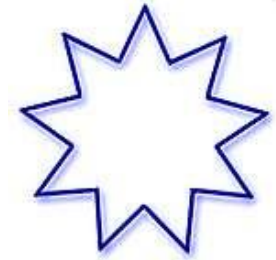
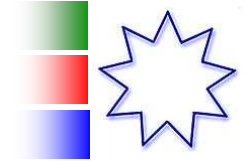


The Tablet of Maqsúd



An Introduction
to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Do you know this teaching?



“The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens”

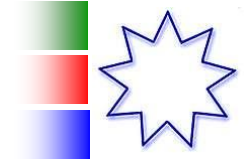
This is one of the best known quotes from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

It is also one of the most used public statements to represent the Bahá'í Faith.

Probably most Bahá'ís are aware of this teaching.



And what about these?



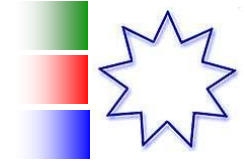
- “You are fruits of one tree, leaves of one branch.”
- “Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him.”
- “Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence.”
- “Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth.”

These statements are often known even by those who may have only a limited knowledge about the Bahá'í Faith. They all, of course, describe some of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

They all also have a common source: the Tablet of Maqsúd.



A first encounter

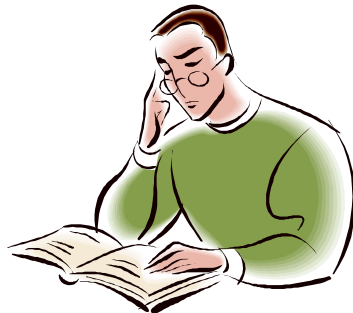


The content of the Tablet of Maqṣúd can be seen as a good presentation of the principles and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. Its structure is suitable to anyone, including someone who is first coming into contact with the Bahá'í Writings.

Before starting an analysis of Tablet we must remember the following:



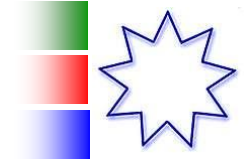
A sacred text has its own very specific features. We must acquaint ourselves with the style, know the terminology, and remember the purpose of the author, if we want to understand the intended meaning of the text.



If we are not aware of these features, we run a serious risk of not understanding the text.



Some challenges...



The Writings revealed by Bahá'u'lláh may present several difficulties to a reader. For example:

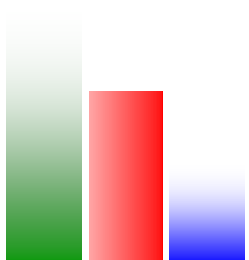
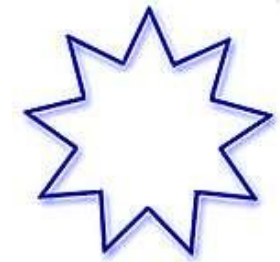
CONTEXT → What were the circumstances surrounding the revelation of the text? When and where was it revealed? Why was it revealed? Does the text contain answers pertaining to a specific believer? (If so, then what are the questions and what are the motivations that lead to Bahá'u'lláh's response?)

THEMES → There often are several secondary themes within the overall major subject areas that can go unnoticed if minor phrases and metaphors are not seriously considered.

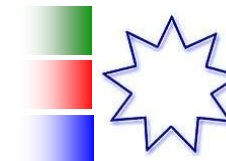
STYLE → The overlapping of themes and the connections between them are frequent features of the Writings. In the middle of any given text, we may well find invocations and prayers.



Background



The Tablet of Maqsúd



Akka, 1880

This Tablet was revealed in 'Akka on the 20th of January 1882 during the fourth exile of Bahá'u'lláh.

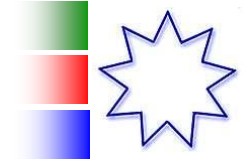
Parts of this Tablet were published during the 20th Century.

A full English translation was released in 1978 and later in other languages in a volume entitled "Epistles of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas".

This book contains a series of tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh during the last years of his life; these clarify and reaffirm some teachings previously established.



Who was Maqsúd? (1)



The addressee was a believer named Mirza Maqsúd living in Syria . Little is known about him.

The very Tablet of Maqsúd turns out to be the main source of information about this believer.

We know that Maqsúd lived in Damascus and had written at least twice to Bahá'u'lláh.



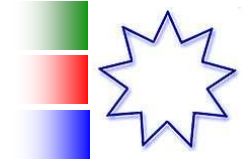
Damascus, 1877

We also know that he was dedicated to poetry and that some of his poems were recited in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh.

In these poems one could perceive just how much he wanted to visit Him personally.



Who was Maqsúd? (2)



Bahá'u'lláh probably liked Maqsúd because He says that He will remember him and also says that God will remember him. Bahá'u'lláh adds that the name of Maqsúd is often mentioned in His presence.

When the tablet was revealed, Maqsúd was preparing to make a trip to Mosul (Iraq) in order to teach the Bahá'í Faith.

