

Lights of 'Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Seventeen



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Study the Bahá'í Teachings More Deeply

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be *au courant* with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. 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 Compilation on Scholarship* pp. 17-18

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Preface

Lights of 'Irfán is an annual publication containing a selection of research papers and texts of the presentations delivered at various sessions of the Irfán Colloquium conducted in English language. The *'Irfán Colloquium* aims at promoting and supporting systematic studies of fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, the interface between the Bahá'í Faith and various religions and schools of thought as well as investigating current challenges in human society from the Bahá'í perspective.

In 1915 the fire of the World War was in full blast and traffic to and from Holy Land was practically stopped. 'Abdu'l-Bahá took the initiative of sharing with the friends who were present in the Holy Land, the life stories of a number of believers of all social strata by showing how they had faithfully served the Cause and demonstrated their loyalty and dedication to the best interests of the Bahá'í Faith. Thus a unique collection was produced and soon afterwards published under the title of *Memorials of the Faithful*. In the course of 2015, 'Irfán Colloquium celebrated the centenary of that precious gift by inviting presentations of the studies covering various aspects and contents of that book. Most of the articles in the present volume are a selection of such studies that were produced and delivered in English language.

Memorials of the Faithful: The Democratization of Sainthood starts with a definition and a brief review of hagiography throughout religious history. It is a kind of comparative study of hagiographies and *Memorials of the Faithful*. It examines the manner in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has used the traditional literary format of hagiographies and used it in an innovative manner to cover all social strata of the believers. It could be considered as democratization of sainthood, in its broad sense. ***Memorials of the Faithful: Hagiography and Models to Set Examples in a Religious Community*** attempts to present examples of life in a religious community, which is that of hagiography: the story of the lives of the saints. In the Christian world, the life of Jesus was the example against which saints were measured, and the lives of saints were the examples against which the general population measured itself. In the Middle Age hagiography became a literary genre par excellence for teaching a largely illiterate audience. This study includes a brief comparison between two examples from *Memorials of the Faithful*, Mishkín Qalam, and Shams-i-Duhá, and two examples from Persian classical texts of hagiographies in the works of Farídu’d-Din Aṭṭár, and Báyzid Bastámí.

The Concept of ‘Faithfulness’ in the Bahá’í Texts in English Translation is a preliminary examination of the concept and various usages of this term, faithfulness, in the Bahá’í texts available in English language. It reviews the behaviours expected from those who are faithful and references to faithfulness such as being faithful as an individual; God being faithful to His people; believers being faithful to the Covenant established by Bahá’u’lláh. As individuals’ behaviour, faithfulness is a spiritual quality that manifests itself in relationships as, for example, loyalty, trustworthiness and reliability.

Homage to Memorial of the Faithful and to eight of its heroes is a composition of eight poems on eight of the personages of the book. The features of *Memorials of the*

Faithful have led the author to compose these poems. They have not been chosen because they were considered in any way superior to or better than all the others. They were chosen because some of their personal qualities and of the events of their lives raised louder echoes in the author's heart and mind.

Significance of Some Historical and Holy Places Cited in the *Memorial of the Faithful* – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the course of portraying the life history of some believers, has cited many villages, cities, and sites, some of which are blessed by the foot-steps of the twin manifestations of God for this age, and others are important due to being the scene of significant historical events of the Faith. In this article four such places are selected from among them and their niche in history is further elaborated. These are (1) the Most Great House in Baghdad, (2) the ruins of Madayen, located some thirty kilometers south of Baghdad, on the banks of Tigris, where the Blessed Beauty visited many times, and once graced the palaces of great kings of Sassanid dynasty which were destroyed by the army of Arab invaders and subsequently lost their glory, (3) surroundings of the Sheikh Tabarsí's tomb where Baha'u'llah visited once, and (4) the city of Mosul in the northern Iraq on the banks of River Tigris, which is built on the ruins of the ancient and historical city of Nineveh where a number of believers and the Holy family were kept as captives for several years, and Baha'u'llah's caravan, exiled to the seat of the Ottoman Empire, passed through it.

