

# The World of Humanity Has Two Wings <sup>1</sup>

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Close your eyes; picture what your life has been, where you are now, and where you believe you will you're headed. Now imagine you had been born the opposite gender. Picture how your life would have been different, what it would be like now, and where you believe your future would look like.

The world of humanity has two wings—one is woman and the other man... Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. - `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*

## Equality

[Expression confuses people, matter of semantics ⇔ doesn't mean women should behave/act like men, e.g. in workplace]

equality ⇔ not sameness ⇔ complementarity

## e•qual•i•ty

1. the state or quality of being equal; correspondence in quantity, degree, value, rank, or ability.

## com•ple•ment

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<sup>1</sup> See online, with related works, at [https://bahai-library.com/toth\\_four\\_talks](https://bahai-library.com/toth_four_talks)

1. something that completes or makes perfect
2. either of two parts or things needed to complete the whole; counterpart.
3. A sense of balance as in concept of 'yin yang' - whole being

In Lewis M. Hopfe's *Religions of the World* we read:

"What made the universe operate the way it did was understood to be a balance between these two forces" [yin, negative; yang, positive] "No philosopher said that yang was good and yin was evil...nature, humankind, and even events were a combination of both forces. When these two forces were at work in harmony, life was what it should be."

Huston Smith, in *The Religions of Man* says of yin and yang:

"...even though its principles are in tension, they are not flatly opposed. They complement and counterbalance each other."

The world is woefully out of balance at the present time. This balance/complementarity will be effected through the liberation of women—and—as long as women do not enjoy perfect freedom—neither will men.

Nancy R. Smith explains this in *For Every Woman*:

- For every woman who is tired of acting weak when she knows she is strong, there is a man who is tired of appearing strong when he feels vulnerable.

- For every woman who is tired of acting dumb, there is a man who is burdened with the constant expectation of "knowing everything."
- For every woman who is tired of being called "an emotional female," there is a man who is denied the right to weep and be gentle.
- For every woman who is called unfeminine when she competes, there is a man for whom competition is the only way to prove his masculinity.
- For every woman who feels tired of being a sex object, there is a man who must worry about his potency. .
- For every woman who feels "tied down" by her children, there is a man who is denied the full pleasure of shared parenthood.
- For every woman who is denied meaningful employment or equal pay, there is a man who must bear full financial responsibility for another human being.
- For every woman who was not taught the intricacies of an automobile, there is a man who was not taught the satisfaction of cooking.
- For every woman who takes a step toward her own liberation, there is a man who finds the way to freedom has been made easier.

In the early 1900's when women were arguing their right to vote, novelist and poet Alice Duer Miller penned a satirical piece entitled: *Why We Oppose Votes for Men:*

- Because man's place is in the army.
- Because no really manly man wants to settle any question otherwise than by fighting about it.
- Because if men should adopt peaceable methods women will no longer look up to them.
- Because men will lose their charm if they step out of their natural sphere and interest themselves in other matters than feats of arms, uniforms, and drums.

- Because men are too emotional to vote. Their conduct at baseball games and political conventions shows this, while their innate tendency to appeal to force renders them particularly unfit for the task of government.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted:

“The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting—force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals—or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more properly balanced.”

The following anecdote illustrates this well.

When I worked for the U.S. Secret Service, there was an incident in which a group of Secret Service agents, along with officers from at least one other agency, went to arrest someone. They got inside the door of the man’s place and ordered him to stay still and put his hands up. Instead, the unarmed man kept walking towards the officers. He was almost face to face with the agent closest to him, so the agent, realizing he couldn’t shoot an unarmed man, but needed his hands free, quickly stuck his gun into his waistband. Immediately the suspect charged him, snatched his gun and shot him in the foot. All the male officers began spraying bullets, while the only female, one of our agents, carefully took aim and with one shot to the arm that held the gun, disabled him, allowing the others to arrest him. All that aggressive testosterone could have killed him, but amazingly, with all the indiscriminate shooting that took place, no major organs were hit and the man

lived to stand trial. The different reactions show why it is a good idea to have women in law enforcement, and yes, male officers should know that their female colleagues do “have their backs.”

