

## Resolving Conflict in the Family

### Session Two

#### Handling conflicts through inner introspection

When trying to resolve a conflict many people resort to wondering why the other partner is behaving in a particular way. They hold them responsible for the way things are, and can often convince themselves that things would be better if only they could change. They look outward rather than inwards for a true understanding of the situation. Through this perspective, it is easy to feel angry and resentful with the other partner.

To be able to handle conflicts effectively however, we must be able to look inwards. We must have enough insight to accept our own fears, frustrations and weaknesses. We must learn how and why we react in certain ways, and look for the roots of our behavior. When we understand ourselves, we are able to understand others better. We begin to see that what we experience is colored by many factors. It is our personal reaction to any given situation that creates the outcome. Although we cannot always control the situation, we do have control over our reaction to it. This reaction is affected by factors such our past experiences, the image we have of ourselves, our fears and worries, etc. Once we understand that part of the problem lies in ourselves, it becomes easier to manage a conflict. We can take some responsibility for our role in it.

Islam highly emphasizes knowing oneself, understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses. The following Hadiths from Imam Ali (a) show how important it is to know oneself:

*The best of wisdom is a human being's knowledge of himself.*

*He who knows himself has achieved the highest achievement.*

*Whoever understands himself, understands others better.*

*It is enough knowledge for a man to know himself.*

It requires a lot of strength and effort to be able to objectively analyze oneself, and admit to problems within oneself that may be causing or aggravating the conflict. But not doing that is a great danger. It means that one goes through life without really recognizing oneself. This would result in not overcoming personal weaknesses, nor making the most of one's strengths. That is why Imam Ali (a) also says; *Do not be ignorant about your own self, for whoever is ignorant of himself is ignorant of all things.*

To change and improve our relationships with others we need to start with ourselves. That is the most effective way, or rather the only way. Stephen Covey in his book [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective](#) people says:

*Change – real change – comes from the inside out. It doesn't come from hacking at the leaves of attitude and behavior with quick fix personality ethic techniques. It comes from*

*striking at the root – the fabric of our thoughts, the fundamental, essential paradigm, which gives definition to our character, and creates the lens through which we see the world.*

To be able to change one's own attitudes and reactions is key to handling conflicts. We must remember that in any relationship, it is possible for one party to change the nature of the relationship. Since it is not always possible to change the other person, or to force them to see the world differently, we must focus our energies on changing the only thing we have the power to change – ourselves. The first step to do this is to recognize ourselves, and view ourselves frankly. Only then can we embark on the road to self improvement.

### **Roots of Conflict within ourselves**

A conflict is sometimes caused by factors within us. Some of the following are common factors that guide our response to a conflict. An awareness of these factors helps immensely in changing one's reactions to a conflict.

#### Our Mindset

A basic premise of psychological reality is that we make our own psychological life. Our perceptions, reactions and experiences are filtered through a lens, and we determine what exactly we will see. This personal view often has many blind spots, and can never be completely objective.

Personal views differ from person to person and are the cause of much misunderstanding between people. It is quite illogical to think that everyone would have the same personal views, and yet that is what we tend to do most of the time. We expect our partners to oblige accordingly, and when they don't, we are annoyed and frustrated.

Almighty Allah has created each human being as a unique personality with his own individual characteristics. It is testimony to the greatness of Allah that human beings are so different. This difference in personalities makes the world a more interesting place to live in. Life would be quite boring if we were all the same and had the same personal views and opinions about everything. But differences sometimes mean a clashing of views, and Islam teaches us to accept differences and be gentle with one another. A hadith of the Holy Prophet (s) says; *Carry the action of your brother in faith over seventy steps*, meaning that give him seventy different excuses for doing what might have displeased you. This is because human beings differ vastly, and the action of one may be in accordance with a personal view that varies greatly from the other partner in the relationship.

Childhood experience is a key factor in the mind set we develop. The love we received as a child, or the lack of it, affects greatly the thinking we carry into this world. A loved child has an optimistic outlook on the world and is willing to love others and be loved. One who is deprived of it has greater difficulty in close relationships, and may not feel worthy of being loved.

### Old Habits

Habits are formed when a behavior is repeated often. This pattern of behavior becomes almost second nature, and a human being often carries it out without thinking too much about it. A habit becomes so ingrained that it becomes part of the personality of the person. A hadith of the Holy Prophet (s) says; *A habit is second nature.*

Sometimes a human being forms a habit that wrong. It is very difficult to change a habit as it needs a lot of will and determination. A Hadith says, *The one who reverts from his habit is like he who has performed a miracle.* Another hadith says, *Habit is an enemy that possesses you.* These hadith show how hard it is for us to change our habits.

Often our reaction to a conflict is out of habit. We may have learned these habits from our childhood, or have formed them in the process of our experiences with others. Either way, we should analyze our habits and make a conscious effort to change them if necessary.

### Self-image

Many people have a low self-image of themselves and try to hide this beneath a veneer of self confidence. When a conflict occurs, and harsh words are exchanged, this low self image props up and feels justified. It opens up the dark and inner part of oneself, feeding self-doubts, and making us defensive and weak. Our feelings of inadequacy are confirmed, and we become hurt and angry.

The low image we have of ourselves sometimes comes from assessments of our character in the past. It could often be a result of childhood labeling by close family members. We grow up to believe these labels, and even as adults, can never quite rid ourselves of it. A conflict rips open the veil that has been put over these hurtful labels, and brings them closer to reality. This can be quite unpleasant and often unjustified.

### Fear and Mistrust

Many people fear that their partners in close relationships do not really love them, or that they may turn into their enemies very easily. This type of mistrust prevents us from being comfortable with a conflict as it is seen as a threat. Mistrust creates misinterpretation of reality, and may cause overly sensitive reactions. We become suspicious and predisposed to looking for danger to fulfill our fears.

In a close relationship partners must trust their love for each other, and not see conflicts as proof that love does not exist any more. Once that type of perception sinks in, facts may be filtered in a way to create evidence. Other aspects of the relationship may be ignored and overlooked.