

26<sup>th</sup> July 2021

## Harmony

**“The touches of sweet harmony.”**

*William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice*

Now that the Olympic Games are under way, I've been thinking about the Olympic Rings, the five interlocked coloured circles which are the symbol of the world's biggest sporting event. They were created in 1913 by Pierre de Coubertin, a French historian and founder of the International Olympic Committee, but didn't make their official Olympic debut till the 1920 games in Antwerp, Belgium. The rings represent the five continents of the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe and Oceania. The world, said de Coubertin, is "now won over to the cause of Olympism", with the athletes coming together from every continent for one global event.

From left to right on the Olympic flag the colours are: blue, yellow, black, green and red. Contrary to popular belief, the colours don't stand for the five continents. Instead, along with white (the background colour) they were chosen because at least one of these colours appeared in the national flag of every country participating at the time Coubertin came up with the design. Worth checking if this still stands, perhaps?

In 1912, when the Olympic dream was taking shape, Abdu'l-Bahá, the head of the Bahá'í Faith, visited the United States and Canada. In one of a series of talks entitled *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, he said:

*If the flowers of a garden were all of one colour, the effect would be monotonous to the eye. But if the colours are variegated, it is most pleasing and wonderful. The difference in adornment of colour and capacity gives the garden its beauty and charm. Therefore, although we are of different individualities, let us strive like flowers of the same divine garden to live together in harmony. Even though each soul has its own individual perfume and colour, all are reflecting the same light, all contributing fragrance to the same breeze which blows through the garden, all continuing to grow in complete harmony and accord.*

I don't know if Pierre de Coubertin and Abdu'l-Bahá ever met, but they certainly had the same heart and vision. "Though we are of different individualities, let us strive to live together in harmony." The interlocking, colourful Olympic rings are a symbol of just that purpose, "the touches of sweet harmony" that stand for a better and more peaceful world.

### **A prayer for today**

*Harmony in diversity. Together in our differences. Your purpose for one world. Amen.*