

`Irfán Colloquium

One Hundred-and-Twenty First
Session

JUBILEE CELEBRATION Establishment of the Universal House of Justice



PROGRAM AND ABSTRACTS

Louhelen Bahá'í School
Davison, Michigan
October 10-13, 2013

`Irfán Colloquium

The ‘Irfan¹ Colloquium is sponsored by Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund and supported by Nadia Saadat Scholarship and Mirafzali Family’s Fellowship grants. In 2012, benefiting from the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, a management board was appointed for this fund to function as a Bahá’í agency under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States.

Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund was established in 1992 to honor Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941) Persian scholar and teacher of the Bahá’í Faith who became well known in Iran for his profound knowledge of the Bible, Qur’an, and Bahá’í scriptures. The primary function of the Fund is sponsoring ‘Irfán Colloquium and its publications.

‘Irfán Colloquia are presently held in North America and Western Europe in English, Persian and German languages. 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 of the Bahá’í Faith with intellectual schools of thought and religious traditions, and current challenges in human society from the Bahá’í perspective.

As of October 2013 one hundred and Twenty Two sessions of colloquia have been held. Papers in English presented or received at the ‘Irfán Colloquia are annually published in a series of volumes of the *Lights of ‘Irfán* ‘,

¹ *`Irfán* is a Persian word referring to mystical, theological and spiritual knowledge.



Irfán Colloquium

One-Hundred-and-Twenty-First Session

October 10-13, 2013

*Jubilee Celebration of the Establishment of Universal
House of Justice*

Thursday October 10, 2013

Afternoon

Arrivals and Registration

6:30 p.m.

Dinner

7:30 p.m.

Opening Session

Words of Welcome and Announcements

**Introducing Louhelen School's Facilities and
Programs**

Getting to Know Each Other

Irfán Colloquium Aims, Mission, and Program

Iraj Ayman

8:30 p.m.

**Election of the First House of Justice
(Video Presentation)**

9:00 p.m.

Bazm-i-Irfán

10:00

Free Time

Friday, October 11, 2013

7:30 a.m.

Devotional (*Optional*)

8:00 a.m.

Breakfast

9:00 a.m.

Opening Prayers

Announcements

9:15 a.m.

**Leadership and Succession in
Taoist-Buddhist Temples**

CHEW Ghim Lian Phyllis

10:00 a.m.

Discussion

10:30 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.

Music

11:15 a.m.

**Discovering One's Own Innermost Divine Reality --
A study on "Man Arafa Nafseh"**

Habib Riazati

12:00 a.m.

Discussion

12:30

Lunch and Free Time

3:00 p.m.

Prayer

3:15

**Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh
Gleaming through the Tablet of Patience**

Foad Seddigh

4:00 p.m.

Discussion

4:30 p.m.

Break

5:00 p.m.

Music

5:15 p.m.

**The Universal House of Justice:
A Unique Institution in the Annals of Religion**

Sovaida Ma'ani

6:00 p.m.

Discussion

6:30 p.m.

Dinner and Free Time

8:30 p.m.

Bazm-e `Irfán

9:30 p.m.

Bookshop/Cafe

11:00

Campus Closes

Saturday, October 12, 2013

7:30 -8:00 a.m.

Devotional (*Optional*)

8:00 a.m.

Breakfast

9:00 a.m.

Opening Prayers

Announcements

9:15 a.m.

**The Last Refuge
Fifty years of the Ministry of the
Universal House of Justice**

Shahbaz Fatheazam

10:00 a.m.

Discussion

10:30 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.

Music

11:15 a.m.

**Major Debates and Disputations of Belief in History
and the Bahá'í Dispensation**

Faris Badii

12:00

Lunch and Free Time

3:00 p.m.

Prayers

3:15 p.m.

**The Greatest Holy Leaf's Unparalleled Role in
Religious History - the Significance of the
Arc, the Site of Her Resting Place**

Baharieh Ma'Ani

4:00 p.m.

Discussion

4:30 p.m.

Break

5:00

Music

5:15 p.m.

Spirit, Mind, and the Universe

Kamran Sedig and Adib Sedig

6:00 p.m.

