

Lights of 'Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Fifteen



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What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply.

– From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi by his secretary

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyze the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.

– From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a believer who had completed advanced studies in a subject related to the Bahá'í Teachings

We need very much the sound, sane, element of thinking which a scientifically trained mind has to offer. When such intellectual powers are linked to deep faith, a tremendous teaching potential is created.

– From a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a scientist who had embraced the Bahá'í Faith

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Preface

Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, differentiates between Bahá'í scholarship and worldly scholarship. He emphatically recommends deeper and systematic study of the verities of the Bahá'í Faith, both for the purpose of teaching the Faith as well as for laying “a permanent foundation” in the hearts and minds of the believers that “tests and trials will not shake down.”¹ Organizing and conducting 'Irfán Colloquium sessions, in Europe and in North America, in English, Persian and German over the past twenty years, and publishing thirty volumes of compilations of the papers presented at those gatherings, as well as study guides and occasional research papers, were all aimed at promoting and facilitating the implementation of this strong recommendation of our beloved Guardian. Those engaged or interested in such studies are invited to share the results of their “spiritual scholarship” with other like-minded friends by making presentations and/or contributing research-based papers.

The present volume includes articles on a range of topics, either focused on a certain item in the Bahá'í Writings, or dealing with a subject related to the fundamental principles and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.

Tablet of Patience (*Surih Şabr*): Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh and Selected Topics is an analytical presentation of a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh revealed on the first day of Riḍván 1863, which is also named Tablet of Job (*Lawh-i-Ayyúb*). This paper explores the relationship between troubles in the path of God, divine tests and steadfastness during times of tests. It also provides the historical context for this Tablet and its contents. Tablet of Patience covers a range of topics mostly dealt with in more

detail in the *Book of Íqán*. The author argues that this Tablet is an indirect announcement of the Station of Bahá'u'lláh as the Promised One of *Kitáb-i-Bayán*.

The Inebriation of His Enrapturing Call (*Mast-and bulbulán*) is a provisional translation of one of Bahá'u'lláh's poems together with detailed analysis, verse by verse, giving meaning, structural specification and comparative references to well-known poems in Persian literature. This analytical translation provides a good specimen of the poems of Bahá'u'lláh. This poem by Bahá'u'lláh is an ecstatic poem, the fruit of the ecstatic experiences He had in Teheran. It is filled with mystical conditions.

Finding a Trace of the Traceless Friend is a reflection on Bahá'í scholarship as a journey in the Valley of Search. It attempts to shed some light on Bahá'í Scholarship as reflected in the first valley of the *Seven Valleys* of Bahá'u'lláh, the Valley of Search. The combination of finding a "trace" of a "traceless friend" indicates the mysteriousness and complexity of this task, and introduces us to the mystical realm. In this paper, topics such as prerequisites of search, independent investigation and the role of the heart, culture and tradition, how to deal with distractions, and the exclusivity of search and sacrificing everything for it are considered and discussed.

The Bahá'í Writings: A Meta-ethical Excursion pursues a philosophical examination of the Bahá'í Writings' ethical teachings, how they relate to the major ethical systems proposed in the past, and how they deal with some of the difficulties inherent in past systems. Among the topics discussed are virtue ethics, utilitarianism, existentialism, Kant's theories, natural law theory, ethical subjectivism and objectivism, relativism, intuitionism, Nietzschean ethics, and self-realization ethics. Special attention is made to Udo Schaefer's magisterial two volumes "Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture" which is the first study to undertake a systematic review of Bahá'í ethical teachings.

Bahá'í Consultation and the Transformation of Society reviews the history of consultation in the Bahá'í Faith from the time of Bahá'u'lláh to the present time. It then looks at the ways in which in successive periods importance of consultation was emphasized and its use was promoted in the community. Finally, the paper deals with the role of consultation in the movement from the present established and customary practices in the world towards the practice that is envisaged in the new World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

The paper on **Origin of Creation** starts with posing the question of "Is there a God?" It deals with the profound implications, and indeed direct impact on the life of mankind and how it looks upon the very meaning and purpose of life. Various arguments presented during the history to prove or disprove the existence of God are briefly reviewed. The author follows 'Abdu'l-Bahá's approach that the existence of God can be proven and concludes that the ultimate source of pre-existence is God, and that the pre-existent properties are attributes of God.

The Greatest Holy Leaf's Unparalleled Role in Religious History – the Significance of the Arc, the Site of Her Resting Place is a description of the status and leadership role of the Greatest Holy Leaf, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, in the history of the Bahá'í Faith. It also deals with the central location of her resting place among the edifices erected at the Bahá'í World Centre on Mount Carmel.

The Emergence and Organization of Chinese Religions is a fascinating attempt to present a bird's-eye-view of the structure, practices and basic ideologies of four different religious trends of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shenism, each of which reflecting an aspect of Chinese life. It also deals with various branches, sects, and schools within each of these religions with references to religious doctrines, symbols, ceremonies, and even deities of these religious trends that have been so intermingled in the course of time.

The ELUCIDATIONS section in the *Lights of 'Irfán* includes letters written by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice and documents that have been issued by the Bahá'í World Centre concerning clarification or elaboration of specific subjects related to the aims and purposes of the 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications. Included in this book is the authorized translation from Persian of a letter written on behalf of Universal House of Justice on "Participation in politics and social activities".

The **In Memoriam** section in this volume pays tribute to dear supporters of the 'Irfán Colloquium who passed away in 2013. It includes short biographies of Mr. Houshmand Fatheazam, Dr. Amin Banani, and Ms. Mahboubeh Arjmand. Mr. Fatheazam was a sincere supporter of the colloquium and made enlightening presentations in some of the 'Irfán sessions in North America and Europe. Dr. Banani was one of the founders of, and presenters at, the 'Irfán Colloquium sessions at Bosch Bahá'í School. The texts of some of the presentations made by Mr. Fatheazam at the 'Irfán Colloquia are published in 'Irfán publications.² In the same year, 2013, Ms. Mahboubeh Arjmand, one of the supporters of Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, also passed away in San Diego, California.

Appendix I is the **Bibliography of Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviated Titles** used in the text of the papers published in this book, to facilitate referring to the sources of the quoted statements.

Appendix II is **Contents of Previous Volumes of *Lights of 'Irfán***. Listing the contents of previous volumes also shows the range, types, methodological approaches and scope of the papers that are presented, and are welcome to be presented, at the 'Irfán Colloquia. 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 for publication in the *Lights of 'Irfán*.

Starting with Book Six, we have made two changes to the 'Irfán Colloquia's style guide. All "authoritative" publications are cited by an abbreviation; see Appendix II, "Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations Used in This Book." Words of Prophets/Manifestations, i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings, (not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice), are italicized.

All papers published in this book present the views and understanding of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. Their 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

NOTE

¹ "He also urges you to study the teachings themselves more deeply. Bahá'í scholarship is needed really more than worldly scholarship, for one is spiritual, the other more or less transient. There is a real lack in the Cause of people who know the teachings thoroughly, especially their deeper truths, and who can consequently teach the souls properly and lay a permanent foundation, one that tests and trials will not shake down." (27 August 1951 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, quoted in *A Compilation on Scholarship*, p. 76)

² See <http://irfancoolloquia.org/database/author/Fatheazam> .