



COMMUNITY CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION



COMMUNITY CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION

TYPES OF CONFLICT	2
Positive Conflict	2
Negative Conflict	3
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN DA'WAH WORK	3
CONFLICT: THE MYTHS AND THE REALITIES	3
Why Deal With Conflict?	4
Grounds for Conflict	4
FIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES	5
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: THE SALAM MODEL	6
HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICT	9
GIVING AND RECEIVING CRITICISM	11
COMMUNITY CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION	14
COMMUNICATING DISPLEASURE: COMPLAINT, CRITICISM, AND CONTEMPT	15
CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND <i>SHURAH</i>	23
CONCLUSION	23
EXERCISE	24

INTRODUCTION

The person conducting da'wah does not operate in a vacuum. He/she interacts with other Muslims, in the mosque and the community and possibly belongs to an Islamic organization or more than one. These organizations themselves interact with members of other organizations and the wider society.

Muslims of different views are therefore bound to encounter one another in the course of their da'wah activities, and this encounter may result in either co-operation for the common

good or in disagreement, rivalry, conflict and disunity, depending on their approach to each other.

The different views of some Muslims based on their School of Jurisprudence (*Madhhab*) or their national or ethnic customs or their type of education (traditional or modern) and so on are potential sources of disagreement and even conflict.

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

According to Wikipedia Encyclopaedia, Conflict refers to some form of friction, or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group.

Conflict is unavoidable due to human diversity which is the natural basis for differences in various aspects of human relationships. Allah (SWT) makes this clear in Qur'an:

"And had thy Sustainer so willed, He could surely have made all mankind one single community: but (He willed it otherwise, and so) they continue to hold divergent views – (all of them,) save those upon whom thy Sustainer has bestowed His grace..."

(Qur'an 11: 118-119)

Also, the Qur'an says:

"And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are signs for those who know." (Qur'an 30:22)

TYPES OF CONFLICT

Conflict can be either a positive or negative process.

Positive Conflict

A difference of ideas or opinions can be very productive in a team environment. It can encourage creative solutions to problems and generate innovation, variety and increased communication.

Positive conflict can also clear the air between team members, raise issues for clarification and resolution and improve relationships.

Negative Conflict

In some instances, varied opinions are not productive. This is generally because the conflict is not communicated and dealt with appropriately

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN DA'WAH WORK

Conflict management is the practice of being able to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly, and efficiently. Since conflicts in a society or community are a natural part of the community, it is important that there are people who understand conflicts and know how to resolve them. This is important in today's society more than ever. Everyone is striving to show and prove his/her identity or value, this can lead to disputes with other members of the society.

CONFLICT: THE MYTHS AND THE REALITIES

1. *Myth*: Conflict of ideas or disagreement is dysfunctional.

Reality: When properly managed, conflict of ideas can help towards goal achievement.

2. *Myth*: Disagreement is caused by lack of communication or miscommunication

Reality: Disagreement will occur due to clashes of ideas and values whether or not there is lack of communication or miscommunication.

3. *Myth*: Conflict will go away, if unattended to.

Reality: Minor conflicts may disappear with time, but major ones will degenerate into big crises.

4. *Myth*: All conflicts of ideas can be resolved.

Reality: Not all conflicts of ideas can be resolved, but all can be well managed when appropriate steps are taken.

5. *Myth*: There must be a winner and a loser

Reality: Conflict of ideas can end with a winner - winner result and even strengthen the relationship between conflicting parties.

6. *Myth*: Conflict demoralizes the parties.

Reality: You may not only come to understand the other party during a conflict of ideas, you may also come to realize your own shortcomings and become motivated to change.

Why Deal With Conflict?

Muslims should be interested in dealing with conflict in their individual as well as collective capacity for the following reasons:

- Muslims like any other people, change as they learn and grow, and change is a precursor to conflict; thus the need to manage change.
- Communication and globalisation is bringing Muslims with different backgrounds and values into contact, therefore the need to understand, tolerate and accept their differences becomes vital.
- Dealing with conflicts equips the *Ummah* and its leadership with the skill and ability to handle problems so that the *Ummah* does not lose direction or degenerate, but rather becomes a stronger and more effective team.

