Breathing a New Breath into the people of Afghanistan

A PEACE CURRICULUM FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

By

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Introduction
This manual was developed as a response to needs expressed by concerned Afghans, some in Afghanistan and some in refugee settlements. It arises from a concern for the future of Afghanistan and its people, especially the children who have known no period of their lives free of war. Afghan children (and their parents and teachers) need to understand the changes in thinking, feeling, behavior and relationships that are caused by war-related difficult circumstances and need to know how to deal with them.

Afghan curriculum developers and storywriters who took part in a peace education workshop in March 2000 in Peshawar reported (from their experience and observations) that many Afghan children and adults witness or experience on-going sadness, disappointment and despair. A large proportion of the Afghan children have to live with angry and yelling parent/s. Many are puzzled by changes in attitude and behavior of a previously friendly family member or friend. A large number of children and adults experience constant fear and nightmares. There were also questions in need of answer, for instance how has grief and suffering affected the mental health of Afghan children and adults? and how has exposure to the hostility and prejudiced thinking, which inevitably develops in times of war, affected the moral development of children?

Participants of the above workshop unanimously agreed that in order to help children, it is necessary to help and strengthen the parents and teachers who are the sources of healing for children. Everyone is damaged by war.

This manual is therefore addressed to adults, and it tackles the core issues of the impact of war on each person’s inner health and harmony as well as the health and harmony of a diverse society. Its specific aim is to assist children, their parents and teachers to understand issues such as anger, fear, sadness, prejudice, hostility, biased thinking, grief, and interpersonal conflicts and to learn ways of addressing them effectively. It draws from experiences in Afghanistan and other war zones.

Although the manual is written for parents and teachers, our intention is that it be transformed into material suitable for children at various levels of development. We envisage this as part of a broader programme of education for a peaceful society, which will eventually include a more comprehensive revision of education, including teaching methods and curriculum.
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MANAGING STRESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Stresses, or demands, are a normal part of everyone's life. We each respond to a whole series of demands every day. Sometimes these demands are small and easy to respond to; at other times they are so large and demanding that we feel overwhelmed and unable to respond. In every case, however, the basic process is the same (see Figure 1)—we experience an event or a person as demanding a reaction from us, and we either react in a way that meets the demand and derive some satisfaction from doing so, or we fail to meet the demand adequately. Many factors determine whether we feel overwhelmed and unable to cope or meet a demand with creativity and enthusiasm.

This chapter describes the normal stress management process and the factors that determine how well we are able to cope. There are some factors that we can do little about, and many factors that we can influence. Knowing what we must accept and adapt to, and what we can change (in ourselves and others), is an important part of the process.

How well we learn this stress management process is a major factor in determining our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. We all manage our stress intuitively, with varying degrees of success. This chapter is about doing it better, regardless of how successful we are.

Figure 1. Basic Stress Management Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Experienced as Requiring a Response</th>
<th>Our Resources are activated:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e) social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Our Physical, Emotional and Mental Reactions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Adequate and we are satisfied;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Not adequate and we are dissatisfied.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Is an Adequate Response?

As Fig. 1 indicates, we respond to an event in a number of ways: physically, emotionally, mentally and socially. Our responses are adequate when we meet the demands required by the event without harming ourselves or others in any of these areas. Table 1 describes the characteristics of positive and negative styles of responding to stressors or demands.
Table 1. Characteristics of Good and Poor Stress Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor Response Style</th>
<th>Good Response Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fatigue, immune suppression, physical symptoms, illness,</td>
<td>energized, good health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accidents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confused, blank mind, restricted, narrow and disoriented</td>
<td>clear thinking, open to new information and ideas,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thinking, stereotyping, stop listening</td>
<td>creative problem solving, assert own needs, able to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>own weaknesses and errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>angry, sad, depressed, anxious, irritable, overwhelmed</td>
<td>relaxed, in control, accepting, sense of self satisfaction,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and unable to cope, dissatisfied with self and life,</td>
<td>feeling of accomplishment, forgiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suicidal, frustrated, suspicious, hopeles and helpless</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alienated, isolated, hostile, aggressive, blaming, hatred</td>
<td>connected to others, trusting, cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seeing the other as &quot;evil&quot;, conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, not all of these characteristics occur each time we manage our stress. Often our own stress management style includes both positive and negative characteristics. Over the long run, the more positive and fewer negative characteristics we have, the more effective we will be at managing our stresses, and the more we can accomplish.

