bahá'u'lláh remained in the garden of Ridvan, great numbers came to pay their respects to Him from all over Baghdad and to say goodbye to Him – for He was about to be exiled again. Nabil has left to posterity the following vivid description of the joyous atmosphere of that historic time:

*Every day ere the hour of dawn, the gardeners would pick the roses which lined the four avenues of the garden, and would pile them in the centre of the floor of His blessed tent. So great would be the heap that when His companions gathered to drink their morning tea in His presence, they would be unable to see each other across it. All these roses Bahá'u'lláh would, with His own hands, entrust to those whom he dismissed from his presence every morning to be delivered, on His behalf, to His Arab and Persian friends in the city... One night, the ninth night of the waxing moon, I happened to be one of those who watched beside His blessed tent. As the hour of midnight approached, I saw Him issue from His tent, pass by the places where some of His companions were sleeping, and begin to pace up and down the moonlit, flower-bordered avenues of the garden. So loud was the singing of the nightingales on every side that only those who were near Him could distinctly hear His voice. He continued to walk until, pausing in the midst of one of these avenues, he observed: “Consider these nightingales. So great is their love for these roses, that sleepless from dusk till dawn, they warble their melodies and commune with burning passion with the object of their adoration. How then can those who claim to be afire with the rose-like beauty of the Beloved choose to sleep?” For three successive nights I watched and circled round His blessed tent. Every time I passed by the couch whereon He lay, I would find Him wakeful, and every day, from morn till eventide, I would see Him ceaselessly engaged in conversing with the stream of visitors who kept flowing in from Baghdád. Not once could I discover in the words He spoke any trace of dissimulation.*

Bahá'u'lláh was a nobleman, exiled from Persia – and shortly prior to His Declaration He began to give forth – reveal – remarkable teachings. His companions knew that some great thing was about to happen. The historian says that ‘Many a night His amanuensis would gather them together in His room, light numerous camphorated candles, and chant aloud to them the newly revealed odes and Tablets in his possession. Wholly oblivious of this... world, completely immersed in the realms of the spirit, forgetful of the necessity for food, sleep or

drink, they would suddenly discover that night had become day, and that the sun was approaching its zenith.'

It is hard to tell anything adequate of all this. It is like the Persian story of the holy man or mystic who was sitting under a tree, lost in meditation. His disciples sat around him and when he returned to himself they asked: Out of that garden whence you have come, what gift did you bring us? He said: 'I had in mind when I should come to the rose-tree, to hold out my skirt and fill it with flowers as a gift to the friends. But when I reached there, the scent of the roses so ravished my senses that my robe fell away from my hands.'

**How could such sweet and wholesome hours  
be reckon'd but with herbs and flowers.**

*– Andrew Marvell (1621-78)*

**08. Excerpts From the Tablet of Ridvan**

Hear Me, ye mortal birds!

In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your soul, the full fervor of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory. Whoso followeth this counsel will break his chains asunder, will taste the abandonment of enraptured love, will attain unto his heart's desire, and will surrender his soul into the hands of his Beloved. Bursting through his cage, he will, even as the bird of the spirit, wing his flight to his holy and everlasting nest.

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

09. Behind the blood-stained curtains of Love  
There are fields of flowers  
Where the lovers wander.  
While the mind sees only boundaries  
Love knows the secret way there.

*– Rumi*

10. Behold a beautiful garden full of flowers, shrubs, and trees. Each flower has a different charm, a peculiar beauty, its own delicious perfume and beautiful colour. The trees too, how varied are they in size, in growth, in foliage – and what different fruits they bear! Yet all these flowers, shrubs and trees spring from the self-same earth, the same sun shines upon them and the same clouds give them rain.

So it is with humanity. It is made up of many races, and its peoples are of different colour, white, black, yellow, brown and red – but they all come from the same God, and all are servants to Him. This diversity among the children of men has unhappily not the same effect as it has among the vegetable creation, where the spirit shown is more harmonious. Among men exists the diversity of animosity, and it is this that causes war and hatred among the different nations of the world.

Differences which are only those of blood also cause them to destroy and kill one another. Alas! that this should still be so. Let us look rather at the beauty in diversity, the beauty of harmony, and learn a lesson from the vegetable creation. If you beheld a garden in which all the plants were the same as to form, colour and perfume, it would not seem beautiful to you at all, but, rather, monotonous and dull. The garden which is pleasing to the eye and which makes the heart glad, is the garden in which are growing side by side flowers of every hue, form and perfume, and the joyous contrast of colour is what makes for charm and beauty. So is it with trees. An orchard full of fruit trees is a delight; so is a plantation planted with many species of shrubs. It is just the diversity and variety that constitutes its charm; each flower, each tree, each fruit, beside being beautiful in itself, brings out by contrast the qualities of the others, and shows to advantage the special loveliness of each and all.

– ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *from the Bahá’í Writings (Paris Talks)*



## 11. Lotus Offering

The lotuses had died in the cruel frost. One alone was still alive in the pond of Sudas, the gardener. He went to the palace to sell this lotus and met a rich merchant at the gate, who greatly admired it.

“I shall buy this lotus,” he said, and offer it to Buddha, who has come to this town. What price gardener?”

Sudas wanted a piece of gold. As the merchant was fumbling for the money, the King came out of the palace on his way to the Master. He saw the white lotus and exclaimed: “For Buddha I shall buy it. What price?”

“It has been sold for a piece of gold,” said the gardener.

The king replied: “I offer you ten pieces of gold.”

“I offer twenty,” cried the merchant. They vied with each other to buy the flower. The price mounted up. The gardener listened and thought: “They want the lotus for the Master. How much more shall I get from Buddha himself?”

“Forgive me,” he said, his palms joined in supplication. “I will not sell this flower.” And he ran breathlessly to the palace where Buddha sat in peace and divine splendour. Sudas saw him and stood transfixed. For a while he could neither speak nor move. Then he threw himself at the Master’s feet and offered Him the lotus.

“What is your wish?” the Master asked, smiling.

“Naught else but a speck of dust from thy feet,” said the eager voice of the gardener.

– *Rabindranath Tagore*

## **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...**

– *Bahá'u'lláh*

## 12. Medieval Legends

According to medieval belief, the first roses appeared in answer to a maiden's prayers. A girl from Bethlehem, unjustly condemned to be burnt at the stake, prayed for help. God answered by turning the already smouldering embers into red roses and the unburnt sticks of wood into white ones. Another legend holds that a white rose bloomed in the Garden of Eden – it blushed when Eve kissed it and turned into a red one.

The Arabs had their theories, one of which was that the rose grew out of the sweat of the prophet Mohammed. More picturesque is the story of the flowers' complaint to Allah that the queen of flowers, the lotus, slept at night. So Allah created the white rose. The story did not end there. The nightingale fell in love with the white rose and during a passionate embrace was pricked by its thorns; the drops of blood which fell from the nightingale stained the white rose red.

13. Sweeter than the perfume of sandalwood or of the lotus-flower is the perfume of virtue. Like a beautiful fragrant lotus, springing up on a pile of the rubbish thrown out on the highway, so a disciple of the Enlightened One stands out among rubbish-like and blinded ordinary people by virtue of his wisdom.

– *Buddhist Writings*

14. 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*

15. Every morning is a fresh beginning. Every day is the world made new. Today is a new day. Today is my world made new. I have lived all my life up to this present moment, to come to this day. This moment – this day, is as good as any moment in eternity. I shall make of this day – each moment of this day – a heaven on earth. This is my day of opportunity.

– *Dan Custer Morning Meditation*

16. **The Hour of Unity**

Today the light of Truth is shining upon the world in its abundance; the breezes of the heavenly garden are blowing throughout all regions; the call of the Kingdom is heard in all lands, and the breath of the Holy Spirit is felt in all hearts that are faithful. The Spirit of God is giving eternal life. In this wonderful age the East is enlightened, the West is fragrant, and everywhere the soul inhales the holy perfume. The sea of the unity of mankind is lifting up its waves with joy, for there is real communication between the hearts and minds of men...

This is a new cycle of human power. All the horizons of the world are luminous, and the world will become indeed as a garden and a paradise. It is the hour of unity of the sons of men and of the drawing together of all races and all classes. You are loosed from ancient superstitions which have kept men ignorant, destroying the foundations of true humanity.

The gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the oneness of mankind and of the fundamental oneness of religion. War shall cease between nations, and by the will of God the Most Great peace shall come...

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

**O Friend!**

**In the garden of thy heart plant naught but the rose of love, and from the nightingale of affection and desire loosen not thy hold.**

– *Bahá'u'lláh*



All Soul Food programs are available for free download from  
**[www.soulfood.com.au](http://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**

May 5th

June 2nd

July 7th

August 4th

September 1st

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](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.bahai.org.au).

## **Supporters**

Soul Food is proudly supported by the Baha'i Council of South-Eastern Australia, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship.

