



Advancement of Humanity

The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens

Bahá'u'lláh

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes is essential to human progress and the transformation of society. Inequality retards not only the advancement of women but the progress of civilization itself. The persistent denial of equality to one-half of the world's population is an affront to human dignity. It promotes destructive attitudes and habits in men and women that pass from the family to the work place, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. On no grounds, moral, biological, or traditional can inequality be justified. The moral and psychological climate necessary to enable our nation to establish social justice and to contribute to global peace will be created only when women attain full partnership with men in all fields of endeavor.

The systematic oppression of women is a conspicuous and tragic fact of history. Restricted to narrow spheres of activity in the life of society, denied educational opportunities and basic human rights, subjected to violence, and frequently treated as less than human, women have been prevented from realizing their true potential. Age-old patterns of subordination, reflected in popular culture, literature and art, law, and even religious scriptures, continue to pervade every aspect of life. Despite the advancement of political and civil rights for women in America and the widespread acceptance of equality in principle, full equality has not been achieved.

The achievement of full equality between the sexes is one of the most important prerequisites for building a united world. Gender prejudice perpetrates an injustice against women and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to economic and political life, and ultimately to relations among states. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which denial of the equality of the sexes can be justified.

The long-standing and deeply rooted condition of inequality must be eliminated. To overcome such a condition requires the exercise of nothing short of *"genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort."* Ultimately, Bahá'u'lláh promises, a day will come when men will welcome women in all aspects of life. Now is the time to move decisively toward that promised future.

A fundamental principle of the Bahá'í Faith

Equality of Women and Men

The world has two wings - one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly

'Abdu'l-Bahá

The full and equal participation of women in all spheres of life is essential to social and economic development, the abolition of war, and the ultimate establishment of a united world. In the Bahá'í Writings the equality of the sexes is a cornerstone of God's plan for human development and prosperity: *"The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized"*.



Spiritual Nature of Women

In this Day the Hand of divine grace hath removed all distinctions. The servants of God and His handmaidens are regarded on the same plane. Blessed is the servant who hath attained unto that which God hath decreed, and likewise the leaf moving in accordance with the breezes of His will.
Bahá'u'llah

The Bahá'í teachings state that men and women are, and always have been, equal in the sight of God. An individual's spiritual development is independent of one's gender and sex, but rather on devotion to God and service to humanity.

Bahá'u'llah, writing to a devoted female Bahá'í, stated that: *"By My Life! The names of handmaidens who are devoted to God are written and set down by the Pen of the Most High in the Crimson Book. They excel over men in the sight of God. How numerous are the heroes and knights in the field who are bereft of the True One and have no share in His recognition, but thou hast attained and received thy fill."*

"Divine Justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other in the eyes of Heaven. Dignity before God depends, not on sex, but on purity and luminosity of heart. Human virtues belong equally to all!"

The Bahá'í vision of equality between the sexes rests on the central spiritual principle of the oneness of humankind. The principle of oneness requires that we *"regard humanity as a single individual, and one's own self as a member of that corporeal form"*, and that we foster an unshakable consciousness that *"if pain or injury afflicts any member of that body, it must inevitably result in suffering for all the rest."* Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the divine purpose of creation is the achievement of unity among all peoples:

"Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest."



Universal Education

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.
Bahá'u'lláh

Bahá'u'lláh has announced that inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction. Through this provision the lack of mutual understanding will be remedied and the unity of mankind furthered and advanced. Universal education is a universal law. It is, therefore, incumbent upon every father to teach and instruct his children according to his possibilities. If he is unable to educate them, the body politic, the representative of the people, must provide the means for their education.

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The Bahá'í Writings state that to proclaim equality is not to deny that differences in function between women and men exist but rather to affirm the complementary roles men and women fulfill in the home and society at large. Stating that the acquisition of knowledge serves as *"a ladder for [human] ascent"*, Bahá'u'lláh prescribes identical education for women and men but stipulates that when resources are limited first priority should be given to the education of women and girls. The education of girls is particularly important because, although both parents have responsibilities for the rearing of children, it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively diffused throughout society:

"There must be an equality of rights between men and women. Women shall receive an equal privilege of education. This will enable them to qualify and progress in all degrees of occupation and accomplishment."

"Furthermore the education of women is more necessary and important than that of man, for woman is the trainer of the child from its infancy. If she be defective and imperfect herself the child will necessarily be deficient; therefore imperfection of woman implies a condition of imperfection in all mankind, for it is the mother who rears, nurtures and guides the growth of the child."