

‘Irfán Colloquium

One Hundred and Forty-Sixth Session

*Bicentennial Celebration of the
Birthday of Bahá’u’lláh*

Program and Abstracts



Centre for Bahá’í Studies

Acuto, Italy

5-8 July 2017

Vision and Aims of `Irfan Colloquium

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.

Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund was established by Houshang Arjmand (1930-2015) in 1992 to honor his grandfather, Haj Mehdi Arjmand and is dedicated to promoting the scholarly study of the Bahá'í Faith. Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941) 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 annual sessions of `Irfán Colloquium and `Irfán publications.

In 2012, benefiting from the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, a management board was appointed for this fund by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to function as a Bahá'í agency. This Fund, together with **Nadia Saadat Memorial Scholarship Fund**, sponsor `Irfán Colloquia, presently held in North America and Western Europe in English, Persian and German languages. Papers in English presented or received at the `Irfán Colloquia are annually published in a series of volumes of the *Lights of `Irfán*.

Program

Wednesday, 5 July, 2017

Participants' Arrival

12:00 p.m. Lunch

Afternoon

Registration

6:15 p.m.

Dinner and Free Time

7:30 p.m.

Opening Session

Words of Welcome and Announcements

Roya Ayman

Getting to Know Each Other

7:45 p.m.

Irfan Colloquium Aims, Mission, and Program

Iraj Ayman

Session 1

8.00 p.m.

Vahid Rafati

**Iran at the beginning of Nineteenth Century as reflected in the
Baha'i Writings**

9:00 p.m. Discussion

9:30 p.m. Free Time

Session 2: Thursday Morning - 6 July: Other Religious Communities

9:15 Devotional and Announcements

9:30

Vahid Rafati

Religious leaders and clergy addressed or referred to in the Baha'i Writings

10:15 Discussion

10:30 Break

11.00

Moshe Sharon

A New Jewish Document on the Mission of Baha'u'llah

11:45 Discussion

12:00

Lunch and Free time

Session 3: Thursday Afternoon – 6 July: Baha'u'llah's Writings

3:30

Vahid Rafati

Religious leaders and clergy addressed or referred to in the Baha'i Writings

4:15 Discussion

4:30 Break

5:00

Iscander Micael Tinto

Days of Remembrance: Notes on Two Tablets

5.45 Discussion

6.00-7.30

Dinner

Session 4: Wednesday Evening – 6 July

8.00-9.00 pm

Julio Savi and Faraneh Varqa-Khadem

Varqa's poetry and its historical background

Session 5: Thursday morning – 7 July: Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá

9:15 Devotional and Announcements

9.30

Vahid Rafati

Iran at the beginning of Nineteenth Century as reflected in the Baha'í Writings

10:15 Discussion

10:30 Break

11.00

Mojgan Malkekan

The Concept of Education in the Writings of Baha'u'llah

11:45 Discussion

12:15-3:00

Lunch and Free Time

Session 6: Thursday Afternoon – 7 July: Bahá'u'lláh in Iraq and Kurdistan

3.30

Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

Ancient poems as a means of Revelation, in an early Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh

4:15 Discussion

4:30 Break 30 mins

5.00

Ami Schrager

From the cave to the *Khanqah* - Baha'u'llah in Kurdistan, a reconsideration

5:45 Discussion

6.00-7.30

Dinner

Session 7: Thursday Evening – 7 July

8.00-8:45 pm

Habib Riazati

Station of Baha'u'llah elucidated in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

**Session 8: Friday Morning – 8 July:
Teachings and Station of Bahá'u'lláh**

9:15 Devotional and announcements

9.30-10.15

Moojan Momen

Power and the Baha'i community

10:15 Discussion

10:30 Break 30 mins

11.00 – 11: 45

Habib Riazati

Station of Baha'u'llah elucidated in the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá

11:45 Discussion

12:00

Lunch and Free time

Session 9: Friday Afternoon – 8 July
Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh - II

