



# Knowledge

## Knowledge and Information

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Knowledge

# Knowledge

We are learning throughout our lifetime but what is the role of knowledge and its importance? A student, of course, expects to acquire knowledge through classes, and this is an important part of building human capacity. An increased understanding can come from reading, listening or watching, or from practical experience, leading to an increasing range of information in one's memory that can be called upon when needed.

# Knowledge

By its very nature, knowledge is abstract or intangible until it is recorded in some physical format outside of your brain. In today's world, there is a whole science of information, and technologies for its recording and transmission. So what role does knowledge play in living your life? How do you come to appreciate its significance and make use of it effectively?

# Knowledge

*...in the sight of God knowledge is the greatest human virtue and the noblest human perfection. To oppose knowledge is pure ignorance, and he who abhors knowledge and learning is not a human being but a mindless animal. For knowledge is light, life, felicity, perfection, and beauty, and causes the soul to draw nigh to the divine threshold. It is the honour and glory of the human realm and the greatest of God's bounties. Knowledge is identical to guidance, and ignorance is the essence of error. Happy are those who spend their days in the pursuit of knowledge, in the discovery of the secrets of the universe, and in the meticulous investigation of truth!*

# Knowledge

We come to see the importance of knowledge in the Bahá'í revelation, which is the source of Divine knowledge. We need to learn both how to know and to worship God, and to absorb and live by the principles and laws revealed for today to help us to grow spiritually, to refine our characters, and to contribute to advancing civilisation.



Centre for the Study of the Texts, Bahá'í World Centre

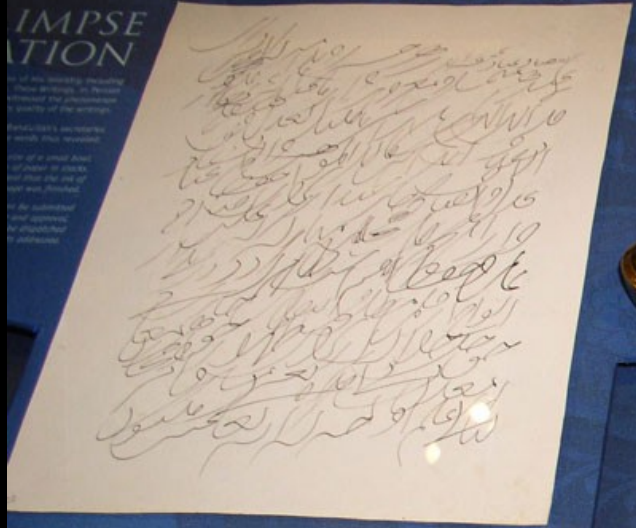
# Knowledge

We embark on a lifelong process of deepening in the Bahá'í writings, the history of the Faith, and the many commentaries and applications of spiritual principles in all the domains of life. This opens to us the domain of Divine knowledge as translated into human terms by the revelation of His Manifestation.

# Bahá'í Sacred Writings

IMPSE  
TION

... of his instantly changing  
... these writings, it Persian  
... the phenomenon  
... quality of the writings.  
Bahá'u'lláh's secretary  
... words thus revealed.  
... of a small sheet  
... of paper, it is clear  
... that the use of  
... paper was finished.  
... to be submitted  
... and approved  
... or disapproved  
... by Bahá'u'lláh.

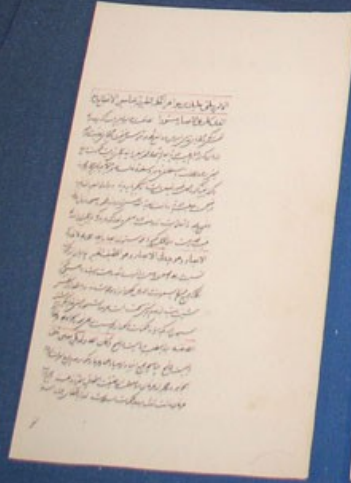


A leaf from the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude) written by the Báb in the early 1840s. The manuscript is written in Nasta'liq script, the standard form of Persian calligraphy used by Bahá'u'lláh and other Bahá'ís.



The case and quills from the private use of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh's father and Bahá'u'lláh's grandfather.

A reproduction of the slender volume - including a sample page - that was the earliest entire transcription of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude). This first volume was in the handwriting of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Revealed in 1842.



Two verses of *The Hidden Words* (Arabic, nos. 68 and 69) in Bahá'u'lláh's handwriting, later decorated with



# Knowledge of God

*From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favor and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign of His knowledge, so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* CXXIV, p.261-264)

# Knowledge of God

*The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge. Every created thing will be enabled (so great is this reflecting power) to reveal the potentialities of its preordained station, will recognize its capacity and limitations, and will testify to the truth that “He, verily, is God; there is none other God besides Him.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings CXXIV, p.261-264)*

Bahá'í  
children's  
class

New  
Caledonia



# Those Who Have Knowledge

In “*The Secret of Divine Civilization*”, written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1875, He defines the standard for the “*learned*”, which includes “*perfection in learning and the cultural attainments of the mind*”.

# Perfection in Learning

This should comprise a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God; the sacred scriptures and laws of all the religions; the natural sciences; those regulations and procedures contributing to progress and civilization; the laws and principles, the customs, traditions and manners, and the moral and material virtues of every nation; all the useful branches of learning of the day; and the historical records of bygone governments and peoples.

# Perfection in Learning

‘Abdu’l-Bahá admits that such fully developed and comprehensively learned individuals are presently hard to come by, and could be replaced with a body of scholars each expert in one of the above branches of knowledge.

