

`Irfán Colloquium
One Hundred-and-Twenty Eight
Session

**IMMERSING IN THE OCEAN
OF
HIS WORDS**



**PROGRAM
AND ABSTRACTS**

Louhelen Bahá'í School
Davison, Michigan
October 9-12, 2014



The **Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund** was established in 1992 to honor Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941) and is dedicated to promoting the scholarly study of the Bahá'í Faith. Haj Mehdi Arjmand was a 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 activity of the Fund is sponsoring `Irfán Colloquium and its publications.

The `Irfan Colloquium is sponsored by Haj Mehdi Memorial Fund and supported by Nadia Saadat Memorial Scholarships grant. 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 United States. `Irfán Colloquia, are presently held in North America and Western Europe in English, Persian and German languages. `Irfan Colloquia at the Acuto Center for Bahá'í Studies are held under the auspices of the National Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Italy.

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 looking at current challenges in human society from the Bahá'í perspective. *`Irfán* is a Persian word referring to mystical, theological and spiritual knowledge.

As of October 2014 one hundred and twenty eight 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*.



`Irfán Colloquium
One-Hundred-and-Twenty Eight Session
 October 9-12, 2014

Thursday October 9, 2014

Afternoon
Arrivals and Registration

6:30 p.m.
 Dinner
 8:00 p.m.

Opening Session

Words of Welcome and Announcements
Getting to Know Each Other
Louhelen Schools Facilities and Programs
Getting to Know Each Other

Irfan Colloquium Aims, Mission, and Program

Iraj Ayman

9:00 p.m.

Bazm-i-`Irfán

10:00
 Free Time

Friday, October 10, 2014

7:30 a.m.
 Devotional (*Optional*)

8:00 a.m.
 Breakfast
 9:00 a.m.
 Opening Prayers
 Announcements
 9:15a.m.

Foad Seddigh

The Ode of the Dove (*Qáṣīdīy-i-Varqá'īyyih*):
Its Significance and Similarities
with *Tá'īyyih Ibn-i-Fárid*

10:00 a.m.
 Discussion
 10:30 a.m.
 Break
 11:00 a.m.
 Music
 11:15a.m.

Habib Riazati

Tablets of Holy Mariner
and their Integral Relationship
with Lawh-i-Howdaj

12:00 a.m.
 Discussion
 12:30

Lunch and Free Time

3:00 p.m.

Bijan Ghafari

Knowledge of God and Knowledge of Self
in one's Spiritual transformation,
powered by Love of God

3:45 p.m.
 Discussion
 4:15 p.m.

Break
4:45 p.m.
Music
5:00 p.m.
Faris Badii

**Symbolism and Metaphor
in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi**

5:45 p.m.
Discussion
6:15 p.m.
Dinner and Free Time
8:00 p.m.
Open Discussion
9:00 p.m.
Bazm-e `Irfán
10:00 p.m.
Bookshop/Cafe
11:00
Campus Closes

Saturday, October 11, 2014

7:30 -8:00 a.m.
Devotional (*Optional*)
8:00 a.m.
Breakfast
9:00 a.m.
Opening Prayers
Announcements
9:15 a.m.
Jena Khodadad

**"The world's equilibrium hath been upset":
Insights from the Science of Chaos".**

10:00 a.m.
Discussion
10:30 a.m.

Break
11:00 a.m.
Music
11:15 a.m.

JoAnn Borovicka

**The Narrative of the Plagues of Exodus
Understood through the Bahá'í Writings**

12:00
Lunch and Free Time
3:00 p.m.
Mehrdad Ehsani

**Man's Station in the Universe:
a Scientist's Spiritual Journey**

3:45 p.m.
Discussion
4:15 p.m.
Break
4:45
Music
5:00 p.m.

Kamran Sedig

**Reflections on the Words of Wisdom
and the Meaning of Faith**

5:45 p.m.
Discussion
6:15 p.m.
Dinner and Free Time
8:00 p.m.
Open Discussion
9:00

Bazm-e `Irfán

10:00 p.m.
Bookshop/Café
11:00

Campus Closes

Sunday, October 12, 2014

7:30 a.m.

