

Bahais say that men and women are the two wings of the bird of humanity. Where does this teaching come from? Can it be traced to the writings of Baha'u'llah?

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To: YY, <TARJUMAN-LIST@LISTSERV.BUFFALO.EDU>
Subject: Source of teaching of Baha'u'llah: the Equality of Men and Women.
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The immediate source is an early translation of the Tablet to the Hague, published in Star of the West, Vol. 11, p. 126, and from there going to PUP and then to Bahai World Faith.

In that section of the Tablet to the Hague (in Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, page 302), each paragraph begins with a briefly stated teaching, followed by an elaboration of it by Abdu'l-Baha, either in his own words or paraphrasing recognisable writings of Baha'u'llah. So it is possible that only the first part; "the equality of women and men." is "among the teachings of Baha'u'llah," and that the following :

"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."

is the explanation by Abdu'l-Baha.

The two wings image is a favourite of Abdu'l-Baha: in reference to spiritual and material civilization, religion and science, faith and reason, men and women. But I do not recall seeing this image used anywhere in the writings of Baha'u'llah, except in the Sureh-ye Ra'is where the soul has two "wings" (janaah. - can mean the wing of a building), the earthly and the spiritual. It is translated there as "the soul is endowed with two wings: should it soar in the atmosphere of love and contentment, then it will be related to the All-Merciful. And should it fly in the atmosphere of self and desire, then it will pertain to the Evil One" but I would translate it as "the soul has two

sides" or "two aspects." The translation is in Summons of the Lord of Hosts paragraph 34 of suuriy-i-ra'is, the Arabic is in neda-ye rabb'ul-junuud page 43, 2/3rds of the way down.

As for where "the equality of women and men" is found in Baha'u'llah's writings, the Quranic teaching of inequality (in some social respects) is found in Qur'an 4:34):

Men (rijal) are superior to women (nisa') on account of the qualities with which God hath gifted the one above the other, and on account of the outlay they make from their substance for them.

If we look for contrasts to this in Baha'u'llah's writings, there is this:

Today the Baha'i women (lit., the leaves of the Holy Tree) must guide the handmaidens of the earth to the Lofty Horizon with the utmost purity and sanctity. Today the handmaidens of God are regarded as gentlemen (rijal). Blessed are they! Blessed are they!

And further:

Today whoever among the handmaidens attains the knowledge of the Desire of the World [i.e., Baha'u'llah] is considered a gentleman (rajul) in the Divine Book. (Both of these are quoted in Ahmad Yazdani, Mabadiy-i Ruhani, Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 104 Badi', p 109.)

And :

...many a man (rajul) hath waited expectant for God's Revelation, and yet when the Light shone forth from the horizon of the world, all but a few turned their faces away from it. Whosoever from amongst the handmaidens hath recognized the Lord of all Names is recorded in the Book as one of those men (rijal) by the Pen of the Most High. (Compilation on Women #7, p 3).

Because the Quranic teaching distinguished between rijal and nisa', when Baha'u'llah says that Bahai women are rijal, he is cancelling the Quranic distinction

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