

PROGRAMME

Today's Theme:

Words and the Power of Speech



Regional conference, London January 2009

1. 'O Lord, my God and my Haven in my distress!...' [Diba]
2. 'A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men...' [Matin]
3. 'Know ye not why we created you all from the same dust...' *chanted in Arabic* [Saba]
4. 'A harsh word is as a sword thrust...' [Emma]
5. 'Every word is endowed with a spirit...' [Jamal]
6. 'Truthful Words' – *Bahá'í children's class song*
7. 'For the tongue is a smouldering fire...' [Igan]
8. 'Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed...' [Shohreh]
9. Make Us Rich In Thee – *a prayer of Bahá'u'lláh arranged and sung by Nica*
10. 'Be fair in thy judgment and guarded in thy speech...' [Adib]
11. 'They must in every matter search out the truth...' [Samira]
12. 'I Think You're Wonderful' – *sung by Red Grammer*

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Full texts can be found overleaf.

1. Diba

O Lord, my God and my Haven in my distress! My Shield and my Shelter in my woes! My Asylum and Refuge in time of need and in my loneliness my Companion! In my anguish my Solace, and in my solitude a loving Friend! The Remover of the pangs of my sorrows and the Pardoner of my sins!

Wholly unto Thee do I turn, fervently imploring Thee with all my heart, my mind and my tongue, to shield me from all that runs counter to Thy will in this, the cycle of Thy divine unity, and to cleanse me of all defilement that will hinder me from seeking, stainless and unsullied, the shade of the tree of Thy grace.

Have mercy, O Lord, on the feeble, make whole the sick, and quench the burning thirst. Gladden the bosom wherein the fire of Thy love doth smoulder, and set it aglow with the flame of Thy celestial love and spirit. Robe the tabernacles of divine unity with the vesture of holiness, and set upon my head the crown of Thy favour.

Illuminate my face with the radiance of the orb of Thy bounty, and graciously aid me in ministering at Thy holy threshold. Make my heart overflow with love for Thy creatures and grant that I may become the sign of Thy mercy, the token of Thy grace, the promoter of concord amongst Thy loved ones, devoted unto Thee, uttering Thy commemoration and forgetful of self but ever mindful of what is Thine.

O God, my God! Stay not from me the gentle gales of Thy pardon and grace, and deprive me not of the wellsprings of Thine aid and favour.

'Neath the shade of Thy protecting wings let me nestle, and cast upon me the glance of Thine all-protecting eye.

Loose my tongue to laud Thy name amidst Thy people, that my voice may be raised in great assemblies and from my lips may stream the flood of Thy praise.

Thou art, in all truth, the Gracious, the Glorified, the Mighty, the Omnipotent.

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá

2. Matin



Devotional gathering – Erdenbulgan, Mongolia

Consort with all men, O people of Bahá, in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. If ye be aware of a certain truth, if ye possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language of utmost kindness and goodwill. If it be accepted, if it fulfill its purpose, your object is attained. If anyone should refuse it, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide him. Beware lest ye deal unkindly with him. A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding....

- Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh CXXXII

3. Saba

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 Hidden Words – Arabic #68

4. Emma



Devotional gathering - Nepal

O people! Words must be supported by deeds, for deeds are the true test of words. Without the former, the latter can never quench the thirst of the yearning soul, nor unlock the portals of vision before the eyes of the blind.

The Lord of celestial wisdom saith: A harsh word is even as a sword thrust; a gentle word as milk. The latter leadeth the children of men unto knowledge and conferreth upon them true distinction.

- Bahá'u'lláh - The Tabernacle of Unity – 1.13

5. Jamal

Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world. Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility. And likewise He saith: One word is like unto springtime causing the tender saplings of the rose-garden of knowledge to become verdant and flourishing, while another word is even as a deadly poison. It behooveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which becometh man's station.

O friend of mine! The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked.

