

Two Wings

O F A B I R D

T H E E Q U A L I T Y O F W O M E N A N D M E N

T H E S P I R I T O F E Q U A L I T Y

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*Four Fireside Workshops on Equality
to accompany the video "Speaking of Gender"*

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THE SPIRIT OF EQUALITY

Four Fireside Workshops on Equality

These sessions are intended for Bahá'ís, friends of Bahá'ís, and others interested in the spirit of equality. Materials mentioned in the video, *The Bahá'ís* magazine and the Two Wings statement, should be available at each of the four fireside workshops described below, along with the short and beautifully illustrated pamphlet, *The Light of Unity*. All these materials are available through the Bahá'í Distribution Service, 1-800-999-9019. The fireside gatherings may be offered sequentially or in any order.

In addition to these short workshop sessions, two training programs have been created by agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly to foster the knowledge, spiritual insights and skills to promote equality within the Bahá'í community and in the world at large. Participation in the training programs will enhance the effectiveness of the friends as they teach the principle of equality. These programs are:

Core Curriculum Equality Training, a spiritual education and training program designed by the National Bahá'í Education Task Force in collaboration with the National Committee for the Equality of Women and Men, and disseminated through the National Teacher Training Center provides training in the skills necessary to promote unity in family and community life, as well as skills necessary to promote equality in the world at large. To participate in this training program, contact the National Teacher Training Center, Louhelen Bahá'í School, 3208 South State Road, Davison, Michigan 48423, email nttc@usbnc.org or phone (810) 653-5033.

Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men Training Weekend, designed and conducted by the National Committee for the Equality of Women and Men at Bosch, Green Acre and Louhelen Bahá'í Schools during 1998-1999, prepared friends to make public presentations on the principle of equality and to distribute the National Assembly's statement, Two Wings. The friends trained through that program continue to offer their service simultaneously with the Core Curriculum Equality trainers.

Facilitator Instructions

The four short workshops or fireside gatherings in this package support the national video broadcast of *Speaking of Gender* as an integral part of the National Teaching Plan. They foster true partnership between women and men, introduce this fundamental principle of Bahá'u'lláh to the world at large, and become an important part of a systematic campaign to advance the process of entry by troops. The following passages explain factors critical to the success of this work:

If presented properly the position of women in the Bahá'í teachings will surely attract much attention, for it is not only legal but also spiritual and educational. Our ideals are so high and at the same time so practicable that all other views will fall short if compared to them.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 369

The principle of the equality between women and men, like the other teachings of the Faith, can be effectively and universally established among the friends when it is pursued in conjunction with all the other aspects of Bahá'í life. Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 405

Those Bahá'ís who devote themselves to promotion of the equality of the sexes, through speeches and articles, should be aware that such a process will be facilitated if it is carried out without disruption to the unity of the believers, in order that spiritual blessings are attracted to the community and its endeavours reinforced. To maintain this unity, Bahá'í men and women must work together co-operatively, in striking contrast to the adversarial and denunciatory attitudes which distinguish so much of the movement for equality of the sexes.

Bahá'ís should realize that the Bahá'í approach to truth-seeking is consultative and not adversarial, and that contention between men and women is counter-productive in the endeavour to promote equality.

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice 5 June 1994

The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth.

Messages from the Universal House of Justice, p. 602

Some more specific guidelines may be helpful in facilitating these workshops:

Using the Master as our example. Constantly bringing to mind the life and words of our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá will assist you to respond in a loving manner to these precious new believers. Please feel free to personally study and reflect upon some of the writings and prayers of 'Abdu'l-Bahá before you begin so you will have His image clearly in mind when delivering the course.

Use the Sacred Texts as a basis for your answers. When answering questions, always try to refer the new believers to where those answers can be found in the Writings. Inspiring in the new believers the confidence to know that by going to the Writings they will find answers and advice that they can then translate into action in their daily lives is an invaluable lesson that they will carry with them forever.

Keep your comments brief. Creating an atmosphere where the participants themselves feel free to share their views and concerns necessitates that the facilitators and lecturing guests keep their presentations and answers brief. Allowing them to have the opportunity to connect their hearts to Bahá'u'lláh through use of the Sacred Texts will have much more impact on them than the typical lecture might. For this reason, very little of this course is based on lecturing or giving long answers to the questions of the new believers.