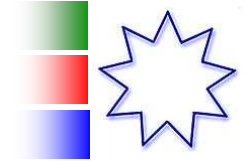
Bahá'u'lláh makes some recommendations to him for this trip, advising him to use tact and wisdom.

Bahá'u'lláh also presents some spiritual and material advice. He tells him that if he is happy with everything in his life, then whatever happens to him would be worthy of praise. He also warns him to get a profession!

Towards the end of the Epistle, Bahá'u'lláh also reveals a prayer for Maqsúd.



Historical Background

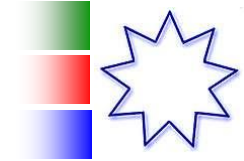


In the years prior to the revelation of the Tablet of Maqsúd two events occurred that disturbed the Islamic world and which also impacted on the newly-born Baha'i community:

- The Russian-Ottoman war (1877-1878).
- Crisis in Egypt: the bombardment of Alexandria (1882)



The Ottoman humiliation (1878)



The Russian-Ottoman war (1877-1878) had its roots in several massacres of Christians within the Ottoman provinces. It began with Russian support of nationalist movements in the Balkans, and ended with huge territorial losses for the Ottoman Empire :

- Independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria
- Bessarabia and Kars (Russia)
- Cyprus (United Kingdom),
- Bosnia-Herzegovina (Austro-Hungarian Empire)



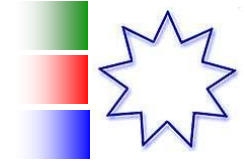
Ottoman territorial losses (1877)



Capitulation of Turks in Nikopol (1877)



Alexandria (1882)



The bombardment of Alexandria was preceded by a political crisis that ignited a riot in the city that killed about 50 Europeans. The British fleet destroyed the city.

"Today, at the time I writing, Alexandria is just a huge pile of ruins. Of the European quarter, the famous Consuls Square, the hotels, banks, offices of corporations, the coffee-brothels, there is only left a confusing rubble on the ground, and here and there a darkened wall that collapses. For the fourth time in history, Alexandria ceased to exist."

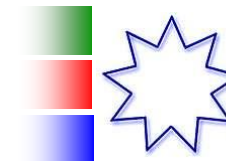
Eça de Queirós



Alexandria after the bombardment (1882)



Themes of the Tablet



In the Tablet of Maqsúd it is possible to identify some central themes:

- Revelation and Religion,
- Civilization and
- The Human Being.

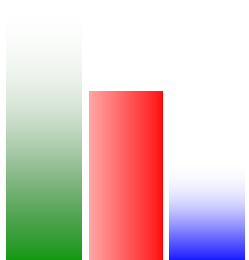
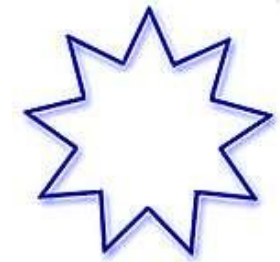


We can also identify some secondary themes to which Bahá'u'lláh devotes only a paragraph or a line.

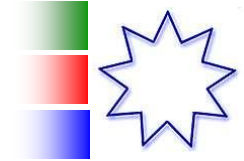
These themes are intertwined with each other and also with words addressed to Maqsúd in invocations and prayers.



Revelation and Religion



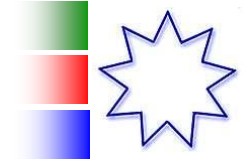
Many questions about religion...



- What is religion?
- Why are there so many religions?
- Why do religions have positive and negative influence?
- Are religions compatible?
- Is it possible that there is only one true religion and all others are false?
- Is there any religion that is the final word of God to humanity?



Revelation and Religion



In the Tablet of Maqsúd, Bahá'u'lláh affirms the veracity of the major world religions and describes them as steps in a gradual process of Divine Revelation. At the same time, He rejects any claim of exclusivism or finality proclaimed by the clergy in any religion.

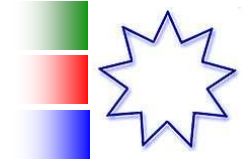
The founder of the Bahá'í Faith says that God sends Divine Messengers cyclically to humanity. These messengers - the founders of major world religions - bring teachings whose aim is to guide and enlighten the people.

And whenever a Divine Messenger appeared, He was persecuted and accused of being the instigator of misery and distress among the people.

The second paragraph of the Tablet of Maqsúd contains a summary of this concept that in Baha'i terminology is known as "Progressive Revelation."



