

# Secret of Divine Civilization Study questions

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## Background Questions:

1. How does the Beloved Guardian describe this work? (World Order of Bahá'u'lláh page 37)
2. When was this work revealed? What are the other title of this work? (WOB: P. 37).
3. What were the social, historical and theological contexts in which this book was written?
4. Who asked the Master to undertake this work and for what purposes? (\* The Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Persian) By Muhammad-Ali Faizi Page 42\*)
5. In how many volumes was this work intentioned to be written? (p. 19-20 and Page 106)
6. What is meant by "were it not our purpose to be brief and to develop our primary subject, we would here set down a summary of themes from the Divine World...let this be, for another time"? (p. 19-20)  
  
Are there any writings that deal with "themes from the divine world, as to the reality of man and his high station" which 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed after this book? (Hint: Some Answered Questions)
7. How many times has this book been translated? by whom? when? From what language into what language? (p. v-ix)
8. Why did the Master withhold his name from the work? (p. 6)
9. How does the Master define the station of man? (his nature and station; p. 3-4)
10. What is the cohesive relation between the nature of man and the aim and purpose of creation (p. 3-4)
11. Who is the Shah that is being referred to in the following statement: "His majesty the Shah has, at the present time, resolved to bring about the advancement of the Persian people"? (p. 5)
12. Does the above mentioned statement truly describe the Shah or is it just another attempt to cause reflection on the state of affairs in Iran? (p. 5)
13. What is meant by "Guidance toward righteousness is in itself a righteous act"? (p. 6)
14. How does the master describe the past of Persia? What are His aims in doing so? (p. 6-9)
15. What is meant by: "It should not be imagined that the people of Persia are inherently deficient in intelligence.... God forbid! on the contrary, they have

- always excelled all other peoples in endowments conferred by birth"? (p. 9)
16. According to the statements of the Master, what were the main factors that contribute to the rise and fall of great nations? (p. 10)
  17. What are the qualities of a just king? (p. 11) Did the Master see these qualities in the Shah or was He just trying to encourage him to strive towards these attributes?
  18. Who are the four groups that the Master addresses in this work? (p. 12)
  19. What are the main objections that the each of the four groups had towards modernity and change? (p. 12-13)
  20. How does the Master respond to those who "maintain that these modern concepts apply only to other countries and are irrelevant to Iran"? (p. 13-25)
  21. What are the main components of the modernity that the beloved Master is offering to the Persians? (p. 14-15)
  22. What are the causes of social deficiencies in a society? (p. 16)
  23. What are the qualifications of the "persons functioning in assemblies of consultation?"
  24. Could we also conclude that members of the Bahá'í Institutions should be the possessors of these qualities in order for "the confirmations of God" to "make them a never failing source of bounty to mankind"? (p. 16-17)
  25. What are the essential requirements of the elected members of the Institutions? (p. 17)
  26. What are "the primary causes of oppression and injustice, or unrighteousness, irregularity and disorder" in a society? (p. 18)
  27. What is the purpose of man's creation? (p. 19)
  28. What are the three most noble stations in creation? (p. 20)
  29. What are the attributes of "just kings"? (p. 20)
  30. What are the attributes of "honorable ministers of state and representatives"? (p. 20-21)¥3
  31. Who are meant by "those famed and accomplished men of learning"? What are their attributes? (p. 21)
  32. What is the main objective in establishing parliaments? (p. 23)
  33. What are 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks concerning wealth? Does he denunciate wealth? What makes wealth a praiseworthy object? (p. 24)
  34. What does "wealth is most commendable provided the entire population is wealthy" mean? (p. 24)
  35. What are the "philanthropic purposes? Please give some examples. (p. 25)

36. What are the main objections or causes of being anti-reformist by "those who maintain that the inauguration of reforms... would in reality be at variance with the good pleasure of God"? (p. 25)

37. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá link the tradition "He who imitates a people is one of them" with the holy tradition "see after knowledge, even unto China"? (p. 25-26)

38. What were some of the practices of "the people of the Days of Ignorance...which the Law of Islam later confirmed"? (p. 28)

39. Can we assume or believe that none of the laws or principles in a given religion should resemble the customs or sayings of the people of the time? Is such a thing possible? (p. 28-29)

40. What are the qualities of the eminent divines and men of learning? p. 32-33)

41. What are the four qualities of a learned person? (p. 34)

42. What does "as for him who is one of the learned: he must guard himself" mean? (p. 34-35)

43. What are the attributes of perfection? (p. 35-40)

44. What does "Cultural attainments of the mind" mean and how can one achieve this? (p. 35)

Is this suggesting the use of a form called Critical Thinking?

