
Papers Presented at the
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars

Lights of 'Irfán

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Lights of 'Irfán:

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars
Volume Twenty-One

'Irfán Colloquia

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Dedicated to

Dr. Iraj Ayman

Feb. 9, 1928 – Nov. 12, 2025

This is the final volume edited by his hand.

“May the memory of his valued contribution to the field of education in numerous academic and other settings as well as his endeavors in the promotion of Bahá’í Studies be a source of enduring inspiration for present and future generations.”

The Universal House of Justice

November 14, 2025

184. All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.

—Baha'u'llah

Gleanings from the
Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 215

Whoso hath searched the depths of the oceans that lie hid within these exalted words, and fathomed their import, can be said to have discovered a glimmer of the unspeakable glory with which this mighty, this sublime, and most holy Revelation hath been endowed. From the excellence of so great a Revelation the honor with which its faithful followers must needs be invested can be well imagined. By the righteousness of the one true God! The very breath of these souls is in itself richer than all the treasures of the earth. Happy is the man that hath attained thereunto, and woe betide the heedless.

—Baha'u'llah

Gleanings from the
Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 10

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PREFACE

Since its inception, ‘Irfán Colloquium, has strived to encourage Bahá’ís to immerse themselves in the ocean of His words, that they “may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths”, and in this manner deepen their faith and prepare themselves for sharing its teachings with their communities. We are grateful to our authors for having meticulously shared with us those pearls of wisdom in this collection of articles on topics related to mystical aspects of the Bahá’í writings.

The “Lights of Irfán Book 21” delves into profound explorations of Bahá’í beliefs and their intersections with various philosophical and spiritual discourses. The volume presents an array of scholarly articles aimed at deepening understanding of the Bahá’í Faith’s principal teachings and their applicability to contemporary societal issues. Each article aims to foster a deeper appreciation of the Bahá’í Faith’s rich theological and philosophical heritage, encouraging readers to consider how these insights can be applied to enhance personal growth and societal advancement. The discussions are rooted in a desire to bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and philosophies, religious traditions and contemporary challenges, advocating for a world where spiritual principles inform and elevate public discourse and personal conduct.

We hope these articles assist the readers in their journey through mystical dimensions of reality, and to better equip them in meaningful conversations on these important existential topics that are often at the centre of thoughts and beliefs of humanity at large:

Myth or Madness: The (Lost) Joy of Religion
by Shahbaz Fatheazam

This article, a profoundly mystical and poetic essay, addresses the growing detachment from and scepticism toward religion in modern society, suggesting that this alienation has led to a loss of joy and fulfillment. Fatheazam argues that the rejuvenation of religious sentiment and practice as well as understanding the profound meanings of love

and spirituality can restore a sense of purpose and happiness in individuals' lives. The article discusses the historical roles of religion in society and contrasts these with the present-day marginalization, proposing that rediscovering the joy in religion could counteract the bleakness of modern secular life - religion is not just a relic of the past but an essential part of human understanding, providing meaning beyond empirical knowledge. The reader may also question the tendency of contemporary culture to dismiss religion as obsolete while appreciating the ways in which faith has historically guided human progress.

A Survey of the Cardinal Maxims of Islamic Philosophy in the Bahá'í Writings by Vargha Bolodo-Taefi

Bolodo-Taefi explores the influence of Islamic thought and intellectual tradition on the Bahá'í Writings and presents thirty-four cardinal maxims of Islamic philosophy that are adopted and expounded in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Each section explains the meaning of a maxim, describes its usage by prominent figures in Islamic intellectual history, and demonstrates its application in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. In doing so, we gain a better understanding of

the integration of some of the most profound Islamic philosophical principles within the Bahá'í teachings, and how these philosophical maxims have been influential in shaping Islamic thought as well as their relevance and reinterpretation in the context of Bahá'í scriptures.