Devotional (*Optional*)

8:00 a.m.

Breakfast

9:00 a.m.

Opening Prayers

Announcements

9:15a.m.

Hushidar Motlagh

Knowledge of God and the Afterlife

10:00 a.m.

Discussion

10:30 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.

Iraj Ayman

Mastering Bahá'í Way of Life: Process or Event?

11:45 a.m.

Discussion

12:00

Lunch

ABSTRACTS

*In Alphabetical Order of
Presenters' Surnames*

PROGRAM ENDS

Coordinator: Roya Ayman

Bazm-e Irfan:

Manoochehr Vahman, Mark Ochu

Mastering Bahá'í Way of Life:

Process or Event?

(A Research Proposal)

Iraj Ayman

“Let deeds, not words, be your adorning.”ⁱ Having knowledge of Bahá'í way of life while necessary for conducting life as recommended in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, does not, by itself, guarantee actualization of such knowledge in the daily life of individual believers. Bahá'í ethics, as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, includes recommended standards and guidelines for Bahá'í way of moral behavior. He also calls on individual to bring himself to account each and every day before being called upon to give account for his/her deeds.ⁱⁱ This procedure requires quantifying quality of deeds on daily basis. Mastering moral conduct, as recommended in the Writings, is a process and not an event. It is the process of gradually habituating to the desired behavior. Therefore, we need a method for daily measurement of the progress of our deeds towards the ideal behavior. In this presentation a research proposal will be discussed for achieving such a goal.

Symbolism and Metaphor in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

Faris Badii

A unique characteristic of the work of the Guardian is His use of symbolism. An examination of His writings, plans and directives reveals continual use of metaphor in almost all of His major and minor works. Questions such as why eight pronged stars, instead of nine pointed ones, were utilized in the landscape of the Bahá'í holy gardens? What precise significances are

embedded in various aspects of the design of the superstructure of the shrine of the Bab or the International Archives building? Why did He pen some of His writings the way He did? What was the motivation behind the dates of completion of some of His announcements and letters? Why did He place the photographs He did in certain places for the pilgrims to see. This brief presentation is an inadequate attempt at bringing into focus the uniqueness of the use of symbolism in His differentiating style.

The Narrative of the Plagues of Exodus Understood through the Bahá'í Writings

JoAnn Borovicka

The Biblical Book of Exodus describes that the Lord commissioned Moses to go to Pharaoh [who is not specifically identified] to call for the release of the Israelites who were under oppression in Egypt. When Pharaoh refused to cooperate, Egypt became afflicted with ten “signs and wonders”¹: waters turning into blood, frogs, lice, flies, diseased livestock, boils, thunder and hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of the first-borns.² This is often referred to as “the narrative of the plagues.”³ The nature of these plagues has historically been interpreted in two ways. The traditional understanding has been that these signs were the miraculous and “direct work of God for His purposes”⁴ -- that being to demonstrate His power and to gain release of the Israelites. Another theory that has received some popularity is to explain the series of plagues as the effect of natural causes and particularly

¹ Exodus 7:3

² Ex 7:19-11:5

³ Houston, Walter. “Exodus” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pg 73.

⁴ Ibid.

related to the ancient Santorini volcano eruption.⁵

'Abdu'l-Bahá offers another understanding of this narrative by explaining the nature of the first plague, the water turning to blood, as a symbol of the degradation caused by holding onto traditional forms of power and thereby denying the current Word of God. The “waters that were in the rivers” symbolize the wealth, power, and religion that had been the cause of life and prosperity in Pharaoh’s nation. Due to pride and denial of the Word of God as revealed by Moses, attachment to traditional ways became the cause of their demise. Metaphorically, what had been life-giving waters were turned to blood:

So the kingdom, wealth and power of Pharaoh and his people, which were the causes of the life of the nation, became, through their opposition, denial and pride, the cause of death, destruction, dispersion, degradation and poverty.⁶

Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá interpreted only the first plague, His explanation opens a new perspective on the entire plague narrative: neither God nor the Manifestation inflicts suffering on anyone -- the plagues symbolize the suffering brought on oneself and entire peoples with the choice to turn away from the Word of God and to hold onto traditional power. This is an archetypal truth.

