

Lights of 'Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Eleven



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Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs
Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars
Book Eleven

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O MY BROTHER! Hearken to the delightsome words of My honeyed tongue, and quaff the stream of mystic holiness from My sugar-shedding lips. Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart, and water them with the water of certitude, that the hyacinths of My knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green in the sacred city of thy heart.

Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words

To read the writings of the Faith and to strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation are obligations laid on every one of His followers. All are enjoined to delve into the ocean of His Revelation and to partake, in keeping with their capacities and inclinations, of the pearls of wisdom that lie therein.

Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010

Table of Contents

Preface.....	i
Chronicles of a Birth Part III: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in Spain (1873-1895) by Amín E. Egea	1
Reflections on Some Messianic Prophecies in Shaykhi Works Y. A. Ioannesyán	21
Textual Context and Literary Criticism: A Case Study based on a Letter from Shoghi Effendi Gerald Keil.....	55
The Path of God Wolfgang A. Klebel.....	99
Neoplatonism and the Bahá'í Writings Ian Kluge	149
Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawḥ Basīṭ al-Ḥaḳíqa) Moojan Momen	203
Lawḥ Basīṭ Al-Ḥaḳíqa	213
Dashavatara and Progressive Revelation Anupam Premanand.....	223
Towards a Contextualization of Bahá'u'lláh's Lawḥ-i Qíná' Sholeh A. Quinn.....	257
The Indispensibility of Consultation for Ordering Human Affairs Ian Semple	271
Elucidations	
Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.....	287
Infallibility of the Universal House of Justice.....	299
Authority and Centrality of the Universal House of Justice.....	301
Appendices	
Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations.....	305
Contents of <i>Lights of 'Irfán</i> Books One-Ten.....	306
Publications of the 'Irfán Colloquia.....	315

Preface

O MY BROTHER! Hearken to the delightsom words of My honeyed tongue, and quaff the stream of mystic holiness from My sugar-shedding lips. Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart, and water them with the water of certitude, that the hyacinths of My knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green in the sacred city of thy heart.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*

The independent search for truth is a fundamental principle of the Bahá'í belief system. It is one of the spiritual obligations of every individual Bahá'í. Fulfillment of this obligation demands systematic study and proper understanding of the prescription for living given by Bahá'u'lláh to the people of the world. It has an enlightening effect and strengthens and consolidates each individual's personal understanding of and adherence to the directives for living a Bahá'í life. The Universal House of Justice provided the following guidance in the message of Ridvan 2010:

To read the writings of the Faith and to strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation are obligations laid on every one of His followers. All are enjoined to delve into the ocean of His Revelation and to partake, in keeping with their capacities and inclinations, of the pearls of wisdom that lie therein.

The 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications are aimed at promoting Bahá'í scholarly activities and facilitating the fulfillment of the above-mentioned spiritual obligation. *The Lights of 'Irfán* presents the outcome of study and research in the Bahá'í Writings, interfacing Bahá'í teachings with the current religious and intellectual trends and with social

challenges confronting humanity. The Universal House of Justice in a letter issued on its behalf on 24 April 2008 emphasizes the need for and advantages gained by scholarly studies in the following words:

The House of Justice is fully committed to fostering the development of Bahá'í scholarly activity in all parts of the Bahá'í world. Through their scholarly endeavours believers are able to enrich the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community, to explore new insights into the Bahá'í teachings and their relevance to the needs of society, and to attract the investigation of the Faith by thoughtful people from all backgrounds. Far from being a diversion from the worldwide effort to advance the process of entry by troops, Bahá'í scholarship can be a powerful reinforcement to that endeavour and a valuable source of new enquirers.

In 2009, on the occasion of the centenary commemoration of the publication of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Some Answered Questions*, Irfán Colloquium began to present and eventually publish the studies related to the topics and concepts delineated in that book. It is hoped this activity would continue and collection of scholarly studies related to that unique book would form a supplemental source for better understanding and appreciating the contents of *Some Answered Questions*.

Most of the articles published in this volume are the texts of the papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia in 2009 which were held at the Acuto Centre for Bahá'í Studies in Italy, Bosch Bahá'í School in California and Louhelen Bahá'í School in Michigan.

The series of articles entitled "Chronicle of a Birth, Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions" by Amin Egea that started in Book Five has continued. In this volume, Part III of this series covers the period of 1873 to 1895. This series presents references published in Spain and supplements "*The Babi and Bahá'í Religions, 1844- 1944: Some Cotemporary Western Accounts*" by Moojan Momen which was published in 1981.

“Reflections on Some Messianic Prophecies in Shaykhi Works” is the fourth paper contributed by Youli Ioannesyan to *The Lights of 'Irfán*. The three earlier papers are published in Books II, VII, and VIII. Mr. Ioannesyan's papers are the results of his research and study of the documents at the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This article is his attempt to trace and highlight correspondences which he believes to exist between the dates and facts symbolically referred to in the messianic prophecy of Siyyid Kázim and notable events in Bábí and Bahá'í history.