Practice patience. It is important to realize that each of us come to our recognition of Bahá'u'lláh through many different avenues and after varying lengths of search. Some may have read every book in sight and others may have that spark of faith after a brief explanation of Bahá'u'lláh's life and mission. All come with something unique to offer and assisting them to realize that their contributions are important is part of making people feel welcomed.

Be happy! An uplifting environment will always make learning easier and a cheerful presenter can really make all the difference. You may even find your own Faith renewed as you joyfully assist these new believers to understand the magnificence of this New Day and the privilege of recognizing Bahá'u'lláh as that Manifestation of God awaited by all the peoples of the earth.

Responding to Questions

The topic of equality may stimulate highly provocative questions from participants in these spiritual gatherings. Welcome these questions, and listen with warmth to the questioner. If it is possible to provide an answer from the sacred text (some helpful resources are listed below), please respond briefly and return to the suggested activities. If it is not possible to provide a brief answer from the sacred text in the context of the gathering, promise to find an answer by the next gathering. If the friends want to carry on a longer discussion of the topic or ask general questions about the Bahá'í Faith, consider inviting them to stay after the gathering or to come to another fireside scheduled in the near future. It will be a courtesy to the participants to stay on the announced topic during the time scheduled.

Compilations prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice:

- *Women*
- *Family Life*
- *Preserving Bahá'í Marriages*
- *Divorce*

Other helpful resources:

- *Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men: A Statement by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States*
- *Advancement of Women, Janet and Peter Khan*

Using the Video; “Speaking of Gender”

These workshops, or spiritual gatherings, assist participants to become acquainted with the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith that undergird the video, *Speaking of Gender*. These workshops may be used one or more at a time and in any order. A workshop may be used following the broadcast or viewing of the video, or facilitators may choose to play the portion of the video most aligned with that particular workshop. If all participants have already seen the video, the facilitator may choose to coordinate the workshop without re-showing the video.



What Is Equality?

Carefully prepare the learning environment so that it reflects the principles of hospitality, beauty, cleanliness, dignity and refinement. Arrive early to say prayers in the room where this spiritual gathering is held. Lovingly greet each person at the door as she or he arrives. Consider playing recorded music as the friends arrive. Consider serving light refreshments to demonstrate the spirit of hospitality.

- Begin the spiritual gathering with carefully selected prayers and music to set a joyful tone.
- Welcome the friends, invite them to introduce themselves, ask each to share a hope for the workshop. Listen carefully to each answer.
- Watch the broadcast of *Speaking of Gender*, show the video, or show the FIRST SEGMENT of the video, after which the question is raised: “What is gender equality?”
- Invite the friends to read aloud the following quotations and discuss the focus questions. *(The quotations and focus questions can be found on page 1 of the participant booklet.)*

Focus Questions

- *What is the spiritual foundation of the principle of equality of women and men?*
- *What are some of the ways that human civilization can become more balanced?*

All should know “Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 379

God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 79-80

Know thou that the distinction between male and female is an exigency of the physical world and hath no connection with the spirit; for the spirit and the world of the spirit are sanctified above such exigencies, and wholly beyond the reach of such changes as befall the physical body in the contingent world.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Janet Kahn and Peter Kahn, *Advancement of Women*, p.38

In former ages, men enjoyed ascendancy over women because bodily might reigned supreme and the spirit was subject to its dominion. In this radiant age, however, since the power of the spirit hath transcended that of the body and assumed its ascendancy, authority and dominion over the human world, this physical distinction hath ceased to be of consequence; and, as the sway and influence of the spirit have become apparent, women have come to be the full equals of men. Today, therefore, there is no respect or circumstance in which a person's sex provideth grounds for the exercise of either discrimination or favor.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Janet Kahn and Peter Kahn, *Advancement of Women*, p. 38

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 balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, 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 evenly balanced.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Compilation of Compilations, Volume 2, p. 369

The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 302

That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature and makes possible their complementary roles in certain areas of the life of society; but it is significant that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that in this Dispensation "Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced."

Universal House of Justice: Introduction to the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 7

Humanity: Balanced for Flight

Invite each individual to make a paper airplane or an origami bird. You will find directions and illustrations on the following pages. Note that it usually takes somewhat longer to fold a bird than to fold a paper airplane. To equalize the time, invite those who are making planes to experiment with more than one type of plane. Test fly each plane. Suspend each bird from a thread so that it can fly. Observe the flight pattern of each bird or plane.

