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## **Course: Secret of Divine Civilization**

### **Lead Instructor: Necati Alkan**

Necati Alkan Has a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern Studies with a specialization in late Ottoman History. He was a post-doc and faculty at the Department of Islamic & Middle Eastern Studies and worked with the Chair in Bahá'í Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2006-2008); he was senior fellow from June 2008-June 2009 at the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (Koç Univ., Istanbul). From 1 July 2009 he has held a teaching and research position at the University of Erfurt, Germany.

### **Course Description:**

In this course we will study the *Secret of Divine Civilization*, the first extensive description of Bahá'í social teachings. Composed by `Abdu'l-Bahá in 1875 and published in Persian in Bombay in 1882, the Secret of Divine Civilization was simultaneously a significant presentation of the Bahá'í principles for social transformation and a Bahá'í response to the currents of modernity stirring in the late nineteenth century Middle East. The work reemphasizes the spiritual prerequisites for good leadership, rejects some popular fads of the day (such as nationalism and anti-westernism) and delineates priorities for building a prosperous and just society. Appealing to world-mindedness, the work is a handbook that describes the true nature of civilization and provides a blueprint for the "future reorganization of the world." To develop the theme of universal peace, honest government, and religion as the true bases of world order, `Abdu'l-Bahá redefined the Islamic tradition that a learned person "must guard himself, defend his faith, oppose his passions and obey the commandments of his Lord." Leaders, in particular are called to a new standard of honesty and trustworthiness. This course will thus look at the complementary processes of personal transformation and social development, leading to a reorganization of the world.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- To become familiar with the contents and purpose of *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.
- To learn about the issues of social reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Middle East and how *The Secret of Divine Civilization* was a response to them.
- To explore the value of *The Secret of Divine Civilization* to us today, including the book as an example of public discourse.

### **Course Expectations and Guidelines:**

This course is divided into one or two-week sessions beginning with an orientation (Unit 1) and ending with a review and summary (Unit 8). All units include readings, activities, and an online discussion among workshop participants. The course has been structured so that it requires an estimated 5 or 6 hours per week of reading and discussion.

During Unit 1, you will draft a personal learning plan (PLP) to define the goals you have set for yourself by participating in this course. If you are taking the course for credit, one of your goals would naturally be meeting the course expectations for discussions, activities, and a final project. If you are not taking the course for credit, you need to set goals that will help you develop your personal capabilities and will be achievable in and around your other daily tasks.

During Unit 8, you will refer again to your PLP and complete a self-assessment reviewing the extent to which you met the goals you set for yourself. In addition, learners seeking credit from their university will complete their final project (15-20 page research paper or equivalent) and submit it to the lead faculty.

Your instructor will periodically review your progress in the course and be available to discuss things with you. The following guidelines will help you gain maximum benefit from your participation in the course and will contribute toward a rich and rewarding experience through dialogue with others. We recommend that you consider them when drafting your PLP.

- Complete the readings and activities for each unit. Afterwards, your first posting in the discussion area should make reference to the readings and activities in such a way that your instructor can tell you read the material and engaged in the activities.
- Post at least 2 message replies in the discussion area for each unit/session. Each post should contain substantive comments (i.e., a comment like "oh, that's interesting" is NOT substantive).
- Choose at least 2 different days each session when you will participate in the discussions. We suggest posting at least once within the first few days of the session, with your second post at least two days before the next session begins. By contributing more than one post on different days, you will help the group develop rich ongoing discussions.
- If you post on time (i.e., within the time period of each unit on the course schedule), others will be able to read and respond to your post.
- Keep a course journal to help you track your ideas as you work on your final project.

In order to be eligible to receive a **Certificate of Completion**, you must participate in a majority of the discussions, as well as complete a majority of available unit activities and the end-of-course self-assessment. Learners taking the course for credit must also complete a final project. Your first discussion posts within each unit should address the discussion topic and demonstrate understanding of the course/unit concepts. Additional postings should provide substantive comments to other participants that are thoughtful, relevant, and help to extend the discussion.