The purpose of this paper is to examine 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

⁵ Trevesano, Siro Igino. *The Plagues of Egypt: Archaeology, History, and Science Look at the Bible*. New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2005)

⁶ ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 50)

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.

Man’s Station in the Universe: A Scientist Spiritual

Mehrdad Ehsani

The Universe is very simple: mostly made of hydrogen, helium and energy. However, the earth contains amazing complexity that is nearly unique in the universe. Unique circumstances have made possible organic chemistry and life on earth, leading to the most complex structure in the universe: human brain. For example, we can show that the energy consumption of human brain per kilogram is 100,000 times the energy per kilogram that our sun can produce. The purpose of all this miraculous combination of events is human consciousness and spiritual awareness. We will explore this physical-spiritual phenomenon in this talk.

This presentation is intended to show the nobility of man and his/her divine purpose. Quotes from Bahá’u’lláh will be referenced to show that this is the central teaching in his writings. Further, it will be shown that keen observation of the world around us, all the way to the edge of the universe, will enlighten the sensitive observer to the same realization. Thus, we will see that one can progress from “faith” to “certitude”, first through the intellect, then through the heart, and finally, through unconditioned consciousness (I bear witness O my God ...) . This is what Bahá’u’lláh calls the state of “Absolute Nothingness”, where “even love is a barrier between the lover and the Beloved”.

I will offer scientific and spiritual pointers to how evident and yet subtle the notion of Absolute Nothingness, the unity of one with all, is. Although the talk is intended to be simple, it is hoped that it will open a window to our true nature, or our essence.

We will start with the notion of simplicity and complexity: how as we travel from the outer universe toward the planet earth and toward the human brain we go from simplicity to complexity. This will show that the human brain is at the apex of the very large pyramid of the manifest universe. The brain realizes human mind and spiritual awareness. All of this is to show how noble and sacred the world around us, and the station of man and in it, is.

The talk will briefly use the current scientific knowledge to illuminate the nature of the “physical reality”. This is to show how mysterious this world really is. In fact, there is no gap between reality and nothingness (this is alluded to in the *Book of Certitude*). This will show us that what we see as the manifest reality is in fact dependent on our capacity to perceive. The finer and more sensitive our perception, the more we realize the nothingness that manifests itself as the real world and we are part of this dance of nothingness as form.

The above talk will be given as the personal journey of this speaker who started as a Bahá’í and after spending a lifetime in search of deeper truths in science and spirituality, arrived at the ancient and simple insight that is “the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden”. This insight melted his heart in the love of Bahá’u’lláh and his teachings.

Knowledge of God and Knowledge of Self in one’s Spiritual Transformation, Powered by Love of God

Bijan Ghafari

We live in a time of chaos, in an ever changing world in which the only constant is the change, rich in potential for new possibilities. A new world order is being born. We need new ideas, new ways of seeing, and new relationships to help us now. New science—the new discoveries in biology, chaos theory, and quantum physics that are changing our understanding of how the world works—offers this guidance. It describes a world where chaos is natural, where order exists “for free”. Chaos is a necessary process for the creation of new order. This is a world where chaos and order exist as partners, where stasis is never guaranteed or even desired.

- How to make sense of chaotic events which seem insurmountable at the time of their occurring?
- How to find meaning in sufferings and changes sometimes so painful yet necessary in essence for our spiritual and emotional development?
- How do we prepare ourselves to create an intrinsic stable changeless core within us based on principles in the teachings of Bahá’í faith which in times of turbulence and chaotic change will provide us with *guidance, wisdom, power* and *security* in order to face the challenges and make sense of chaos, learn from it, and make the optimum decision possible for our spiritual transformation?

We need to learn how to facilitate the process of change. We need to become savvy about how to foster relationships, how to nurture spiritual growth and

development. All of us need to become better at listening, conversing, respecting and embracing one another's uniqueness, because these are essential for strong relationships.