- Bahá'u'lláh – Lawh-i-Maqsúd (Tablet of Maqsúd)

6. Truthful Words – Bahá'í Children's Class Song

A mirror that's covered up in dust
Cannot reflect the sun's bright light
A bird with wings all full of mud
Is unable to take flight

CHORUS:

*When all of our words are truthful
Our souls are able to progress
The foundation of all human virtues
We know is truthfulness*

CHORUS

A ship cannot catch the wind
If it is using a torn sail
Eyes can't see the path ahead
If they are covered up in veils

CHORUS (with last line repeated)



Children's class – Mwinilunga, Malawi

7. Igan

That seeker must at all times put his trust in God, must renounce the peoples of the earth, detach himself from the world of dust, and cleave unto Him Who is the Lord of Lords. He must never seek to exalt himself above anyone, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence, and refrain from idle talk. For the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endure a century.

That seeker should also regard backbiting as grievous error, and keep himself aloof from its dominion, inasmuch as backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul.

- Bahá'u'lláh – Kitáb-i-iqán (Book of Certitude)

8. Shohreh

Oh, would that the world could believe Me! Were all the things that lie enshrined within the heart of Bahá, and which the Lord, His God, the Lord of all names, hath taught Him, to be unveiled to mankind, every man on earth would be dumbfounded.

How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: “Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.”

- Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh LXXXIX

9.

Make Us Rich In Thee

– a prayer of Bahá'u'lláh arranged and sung by Nica

"Glory be to Thee, O God, for Thy manifestation of love to mankind!

O Thou Who art our Life and Light, guide Thy servants in Thy way, and make us rich in Thee and free from all save thee.

O God, teach us Thy Oneness and give us a realization of Thy Unity, that we may see no one save Thee. Thou art the merciful and the Giver of bounty!

O God, create in the hearts of Thy beloved the fire of Thy love, that it may consume the thought of everything save Thee.

Reveal to us, O God, Thine exalted eternity -- that Thou hast ever been and will ever be, and that there is no God save Thee. Verily, in Thee will we find comfort and strength."

- Bahá'u'lláh



10. Adib



Devotional gathering – Biharsharif, India

BE generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbour, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts...

- Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh CXXX

11. Samira

...They must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on high and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honoured members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority. It is again not permitted that any one of the honoured members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously, though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness....Should they endeavour to fulfill these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that assembly shall become the centre of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá - 45

I Think You're Wonderful – written and sung by Red Grammer

CHORUS

I think you're wonderful

When somebody says that to me

I feel wonderful, as wonderful can be

It makes me wanna say

the same thing to somebody new

And by the way I've been meaning to say

I think you're wonderful, too

If we practice this phrase in the most honest way

And find something special in someone each day

We'll lift up the world one heart at a time

It all starts by saying this one simple line

CHORUS

When each one of us feels important inside

Loving and giving and glad we're alive

Oh what a difference we'll make in each day

And all because someone decided to say...

CHORUS

And by the way I've been meaning to say,

I think you're wonderful, too

From a Bahá'í point of view, the exercise of freedom of speech must necessarily be disciplined by a profound appreciation of both the positive and negative dimensions of freedom, on the one hand, and of speech, on the other.

Bahá'u'lláh warns us that “the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison.” “Material fire consumeth the body,” He says in elaborating the point, “whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endureth a century.” In tracing the framework of free speech, He again advises “moderation.” “Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation,” He states, adding, “As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.”

Also relevant to what is said, and how, is when it is said. For speech, as for so many other things, there is a season. Bahá'u'lláh reinforces this understanding by drawing attention to the maxim that “Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it.”

Speech is a powerful phenomenon. Its freedom is both to be extolled and feared. It calls for an acute exercise of judgment, since both the limitation of speech and the excess of it can lead to dire consequences. Thus there exist in the system of Bahá'u'lláh checks and balances necessary to the beneficial uses of this freedom in the onward development of society. A careful examination of the principles of Bahá'í consultation and the formal and informal arrangements for employing them offer new insights into the dynamics of freedom of expression...

- extracts from a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States, 1988 – published as ‘Individual Rights and Freedoms’ and available online [here](#).