

Scholarship

Capacity to use knowledge for good

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Scholarship

Scholarship

Scholarship describes the methods and achievements characteristic of scholars and academic work.

It involves both acquiring the knowledge of the past, and creating new knowledge for an ever-advancing civilisation.

For those with the intellectual capacity, it is an important way to fulfil one's potential.

Knowledge

Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world.

(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Tajallíyát)

Science

Science is the first emanation from God toward man. All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research, which is an eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight.

Therefore, you should put forward your most earnest efforts toward the acquisition of science and arts.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, 23 April 1912, 20)

Science

A scientific man is a true index and representative of humanity, for through processes of inductive reasoning and research he is informed of all that appertains to humanity, its status, conditions and happenings. He studies the human body politic, understands social problems and weaves the web and texture of civilization.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, 23 April 1912, 20)

Science

...science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected. It is the very foundation of all individual and national development. Without this basis of investigation, development is impossible. Therefore, seek with diligent endeavor the knowledge and attainment of all that lies within the power of this wonderful bestowal.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, 23 April 1912, 20)

Scholarship

Scholarship in the Bahá'í Faith has a formal institutional role. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Secret of Divine Civilization*, describes the roles of the rulers and the learned. The former are the decision-makers, Local and National Spiritual Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice. The latter are individuals who advise and counsel, formerly given titles like Hand of the Cause, now appointed as Counsellors and Auxiliary Board Members under the International Teaching Centre.



Hands of the Cause 1957

The Learned

Happy are ye, O ye the learned ones in Bahá. By the Lord! Ye are the billows of the Most Mighty Ocean, the stars of the firmament of Glory, the standards of triumph waving betwixt earth and heaven. Ye are the manifestations of steadfastness amidst men and the daysprings of Divine Utterance to all that dwell on earth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, §173)

The Learned

Know thou that he is truly learned who hath acknowledged My Revelation, and drunk from the Ocean of My knowledge, and soared in the atmosphere of My love, and cast away all else besides Me, and taken firm hold on that which hath been sent down from the Kingdom of My wondrous utterance. He, verily, is even as an eye unto mankind, and as the spirit of life unto the body of all creation.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 207-208)

Mirza Abul Fadl
1844–1914

pre-eminent scholar of
the Bahá'í Faith
Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh

pioneer in Egypt
sent to USA 1901-1904
to deepen American
Bahá'ís



Pre-eminent Scholar

Pure souls, such as Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl, upon him be the Glory of God, spend their nights and days in demonstrating the truth of the Revelation, by adducing conclusive and brilliant proofs and expanding the verities of the Faith, by lifting the veils, promoting the religion of God and spreading His fragrances.

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet, translated from the Persian, *Scholarship*, pp. 14-15)

Wisdom of Scholars

...there are those famed and accomplished men of learning, possessed of praiseworthy qualities and vast erudition, who lay hold on the strong handle of the fear of God and keep to the ways of salvation. In the mirror of their minds the forms of transcendent realities are reflected, and the lamp of their inner vision derives its light from the sun of universal knowledge. They are busy by night and by day with meticulous research into such sciences as are profitable to mankind, and they devote themselves to the training of students of capacity.

Wisdom of Scholars

It is certain that to their discerning taste, the proffered treasures of kings would not compare with a single drop of the waters of knowledge, and mountains of gold and silver could not outweigh the successful solution of a difficult problem. To them, the delights that lie outside their work are only toys for children, and the cumbersome load of unnecessary possessions is only good for the ignorant and base. Content, like the birds, they give thanks for a handful of seeds, and the song of their wisdom dazzles the minds of the world's most wise.

Qualities of Scholars

The spiritually learned must be characterized by both inward and outward perfections; they must possess a good character, an enlightened nature, a pure intent, as well as intellectual power, brilliance and discernment, intuition, discretion and foresight, temperance, reverence, and a heartfelt fear of God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1875), The Secret of Divine Civilization)

Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney

1873-1928

Disciple of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

First French Bahá'í
translated Writings
into French

undertook many
missions for
'Abdu'l-Bahá
and the Guardian



Bahá'í Scholarship

The Universal House of Justice... regards Bahá'í scholarship as of great potential importance for the development and consolidation of the Bahá'í community as it emerges from obscurity.

(Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1979)

Bahá'í Scholars

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 21 October 1943)

Bahá'í Scholars

Young men and women in the Faith must be deep and thoughtful scholars of its teachings, so that they can teach in a way that will convince people that all the problems facing them "have a remedy".

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 12 May 1944)

Bahá'í Scholars

In these days when people are so sceptical about religion and look with so much contempt towards religious organizations and movements, there seems to be more need than ever for our young Bahá'ís to be well equipped intellectually, so that they may be in a position to present the Message in a befitting way, and in a manner that would convince every unbiased observer of the effectiveness and power of the Teachings.

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 May 1934)

Acquiring Scholarship

God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1875), *The Secret of Divine Civilization*)

Purpose of Scholarship

We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfill his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man's, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1875), *The Secret of Divine Civilization*)

Bahá'í Scholars

An effort should be made to raise the standard of studies, so as to provide the Bahá'í student with a thorough knowledge of the Cause that would enable him to expound it befittingly to the educated public.

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 November 1937)

Bahá'í Scholars

...the friends need greatly to study the more profound works which would give them spiritual maturity to a greater degree...

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 24 February 1946)

Bahá'í Scholars

All aspects of the Faith should be deeply studied...

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 4 May 1946)

Bahá'í Scholars

By 'verities of the Faith' he means the great teachings and fundamentals enshrined in our Bahá'í literature; these we can find by reading the books, studying under Bahá'í scholars at summer schools and in classes, and through the aid of study outlines.

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 19 April 1947)

Bahá'í Scholars

We need Bahá'í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well read and well educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society.

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 July 1949)

The Basis of all Knowledge

When studying at school or university Bahá'í youth will often find themselves in the unusual and slightly embarrassing position of having a more profound insight into a subject than their instructors. The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh throw light on so many aspects of human life and knowledge that a Bahá'í must learn, earlier than most, to weigh the information that is given to him rather than to accept it blindly.

(Universal House of Justice, 10 June 1966, *Wellsprings of Guidance*, pp. 95-96)

The Basis of all Knowledge

A Bahá'í has the advantage of the Divine Revelation for this age, which shines like a searchlight on so many problems that baffle modern thinkers; he must therefore develop the ability to learn everything from those around him, showing proper humility before his teachers, but always relating what he hears to the Bahá'í teachings, for they will enable him to sort out the gold from the dross of human error.

(Universal House of Justice, 10 June 1966, *Wellsprings of Guidance*, pp. 95-96)

Bahá'í Scholarship

Bahá'í scholarship is needed really more than worldly scholarship, for one is spiritual and the other more or less transient. There is a real lack in the Cause of people who know the teachings thoroughly, especially their deeper truths, and who can consequently teach the souls properly and lay a permanent foundation, one that tests and trials will not shake down.

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 27 August 1951)

Knowledge and Ignorance

There are certain fundamental concepts that all should bear in mind. One is the centrality of knowledge to social existence. The perpetuation of ignorance is a most grievous form of oppression; it reinforces the many walls of prejudice that stand as barriers to the realization of the oneness of humankind, at once the goal and operating principle of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

(The Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2010)

Access to Knowledge

Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and participation in its generation, application and diffusion a responsibility that all must shoulder in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization—each individual according to his or her talents and abilities. Justice demands universal participation.

(The Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2010)



John Ferraby, Adib Taherzadeh, Hassan Balyuzi
Hand of the Cause; Counsellor-UHJ; Hand of the Cause

Advances in Knowledge

The profound changes now shaping human affairs suggest that new models of life—far reaching in their capacity to release human potential—are within the grasp of a rapidly evolving global community. Advances in knowledge across an ever-expanding range of disciplines, the emergence of international mechanisms that promote collective decision-making and action, and the increasing ability of the masses of humankind to articulate their aspirations and needs, portend a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet.

(ISGP, Science, Religion and Development: Some Initial Considerations, 20 November 2008)