

Bahá'í Discourse

Applying the Bahá'í Teachings

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Discourse

What is Discourse?

An example of discourse is how the resources of nature can be used while safeguarding the health of the environment. The challenge has many dimensions. There are scientists investigating the causes of climate change or ways to stop pollution. Others raise consciousness about the effects of present systems and processes on the natural world. Still others aim to establish environmentally sound policies. A diversity of groups engage in interconnected conversations, more or less formal, from the local to the international level. This discourse on the environment takes place in books and articles, at summits and conferences, in the media, in classrooms, etc. It aspires to reach everyone.



Bahá'í International Community at Climate Conference in 2023

Bahá'í Discourse

In Bahá'í discourse, we participate in the prevalent discourses of society by relating them to our spiritual principles. We enter into uplifting and meaningful conversations with others. We have structured conversations with numerous participants in a variety of social spaces.

Share a dewdrop from this Ocean

O wayfarer in the path of God! Take thou thy portion of the ocean of His grace, and deprive not thyself of the things that lie hidden in its depths. Be thou of them that have partaken of its treasures. A dewdrop out of this ocean would, if shed upon all that are in the heavens and on the earth, suffice to enrich them with the bounty of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. With the hands of renunciation draw forth from its life-giving waters, and sprinkle therewith all created things, that they may be cleansed from all man-made limitations and may approach the mighty seat of God, this hallowed and resplendent Spot.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, CXXIX)

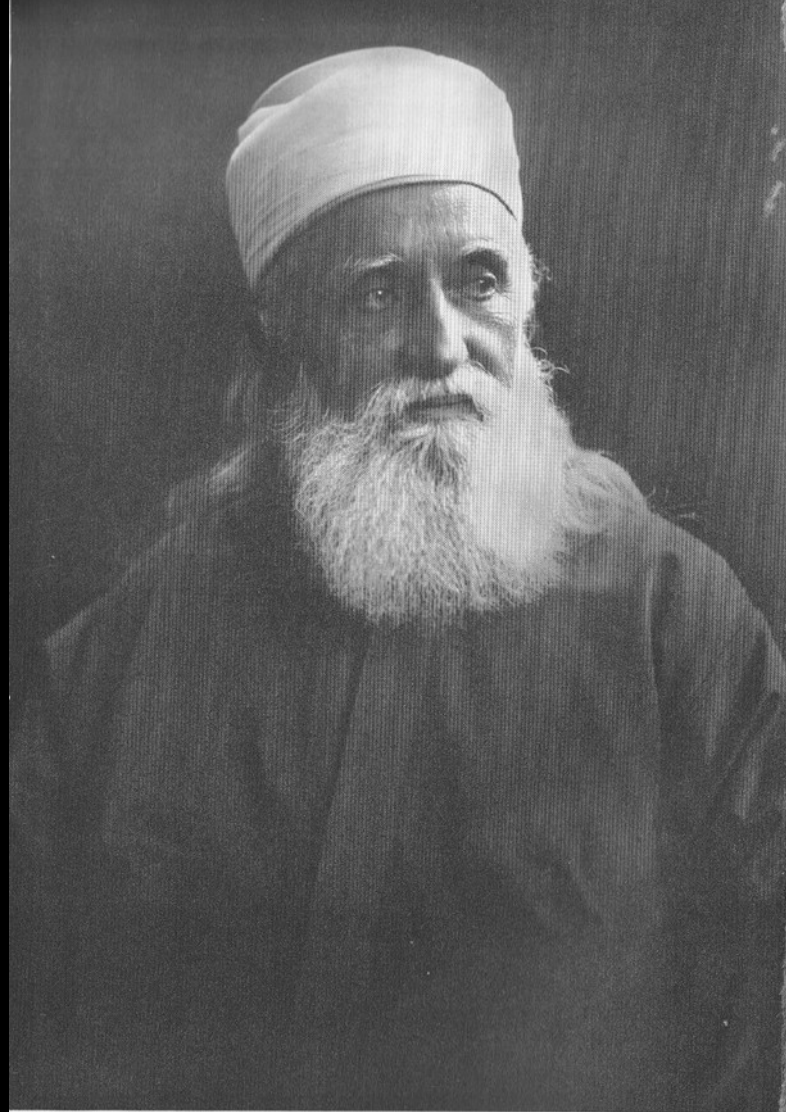
Bahá'í Discourse

Perhaps the best and earliest example of Bahá'í discourse is the letter 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote at Bahá'u'lláh's request to the people of Persia in 1875, later published as *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. It aims to explain principles on how to progress as a country. It was delivered anonymously and makes no direct mention of the Bahá'í Faith, so that it would not be rejected out of hand.