What is meant by " The Reality of man is his thoughts"?

45. What are the main duties of scholars in the world? (p. 39-40)

Is "Scholar" the same as " Spiritually Learned"?

What does SPIRITUAL mean? Is Spirituality a holistic aspect of MIND, BODY and SOUL of an individual?

46. How can a person become a "fully developed and comprehensively learned individual"? Is such a thing possible? How does the Master resolve the above fact with the need for "comprehensive knowledge"? (p. 37)

Does what the Master offer, establish a model for the future research centers in the world? Do we (Bahá'ís) have such centers established? Where?

47. What does "he should be the defender of his faith" mean? Does this "refer exclusively... to observing the forms of worship, avoiding greater and lesser sins"? (p. 41)

48. Is "entry by troops" and "increase the number of believers" a true implication of defending the Faith? (p. 41.)

49. Who was Luther? Was he one of the twelve members of a Catholic religious body? (p. 41)

50. According to the existing records, Luther was a professor of theology in Germany and a member of a local church, who visited the Vatican once as a

petitioner on behalf of his monastic order. How then should we understand the statement of the Master, "Luther, who was originally one of the twelve members of a Catholic religious body at the center of the Papal government"? Is this a metaphor (symbolic)? (p. 41)

51. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá interpret the traditions "I am a prophet by the sword" and "I am commanded to threaten the lives of the people until they say, There is none other God but God"? Does this mean Muhammad propagated His religion by the sword? (p. 44-45)

52. What are the correct ways of propagating the Faith of God? (p. 46)

53. What is "one of the principle reasons why people of the other religions have shunned and failed to be converted to the Faith of God"? (p. 53)

54. What is "fanaticism and unreasoning religious zeal"? (p. 53)

55. In the Bahá'í Faith are there any guiding principles to help one not become a religious fanatic under the guise of faith? Please name some of these principles.

56. In one tradition it is stated, " I am a prophet by the Sword" and "I am commanded to threaten the lives of the people until they say 'there is none other God but God'". (p. 44)

Is not this another sign of religious fanaticism? How does the Master reconcile this problem with the passage quoted from the Quran (16:126), "Debate with them in the kindest manner"? (p. 53)

57. Was Islam a universal religion? (p. 53)

58. What does "That Blessed Tree whose light was neither of the East nor of the West" mean?

59. Why, in light of the above statements, did Islam not become a universal faith "who cast over all the peoples of the earth"? (p. 53-54)

60. What is the aim of the statement "If one is not allowed to associate with another, how can one guide him out of the dark and empty night of denial of 'there-is-no-God' into the bright morning of belief and the affirmation, 'but God'"? (p. 54)

61. How does the beloved Master describe the attributes of a true believer? (p. 55)

62. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá describe the state of the religious people of the time? (p. 56-57)

63. What is meant by "Not every cleric's turban is proof of countenance and knowledge"? (p. 54)¥5

64. According to the text of this book, what are some of the meanings of "opposes his passions"? What is passion? Are all passions bad? What is the measuring factor? (p. 59)

65. What is meant by, "Desire is a flame that has reduced to ashes uncounted lifetime harvests of the learned"? (p. 59)

66. What are the condition and base for judging a good character? (p. 60)

What is the difference between character and act?

What is the meaning of moderation in the Bahá'í Writings? (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh- i-Sayid Mahdi-Dahji)

67. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá describe the state of Europe at the time? (p. 60)

68. According to the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is it not correct to say that, a culture and civilization "unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as 'a confused medley of dreams'"?(p. 60) How does the Master describe the relationship between culture and morality? (p. 60-61)

69. What is the "primary purpose, the basic objective", in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions? (p. 60)

70. Does this mean that we consider the institutions as means? (p. 60) What are the distinctive features of Bahá'í institutions? (WOB)

71. What is meant by "Moral Civilization"? (p. 61)

72. Does moral civilization mean a civilization that is governed by science or religion? (p. 60-61)

73. What are some examples that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives in order "to demonstrate the fact that Europe is morally uncivilized"? (p. 61-63)

74. What are the elements of true civilization as have been outlined by the Master? (Please list at least five elements) (p. 64-65)

