

LIGHTS OF 'IRFÁN

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs



Papers Presented at the 'Irfán
Colloquia and Seminars

Book Twelve



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Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs
Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars
Book Twelve

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*O My Name! The 'Day-Star of utterance,
shining resplendent from the dayspring of divine
'Revelation, hath so illumined the Scrolls and
Tablets that the 'kingdom of utterance' and the
exalted dominion of understanding vibrate
with joy and ecstasy and shine forth with the
splendour of His light, yet the generality of
mankind comprehend not.*

*That which is conducive to the regeneration
of the world and the salvation of the peoples
and kindreds of the earth hath been sent down
from the heaven of the utterance of Him Who
is the 'Desire of the world. Give ye a hearing
ear to the counsels of the Pen of Glory. Better
is this for you than all that is on the earth.
'Unto this beareth witness My glorious and
wondrous 'Book.*

— *'Baha'u'llah*

Tablets Revealed After the
Kitab-i-Aqdas pp. 199, 222

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Preface

Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. Take heed that ye do not vacillate in your determination to embrace the truth of this Cause—a Cause through which the potentialities of the might of God have been revealed, and His sovereignty established. With faces beaming with joy, hasten ye unto Him. This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. (Kitáb-i-Aqdas ‘ 182)

Bahá'u'lláh, in the above verses of the Most Holy Book, urges the believers to not only gladly embrace what has been revealed but to hasten to do so. The 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications are aimed at responding to this call by promoting and supporting deeper and more systematic studies in the Bahá'í texts and principal beliefs, as well as comparative studies of the religious traditions, schools of thought, scientific discoveries, and challenges facing humanity from the perspective of the Bahá'í Faith. A selection of the research papers presented and discussed at the annual sessions of the 'Irfán Colloquia convened in Europe and North America in English are published in the annual editions of the *Lights of 'Irfán*.

In 2008 on the occasion of the centenary celebration of the publication of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Some Answered Questions*, scholars were invited to prepare and present research papers on the topics and concepts that are elucidated in that book. So far, about seventy such presentations have been made at the 'Irfán Colloquia in English, Persian and German. Some of those papers written in English are gradually being published in the *Lights of 'Irfán*. In this volume the following articles belong to this category. "The Essence of Man: Towards a Bahá'í Understanding of Human Nature and Psychology"; and "The

Mystery of Divinity: A comparison of traditional views of Divinity to those in *Some Answered Questions*."

"The Essence of Man: Towards a Bahá'í Understanding of Human Nature and Psychology" is a commentary on a quotation taken from *"Gleanings of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,"* about *"the essence of man."* It attempts to provide an understanding of what is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh's announcement, in these few verses, that may change our understanding of the question "Who is Man?". Another paper in this category is **"The Mystery of Divinity: A comparison of traditional views of Divinity to those in *Some Answered Questions*,"** which is a comparative study on traditional views of Divinity and the elucidation found in *Some Answered Questions* by 'Abdu'l-Bahá'. It attempts to infer a new paradigm of spiritual evolution, and suggests a possible platform for philosophical dissertation regarding the influence of religion on secular matters in the modern world

In 2010 The 'Irfán Colloquium initiated a four-year program commemorating the centenary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels to the West (1910-1913) by inviting presentations on the significance and impact of His visits in Egypt, Europe, and North America, as well as the themes and concepts elucidated by Him in His talks and press interviews. The papers presented in English on the occasion of this commemoration will be published in the *Lights of 'Irfán*. In this volume, the following articles are related to the travels and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: **"The Travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and their Impact on the Press: A Survey"** and **"Preparing Bahá'í Communities in the East and West to Embrace Gender Equality."**

The presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in western countries aroused great interest in the general public and in the media. Leading newspapers, journals, magazines and specialized periodicals paid considerable attention to the personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í teachings that He was proclaiming. **"The Travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and**

their Impact on the Press: A Survey” is a preliminary survey of the news reports of the events related to His visit, and references to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá published in the Western press at that time. This survey also includes the impressions gained by His audiences, as well as the published accounts of private interviews and reports of His talks. The abandonment of racial, religious and nationalistic prejudices is one of the central issues in the talks delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris. **“The duty of kindness and sympathy towards strangers and foreigners”** is an interesting comparative study of those talks as reflected in the recent Italian *“Charter on the Values and Significance of Citizenship and Integration,”* which upholds many of the concepts expounded by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá almost a century ago. **“Preparing Bahá’í Communities in the East and West to Embrace Gender Equality”** deals with one of the aspects of the impact of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visits and talks in Europe and North America, i.e. equality of the rights of men and women. It attempts to describe the intricacies involved in, and the remarkable way He dealt with, this matter. It also examines some of His writings issued in honor of the Bahá’í women in Iran and North America, and the methods He used to utilize their energy and capabilities for the furtherance of the Cause of God. It further looks at the practical ways He educated the Bahá’í men of the time to accept women as their equals. Finally, it discusses the glowing results He achieved in a relatively short time.

The publication of studies on the comparison of various schools of philosophical thought and the Bahá’í teachings continues in this volume, in the second section of the paper on **“Neo-Platonism and the Bahá’í Faith.”** It summarizes and expands the ideas presented in **“Neo-Platonism and the Bahá’í Writings”** published in Book Eleven of the *Lights of ‘Irfán* in order to demonstrate how the work of Plotinus and his successors complements and offers new insights into the philosophy embedded in the Bahá’í Revelation. It aims at presenting the convergences and congruencies that improve our philosophical understanding of the Writings and concludes that in terms

of philosophical affinities, the philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Writings is a unique type of objective idealism.

Publication of papers on the studies in the Writings of the Báb related to fine arts started in Book Eight of *Safíní-yi 'Irfán* (in Persian). Now, we are happy that the same topic is dealt with in English in **“Perfection and Refinement: Towards an Aesthetics of the Báb.”** It begins by describing what the author calls “composing arts,” that which artists produce in their mind and then transfer to paper, such as literature, both poetry and prose, and the composition of music. It describes how a rather large number of the Writings of the Báb were produced in a rapid and fluent manner which amazed those who witnessed it. The Báb as a performance artist, and the nature of some of His writings as pieces that are intended to be performed as much as read, as well as the concept of refinement that comes across very strong in both the person and the writings of the Báb, are delineated.

“May flowers in the Ville Lumière: The dawning of Bahá'í history in the European continent” is the account of the start of the Bahá'í community in Paris, which prepared the ground for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visits to that city. It is written in a beautiful literary style and describes how a young American lady becomes the catalyst for the spiritual awakening of a group of early receptive believers. The paper emphasizes the mysterious ways through which they came to recognize the dawn of the new era on the European continent and in the whole world.

“The Indispensability of Consultation for Ordering Human Affairs” explains the unique features of Bahá'í Consultation. It was published in Book Eleven of the *Lights of 'Irfán* but in the process of forwarding it digitally certain sections were omitted in the text that was published. The complete text of the article is now included in this volume.

Preface

The section entitled ELUCIDATIONS includes several items clarifying and elucidating issues and topics of interest to Bahá'í studies. The letter of the Bahá'í World Centre provides guidance regarding speaking on socio-political issues. The article by Mr. Ali Nakhjavani on **“Teaching the Cause of God -- A Double-Edged Sword”** is an enlightening explanation of one of the distinctive features of the Bahá'í Faith, that we cannot separate the spiritual life of the individual from the spiritual life of the community. **“A Commentary on Relativism and the Bahá'í Writings”** is further clarification on an article on the same subject, which was published in Book Nine of the *Lights of 'Irfán*. In comparing the two articles it is explained that in this debate we have two different conceptual worlds each perfectly self-consistent and understandable within itself but coming to different conclusions, using different criteria for what will count as evidence and what will count as decisive proof. In other worlds we have two universes of discourse, two paradigms, two realities or two different language games. Each side is looking at the subject from a different viewpoint and drawing different conclusions.

Appendix II presents a list of the topics of the papers published in previous volumes of the *Lights of 'Irfán*. It provides a preliminary familiarity with the range, types, methodological approaches and scope of the papers that are welcome to be presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and be considered for publication in *The Lights of 'Irfán*. In addition to the papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia, research papers related to the main goals of the 'Irfán Colloquium are welcome to be directly submitted.

Starting with Book Six we have made 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.” Words of Prophets/

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Manifestations, i.e. quotations from 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 author's surnames.

Iraj Ayman
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