From the beginning of the activities of the 'Irfán Colloquium it was hoped that the papers submitted in English, Persian or German could be translated into the other two languages and published in the series of annual publications of the 'Irfán publications. The article on “The Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace” by Ali Nakhjavani published in *Lights of 'Irfán* Book Nine was the English version of the article originally published in Persian in *Safini-yi 'Irfán* Book Ten. Now we are happy that Gerald Keil has provided an English translation of his paper, “Textual Context and Literary Criticism” that was originally presented in German at the 'Irfán Kolloquium held in Tambach, Germany, 2007 and printed in *'Irfán-Studien zum Bahá'í-Schrifttum: Beiträge des 'Irfán-Kolloquiums 2007/2008*. This is a case study of a phrase from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in 1940. The sole purpose of this study is to explore whether this text passage represents an unambiguous confirmation of the indispensability of such a spot for the determination of the day of Naw-Rúz as stipulated by Bahá'u'lláh, as is generally assumed, or whether it could also be understood in some other way. The methodology used in this study is known as *literary criticism* (“literary” in the broad sense of “anything written”). In this presentation, this term implies the systematic analysis of the written word as a preliminary stage of the process of exegesis and – to achieve clarity from the very start – has nothing to do with criticism in the sense of complaint or faultfinding.

In 1993 German theologian Hans Küng presented a ‘Declaration Towards a Global Ethic’ in the Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1993. It has become a subject of a number

of pro and con studies. Wolfgang Klebel in “The Path of God: Declaration Towards a Global Ethic” attempts to demonstrate that the Bahá’í Tradition follows substantially in the same tradition of all other religions, having in common with them many spiritual principles. Further, it compares several specific ethical principles as they are expressed in the Declaration of a Global Ethic with the ethical principles of the Bahá’í Faith.

Ian Kluge in “Neoplatonism and the Bahá’í Writings” attempts to demonstrate how familiarity with the work of Plotinus and those who have followed his philosophical school can be useful in understanding philosophical concepts embedded in the Bahá’í Writing. It also argues that in terms of philosophical affinities, the philosophy embedded in the Bahá’í Writings is a unique type of objective idealism.

The Tradition (Hadith) “What is the Truth” related by Kumayl bin Ziyad has received a wide range of explanatory exegesis treatments in the Islamic literature and has been mentioned in a number of occasions in the Writings of the Founders of Bahá’í Faith. Furthermore some Bahá’í scholars have also written commentaries on this Tradition. Moojan Momen in “Baha'u'llah's Tablet of Uncompounded Reality (*Lawḥ-i Basít-Al-Ḥaqíqa*)” discusses the Báb's Commentary on this Tradition. He demonstrates that the Báb refers to himself as Subh-i Azal and it is a reference to the Báb's declaration of his own true station. A recent publication of 'Irfán Colloquium (in Persian), *Aftab Amad Dalil-i Aftab: The Proof of the Sun is the Sun*” by Vahid Rafati provides detail information on the Islamic background and in the Bahá’í literature on this subject.

“A Comparative Study of Hinduism and the Bahá’í Faith” by Anupam Premanand is a comparative study of the phenomenon of the Divine Revelation from Hindu and Bahá’í points of view. He comes to the conclusion that the Bahá’í Faith and Hinduism are two most common Faiths who have spoken in the loudest terms of the eternal nature of Religion. The words of Bahá’u’lláh “*the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future*” and the Hindu term of “Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Law” have inspired the author to study

and compare the Hindu and the Bahá'í conception of Revelation and he finds them to be strikingly similar.

Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Veil (*Qina*) revealed in response to questions asked by a Bábí in relation to the objection raised by Karim Khan-i Kirmani, a Shaykhi leader and a famous enemy and opponent of the Báb, regarding certain grammatical points in the Writings of the Báb, contains a wide range of subjects. In the words of Sholeh Quinn this article attempts to place this Tablet in historical context, and demonstrate how that context explains certain elements in that Tablet.

The Bahá'í Faith has revolutionized the procedure and the manner of conduct in using consultation as a technique for problem solving and group decision making. "The Indispensability of Consultation for Ordering Human Affairs" by Ian Semple, explains the unique features of Bahá'í consultation. It demonstrates that consultation is not just a technique to be learned, but a development of the character of the individuals who participate in it.

The section entitled ELUCIDATIONS includes the text of three messages from the Universal House of Justice providing guidance on three important matters related to the World Centre of the Bahá'í Faith, i.e. Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, infallibility, authority and centrality of the Universal House of Justice.

For those readers interested to know the topics of the papers published in previous volumes of the *Lights of 'Irfán*, Appendix II presents a list of all those papers. This listing of the papers published in various volumes of the *Lights of 'Irfán* provides a preliminary familiarity with the range, types, methodological approaches and scope of the papers that are welcome to be presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and be considered for publication in *The Lights of 'Irfán*. 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.

Starting with Book Six we have made two changes to the 'Irfán Colloquia's style guide. All "authoritative" publications are cited by an abbreviation; see Appendix I, "Bibliography of

the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations Used in This Book.” Words of Prophets/Manifestations, i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings (not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice), are italicized.

All papers in this volume present the views and understanding of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. The writing styles and scholarly approaches are therefore different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the author's surnames.

Iraj Ayman

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