3.00-4.15

Wendi Momen

The Influence of the Baha'i Teachings on the Advancement of
Women

4:15 Discussion

4:30 Break 30 mins

5:00

Houshmand Badee

An analytical perspective of economic impact of unity

6.00-7.30

Dinner

Session 10: Friday Evening

8.00

Houshmand Badee

An analytical perspective of economic impact of unity

8:45 Discussion

9:00 p.m

***End of the 146th Session
of `Irfán Colloquium***

Abstracts

In Alphabetical Order of Presenters' Surnames



An analytical perspective of economic impact of unity

Hooshmand Badee

Unity of humankind is Bahá'u'lláh's main mission. This analytical presentation focuses on economic consequences of unity. Economists are concerned about the opportunity cost of resources allocated to war, in both real and monetary values. As unity prevails, resources and in particular human resources become more useful, productive and creative, leading to an increase in human wellbeing. It will be established that unity along with components of spirituality are prerequisites for problem

solving at all level of human society. We examine this from both Bahá'í and secular thinkers viewpoints. Alternative models and theories of unity and spirituality and their effectiveness in resolving conflicts will be examined. Universal acceptance of unity as a spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish human prosperity. It would therefore be suggested that there is a need for universal education and increasing awareness of the importance of unity. The Bahá'í writings provide a number of specific models that are effective for the creation of a relative unity in the Bahá'í community. However, establishing unity is not without challenges. Can we fix humanity's problems with the message of Bahá'u'lláh? Unity should be understood from social, political and economic perspectives, which could be threatened by unjust economic conditions such as poverty. It will be concluded that the Bahá'í community has invested in the process of establishing unity from its very inception with the result of increasing prosperity for the entire population. The experience of the Bahá'í community provides hopeful signs associated with the benefits of unity.



The Concept of Education in the Writings of Baha'u'llah

Mozhgan Malekan

The term “education” in the writings of Baha'u'llah is based on a number of elements such as the nature and the ontological dimensions of human, and objectives and goals that are considered for education. There are different words that are used to describe “education” in the Baha'i writings— in general— and within the writings of Baha'u'llah— specifically. For example, *tarbiah*, *ta'dib*, and *ta'lim*, which stem from various root words, suggest distinct kinds of education and refer to different aspects of human beings. Since the Baha'i teachings emphasize and focus on education as a means for facilitating the process of creating humanity, the theoretical foundations and the practical principles of education are explained based on the aforementioned elements. This article is a brief description and explanation about the theoretical foundations and the practical principles of education as well as its objectives and goals in the writings of Baha'u'llah.



Power and the Baha'i community

Moojan Momen

More than fifty years ago, Shoghi Effendi was writing that the thinking world has already caught up with the

"great and universal principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh". He suggested that Baha'is needed to find ways of presenting to the world "the capacity of His projected World Order to re-create society". This paper explores what exactly is meant by this latter phrase. It suggests that what could be meant is to examine the workings of the Baha'i community and to see in what way these present solutions to the problems facing society. This paper examines two inter-related problems: first the fact that a large proportion of people in our societies feel that they are excluded or that they are unable to participate fully in society because barriers exist that prevent this. They feel a lack of power to determine their own lives and an inability to develop fully. On account of this, they also feel a sense of injustice and consequent resentment. The second problem is that the balance between individual freedom and central authority in society has not been satisfactorily resolved, between individualism and collectivism. While authoritarian regimes have been overthrown and democracy established in many parts of the world, many are now saying that the balance has shifted too far towards individualism and a lack of central authority, that the rampant freedom of the market has led to a danger of falling into a situation of the "rule of the jungle", where the wealthiest and most powerful have free reign to do what they like. It is the contention of this paper that the workings of the Baha'i community present some possible solutions to these two problems.



**Women Advance:
The Relationship between the Bahá'í Teachings
and the Women's Movement**

Wendi Momen

This is a preliminary exploration of the relationship between the advancement of women and the Bahá'í teachings on the equality of women and men.

It traces the emergence and development of the women's movement from its roots in the 18th century through the 19th and 20th centuries and into the 21st. It sets this phenomenon against the Bahá'í teachings as expressed in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the interpretations and talks of `Abdu'l-Bahá, the works of Shoghi Effendi, the statements and letters of the Universal House of Justice and the statements of the Bahá'í International Community; and considers whether there is any causal relationship between the two.



