



THE SECRET OF DIVINE CIVILIZATION

Wilmette Institute Course

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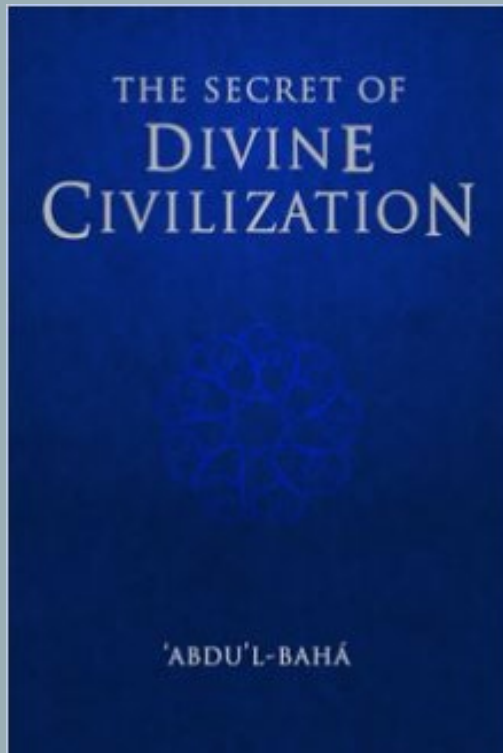
BACKGROUND

Naser al-Din Sháh Qajar was the Shah of Qajar, Iran, from 5 September 1848 to 1 May 1896, when he was assassinated. He was the third longest reigning monarch in Iranian history after Shapur II of the Sassanid dynasty and Tahmasp I of the Safavid Dynasty.



- The treatise *The Secret of Divine Civilization* was written at a time when genuine reform of Iran seemed possible, as Mirza Husayn Khan was still politically influential and Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar had just made his first visit to Europe in 1873. The reform process petered out in the late 1870s.
- The Sháh had (in 1875) resolved to bring about the advancement of the Persian people, their welfare and security, and the prosperity of their country. He had spontaneously extended assistance to his subjects, displaying energy and fair-mindedness, hoping that by the light of justice he might make Iran the envy of East and West, and set that fine fervor which characterized the first great epochs of Persia to flowing again through the veins of her people.
- The original text was written anonymously. The first English translations were published in London in 1910 and Chicago in 1918, under the title *Mysterious Forces of Civilization*, attributed to “an Eminent Bahá’í Philosopher.”

WHEN & WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?



https://bahai.works/Secret_of_Divine_Civilization
(This link to the publication has paragraph numbers.)

- Written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá* in Persian in 1875; addressed to the rulers and people of Persia, but still applicable to developmental reform in any society after over a century.
- Focuses primarily on how to transform society to create the conditions for progressive reform and modernization.
- Printed in Bombay in 1882 and widely circulated in Iran. The current English translation of *The Secret of Divine Civilization* was first published in 1957.

* It is important to know that it was Bahá'u'láh who asked His son to write this treatise. In one of His tablets, Bahá'u'lláh mentions that He asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá to write some pages on the means and the cause of development and underdevelopment of the world in order to reduce the prejudices of the dogmatic conservatives. In reading *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, one notes the interesting apparent paradox that Bahá'u'lláh called for an explication of the conditions for development of the world, whereas apparently 'Abdu'l-Bahá's book is oriented toward the question of the socioeconomic development of Iran. However, there is no contradiction here. On the contrary, this apparent paradox is the key to understanding 'Abdu'l-Bahá's concepts of modernity and development.

WHY DID THE MASTER WITHHOLD HIS NAME FROM THE WORK?



- To promote general welfare
- Guidance toward righteousness is in itself a righteous act
- For God's sake

To demonstrate that His one purpose is to promote the general welfare, He has withheld His name. Since He believes that guidance toward righteousness is in itself a righteous act, He offers these few words of counsel to His country's sons, words spoken for God's sake alone and in the spirit of a faithful friend. Our Lord, Who knows all things, bears witness that this Servant seeks nothing but what is right and good; for He, a wanderer in the desert of God's love, has come into a realm where the hand of denial or assent, of praise or blame, can touch Him not. "We nourish your souls for the sake of God; We seek from you neither recompense nor thanks."

Paragraph #10, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

FOUR LAYERS OF DISCOURSE PRESENT IN 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S WORK

To understand the basic content of *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, one should understand the four layers of discourse present in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's work:

The **first layer** of discourse is directly related to the specific political and cultural developments in the decade of the 1870s.

The **second layer** is related to the prevalent debate between secular intellectuals and traditionalist conservative 'ulamá (guardians of religious knowledge). The fundamental question here concerned the relation of Islám to society and the relation of religion to modernity and development.

The **third layer** is related to the definition and nature of the concept of development. The two sides of this debate can be called traditionalist/historicist and rationalist/objectivist. The question is whether it is possible to define development in an objective and universal manner.

The **fourth layer** is oriented to a question that was not seriously debated in nineteenth-century Iran or in any other part of the world. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's analysis is becoming increasingly relevant for humanity in the 21st century. The question here is the relation of development with nationalism and internationalism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá addresses questions of world peace and international cooperation as imperatives for advancement and development of all humanity in the foreseeable future.

“The four layers are the key for understanding 'Abdu'l-Bahá's concept of modernity and development. They deal with different debates and questions. Although *The Secret of Divine Civilization* is related to specific questions of development in the second half of the nineteenth century, its message is far more general and universal.”



Based on the Introduction to Secret of Divine Civilization
by Dr. Nader Saiedi



○ PEOPLE OF PERSIA!

Even though this treatise was written for the nation of Persia, the Master addresses the people of Persia six times, and every time He warns them about various moral and spiritual concerns and reminds them of the glorious times of the past.