The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, made the staggering claim that His Revelation would be the chief instrument by which the unification of mankind would take place and through which world order and world peace would ultimately be established. Whoever is truly interested in world peace will, therefore, need to have an interest in how that transformation can take place. The Bahá'í Faith having spread throughout the world in such a short time and having demonstrated its power to transform the lives of so many human beings, there has developed much interest in the nature of the actual process by which the Faith does enable a human being who embraces it to become transformed into his/her true self.

Bahá'í Writings shed a great deal of light on the way in which the Faith transforms the lives of its adherents by releasing the human potential.

A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states: *"The whole purpose of Bahá'u'lláh is that we should become a new kind of people, people who are upright, kind, intelligent, truthful, and honest and who live according to His great laws laid down for this new epoch in man's development. To call ourselves Bahá'ís is not enough, our inmost being must become ennobled and enlightened through living a Bahá'í life."* (Compilation of Compilations, vol. 2, p. 13.)

What are those fundamental capacities endowed within every human being that when released through proper true education will ennoble one's character and enable him/her to serve humanity?

These are the capacities of Knowing and Loving. Bahá'u'lláh states: "I bear witness, o my God,

that Thou hast created me to know thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is non-other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting."

A spiritual person is one who knows and loves God and who is committed to the struggle of developing those knowing and loving capacities for the purpose of serving humanity. In other words, knowing and loving used in the right way through faith and courage will increase the knowing and loving capacity — will release human potential. Each capacity supports and facilitates the development of the other. In order to know, for instance, we must love learning; if we are to love, we must know how to love and how to be loved.

All other virtues can be understood as expressions of different combinations of these basic fundamental capacities of loving and knowing as they are applied in different situations.

Of course Baha'u'llah's teachings concerning the transformation process are stimulating to the mind, but knowledge of them has also a practical purpose, for conscious knowledge of what is happening to oneself during that process helps to consolidate the gains and enables one to identify and accept, often through painful experiences that may at first appear needless or cruel, opportunities for further growth.

Bahá'u'lláh Himself affirms that: *"The object of every Revelation" is to "effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions."* Otherwise, He observes, *"the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent"* (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 241)

What is the highest and fundamental source of power needed to provide the individual with energy, enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation to go through the multiple phases of transformation defined by Bahá'u'lláh?

Creative Word of God and The Power of love.

He states: *"In the world of existence there is no greater power than power of love."* And `Abd'u'l-Bahá explains: *"For when the heart of Man is aglow with the flame of love, he is ready to sacrifice all—even his life."*

The loving capacity includes not only the ability to love but also the ability to be loved — to attract love. As `Abdu'l-Bahá states, *"The essence of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching is all-embracing love, for love includeth every excellence of humankind. It causeth every soul to go forward; it bestoweth on each one, for a heritage, immortal life. Ere long shalt thou bear witness that His celestial Teachings, the very glory of reality itself, shall light up the skies of the world. (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p.66)*

The knowing capacity also includes knowledge of how to learn and how to teach. Teaching and learning are reciprocal aspects of the knowing capacity. From a Bahá'í point of view, true education refers to a development of potential to the fullest extent possible. It has been demonstrated that if the loving capacity is blocked in any way, there will be learning problems and the development of the knowing capacity will be impaired.

We must love — be attracted to, have a particular attitude towards — that unknown in our own selves if it is to become released. If we relate truly to the unknown in ourselves, we will be able to relate to the unknown in others. In other words, we have to accept others not only for what they presently are but also to

their potential latent within them for what they can become; otherwise, we impede their process of transformation and keep them from becoming their own true selves. If you do not accept the unknown possibilities in yourself, you will not be able to establish anything more than superficial relationships with other human beings, and you will not be able to help them to develop their potential nor yourself to develop your own.