What Determines Whether Our Response Is Adequate?

Characteristics of the Event:

How much the event demands of us is an important factor in determining how we respond to it. If the event is very simple and clear (e.g., meeting someone for an appointment), we do not have to activate many resources to respond adequately. The event does not demand a lot of us. However, if the event demands a great deal and we have to activate many resources (e.g., migrating to a new country), it is less certain we will be able to react adequately.

Everyone has limits to how many resources they can activate. Major events like war, migration, widespread illness and loss of home and loved ones, can make more demands than some people can manage. When these heavy demands extend over long periods of time, it becomes even more difficult to manage them well. In such circumstances it is very easy to make matters worse by our actions, because we do not
have the resources to respond adequately. Recognizing these dangers can help us not make matters worse, and to best use the resources we have to slowly improve our situation.

Note that it is possible to respond to an imagined event as well as a real one. How we interpret an event will determine our response.

Emotional Factors:

The more we can recognize our feelings, the better we are able to deal with them. Once we recognize a negative feeling (e.g., being sad, angry, or helpless), we can try to identify the reasons for the feeling. If we think we can change whatever is making us feel sad, angry or helpless, then we can work out a plan to do it. If we do not think we can change what is making us feel this way, then we have to learn to adapt ourselves to the situation as best we can. (Stress management techniques to do this will be described below.)

Sometimes, it is helpful to do both: try to adapt to what is making us feel a certain way, as well as try to change it.

Often, each of us is better at handling some feelings than others. We might be able to deal with anger, for example, but not sadness. It is helpful to understand which feelings we have most difficulty with, both to help us not make things worse, and to determine how best to deal with those specific feelings.

It is helpful to remember that having a particular feeling does not mean there is only one way of responding to or acting on that feeling. For example, feeling sad because of a loss does not mean we must continue to feel sad (e.g., to honour that loss). Feeling angry does not mean we must act in a hostile way, or take revenge. These "automatic" responses may only make things worse. Working out the best way of reacting is an important part of stress management.

Cognitive Factors:

The more highly stressed, or highly emotional we are, the more difficult it will be to think about our problems creatively. The more options we can think of to solve our problems (i.e., deal with demands that make us feel bad and/or that we cannot manage), the more likely we are to come up with a useful solution (way of managing the stress). Thinking only in terms of our prejudices and stereotypes usually does not help us generate new approaches to problems. The more we can see a situation from someone else's perspective, the more we can empathize with them (even if we do not agree with them), and the more likely we will be to come up with a useful solution.
Often, in a stressful or conflict situation, our prejudices and stereotypes make it difficult for us to understand the others involved. Often, our prejudices lead us to disagree with them even before we really understand their position on a particular issue. It is important to recognize this effect of prejudice, and make sure we separate our understanding and our agreement. It does not make sense to disagree with something we do not first understand, yet this phenomenon is a common cause of conflict and unnecessarily creates stress for everyone.

Being able to communicate your needs openly and freely is important to being understood. Listening with a genuine attempt to understand the other who may be causing you stress (versus listening only to those things which reinforce your prejudices) is also important. Showing the other person you are listening and showing you understand them can go a long way to their listening to, and understanding, your needs.

Thinking that there is only one way to manage stress, or that your solution to a problem is the only good solution, generally means lack of openness to new ideas. Simply restating your solution is less helpful than exploring as many new options as possible.

Social Factors:

The more social support someone has, the better they will be able to manage stress. The more isolated and alienated they are, the more difficult it will be. Building strong social supports in families and communities is a key factor in stress management. The more able someone is to influence others, the better they will be able to manage stress. Being able to influence others by good example or by appealing to common values or principles will be most helpful. Trying to influence someone by force of some kind will backfire sooner or later.

Values or Principles:

Appeals to mutually held values or principles can often play an important role in stress management. The following values/principles, if acknowledged by all parties, can often play a positive role: respect for the other as a human being with rights and needs, honesty, charity, mercy, humility, and a commitment to nonviolent conflict resolution. The absence of such values or principles often increases stress and makes successful management more difficult.