Discuss the following questions:

- *What enables flight?*
- *What factors improve flight?*

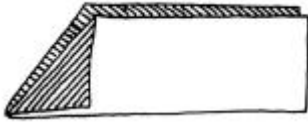
Then give each person a paper clip and ask:

- *How can you place this paper clip to help or hinder flight? Invite demonstrations.*

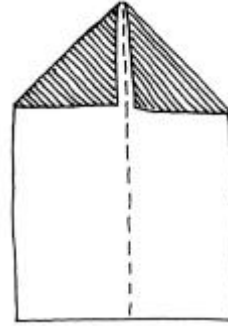
Discuss the following questions:

- *What does this demonstration tell us about equality and the need for balance?*
- *What can it tell us about the complementary contributions of women and men to the world of humanity?*

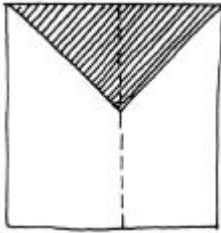
Paper Airplane



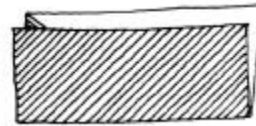
A Fold a sheet of paper lengthwise. Fold down two corners, like the start of a standard airplane.



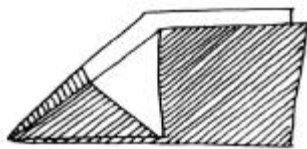
B Unfold your first fold. Your paper will look like a house.



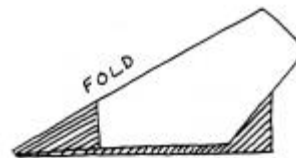
C Fold the peak of the "house" down.



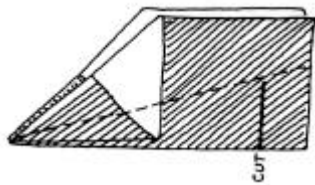
D Refold your paper lengthwise with the peak on the inside.



E Fold down the two corners, like the start of the plane again. Half the peak should now show.



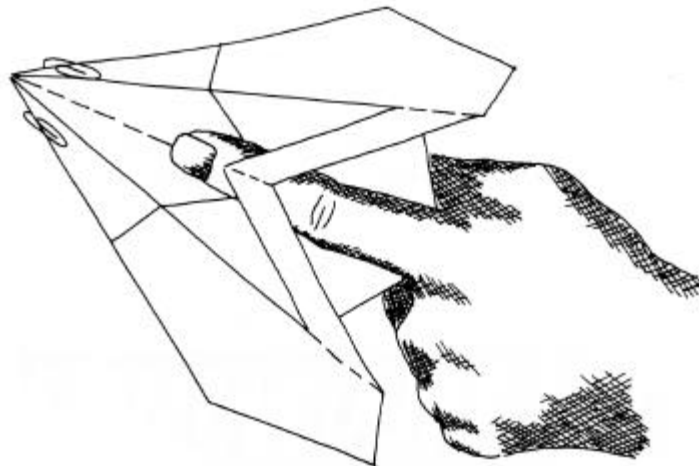
F Fold down the two wings. Line up the diagonal edges with the bottom.



G Put the wings up again. Then cut along the back from the bottom to the wing fold, 1" from the back.



H Open the wings. Fold up the cut flap into an upside-down V.

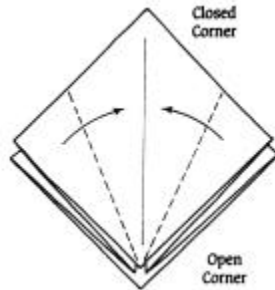


Paper Crane

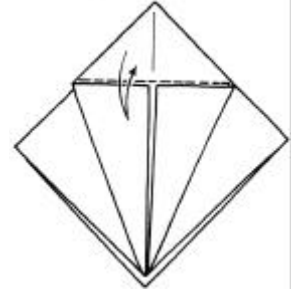


Fold a Square Base following the small diagrams above.

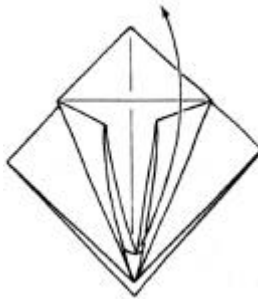
1 Place closed corner away from you. Fold the outer edges on the front flaps to the middle crease. Turn the paper over and repeat this with the two flaps on the back.



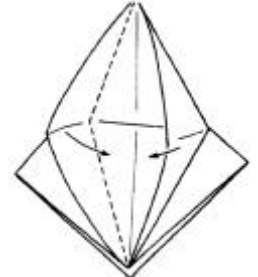
2 Draw a pencil (or imaginary) line between the ends of the creases. Fold back and forth on that line. Paper looks as before, but the crease helps you with the next step.