Understanding Traditional Discourses by JoAnn Borovicka

Borovicka investigates the challenges and opportunities in interpreting traditional religious discourses in the modern world. The author examines historical narratives, particularly the allegorical nature of religious

stories. The chapter highlights how Bahá'í interpretations align with modern historical and hermeneutical approaches, suggesting that religious texts should be read with an awareness of their metaphorical and contextual meanings. She emphasizes the need to understand these discourses within their historical contexts and explores how they can be made relevant to contemporary issues. The article advocates for a balanced approach that respects traditional wisdom while adapting its teachings to modern circumstances.

Which World Are You In? by Ian Kluge

The article by the late Ian Kluge engages with philosophical inquiries about the nature of reality, questioning the existence of different “worlds” such as the material, spiritual, and metaphysical. He discusses how Bahá'í teachings address these concepts and examine existence of God. Kluge further argues that human perception of reality is shaped by philosophical assumptions, and that the Bahá'í worldview *inter alia* considers empirical reason and spiritual insight. He also examines postmodern relativism and defends the idea that objective truth exists beyond individual subjectivity. The article may challenge readers to reflect on their perceptions of reality and consider a more integrated worldview that encompasses both physical and spiritual elements when reflecting on God's existence and its implications on our lives.

The Invocation “Is There Any Remover of Difficulties Save God...” by Muhammad Afnan, translated by Adib Masumian

The article, which was first published by ‘Irfán Colloquium in Persian in 2006, has now been translated in English and explains the origin of this invocation in the Bahá'í Faith, discussing its significance in times of personal and communal hardship. The author examines how this invocation reflects broader theological themes of divine providence and human reliance on God.

**The Potent God and the Attracting God:
Metaphysics and its Social Consequences
by Moojan Momen**

The article examines two conceptual frameworks in relation to God by major Western world religions and by philosophers – attracting God versus Potent God, and their implications on theological thought and on humanities' belief in God and religion, and how it influences their world view and governance. The “Potent God” represents divine authority, justice, and law, whereas the “Attracting God” embodies love, beauty, and personal transformation. Momen argues that societies dominated by a fear-based view of God tend toward authoritarianism, while those embracing a loving God foster inclusivity and moral progress. Understanding the difference between these frameworks also has profound implications on our social relationships based on “power and hierarchy” or “love and mutuality” and on models of governance in our society.

**Tablet of Fitnih (Tribulations) and Its Recipient: Shams-i Jahán
by Foad Seddigh**

Seddigh reviews the story and the poems of Princess Sháms-i Jahán – a grand-daughter of Fáth-i-'Alí Sháh and an aunt of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, who declared her belief in the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. The article also examines in depth Bahá'u'lláh's *Tablet of Fitnih*, which prophesies a time of great trials and tests for humanity. The author highlights the esoteric language used in the tablet, discussing its references to cosmic disturbances (e.g., “the heavens of knowledge will be cleft asunder” and “resplendent suns will be darkened”). The chapter explores how Bahá'u'lláh's warnings about spiritual tests and separations echo earlier religious prophecies, and includes a translation of the Tablet at the end of the article.

The **In Memoriam section** in this volume pays tribute to two of ‘Irfán Colloquium’s closest collaborators and ardent supporters: Dr Manuchehr Derakhshani (1932-2025) who served for nearly 3 decades at the Bahá’í National Centre Persian Affairs Office and was most helpful in reviewing many of the articles that ‘Irfán published over the past 3 decades, and Ian Kluge (1948-2025) who had an uniquely in-depth knowledge of philosophical traditions and the intellectual history of religious thought, and enthusiastically participated and contributed to numerous discussions on these topics over many decades. We shall miss them dearly.

We thank the authors for their diligent research and their patience; and hope the readers will have the opportunity to reflect on the profoundly mystical concepts shared in many of these articles, which may enhance their understanding of the purpose of life as they continue their journey towards drawing closer to that unknowable essence.

All papers published in this book, 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.

Rama Ayman