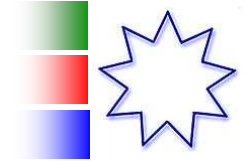
Revelation and Religion



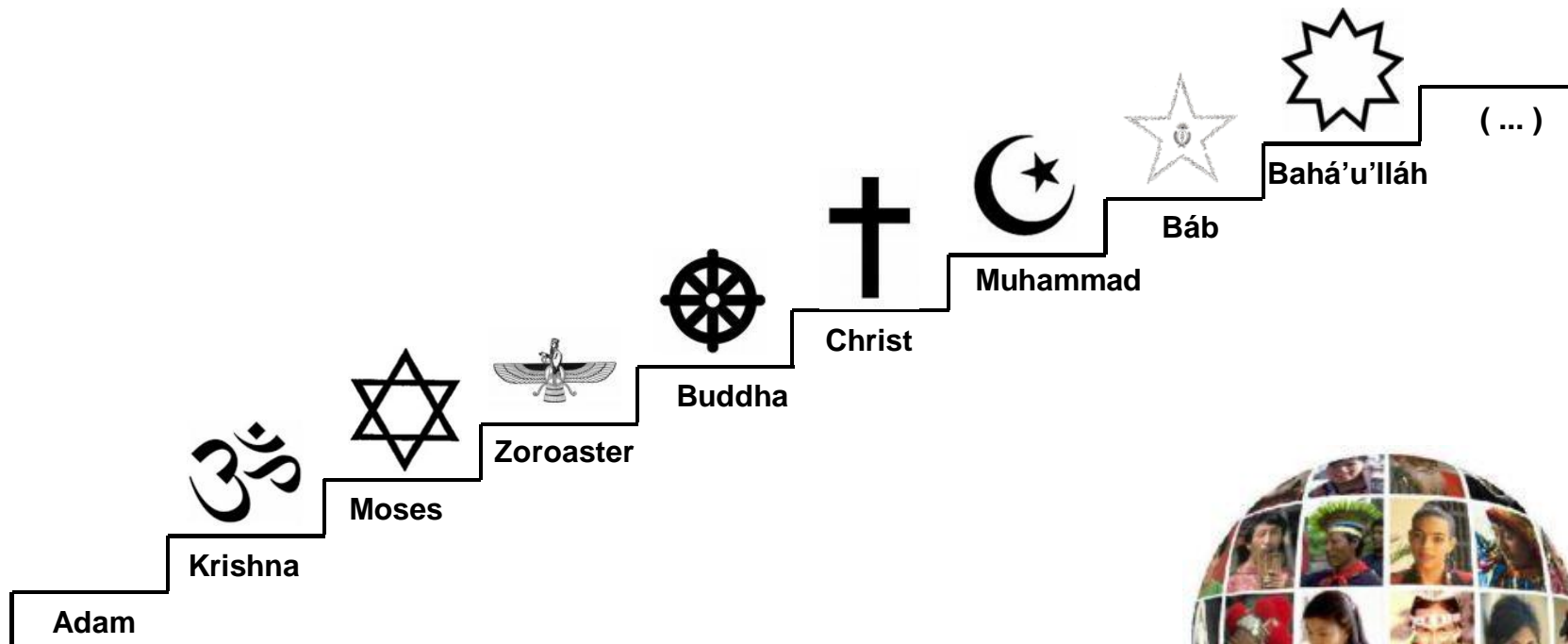
“Moreover He hath in every age and cycle, in conformity with His transcendent wisdom, sent forth a divine Messenger to revive the dispirited and despondent souls with the living waters of His utterance, One Who is indeed the Expounder, the true Interpreter, inasmuch as man is unable to comprehend that which hath streamed forth from the Pen of Glory and is recorded in His heavenly Books. Men at all times and under all conditions stand in need of one to exhort them, guide them and to instruct and teach them. Therefore He hath sent forth His Messengers, His Prophets and chosen ones that they might acquaint the people with the divine purpose underlying the revelation of Books and the raising up of Messengers, and that everyone may become aware of the trust of God which is latent in the reality of every soul...” [2].



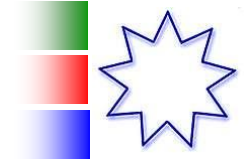
Revelation and Religion



GOD



Revelation and Religion



The Tablet of Maqṣúd shows us what the objectives of religion should be and what its potential as a regenerating agent in the world can be.

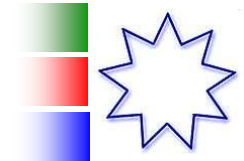
According to the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, the purpose of religion is *“safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity.”* [15].

Bahá'u'lláh adds a brief reference to religious leaders, who must consult with the government on what best serves the interest of humanity.

The religious leaders also have a role to play in the rehabilitation of the human condition.