Discussion

6:30 p.m.

Dinner and Free Time

8:30 p.m.

Bazm-e `Irfán

9:30 p.m.

Bookshop/Café

11:00
Campus Closes

Sunday, October 13, 2013

7:30 a.m.

Devotional (*Optional*)

8:00 a.m.

Breakfast

9:00 a.m.

Opening Prayers

Announcements

9:15a.m.

**Integration of Centralization and Decentralization
in the Bahá'í Administrative Order**

Iraj Ayman

10:00 a.m.

Discussion

10:30 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.

**The Meanings and the Stations of Tawhid in the
Bábí and Bahá'í Writings**

Habib Riazati

11:45 a.m.

Discussion

12:00

Lunch

PROGRAM ENDS

Coordinator: Roya Ayman
Bazm-i-`Irfán
Firooz Mohtadi and Monika Meelani

ABSTRACTS

*In Alphabetical Order of
Presenters' Surnames*

The Universal House of Justice

1963 - 2013

Ali Nakhjavani¹

The advent of the 50th Anniversary of the election of the Universal House of Justice is an appropriate time to recall the bewilderment of the Bahá'í world at the sudden passing of the beloved Guardian in November 1957, the pivotal role played by the Hands of the Cause of God, as Chief Stewards and Custodians of the Faith during the interregnum, the emergence of the Universal House of Justice, on the Hundredth Anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad, and the holding of the Most Great Jubilee in London to mark the conclusion of Shoghi Effendi's monumental Ten Year Crusade.

The friends were on the one hand grieved because of the physical absence of the beloved Guardian, but, on the other, they were rejoicing at the victories won during the Crusade, and at the inception of an Institution ordained in the Most Holy Book and destined to become the "last refuge of a tottering civilization".

There was a need, however, for the friends to be assured that the year 1963 had been anticipated in our

texts. They also wondered: Will there be new Teaching Plans? Will there be future Guardians?

Opposition to the Faith was clearly anticipated in the Writings. If the Administrative Order were to be attacked on the grounds that no living Guardian existed, as foreshadowed in the first section of `Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament*, how were the friends to respond? Was there any text to indicate that the Guardianship will not be an on-going Institution throughout the Bahá'í Dispensation? Had Shoghi Effendi given any hints in his writings on the future leadership of the Faith after his passing?

This presentation will deal with such issues. Its main purpose is to help the friends in defending the Administrative Order in its present form. An important part of this presentation will deal with historical facts after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, the defection of Mirza Muhammad-Ali, the similarity of method and purpose in the application of the Law of Succession by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the resolution of apparent problems arising from statements made by the Guardian in his *The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah*, and the guarantees stipulated in the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice that the Covenant of God's Holy Cause will continue to be impregnable, unassailable and incorruptible till the end of the Dispensation, when God's new Manifestation will appear, to Whom, in the words of the Constitution "will belong all authority and power".

Integration of Centralization and Decentralization in the Bahá'í Administrative Order

Iraj Ayman

¹ Abstract of Mr. Nakhjavani's presentations at the `Irfán Colloquium, 2013, Acuto, Italy

The Universal House of Justice is a unique institution in the field and the discipline of Public Administration. It is the only international governing council whose members, every five years, are internationally elected by all the members of its community, namely, Bahá'ís around the world in a three stage election free from any kind of electioneering. It is the center of an order that “constitutes the very pattern of that divine civilization which the almighty Law of Bahá'u'lláh is designed to establish upon earth.”² Among its many features, it functions as the nerve center of an unprecedented administrative structure that combines the advantages of both centralized and decentralized systems of administration and management. Bahá'í Administrative Order is an organic entity gradually growing and developing under the care and guidance of the Universal House of Justice and presents a solution to many of the challenges and problems in the field of Public Administration. This study concentrates on one of those issues and problems, i.e. centralized versus decentralized systems of administration from the perspective of the Bahá'í pattern of administration, and also the role and function of the Universal House of Justice and other Bahá'í senior administrative intuitions concerning centralization and decentralization.