- ○ people of Persia! Look into those blossoming pages that tell of another day, a time long past. Read them and wonder; see the great sight. Iran in that day was as the heart of the world; she was the bright torch flaming in the assemblage of mankind. Her power and glory shone out like the morning above the world's horizons, and the splendor of her learning cast its rays over East and West. Word of the widespread empire of those who wore her crown reached even to the dwellers in the arctic circle, and the fame of the awesome presence of her King of Kings humbled the rulers of Greece and Rome. The greatest of the world's philosophers marveled at the wisdom of her government, and her political system became the model for all the kings of the four continents then known. She was distinguished among all peoples for the scope of her dominion, she was honored by all for her praiseworthy culture and civilization. She was as the pivot of the world, she was the source and center of sciences and arts, the wellspring of great inventions and discoveries, the rich mine of human virtues and perfections. The intellect, the wisdom of the individual members of this excellent nation dazzled the minds of other peoples, the brilliance and perceptive genius that characterized all this noble race aroused the envy of the whole world.



O PEOPLE OF PERSIA!

O people of Persia! Awake from your drunken sleep! Rise up from your lethargy! Be fair in your judgment: will the dictates of honor permit this holy land, once the wellspring of world civilization, the source of glory and joy for all mankind, the envy of East and West, to remain an object of pity, deplored by all nations? She was once the noblest of peoples: will you let contemporary history register for the ages her now degenerate state? Will you complacently accept her present wretchedness, when she was once the land of all mankind's desire? Must she now, for this contemptible sloth, this failure to struggle, this utter ignorance, be accounted the most backward of nations?

Were not the people of Persia, in days long gone, the head and front of intellect and wisdom? Did they not, by God's grace, shine out like the daystar from the horizons of Divine knowledge? How is it that we are satisfied today with this miserable condition, are engrossed in our licentious passions, have blinded ourselves to supreme happiness, to that which is pleasing in God's sight, and have all become absorbed in our selfish concerns and the search for ignoble, personal advantage?

Paragraphs #14-15, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*





This fairest of lands was once a lamp, streaming with the rays of Divine knowledge, of science and art, of nobility and high achievement, of wisdom and valor. Today, because of the idleness and lethargy of her people, their torpor, their undisciplined way of life, their lack of pride, lack of ambition--her bright fortune has been totally eclipsed, her light has turned to darkness. "The seven heavens and the seven earths weep over the mighty when he is brought low."

It should not be imagined that the people of Persia are inherently deficient in intelligence, or that for essential perceptiveness and understanding, inborn sagacity, intuition and wisdom, or innate capacity, they are inferior to others. God forbid! On the contrary, they have always excelled all other peoples in endowments conferred by birth. Persia herself, moreover, from the standpoint of her temperate climate and natural beauties, her geographical advantages and her rich soil, is blessed to a supreme degree. What she urgently requires, however, is deep reflection, resolute action, training, inspiration and encouragement. Her people must make a massive effort, and their pride must be aroused.

Paragraphs #16-17, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*





O people of Persia!

How long will you wander?

How long must your confusion last?

How long will it go on, this conflict of opinions, this useless antagonism, this ignorance, this refusal to think?

Others are alert, and we sleep our dreamless sleep. Other nations are making every effort to improve their condition; we are trapped in our desires and self-indulgences, and at every step we stumble into a new snare.

Paragraph #21, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT ARE THE MAIN COMPONENTS
OF THE MODERNITY THAT THE
BELOVED MASTER IS OFFERING TO
THE PERSIANS?



Would the **extension of education**, the **development of useful arts and sciences**, the **promotion of industry and technology**, be harmful things? For such endeavor lifts the individual within the mass and raises him out of the depths of ignorance to the highest reaches of knowledge and human excellence. Would the setting up of **just legislation**, in accord with the Divine laws which guarantee the happiness of society and protect the rights of all mankind and are an impregnable proof against assault—would such laws, insuring the integrity of the members of society and their equality before the law, inhibit their prosperity and success?

Or if by using one's perceptive faculties, one can draw analogies from present circumstances and the conclusions arrived at by collective experience, and can envisage as coming realities situations now only potential, would it be unreasonable to take such present measures as would guarantee our future security? Would it seem shortsighted, improvident and unsound, would it constitute a deviation from what is right and proper, if we were to **strengthen our relationships with neighboring countries**, **enter into binding treaties with the great powers**, **foster friendly connections with well-disposed governments**, **look to the expansion of trade with the nations of East and West**, **develop our natural resources and increase the wealth of our people?**

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF SOCIAL DEFICIENCIES IN A SOCIETY?

It is obvious that not until the people are educated, not until public opinion is rightly focused, not until government officials, even minor ones, are free from even the least remnant of corruption, can the country be properly administered. Not until discipline, order and good government reach the degree where an individual, even if he should put forth his utmost efforts to do so, would still find himself unable to deviate by so much as a hair's breadth from righteousness, can the desired reforms be regarded as fully established.

Paragraph #27, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE "PERSONS FUNCTIONING IN ASSEMBLIES OF CONSULTATION"?

If these individuals prove to be pure and high-minded, if they remain free from the taint of corruption, the confirmations of God will make them a never-failing source of bounty to mankind. He will cause to issue from their lips and their pens what will bless the people, so that every corner of this noble country of Iran will be illumined with their justice and integrity and the rays of that light will encompass the whole earth. "Neither will this be difficult with God."