The Language of the Heart claims the Bahá'í Religion could justifiably be called the "Religion of the Heart." The heart in the Bahá'í Writings is given a special meaning; concepts like the city of the heart and the citadel of the heart are emphasizing the importance of the heart. The heart is described as possessing sensory capacities. The question raised in this article is about the form and style of the language of the heart, in what way is this language different from our normal language and thinking as it is developed in the human brain. The faculty of reason, which is an endowment of the spiritual soul, uses

different bodily instruments, i.e., the brain and the heart. They always need to work together, but they have different languages, so that spiritual truth has to be reasonable even in the logical linguistic sense, and the heart has to be pure in a moral sense, otherwise it will contaminate logical reason or even pervert it. Clearly we need both, a pure heart and a clear mind to understand the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh

Nietzsche and the Bahá'í Writings: An Introductory Exploration – Though at first glance Nietzsche and the Baha'í Writings appear to be totally contrary, this article is an attempt to show that Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche's philosophy share a surprising number of features that seem to be in common. It invites a re-vision of Nietzsche from a new perspective. The basis of this re-visioning is the Aristotelian elements in the Writings. Nietzsche calls on man to "become what he is," i.e. to actualize his potential to become an *Uebermensch*. In other words, both the Writings and Nietzsche analyze reality in Aristotelian terms: actuality and potential; essence/substance and attribute; matter and form; essential and accidental as well as causality. Both have a dynamic understanding of reality and both see human life as a process towards a new and superior form of mankind, i.e. as a quest for greater actualization of our potentialities. Viewed from a Bahá'í perspective, being "beyond good and evil" also takes on a new meaning. Interestingly enough, the Bahá'í Writings offer a way to interpret the "will to power" in a way that resolves various contradictory understandings. They also agree on the need for 'superior individuals'—called 'Manifestations' by the Writings—to guide humankind. Of course, there are significant differences between the Writings and Nietzsche, the most obviously being Nietzsche's sometimes hysterical tone in which he reaches rhetorical excesses that seem to lead his thinking into absurdity.

Parallels in the Ministries of Táhirih (1817-1852) and Paul (circa 5-64) is a study pointing out ten parallels in the ministries of Táhirih and Paul and a reflection on the value of this knowledge in interfaith application. Táhirih and Paul are

separated by gender, religion, nationality, culture, and eighteen hundred years, yet, when stories of their lives and apostolic ministries are compared, parallels arise—the most significant of which is that both are known for singular initiatives that helped differentiate new Revelation from the old.

The rise of extreme inequality in wealth: Implications of converging trends in amorality and globalization: The tremendous strides made in globalization, especially since WWII, have converged with a trend in growing amorality as the fabric of international business conduct in society. This convergence has led to extreme inequality within majority of nations in the world at a time when, on aggregate, wealth inequality between nations actually has been falling at impressive rates. Here, the author discusses the impact that the rise of amorality and globalization have had on wealth inequality and the guidance we observe in the Bahá'í scriptures to alleviate extremes of wealth and poverty in the context of a world that increasingly selects amorality and acting in self-interest as its new ethical foundation and globalization as its tool to optimize wealth concentration.

The section on **Elucidation** contains the messages of the Universal House of Justice providing guidance regarding the following two key issues:

1. Translation of Key Bahá'í Terms
2. Suggestions about Changes in the Administration

In Memoriam section in this volume pays tribute to one of the main and steadfast sponsors and supporters of the 'Irfán Colloquium, **Mr. Houshang Arjmand**, who passed away in 2015. Mr. Arjmand was the founder and main supporter of **Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund** which has been the major source for financing Irfán Colloquium activities and its publications.

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***, is a listing of 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, and 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