Grounds for Conflict

Sometimes, conflict may arise from issues not relating to ideology or differences in values or background. For instance, conflict may arise because:-

- a younger person is engaged in da'wah to an older person;
- a less knowledgeable and experienced person is engaged in da'wah to a more knowledgeable and experienced person;
- a woman is engaged in da'wah to a man;
- racial, tribal or class differences amongst people engaged in da'wah may involve superiority complexes or inferiority complexes.

The scenario could be a young American female *da'wah* worker talking to older, knowledgeable, experienced, conservative Arab man. There ought not be any problem here because Islam teaches respect on the part of the *Da'wah-worker*; learning constantly from cradle to grave; equality among mankind of either sex and any race; and that the best of them is determined by level of piety. However, *da'wah* workers should look out for such areas of potential conflict and take necessary steps towards averting them.

FIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES

Conflicts can arise at any time. How you utilize conflict resolution strategies depends on both your conflict style and your conflict resolution skills. There are many different ways to respond to conflict situations; some conflict styles involve a considerate or cooperative approach while others involve either a competitive or passive approach

Those who have proper conflict resolution training understand how to diffuse the situation and reach an agreement that satisfies all parties. The first step in conflict resolution is understanding the various styles of conflict. The five styles of conflict include:

1. **Avoiding the Conflict**

Avoiding or withdrawing from a conflict requires no courage or consideration for the other party. By avoiding the conflict, you essentially pretend that it never happened or doesn't exist. Some examples of avoidance or withdrawal include pretending there is nothing wrong, stonewalling or completely shutting down.

2. Giving In

Giving in or accommodating the other party requires a lot of cooperation and little courage. Basically, you agree to accommodate the other party by acknowledging and accepting his point of view or suggestion. This style might be viewed as letting the other party have his way. While this style can lead to making peace and moving forward, it can also lead to the accommodator feeling resentment toward the other party.

3. Standing your Ground

While standing your ground requires courage, it can also be inconsiderate. By standing your ground, you are essentially competing with the other party; you'll do anything to ensure that you win the battle. The fact is, a competitive approach offers short term rewards, but in the long term effects can be detrimental to your business.

4. Compromising

Compromising is a big step toward conflict resolution. Both courage and consideration are used when both parties look for common ground. You agree to negotiate larger points and let go of the smaller points; this style expedites the resolution process. Occasionally, the person compromising might use passive-aggressive tactics to mislead the other party, so beware.

5. Collaborating

Collaboration plays a major role within conflict resolution and requires great courage and much consideration. Collaborating with the other party involves listening to their side, discussing areas of agreement and goals, and ensuring that all parties understand each other. Collaboration requires thinking creatively to resolve the problem without concessions. Collaborators are usually admired and well-respected.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: THE SALAM MODEL

An attempt has been made by scholars to look at the process of conflict management from Islamic perspectives. This birthed the Salam Model. The English acronym SALAM is a transliterated version of the corresponding Islamic terms. Thus, SALAM here stands for:

S – Stating the Conflicting View**A – Agreeing that a conflict exists****L – Listening and Learning****A – Advising one another****M – Minimizing areas of disagreement**

The SALAM model points to a systematic way of approaching the conflict and moving towards a fair resolution, assuming of course that all parties to the conflict want to reach a fair conclusion. The first letter **S** stands for **stating** the conflicting view. We should not assume that we already know what the nature or content of the conflict is. Let it be stated what it is that we are in conflict about. The Qur'an advises us not to act on what we do not know:

“And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge; for every act of hearing or of seeing or of (feeling in) the heart will be inquired into (on the Day of Reckoning).” (Qur'an 17:36)

“But they have no knowledge therein. They follow nothing but conjecture; and conjecture avails nothing against the truth.” (Qur'an 53:28)

Once what is in conflict is clearly stated – without agreement or disagreement, it is possible to relate it to the conflicting parties' purposes. This will establish what is at stake and how critical is the disagreement. Some conflict might be resolved just by stating the parameters of conflict clearly, because one party or the other might find that it can live with the situation without trying to change.

Therefore, S stands for stating the conflicting view.

The second letter **A** stands for **agreeing** that a conflict exists, again without making any judgment.

At this stage, we must detach issues from personalities. One way to do that is, when possible, let each side state the other side's position as fairly as it can. This enables them both to focus on issue, not persons.

The third letter **L** stands for **listening** for and **learning** the difference. Of course, that is the tough part.