As `Abdu'l-Bahá states: *"The love which is between the hearts of believers {.....} is attained through the knowledge of God. {...} Each sees in the other the beauty of God reflected in the soul, and, finding this point of similarity, they are attracted to one another in Love. This love will make all men the waves of one sea. This love will make them all the stars of one heaven and the fruits of one tree. This love will bring the realization of true accord, the foundation of real unity. (Paris Talks, pp. 180-181)*

Faith & anxiety of the Unknown

In essence, faith means a loving of the unknown or unknowable — an attraction to whatever is unknown and a capacity to approach it. Since, as Bahá'u'lláh affirms, God is unknowable, it takes faith to become attracted and related to Him.

The power of the Bahá'í Faith to transform human beings by releasing their potential stems directly from the fact that it keeps doubt and anxiety of uncertainty and chaos from reaching unmanageable proportions and provides an incentive and motivation to deal with them constructively through faith and courage. Bahá'u'lláh himself indicated that the primary source of the power for transformation comes from an acceptance of his Word — the Word of God. His Writings are often referred to as "the creative word" precisely because human beings have felt themselves

being created anew as they have become more and more exposed to it. Bahá'u'lláh clearly affirms that if you want to become transformed, you must "immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words."

As we continually explore the Writings, we begin to see ourselves differently and to see the environment differently. As we begin to see ourselves and the environment differently, we begin to feel differently about things. As we begin to feel differently, we begin to behave differently. Behaving differently is the tangible manifestation of one's having embarked upon the adventure of becoming what one potentially can become.

However, Bahá'u'lláh has not come merely to establish yet another alternative religious congregation in pursuit of its own aims. Rather, He has renewed the wellspring of revelation in order to raise up a new "Race of Men," "incomparable in character," who will "cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created from water and clay." (Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 31.)

Thus, as greater and greater numbers of human beings find a way in the Bahá'í Faith to become their own true selves — to reflect the image of God in their lives, society will also be in the process of becoming its true self — the Kingdom of God on earth.

But what is the "**excellence**" of what one can potentially become?

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the highest expression of the self is servitude.


For a Bahá'í happiness and success is not a life free from anxiety or tension. That is the Bahá'í definition of boredom. Happiness and success for a Bahá'í is having tests and knowing how to muster the courage to pass them in such a way that his knowing and loving capacities are further developed in service to humanity.

Living in the community provides the tests which become the opportunities to acquire experience in translating abstract principles into concrete realities, and this gives faith a foundation of conscious knowledge

"The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order..."  :

Insights from the Science of Chaos

Jena Khadem Khodadad

These prophetic words of Bahá'u'lláh, launch and illumine this session. This statement attributes the prevailing world disequilibrium, turbulence, and disorder to the destabilizing impact of the emerging new world order- introduced by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Moreover, the statement: ***"Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead,"***  confers assurance that, in time, a new order will replace the present day order.

Turbulence, disequilibrium, and apparent disorder, are all features associated with the process of Chaos; the science of Chaos portends the emergence of order out of apparent disorder. Our times display the characteristics of a true Chaotic process.

The term "chaos"-- in common usage-- is applied to systems that are disorderly. However, the science, of "Chaos", tells us that there is a process which appears disorderly on the surface; albeit, it camouflages an emerging order. Therefore, it is important to be cognizant of two types of "chaos": 1. A process which is disorderly with no emerging order and 2. A process which appears disorderly but results in the emergence of order. For this presentation, "Chaos" is used with capital C as in "2", above. Such

a process can give rise to a higher level order. The process of Chaos may be distinguished by its mathematical feature of fractals.^v

The Science of Chaos

The science of Chaos,^{vi} along with relativity and quantum mechanics was one of the major theories of science in the twentieth century. The process of Chaos was predicted early by James Clerk Maxwell, Noble laureate physicist. His essay contains the essential ideas of the modern Chaos theory, "sensitive dependence on initial conditions;" that is a very small change (in non-linear systems) under appropriate condition can have a very large outcome. This concept is described, poetically as "the butterfly effect" of the science of chaos.

The implications of Chaos are sweeping. Chaos is entailed in the workings of the twin processes of disintegration and integration explained in the Bahá'í sacred scriptures. The science of Chaos sheds insights on the tempo and tenor of our times. Insights imparted by the science of Chaos on the course of human history and the attainment of a global civilization are of particular interest. Furthermore, the "butterfly effect" of Chaos holds implications for a significant enhancement in the growth and advancement of the Bahá'í Faith. These points will be introduced in this presentation.

