

Lights of ‘Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá’í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the
‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Nine

Papers published in *Lights of 'Irfán* represent the views of their authors.

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Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs
Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars
Book Nine
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All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research, which is an eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight. Man is ever partaking of these fruits. All other blessings are temporary; this is an everlasting possession. Even sovereignty has its limitations and overthrow; this is a kingship and dominion which none may usurp or destroy. Briefly, it is an eternal blessing and divine bestowal, the supreme gift of God to man.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PUP 50

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Preface

Knowledge is one of the wondrous gifts of God.

It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it.¹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, further expanding upon this exhortation of the Most Supreme Pen, offers this advice: “*All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research, which is the eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight....Briefly, it is an eternal blessing and divine bestowal, the supreme gift of God to man*”² *Lights of ‘Irfán* attempts to present the end results of such investigation and research that are focused on in depth studies in the Bahá’í Writings and fundamental principles of the Bahá’í Faith. It also includes studies that, according to the guidance of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, “correlate” Bahá’í beliefs, its teachings and their significance “with the current thoughts and problems of the peoples of the world.”³

The publication of Book 9 of *The Lights of ‘Irfán* coincides with the centenary of the publication of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Some Answered Questions*, a book which most befittingly presents an example of Shoghi Effendi’s above recommendation. Celebrating this centenary, *Some Answered Questions* will be the general theme of the sessions of ‘Irfán Colloquia in 2008 and 2009. Studies related to the topics and concepts presented in that book, particularly those correlating with the current thoughts and problems of the peoples of the world, will be published in a volume dedicated to this centenary celebration.

Most of the articles published in this volume are the texts of the papers presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia in 2007, which were held in Acuto, Italy, Bosch Bahá’í School in California and Louhelen Bahá’í School in Michigan.

The first two articles are interrelated and deal with the pivotal principle of unity in Bahá’í beliefs. They investigate the question, What philosophical viewpoints are necessary for understanding the concepts of Unity and Oneness of the world, which are ubiquitous in the Bahá’í Writings? The new vision of the “integral whole” is used to present a new worldview as the heart of the New World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. These twin articles illustrate a philosophical development that began after

the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

The article on Relativism deals with the critical subject of whether religious truth is absolute or relative. It examines the subject from the perspectives of various branches of knowledge and various relativist philosophies with reference to the Bahá'í Writings and concludes that the Writings may best be described as espousing an “evolutionary Platonic perspectivism.”

Postmodernism is discussed in a two-part article. The first part is a survey of the history of postmodernism and focuses on the philosophical principles and implications particularly concerning epistemology, ontology and ethics. The second part is a comparative study that examines postmodern philosophy in relation to the Bahá'í Writings. It argues that there are coincidental or superstructural similarities but also many essential disagreements on most fundamental matters between postmodern philosophy and the Bahá'í belief system.

Two articles are reviews of certain aspects of two major works of Shoghi Effendi, *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* and *The Advent of Divine Justice*. The first examines salient features of the content of *Dispensation* as a proactive theological document and points out certain structural patterns in its manner of presenting theological truth. The other article is a general review of the contents of the *Advent* and its historical background. It depicts two “startling realizations”: the United States being the Cradle of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh and the North American Bahá'ís initiating the fulfillment of the goals set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of Divine Plan*. This article concludes with an analysis of the destiny of America as seen through the eyes of Shoghi Effendi, and how it relates to present world challenges.

A subject that both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh have dealt with is addressing the kings of the world. The article *From Suratu'l-mulk to Suratu'l-mulúk* is an attempt to compare and contrast these two Tablets, one revealed by the Báb and the other by Bahá'u'lláh. It deals with similarities and differences between the two texts and their historical backgrounds, as well as their structure, literary style and other textual features. It closes with some tentative conclusions about kingship and authority.

Prayers and Rituals in the Bahá'í Faith provides a detailed historical background and a provisional translation of a famous Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh addressed to Mullá 'Alí-Akbar Ardestání, one of the early believers and one of the first Bábís who

suffered harsh persecution. This Tablet includes, in addition to strong admonitions to those with misgivings or doubts regarding whom should be followed after the Báb, the text of *Salát-i-Hájat*, a special prayer imploring God to grant one's needs.

The article on the *Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace* is a concise, clear, and well-documented exposition of the Bahá'í perspective on peace. It demonstrates a fascinating road map illuminating the three processes humanity faces: the Lesser Peace, the Great Peace and the Most Great Peace.

The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice is a talk presenting an account of the challenges that were faced by Shoghi Effendi during His ministry. It also covers some aspects of the function of the Covenant in the Bahá'í community.

A very interesting and pertinent observation is presented in the article *Insider and Outsider: Scholarship in the Bahá'í Studies*. It is a preliminary approach to the differences between the works of scholars who undertake studies in the texts, teachings and history of their own belief system and scholars who engage in the same type of studies but related to belief systems other than their own. This article is more focused on these two types of studies as they relate to the Bahá'í Faith.

The location and significance of mountains in various religious traditions are discussed in the article *Prophets and Mountains*. It particularly focuses on four mountains in the Holy Land: Sinai, Zion, Tabor and Carmel that were combined in many Jewish traditions describing the End of Days and the reestablishment of the Lord's Temple. The four Mountains will be assembled together so that their summits combine to form the foundations of New Jerusalem.

The section entitled ELUCIDATIONS includes the text of a message from the Universal House of Justice regarding research and studies in the Bahá'í Faith, and a memorandum of the Bahá'í World Center concerning expectations of the return of Jesus Christ. Receiving documents and short articles elucidating and clarifying various concepts and questions regarding the verities of the Bahá'í Faith are welcome for inclusion in this section of *The Lights of 'Irfán*

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. It further

provides a preliminary familiarity with the range, types, and methodological approaches of the papers that are welcome for presentation at the 'Irfán Colloquia. In addition to the papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia, research papers related to the main goals of the 'Irfán Colloquium may also be directly submitted for inclusion in *The Lights of 'Irfán*.

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. Their writing styles and scholarly approaches are therefore different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the author's last names.

Iraj Ayman

Chicago, May 2008

¹ TAB 39.

² *Compilation of Compilations* (Bahá'í Publications Australia) p 228

³ Ibid, p 231