Most of the time, we listen not to learn but to respond when our turn comes. Here we must turn to the essence of the Islamic principles of *shura*, by focusing on the issues. The two parties should move to a higher level by consulting with one another on how to attack the problem between them. Through this exercise of *shura*, they direct their mutual resources of creativity, experience, wisdom, etc. to attack the problem, not one another.

As far as *shura* is concerned, there is probably no other Islamic concept that is talked about as much as and practiced as little as *shura*. Therefore, I will not spend more time discussing what *shura* is.

However, within the context of avoiding conflict, one must stress the pro-active nature of *shura*. When the Prophet received the news about Abu Sufyan's caravan before the Battle of Badr, he consulted the members of his expedition. Sayiddina Abu Bakr and Sayyidina Umar spoke and then al Miqdad ibn 'Amr spoke, and then there was a long silence. The Prophet (pbuh) asked for advice. It seemed he was anxious to hear the Ansar's view because he had made a pledge with at al 'Aqabah.

Then Sa'd ibn Mua'dh, their leaders, addressed the Prophet (pbuh) asking the Prophet (pbuh) if he was seeking to hear their views, and the Prophet (pbuh) confirmed that indeed he was. This anecdote stresses the pro-active nature of *shura*, the idea the one has to invite and seek *shura*, not simply engage in it because it is forced by circumstances.

Of course at this stage, we must examine the guidelines of Sharia with respect to the issues at hand. This should also be a mutual effort, to make the Sharia – in a sense – an unbiased arbitrator.

The fourth letter **A** stand for **advising** one another. This is a stage where compromises begin to take shape. We advise one another in the Islamic manner of *naseeha*, recognizing that the advisor is not always right. Two things are important here.

- **First:** we move to common ground by proposing action that meets the principal needs of the other party while enabling us to reach our goals.
- **Second:** we offer to help carry out whatever is agreed upon. Again, we are talking about a pro-active mode of behaviour. It requires a continual monitoring of actions and prompt evaluative response to them.

We all know the very famous hadith of the Prophet (pbuh) related by Muslim on the authority of Abu Ruqayya Tamim ibn Aus ad-Dari (ra): The Prophet (pbuh) said: Religion is good advice. We said: To whom? He said: To Allah and His Book, and His Messenger, and to the leaders of the Muslims and their common folk.

We see that the Prophet (pbuh) extended the principle of *naseeha* to everyone from the top to the bottom, from the leaders to the common folks. Thus the giving or receiving of *naseeha* is not restricted to one group of the other but is a general operational principle, especially when we study this hadith with the other famous one: A believer is a mirror to his brother.

The last letter **M** stands for **minimizing** areas of disagreement that could lead to aggression or withdrawal.

We do not want the other party to become an aggressor because they did not get what they wanted. In most situations, we also do not want the other party to withdraw from us. In most situations, this will be only a short-lived resolution of the conflict, until the other party feels strong enough to challenge the resolution.

Therefore, we want to seek agreement in as many aspects of the conflict as possible, minimizing those aspects in which either party has to yield its position. We recognize that conflict is unavoidable; and that it is even desirable to have functional and occasional conflict.

When two people always agree with one another, one of them is redundant.

HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICT

When do you accommodate opposing views?

- When it is more important to preserve the relationship than argue the issue (Qur'an 20:94).
- When the issue is more important to the other person than to you.
- When you want to exhibit some degree of reasonableness and maturity.
- When there is the need to encourage others to express their own point of view.
- When it will be more effective for someone to learn from his choices and actions.

When is it appropriate to avoid resolving conflict:

- When other people are more effective at settling the conflict.
- When both groups see the issue as minor (unimportant).
- When foresight or fore-knowledge indicates that the issue will have a negative effect on both groups.
- When time is inadequate to handle the conflict.
- When both groups want to take time to cool-off. For example in the heat of an argument, when emotions are high and no peace or compromise is at sight, someone can just say: *“Assalamu Alaykum, why don't we rest the issue for a moment and discuss later, when everyone has cooled down?”* The brother or sister should not forget to be the one to raise the issue again at the appropriate time.

When is it appropriate to collaborate with others?

Collaboration is an effective tool for resolving conflict and it is perhaps the most difficult. Here, there is equal concern for the topic of discussion and for unity or maintenance of the relationship. But for collaboration to succeed:

- there must be sincerity and willingness on all sides concerned;
- there must be willingness to probe into the true sources and causes of the conflict and resolve it;
- there must be the willingness to be considerate even when there is cause for differences. This involves accepting, understanding and validating the other people's feelings too.