The Universal House of Justice has described the importance of its example.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

*The Secret
of Divine
Civilization*



‘Abdu’l-Bahá

*The Secret of
Divine Civilization*

by

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

Translated from the original Persian text

by

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WILMETTE, ILLINOIS

About the *Secret of Divine Civilization*

What the letter prophetically laid out was the challenge of modernity. Today, that challenge has become the inescapable preoccupation of populations throughout the planet, not least the peoples of the Islamic world. The meaning of modernity and the features of that rising flood of cultural revolution were explicitly identified in the Master's message: constitutional and democratic government, the rule of law, universal education, the protection of human rights, economic development, religious tolerance, the promotion of useful sciences and technologies and programmes of public welfare.

(Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá'ís of Iran, 26 November 2003)

About the *Secret of Divine Civilization*

In praising the achievements of what He termed this “temporal and material apparatus of civilization”, the Master made it clear that He was not proposing simply a credulous imitation of the West. On the contrary. In uncompromising language, He portrayed European society as drowning “in the sea of passion and desire”, trapped in a materialistic perception of reality that could bring in its wake nothing but disillusionment:

(Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá'ís of Iran, 26 November 2003)

Secret of Divine Civilization

“Be just: can this nominal civilization, unsupported by a genuine civilization of character, bring about the peace and well-being of the people or win the good pleasure of God? Does it not, rather, connote the destruction of man’s estate and pull down the pillars of happiness and peace?”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá’ís of Iran, 26 November 2003)

About the *Secret of Divine Civilization*

At a much deeper level, the Master turned his readers' attention to the spiritual forces shaping and impelling the work of the mind. In one of the most penetrating passages of the letter, He challenged those fundamental errors about the nature of man and society that had already had ruinous consequences in other lands and that could, if not avoided, undermine the capacity of the Iranian people to assess their present situation objectively and seize the opportunities before them.

(Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá'ís of Iran, 26 November 2003)

About the *Secret of Divine Civilization*

“There are”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarked, “some who imagine that an innate sense of human dignity will prevent man from committing evil actions and ensure his spiritual and material perfection.” On the contrary, He pointed out, it is readily observable that human development depends on education. He then drew the implications of this law for the progress of society. All the evidence inescapably demonstrates that the principal influence in the gradual civilizing of human character, far from being a simple endowment of nature, has been the effect produced on the rational soul by the guidance of the successive Messengers of God.

(Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá'ís of Iran, 26 November 2003)

About the *Secret of Divine Civilization*

It has been through Their intervention, and through it alone, that the peoples of the world, of whatever nation or religion, have learned the values and ideals that have empowered them to put material resources and technological means at the service of human betterment. It is They who, in each age, have defined the meaning and requirements of modernity. It is They who have been the ultimate Educators of humankind:

(Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá'ís of Iran, 26 November 2003)

Secret of Divine Civilization

Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honour, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valour and to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind. It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá’ís of Iran, 26 November 2003)

Bahá'í Discourse

...the participation of Bahá'ís in the discourses of society will advance as more and more believers throughout the world contribute to this area of activity....

A growing number of individual believers will bring insights based on the writings to conversations in a variety of social spaces in which they find themselves – some will be related to life in their localities while others will be connected to their professions.

(on behalf of the Universal Houses of Justice, 6 February 2011)

Bahá'í Discourse

...as... the friends are drawn into the life of society around them, their efforts to overcome challenges facing their communities through the application of spiritual principles will invariably entail participation in discourses at the grassroots.