<Koranic quotations?>

Techniques for Adapting to Stresses that We Cannot Change:

Managing stress is a lifelong activity. With experience we should improve our skills. As described above, there are two broad strategies for managing stress: either a) change the event or situation that is placing demands on us that we do not wish to, or cannot,
meet; or b) adapt ourselves in how we react to such demands that we cannot change or influence to any great extent. The other chapters in this manual will assist you in finding new ways of changing the event or situation that is placing demands on you. Below, we discuss specific techniques, which help you adapt to stresses you cannot change.

Identify Your Early Warning Signs:

Everyone responds to a stressor in his or her own unique way. Generally, there are early warning signs that you are being challenged and your resources are being activated. For some people, it will be muscle tension, while others may find their palms get sweaty. Others feel an increase in heart rate or blood pressure.

It is very helpful to identify the earliest warning signs that a stress reaction may occur. The earlier you can detect it, the better you can control it. Often, someone close to you who knows you well may have a better idea than you of your first signs of stress.

Once you have identified that you are getting stressed, you can try one of the following techniques to manage the response and protect yourself. Some of these techniques work better for some people than for others. All of them are useful and the more of them you learn, the more options you will have for different stressful situations. Like any new skill, they will take some practice to be effective. They can be practiced in the absence of specific stresses.

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Meditation
- Getting Rid of Persistent Negative Thoughts (Stop-Think)
- Reframing
- Positive Thoughts/Activities
- Maintaining Self-Esteem
- Deep Breathing

Maintain Protective Factors:

The above techniques can be used in response to specific stressful situations or they can be used in the absence of specific stresses as a protective factor. Other protective factors are more general lifestyle habits such as:

- Adequate Sleep - You should feel refreshed when you awake.
- Good Nutrition - Try to ensure that you have balanced meals and avoid overeating, or eating fatty "comfort" foods.
- Drugs and Alcohol - Avoid these, especially when feeling stressed.
- Smoking - Smoking may provide short-term relief from stress, but smoking is very bad for your health and will make it more difficult to manage your stress well.
Physical Exercise - Being physically fit will help you stay healthy and manage your stress.
Humour - Try to see the humourous aspects of life and share these with others. Laughter is, indeed, a medicine.
Helping Others - Providing social supports for your family, friends and community will help others, and they will be there for you.
Live Your Values - Making your most important values relevant in your every day will give your life positive meaning and help you through difficult times.

Progressive relaxation (intra-personal approach):
Tense muscles, while needed for certain life activities, can be a sign of stress where energy is being wasted. We need to prevent this waste of energy and conserve it for achieving more important things in life. Physical relaxation produces a sense of refreshment, reduces insomnia, anxiety, headaches, backaches and high blood pressure. Progressive relaxation, as described below, increases awareness of one’s state of tension.

- Get comfortable in a good position
- Open your mouth and move your jaw gently from side to side
- Tense one group of muscles for a count of 8, hold and then relax muscles
- Take a deep breath (when exhaling say, “the tension goes out”)
- Start from head, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, jaws, tongue-up, mouth (open wide and closed), shoulders up to your ears, arms (bend and push down the palm of your hand), forearms, chest (fill your lungs with air), abdomen (push out and pull in), hips, legs, calf (pressing down the heels of your feet against a surface), and toes.
- Review your body and see if there are any tension spots and repeat exercises for those parts.
- Scan your body from time to time to find the tense spots. This should be a routine practice. To scan, some people imagine their muscles on a TV screen or drawn in colour in a book.
- Do scanning when on the bus or bike or walking or sitting in a meeting or in the classroom or even in the middle of a heated discussion. Scan each portion of your body muscles step by step.

Meditation:
To free the mind from preoccupying thoughts, deep muscle relaxation can be combined with visualization. Visualization, whether simply focussing on a spot or picturing yourself engaged in a peaceful activity (such as, riding a horse in slow motion) has been shown to be effective in treating hypertension and psychosomatic illnesses. Below is an example of an exercise that frees a worried mind from preoccupying thoughts:

- Deep breathing (saying a cue word or counting down from ten to zero as you exhale or visualizing gentle waves going out with your breath)
- Body scanning
• Visualizing a gentle massage flowing through your muscle move from one group of muscle to another
• Come back to normal with a count of one to five and slowly open your eyes