However, collaboration can be employed:

- When there is the need to preserve important objectives which cannot be compromised, while still maintaining the relationship. For example, if two sects or groups of Muslims want to use a common Mosque or theatre for their different programmes at the same time;
- When there is need to share experiences with people who have diverse background and ideology;

- When there is need to break fresh ground. This requires exploring alternatives together which neither group had previously envisaged;
- When our surface conflict could be resolved by examining its root causes which has hindered progress over a long period of time.

When do you keep silent?

Silence is difficult for most people, particularly during conflicts. We are prone to speaking instead of listening. However, the person who disciplines himself to imbibe this “silence-system” will easily acquire more information from the speaker and the more silent he is the more information the speaker reveals.

How do you listen and respond to the excessive talker?

This is difficult but achievable. In order to channel the conversation to get the information and resolve the conflict, you may employ the following tools:-

- Interrupt the speaker but choose your diction properly; e.g. *“Excuse me but...”* or *“I don’t know if I am getting you, are you saying...”* or *“Can I seek a clarification? I want...”*
- Help him to focus by simply saying, *“The bottom line of your explanation is...”* or *“So, your point is...”*

You have to use these two tools frequently in order to curtail the excess of the verbose speaker.

GIVING AND RECEIVING CRITICISM

Constructive Criticism:

Constructive criticism is usually employed to evaluate performance. It is well intentioned and thus focuses on issues, not persons or personalities. Its appraisal of the issue and the recommendations should not be viewed as a personal attack.

Ask yourself these questions when you want to give constructive criticism:

- Is the issue that of performance or behaviour?
- If it is performance, which agreed standards or goals are not being met and where specifically is improvement needed?
- If it is behaviour, specify the dates, times and give a detailed behavioural analysis and specify what changes are expected.
- What specific suggestions do you have for improvement? You must provide this in order to be constructive.

Destructive Criticism:

Constructive criticism is intended to promote progress and reduce differences, while destructive criticism provokes conflicts and widens differences. It attacks the person rather than the issue of performance or behaviour. It is employed to dominate the other person. It is devoid of the fear of Allah and sincerity of intention.

Receiving Criticism:

Most people are good at giving criticism but are unwilling to accept it. While managing conflict, you must be ready to accept criticism even if people's intention to embarrass or humiliate you is very obvious. This goes a long way to show your maturity and noble intentions and it also enables you to review yourself and make changes where and when necessary.

When do you accept Criticism?

1. When the criticism is accurate: Once you know that a criticism is valid employ the Negative Assertion technique to accept the criticism. Negative Assertion is a non- defensive response used to confirm criticism levelled against you. Once you agree with it when it could be true, you will have put an end to the conflict. It will not escalate any further.

2. When the criticism is questionable: You may not understand the criticism, but you can still avoid opposing the criticism by using the Negative Inquiry technique. Negative Inquiry allows

you to question the criticism for more specific information. The more you question, the more facts emerge as to the accuracy or not of the criticism.

There is however a secondary aspect to using either of these techniques. Some people like to criticise simply in order to start conflict. In the case of Negative Assertion, just agree with the criticism (when it is right) and you will stop the conflict instantly. For Negative Inquiry, by asking for specifics, you give the other person the responsibility of clarifying the problems. If he has specifics you have an opportunity to accept criticism and make changes, if he does not, he loses grounds for conflict.

How do you avoid giving destructive Criticism?

- Do not react when you are angry.
- Make sure you concentrate on the issue not the personality.
- Avoid accusing words when commencing your criticism (e.g. *"You are the.."*). The person becomes defensive the moment you accuse him or her.
- Show your intention of achieving resolution and progress. This creates a non-defensive environment.

How do you handle Other People's Anger?

Knowing how to handle angry people is an effective tool of conflict resolution. Criticism may engender anger from any side, and once emotions are high, it is practically impossible to resolve differences. You may use two methods to deal with the situation:

- Allow the emotion to be discharged by the other group. It is very important not to take things personally when attempting this first step. Use a phrase like *"I can understand your anger.."* or *"I can see that you are angry.."* This shows you understand and are concerned, but not necessarily that you are giving in to his position or argument.
- After the person has relieved his anger, you can then deal with the content (i.e. re-examine the reasons for that feeling). You can thereafter use the Negative Inquiry technique and possibly Negative Assertion (where necessary).