3 Pop the two front flaps apart. Find the loose corner at the bottom. Lift it up in the direction of the arrow.



4 Bring the outside edges of the paper to the middle and flatten it into a long diamond. The trick is to keep the crease made in previous step. Turn the paper over and repeat on the back.



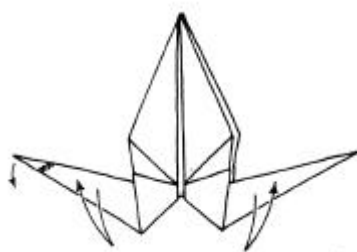
5 This diamond shape is called the Bird Base. It has two "legs" at the bottom. Fold their outer edges to the middle, first on the front flaps. Turn the paper over and repeat on the back.



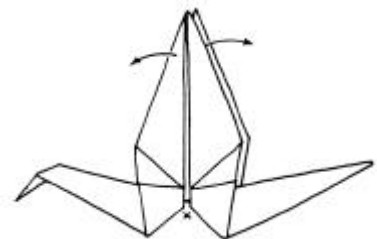
6 Make the neck and tail by folding the "legs" to the outside.



7 Fold the "legs" down again. Then fold them up on the creases made in the previous step, but this time in between the two main layers of paper. Fold the head down in between the two main layers of the neck.



8 Inflate the crane by holding a wing in each hand. Pull your hands apart gently and at the same time blow into the opening at point X.



Then discuss:

- *What practical steps can we take to make the spiritual reality of true equality known in the world?*
- *What practical steps can we take to implement the principle of equality in our own lives?*
- *What initial steps could be taken within the next week or even within the next 24 hours?*

Invite those who would like to commit to taking a single specific action to promote equality during the next day to write their promise to themselves on their bird or their plane as a reminder.

F I R E S I D E I I

Equality in the World at Large



Carefully prepare the learning environment so that it reflects the principles of hospitality, beauty, cleanliness, dignity and refinement. Arrive early to say prayers in the room where this spiritual gathering is held. Lovingly greet each person at the door as she or he arrives. Consider playing recorded music as the friends arrive. Consider serving refreshments to express the spirit of loving hospitality.

- Begin the spiritual gathering with carefully selected prayers and music to set a joyful tone.
- Welcome the friends, invite them to introduce themselves, ask each to share a hope for the workshop. Listen carefully to each answer.
- Invite those who feel they have observed from among those around them actions promoting equality to share those with the group.
- Watch the broadcast of *Speaking of Gender*, show the video, or show the SECOND SEGMENT of the video.

Study the following passages selected from the Bahá'í writings, then discuss the focus questions.

Equality in the World at Large

Focus Questions

- *What will be the benefits to humanity of women fulfilling their mission in all departments of life?*
- *What is the importance of education in establishing equality?*

According to the spirit of this age, women must advance and fulfill their mission in all departments of life, becoming equal to men. They must be on the same level as men and enjoy equal rights.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in J. E. Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, p. 147

So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and hindrance to it.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 135

Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful. By this means she will demonstrate capability and ensure recognition of equality in the social and economic equation.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 283

The difference in capability between man and woman is due entirely to opportunity and education. Heretofore woman has been denied the right and privilege of equal development. If equal opportunity be granted her, there is no doubt she would be the peer of man.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 135

. . . if woman be fully educated and granted her rights, she will attain the capacity for wonderful accomplishments and prove herself the equal of man. She is the coadjutor of man, his complement and helpmeet. Both are human; both are endowed with potentialities of intelligence and embody the virtues of humanity. In all human powers and functions they are partners and coequals. At present in spheres of human activity woman does not manifest her natal prerogatives, owing to lack of education and opportunity. Without doubt education will establish her equality with men.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 136-137

As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 133

Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 175

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.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 392

Heroic Women

Remind the friends that women have displayed heroism throughout history. Although there are many heroic women in the history of the Bahá'í Faith, the “outstanding heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation” is the Greatest Holy Leaf, Bahiyyih Khanum, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet and Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Briefly tell the about the life of the Greatest Holy Leaf. You may wish to show her photograph or a photograph of her shrine.