Intruding thoughts (interpersonal approach):
Due to intruding thoughts we may lose our concentration. Thoughts about the problems keep spinning in our minds and one idea leads to another. This way we keep rehashing the problem without finding a solution. We may find that we cannot pay attention to anything else but the troubling thoughts. This may keep us emotionally aroused and therefore we may be tense all day and cannot sleep at night. Imagery exercise involving all five of our senses can take us out of these thoughts: for example, seeing a green valley, hearing a bird sing, tasting spring water, touching grass with our hands and feet and smelling the fragrance. Taking deep breaths at the same time can add to mental relaxation. If tense muscles are found, a muscle relaxation component can be added. Come back to normal by counting from one to five.

"STOP- think":
In cases of very persistent intrusive thoughts, the STOP-think technique may be used. It is a variation of self-talk. When your mind is stuck in a rut of repetitive thinking, you imagine yourself yelling, “STOP!” at the top of your voice. Then each time you return to this rut, you yell (inside your head) “STOP!” and try to move your thoughts to another track. This technique is for when the more gentle methods have not worked.

Reframing:
Sometimes, when something very bad has happened and we cannot change it, we can work out a new, more positive way to look at it. It is as if we took a picture out of an ugly frame and put it in a beautiful frame. It is the same picture, but it looks different.

People often use their religious beliefs to reframe painful events. Sometimes the pain and discomfort of change enables us to develop new resources and abilities and to encounter new experiences that enrich us. Sometimes the goodness and self-sacrifice of others under the most terrible of circumstances has a life-changing effect. Sometimes calm acceptance is the best approach: we simply do not know how things will turn out.

Story:
Once there was an old man, who lived in poverty on a little farm with his beloved only son. He was known for his calm acceptance and was very often praying.
He had a horse, which escaped one day and ran away. Since this would have a bad effect on his livelihood, his neighbour expressed sorrow for him. The old man did not look sorrowful. "Life goes on," he said, "Who can tell how it will unfold."

Before long the horse returned bringing with it a fine horse from the wild. Now the old man had two horses. Some neighbours were glad for the old man, others were envious. The old man was calm.

"Life goes on. Who knows how it will unfold."

The man's son had the job of taming the horse for farm work. The horse was wild and strong and one day it threw the boy. The boy's leg was broken. It mended badly and he had a severe limp.

The neighbours expressed sorrow and pity for this misfortune to the old man, who continued to pray a great deal.

"Life goes on. Who knows how it will unfold."

A terrible war swept through the region. An army came and took all the able-bodied young men to fight, and probably to die. The boy with the limp was left behind. Some neighbours rejoiced for the old man, others were envious again.

"Life goes on," said the old man, "Who knows what will unfold."

And he never ceased to pray.

Positive thoughts and activities:
Even under very bad circumstances, there may be things that bring us joy. Gazing at a flower, watching a baby, concentrating our mind on enjoying a good cup of tea, preparing a meal with love, playing with a child, listening to music and sharing a joke are some such things. You know best what brings you joy. When we are stressed and distracted, we may forget to focus on the joyful moments of life and deprive ourselves of their pleasure. Taking a little time to seek out and experience something joyful may help us through difficult times.

Maintaining Self-Esteem:
We all need to proceed in our social relationships with a realistic view of ourselves - both our strengths and our shortcomings. While some people have difficulty seeing their very real shortcomings, others seem to see nothing but their own weaknesses and failings. They seem to be unaware of their strengths and good qualities. This problem is called having "low self-esteem". Such adults and children are very vulnerable to criticism and are deeply hurt by insults, put-downs, or rejection.
Feel rejected, insulted, put-down, distorted thinking magnifies

Feel sad, hopeless, guilty

Feel angry and want to hurt back

They often magnify criticisms or hurtful comments and interpret them as even more insulting than they were. Then they sink into sadness and guilt, or they become angry and retaliate.

Having a secure self-esteem is a very helpful strength in dealing with the negative input that is bound to occur for almost anyone.

How can this be done?

1. Become aware.
   Scan your mind to check if you are unnecessarily magnifying negative input.

2. Check it out.
   If possible, communicate with the person who is affecting your self-esteem.
   "Mariam, when you walk away while I'm talking to you, I feel ignored as if you think what I have to say is not worth listening to."

