

## Session Four

### Balancing Emotion and Reason

Emotion is an impulse within the human being which needs to be expressed. It is described as the feelings that are aroused in response to others. Almighty Allah has placed emotions inside the human being, and each emotion has a positive aspect to it. Without emotion, man would be a cold, hard animal who would not feel love and sympathy for others, or grief at the death of a loved one, or who would be unmoved by being oppressed or humiliated. He would be completely unresponsive to others. In other words, he would not be human.

The heart is the seat of all emotions, and has been described in hadith as the organ that leads the body. This is because a lot of human behavior is dictated by the emotions that arise in the heart. The following hadith stress the importance of the role of the heart:

1. *Surely the position of the heart to the body is like that of a leader among men.* Imam as-Sadiq (a)
2. *When the heart of a person is pure his body is pure, and when the heart is polluted his body is polluted.* Holy Prophet (s)
3. *The heart is a King, and has his army. So if the King is virtuous his army will also be virtuous, and if the King is corrupt, his army will also be corrupt.* Holy Prophet (s)

Emotions can be very positive when expressed appropriately. It is when emotions cloud reason, and become stronger and harsher than necessary, that they can become destructive. Strong emotions often overcome rational and logical thinking. They overwhelm the mind of the human being and cloud his judgment. If unstoppable, waves of emotion gain full control over behavior even if that behavior is unworthy of reason. This lack of emotional control can be very harmful for the human being. Imam Ali (a) says; *The cause of all evil is the victory of emotions and desires.* He also says; *A heart that is overcome with emotions and desires will never benefit from wisdom.*

Emotional Intelligence is the term used to describe the ability to manage one's emotions. Daniel Goleman, in his book, Emotional Intelligence, says that emotional intelligence is more crucial to the success of the human being than other forms of intelligence. He says: *In a sense we have two brains, two minds – and two different kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional. How we do in life is determined by both – it is not just IQ but emotional intelligence that matters.* (pg 28)

#### **Emotions and Conflict**

In close relationships almost every conflict stems from emotions. Each person has a unique emotional world, and an emotional reality that is very different from the emotional reality of the other partner. Although the situation from which the conflict arises is the same, the meaning that each person attaches to it may be different. James L. Creighton in his book, Don't Go Away Mad, says:

*One of the biggest differences between the logic of emotional thought and the logic of rational thought is that the realities that make sense in our emotional lives are different for each individual. Quite literally, what makes sense to be emotionally may not make emotional sense to you or anyone else. And yet, in conflicts that occur in our relationships, we often try to apply a rational system. Instead of acknowledging each other's right to a unique emotional reality, we insist that it "make sense" to us. (pg.37)*

We would like to believe that every reasonable person feels about things the way we do. If something causes me to be happy, or sad, or angry, I would assume that everybody who is rational would also feel about it in the same way. However this is often not the case. When an event arouses some emotion in me, it is because of the meaning I attach to that event. That meaning depends on my background, my personality, my childhood experiences etc. This forms my emotional reality. It is obvious then, that emotional realities differ from person to person since the factors determining them are also different.

To avoid a clash of emotional realities, the partners have to acknowledge and accept each other's reality. It may not agree with theirs but it craves understanding. When that need is fulfilled, the partner may be more willing to listen and compromise if necessary. Most conflicts are aggravated when one side refuses to acknowledge the emotional reality of the other. The other party then feels rejected and may become defensive and hostile. This then escalates the conflict even further.

### **The Role of Reason**

Reason, or the *Aql*, of the human being needs to be in control of human behavior. Although emotions have their role, behavior should be guided by reason. The following hadith of Imam Ali (a) show us the importance of listening to reason;

1. *Reason guides and saves, while ignorance deceives and destructs.*
2. *There is no wealth greater than reason.*
3. *The best of fortunes for man is his reason; if he is humiliated it gives him honor, if he falls it raises him, if he is led astray it guides him, and if he speaks it prevents him (from mistakes).*

The first step towards solving a conflict is to understand that emotional realities are different, but that each person has a right to their own emotional reality. To express emotion is necessary, although strong emotions should be controlled before expressing them. Suppressing emotion is not the answer to solving a conflict. Each side has to express their own emotions and be listened to and accepted.

When expressing emotion it is important to remember not to turn emotions into judgments. An emotional feeling is my own interpretation of something, and I must understand that it may be wrong. I express it as something which I feel, and am

responsible for. It is not always a consequence of what the other partners has said or done. I may have attached a wrong meaning to it.

Emotional expression gives great relief when the following three conditions are met:

a) Feelings are shared with the person who stimulated them.

Although it may help to talk to someone else about a strong emotion such as anger, sharing feelings with the person who caused the anger gives the greatest relief.

b) The listener gives serious consideration to the feelings expressed.

When the person expressing emotion is convinced that the listener is concerned and cares enough to address the issue. Such attention soothes and calms troubled emotions.

c) Sharing feelings does not lead to being attacked.

The person expressing emotion should not be labeled as crazy, or dumb. Such rejection creates a lot of troubled emotion and will not resolve the conflict.

Once the emotions have been expressed and accepted, both sides must try to reach a solution. This should be done rationally, considering the feelings of both sides. Emotions, after being expressed must be controlled and calmed through reason. This requires a lot of strength and character. That is why a hadith of Imam Ali (a) says; *the strongest of men is the one who can overcome his emotions*. To be able to do this, Imam advised his followers to seek guidance through knowledge. Knowledge counters emotion, and tells the heart when it is wrong. *When wisdom increases, says Imam, emotions and desires decrease.*

Balancing emotion and reason is a skill that is not easily acquired. It requires a lot of effort in taming emotions, opposing them if necessary, and polishing and strengthening one's reason and wisdom. This is easier to do when emotions are expressed and accepted without the threat of rejection.