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## Cosmos as Meditation

### Introduction – What is Gnosis (ʿirfan)?

The following work deals exclusively with cosmology and spirituality. In Shi'a Islam, and its modern messianic reflection in the Baha'i Faith, the idea of gnosis or innate direct experiential knowledge of the divine is known as ʿirfan:

*Irfan* also spelt eerfan ([Arabic/Persian/Urdu: عرفان](#)) literally means *knowing*. Sometimes it is transliterated as *Erfan*. It is used to refer both to [Islamic mysticism](#) as well as the attainment of direct spiritual knowledge. In the latter sense it is often translated in [English](#) as [gnosis](#). Those with the name are sometimes referred to as having an insight into the unseen.

In [Twelver Shi'a](#) Islam, the term refers specifically to the discipline of mystical knowledge within religious teachings. In this respect **Irfan** overlaps considerably with [Sufism](#) in both meaning and content. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irfan>)

How the great teachers of ʿirfan have conveyed their insights into reality has taken root in poetic utterances and philosophical treatises. These great teachers of ʿirfan have all traced their lineage through the Prophet Muhammad, through the imams of the Shi'a, down to the teachings of a former Shi'a Sufi named Baha' Allah (Glory of God). We shall trace and delineate out how philosophy along with cosmology has shaped the discourse and explication of the divine worlds in the writings of great ʿIrfanic and Sufi teachers. We shall read about the teachings of the Shi'a scholars, Sufi teachers and the divine revelation of Baha' Allah and how they relate to philosophical and experiential conceptions of cosmos. We shall encounter the great teachers like Ibn ʿArabi, Mulla Sadra, al-Bab, Baha' Allah and others.

The [first chapter](#) deals with delineating what is meant by symbolic discourse and the topic of cosmos. The [second chapter](#) details the Qur'anic creative vocabulary, how the Qur'an teaches about creation. The [third chapter](#) delves into the lasting effects of Neo-Platonic philosophy on Islamic thinkers. The [fourth chapter](#) outlines the Sufi and Baha'i symbolic cosmology, specifically dealing with the five worlds (ʿalam) of God: Hahut, Lahut, Jabarut, Malakut and Nasut. The [fifth chapter](#) details the cosmology as taught by gnostic Shi'a thinkers, specifically the teachings of Mulla Sadra. The [sixth chapter](#) delineates further the thinking of Mulla Sadra, specifically addressing his teachings on knowledge and existential reality. The [seventh chapter](#) addresses sufi symbols found in the *Seven Valleys* of Baha' Allah, delineating the sufi context to the work. The [eight chapter](#) goes into the ideas behind the sufi conception of resurrection (qiyamat). The [ninth chapter](#) deals with spiritual practices in sufism and the Baha'i teachings. The final and [tenth chapter](#) shows how Baha' Allah's *Four Valleys* is actually a work which touches on the Sufi Enneagram, a sufi program that helps the seeker overcome their ego deficiencies and draw closer to the Ultimate Reality.

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