Knowledge of God and the Afterlife

Hushidar Motlagh

The key to an enduring happiness is the knowledge of God. My talk will focus on this statement from Bahá'u'lláh in *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*:

What "oppression" is greater than that which hath been recounted? What "oppression" is more

grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it? For opinions have sorely differed, and the ways unto the attainment of God have multiplied. (*The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p., 31.)

Bahá'í Scriptures expand our knowledge of God a hundredfold. My most recent book uses this vast store of knowledge to respond to the most common questions people ask about God and the afterlife.

Tablets of Holy Mariner and their Integral Relationship with Lawh-i-Howdaj

Habib Riazati

The purpose of this presentation is to correlate the two Tablets of Holy Mariner with Lawh-i-Howdaj of Bahá'u'lláh who was revealed in response of Mirza Aqa Jan about the two Tablets of Holy Mariner. Moreover, some of the Tablets of `Abd'u'l-Bahá that shed light on these three Tablets will be introduced.

The Tablets of the Holy Mariner were revealed in 1863 on the fifth day of Naw-Ruz a few weeks before Bahá'u'lláh declared his prophethood and mission on the first day of Ridvan. The first part of the tablet in Arabic speaks of the forthcoming declaration of Bahá'u'lláh. A number of symbolic terms used relating to the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh include: "the Holy Mariner", "the ark of eternity", "the Maid of Heaven", "the deathless tree", "the Hand of God" and "the snow-white spot". The latter part of the tablet is about one maiden of the Maid of Heaven's handmaidens.

The Ode of the Nightingale

(*Qáṣídíy-i-Varqá'íyyih*):

Its Significance and Similarities

with *Tá'íyyih Ibn-i-Fárid*

Foad Seddigh

The Ode of the Nightingale (alternatively, The Ode of the Dove) is unique among the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh for a number of reasons. First, this Sacred Scripture is entirely in Arabic and in the form of poetry (*qáṣídih*). Second, it is among His earliest Writings after He was entrusted with His Mission in the *Síyáh-Chál* (Black Pit). Third, it is the product of His soul searching servitude in the mountain wilderness of Kurdistán (three days walking distance from Sulaymáníyyih in 'Iráq near the border of Iran) and in praise of the Maid of Heaven (Hourí Ilahí), personifying the Great Spirit of God, and the Primal Will of God. Fourth, it was revealed in response to a request from *Shaykh* Ismá'íl and other divines who asked Him to write a poem in the same rhyme and meter as that of *Qáṣídíy-i-Tá'íyyih* by the celebrated mystic Egyptian poet, Ibn-i-Fárid known as the 'King of Lovers' – an exercise that no one was able to adequately accomplish until then. *Shaykh* Ismá'íl was the leader of the *Khálidíyyih* Order (a branch of *Naqsh-banddíyyih* Order of Sunní sect of Islam) and became intensely attracted to Bahá'u'lláh. The original poem of Bahá'u'lláh consisted of two thousand verses, nearly three times the size of the work of Ibn-i-Fárid, from which one hundred and twenty seven verses were selected and the rest discarded and destroyed. These one hundred and twenty seven verses are the ones that were allowed to

be transcribed and distributed. In the history books of the Faith, there are records of great influences which the Ode of the Nightingale has exerted on the hearts of believers in the early years of the Faith.

Bahá'u'lláh Himself has written a short commentary of about three to four pages on His Ode of the Nightingale in order to clarify certain phrases or words. This commentary is in Persian and was written in Baghdád after His return from Sulaymáníyyih. It seems that this commentary clarifies only a small fraction of many puzzling phrases and references in the Ode. Several commentaries have been written on the *Tá'íyyih* of Ibn-i-Fárid by Muslim scholars but published material explaining complex phrases in this Ode of Bahá'u'lláh is far from adequate. Since, the Ode of the Nightingale is revealed in the pattern of the *Tá'íyyih* of Ibn-i-Fárid, and after giving consideration to the background information given above, this paper tries to identify that pattern, draw comparison between the two Odes, and explain some of the complexities of the Ode of the Nightingale within the constraints of space.