Revelation and Religion



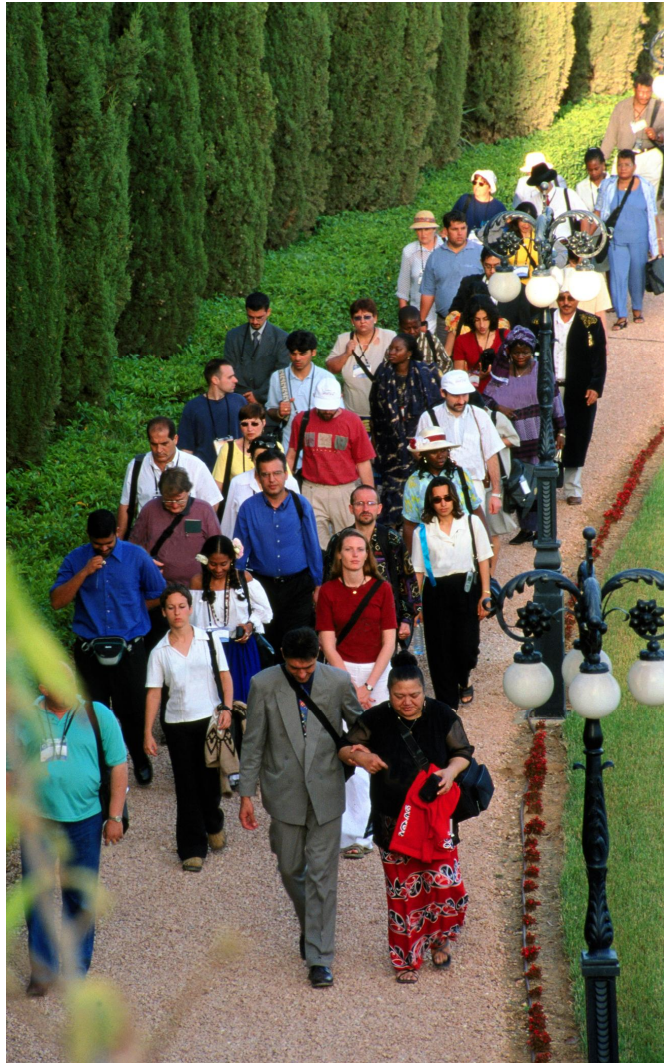
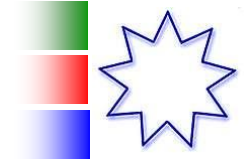
Throughout the evolution of humanity, there were major progress and terrible afflictions. We can not ignore the ability of religion to guide the development and mitigate sufferings.

According to Bahá'u'lláh, the Scriptures show the path to follow in the evolution of humanity and the means to solve the problems.

To illustrate this point, uses the metaphor “*fruits of the tree of wisdom*”^[3] to refer to the teachings of God contained in the Scriptures, and adds that the people of the world seems unable to appreciate the taste these fruits due to “*the fever of negligence and folly*”^[33].



Revelation and Religion



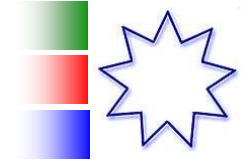
According to Bahá'u'lláh, the source of many of humanity's problems seems to lie in the inability of humans to put into practice the true teachings of any religion.

When a person puts into practice the teachings of a religion, he/she transforms himself/herself and affects in a positive way all those around him/her. The mere political and social transformations sustained in the Tablet will not have major effects just by themselves.

A change at the individual level is also required. As someone said, you can not make a gold society with people made of lead.



Revelation and Religion



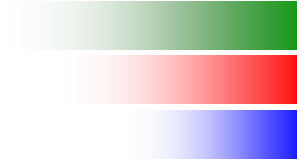
All religions have their own scriptures where the words, teachings and traditions associated with the Manifestations are recorded and demonstrated by the first believers.

Some of these Scriptures are considered as emanations of the Word of God.

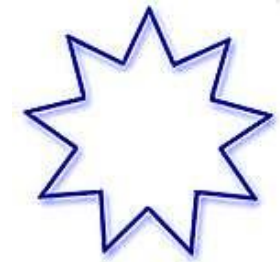
The Tablet of Maqsúd describes the Word of God as the most powerful force between in creation: “...*its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being*”^[32].

Although Bahá'u'lláh does not write much about this subject in this tablet, He uses interesting metaphors that describe the power of the Divine Word: “... *an ocean inexhaustible in riches*”^[32] “... *master key for the whole world*”^[32].

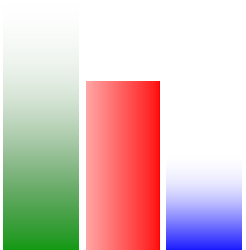




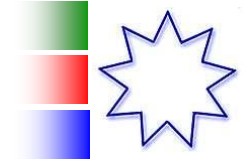
Civilization



World peace, the art of governing
and the well-being of people



The Condition of Mankind (1)



According to Bahá'u'lláh, humanity has been afflicted by several turmoils, and yet, nobody seems to have stopped for a moment to reflect on the reasons for the anxiety of the people. "*The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divideth and afflicteth the human race is daily increasing*" [27].

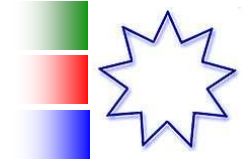


3rd May 1808, Goya

Human beings seem to be divided against each other and are always willing to conflict. When looking at the succession of conflicts and cruelty, and the persistence of some leaders in their pursuance of these types of acts, Bahá'u'lláh laments: "*How long will injustice continue? How long is chaos and confusion to reign amongst men? How long will discord agitate the face of society?*" [26]



The Condition of Mankind (2)



Although the world has changed a lot - for better and for worse – since the revelation of this Tablet until today, these questions still need to be updated and should make us think a little.