COMMUNITY CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Definition and Meaning

A community is a small or large social unit that has something in common, such as norms, religion, values, or identity. Communities often share a sense of place that is situated in a given geographical area or in virtual space through communication platform. Part of the characteristics of a community is the degree of its social cohesion and anticipate problems that may arise. These characteristics include the history of the community, its relations with others, present social structure, cultural values and the way it governs itself.

According to *Berghof Foundation*, conflict transformation means:

A generic, comprehensive term referring to actions and processes seeking to alter the various characteristics and manifestations of violent conflict by addressing the root causes of a particular conflict over the long term. It aims to transform negative destructive conflict into positive constructive conflict and deals with structural, behavioural and attitudinal aspects of conflict. The term refers to both the process and the completion of the process. As such, it incorporates the activities of processes such as conflict prevention and conflict resolution and goes farther than conflict settlement or conflict management.

According to *Institute for Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding (ICP)*, conflict transformation means:

Conflict transformation, in contrast to conflict resolution, does not only seek to resolve the contradiction in a conflict setting. It also aims at addressing structural and social root causes by challenging injustices and restoring human relations and it deals with ethnical and value-based dimensions. Conflict transformation is not only an approach or a tool but primarily a mind-set. Conflict transformation, according to our 3 Cs approach, needs to be comprehensive, compassionate and creative.

According to *Search for Common Ground*, conflict transformation initiatives are often characterized by long time horizons and interventions at multiple levels, aimed at changing perceptions and improving communications skills addressing the underlying issues.

Conflict transformation approaches differ from those of conflict management or conflict resolution. Whereas conflict transformation involves transforming the relationships that support violence, conflict management approaches seek to merely manage and contain conflict, and conflict resolution approaches seek to move conflict parties away from suppositions towards positive outcomes, often with the help of external actors.

Conflict transformation is in line with Islamic injunctions as Allah said in the Qur'an, *"Repel (the evil) with one which is better, then verily he, between whom and you there was enmity."* (Qur'an 41: 34-35)

Islam enjoins any one of the parties in conflict to look beyond the negative effect of conflict by making positive advances to the other party, with the possible effect of softening his/her mind. Such an unexpected gesture is considered a better practical way of managing conflict, especially from escalating beyond control.

COMMUNICATING DISPLEASURE: COMPLAINT, CRITICISM, AND CONTEMPT

"And obey Allah and His Messenger; and fall into no disputes, lest ye lose heart and your power depart; and be patient and persevering: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere."

(Qur'an 8: 46)

Anger or comment are neither good nor bad. We place values on the emotion anger, but really anger (like all emotions) is amoral. It is what you do with that anger that qualifies the anger. Comments are just that - amoral comments. Comments are observations and helpful for building relationships. For instance, *"the meeting lasted 90 minutes"* is a comment.

How we communicate our displeasures can make all the difference in the world, to the quality of our relationship. Issues arise when we do not address comments and allow them to build up. At that point, we are stepping toward Complaining.

1. Complaint:

The Prophet (pbuh) entered the garden of a man from the Ansar, and upon seeing him, the camel froze and its eyes watered. He (pbuh) came to it and rubbed its ears until it calmed

down. He (pbuh) inquired about the owner and warned him to fear Allah for the camel had complained to him that 'he starves it and tires it by overworking it and using it beyond its capacity.'

(Hadith: Ahmad and Abu Dawud)

Complaint is a subtle shift from Commenting. Complaints are Comments with qualifiers. Sticking with the example above, *"The meeting lasted 90 minutes but should have been done in half as much time,"* is a complaint. A complaint is a specific statement of distress, displeasure, or anger. When a person complains, he/she is referring to a particular action (or lack of action). As complaints are necessary to maintaining long-lasting relationships, one must communicate what is troubling him/her authentically and honestly. Complaints are objective statements of unmet needs. An effective complaint is one that:

- i. Starts softly, with a request for help
– "I need your help."
- ii. Observes an action or behavior
– "When there are stacks of mail on the kitchen table and counters."
- iii. States the impact of that action or behavior
– "I react badly to the clutter."
- iv. Defines the desired change in behavior
– "I'd like to keep the kitchen table and counters clear."
- v. Asks for input as to how to achieve the outcome
– "What are you willing to do to help have a less cluttered kitchen?"