Major Debates and Disputations of Belief in History and the Bahá'í Dispensation

Faris Badii

² *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 152

Religious and scientific differences of views and opinions throughout human history have resulted in incalculable debates and disputations. Despite its short life, the Bahá'í history has also witnessed some major debates of its own. A brief survey of some of the most famous and important historical debates such as the disputation of Barcelona between the Jews and Christians, the debate between Galileo and ten cardinals representing Pope Urban VIII and the Oxford debate of 1860 on Darwinian evolution will be presented. Following this introduction, the presentation will focus on some major debates of the Bahá'í history including the Trial of the Báb in Tabriz, the debate between `Abdu'l-Bahá and Pastor Meunier in Paris, and the face to face encounter of a Bahá'í teacher with Muzaffaruddin-Shah.

Leadership and Succession in Taoist-Buddhist Temples

Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew

While there is a large body of research on religion, there is very little on the internal structure of religious organisations. More specifically, on the topic of leadership and succession, a keyword search on Amazon produced more than 7000 titles, which indicate these are topics of wide appeal. Yet there is hardly anything on leadership and succession in Chinese religious organisations.

This paper examines leadership hierarchical structures and processes in traditional Chinese temples. My research questions fall into three major clusters:

STRUCTURE. Who chooses the leader or the assembly? What is the length of the appointment (for life or for a fixed term length)? How powerful are the leadership positions? How does the leadership of Chinese temples and mosques compare with each other?

PROCESS & IDEOLOGY. What are the ideologies and presuppositions behind the internal structure of these religious organisations? How do Chinese temples and mosques influence their membership or help their group live out its purpose and character?

CHALLENGE & CHANGE. How do Chinese religious organisations keep relevant in the winds of globalization and change? Are leadership and succession policies in both the Chinese temple and the Chinese mosque able to meet the challenge of operating in highly demanding political, social, and economic climate?

The Last Refuge
**Fifty Years of the Ministry of
the Universal House of Justice**

Shahbaz Fatheazam

This paper focuses on the emergence of the Universal House of Justice and studies the experience of the Bahá'í world community with its supreme body since its inception. As a corollary, the organizational structure of Bahá'í polity and its special vision of politics and government is also examined highlighting the connection between the institutional and the cultural and how the influence and durability of

institutions is a function of the extent to which they are inculcated in political actors at the individual or organizational level. To this end, cognitive scripts, moral templates and personal perceptions are used liberally. The task is made difficult by the limitations imposed by: (a) our intellect which is not fixed but always relative to the culture, ideas, arts and sciences, of the times. It needs aging before it is potable and safe; (b) the absence of precedence which raises the problem of how to move the information we have gathered into any form of conceptual framework – a set of concepts that are easy to understand and that can travel' – i.e. are truly comparative across systems – and can thus be related to the political process in various societies and to which all people may easily connect; and (c) the very contemporary nature of a complex subject so closely rooted to the present with no proper distance that our proximity to the passage of time brings us too close to and perhaps even too much part of the events to make proper historical judgments compounded by how little we know about what is yet to happen in an institution whose provisions and implications are yet to be unveiled. We also underline the importance of how the evolution of any religious community rests on its ability to analyze its institutional set-up and how the constitution of the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith is necessary to its viability quite apart from the need to maintain a healthy interaction between masses and leaders whose outcome must match, as closely as possible, intended results, assured only by man's willingness or ability to live within the structure of authority.

The Greatest Holy Leaf's Unparalleled Role in Religious History --the Significance of the Arc, the Site of Her Resting Place

Baharieh Rouhani Maani

The Greatest Holy Leaf enjoys a unique station in religious history. She is the only woman with a mandate to lead a worldwide community. She was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 'competent deputy, His representative and vicegerent' during His long absence in the western world. Immediately after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Ascension and several times during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, she found herself in leadership roles and performed the responsibilities brilliantly. The choice by Shoghi Effendi of a specific spot on Mount Carmel under the shadow of the Báb's Sepulcher as the site of her resting place set in motion the process of establishing the Arc around which are built institutions at the Bahá'í World Centre. The Seat of the Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, occupies the top of the Arc. This presentation focuses on her station, the services she rendered in the absence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi from the World Centre, and discusses the significance of her monument.