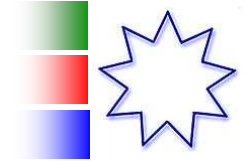
The problems Bahá'u'lláh mentions are not the problems of His own time. The words of the founder of Bahá'í Faith in this Tablet apply to the history of human civilization.

But Bahá'u'lláh does not have a fatalistic view. He says that the human being - as a rational creature - has all the capabilities to solve his problems, but strangely does not seem to want to use these skills to solve these problems.

To respond to current problems of humanity, Bahá'u'lláh advocates the need of a New World Order.



A New World Order (1)



The term "New World Order" has been used to describe significant changes and rebalancing of power in world politics.

The term had some use at the end of the two World Wars, but was only at the end of the Cold War, which began to be used more often.

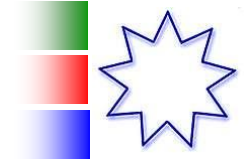
At that time, the American and Soviet presidents felt the need to define the nature of the world in a new era of cooperation between super-powers.

More recently, the term has again been used to describe the need for global solutions to environmental problems, economic crises, and other global problems as the administration of global institutions (World Bank, IMF, the G-20) as well as the creation of a military force to quickly intervene in failed states.

The term may also have a negative meaning and can be presented as synonym of "imperialism" or global dictatorship ("1984").



A New World Order (2)

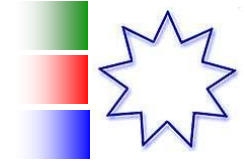


After characterizing political and social problems affecting the peoples of the earth, Baha'u'llah presents a formula to achieve peace and tranquility among them:

“The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquility of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. “ [8].



A New World Order (3)



The previous paragraph is one of the most quoted of the Bahá'í Writings and contains a formula that today seems obvious to anyone with a little common sense.

In recent history we witnessed a few attempts to implement plans like this. The League of Nations after WWI and now the United Nations are apt examples.

These two organizations were created in the aftermath of World Wars. In a way both reflect the world political balance at the time they were created. Over time both became inadequate to meet new global demands.

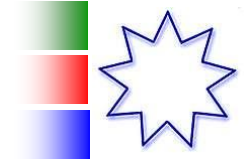


A meeting of the League of Nations, Geneva, 1936

National Archives of Canada



A New World Order (4)



It is not surprising, therefore, that demands for the reform of the UN is now current. The claim is that it needs to be more balanced, more interventionist, and more representative of current global conditions.

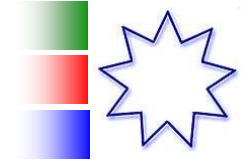
One possible interpretation of the words of Bahá'u'lláh, leads us to believe that such a world body should reflect the basic and desirable balance between all nations and not one that suits a particular balance between particular nations at a particular time in human history.



Can we build a world order that is strong enough to be broadly accepted and be flexible enough to adapt and sustain changes that inevitably will occur in the world?



The Art of Governing (1)

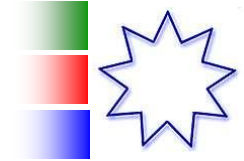


Today we talk a lot about the separation of State and Religion. It is more often than not that the modern constitutional state is required by law to separate these powers. This is in contrast to centuries of rule in which the religion of the majority was favored, often to the detriment of adherents of minority faiths. But it is not unusual to hear criticism of secular power interfering in religious affairs, and that of religious powers interfering in the affairs of state.

Bahá'u'lláh, however, never wanted to interfere in the affairs of governance. In the Epistle to the Kings He had already stated: "*It is not Our wish to lay hands on your kingdoms.*"



The Art of Governing (2)



But Bahá'u'lláh does not refrain from presenting several ethical values that should guide governance.

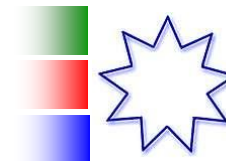
In the Tablet of Maqsúd, kings and rulers are described as "*symbols of the power of God*" [6].

Bahá'u'lláh says that justice must be the cornerstone of the acts of any statesman. His/Her purpose should be "*welfare, security and protection of mankind and the safety of human lives*" [12].

Bahá'u'lláh does not hesitate in condemning tyrants, and regrets that the "*tabernacle of justice hath fallen into the clutches of tyranny and oppression*" [11].



The Art of Governing (3)



In the Tablet of Maqsúd, Bahá'u'lláh further adds that the rulers should have a comprehensive world view.

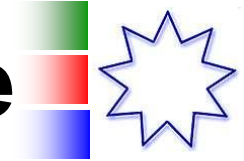
Service to the state cannot be accomplished only with the aim of bringing benefits to a particular people (over others), benefit only a segment of society or a certain social classes.

Bahá'u'lláh explains: "*That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race*" [13]. And concerning current nationalisms: "*It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens*" [13].

Rulers need be aware of this sense of justice and service to humanity in order to help the people realize what their best interests are.



