
Lights of ‘Irfán

Papers Presented at the
‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars



Book Three

Lights of 'Irfán

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Book Three
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Sponsored by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund
159 B.E. 2002 C.E.

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www.irfancolloquia.org

Design and Artwork by Trey and Lynne Yancy
Edited and typeset by Jonah Winters, winterswebworks.com

*I*t is now incumbent upon them who are endowed with a hearing ear and a seeing eye to ponder these sublime words, in each of which the oceans of inner meaning and explanation are hidden, that haply the words uttered by Him Who is the Lord of Revelation may enable His servants to attain, with the utmost joy and radiance, unto the Supreme Goal and Most Sublime Summit—the dawning-place of this Voice. —Bahá'u'lláh
Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 147

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Preface

Preface

The Words of God have innumerable significances and mysteries of meanings - each one a thousand and more,¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts in one of His talks delivered in the United States. And in another talk He adds, “It is difficult to comprehend even the words of a philosopher; how much more difficult it is to understand the Words of God. The divine Words are not to be taken according to their outer sense. They are symbolical and contain realities of spiritual meaning.”² The ‘Irfán Colloquium is a forum for those who undertake deeper studies of the Words of God, attempting to understand the meanings and messages contained in those sacred words and presenting their findings to the participants.³ Such gatherings take place several times in Europe and North America every year. Each year more than 100 papers are presented in these gatherings, half of them in the sessions conducted in English and the other half in the sessions conducted in Persian. The present volume of *The Lights of ‘Irfán* contains some of the papers presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia held in 2001. Lights of ‘Irfán volumes are published by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund.⁴

The main theme of the colloquium in 2001 was Mysticism and the Bahá’í Faith. About half of the papers published in this volume deal with various aspects and dimensions of that theme. Two papers are on the Seven Valleys, studying it from two different points of view: “A Journey through the Seven Valleys” by Ghasem Bayat and “The Seven Valleys and the Scientific Method” by Robert Sarracino. This latter paper and Kavian Milani’s paper “The Mystical Dimensions of the Bahá’í Administrative Order” open new lines of research in Bahá’í literature.

Papers on “Mysticism and the Bahá’í Community” by Moojan Momen, “The Báb’s Epistle on the Spiritual Journey Towards God” by Todd Lawson, “Knowledge, Certitude and Mystical Heat: The Hidden Essence of God’s Word” by LeRoy Jones, and “Mysticism in African Traditional Religion” by Enoch Tanyi present various aspects of and different approaches to the study of mysticism and the Bahá’í Faith.

The sessions of the Irfán Colloquium, over the past few years, have been followed by a Seminar on the study of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh. Studies presented in 2001 and included in this volume, in addition to the papers related to the Seven Valleys, are “The beginning that hath no beginning: Bahá’í Cosmology” by Vahid Brown, which discusses the interpretation of a particular segment of the Tablet of Wisdom (Lawh-i-Hikmat); “Lawh-i-Mánikjī Sáhīb,” a Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh in response to the questions of Mánikjī Sáhīb, by Ramin Neshati; “An Exposition on the Fire Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh” by James Thomas; and “The Wronged One: Shí’í Narrative Structure in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Visitation for Mullá Husayn” by William McCants.

Other papers in this volume include “From Adam to Baha’u’llah: The Idea of a Chain of Prophecy” by Zaid Lundberg, a paper which was not completely ready for publication in *The Lights of ‘Irfán*, Book II, and was mistakenly referred to in the Preface of that volume under its earlier title “Perception Into Faith: A Radical Discontinuity Within Unity”; Jianping Wang’s “The Influence of Bábí Teachings on Ling Ming Tang and Nineteenth-century China”; and Oliver Scharbrodt’s paper “Theological Responses to Modernity in the Nineteenth-century Middle East.”

All papers in this volume present the views and understandings of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors; therefore their style or scholarly approaches are not the same. They are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the surnames of the authors. Abstracts of all the presentations made at the ‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars are published in a series of separate booklets.

Iraj Ayman
Chicago, March 2002

Notes

- 1) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust) p. 155
- 2) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 459
- 3) *‘Irfán* is a Persian-Arabic word referring to mystical, theological, and spiritual recognition and knowledge.
- 4) Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941) was a distinguished Bahá’í scholar of the Biblical studies and a prominent teacher of the Bahá’í

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Faith in Iran.