The Universal House of Justice: A Unique Institution in the Annals of Religion

Sovaida Maani

Never before in the annals of the world's religions has the world encountered an institution remotely resembling the Universal House of Justice. Its uniqueness is apparent in a number of different

ways: its origins which lie in the express provisions made for it by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the nature of its authority, the scope of its jurisdiction, the overall purpose for which it was designed and the very circumstances surrounding its creation. This presentation will examine each of these several aspects in turn and contrast them with the institutions of some past Dispensations

Knowing Self, Knowing God Discovering one's own Innermost Divine Reality

Habib Riazati

The various meanings, applications and the implications of "Self-Knowledge" and how such a knowledge is equivalent to the "Knowledge of God"! One of the main objectives of this presentation is to examine some of the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on some of the universal and the contextual meanings of the statement: "**One who knows his own self, shall also know God**" uttered by the sages and manifestations throughout the history of humankind.

Another major goal of this presentation is to demonstrate the practical relevance of the doctrine of **Self-Knowledge** on the developments of individual, society (community), and the governing institutions. In other words, how the different belief systems and perspectives on the Nature and the Reality of man (human) could have positive or negative influences on how we view our own individual self, our attitudes towards others and about the world, and most importantly how the different ideological doctrines on

human nature have resulted in the creation of different social and political orders throughout the history.

The Meanings and the Stations of Tawhid in the Bábí and Bahá'í Writings

Habib Riazati

The two aspects of divine unity and the progressive and non-linear continuity of all revelations are among the foremost fundamental verities of all the religions of God.

The purpose of this research is to underscore the significance of the concept the continuity and the progressive unfolding of truth, in the major works of the Primal Point. In particular, the multidimensional contexts in the *Persian Bayán*, in which this fundamental concept has been discussed and emphasized, will be examined.

Spirit, Mind, and the Universe

Kamran & Adib Sedig

This presentation will cover the concepts of spirit, soul, mind, and the universe. We will explore each concept and discuss their relationships. As much as possible, we will try to correlate the Bahá'í conceptualization of these concepts with new scientific ideas.

"Spirit, mind, and the universe"? The presentation will be an exploration of the relationship between these concepts and how new scientific findings support the Bahá'í conceptualization of these concepts

Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh Gleaming through the Tablet of Patience

Foad Seddigh

This paper takes a closer look at Súriy-i-Sabr (Surih Sabr), to which references are made by other names. This Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh, which has been revealed on the first day of Ridván 1863, and has great significance among the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, is the subject of the study of this paper. In order to understand the contents of this Tablet better, one needs to review the events in the life of Bahá'u'lláh in the last few weeks prior to his exile to Istanbul (Constantinople) and Adrianople (Edirnih). Sabr is an Arabic word meaning patience, and Súriy-i-Sabr (Surih Sabr) derives its name from the attribute of 'patience' which is the starting theme of this Tablet. Troubles might come in one's path as a test for which patience is needed. In such occasions, one needs to be steadfast and loyal to one's Lord. The relationship between troubles in the path of God, and being steadfast in such instances on one hand, and divine tests on the other, have come under scrutiny in this paper. Ayyúb (Job) is one of the prophets of Israel who has exhibited these qualities, and his life is synonymous with patience. Bahá'u'lláh, while stating the story of the life of Ayyúb (Job) in this Tablet, writes some passages which may be interpreted as a statement of His own revelation from the tongue of Ayyúb. These statements have been identified in this paper. In this Tablet, the life history of Ayyúb is briefly mentioned and in this paper expanded. Ayyúb is also, a name which has been conferred by Bahá'u'lláh on a person who showed this attribute in the path of God and was steadfast in allegiance to his Lord, the Bab. He is Hájí Muhammad-Taquí Nayrízí,