Religious Clergy in the Baha'i Writings

Vahid Rafati

From the beginning of the Bab's ministry in 1844 and up to the present, the Babi Movement and then the Baha'i Faith have faced the opposition of the Shi'i clergy. The bloodiest and most tragic events in Babi/Baha'i history have often been the result of the enmity held, and sentences issued, by the religious leadership of that branch of Islam. It should therefore be no surprise that the most important works of Baha'u'llah were revealed to the Shi'i clergy, and in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, for example, Baha'u'llah addresses a few religious authorities such as Shaykh Muhammad Hassan Najafi.

However, the Shi'i clergy are not the only group of religious leaders addressed by Baha'u'llah. Shaykhi figures such as Hajj Muhammad Karim Khan Kermani have been referred to in the *Book of Certitude (Kitab-i-Iqan)*, and he was addressed both in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and the *Lawh-i-Qina*. Baha'u'llah further addressed the religious leadership of the Bayanis as well as Azali figures such as Mirza Hadi Dowlatabadi.

To prepare a comprehensive list of all those religious leaders who have been addressed in general Tablets of Baha'u'llah, or in particular works by Him, requires thorough research. Nonetheless it is worth noting that one of the most extensive works of Baha'u'llah, which by itself is a book, is his Tablet to Muhammad Taqiy-i-Najafi, known as the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. His father, Shaykh Muhammad Baqer Najafi, as well as Mir Muhammad Hussein (the Friday prayer leader of Isfahan,)

Hajj Mulla Ali Kani, Sayyed Sadeq Sangelaki, and Hajj Mulla Hadi Sabzavari, are just some of the other key religious leaders whom Baha'u'llah has addressed.

It should also be noted that the addressees in the writings of the Baha'i Faith are not limited to the Shi'i nor the Muslim clergy more broadly; leaderships of all religions have been addressed whether by Baha'u'llah, Abdul-Baha, or in the works of the Guardian. Some have even been the recipients of specific Tablets, as is the case with Baha'u'llah's Tablet to Pope Pius IX, the Tablet of Aqdas, the Tablet of Hardegg, which were revealed to the Christian clergy. Zoroastrian religious leaders, such as Manikchi Sahib, have been addressed in several Tablets by Baha'u'llah and Abdul-Baha. Many passages in the Surih-ye-Muluk are revealed to the entire religious leadership.

It may also be added that Mohyeddin-e Qazi of Qaneqein, Abdurrahman Karkuri, from the Sufi orders, have been the recipients of the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys.

Shaykh Hadi Najmabadi, one of the greatest *mujtahids* of the Qajar period, was the addressee of one of Abdul-Baha's works; he also wrote to figures within the Sunni religious leadership such as Shaykh Muhammad Abdu and Shaykh Muhammad Bakhit, the Grand Mufti of Egypt.

Finally, a work of Baha'u'llah that deserves our special attention and will be studied with particular emphasis is the Tablet of Burhan, revealed by Baha'u'llah to the greatest *mujtahids* of the Qajar period.



The Situation of Iran in the 19th Century as Reflected in the Baha'i Writings

Vahid Rafati

Taking into account the length of time and variety of events in 19th century Iran on the one hand, and on the other hand the vast amount of Baha'i writings which reflect the situation of Iran and Iranians, requires that we limit our study by focussing on the key events over this period.

Broadly speaking, the major issues in Iran during the 19th century that are reflected in the Baha'i writings can be said to cover four major areas.

1. Issues related to government / politics / institutions / leadership.
2. Issues related to religion, religious life, and Shi'i Clergy

3. Issues related to science, culture, education and journalism
4. issues related to social life, economic, ethics, and social relations.

Writings of the Baha'i Faith regarding those issues are sometimes intended to be analytical in their nature. Sometimes they are reactions to, or evaluations of, the conditions and circumstances. The reflection of these issues in the Baha'i writings is at times to explain the difficulties and pains, to prescribe remedies, and to analyse the problems and the issues to show how to address them.

One of the leading issues regarding Iran in the 19th century which is reflected in the Baha'i writings is the emphasis on corruption and backwardness in the country's political and social institutions. Tyranny, inequality of rights in society, power-seeking, the question of *Marja-ye-Taqlid* (Source of Emulation) in the religious life of the Shi'is, superstition, blindly following religious leadership, illiteracy, lack of science and technology and more than anything else the need for change and modernization in all four fields referred to above are major issues that have been dealt with in the Baha'i writings.

