

## Desensitization

*Friday Sermon, 5 Dec. 2008*

One of the common problems of social life is the sensitivity that many of us have against people's comments or attitudes towards us. Suppose you have a very abrupt classmate who makes sharp comments on your personal issues. How can we deal with people around us whose comments hurt?

1. Revenge: one of the most common reactions to hurtful comments is to get them back. Tit for tat. Spite doesn't solve the problem, it worsens it.
2. Ignore it: Imam 'Ali (a.s) says:

ان صبرتَ صبر الاكارم و الا سلوت سلو` البهائم.. نهج البلاغة

“If (could) endure the patience of noble people, otherwise pretend the heedlessness of the beasts.”

Although ignoring often works, there is a limit to which you can ignore the person. Once it hits the threshold you blow up and may react with a severe revenge.

3. Desensitization. In medicine there is a method to reduce or eliminate an organism's negative reaction to a substance or stimulus. This method is called desensitization. For example, if a person with diabetes mellitus has a bad allergic reaction to take a full dose of beef insulin; his doctor gives him a very small amount of the insulin at first.

Over a period of time, larger doses are given until the person is taking the full dose. Vaccination is another form of desensitization. Therefore, desensitization is the technique of making an organism less sensitive.

Desensitization is a cognitive therapy. Most of mental pains or pleasures have in fact internal causes. The best way to deal with people's unpleasant comments is to desensitize yourself against their comments. The following are some methods of desensitization:

A) Be optimistic: Most people are not sadists and don't have any evil intentions for what they say or do. It is often our assumption that brands a speech or attitude negative. For instance, a mother whose daughter has been sick for quite a long time had become sensitive to people repeatedly asking her about her daughter. As a result she went into isolation.

In a short consultation she managed to realise that people's inquiries are in fact a sign of their concern to pray for her or offer any assistance. Of course, often people don't have the best choice of words to express their concern in the manner, but rest assured that they are sincere. Thus, we should judge them for their good intention. For this reason negative assumption is considered a mortal sin in Islam. The Almighty Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ

***“O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion; indeed some suspicions (negative assumptions) are sins....” (the Holy Qur’an 49: 12)***

B) Justification: We must understand that people's behaviour is the effect of many factors. The healthy way to deal with people's attitude is to endeavour to find justification for it. Imam al- Sadiq (a.s) said:

اطلب لأخيك عذرا فان لم تجد له عذرا فالتمس له عذرا. – بحار الانوار 75:197

“Seek an excuse for your brother (friend), and if you couldn't find any excuse for him, seek an excuse (from someone else) for him.” [1](#)

C) Compliance (with someone's mood): the bottom line is that we are not living in Paradise. As people look different, they also think and behave differently. We cannot possibly expect everyone to behave the way we are pleased with. Thus, it is very much recommended in Islam to comply with them as much as possible. It is narrated from the holy Prophet of Islam (S) to have said:

امرني ربي بمداراة الناس كما امرني بالفرائض. – الكافي 2:96

“My Lord commanded me to comply with people as much as He commanded me for obligations.” [2](#)

The term ‘al-Modarat’ in Arabic has two possible roots: if the root of it is (مهموز اللام) (درأ) then it means to avoid people's evil (اتقاء شر الناس), but if the root of it is (غير مهموز اللام) (درا) then it means tricking a prey to hunt it. It is assumed that by complying with people's moods we will be able to eventually win their hearts.

In fact, no so-called negative comment can create a problem unless the receiver reciprocates it. It is

only then that a family quarrel or a clash between two friends begins. Therefore, if one party supposedly makes a mistake and throws an inappropriate comment at you, unless you take revenge it will die out.

Imam 'Ali (a.s) advised his son Muhammad In Hanafiya:

يا بُنى! الكلام ذَكَرٌ، و الجواب انثى، فاذا اجتمع الزوجان فلا بدّ من انتاج

سليم العَرَض من حذر الجوابا و مَنْ دارى الرجال فقد اصابا

وسائل الشيعة 12:220 -

“My dear son! A statement is a male, and a response to it is a female. When a couple is united then the production is necessary.” <sup>3</sup> He then poetically said:

The one who avoids a (negative) response has kept his honour

And whoever complies with people has met the right target.

<sup>1</sup>. Bihar al-Anwar, 75/197

<sup>2</sup>. Al-Kafi, 2/96

<sup>3</sup>. Wasa'il ush-Shi'a, 12/220