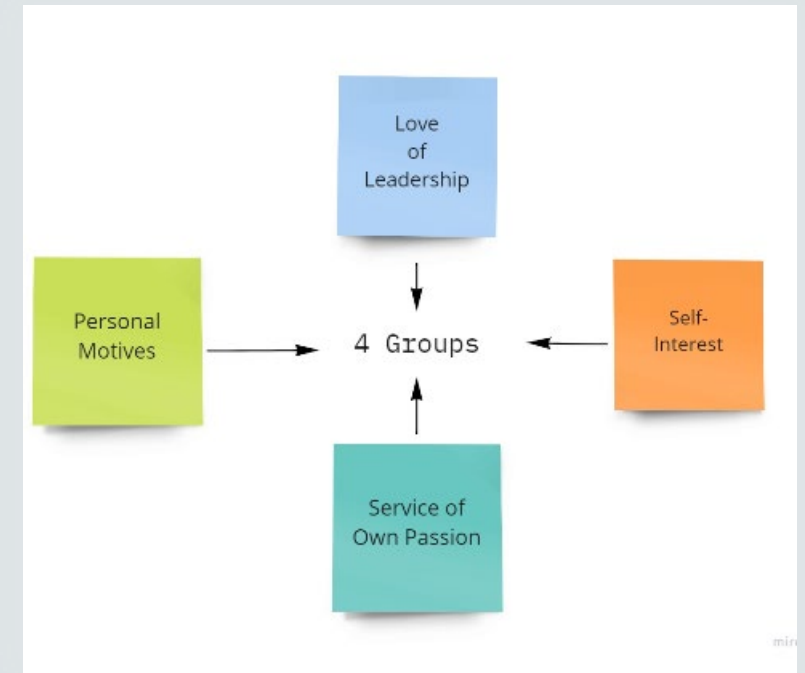
Paragraph #29, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHO ARE THE FOUR GROUPS THAT THE MASTER ADDRESSES IN THIS WORK?

1. Those whose reason has been corrupted by personal motives and the clarity
2. Those whose perception has been clouded by self-interest and conceit
3. Those whose energies are devoted to the service of their passions
4. Those whose sense of pride is perverted to the love of leadership, have raised the standard of opposition and waxed loud in their complaints

Paragraph #30, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHAT ARE “THE PRIMARY CAUSES
OF OPPRESSION AND INJUSTICE,
OR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS,
IRREGULARITY AND DISORDER”
IN A SOCIETY?



- Close investigation will show that the primary cause of oppression and injustice, of unrighteousness, irregularity and disorder, is the **people's lack of religious faith and the fact that they are uneducated.**
- When, for example, the people are genuinely religious and are literate and well-schooled, and a difficulty presents itself, they can apply to the local authorities; if they do not meet with justice and secure their rights and if they see that the conduct of the local government is incompatible with the Divine good pleasure and the king's justice, they can then take their case to higher courts and describe the deviation of the local administration from the spiritual law.
- Those courts can then send for the local records of the case and in this way justice will be done. At present, however, because of their **inadequate schooling, most of the population lack even the vocabulary to explain what they want.**

Paragraph #31, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MAN'S CREATION?



- A man should pause and reflect and be just: his Lord, **out of measureless grace**, has made him a human being and honored him with the words: “Verily, We created man in the goodliest of forms—and caused His mercy which rises out of the dawn of oneness to shine down upon him, until he became the wellspring of the words of God and the place where the mysteries of heaven alighted, and on the morning of creation he was covered with the rays of the qualities of perfection and the graces of holiness.
- How can he stain this immaculate garment with the filth of selfish desires, or exchange this everlasting honor for infamy? “Dost thou think thyself only a puny form, when the universe is folded up within thee?” The Imám `Alí.

Paragraph #33, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF “JUST KINGS”?

- ✓ Powerful champions of the people's rights [whose name] has echoed through creation
- ✓ These give no thought to amassing enormous fortunes for themselves
- ✓ They believe, rather, that their own wealth lies in enriching their subjects
- ✓ To them, if every individual citizen has affluence and ease, the royal coffers are full
- ✓ They take no pride in gold and silver, but rather in their enlightenment and their determination to achieve the universal good

Paragraph #35, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHAT IS THE MAIN OBJECTIVE IN ESTABLISHING PARLIAMENTS?

It is unquestionable that the object in establishing parliaments is to **bring about justice and righteousness**, but everything hinges on the efforts of the elected representatives. If their intention is sincere, desirable results and unforeseen improvements will be forthcoming; if not, it is certain that the whole thing will be meaningless, the country will come to a standstill and public affairs will continuously deteriorate. “I see a thousand builders unequal to one subverter; what then of the one builder who is followed by a thousand subverters?”

Paragraph #40, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHAT ARE 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S
REMARKS CONCERNING
WEALTH? WHAT MAKES WEALTH
A PRAISEWORTHY OBJECT?



- It should not be imagined that the writer's earlier remarks constitute a denunciation of wealth or a commendation of poverty.
- **Wealth is praiseworthy** in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes.
- Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude.
- Wealth is most commendable, provided the **entire population is wealthy**. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessors.