An international auxiliary language

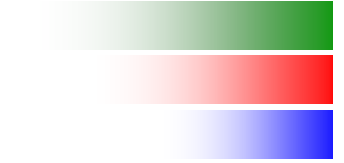


Another teaching presented in this Tablet is the adoption of an international auxiliary language: "*The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own home*" [10].

It is another measure to increase the understanding and harmony among the peoples of the world.

The nations of the earth should appoint men of wisdom who, through dialogue and consultation, will choose "*one language from among the varied existing languages, or create a new one, to be taught to the children in all the schools of the world*" [9].

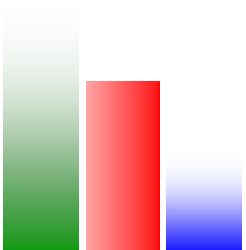




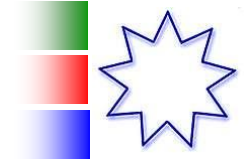
The Human Being



... and some ethic teachings.



Humanism



After the 15th century, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment lead to the emergence of various trends of humanist thought. These proclaimed the dignity and worth of every human being, and stressed the importance of his/her rationality.

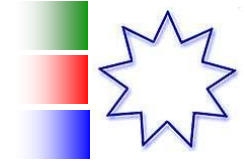
Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469-1536), a Dutch Catholic theologian, was the best known exponent of Renaissance humanism and was considered the “teacher of teachers”. Throughout his life he urged his followers to devote themselves to teaching and the establishment of schools.

He believed that without education, civilization would be replaced by barbarity. Education develops the human being and raises him/her above other creatures. Humans act according to reason, the animals act by instinct. Therefore reason must be developed through education.

➤ “Men not born men, they become men.”



The Human Being



In the Bahá'í Writings we can find many confirmations of the validity of the humanist perspective and many references to the importance of education in the development of human potential.

In the Tablet of Maqṣúd, Bahá'u'lláh describes human beings as a "*supreme Talisman*"^[3] and "*a mine rich in gems of inestimable value*"^[3]. Being the highest expression of creation, human beings must express a "*goodly character, pure deeds, and a seemly and praiseworthy conduct*"^[28].

And if the human being has a high status in the eyes of God, their efforts to rehabilitate the world and working for the welfare of nations should also be high ^[36].

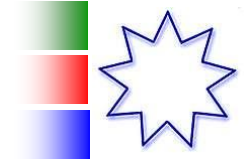


"Civilization is a method of living, an attitude of equal respect for all men."

- Jane Addams



The Human Being



Bahá'u'lláh believes that lack of education has prevented people from revealing their full potential and emphasizes that children should study sciences and arts that *"will result in advantage to man, will ensure his progress and elevate his rank"* [17].

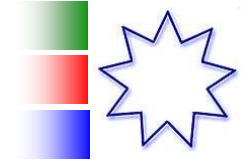


"Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth" [18].

And then Bahá'u'lláh notes that much of the studies of many of the "educated" of Persia of His time produced nothing but words!