# Knowledge and Information

In the material civilisation of today, we rely on scientific research and technological innovation to create new knowledge. We see increasingly the risks from our industrial civilisation. We develop technologies and use chemicals and other materials without considering their implications for our Earth system.

# Knowledge and Information

Different kinds of information in our civilisation are in conflict, and we are not asking questions about whether they are good or bad. Should we question material civilisation?

We are missing moral or ethical values about what is just or equitable, which could be considered a critical kind of knowledge or information.



# Excess of Civilization

*The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men.... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.... The day is approaching when its flame will devour the cities...*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, [Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh](#), CLXIV, p. 342-343)*

# Material and Spiritual Civilization

*...until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions are imminent.... Progress and barbarism go hand in hand, unless material civilization be confirmed by Divine Guidance... and be reinforced by spiritual conduct...*

*(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, [Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá](#), 225, p. 283-284)*

# Indigenous Knowledge

Beyond Western scientific knowledge, there are many other forms such as Indigenous knowledge, with alternative world views and profound spirituality despite the impacts of long colonisation. This is often coherent with modern science, while showing the rich diversity of kinds of information and rules of community organisation that made their Indigenous cultures so successful despite the limits of their environment.

Sacred  
Taboo  
area of  
resource  
managers

Lau  
Lagoon,  
Malaita,  
Solomon  
Islands



Traditional  
Meeting  
House

Kayangle  
Atoll  
Palau



Taro  
cultivation

Butaritari  
Atoll  
Kiribati



# Information for System Change

Donella Meadows, lead author of *The Limits to Growth* and its updates, summarized what she had learned about complex systems in a paper on *Leverage Points* in a system, analysing the kinds of information that might bring about system change. At the highest levels, one should change the paradigm within which the system was conceived, above that the values that determined how the system functions, and at the very top, about every thousand years, a new religion that would bring a new system of values to civilisation.

*Limits to Growth 1972*

THE LIMITS TO  
growth

Donella H. Meadows

Dennis L. Meadows

Jørgen Randers

William W. Behrens III

*A Report for THE CLUB OF ROME'S Project on the  
Predicament of Mankind*



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\$ 2.75



# Knowledge

Knowledge and information are generally treated in silos by separate institutions and professional disciplines, when the need is increasingly for holistic, integrated knowledge.

# Knowledge

Our scientific and technological civilization has flourished by encouraging increasing specialization. With the rapid multiplication of knowledge and the techniques for storing and transmitting it, the human capacity to absorb and use knowledge is rapidly saturated, so we end up by knowing more and more about less and less, compensating our increasing specialization with a division of labour among more and more specialists.

# Knowledge

This is accompanied by a reductionist approach that assumes that if you know each part, you also know the whole. While this may be true of machines, more complex systems like computer programmes, ecosystems and people show emergent properties that cannot be predicted simply from a knowledge of the component parts.

# Free Access to Information

Information is not a physical resource that diminishes if it is used. In fact, information becomes more valuable the more it is shared, benefiting thousands or millions of people without diminishing the original information. With the internet, free access is universally possible as a public utility, although some companies would like to privatize it.

# Free Access to Information

*A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity.*

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*)



Learning

# Information as a Public Good

Should information be private property or a public good? The concept of intellectual property is one of the foundations of the present economic system. We have built a system for intellectual property rights, including patents, trade marks, and copyright, enshrined in national law and managed globally by the UN World Intellectual Property Organization. Patents are the foundation of modern industries, and are intended to make new discoveries public in exchange for a limited period (usually 20 years) of exclusive rights.

# Information as a Public Good

Today knowledge and information that used to be freely available becomes the property of multinational corporations intent on managing it for maximum profit. With the medium of the new information technologies and social networks, we are all exploited to extract our information, which is assembled in "big data" used to target us with the advertisements we will be most susceptible to, and the news that will reinforce our prejudices and confirmation biases.



# Information as a Public Good

We are far from knowledge as truth, the goal of science, and are flooded with misinformation which has not been verified, and disinformation or propaganda that knowingly manipulates public opinion for profit or political objectives. It becomes hard to know what to believe, or what information sources are reliable and trustworthy.

# A Human Right to Knowledge

Is there a human right to access information, or is it normal that we have to pay for it? For those who cannot afford to pay for information, is it damaging for society that they do not have access? Inequality in access to information is as unjust as extremes of poverty and wealth. Access to knowledge has spiritual benefits and should never be limited.

# Knowledge

*Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone.*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf)*

# Information Creation

Is profit the only motive for creation and innovation? What about scientific curiosity, the desire to help others or to advance civilization? Are we inherently selfish, or can altruistic motivations be more important? How do we encourage creation for the common good, for everyone's benefit? For individuals, an ethical education and spiritual motivation will be determinant. For corporations, which today are driven only by profit, we need to add to their corporate charters a social motivation and responsibility to be of service to society. Profit should be one measure of efficiency among others, but not an end in itself.

# Information Creation

Even access to scientific discoveries has largely been privatised, as the major journals have increasingly been bought up by multinational scientific publishers who protect everything by copyright and require payment to read each paper. Should the poor be excluded from science because they cannot pay?

# Free Access to Information

There are many benefits from the free access to information, from political transparency to health information and environmental warnings. It facilitates democracy and elections, and encourages public participation. It can also shed light on attempts to manipulate people, to incite hatred (as during the genocide in Ruanda), or even to wage cyberwarfare.

# Free Access to Information

From the perspective of system science, it is the exchange of information between the different components that allows the system to organize and function. The more highly evolved and productive a system is, the more developed and diversified are its networks of communication and coordination. Limiting the circulation of information by privatizing it deprives the poor and slows the advance of our civilization.

# Children's Class