who was no longer living when this Tablet was revealed. This tablet has immortalized his life. This paper touches upon the sacrifices of this devoted believer. A summary of the content of the Tablet, without much explanation has been presented. Names of the persons and localities which appeared in the Tablet have been discussed. Significance of the devotion and heroic acts of Siyyid Yahyá Dárábi, Vahíd, in Nayríz has been discussed, and offering his life for his beloved, the Exalted One, the Primal Point, has been compared to the martyrdom of the Imám Husayn, to which a reference has been made in the Tablet. Similarities between the lives of these two spiritual towers have been drawn. Although, in the Tablet topics such as: Seal of Prophets, Beholding the Countenance of God, Appearance of God in the Shelter of Clouds, attaining the presence of God, Great Announcement, the Hour, Day of Resurrection, the Trumpet Call, and clarification of other puzzling references in the past scriptures, particularly the holy Qur'an, etc, have been discussed, none-the-less, these topics have been dealt with in greater details, in books such as the '*Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Book of Certitude', and '*Jems of Divine Mysteries*' which were revealed before this Tablet. However, topics such as these, important as they may seem, which are presented in the Tablet, do not constitute the significance of this Tablet. Rather, the significance of this Tablet lies in clarifying the manner of announcement of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, when He left Baghđad, and in references made to His station as the Promised One of the Dispensation of the Báb. There is no such phrases as: I am 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' in this Tablet which clearly would proclaim and pronounce that he is "the Promised One of the Bayán." Though, He announces a new Light is being shed upon the

world and a new Song is being sung, but it seems, He realizes that the time is not ripe for making the announcement openly, clearly and widely. References to His station and the new religion of God in this Tablet all have been discussed in this paper and have been analyzed. There are several passages in the Tablet which clearly indicate that those pure souls who expected Him to put a claim to a station, needed to wait and be patient. He also stresses that once He has made this announcement, it is not proper for them to hesitate for a moment, and if they stop for a moment, despite their long patience, the pronouncement of 'patient one' no longer can be applied to them. In the Tablet, there is a reference to Qayyúmu'l-Asmá. In this paper, Qayyúmu'l-Asmá has been discussed and the references made in the Tablet regarding 'two names', 'two dawning places', 'two mysteries', etc. have been traced and identified in Qayyúmu'l-Asmá. In the Tablet, there is no mention of the name of the arch enemy of the 'Light of God', the half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh, Yahyá Azal. But there are several references to him such as the "Calf" and 'Samirí'. These references have been identified and explained. At the end of the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh bids farewell to the friends in elevating and exalting words in a manner that may be interpreted as something profound, as a result of this separation, will happen. But, he does not pinpoint what that would be. This is indeed, a reference to the announcement of His station as the Promised One of the Bayán in an unequivocal manner in Adrianople which lead to the rebellion of His half-brother, Yahyá Azal. In this paper, His parting words and their meanings have been analyzed. Also, there has been a prophecy and warning regarding the 'birds of darkness' which will start flying in the absence of the light which is in reality the 'Light of His Countenance'.

These passages have been identified and their meanings have been discussed. In the Tablet there are several references to Himself with names such as the 'the Nightingale of Paradise', the 'Beauteous Countenance of Eternity', etc. A list of these names have been compiled and presented in the paper.

Publications of the 'Irfán Colloquia

Moojan. Momen (ed.), *Scripture and Revelation* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997)

Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bahá'í Faith and the World Religions* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2005)

Iraj Ayman (ed.), *The Lights of 'Irfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at 'Irfán Colloquia* (in English), Books One to Fourteen (2000–2013)

Iraj Ayman (ed.), *Safini-yi Irfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at 'Irfán Colloquia* (in Persian). Books One to Fifteen, (1998–2012)

Farah Dustdar (ed.), *Beiträge des 'Irfán-Kolloquiums: Compilations of Papers Presented at 'Irfán Colloquia* (in German) Books One to Five (Hofheim, Germany: Bahá'í Verlag, 2004–2009)

Maryam Afshar, *Images of Christ in the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (2004)

Wolfgang Klebel, *Revelation of Unity, Unity of Revelation* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2009)

Vahid Rafati, *Áftab Ámad Dalil-i Áftáb* (The proof of the Sun is the Sun) (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2010)

Vahid Rafati, *Baddáy'-i-Ma'áni va Tafsír* (The Wonders of Inner Meanings and Interpretation): *Selected Commentaries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on Qur'anic Verses and Islamic Traditions* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2013)

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