Paragraph #43, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

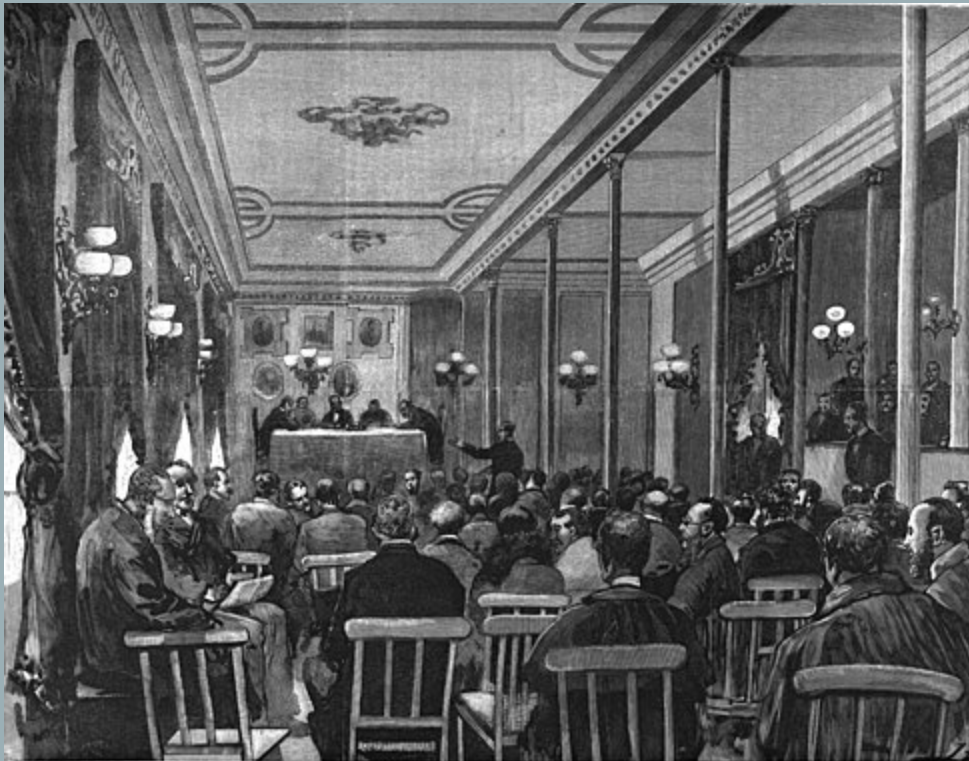
WHAT ARE THE MAIN DUTIES OF SCHOLARS IN THE WORLD?



It is essential that scholars and the spiritually learned should undertake in all sincerity and purity of intent and for the sake of God alone, to counsel and exhort the masses and clarify their vision with that collyrium which is knowledge. For today the people out of the depths of their superstition, imagine that any individual who believes in God and His signs, and in the Prophets and Divine Revelations and laws, and is a devout and God-fearing person, must of necessity remain idle and spend his days in sloth, so as to be considered in the sight of God as one who has forsaken the world and its vanities, set his heart on the life to come, and isolated himself from human beings in order to draw nearer to God.

Paragraph #51, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

HOW CAN A PERSON BECOME A
“FULLY DEVELOPED AND
COMPREHENSIVELY LEARNED
INDIVIDUAL”?



- In view of the fact that at the present time such **fully developed and comprehensively learned individuals are hard to come by**, and the government and people are in dire need of order and direction,
- It is essential to establish a body of scholars the various groups of whose membership would each be expert in one of the aforementioned branches of knowledge.
- This body should with the greatest energy and vigor deliberate as to all present and future requirements, and bring about equilibrium and order.

Paragraph #64, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF PERFECTION?



**Welcome to
Perfection**
POPULATION= 0

- **Learning and the cultural attainments of the mind.** This eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God.
- **Justice and impartiality.** This means to have no regard for one's own personal benefits and selfish advantages, and to carry out the laws of God without the slightest concern for anything else. It means to see one's self as only one of the servants of God.
- **To arise with complete sincerity and purity of purpose to educate the masses:** to exert the utmost effort to instruct them in the various branches of learning and useful sciences, to encourage the development of modern progress, to widen the scope of commerce, industry and the arts, to further such measures as will increase the people's wealth. For the mass of the population is uninformed as to these vital agencies which would constitute an immediate remedy for society's chronic ills.

OTHER ATTRIBUTES OF PERFECTION?



“Whoever is lacking in these excellent human qualities is defective”

- To fear God
- To love God by loving His servants
- To exercise mildness and forbearance and calm
- To be sincere, amenable, clement and compassionate
- To have resolution and courage, trustworthiness and energy
- To strive and struggle
- To be generous, loyal, without malice
- To have zeal and a sense of honor
- To be high-minded and magnanimous
- To have regard for the rights of others

Paragraph #70, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT ARE THE CORRECT WAYS OF PROPAGATING THE FAITH OF GOD?



- The Faith of God must be propagated through **human perfections, through qualities that are excellent and pleasing, and spiritual behavior.** If a soul of his own accord advances toward God he will be accepted at the Threshold of Oneness, for such a one is free of personal considerations, of greed and selfish interests, and he has taken refuge within the sheltering protection of his Lord.
- He will become known among men as **trustworthy and truthful**, temperate and scrupulous, high-minded and loyal, incorruptible and God-fearing.
- In this way the primary purpose in revealing the Divine Law—which is to bring about happiness in the after life and civilization and the refinement of character in this—will be realized. As for the sword, it will only produce a man who is outwardly a believer, and inwardly a traitor and apostate.

Paragraph #77, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT IS “ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL REASONS WHY PEOPLE OF THE OTHER RELIGIONS HAVE SHUNNED AND FAILED TO BE CONVERTED TO THE FAITH OF GOD”?

Fanaticism and unreasoning religious zeal

See for example the divine words that were addressed to Muḥammad, the Ark of Salvation, the Luminous Countenance and Lord of Men, bidding Him to be gentle with the people and long-suffering: “Debate with them in the kindest manner.” That Blessed Tree Whose light was “neither of the East nor of the West” and Who cast over all the peoples of the earth the sheltering shade of a measureless grace, showed forth infinite kindness and forbearance in His dealings with every one. In these words, likewise, were Moses and Aaron commanded to challenge Pharaoh, Lord of the Stakes: “Speak ye to him with gentle speech.”

Paragraph #93, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



HOW DOES THE BELOVED MASTER DESCRIBE THE ATTRIBUTES OF A TRUE BELIEVER?

- ✓ Endowed with the attributes of true faith
- ✓ Characterized with spiritual qualities
- ✓ Just and fair-mindedness
- ✓ Forbearance with compassion and generosity
- ✓ Consideration for others
- ✓ Candor, trustworthiness, and loyalty
- ✓ Love and loving-kindness
- ✓ Devotion, determination, and humanity
- ✓ Truly righteous



Paragraph #95, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

HOW DOES 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ DESCRIBE THE STATE OF THE RELIGIOUS PEOPLE OF THE TIME?