75. What does "all the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant" refer to? (p. 64)

76. By reading 'Abdu'l-Bahá's description of true civilization, should the political systems be separated from religion?

77. Could we ever "ensure the stability" and "establish a union of the nations" without collaboration of both the systems government and religion? (p. 64)

78. Please describe the relationship of Bahá'í Institutions and the leaders of political systems in the "Future Bahá'í Society"? (p. 64-66)

79. How does the Master describe the "size of the armaments of every government"? (p. 65)

80. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá's blue print for the future civilization ensure both the independence of the nations as well as "universal development and prosperity"? (p. 66)¥6

81. Would 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "all embracing pact" for the establishment of a true civilization eliminate the need for war at all levels? If yes, then what is meant by "a conquest can be praiseworthy thing, and there are times when war

becomes the powerful basis of peace"? (p. 70-71)

82. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "There are two mighty banners which, when they cast their shadow across the crown of any king, will cause the influence of his government to quickly and easily penetrate the whole earth". (p. 70) What are these two banners? What is meant by wisdom in the Bahá'í Writings? What does justice mean? (HWA, #2) How does justice differ from mercy? (ESW)

83. What is meant by being "obedient to the commandments of His Lord"? (p. 71) What should the spirit in which one obeys the commandments be? (love or fear?) (Hint: "Observe My commandments for the love of My Beauty" [Aqdas]) What constitutes the commandments, laws, principles, administrative orders, or all of these?

84. What does being "lowly before God" mean? (p. 71) What is the true meaning of humility?

85. What is meant by the statement: "Religion is the light of the world"? (p. 71) What does the word "religion" mean? Can religion become the cause of darkness and disunity? Is religion an "instrument" for the progress and happiness of mankind? In what context can religion become the cause of disunity? How can one measure the effectiveness of religion?

86. What does 'Abdu'l-Bahá mean by "the fundamentals of the Divine religions"? (p. 72) Please name some of these "fundamentals".

87. According to the Beloved Master's statements, what are the bases for people who have concluded that "religion is an obstacle to the progress of mankind"? (p. 72) How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá refute the argument that religion is "divisive factor"? (p. 72)

88. Who is Voltaire? What century did he live in? (p. 72) Is he the same person who was against tyranny, bigotry and cruelty? What is 'Abdu'l-Bahá referring to when he describes Voltaire's works on religion as the "works which are no better than children's playthings"? (p. 72-73)

89. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, what was the main reason for Voltaire's "unsound" reasoning against religion? (p. 73)

90. By the reading of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exact statements about Voltaire, could we conclude that one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's main points is to show that "the principles of Divine Religions can hardly be evaluated by the acts of those who only claim to follow them"? Can this statement also be true about Bahá'ís whose life does not reflect the writings?

91. What does "A lighted Lamp in the hands of an ignorant child or of the blind will not dispel the surrounding darkness or light up the house - it will set both the bearer and the house on fire" mean? (p. 72) What are the implications of this statement on the teaching campaigns and the "entry by troops"?

92. What is the greatest instrument "for achieving the advancement and glory of man..."? (p. 73)

93. How does the Beloved Master show that "religion is the very basis and root-principle of culture and civilization?" (p. 75-79)
94. Is there any historical evidence to show that "Socrates after having eagerly journeyed to meet with some of Israel's most illustrious scholars and divines, established the concept of the oneness of God after returning to Greece?" (p. 77) What is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's purpose in making this statement? (p. 80)
95. What does 'Abdu'l-Bahá mean by "Jesus, then founded the Sacred Law on a basis of moral character and complete spirituality"? (p. 82) What is "Sacred Law"?
96. What is meant by "the generality of mankind are unable to grasp a sequence of logical arguments, for this reason they stand in need of symbols and parables..."? (p. 84)
97. What are some of the practical impacts of Christianity on advancing civilization? (p. 85-86)
98. What centuries constitute the Middle Ages? (p. 86)
99. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá describe the Middle Ages? (p. 86-87)
100. What was the impact of Islam on Europe? (p. 88-89)
101. How does the Master demonstrate the fact that "the beginnings of European Civilization date from the Seventh Century of the Muslim era"? (p. 90-96)
102. Who is "Draper", referred to by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the statement, "Draper, the well-known French authority, a writer whose accuracy, ability and learning are attested by all European scholars"? (p. 92-93)
103. According to Draper, what were the main contributions of Islam to European civilization? (p. 93-94)
104. What are the main themes in John W. Draper's book called "The Age of Reason in Europe and the Future of the World Order" (ISBN 0899013589 published 7/1/1988)?  
Is this book the same book that the Master is referring to? (P. 92)
105. How does the Master describe the world of politics? (p. 107)
106. How does the Master's description of the world political systems differ from Prince by Niccolo Machiavelli?  
(\* The Prince - the world's pre-eminent how-to manual on the art of getting and keeping power, and one of the literary landmarks of the Italian Renaissance; a treatise on states, statecraft, and the ideal ruler.\*)
107. What are the problems with the current system of education? (p. 105-106)  
How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá wish to reform the process of education? What are the ultimate goals for engaging in the study of any subject? (p. 106-107)
108. What did 'Abdu'l-Bahá hope for the reader to obtain (achieve) from