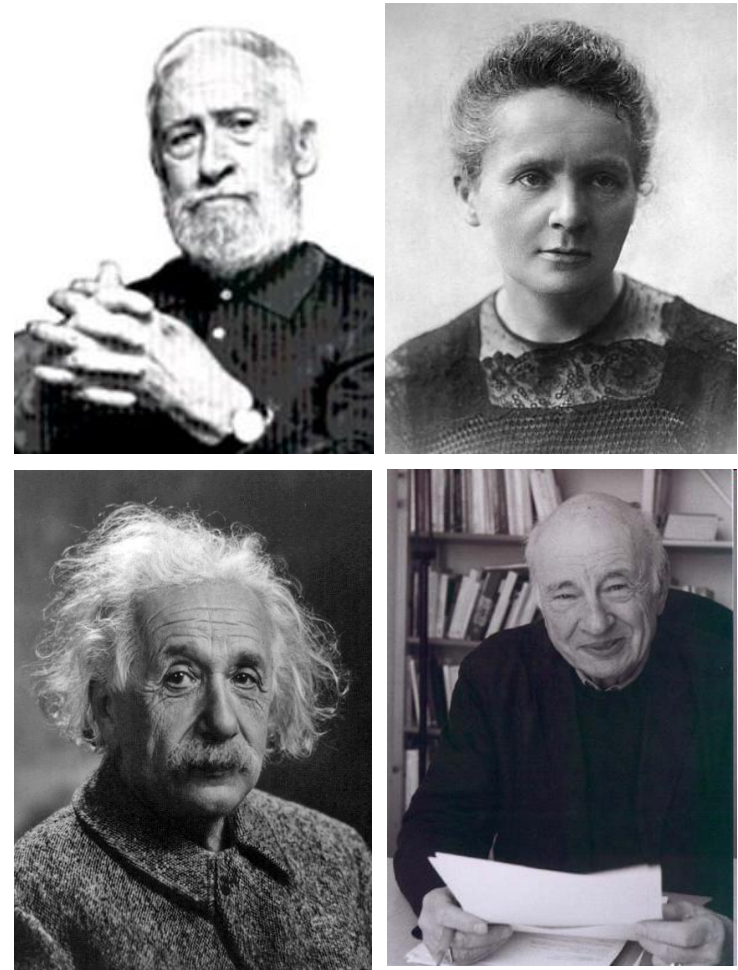
The Wise and Learned



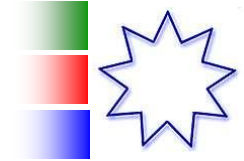
As in other tablets, Bahá'u'lláh also here refers to the "wise and learned," emphasizing their importance in society: *"The man of consummate learning and the sage endowed with penetrating wisdom are the two eyes to the body of mankind. God willing, the earth shall never be deprived of these two greatest gifts"* [24].

Their role in educating the people and the dissemination of knowledge, places them as key actors in the social regeneration of mankind.

These people must serve all peoples of the earth!



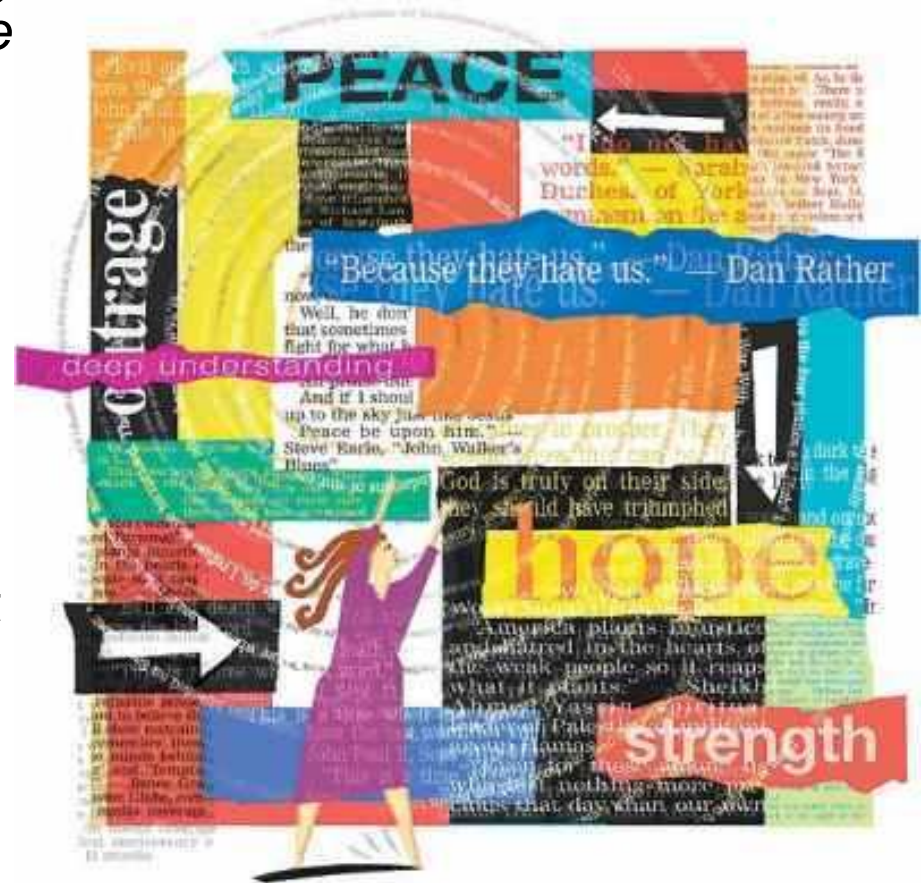
Words



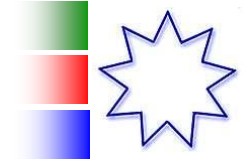
To describe the power of human words, Bahá'u'lláh, uses several metaphors:

- *"One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world"*[31];
- *"One word is like unto springtime causing the tender saplings of the rose-garden of knowledge to become verdant and flourishing, while another word is even as a deadly poison"*[31].

Every person must express himself/herself in such a manner that it will cause the listener to experience what is worthy of the human condition. To put it another way, words alone can cause human beings to commit acts worthy or unworthy of their condition.