(on behalf of the Universal Houses of Justice, 6 February 2011)

Engaging in Discourse

The friends are also developing their capacity for engaging those around them, regardless of creed, culture, class, or ethnicity, in conversations about how to bring about spiritual and material well-being through systematic application of the divine teachings. One gratifying result of this growing capacity is the community's increased ability to make meaningful contributions to various important discourses prevalent in society; in certain countries, leaders and thinkers striving to address the challenges confronting their societies increasingly show appreciation for the perspectives offered by Bahá'ís.

(Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019)

Engaging in Discourse

These contributions articulate insights derived from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, draw on the experience being generated by the believers around the world, and aim to elevate the discussion above the acrimony and contention that so often prevent discourses of society from progressing. Further, the ideas and lines of reasoning advanced by Bahá'ís are reinforced by their practice of consultation.

(Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019)

Engaging in Discourse

Sensitized as they are to the importance of harmony and the fruitlessness of conflict, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh seek to cultivate those conditions that are most conducive to the emergence of unity in any setting. We are heartened to see the believers expanding their efforts to participate in the discourses of society—especially those friends who, in their professional capacity, are able to contribute to discourses directly related to peace.

(Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019)



Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, University of Maryland, USA

Avoid Bahá'í terminology

Like all groups, Bahá'ís tend to develop their own terminology which, while meaningful to Bahá'ís themselves, can be bewildering or even meaningless to a non-Bahá'í audience.

(letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 30 March 1985)

Public Discourse

A world largely oblivious to the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation finds itself increasingly divided and disoriented on matters of truth, morality, identity, and purpose, and bewildered by the accelerating and corrosive effect of the forces of disintegration.

(Universal House of Justice, Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age, 28 November 2023)

Public Discourse

Involvement at all these levels of society becomes more pressing as the process of the disintegration of the old world order intensifies and discourse becomes increasingly coarsened and polarized, leading to the recrudescence of conflict among the competing factions and ideologies that divide humanity.

(Universal House of Justice, *Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age*, 28 November 2023)

Public Discourse

A plethora of destructive forces and events, including environmental degradation, climate change, pandemics, the decline of religion and morals, the loss of meaning and identity, the erosion of the concepts of truth and reason, unbridled technology, the exacerbation of prejudices and ideological contention, pervasive corruption, political and economic upheaval, war and genocide, have left their traces in blood and anguish on the pages of history and the lives of billions.

Public Discourse

In working with individuals, communities, and organizations both civic and governmental, the friends maintain awareness that the discourse on many social issues may become contentious or entangled with political ambitions. In all settings where Bahá'ís become more deeply engaged with the wider society, they seek to foster consensus and unity of thought, and to promote collaboration and a common search for solutions to humanity's pressing problems.