In studying the issues of 19th Century Iran, the necessity for the separation of politics from religion, access to education, the removal of prejudice in all forms, the conduct of *Jihad* by words and by statements rather than

weapons or force, the necessity for relations across faiths, the promotion of industry and innovation, adopting the modern sciences of the West, the pursuit of justice, and the need for equality between men and women are among those major issues that have been repeatedly and emphatically reflected upon in the Baha'i Writings. There are even some special works and treatises written to deal with these many problems. The emphasis in the Baha'i writings for resolving these problems is people's universal participation, common consultation, and accepting the responsibility of individuals.



Station of Baha'u'llah elucidated in the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá

Habib Riazati

The main objective of this presentation is to explore the systemic nature of the revelations of God and the cohesive relationships between the various components of the messages conveyed by the Manifestations of God. In another word, the purpose of this presentation is to show, by examples from the writings, that the proper understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings is impossible without immersing in the interpretations and elucidations of Shoghi Effendi.



Ancient poems as a means of Revelation, in an early Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh

Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

This paper offers a personal translation of a Persian Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the 'Iraqí period. The Tablet is rich in quotations from ancient Iranian poets. Our paper examines the importance of poetry in the history of the Faith and in its Writings. It analyzes the quoted poems and the many poetical metaphors used in the Tablet. It ends with a short commentary on the contents of the Tablet: detachment is a fundamental prerequisite for attaining “unto the divine Presence.”



The Mathnaví by Rúḥu'lláh Varqá, the martyr: a few notes on its historical context and poetical content

Faraneh Vargha-Khadem, Faezeh Mardani and Julio Savi

A tentative translation of the Mathnaví by Rúḥu'lláh Varqá, the martyr, is presented. It is accompanied by a few historical remarks on the short life of this heroic child and a concise commentary of the content of his poem. After a

few words on the *mathnaví* in Persian literature, the most important images presented in the poem are briefly explained: the motif of the cup-bearer and the cup, springtime motifs, love motifs. The poem is a hymn of love to the Blessed Beauty. However, in the final 10 verses after verse 31 the poet turns to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and it closes his eulogy with a quotation of a verse from one of the Master’s poems (Ay Khudáy-i-Pur-‘Aṭáy-i-Dhu’l-Manán), a rhetorical device called *Taḍmín*.



From the cave to the *Khanqah*: Baha'u'llah in Kurdistan, a reconsideration

Ami Schrager

After spending a meaningful period in the caves of Sargalu mountains in Kurdistan, Bahá'u'lláh decided to end his solitude and return to society. This crucial transition has few versions which describes how Bahá'u'lláh transformed from an unknown Darwīsh to a famous Shaykh.

This presentation will re-examine the different versions of the account from its basic original tradition till the formal Bahá'í version in “God Passes By”. Hopefully, the examination of this important account will help us learn how a “story” turns into a “holy history”.



A New Jewish Document on the Mission of Baha'u'llah

Moshe Sharon

In 2015 an antique dealer offered for sale a document of great interest. He could make out that the hand written document in Hebrew characters had something to do with the Bahá'í religion since the word Bahá' and combinations with this word appeared throughout the document. This one page text is written in three languages: Hebrew, Judaeo-Arabic and Talmudic Aramaic.

The document was offered to an antique collector in Israel who brought it to me at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for evaluation. I could easily recognize its value for understanding how Jews, who joined the Bahá'í faith, made an effort, using Jewish messianic traditions and Biblical sources to prove, in Jewish terms, the true manifestation, even the full divinity of Bahá'u'lláh.

The text is placed within the context of the messianic expectations and calculations based on the cryptic numbers in the book of Daniel 12:11-12. As is well known almost all the “Calculators of the End (of Days)” (Hebrew: מחשבי קיצ) based their date for the coming of the Messiah, the ultimate redeemer, on the same texts of the book of Daniel.

A four pages manuscript of a text calculating the End of Days and fixing it also according to Daniel's prophecies was written by Joseph Ben 'Uliel (1858-1937) a Rabbi, professor of Romanic languages in the University of Lisbon, and the Consul of Morocco in Portugal. After explaining all the dates appearing in Daniel's prophecies, he concluded that the year 1917 represents the Messianic Time. I shall refer to this text as well. (It was recently sold in Jerusalem for a reasonable price.)