3. Remind yourself of your good qualities.
   Accept it when someone comments on your good qualities. (Sometimes people with low self-esteem do not believe others' compliments to them.)

[Exercise on self-esteem]
Chapter Two

COMMON TYPES OF BIASED THINKING

Normal thinking relies on logic and experience. Thinking properly requires us to gather information, check our facts, seek clarification where necessary, reflect on what we learn, and then to reach a conclusion or make a judgment. It is a complex process, and even at the best of times it is easy to make an error. When we are stressed, or emotionally aroused, it is even easier to make an error in our thinking or judgments, yet these stressful circumstances are when we need to be thinking most clearly and making the wisest judgments.

Knowledge and wisdom allow us to predict consequences, make intelligent guesses, put some pieces together to solve a puzzle and to draw conclusions from individual occurrences to apply to similar events and assign definitions and labels to events and people. Each one of these abilities is useful but if overdone or done wrongly becomes a liability and a hazard. For example, suppose you are lost in thought and pass a friend without greeting them. The friend assumes you are upset with them. This is called “mind-reading”. Likewise, when a conclusion from a rare event is wrongly applied to similar situation it is called “over-generalization”. For example, a person who had been badly treated by someone in a uniform might feel very anxious when approached by anyone in a uniform. When negative definitions and labels are overused it becomes distorted thinking called “mislabeling”. In summary, biased thinking refers to overusing a function of the mind in a negative way, which instead of usefulness causes problems. For example, using wisdom to predict a danger accurately and act accordingly will prevent or diminish its consequences. Being in constant fear and alert when there is no real danger is exhausting and draining.

Distorted thinking not only causes distress to a person but also can damage relationships. On-going distress causes changes in the body’s internal functions and in physical health. It is like an army preparing every day and every moment to defend against a non-existing threat. The army will wear out its human and equipment resources without a real necessity. Furthermore, some unwanted incidents, or provocation of others, may occur as well.

Certain kinds of distorted thinking such as mind reading, catastrophization (exaggeration), over-generalization, fortune-telling (jumping to conclusions) can contribute to the development of a distorted image of the “enemy” and to hatred and prejudice. Understanding the role of distorted thinking can reduce the level of blaming, anger and hatred. Examples of distorted thinking are as follows:

1) Mind reading: Refers to making assumptions about other’s intentions. An example of mind reading can be assuming we understand other people’s judgments about our appearance or competence or likeability. The thoughts coming to mind in this instance
may be: “they do not like me, they think I am not good enough, they doubt my honesty and sincerity.” Mind reading occurs when we negatively interpret someone’s intention from an implicit statement or behavior, without their explicitly making the statement.

2) Catastrophization (turning an event into a catastrophe) or negative exaggeration: Refers to assigning an exaggerated negative meaning to an event or a behavior. Catastrophization can induce an exaggerated reaction to a small problem. An innocent behavior from an adversary can be interpreted as provocative, leading to an aggressive overreaction. If one’s child is a little late coming home one immediately becomes convinced a disaster has befallen them, when it is far more likely that they stopped to talk to a friend.

3) Overgeneralization and labeling: Refers to extrapolating an occasional mistake, failure or weakness as a non-ending repetitive problem. Overgeneralization applies to a person when one mistake is considered a total failure or occasional problems are seen as if they happen all the time. It also applies to groups when a wrongdoing by a few people from a group is seen as part of the nature of the entire group. Overgeneralization leads to labeling. Someone who makes a mistake may say: “I am a total failure and I have never done anything well.” An example of over-generalizing across time will be when a child forgets to take her book to school and the father say “You are always forgetting your book.” Or, when an upset wife says to her husband who on one occasion forgot to bring the promised gift, “you are unreliable -- you never remember what I ask you to do.”

Overgeneralization is also expressed as categorical statements about another’s occasional behavior, “You always put me down or you never support me.” Stereotyped images of ethnic or religious groups are based on relating occasional negative incidents to the entire group. The author once heard a Canadian doctor who had just returned from a war-affected country point to a nation and said, “All of them are thieves.”

4) Fortune-telling and unjustified jumping to conclusions: Refers to forecasting bad things to happen in the future. This distorted thinking causes unnecessary fear and anxiety and perhaps anger and can have implications for interpersonal and inter-group relationships.