They have closed their eyes to every righteous act and have sacrificed the abiding happiness of society to their own transitory profit. They regard fanaticism and zealotry as redounding to their credit and honor, and not content with this, they denounce one another and plot each other's ruin, and whenever they wish to put on a show of wisdom and learning, of virtue and godliness, they set about mocking and reviling this one and that.

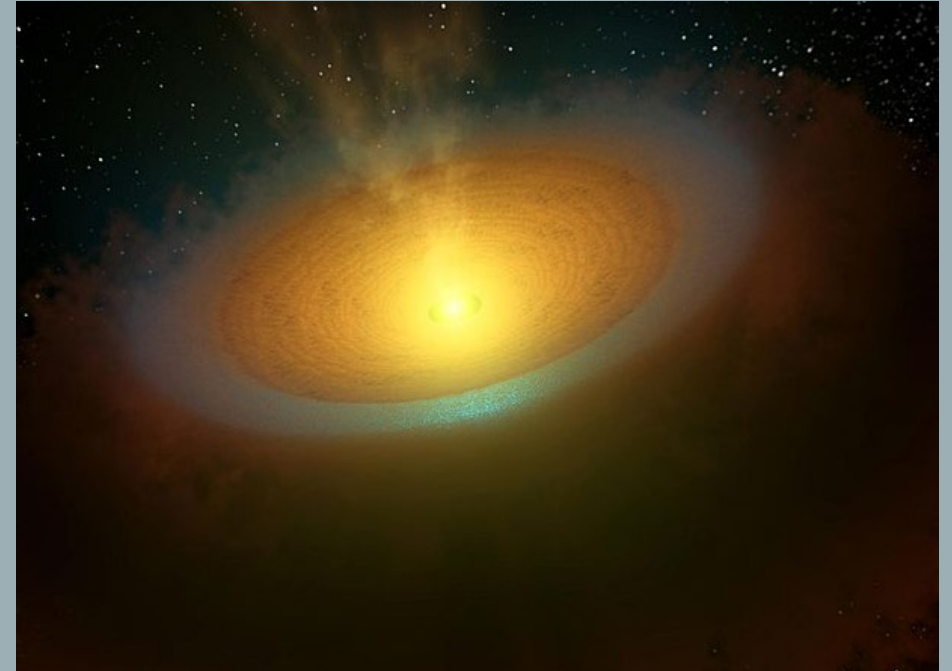
Paragraph #96, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHAT ARE THE CONDITION AND BASE FOR JUDGING A GOOD CHARACTER?

A good character is in the sight of God and His chosen ones and the possessors of insight, the most excellent and praiseworthy of all things, but always on condition that its center of emanation should be reason and knowledge and its base should be true moderation.

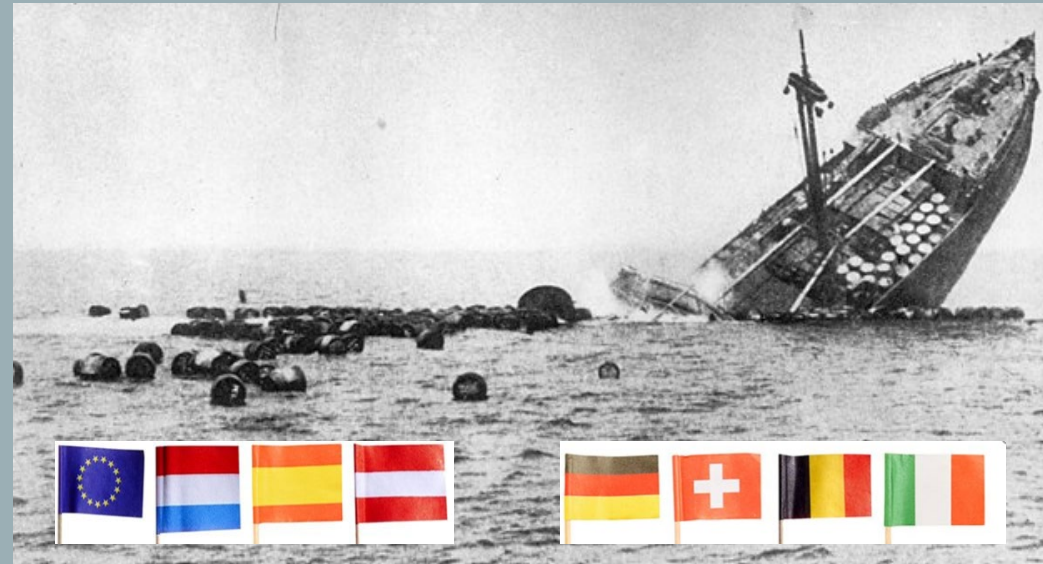
Paragraph #101, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



HOW DOES 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ DESCRIBE THE STATE OF EUROPE AT THE TIME?

All the peoples of Europe, notwithstanding their vaunted civilization, sink and drown in this terrifying sea of passion and desire, and this is why all the phenomena of their culture come to nothing. Let no one wonder at this statement or deplore it.

Paragraph #102, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CIVILIZATION?

We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end.

The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is **human happiness**; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race; and the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objectives are the excellent qualities with which humanity has been endowed.

Paragraph #102, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



HOW DOES THE MASTER DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND MORALITY?

A superficial culture, unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as “a confused medley of dreams,” and external lustre without inner perfection is “like a vapor in the desert which the thirsty dreameth to be water.” For results which would win the good pleasure of God and secure the peace and well-being of man, could never be fully achieved in a merely external civilization.

Paragraph #103, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHAT IS MEANT BY “MORAL CIVILIZATION”?