'Abdu'l Bahá (SAQ, 36-42) used solely Daniel's prophecies in order to prove the true missions of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, using both the Christian and the lunar-Islamic calendars. Jewish searchers of Messianic time and the coming of the Son of David are scattered abundantly throughout Jewish History, which is dotted with great number of impostures as well. This is understandable due to the long exile and its misery from which, most Jews believed, only the long awaited divine redeemer can deliver.

For many Jews in Iran of the 19th century Bahá'u'lláh was such a redeemer. In this document we have the proof that one of them engaged himself in making the calculation using both the numbers, and the Hebrew text (not used by 'Abdu'l Bahá) in the book of Daniel, as well as the method of acronyms, in order to send the message that the Messiah is here not in the form of an anointed person but more as God Himself.

As to the document itself. I am not allowed to publish it, nor am I allowed to quote it in writing, and this short report and my lecture are more or less the only things that I can do about it unless it is purchased from the dealer who is asking a high price for it hoping that the Bahá'ís will buy it. I advised the BWC not to pay this price, because I believe that at the end the dealer will come down to the price I offered, since, in my mind, there will hardly be anybody outside our narrow circle who would understand its value.

I copied (not photographed) the document, and shall show and analyze it in the lecture.



Days of Remembrance: Notes on Two Tablets

Islander Micael Tinto

The purpose of this article is to present a study of two tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and collected, along with forty-three others, in *Days of Remembrance*, a beautiful book published by the Universal House of Justice to commemorate the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

In the introduction we read:

The observance of holy days occupies a central place in every religion. Through their

commemoration, the calendar year becomes the stage on which the signal events associated with the life and ministry of the divine Manifestations of God are annually remembered and honoured. This remembrance has both a personal dimension, providing a time for reflection on the significance of these events, and a social dimension, helping to deepen the identity and foster the cohesion of the community [...] The present volume offers forty-five selections from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh revealed specifically for, or otherwise relating to, these nine Holy Days. The selections represent different revelatory modes, each reflecting facets of the greatness, the preciousness, and the peerless nature of this Day in which all the promises and prophecies of the past have been fulfilled

The two tablets are the Lawh-i-Náqús (Tablet of the Bell) and the Lawh-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld (Tablet of the Deathless Youth). Both were revealed on the occasion of the birth of the Báb and are rich in important elements — such as metaphors, images and also repetitions of portions of other tablets—which make them very inspiring for the reader, especially at this historic moment, and offer new perspectives to our study of the Revelation.

ʿIrfán Colloquia Publications

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.), *Lights of ʿIrfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at ʿIrfán Colloquia* (in English), Books One to Eighteen (2000–2017)

Iraj Ayman (ed.), *Safini-yi Irfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at ʿIrfán Colloquia* (in Persian). Books One to Twenty (1998–2017)

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

Maryam Afshar, *Images of Christ in the Writings of ʿAbdu'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, *Badáy'-i-Ma'áni va Tafsír* (The Wonders of Inner Meanings and Interpretation): *Selected Commentaries of ʿAbdu'l-Bahá on Qur'anic Verses and Islamic Traditions* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2013)

Shahbaz Fatheazam, *The Last Refuge* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2015)

Distributors of 'Infán Publications

Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS)

415 Linden Ave., Wilmette, IL 60091-2886, USA

Tel.: (847)425-7950

Fax: (847)425-7951

E-mail: BDS@usbnc.org

Bahá'í Verlag

(For books in German Language)

Eppsteiner Str. 89, D-65719, Hofheim, Germany

Tel: (49) 6192-22921

Fax: (49)6192-22936

E-mail: office@bahai-verlag.de

Reyhani Verlag

Benzweg 4, 64293 Darmsstadt, Germany

Tel: 49-6151-95170

Fax: 49-6151-9517299,

E-Mail: druck@reyhani.de

Notes

Notes

‘Irfán Colloquium

Bahá’í National Center

1233 Central Street

Evanston, IL 60201

USA

Telephone: (847) 733-3501

Fax: (847) 733-3527

E-Mail: contact@irfancoolloquium.org

Website: www.irfancoolloquia.org