5) Over-expectations: Having unreasonable expectations from self or others is associated with ‘the tyranny of should or shouldn’t’ that is driven by self-created, narrow-minded rules. The individual constantly compares how things are with how things should be. This thinking habit leads to feeling inadequate.

On an interpersonal level the 'should' type of thinking can damage relationships. The rules behind a 'should' type thinking involve attaching unreasonable interpretations such as “If they do not praise me it means they do not like me; therefore, to get their compliment I should do things their way and try hard to please them.” “People should understand what my needs are and what I want”, or “If someone is not on time the way they should be it means they do not see me as important” or “Others should do what is
important for me no matter how much they suffer.” A husband makes himself a cup of tea without offering it to his wife. By doing this he is violating wife’s secret rule of, “If he cared about me he would have offered me a cup of tea.” “In his eyes, I am not even worth a cup of tea.” The more we feel hurt, the more we become self-centered and a vicious cycle is formed.

When the self-created rules are violated, another set of retaliatory beliefs is activated, such as, “I should punish anybody who disagrees with me.” Depending on what the thoughts are around the hurt feeling, anger or sadness may ensue.

Examples of should rules (Aaron Beck, 1999):
Reliability rule: my children or my subordinates should not make mistakes
Fairness rule: everyone should be fair regardless of how unfair they have to be to themselves
Reciprocity rule: since I do many things for others, they should do things for me or they should forgive me when I hurt them
Respecting rule: people should respect me by listening to me otherwise, I should hate and punish.

{Do a DIAGRAM OF HOW UNDER STRESS OR THREAT >>> THINKING BECOME SELF-CENTERED AND THE AREA OF CONCERNS EXPANDS} ALSO A DIAGRAM OF Hurt >>>> Anger >>>> Retaliation >>>> Hurt >>>> Anger >>>> Retaliation ...

Diminishes our feelings of self-worth or being liked
Depression

Overestimates threat
Anxiety

Mistakenly perceives hostility or conflict or disrespect
Anger

Creates negative stereotypes
Prejudice and mistaken image of “enemy”

What to do about biased thinking:
The two basic principles are:
1. Become aware.
2. Check it out.

1. Become aware
All wisdom traditions teach us to examine our own thinking and feeling with a searching eye. [Is there a Koranic quote for this?] If we are feeling sad, anxious, angry or hostile and critical of others, these feelings can be taken as a signal to examine the thoughts that go with the feelings. We can then compare our thoughts with other evidence of reality. For example: Is it true that we have never done anything right? Is it likely, if our child is five minutes late that she has been kidnapped?

2. Check it out
“Ali, when you make yourself tea, and don’t think to offer me any, I feel as if I’m quite unimportant to you. Is this true?”

“Merza, I’m worried that you’re upset with me. You passed me without a smile this morning.”

There are many real things in life that justify sadness, anger, and anxiety. By clearing away those that result from distorted thinking, we relieve our burdens somewhat. Then we are better able to deal with the difficult aspects of reality, and to take pleasure in the joyous aspects.
Chapter Three

COGNITIVE AND INTERPERSONAL ASPECTS OF HOSTILITY

Over-suspicion:
It is because of biased thinking and misinterpretations that every party in a conflict claims to be an innocent victim. It is for the very same reasons that aggressors argue "they had to attack to defend and protect themselves from a threat." There is a general tendency in everyone involved to feel victimized, betrayed, wronged, threatened and attacked and to have an unrealistic view of the situation.

As part of our survival instincts we make judgments about whether a person or situation presents a threat to us. Under stressful circumstances we may be biased to see threats where none exist, to see as foes people who are neutral or well-disposed to us. Overprotection of self and over-suspicion of others' intention can create serious interpersonal and social problems in homes, communities and among groups. Constant interpersonal conflicts can be provoked by such things as strong reactions to non-existing and imaginary threats or perceiving innocent behaviors of others as offences.

As a behaviour is labeled (rightly or wrongly) as threatening, our self-protection system gets mobilized. When fear takes over, the tendency to overuse these simplified labels is increased. When people feel under serious threat, their primal thinking (flight or fight) replaces their adaptive skills such as negotiation, understanding, empathy, problem solving and compromise. [A. Beck 1999].