Airing a complaint, though it may not be pleasant, is very healthy for any relationship - much healthier than suppressing the grievance. As complaints are left unchecked, they too can bundle up into critiques.

2. Criticism:

Criticisms are qualified comments with an evaluation. So you can see how *"The meeting lasted 90 minutes but I could have run that meeting more efficiently so it would have only taken half*

the time" is a criticism. It is nefarious to bundle complaints because they become the fuel for scathing criticism. Criticisms creep in when complaints are ignored. Criticisms are global attacks on character and worth that target the shortcomings of the other.

Criticism is not to be confused with delivering feedback or otherwise seeking improvement or change in another person. Criticism becomes, well, criticism when it is not constructive ("This report is terrible."). Criticism, in its most troubling form, focuses on the individual's personality, character, or interests rather than the specific action or behavior you'd like to see changed ("You are terrible at writing. You're so disorganized and irrelevant."). It is one thing to criticize without being constructive; it is another to go after someone for something they are unable to change.

Criticizing your partner is different than offering a critique or voicing a complaint. The latter two are about specific issues, whereas the former is an ad hominem (appealing to people's emotion and prejudices instead of their ability to think) attack. It is an attack on your partner at the core of their character. In effect, you are dismantling their whole being when you criticize.

The important thing is to learn the difference between expressing a complaint and criticizing:

- **Complaint:** "I was scared when you were running late and didn't call me. I thought we had agreed that we would do that for each other."
- **Criticism:** "You never think about how your behavior is affecting other people. I don't believe you are that forgetful, you are just selfish. You never think of others! You never think of me!"

Complaints usually begin with the word "I", while criticisms usually begin with "you". As an example, "I wish we travelled more" is a complaint, whereas "you never take me on holiday" is a criticism. Criticism may seem just a hairs breadth beyond complaining, but receiving a criticism really does feel far worse than receiving a complaint.

Allah warn us in the Qur'an that:

"O ye who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by

(offensive) nicknames: ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used for one) after he has believed: and those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong."

(Qur'an 49: 11)

Finally, critiques that are not addressed in healthy ways can build into Contempt.

3. Contempt:

"Do not ascribe purity to yourselves. Allah knows best who is righteous."

(Qur'an 53:32)

"Do not turn your face away from people in contempt, nor go about in the land exultingly."

(Qur'an 31:18)

As per definition given in the Wikipedia Encyclopedia, Contempt is an intense feeling or attitude of regarding someone or something as inferior, base, or worthless—it is similar to scorn. Contempt is also defined as the state of being despised or dishonored; disgrace, and an open disrespect or willful disobedience of the authority of a court of law or legislative body. This pattern involves attacking someone's personality rather than their behaviour.

When we communicate in this state, we are truly mean—we treat others with disrespect, mock them with sarcasm, ridicule, call them names, and mimic or use body language such as eye-rolling or scoffing. The target of contempt is made to feel despised and worthless.

Contempt goes far beyond criticism. While criticism attacks your partner's character, contempt assumes a position of moral superiority over them:

"You are 'tired?' You must be kidding. I have been with the kids all day, running around like mad man to keep this house clean and all you do when you come home from work is lie down on that bed like a child and play those useless games on your phone. I don't have time to deal with another child. Could you be any more pathetic?"

Contempt is fueled by long-simmering negative thoughts about the partner—which come to a head when the perpetrator attacks the accused from a position of relative superiority.

Contempt presents a perfect storm of relationship spoilers. Here are multiple ways that contempt insidiously or explicitly poisons relationships, and especially long-term relationships like marriage and parenting.

i. Insufficient loving:

The more expression of contempt, the less caring for and about each other. Empathy has the opposite impacts. The more acts and attitudes of empathy, the more caring and love. The more empathy between spouses and toward children, the more that everyone in a household feels loving and loved.

ii. Powering over:

Talking with a contemptuous tone of voice or dismissing information from the other of says "I matter. You don't." That is a power play. If I know better than you do about you, I'm setting myself above you.

iii. Toxicity dumping:

Contempt dumps toxicity into a relationship. As Eric Berne once wrote, relationships that convey "I'm OK, You're OK" feel safe. "I'm OK, You're Not OK" feels unsafe. We all want to feel positive about ourselves. Negative messages of you are-not-ok are in this sense toxic. Our tone alone can convey the contemptuous "you are not ok" message. Even if the words are fine, when the tone sounds contemptuous, the tone will prevail.

iv. Contempt signifies rejection:

Rejection may be of what the other person is saying. It may be also of the other person as a whole. When someone speaks to you with a tone of contempt, you are likely to feel rejected from that person's world. "Get out of my life" is the subconscious message embedded in the "you are not ok" and "your concerns and your thoughts are not ok" tags that get communicated via contemptuous tone of voice or attitudes.