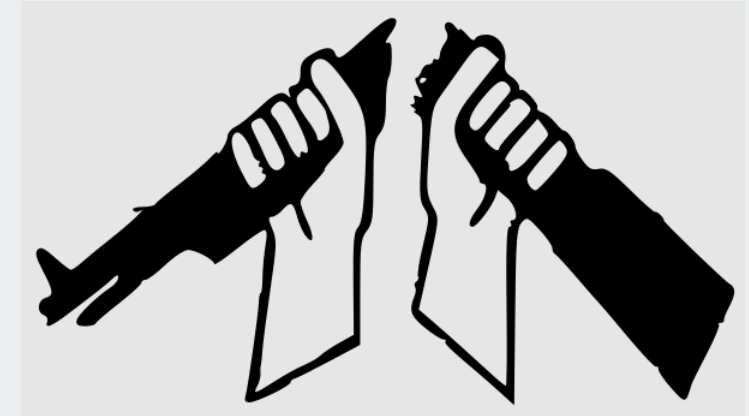
The peoples of Europe have not advanced to the higher planes of moral civilization, as their opinions and behavior clearly demonstrate. Notice, for example, how the supreme desire of European governments and peoples today is to conquer and crush one another, and how, while harboring the greatest secret repulsion, they spend their time exchanging expressions of neighborly affection, friendship and harmony.

Paragraph #104, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF TRUE CIVILIZATION AS HAVE BEEN OUTLINED BY THE MASTER?

True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns—the shining exemplars of devotion and determination—shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish **the Cause of Universal Peace**. They must make the **Cause of Peace** the object of general **consultation**, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and **establish a covenant**, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. **This supreme and noble undertaking—the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world—should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth.**



All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant

HOW SHOULD ALL THE FORCES OF
HUMANITY BE MOBILIZED TO ENSURE
THE STABILITY AND PERMANENCE OF
THIS **MOST GREAT COVENANT?**



In this all-embracing Pact:

- The limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed,
- The principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained.
- In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others.
- The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government.
- Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure.

Paragraph #112, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

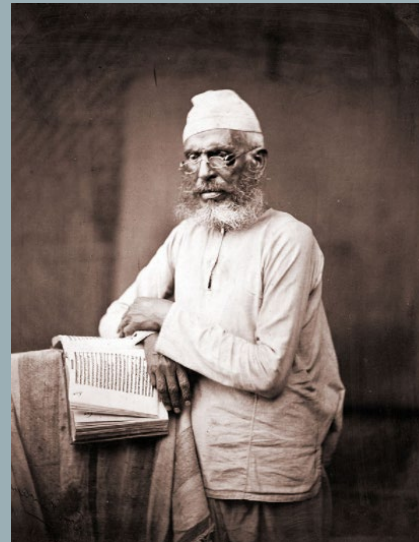
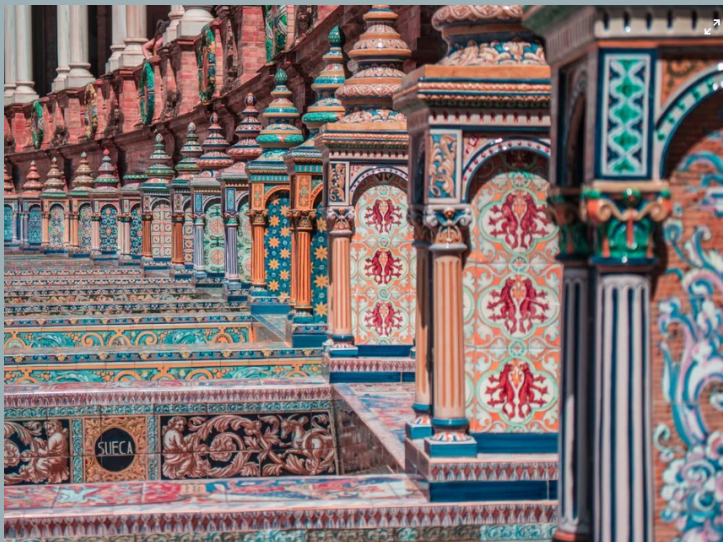
WHAT IS THE GREATEST
INSTRUMENT “FOR ACHIEVING
THE ADVANCEMENT AND THE
GLORY OF MAN”?

It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human race. Nothing can be effected in the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement, and the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union is true religion.

Paragraph #124, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF ISLÁM ON EUROPE?



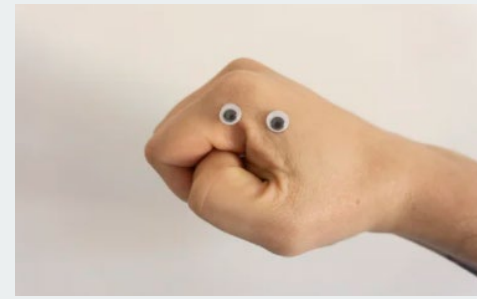
- In the early ages of Islám the peoples of Europe acquired the sciences and arts of civilization from Islám as practiced by the inhabitants of Andalusia.
- A careful and thorough investigation of the historical record will establish the fact that the major part of the civilization of Europe is derived from Islám; for all the writings of Muslim scholars and divines and philosophers were gradually collected in Europe and were with the most painstaking care weighed and debated at academic gatherings and in the centers of learning, after which their valued contents would be put to use.
- Today, numerous copies of the works of Muslim scholars which are not to be found in Islamic countries, are available in the libraries of Europe.
- Furthermore, the laws and principles current in all European countries are derived to a considerable degree and indeed virtually in their entirety from the works on jurisprudence and the legal decision of Muslim theologians.



O PEOPLE OF PERSIA!

O people of Persia! How long will your torpor and lethargy last? **You were once the lords of the whole earth;** the world was at your beck and call. How is it that your glory has lapsed and you have fallen from favor now, and crept away into some corner of oblivion?

You were the fountainhead of learning, the unfailing spring of light for all the earth, how is it that you are withered now, and quenched, and faint of heart? You who once lit the world, how is it that you lurk, inert, bemused, in darkness now?