When an ordinary interpersonal or inter-group conflict is treated as a battlefield confrontation, it can quickly turn into a situation where parties see one another as presenting life-or-death threats to each other. In other words, the situation is seen as an emergency, which obviously demands an emergency response. An emergency response, which may be lifesaving when one is attacked by a wild animal in a jungle, if applied to day-to-day interpersonal conflicts, will cause on-going unnecessary distress and possibly violent confrontations. It is known that misinterpretations and biased thinking occur in all of us [Beck 1999]. It is also known that people who are prone to engage in harmful behavior tend to suffer more from biased thinking and misinterpretations.

The Enemy Image:
An 'enemy image' is created when the meanings assigned to events in a conflict situation (whether real or imaginary) are important, or the damage caused by a conflict is considered intentional, extensive or irreversible, or the conflict remains unresolved. Anger contributes to how the opponent is perceived; and the image of the enemy itself provokes more anger (vicious cycle). A reaction may be intense and anger-driven if the victim thinks that the damage was done intentionally, caused by negligence, indifference or deficiency or the act causing damage was not justified. At this anger-and
hatred-dominated stage, the enemy is seen as evil. They have no good or likable qualities, nothing which can be considered strength. Conflicting parties continue to blame each other and refuse to accept any responsibility for their own wrongdoing. As the conflict escalates, endless and exaggerated blaming takes over to block open communication and understanding. Sometimes, when both sides form distorted enemy images of each other, it is as if they are mirror images.

Ultimately, exaggerations about the negative characteristics and qualities of 'the enemy' and perhaps their 'sinister' intention, combined with anger and hatred, legitimizes violent engagement.

The 'enemy' image may evaporate subsequent to reconciliation, when both sides come to see each other more realistically.

**Fixed Enemy Image and the Role of Hatred:**
In the face of an unresolved and complicated conflict, the 'enemy image' becomes fixed. Due to a strong hatred, the super-negative image of the enemy overshadows positive realities about the enemy. A 'fixed enemy image' is a perfect medium for growth of further hatred and development of stereotypical images. A 'fixed image of the enemy' may evolve to a shared myth and a very untrue and exaggerated negative picture of the enemy. A 'fixed enemy image' is an even more serious obstacle to realistic appraisal of the situation, mutual understanding and empathy. Negotiations, dialogue and compromises are not seen as reasonable options and basic rights and needs of the enemy are denied. The enemy may be dehumanized, i.e. seen as less than a human being, and therefore not accorded human rights. They may be demonized, i.e. seen as exaggeratedly dangerous, malicious and evil. Once this happens, there is a strong tendency to legitimize violence to eliminate them. At this stage, conflicting parties hope to destroy each other.

**Hostility in Political and Societal Contexts:**
To keep the cycle of hostility and revenge going, in politically motivated inter-group hostilities (ethnic, religious and national), propaganda is used to disseminate myths and stereotype-based hatred. A group leader may justify a military attack on another group as follows: "Our group (ethnic, linguistic and political) has been endangered or mistreated by the enemy; thus, the enemy should be punished. The harm inflicted on our groups was deliberate and unjustified and the offender must pay the price." This is the time when violence may be seen as not only legitimate but even a necessity for the sake of a concept of "honour". This is revenge, and may continue a long time in a terrible cycle. Sometimes people get so caught in revenge cycles they forget what the original conflict was about.

A similar process operates in conflicts between siblings, parents and children, husbands and wives, and employers and employees. Studies of conflicting siblings and co-workers show that each adversary believed he or she was wronged and that the other persons were controlling and manipulative. They made distorted interpretations of the motives of others. They took an impersonal statement as a personal offence, attributed
bad intention to an innocent mistake and over-generalized an isolated action to make a categorical labeling ("You always do this or you never do that").

The following (adapted from Aaron Beck's 1999 book) examines the role of over-interpretation and assigning distorted meaning to an event, and the impact on the subsequent surge of emotions:

Example number one: A woman is waiting at a bus stop. A bus passes by without even slowing down. She feels angry as she tells herself "The driver ignored me" (intentional unacceptable behavior). To demonstrate the role of thought on feeling let us imagine her in a couple of scenarios. She would have felt anxious if she thought "I am going to be late" (bad consequence) and angry if she focused on the driver's being at fault. She would have remained relaxed if she thought, "The bus was too full or the driver did not see me" (understandable behavior on part of the driver).