The Ode of the Nightingale describes the relationship between the Manifestation of God, who has not yet made any claims, and the Primary Will of God which is also called the Holy Spirit, while the *Tá'íyyih* of Ibn-i-Fárid expresses his journey towards a beloved who is intentionally left vague, and may be interpreted to be The Essence of Divinity. We note that *Tá'íyyih* of Ibn-i-Fárid is comprised of numerous conversations between Ibn-i-Fárid and his beloved and a description of the journey he is undertaking to join the beloved. For this reason it is called the 'Poem of the Wayfarer'. From the onset, we note that both Odes are expressing spiritual sentiments but entirely

of different nature. One approach for comparing the two odes is to divide each of the two odes into their sub-sections and then find similarities between sub-sections. We note that the Ode of the Nightingale may be divided into six different sections. The first section consists of verses one to nine which describes the beauty and splendor of the Maid of Heaven. In the Poem, Bahá'u'lláh describes her as the most exalted being possible - as the source of revelation and creation. He states that the light of her beauty darkens all other stars, or in verse nine He states:

*The heart of hearts embraced Her eyelid's dart.
For Her locks' lasso, Being's head was bent.*

The second section consists of verses ten to thirty-six which describe the feelings of love towards the Maid of Heaven that sustains Bahá'u'lláh. The third section includes verses thirty-seven to sixty-one which is the response of the Maid of Heaven to Him. She rebukes Him, explaining that the path of love is rough and may cost one's life. Section four includes verses sixty-two to ninety-seven which is in fact the statement of Bahá'u'lláh's sufferings in the path of His beloved. Section five includes verses ninety-seven to one hundred and twenty-four in which the Maid of Heaven acknowledges His sufferings and encourages Him to continue in this path. Finally, section six consists of verses one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and twenty-seven which is an expression of bidding farewell and a conclusion for the Ode.

The sentiment of Divinity had been expressed by Bahá'u'lláh in poems revealed prior to writing this Ode, in particular in the Ode of Sprinkling of the Clouds (Rashḥ-i-‘Amá) which was revealed immediately after He had the vision of the Maid of

Heaven. The first verse of the Ode of the Sprinkling of the Clouds is:

*On account of Our Rapture the Sprinkling of
the Cloud of Unknowing raineth down;
The Mystery of Fidelity poureth forth from
Our Melody.*

Such Odes can shed some light on the meaning of some of the lines in the Ode of the Nightingale, and its comparison with the Tá'íyyih of Ibn-i-Fárid. These issues have been identified and discussed in this paper.

Reflections on the Words of Wisdom and the Meaning of Faith

Kamran Sedig

The Bahá'í Faith teaches the existence of a personal God--a God who has a will, a purpose, and has a relationship with us. The core of religious faith is the mystic feeling that unites us to God. Words of Wisdom, one of Bahá'u'lláh's short Tablets, composed of 22 aphorisms, conveys a wealth of wisdom and meaning, touching upon different facets of our relationship with God. In this presentation, we will briefly reflect upon some of the concepts in this Tablet that deal with the meaning of religious faith and our spiritual existence.

Footnotes

ⁱ Persian Hidden Words #5

ⁱⁱ Arabic Hidden Words #31

ⁱⁱⁱ Baha'u'llah. *Gleanings*, B PT, London, 1978, p. 135

^{iv} Baha'u'llah. *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, London, 1978, p. 7

^v Fractal –a mathematical feature of chaos. Fractal is derived from the word “fractional”; it signifies any image or process that displays the attribute of self-similarity at all scales. Simply put, fractal is repetition of a pattern or property at all levels of magnification and enlargement. Thus the same pattern or feature is repeated at each level.

^{vi} There are numerous publications on the science of Chaos. See Prigogine, Ilya (Nobel Laureate), and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos*, Bantam Books, 1984. For a comprehensive introductory book on Chaos see Gleick, James. *Chaos - Making a New Science*, Penguin Books, 1987

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