

Status of Women, The: Warwick Leaflet

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Equal Status

It is a basic principle of the Bahá'í Faith that women should have equal status with men. This principle was first stated 150 years ago.

"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."

"God is the Creator of all mankind. He has endowed both sexes with perfections and intelligence...He has created them equal: in His estimate there is no question of sex. The one whose heart is purest, whose deeds are most perfect, is acceptable to God, male or female..."

"Equality between men and women does not and physiologically cannot mean they have identical functions. In some things women excel men, in others men are better suited than women and in many things the difference in sex is of no consequence at all."

"The entrance of women into all human departments is an irrefutable and incontrovertible question. No soul can retard or prevent it and in no movement will women be left behind."

Marriage

Bahá'í marriage is a partnership, where decisions should be made by consulting together:

"There are times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other."

"They are two helpmates, two friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other."

The purpose of the couple should be: "to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity."

Motherhood

"The difference of function is most apparent in family life. The capacity for motherhood has many far-reaching implications..."

"The great importance attached to the mother's role derives from the fact that she is the first educator of the child. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in the womb. When the child is born, it is she who has been endowed by God with the milk which is the first food designed for it, and it is intended that if possible she should be with the baby to train and nurture it in its earliest days and months."

"The concept of a Bahá'í family is based on the principle that the man has primary responsibility for the financial support of the family, and the woman is the chief and primary educator of the children. This by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed nor does it mean that the place of women is confined to the home."

"It is up to each individual woman, if and when she becomes a mother, to

determine how best she can discharge on the one hand, her primary responsibility as mother, and on the other, to the extent possible, to participate in other aspects of the society of which she forms a part."

Education

"Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes."

"If it be considered through the eye of reality, the training and culture of daughters is more necessary than that of sons, for these girls will come to the station of motherhood and will mould the lives of the children."

Bringing Peace

"Only as women are welcomed into all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge."

"The denial of 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."

"The happiness and stability of human societies and their peace and unity will be established only when the equality of men and women is achieved and women are given equal opportunities to participate fully in the administration of human affairs."

"Humanity is like a bird with its two wings...the one male, the other female. Unless both wings are strong and impelled by some common force, the bird cannot fly heavenwards."

The Bahá'í Contribution

The Bahá'í International Community, which has consultative status at the United Nations, has an Office for the Advancement of Women which promotes the status of women worldwide and works to improve their living conditions. Local initiatives also flourish. In India, for example, there are Bahá'í Vocational Training Institutes where women learn to read and write, study basic nutrition and hygiene and learn a useful craft. When they return to their villages they are not only able to support themselves but have a positive influence on their communities.

The New Age

"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 will be more properly balanced."

Published by the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Warwick.

Approved by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom,

27 Rutland Gate, LONDON SW7 1PD.

All quotations are from the Bahá'í writings.

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