Canadian Poet Roger White understood that women, even from historical times, have always had great capacity. In *Always it is Women*, he uses two women to illustrate this point: Mary Magdalene, and Táhirih, early heroine in Bahá'í history. For those of you unfamiliar with her, Táhirih was a poet and scholar of the Qur'án, which was almost unheard of in the 1800s. She travelled, teaching the new faith and encouraging literacy amongst the women. At a religious conference during the earliest days of our faith, she proclaimed that it was time for the emancipation of women and removed her veil. *Always it is Women*

It is women, always women, who reveal the way,  
who see and understand what well serves life  
Forced from prehistoric day  
to yield in love and birth  
to bend and stoop to cradle, fire and field,  
they gazed to earth  
were befriended by what nurtures  
and grew wise.  
Men went gladly whooping to the hunt  
happy with the power to devise,  
schemes of war, instruments of death  
and magic to hold congress with the stars.  
If the rich game thinned or weather turned adverse

they might placate capricious spirits,  
blame illest luck or totem's curse  
and range afar. But women knew.  
Leaning and listening they learned  
what in stillness is acutely earned.  
Crouched closest to the soil  
they saw the berry sicken,  
the water fail,  
the sweet clay spoil,  
knew incantation would not avail  
nor sacrifice behoove.  
Soon the camp would move.

It was the Magdalene who as she poured  
over the dust that held her Lord  
read the message of the Nazarene  
and knew for what the men must cast their nets.

Always it is women who reveal the way  
and who, conceiving, conceive what fosters life.  
But man forgets.

Again it is a woman.

At Badasht, prostrate in prayer,  
she hears the shrilling trumpet pierce the air  
and knows the Nightingale is listening.

Rising she tears off her veil,  
steps blazing, glistening, from her tent—  
the past is rent.

Men groan in consternation,  
constellations pale,  
the age shudders, reels and dies.

Slowly the camp moves toward  
the world that she espies.

**What is this “world that she espies?” A peaceful world. A world without war. A world beyond war. A world of cooperation, appreciation, unity and oneness.**

**‘Abdu’l-Bahá advised:**

“Therefore, strive to show in the human world that women are most capable and efficient, that their hearts are more tender and susceptible than the hearts of men, that they are more philanthropic and responsive toward the needy and suffering, that they are inflexibly opposed to war and are lovers of peace. Strive that the ideal of international peace may become realized through the efforts of womankind, for man is more inclined to war than woman, and a real evidence of woman's superiority will be her service and efficiency in the establishment of universal peace.”

This has never before been addressed in Scripture. In fact, the teachings on the equality of men and women in the Bahá'í Writings are unique in religious history. And the references to this subject in those Writings are numerous.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also said,

“Another teaching is that there shall be perfect equality between men and women. Why should man create a distinction which God does not recognize? In the kingdoms below man sex exists, but the distinction between male and female is neither repressive nor restrictive.”

The repressive and unhealthy attitudes towards women have created an imbalance in society which led to, permitted and, in effect, condoned their ill treatment. The Universal House of Justice, supreme administrative body of the International Bahá'í Community, in their statement *The Promise of World Peace*, wrote:

“The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.”

On the same subject, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States assert in their statement: *The Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Men and Women*,

“The elimination of discrimination against women is a spiritual and moral imperative that must ultimately reshape existing legal, economic, and social arrangements. Promoting the entry of greater numbers of women into positions of prominence and authority is a necessary but not sufficient step in creating a just social order. Without fundamental changes in the attitudes and values of individuals and in the underlying ethos of social institutions, full equality between women and men cannot be achieved. A community based on partnership, a community in which aggression and the use of force are supplanted by cooperation and consultation, requires the transformation of the human heart.”

*The Promise of World Peace* explains that in the concept of universal education, the most important priority is the education of women and girls. This, too, is based on Bahá'í Scripture. In a recorded talk by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we learn:

“In ancient times and medieval ages woman was completely subordinated to man. The cause of this estimate of her inferiority was her lack of education. A woman's life and intellect were limited to the household...Why should a woman be left mentally undeveloped? Science is praiseworthy—whether investigated by the intellect of man or woman...woman has been outdistanced through lack of education and intellectual facilities. If given the same educational opportunities or course of study, she would develop the same capacity and abilities.”