reading "The Secret of Divine Civilization"? (p. 106)

109. How does "Fundamental changes in the thinking and behavior of society" influence civilization? (p. 106-107) Does change in thinking impact the change in behavior? Is "Change in the thinking" the same as change in believing something?

110. What are the main components of a good political system? (p. 107-108)

111. What is the most urgent and primary cause of prosperity in one country? (p. 109)

112. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá describe the role of education in achieving prosperity? (p. 109)

113. What kinds of books and articles need to be written or published for society? (p. 109)

114. What is meant by "Public opinion must be directed toward whatever is worthy of this day"? (p. 110)

115. What steps need to be taken in one society in order to reach true happiness? (p. 108-112)

116. How does 'Abdu'l-Bahá direct the people to spread education throughout the land? (p. 111)

117. How does the Master describe the benefits of cooperation among the nations and warns against re-creation of techniques? (p. 112-115)

118. What are the results of superstitions? (p. 115) Who are the causes of superstitions?

119. What are the signs of having "faith" in something and believing in "superstitions"?

120. Is the principle of Harmony of Religion and Science one way to avoid superstitions?

What does harmony mean?

Does harmony imply agreement? If yes, then how could a science, which is empirical and derives from the human mind, agree with a reality which is metaphysical?

121. What is the last counsel of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in this book to the people of Persia? (p. 116)

More Comprehensive Questions:

122. Who are the primary addressees of this work? (Is the book addressed to the people of Persia or to the people of the world?)

Can we say that the context of this work is dealing with the social and political environment of Persia while the content of this work is for the whole world and is aiming to contribute to " the future reorganization of the world"

?

Can you provide some examples from the book to demonstrate the universal aspect of this work?

123. Since this work is another primary example of how one needs to teach the Faith to the non-Bahá'ís

Could you please show some teaching methods used by the beloved Master that one can learn in presenting the Faith to others?

124. Are there any guiding principles in this text that can be used in our community development? (List ten such principles).

125. Based on the reading of this text, what should be the main objective of a Bahá'í scholar?

126. What is "Fear of God" and how is it different from "Love of God"? Should our deeds be based on love or fear? Is this love or fear an intrinsic aspect of human nature? Is "Fear of God" or "Love of God" related in any way to the sense of "shame"?

127. Is it correct to assume that Ábdu'l-Bahá's main hope of writing the Secret of Divine Civilization was to "produce fundamental changes in the thinking and the behavior of society"?

If yes, then could you give some examples of such changes that could come about in the Bahá'í Community as a result of this work?

128. There are some historical statements in this work that seem to agree with the historical records available before us (\* Examples are on pages 41 and 77\*).

How should one view such statements in the writings?

Is there any given guidelines concerning such statements in the works of the beloved Guardian?

Are these statements other examples of the need for having "comprehensive" knowledge about all the subjects?

What should the attitude of a Bahá'í scholar be on these issues?

Can the statement concerning the records of the past that they, "Are not adequately set down in authoritative histories" (p. 74) be a guiding light for scholars to resolve these inconsistencies?

Would it be possible for the author to have other aims than accuracy of the historical data?

129. What is meant by "religious faith"? ( p. 96)

130. What is meant by "self-love"? What are some of the signs of self-love that are referred to in the text?

131. What are some examples of "The publication of high thoughts is the dynamic power in the arteries of life"?

What are some examples of "high thoughts"?

Could this mean that we need to study the works of the great thinkers of our time?

What are the practical results of such publications?

How can a Bahá'í scholar use this guideline when s/he writes or publishes any of his/her work?

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