Moderation

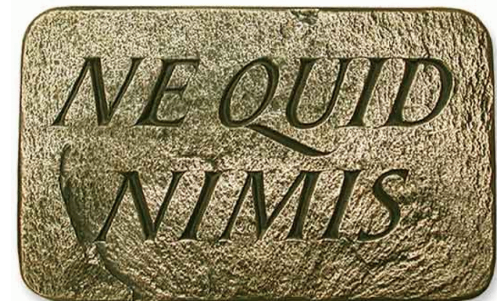
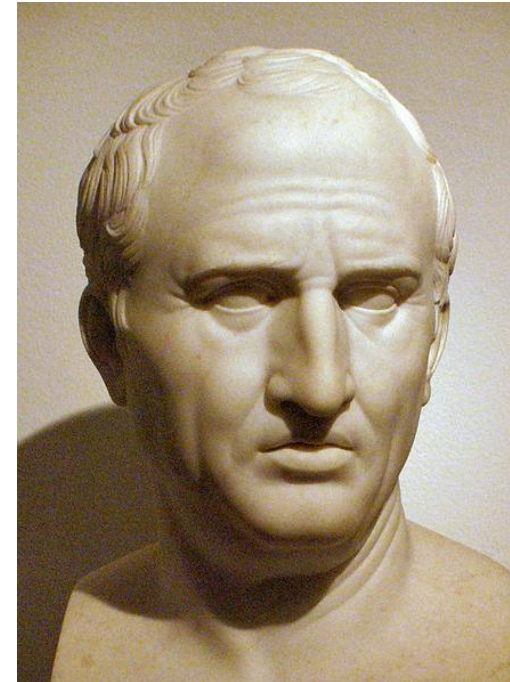


The need for dialogue and moderation in human activities - repeatedly advocated by many scholars and philosophers - is also emphasized in the Tablet of Maqsúd.

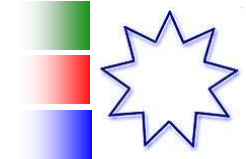
"Never enter into excess; let Moderation guide you "(Cicero)

This is a recommendation not only for ordinary people, but also for anyone who has a position of authority. "*Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence*" [19].

Moderation should also be applied, with tact and wisdom, to the use of words [29, 30].



In Conclusion...

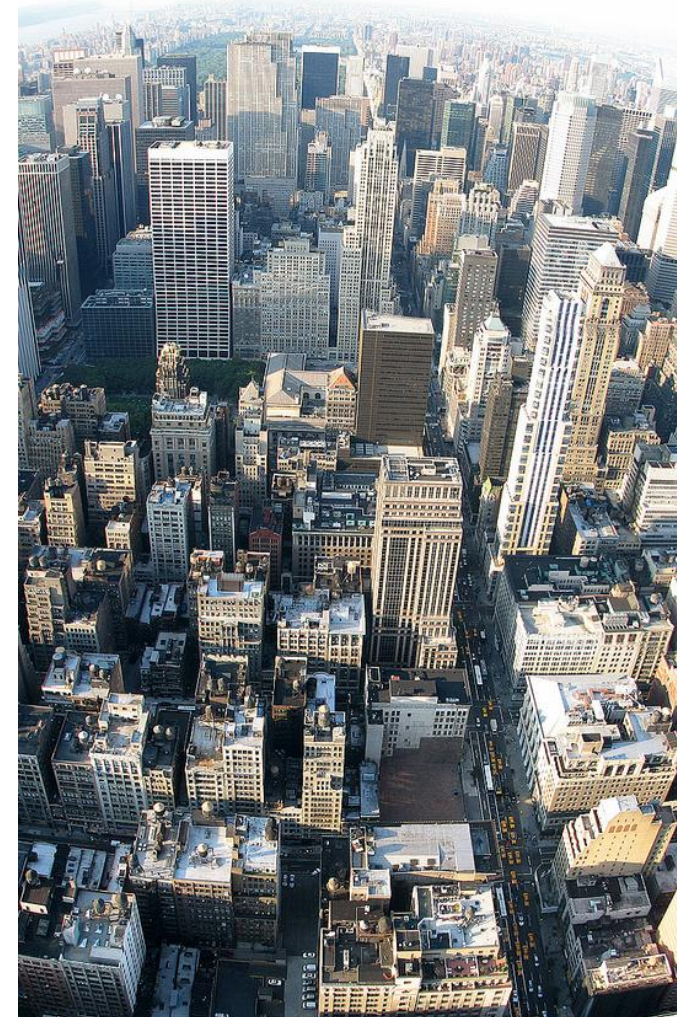


Throughout Tablet of Maqṣúd, Bahá'u'lláh addresses the purpose of religion, suggests solutions to the establishment of peace between nations, discusses the value of human beings and presents several ethical teachings.

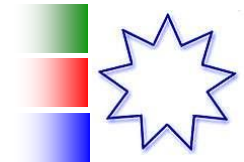
There are other texts by the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith that expose other principles aimed at the transformation of human, social and political conditions of the planet.

These proposals should not be seen as a panacea per se. These are guidelines to help transform the world of nations into a global village, well balanced and in a state of constant progress.

The basic teaching that Bahá'u'lláh makes can be summarized in: "*Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch*" [6]. (GI 3, 27-28)



Concluding...



We made a brief analysis of one of the many tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, in this case, the Tablet of Maqsúd.

We identified several themes that are among the principles and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.

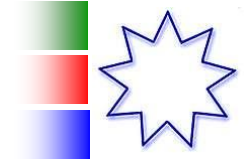
This analysis could, no doubt, be more extensive and more profound.

And, for sure, other people may identify other issues and other reasons to find interest in this tablet.

I hope this presentation has aroused your curiosity and interest in this document. It is an example of what anyone of us can do. It has given me joy and understanding!



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