Bahiyyih Khanum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, “the outstanding heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation,” was born in 1846 in Tihran. She accompanied Bahá'u'lláh on every stage of His exiles. As a young girl she decided to devote herself to the service of the Faith of her Father; therefore she never married. Perhaps her greatest hour of service was after the passing of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá when Shoghi Effendi (newly appointed as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith), overwhelmed by the responsibilities thrust upon him, decided to leave the affairs of the Cause “under the supervision of the Holy Family and the headship of the Greatest Holy Leaf,” while he retired to recuperate and contemplate the tasks ahead.

Shoghi Effendi describes her character in these words:

A purity of life that reflected itself in even the minutest details of her daily occupations and activities; a tenderness of heart that obliterated every distinction of creed, class and color; a resignation and serenity that evoked to the mind the calm and heroic fortitude of the Báb; a natural fondness of flowers and children that was so characteristic of Bahá'u'lláh; an unaffected simplicity of manners; an extreme sociability which made her accessible to all; a generosity, a love, at once disinterested and indiscriminating, that reflected so clearly the attributes of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's character; a sweetness of temper; a cheerfulness that no amount of sorrow could becloud; a quiet and unassuming disposition that served to enhance a thousandfold the prestige of her exalted rank; a forgiving nature that instantly disarmed the most unyielding enemy - these rank among the outstanding attributes of a saintly life which history will acknowledge as having been endowed with a celestial potency that few of the heroes of the past possessed.

Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, p. 194

Shoghi Effendi also describes her heroism during the darkest days of World War I:

The outbreak of the Great War gave her yet another opportunity to reveal the true worth of her character and to release the latent energies of her heart. The residence of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa was besieged, all throughout that dreary conflict, by a concourse of famished men, women and children whom the maladministration, the cruelty and neglect of the officials of the Ottoman Government had driven to seek an alleviation to their woes. From the hand of the Greatest Holy Leaf, and out of the abundance of her heart, these hapless victims of a contemptible tyranny, received day after day unforgettable evidences of a love they had learned to envy and admire. Her words of cheer and comfort, the food, the money, the clothing she freely dispensed, the remedies which, by a process of her own, she herself prepared and diligently applied – all these had their share in comforting the disconsolate, in restoring sight to the blind, in sheltering the orphan, in healing the sick, and in succouring the homeless and the wanderer.

She had reached, amidst the darkness of the war days the high water-mark of her spiritual attainments. Few, if any, among the unnumbered benefactors of society whose privilege has been to allay, in various measures, the hardships and sufferings entailed by that Fierce Conflict, gave as freely and as disinterestedly as she did; few exercised that undefinable influence upon the beneficiaries of their gifts.

Shoghi Effendi, Bahiyyih Khanum, pp. 40-41

The Greatest Holy Leaf passed away on 15 July 1932 and is buried under a shrine in the Monument Gardens on Mount Carmel.

- After sharing this brief description of the Greatest Holy Leaf, invite each participant to reflect on the contributions to the world of humanity of a woman that they themselves know, or whose life they have studied. In small groups of 5 or fewer participants, invite each to briefly (in about 2 minutes each) describe the contributions of that particular woman to the world at large and to share with the others the personal impact of that woman on themselves.

After each has had time to share, discuss the following questions with the entire group:

- What are the common elements in the contributions of these woman that have influenced us and changed the world?
- What actions, large or small, can we take to enable the contributions of more women to the world at large?

Invite each person to choose an action to enable contributions of a woman or girl that they know during coming week.

F I R E S I D E I I I

Equality in the Family



Carefully prepare the learning environment so that it reflects the principles of hospitality, beauty, cleanliness, dignity and refinement. Arrive early to say prayers in the room where this spiritual gathering is held. Warmly greet each person at the door as she or he arrives. Consider playing recorded music as the friends arrive. Consider offering simple refreshments to the friends and seekers.

- Begin the spiritual gathering with carefully selected prayers and music to set a joyful tone.
- Show the video or the third segment of the video *Speaking of Gender* if the friends have not already seen it. Invite brief comments about the video.
- Share the following short story about the family life of Bahá'u'lláh, as told by His daughter, the Greatest Holy Leaf:

Asiyih Khanum, my dear mother, was in delicate health, her strength was diminished by the hardships she had undergone, but she always worked beyond her force.

Sometimes my father himself helped in the cooking, as that hard work was too much for the dainty, refined, gentle lady. The hardships she had endured saddened the heart of her devoted husband, who was also her beloved Lord. He gave this help both before His sojourn in the wilderness of Sulaymaniyyih, and after His return.

(Lady Bloomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 47)

Study the following passages from the Bahá'í writings. Then discuss the focus questions.

