

Lights of 'Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Sixteen



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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.

— *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 118-119

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Preface

Bahá'ís are advised and urged by the founders of the Bahá'í Faith to engage in deeper study of the Bahá'í Writings, reflecting on them and try to unravel the many inner meanings and the important knowledge hidden in them. Baha'u'llah likens the words of God to an ocean that has precious pearls in its depth. He encourages the believers to swim and even immerse in that ocean in search of those pearls of spiritual realities. Such exercises, among many advantages, deepen our knowledge, consolidate our faith and make us better prepared for propagation and teaching of Bahá'í Faith. 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications aim at promoting deeper and systematic study of the scriptures of the world's religions from the Bahá'í perspective, the verities and fundamental principles of the belief system of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as the interface between the Bahá'í Faith and the various religious traditions and schools of thought. In volumes of *Lights of 'Irfán* collections of research papers either presented at 'Irfán Colloquia or submitted to the 'Irfán Colloquium are published.

In this volume, **Nathan Soderblom and the Bahá'í Faith** is the historical background of how Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths were publicly introduced in Sweden for the first time by Nathan Söderblom in 1907. He was the first Professor of Comparative Religion in Sweden and also the Archbishop and the prime representative of the Christian Church in Sweden. He published a text-book in four volumes on religious texts in Swedish language in 1907, in which he provided a brief and objective description of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths.

The Ten Plagues of Exodus in Light of the Bahá'í Writings mentioned in the Biblical Book of Exodus and known as “*the*

narrative of the plagues” has historically been interpreted in two ways. The traditional understanding and as interpreted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who offers another understanding of this narrative by explaining only the nature of the first plague. His explanation opens a new perspective on the entire plague narrative. This paper examines the remaining nine plagues through an exploration of how these terms (frogs, lice, flies, diseased livestock, boils, thunder and hail, locusts, darkness, and first born) are used in other contexts in the Bahá’í Writings in order to get a sense of the symbolism that may be contained in these Biblical verses. The paper will close with an examination of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interpretation of the culmination of the Exodus story: the crossing of the Red Sea.

Freud’s Transference with the Four States of Bahá’u’lláh is an attempt to use a statement of Bahá’u’lláh in the Seven Valleys, *“Inwardness and Outwardness, Firstness and Lastness are ... true of thyself,”* that gives us a psychological understanding of what is “true of thyself,” as the “Mother Verse,” and further develops this idea. It argues that the transference concept seems to be correlated with the above statement of Bahá’u’lláh and gives us a psychological understanding of what is *“true of thyself.”*

Procrustes’ Bed: The insufficiency of secular humanism deals with a very important issue currently debated in intellectual circles. It aims to prove secular humanism’s inability to accommodate the empirically established universal presence of religion in human nature that undermines secular humanism’s claim to be a viable world-view for mankind. It shows secular humanism’s failure to live up to its self-proclaimed empiricism, unleashes a cascade of consequences that undermines its internal coherence, diminishes its value as a rational argument and leaves the arguments for theism untouched.

Women and Wisdom in Scripture discusses the treatment of women in religion and the role played by language in degrading women’s status, the direct and indirect influence of the Bábí

and Bahá'í Faiths in raising awareness about the plight of women and transforming attitudes towards them across the globe, the role of wisdom in scripture and how it has been applied in regard to the question of gender equality, the need for vigilance to prevent past shortcomings from affecting our way of thinking and doing things.

On Existence and Qualities of The Human of Soul deals with the question of the existence, nature, and necessity of a human soul. It takes a two-phase approach. It first establishes a rational foundation and then applies the principles established to specific questions such as “Is there a human soul?” In the first phase, science and rationality are compared and their relationship established. In the second phase, a part scientific and part rational methodology is employed to specifically answer the direct and indirect questions about the existence of the human soul. It concludes that the mere fact of comprehension of abstract rational relationships necessitates the existence and assistance of a non-physical entity, the human soul, which provides the power of rational comprehension from outside the physical realm.

Shoghi Effendi's Translation of Terms Related to Law in Bahá'í Scripture is an attempt to find out whether there is any pattern within Shoghi Effendi's translation of terms related to the word “law”. The search in the translations of Bahá'u'lláh's writings by Shoghi Effendi resulted in finding about ten Arabic/Persian words that occur in Bahá'í scripture and have been translated by him as “law” or other equivalent terms. His translations appear to be based on contextual purpose and meaning of Persian/Arabic terms.

Shared Prosperity: How Does That Work? examines proposals from three sectors – government, global institutions and the third sector – and considers them in the light of principles found in the Bahá'í writings bearing on shared prosperity and poverty eradication.

At Dawn the Friend came to my bed: An early fruit of the Supreme Pen is a provisional translation and a detailed analytical commentary of Bahá'u'lláh's poem which begins with the verse *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am Yár*, "At dawn the Friend came to my bed," and is one among eight Persian poems signed "Dervish." A Hymn to Love (*Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*) is a provisional translation of another one of Bahá'u'lláh's poems probably belonging to the period of his sojourn in Kurdistan. In this poem the Most Great Spirit is described first as Water and Fire, and then as Love itself. Many verses are devoted to a description of Love and of its impact on human hearts and on the world.

The section on **Elucidation** contains the message of the Universal House of Justice of 24 July 2013 on **Intellectual Life and the Future of Bahá'í Studies** addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada. It provides a new vision and a set of guidelines for activities such as those of the Associations of Bahá'í Studies.

The **In Memoriam** section in this volume pays tribute to one of the first and steadfast supporters of the 'Irfán Colloquium, Dr. Kamran Ekbal, who passed away in 2014. Dr. Ekbal made a number of research-based presentations, over the past twenty years, at the 'Irfán Colloquium sessions held in Persian, English and German languages. We also lost another sincere contributor to the English programs of the 'Irfán Colloquium held at Bosch Bahá'í School, Mr. James Thomas. Unfortunately, we have so far been unable to find biographical information on Mr. Thomas.

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, 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 authors’ surnames.

– Iraj Ayman