Open your mind's eye, see your great and present need. Rise up and struggle, seek education, seek enlightenment.

Is it meet that a foreign people should receive from your own forbears its culture and its knowledge, and that you, their blood, their rightful heirs, should go without?

How does it seem, when your neighbors are at work by day and night with their whole hearts, providing for their advancement, their honor and prosperity, that you, in your ignorant fanaticism, are busy only with your quarrels and antipathies, your indulgences and appetites and empty dreams?

Is it commendable that you should waste and fritter away in apathy the brilliance that is your birthright, your native competence, your inborn understanding?



O People of Persia! Open your eyes! Pay heed! Release yourselves from this blind following of the bigots, this senseless imitation which is the principal reason why men fall away into paths of ignorance and degradation. See the true state of things. Rise up; seize hold of such means as will bring you life and happiness and greatness and glory among all the nations of the world.



The winds of the true springtide are passing over you; adorn yourselves with blossoms like trees in the scented garden. Spring clouds are streaming; then turn you fresh and verdant like the sweet eternal fields. The dawn star is shining, set your feet on the true path. The sea of might is swelling, hasten to the shores of high resolve and fortune.

The pure water of life is welling up, why wear away your days in a desert of thirst? Aim high, choose noble ends; how long this lethargy, how long this negligence! Despair, both here and hereafter, is all you will gain from self-indulgence; abomination and misery are all you will harvest from fanaticism, from believing the foolish and the mindless. The confirmations of God are supporting you, the succor of God is at hand: why do you not cry out and exult with all your heart, and strive with all your soul!

Paragraphs #172-173, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF EDUCATION?



- From lack of organization, education has become haphazard and confused.
- Trifling subjects which should not call for elaboration receive undue attention, to such an extent that students, over long periods of time, waste their minds and their energies on material that is pure supposition, in no way susceptible of proof, such study consisting in going deep into statements and concepts which careful examination would establish as not even unlikely, but rather as unalloyed superstition, and representing the investigation of useless conceits and the chasing of absurdities.
- There can be no doubt that to concern oneself with such illusions, to examine into and lengthily debate such idle propositions, is nothing but a waste of time and a marring of the days of one's life.
- Not only this, but it also prevents the individual from undertaking the study of those arts and sciences of which society stands in dire need.

WHAT ARE THE ULTIMATE
GOALS FOR ENGAGING IN
THE STUDY OF ANY SUBJECT?



The individual should, prior to engaging in the study of any subject, ask himself what its uses are and what fruit and result will derive from it. If it is a useful branch of knowledge, that is, if society will gain important benefits from it, then he should certainly pursue it with all his heart. If not, if it consists in empty, profitless debates and in a vain concatenation of imaginings that lead to no result except acrimony, why devote one's life to such useless hairsplittings and disputes.

Paragraph #174, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

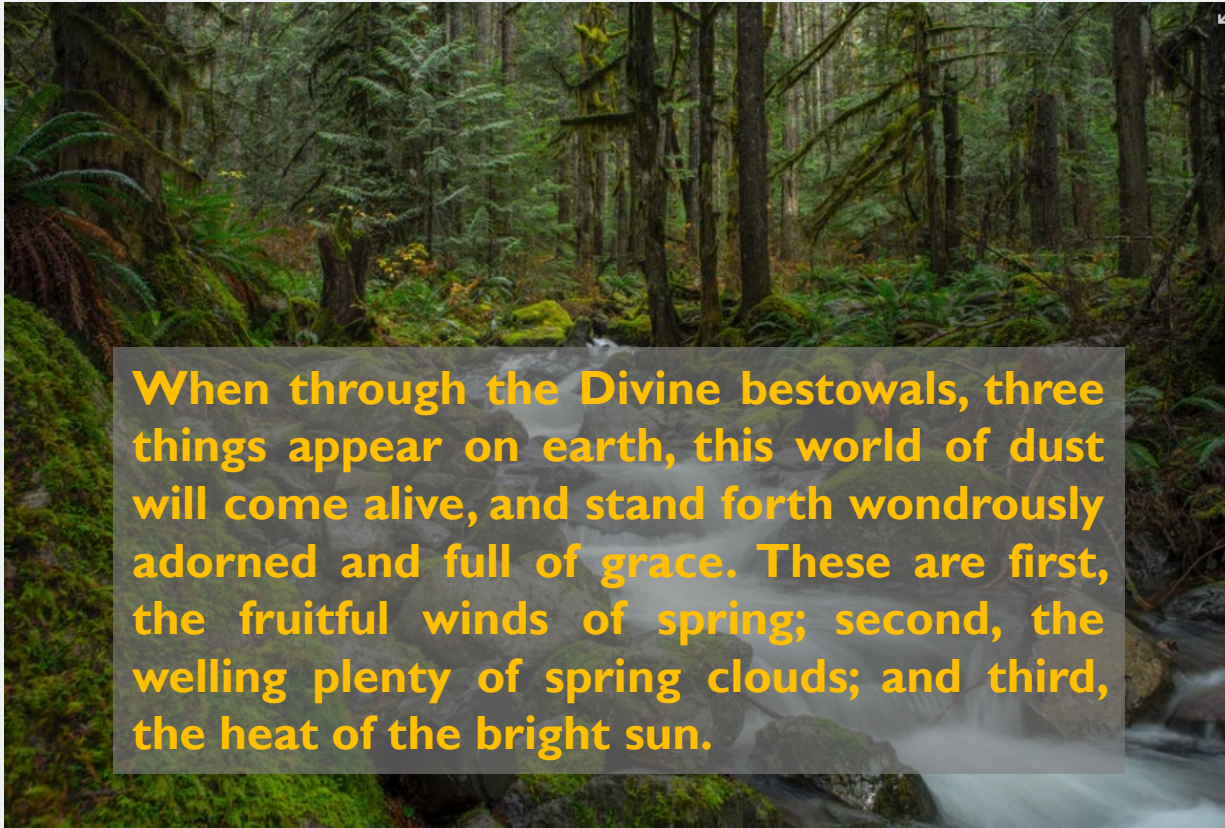
HOW DOES THE MASTER
DESCRIBE THE WORLD OF
POLITICS?