Equality in the Family

Focus Questions

- *How does equality promote the happiness and well-being of each member of the family?*
- *How does equality in the family foster habits that promote the prosperity of nations?*

Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 157

Consider the harmful effect of discord and dissension in a family; then reflect upon the favors and blessings which descend upon that family when unity exists among its various members. What incalculable benefits and blessings would descend upon the great human family if unity and brotherhood were established!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 230

The world of humanity consists of two parts: male and female. Each is the complement of the other. Therefore, if one is defective, the other will necessarily be incomplete, and perfection cannot be attained. There is a right hand and a left hand in the human body, functionally equal in service and administration. If either proves defective, the defect will naturally extend to the other by involving the completeness of the whole; for accomplishment is not normal unless both are perfect. If we say one hand is deficient, we prove the inability and incapacity of the other; for single-handed there is no full accomplishment. Just as physical accomplishment is complete with two hands, so man and woman, the two parts of the social body, must be perfect. It is not natural that either should remain undeveloped; and until both are perfected, the happiness of the human world will not be realized.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 134

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother - none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.

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The members of a family all have duties and responsibilities towards one another and to the family as a whole, and these duties and responsibilities vary from member to member because of their natural relationships. The parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children - but not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents - the parents do not obey the children; the mother - not the father - bears the children, nurses them in babyhood, and is thus their first educator; hence daughters

have a prior right to education over sons. A corollary of this responsibility of the mother is her right to be supported by her husband – a husband has no explicit right to be supported by his wife.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. 2, p. 384

Although the mother is the first educator of the child, and the most important formative influence in his development, the father also has the responsibility of educating his children, and this responsibility is so weighty that Bahá'u'lláh has stated that a father who fails to exercise it forfeits his rights of fatherhood. Similarly, although the primary responsibility for supporting the family financially is placed upon the husband, this does not by any means imply that the place of woman is confined to the home.

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There are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place, is a matter for each couple to determine.

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Invite the friends to each think of a beautiful memory of loving interaction with adults from their own childhood, either within their own families or within a group that was like a family to them. Invite each friend to turn to the person beside them and share the memory in this little team of two. Invite the friends to listen with their ears and with their hearts to the memory shared by their partner.

Then in the whole group, discuss the questions:

- *What are the elements that make our memories beautiful?*
- *In what ways will the establishment of equality enhance the beauty of family life?*

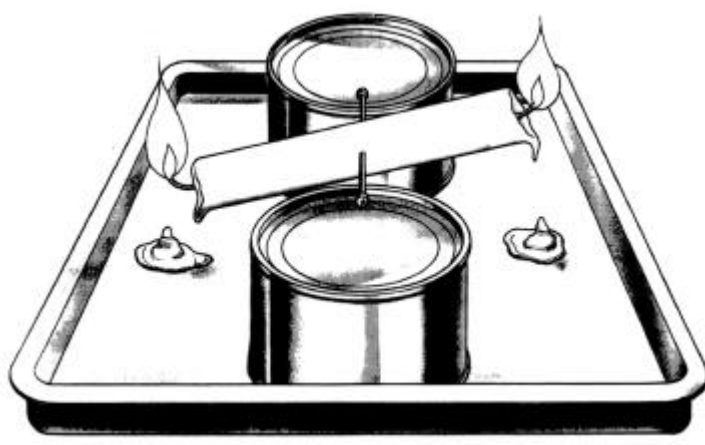
Invite each of the friends to think of example of dynamic equilibrium in nature, briefly share examples in the whole group, then discuss the questions:

- *In nature is balance always the same?*
- *Is it possible that there could be more than one strategy for promoting equality in the family?*
- *What would be common elements?*

Brainstorm a variety of options that families could use to promote equality.

Conclude the session with the following demonstration:

Place two tin cans (catfood size) in a shallow pan of water, so that an object could be balanced on the cans, above the water. Remove the wax from the flat end of a taper candle, so that there is a wick at each end of the candle. Then carefully insert a nail on each of the long sides of a candle. Carefully balance the candle above the water by resting the on the tin cans, so that the candle is free to rotate back and forth above the water. Light both ends of the candle. (See diagram below.) Notice that the candle swings back and forth in a balanced pattern that shows how each flame is lifted up alternately. Invite the friends to compare this dynamic equilibrium with the changing patterns of family life over time.



Invite each person to privately commit to an action, large or small, that will promote equality in their own families during the coming week.

