

Lights of 'Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Ten



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'Irfán Colloquia
Bahá'í National Center
1233 Central Street
Evanston, IL 60201
Phone: (847) 733-3501
Fax: (847) 733-3527
E-mail: contact@irfancolloquia.org
www.irfancolloquia.org

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Book Ten

General Editor Iraj Ayman

Manuscript Edited by Omid Nolley

Artwork by Trey Yancy

Graphic Design by Majid Nolley, majidnolley.org

Typeset by Jonah Winters, winterswebworks.com

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Whoso hath searched the depths of the oceans that lie hid within these exalted words, and fathomed their import, can be said to have discovered a glimmer of the unspeakable glory with which this mighty, this sublime, and most holy Revelation hath been endowed.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

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Preface

*Promotion of science and spiritual knowledge (ʻIrfán)
is a duty and an obligation for each and every Bahá'í.**

ʻAbdu'l-Bahá

The organization of the annual sessions of the ʻIrfán Colloquia and the publication of the successive volumes of *The Lights of ʻIrfán*, first initiated fifteen years ago, are some attempts towards the fulfillment of this spiritual obligation exhorted by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá. Eighty five sessions of the ʻIrfán Colloquia have, so far, been organized in North America and Europe and twenty five volumes of the collections of the research papers, in English, German and Persian, presented at various sessions of the colloquia have been published. Furthermore, ʻIrfán publications include over ninety booklets containing the abstracts of all of the presented research papers and fifteen booklets of occasional research papers as well as guidebooks for the study of the scriptures.

The aim of *The Lights of ʻIrfán* is publishing scholarly studies in a variety of areas including the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í belief system, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, the scriptures of other religions, as well as the interface between the Bahá'í Faith and current intellectual and religious trends in the world, and to address the Bahá'í perspective of major issues and challenges faced by human society.

In 2008 ʻIrfán Colloquia celebrated the centenary of the publication of *Some Answered Questions* of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá', hereinafter referred to as SAQ, by inviting researchers to present papers and commentaries at the ʻIrfán Colloquia on different subjects which were addressed in that book. A number of those papers are published in the present volume. Laura Clifford Barney-Dreyfus was instrumental in raising most of the questions that were answered by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá. She undertook to compile those answers, organize them in the form of a book and publish them in 1908. A biographical sketch of

* Translated from *Compilation on Bahá'í Education* (in Persian), p 38.

Laura Barney-Dreyfus, mostly based on information from primary sources, is published in the present volume.

“A Philosophical Perspective of Some Answered Questions” is an attempt to identify and examine the philosophical positions explicitly embedded in SAQ, and to point out the philosophical foundations of the Bahá’í teachings. It further tries to specify those philosophical views with which the position taken in SAQ has the greatest natural affinity.

A number of chapters in SAQ are devoted to the questions related to Biblical prophecies and various topics and verses in the Bible. One of those topics is explored in the article on “Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” This article also considers the general phenomenon of covenant-breaking in the Bahá’í Faith and discusses a possible definition of this phenomenon.

Another subject covered in SAQ is presented in the article on “Methods and Qualities of the Seekers of Reality.” This subject is one of the fundamental principles of the Bahá’í belief system. It is elaborated on in light of the guidance given in the Bahá’í Scriptures on the necessity of, and conditions for, the successful search for truth.

The article on “The Bahá’í Worldview on Unity of Religion” is an attempt to present the relationship between the “Manifestations of God” (prophets) and the principle of “progressive revelation” (successive appearance of revealed religions). This is one of the essential teachings of the Bahá’í Faith and it is dealt with in several chapters of SAQ. The intent of this article is to explore the Bahá’í “paradigm” of the unity of religions and its role and function in the advancement of civilization.

“In the Heart of All Things” is the title of an article dealing with the idea of the heart being the site where the spiritual and the physical meet. There are, in common use, two distinct meanings for the concept of “heart.” One is the physical heart and the other is a metaphorical concept of the heart. This article explores the distinction between these two concepts and then explains the usage of these two concepts in the Bahá’í scriptures and reaches the conclusion that the heart is the organ (or the instrument) for spiritual experiences.

A unique explanation of the issue of creation versus evolution that was given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, at the beginning of the twentieth century, and published in this book, is elaborated

on in the article entitled “**Man is Man: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Human Evolution.**” Scientific research and discoveries since that time have increasingly supported the validity of the solution presented in this book.

One of the themes expounded in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Wisdom (*Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat*) is the way in which philosophical wisdom is ultimately dependent on revealed religion and “the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets.” The article entitled “**Further Comments on a Passage of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat**” demonstrates that ancient records and modern scholarship provide an enormous amount of information about a possible transmission of ideas from Eastern religions into Greek philosophical thought.

The section on **Elucidations** opens with a clarifying article by Mr. Ali Nakhjavani on the **Ministry of the Universal House of Justice**. This article provides well-documented answers and explanations of a series of questions and issues related to the ministry of the Universal House of Justice in the absence of the Guardian, such as the timing of its election, the limits of the sphere of its jurisdiction, and the wide range of responsibilities and enactments the Universal House of Justice.

The above topic is also elucidated in the “**Comments on the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice**” issued by the Universal House of Justice.

The taxonomy of the Bahá’í sacred texts, which is the basis of textual studies and documentation, is clarified in the letter of the Universal House of Justice on “**The Classification of the Bahá’í Sacred Texts**” that differentiates between various categories of the Writings by the Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith.

A recently issued letter by the Universal House of Justice on the **Promotion and Development of Bahá’í Scholarly Activities** completes the section on Elucidations. This letter provides welcome support and reinforcement for the activities and services of the ‘Irfán Colloquium and its publications.

Starting with Book Six we have adopted two changes in the ‘Irfán Colloquia’s style guide. All “authoritative” publications are cited by an abbreviation; see Appendix I, “Bibliography of the Bahá’í Writings and Their Abbreviations Used in This Book.” Second, the Words of Prophets/Manifestations, i.e. quotations from the Sacred Writings (not including statements

by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice), are italicized.

All papers in this volume present the views and understandings of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. The writing styles and scholarly approaches are, therefore, different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the authors' last names.

Iraj Ayman

Chicago May 2009