- The world of politics is like the world of man; he is seed at first, and then passes by degrees to the condition of embryo and foetus, acquiring a bone structure, being clothed with flesh, taking on his own special form, until at last he reaches the plane where he can befittingly fulfill the words: “the most excellent of Makers.”
- Just as this is a **requirement of creation** and is based on the universal Wisdom, the political world in the same way cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of rightness and perfection.
- Rather, **qualified individuals must strive** by day and by night, using all those means which will conduce to progress, until the government and the people develop along every line from day to day and even from moment to moment.

Paragraph #177, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT STEPS NEED TO BE TAKEN IN ONE SOCIETY IN ORDER TO REACH TRUE HAPPINESS?



When through the Divine bestowals, three things appear on earth, this world of dust will come alive, and stand forth wondrously adorned and full of grace. These are first, the fruitful winds of spring; second, the welling plenty of spring clouds; and third, the heat of the bright sun.

- When, out of the endless bounty of God, these three have been vouchsafed, then slowly, by His leave, dry trees and branches turn fresh and green again, and array themselves with many kinds of blossoms and fruits.
- It is the same when the pure intentions and the justice of the ruler, the wisdom and consummate skill and statecraft of the governing authorities, and the determination and unstinted efforts of the people, are all combined; then day by day the effects of the advancement, of the far-reaching reforms, of the pride and prosperity of government and people alike, will become clearly manifest.

HOW DOES 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ
DESCRIBE THE ROLE OF
EDUCATION IN ACHIEVING
PROSPERITY?



- The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward.
- The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance.
- Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time.

Paragraph #179, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT KINDS OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES NEED TO BE WRITTEN OR PUBLISHED FOR SOCIETY?



- It is therefore urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and definitely establishing what the present-day requirements of the people are, and what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society.
- These should be published and spread throughout the nation, so that at least the leaders among the people should become, to some degree, awakened, and arise to exert themselves along those lines which will lead to their abiding honor.
- The publication of high thoughts is the dynamic power in the arteries of life; it is the very soul of the world. Thoughts are a boundless sea, and the effects and varying conditions of existence are as the separate forms and individual limits of the waves; not until the sea boils up will the waves rise and scatter their pearls of knowledge on the shore of life.

Paragraph #180, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

WHAT IS MEANT BY “PUBLIC OPINION
MUST BE DIRECTED TOWARD
WHATEVER IS WORTHY OF THIS DAY”?



- Public opinion must be directed toward whatever is worthy of this day, and this is impossible except through the use of adequate arguments and the adducing of clear, comprehensive and conclusive proofs.
- For the helpless masses know nothing of the world, and while there is no doubt that they seek and long for their own happiness, yet ignorance like a heavy veil shuts them away from it.

Paragraph #181, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

HOW DOES 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ DIRECT
THE PEOPLE TO SPREAD EDUCATION
THROUGHOUT THE LAND?



- It is, furthermore, a vital necessity to establish schools throughout Persia, even in the smallest country towns and villages, and to encourage the people in every possible way to have their children learn to read and write.
- If necessary, education should even be made compulsory. Until the nerves and arteries of the nation stir into life, every measure that is attempted will prove vain; for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body does not move.
- This dynamic power is present to a superlative degree in the very nature of the Persian people, and the spread of education will release it.

Paragraph #184, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



O people of Persia! The heart is a divine trust; cleanse it from the stain of self-love, adorn it with the coronal of pure intent, until the sacred honor, the abiding greatness of **this illustrious nation** may **shine out like the true morning** in an auspicious heaven. This handful of days on earth will slip away like shadows and be over. Strive then that God may shed His grace upon you, that you may leave a favorable remembrance in the hearts and on the lips of those to come. "And grant that I be spoken of with honor by posterity."

Happy the soul that shall forget his own good, and like the chosen ones of God, vie with his fellows in service to the good of all; until, strengthened by the blessings and perpetual confirmations of God, he shall be empowered to raise this mighty nation up to its ancient pinnacles of glory, and restore this withered land to sweet new life, and as a spiritual springtime, array those trees which are the lives of men with the fresh leaves, the blossoms and fruits of consecrated joy.

THE PROMISE OF THE MASTER

A few, unaware of the power latent in human endeavor, consider this matter as highly impracticable, nay even beyond the scope of man's utmost efforts. Such is not the case, however. On the contrary, thanks to the unfailing grace of God, the loving-kindness of His favored ones, the unrivaled endeavors of wise and capable souls, and the thoughts and ideas of the peerless leaders of this age, nothing whatsoever can be regarded as unattainable. Endeavor, ceaseless endeavor, is required. Nothing short of an indomitable determination can possibly achieve it. Many a cause which past ages have regarded as purely visionary, yet in this day has become most easy and practicable. Why should this most great and lofty Cause—the daystar of the firmament of true civilization and the cause of the glory, the advancement, the well-being and the success of all humanity—be regarded as impossible of achievement? Surely the day will come when its beauteous light shall shed illumination upon the assemblage of man.”

Paragraph #114, The Secret of Divine Civilization

THE END

The Secret of Divine Civilization, written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1875, offered an extraordinary treatise on what was required for modernization in Persia (modern-day Iran). It was the Master's elaboration of the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh in Tablets to the rulers of the earth. It can easily be read in the context of the very real and existing constraints of so many developing or developed countries in the 21st century. Compared with current studies and works on community and national development and the poverty of nations, **it stands alone.**