In another talk, He explained:

“Briefly, history furnishes evidence that during the past centuries there have been great women as well as great men; but in general, owing to lack of educational advantages, women have been restricted and deprived of opportunity to become fully qualified and representative of humankind. When given the opportunity for acquiring education, they have shown equal capacity with men. Some philosophers and writers have considered woman naturally and by creation inferior to man, claiming as a proof that the brain of man is larger and heavier than that of woman. This is frail and faulty evidence, inasmuch as small brains are often found coupled with superior intellect and large brains possessed by those who are ignorant, even imbecilic. The truth is that God has endowed all humankind with intelligence and perception and has confirmed all as His servants and children; therefore, in the plan and estimate of God there is no distinction between male or female. The soul that manifests pure deeds and spiritual graces is most precious in His sight and nearer to Him in its attainments.”

The Bahá'í Writings encourage both women and men to work earnestly to bring about the changes necessary to quickly and effectively attain this ideal.

Women must be assertive and claim their rightful place in society. Understanding the situation past and present, and looking to the future, poet Barbara Bostian wrote a tongue-in-cheek poem she calls *Jill-in-the-Box*:

Crammed into place by a careless hand  
Jill waits for someone to play her song  
springing her forth into service.  
Delighted giggles greet her appearance  
til the lid cloisters her with a clack.

Sisters the world over, lay mute  
in the darkness of mankind's ignorance, bound  
by time and place, estranged  
from primal knowledge, from feminine truth,  
propelled by rhythms not their own.

But women have legs and minds, I scream,  
toes to flex and neurons to crack.  
What box can restrain that energy?  
Sisters, you're living a nightmare dream.  
Wake up and listen, listen, listen.

Hold close your wholeness; feel its sounds;  
Delight to its pulse; dance your souls.  
Leap out of the coils of containment.  
And once you've mustered your own powers,  
Help free that scoundrel, Jack.

In *The Two Wings of a Bird* statement, men are admonished that they have:

"...an inescapable duty to promote the equality of women. The presumption of superiority by men thwarts the ambition of women and inhibits the creation of an environment in which equality may reign."

It goes on to explain:

“It is essential that men engage in a careful, deliberate examination of attitudes, feelings, and behavior deeply rooted in cultural habit, that block the equal participation of women and stifle the growth of men. The willingness of men to take responsibility for equality will create an optimum environment for progress: “When men own the equality of women there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights.”

Poet Michael Fitzgerald has a very beautiful vision of the station and qualities of women, as set forth in his work entitled, *She*:

She is the aviator of her own becoming  
the friend of her own needs—  
She is a river among all rivers, unfolding—  
the mapmaker of her own mind—  
She is giver, protector, provider, source—  
a confidante and doer—  
She is sufficient to her solitude, yet,  
solidarity for her is tribal—  
She is aware of the living flow, yet  
able to say a solid no—  
She is a buttress, bulwark, partner,  
yet ample to herself—  
She weaves her tapestry of being

on a loom of her making—  
She relates, she executes, she is kind—  
yet she knows her way to toughness—  
She knows the by-ways of the heart—  
and the landscapes of the mind—  
She is ambassador to her world—  
the royalty of her own heart—

As we close, let's again shut our eyes and repeat the imaging with which we began this consideration.

Picture what your life has been, where you are now, and where you believe you will you're headed. Now imagine you had been born the opposite gender. How would your life have been different? What it would be like now? What would your future look like. Has it changed from earlier? If so, was that change positive, negative, or some of both in different areas? Has this made you feel just a bit more aware of what the other gender's challenges are?

I trust you'll be thinking about this long after you've left here today. And, perhaps, considering what you can do to help bring balance into your own lives and those of others, always striving to achieve the perfect balance of partnership, equality, complementarity between men and women, helping bring forth the promised kingdom of God on earth.