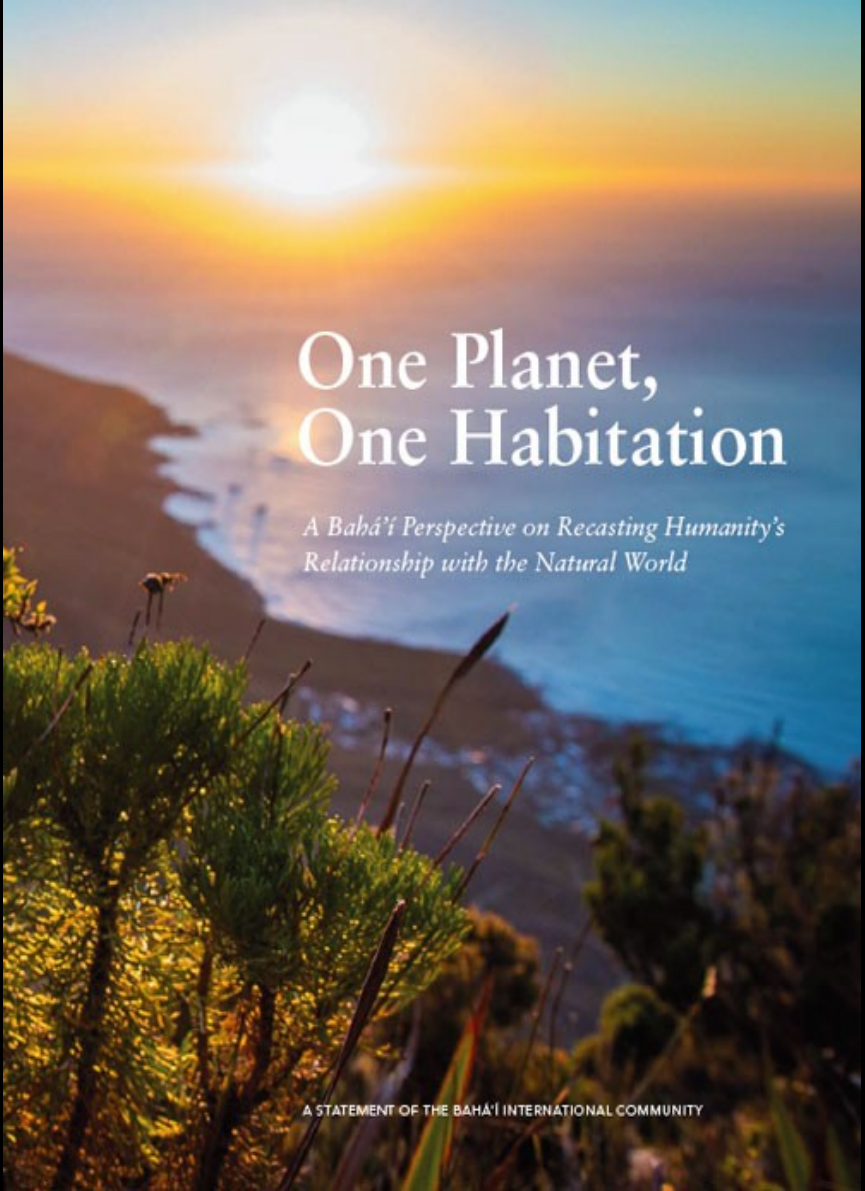
Public Discourse

Bahá'í engagement in social discourse has been met with a resoundingly affirmative response in countless settings, from neighbourhoods to nations, as a humanity baffled and divided by the manifold problems resulting from the operation of the forces of disintegration eagerly seeks new insights. At all levels of society, leaders of thought increasingly associate the Bahá'í community with fresh conceptions and approaches sorely needed by an ever more disunited and dysfunctional world.

One Planet, One Habitation

Bahá'í
International
Community

2022



One Planet, One Habitation

*A Bahá'í Perspective on Recasting Humanity's
Relationship with the Natural World*

A STATEMENT OF THE BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Public Discourse

The intellectual life of the community will be cultivated to provide the rigour and clarity of thought required to vindicate to a sceptical humanity the applicability of the healing remedy of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.

(Universal House of Justice, Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age, 28 November 2023)

Public Discourse

The diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity, a greater consciousness of global interdependence, the embrace of collaborative action among individuals and institutions, and a heightened longing for justice and peace are profoundly transforming human relationships.

(Universal House of Justice, Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age, 28 November 2023)

Public Discourse

...it is the responsibility of the friends, as the bearers of Bahá'u'lláh's restorative message, to assist populations to release their latent potentialities to achieve their highest aspirations. In this effort, the friends share this precious message with others, strive to demonstrate the efficacy of the divine remedy in the lives of individuals and communities, and work together with all those who appreciate and share the same values and aspirations.

(Universal House of Justice, *Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age*, 28 November 2023)

Public Discourse

As they do so, Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a unified world will offer a hopeful and clear direction to peoples whose perception has been distorted by the confusion prevailing in the world, and a constructive path for cooperation in the search for solutions to long-standing social maladies.

(Universal House of Justice, *Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age*, 28 November 2023)



Bahá'í International Community, Jakarta Office, Bali meeting

Public Discourse

As the spirit of the Faith increasingly permeates the hearts to enkindle love and reinforce the shared identity of humanity as one people, it instils a sense of loyal and conscientious civic responsibility and, in place of the pursuit of worldly power, redirects energies towards disinterested service in the pursuit of the common good.

(Universal House of Justice, *Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age*, 28 November 2023)

Public Discourse

Populations increasingly adopt the method of consultation, action, and reflection to displace endless contest and conflict. Individuals, communities, and institutions across diverse societies increasingly harmonize their efforts in common purpose to overcome sectarian rivalries, and spiritual and moral qualities foundational to humanity's progress and well-being take root in human character and social practice.

(Universal House of Justice, *Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age*, 28 November 2023)