If you feel you have been treated in this manner, you are likely to exit the relationship. That is because most people react to being treated contemptuously with the thought that "If you don't want me, then I don't want you!"

v. Contempt signifies breaks in the flow:

A relationship connection is expressed and reinforced via information-sharing, that is, by talking and listening. As soon as you say something to me and I respond in a way that indicates that I have heard and accepted your information, we both will feel connected. In a good conversation, two people take turns offering and accepting information, braiding their connection all the while.

If, by contrast, you dismiss what I say, brushing my input aside as if it were unimportant or wrong, the break in the flow of information between us severs the connection.

vi. Contempt invites feelings of hopelessness:

Psychologist Martin Seligman clarified that when people feel depressed, i.e., hopeless, they regard a negative attribute as permanent and pervasive, i.e., as something that will always be there and cannot be changed. Contempt conveys the sense that you have a quality that is hopelessly un-fixable.

The Antidotes to Criticism and Contempt

It was reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said:

“How excellent the affairs of the believer! His affair, all of it, is good for him, and this is not the case with anyone except the believer. If prosperity comes to him, he is thankful, and if adversity falls on him, he perseveres patiently. So it is all good for him.”

(Hadith: Muslim, Ahmad)

Being able to identify Criticism and Contempt in your conflict discussions is a necessary first step to eliminating them, but this knowledge is not enough. To drive away destructive communication and conflict patterns, you must replace them with healthy, productive ones.

All relationships, even the most successful ones, have conflict. It is unavoidable. However, it is not the appearance of conflict, but rather *how it is managed* that predicts the success or failure of a relationship. “Manage” conflict rather than “resolve” conflict, because relationship conflict is natural and has functional, positive aspects that provide opportunities for growth and understanding

i. The Antidote to Criticism: Gentle Start-Up

A complaint focuses on a specific behavior, but criticism attacks a person's very character. The antidote for criticism is to complain without blame by using a soft or gentle start-up. Avoid saying "you," which can indicate blame, and instead talk about your feelings using "I" statements and express what you need in a positive way.

To put it simply, think of these two things to formulate your soft start-up: *What do I feel?*
What do I need?

Criticism: "You always talk about yourself. Why are you always so selfish?"

Antidote: "I'm feeling left out of our talk tonight and I need to vent. Can we please talk about my day?"

Notice that the antidote starts with "I feel," which leads into "I need," and then respectfully asks to fulfill that need. There is no blame or criticism, which prevents the discussion from escalating into an argument.

ii. The Antidote to Contempt: Build a Culture of Appreciation and Respect

"Do not hate one another and do not be jealous of one another and do not boycott one another, and be servants of Allah, as brothers; and it is not lawful for a Muslim to sever his relations with his brother for more than three days."

(Hadith: Sahih Bukhari)

Contempt shows up in statements that come from a position of moral superiority. Some examples of contempt include sarcasm, cynicism, name-calling, eye-rolling, sneering, mockery, and hostile humor. Contempt is destructive and defeating.

The antidote to contempt is to build a culture of appreciation and respect in your relationship, and there are a few ways to do that. If you regularly express appreciation, gratitude, affection, and respect for your partner, you will create a positive perspective in your relationship that acts as a buffer for negative feelings. The more positive you feel, the less likely that you will feel or express contempt.

Another way to explain this is the 5:1 "magic ratio" of positive to negative interactions that a relationship must have to succeed. If you have five or more positive interactions for every one

negative interaction, then you are making regular deposits into your emotional bank account, which keeps your relationship in the green.

Contempt: “You forgot to load the dishwasher again? Ugh. You are so incredibly lazy.” (Rolls eyes.)

Antidote: “I understand that you have been busy lately, but could you please remember to load the dishwasher when I work late? I’d appreciate it.”

