
Lights of 'Irfán

Papers Presented at the
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars



Book Four

Lights of 'Irfán Book Four

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Book Four
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The existence of authoritative interpretations does not preclude the individual from engaging in the study of the Teachings and thereby arriving at a personal interpretation or understanding. A clear distinction is, however, drawn in the Bahá'í Writings between authoritative interpretation and the understanding that each individual arrives at from a study of its Teachings. Individual interpretations based on a person's understanding of the Teachings constitute the fruit of man's rational power and may well contribute to a greater comprehension of the Faith. Such views, nevertheless, lack authority. In presenting their personal ideas, individuals are cautioned not to discard the authority of the revealed words, not to deny or contend with the authoritative interpretation, and not to engage in controversy; rather they should offer their thoughts as a contribution to knowledge, making it clear that their views are merely their own.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Notes, p. 221-222

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Preface

LIGHTS OF 'IRFÁN, Book Four, concludes the first decade of the 'Irfán Colloquium's activities. It ushers in a new decade that will hopefully witness the inauguration of the 'Irfán Colloquia in more major languages of the world and expansion of its sphere of activities beyond North America and Europe. 'Irfán Colloquium that started in Europe, in New Castle, England in late 1993 and was conducted in English, soon found its way into North America and embarked on conducting annual sessions in both English and Persian. In July 2003 the Colloquium in German language will be launched in Tambach-Diethartz which will mark the fiftieth session of the 'Irfán Colloquium.

Presentation of studies in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh has been the main focus of the activities of the Irfan Colloquium since 1995. In 2002 a new project was launched for presentation of the studies in the Writings of Báb and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A further development is the formation of the "Bábí-Shaykhí Studies Interest Group." The 'Irfán Colloquium that was held at the Louhelen Bahá'í School in 2002 included an extensive seminar on *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá*, "the first, the greatest, and the mightiest of all books in the Bábí Dispensation." It was a unique occasion for the presentation of a series of scholarly papers all of them focused on various parts or aspects of that book.

The 'Irfán Colloquium established and mainly supported by Háj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund is a project devoted to the promotion of scholarly studies in the scriptures and in the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs. Selections of the papers, in English, presented at the Colloquium are regularly published in the volumes of *The Lights of 'Irfán* and *Scripture and Revelation*. *Lights of 'Irfán* also contains items not presented at the Colloquia but contributed for the benefit of the participants at the 'Irfán Colloquia.

The current volume of *The Lights of 'Irfán* presents a wide range of articles presented during the Colloquia in English language conducted in 2002. A provisional translation of the historic Epistle of the Báb to Sultan Abdulmecid of Ottoman Empire is presented with some introductory information. From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh the provisional translations of the following Tablets together with their historical background are included in this volume: Tablet of Maqsud, Tablet of Náqús (*the Bell*), first Tablet to Napoleon III, and the Tablet to the Templer Leader Georg David Hardegg are presented. This volume also opens a new line of inquiry through the comprehensive study of the Aristotelian philosophy from the perspective of Bahá'í belief, followed by an article on Bahá'í Existentialism. It is hoped that these two papers will encourage further philosophical studies in the Bahá'í Writings and conceptual principles. The article on genealogy focuses on yet another line of studies by examining certain historical references in the Bahá'í Writings. Finally, the section on ELUCIDATIONS contains four enlightening items. The two memorandums of the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre on "Letters of Quranic Dispensation" and "Inmates of the Celestial Pavilion" are published here with permission granted by the Universal House of Justice. And two very enlightening items related to the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf which shed light on a delicate point in the translation of that Epistle and offer original and valuable research on the source of the 'Akká traditions (hadiths) quoted in that book.

Lights of 'Irfán Book Four

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, without further editing. The writing styles and scholarly approaches are therefore different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the authors' surnames. Abstracts of all the presentations made at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars are published in a series of separate booklets.

Iraj Ayman
Chicago, April 2003