**Course Schedule:**

<b>Unit 1</b>	<b>Introduction to the Course and to Moodle</b>	<b>Dec. 15-18</b>
In this unit, you will review the unit topics and dates, learn how to use Moodle (our course management system), set up your user profile, begin developing a personal learning plan, and learn how to post and reply in the discussion forums. Learners seeking university credit through their own university or an external agency will be required to design a personal learning plan to meet external standards, including active and ongoing participation in the course discussion forums, readings, assigned activities, and completion of a 15 to 20 page research paper or a project of equivalent complexity.		
<b>Unit 2</b>	<b>Introduction to the Book and its Times</b>	<b>Dec. 19-25</b>
This unit explores the background for the composition of <i>The Secret of Divine Civilization</i> in 1875 and provides an overview of the entire work. It includes the November 2003 letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Iranian Baha'is marking the 125 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the book and an essay by Nader Saiedi.		
<b>Unit 3</b>	<b>Study of the First Quarter of the Book</b>	<b>Dec. 26-Jan 1</b>
The unit involves a slow and careful read of the first section of <i>The Secret of Divine Civilization</i> , a review of the available study questions, and posting to the unit's discussion Forum. An extended outline is presented by Roger Coe. This unit begins a list of extensive and comprehensive study questions by Habib Riazati from 2001.		
<b>Unit 4</b>	<b>Study of the Second Quarter of the Book</b>	<b>Jan. 2-8</b>
The unit involves a slow and careful read of the second section of <i>The Secret of Divine Civilization</i> , a review of the available study questions, and posting to the unit's discussion Forum. There is an optional reading by Peter Terry, <i>The Prerequisites of the Learned</i> .		

<b>Unit 5</b>	<b>Study of the Third Quarter of the Book</b>	<b>Jan. 9-15</b>
The unit involves a slow and careful read of the third section of <i>The Secret of Divine Civilization</i> , a review of the available study questions, and posting to the unit's discussion Forum. Peter Terry collects excerpts from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in an essay "Critique of the Civilization of the West."		
<b>Unit 6</b>	<b>Study of the Fourth Quarter of the Book</b>	<b>Jan. 16-22</b>
The unit involves a slow and careful read of the fourth section of <i>The Secret of Divine Civilization</i> , a review of the available study questions, and posting to the unit's discussion Forum. It includes an article by Cynthia Shawamreh, " <i>The Secret of Divine Civilization</i> and Political Reform in the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran."		
<b>Unit 7</b>	<b>Summing up The Secret of Divine Civilization</b>	<b>Jan. 23-29</b>
The unit reviews what we have learned about <i>The Secret of Divine Civilization</i> through discussion of its major themes, and postings to the unit's discussion forum. Also included is an article by Moojan Momen, "The Baha'i Influence on Reform Movements of the Islamic World in the 1860s and 1870s" and "The Education of Nations" by Barbara Casterline, a book review.		
<b>Unit 8</b>	<b>Summary and Integration</b>	<b>Jan 30-Feb. 1</b>
In this unit, we discuss the course in general and the relationship of the various topics to each other and review the learning goals set during Unit 1. Those seeking credit will complete their final projects (15-20 page research paper or equivalent) and submit them to the lead faculty.		
<b>Course Project</b>		
Your Personal Learning Plan (PLP) helps you focus on what you want to learn in the course and on what course project you might be interested in creating. The final project is a course requirement only if you wish to receive credit from an external agency. You will have an opportunity to share your final project with course participants.		
The following is a short list of possible ideas for final projects. Learners may propose other ideas as well:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit a research/reflection paper (approximately 15-20 pages including references) on a topic related to the course.</li> <li>• Create an artistic project related to the course with a written explanation about it.</li> <li>• Alternative final project formats can be discussed with course instructor.</li> </ul>		
<b>Certificate of Completion</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners not taking the course for credit will receive a certificate of completion from the Wilmette Institute after course expectations were met.</li> <li>• For learners taking the course for credit, the Wilmette Institute will send a transcript to the learner and the external accrediting institution within a month of completion of the course.</li> </ul>		