The antidote here works so well because it expresses understanding right off the bat. This partner shows how they know that the lack of cleanliness is not out of laziness or malice, and so they do not make a contemptuous statement about their partner or take any position of moral superiority. Instead, this antidote is a respectful request, and it ends with a statement of appreciation.

In conclusion, Allah commands us with this injunction:

"Speak good words to all people."

(Qur'an 2:83)

If you understand how a complaint differs from criticism or contempt but still have difficulty controlling yourself from being negative during an argument, keep the following general guidelines in mind.

- i. Remove the blame from your comments.
- ii. Say how YOU feel.
- iii. Don't criticize your partner's personality.
- iv. Don't insult, mock, or use sarcasm.
- v. Be direct.
- vi. Stick with one situation.
- vii. Don't try to analyze your partner's personality.
- viii. Don't try to mind-read.

Most of all, try to be as specific as possible when you complain. The more concrete your grievance, the more you will improve your partner's understanding of why you are upset.

The Prophet (pbuh) said:

"You will see the believers in their having mercy for one another, and in their love for one another, and in their kindness towards one another, like the human body: when one limb is ailing, the whole body feels it, one part calling out the other with sleeplessness and fever."

(Hadith: Sahih Bukhari)

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND SHURAH

A Muslim leader is expected to practice **Shura** (Consultation) with capable advisors in decision-making (Qur'an 42:38) and to be guided by their views. However, he is expected to make everyday decisions in the course of his work, and may have to make important emergency decisions when there is no time for consultation. Since he was chosen because of his leadership qualities he is expected to have enough sense to do this wisely.

If nevertheless a conflict brews as a result of his decision he should return to **shurah** (consultation) and they should jointly review the situation. What has worked? What didn't work? How could it be done differently next time? However, nobody should use phrases like *"Didn't I warn that.."* in this evaluation process.

CONCLUSION

Faced with the inevitability of conflict within any community, man has the onerous task of learning how to leave with the conflict by finding the ways and means of managing it and transform it into an opportunity for growth and development of the society.

An Imam or Muslim leader in any community has been positioned by Allah to play multifarious roles in both the mundane and spiritual life of his followers or the people under him. The Qur'an 22:41 enjoins Muslim leaders thus:

“Those who, if We give them power in the land, (they) establish the Salah, enforce the Zakah, and they enjoin the good and forbid the evil. And with Allah rests the end of (all) matters.”
(Qur'an 22:41)

It is assumed that the leader should naturally be interested in ensuring the peace and stability of his community as part of *'amru bil-m'aruf wa nahy 'ani'l-munkar*.

EXERCISE

Answer whether each of these is a Complaint, Criticism or Contempt:

1. I am upset that you didn't pay the gas bill.
2. How can I ever trust you?
3. You are totally irresponsible.
4. You stupid fool!
5. I should have known you'd pull something like that.
6. You are just terrible with the kids.
7. When we don't go out together I feel like you take me for granted.
8. Don't interrupt!
9. You just never care about my feelings.
10. Leave it to you so that you spoil the vacation plans?
11. Whose fault is it then?
12. Don't tell me you didn't know any better.
13. I am sick to death of your behavior.
14. Have you got an attitude problem?
15. When you don't listen to me I feel unimportant.
16. I'm upset you didn't clean up the dishes last night.

17. You are just like your mother!

18. How can you hurt me like this?

ANSWERS

1. I am upset that you didn't pay the gas bill. COMPLAINT
2. How can I ever trust you? CRITICISM
3. You are totally irresponsible. CONTEMPT
4. You stupid fool! CONTEMPT
5. I should have known you'd pull something like that. CONTEMPT
6. You are just terrible with the kids. CRITICISM
7. When we don't go out together I feel like you take me for granted. COMPLAINT
8. Don't interrupt! COMPLAINT
9. You just never care about my feelings. COMPLAINT
10. Leave it to you so that you spoil the vacation plans? CONTEMPT
11. Whose fault is it then? CRITICISM
12. Don't tell me you didn't know any better. CRITICISM
13. I am sick to death of your behavior. CRITICISM
14. Have you got an attitude problem? CRITICISM
15. When you don't listen to me I feel unimportant. COMPLAINT
16. I am upset you didn't clean up the dishes last night. COMPLAINT
17. You are just like your mother! CONTEMPT
18. How can you hurt me like this? CRITICISM