F I R E S I D E I V

Transforming Human Society



Begin the spiritual gathering with music and prayers to create a joyful atmosphere. Warmly welcome the friends as they arrive. Invite each participant to briefly share actions that they have observed over the past week that promote equality either in the family or in the world at large.

Watch the broadcast of *Speaking of Gender*, show the video or show the fourth segment of the video, and invite brief comments about the video.

Promoting Equality

From the time of Bahá'u'lláh until the present day, Bahá'ís have actively promoted the principle of equality. From developing the capacities of women, to fostering the involvement of women in society, to promoting equality in the family, to promoting the principle of equality in the community at large,

Bahá'ís everywhere strive to respond to the directives of our Faith to establish equality. Briefly share the following two examples of current work for the advancement of women and the promotion of equality:

Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women, Indore, India

The Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women conducts residential training programs every year for needy, deserving and willing rural and tribal women. Transportation, food, accommodation, training and training materials are provided at no charge to the trainees. Women are trained as community workers, and as Area Coordinators. In addition courses are offered for married couples in such skills as mutual partnership, parental responsibilities, joint decision making through consultation, and overcoming alcoholism and domestic violence and other harmful influences on family life.

Training includes such topics as environmental education and gardening, literacy, health and hygiene, vocational and income-generating skills. All Institute courses include instruction in literacy. For example, in learning gardening the women learn to count the tools, trees and fruits, to weigh them and to write their names. In health instruction, they learn to write the names of different diseases, preventive measures, to take body weight and height. They learn to understand and record time for immunizations and for pre- and post-natal care. The newly-learned Hindi is immediately put to use in measuring cloth and the size of person for whom the garment is being made, making patterns, cutting and stitching according to measurements. Trainees learn through practical experience to write a receipt, calculate stock, estimate costs, count cash and give change. They also learn to approach a bank or a local government official for the purpose of applying for loans.

After completing a course, literacy is maintained by encouraging participants to correspond with the Institute. All the news, views and stories of the graduates, plus some educational messages, are published in a monthly newsletter, which is sent to all the former trainees. The most promising trainees are encouraged to continue their education through the open school system.

“Traditional Media as Change Agent”

A project of Bahá'í Office for the Advancement of Women in cooperation with UNIFEM in Bolivia, Cameroon, with extensions in Brazil and Nigeria

This project seeks to bring about a fundamental change in the organization of community life by involving community members in identifying their own problems through focus groups, surveys, and consultation, applying the principle of equality to address these problems; and using the traditional media of theatre, songs, and dance to promote change in the community.

In a local community, a core group of volunteers are trained in non-adversarial group decision-making, and techniques for gathering data, assessment, organization and record-keeping. This group then interviews male and female members of the community at large about issues pertaining to the role of women. Men and women may be asked to list their daily tasks, from which it becomes clear that women have twice as many duties as men! After consultation about the issues, local artists and performers are invited to prepare songs, dances, stories and plays that illustrate the issues to share with the entire population at festivals and other community events.

Surveys have indicated that this project is very successful in increasing the participation of women in family and community decision-making, increased motivation of women and girls to seek education, and greater involvement of men in domestic chores.

Transforming Society

Invite the friends to share information about local efforts that directly or indirectly support the principle of equality. Then study the following passages from the Bahá'í writings and discuss the focus questions:

Focus Questions:

- *In what practical ways can we encourage and support each other as together we move toward equality?*
- *How can we share these ideas with others, including children and youth, so that they too will choose to work for equality?*

The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light are these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day-Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.

Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 14

O children of men! 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. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Arabic, p. 68

O son of spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

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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!

Woman must endeavour then to attain greater perfection, to be man's equal in every respect, to make progress in all in which she has been backward, so that man will be compelled to acknowledge her equality of capacity and attainment.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 162

The assumption of superiority by man will continue to be depressing to the ambition of woman, as if her attainment to equality was creationally impossible; woman's aspiration toward advancement will be checked by it, and she will gradually become hopeless.

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When men own the equality of women there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights!

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I appeal to you to obliterate this contention between men and women.

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The position of women in the Bahá'í teachings is not only legal but also spiritual and educational.

Shoghi Effendi, The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. 2, p. 369

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

Shoghi Effendi, The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. 1, p. 84

Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.

The Universal House of Justice, The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. 1, p. 405

- Provide blank note cards, stamped envelopes, and art supplies (such as colored paper, scissors, pens and markers, pictures cut from magazines, etc.). Invite each person to think of a specific individual with whom he or she would like to share the importance of the principle of equality. Invite the friends to make a beautiful card, write a small note, include one or more of the passages studied, and address the card while the friends in the meeting. Invite those who wish to share their cards with the group before sealing the envelopes. Offer to mail the cards for the participants if they are already addressed.
- Then invite the friends to each create a specific plan to continue sharing these ideas with specific individuals or groups. Invite each person to consider what he or she will do, and how, when and where to do it. Invite the friends to consider how they each can encourage the others in these actions.
- Describe the training programs of the National Spiritual Assembly that are designed to promote equality and explain how individuals can participate in those programs.
- Invite the friends to participate in upcoming activities in the local Bahá'í community.
- Invite participants to participate in a joyful, uplifting closing devotional program that includes music, prayers for the success of these important actions.



THE SPIRIT OF EQUALITY

Four Fireside Workshops on Equality

FIRESIDE I

What Is Equality?



Focus Questions

- *What is the spiritual foundation of the principle of equality of women and men?*
- *What are some of the ways that human civilization can become more balanced?*

All should know “Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 379

God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 79-80

Know thou that the distinction between male and female is an exigency of the physical world and hath no connection with the spirit; for the spirit and the world of the spirit are sanctified above such exigencies, and wholly beyond the reach of such changes as befall the physical body in the contingent world.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Janet Kahn and Peter Kahn, *Advancement of Women*, p.38

In former ages, men enjoyed ascendancy over women because bodily might reigned supreme and the spirit was subject to its dominion. In this radiant age, however, since the power of the spirit hath transcended that of the body and assumed its ascendancy, authority and dominion over the human world, this physical distinction hath ceased to be of consequence; and, as the sway and influence of the spirit have become apparent, women have come to be the full equals of men. Today, therefore, there is no respect or circumstance in which a person's sex provideth grounds for the exercise of either discrimination or favor.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Janet Kahn and Peter Kahn, *Advancement of Women*, p. 38

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 balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, 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 evenly balanced.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 369

The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.

'Abdu'l-Bahá: *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 302

That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature and makes possible their complementary roles in certain areas of the life of society; but it is significant that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that in this Dispensation “Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced.”

Universal House of Justice: *Introduction to the Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 7



Equality in the World at Large

Focus Questions

- What will be the benefits to humanity of women fulfilling their mission in all departments of life?
- What is the importance of education in establishing equality?

According to the spirit of this age, women must advance and fulfill their mission in all departments of life, becoming equal to men. They must be on the same level as men and enjoy equal rights.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in J. E. Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, p. 147

So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and hindrance to it.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 135

Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful. By this means she will demonstrate capability and ensure recognition of equality in the social and economic equation.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 283

The difference in capability between man and woman is due entirely to opportunity and education. Heretofore woman has been denied the right and privilege of equal development. If equal opportunity be granted her, there is no doubt she would be the peer of man.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 135

... if woman be fully educated and granted her rights, she will attain the capacity for wonderful accomplishments and prove herself the equal of man. She is the coadjutor of man, his complement and helpmeet. Both are human; both are endowed with potentialities of intelligence and embody the virtues of humanity. In all human powers and functions they are partners and coequals. At present in spheres of human activity woman does not manifest her natal prerogatives, owing to lack of education and opportunity. Without doubt education will establish her equality with men.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 136-137

As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 133

Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 175

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.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume 2, p. 392



Equality in the Family

Focus Questions

- How does equality promote the happiness and well-being of each member of the family?
- How does equality in the family foster habits that promote the prosperity of nations?

Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 157

Consider the harmful effect of discord and dissension in a family; then reflect upon the favors and blessings which descend upon that family when unity exists among its various members. What incalculable benefits and blessings would descend upon the great human family if unity and brotherhood were established!

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 230

The world of humanity consists of two parts: male and female. Each is the complement of the other. Therefore, if one is defective, the other will necessarily be incomplete, and perfection cannot be attained. There is a right hand and a left hand in the human body, functionally equal in service and administration. If either proves defective, the defect will naturally extend to the other by involving the completeness of the whole; for accomplishment is not normal unless both are perfect. If we say one hand is deficient, we prove the inability and incapacity of the other; for single-handed there is no full accomplishment. Just as physical accomplishment is complete with two hands, so man and woman, the two parts of the social body, must be perfect. It is not natural that either should remain undeveloped; and until both are perfected, the happiness of the human world will not be realized.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 134

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother - none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.

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The Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. 1, p. 405