Example number two: An employee criticized by his boss feels rejected. His misinterpretation of the very specific criticism makes him feels worthless and incompetent. He feels rejected and incompetent because he tells himself, "The boss does not like me." This may go on to, "Nobody likes me and I am no good for any work." Soon these stressful feelings of rejection and vulnerability give place to anger-provoking thoughts such as, "My boss had no right to treat me like this. He is unfair. He never shows appreciation for all the efforts that I put into my work. I hate him." As noted, the focus of thinking shifted from "my boss disapproves of me" to "I am inadequate" (mind reading and labeling of self) and "He is unfair" (labeling of others) to overgeneralization about the boss by saying, "He never ..."

This way, responsibility is assigned to the boss for unjustly causing unpleasant feelings. Then the employee feels angry. In an alternative scenario, if the employee recalled the specific incident and specific criticism, he could have been realistic about his mistake and empathetic to his boss's unhappiness. He could have avoided going through the pain of rejection and anger.

DO A DIAGRAM OF THIS: Something goes wrong by a subordinate >>>>>>> causes distress >>>>>>> he should have been more responsible (he is not trustworthy anymore) >>>>>>> anger >>>>>>> one person's anger relieves him but hurts someone else >>>>>>> the vicious cycle goes on

Historical and Recent Examples:
Biased thinking is an important aspect of religious, ethnic and linguistic stereotypes and prejudices and the driving force behind ideological aggression and warfare. Leaders who have been successful in moving their nations into wars or genocide played deadly cognitive games of exaggeration and overgeneralization. Hitler capitalized on the availability of Jews to explain Germany's World War I defeat. He depicted Jews as warmongers, international capitalists and Bolsheviks and blamed them for the political humiliation caused by World War I and economic depression. He created self-pity
among his followers by portraying them as the victims of Jewish control, subversion and corruption. The logic behind persecuting Jews was “to eliminate the enemy so they could not again commit their act of destruction.”

Dramatizing the image of the enemy was used to motivate massacres and killings between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, Hindus and Muslims in South Asia and the assault of Serbs on the Muslims in Bosnia. In all of these cases, creation of a mythical image of the enemy has been used to legitimize subsequent violence and killings. After the breakdown of communist Yugoslavia in 1990, Serbian leaders deliberately refreshed public memories of the domination of Serbs by Turks and the Bosnian Muslims. The message was “We suffered through centuries of Turkish domination and will no longer tolerate the yoke of their descendants.” In this way, the act of ‘ethnic cleansing and displacement of thousands of Muslims’ was legitimized. Likewise, over-generalization (“all Serbs are bad and should be punished”) must have functioned to legitimize the massacre of civilians in Kosovo and burning of their villages, as well as the attacks on Serb minorities by majority Albanians in Kosovo.

Aaron Beck (1999), the father of cognitive therapy, has taken a closer look at the interactions between distorted thinking, anger and hatred in circumstances such as those in two examples above and has arrived at the following analysis: First, the members of an enemy group are homogenized, where they are seen as the same and all are to be blamed or punished for the action of a smaller group or some individuals. Next, the enemy group is dehumanized and seen as a bad entity that does not deserve empathy or sympathy. Then, the enemy is demonized and seen as embodied Evil. Killing the enemy, at this stage, is no longer optional: “they must be exterminated because their continued existence becomes a threat.” This maybe why members of a mob or soldiers involved in killing innocent villagers do not see that they are destroying human beings like themselves. In addition, they are so focused on their act of fighting and killing that they cannot see the bigger picture of a human being destroyed (tunnel vision). Inhibitors against killing are automatically lifted by the belief that they are doing the right thing (evil-doers must be exterminated). An act of killing based on such thinking brings satisfaction from the notion of ‘justice’ having been done. Sometimes people even apply religious beliefs to justify this kind of killing, imagining that God has chosen them to rid the world of the other. The other, of course, may believe the same in mirror image.

Layers of Hostility and Problem-solving Styles:
The culture and values of conflicting parties play a crucial rule in outcomes of a conflict. The direct impact of culture can be understood from the type of meaning assigned to, and interpretations made of, a behavior or event. Biased thinking is used when an act is wrongfully interpreted as a threat to dignity, family name, pride, honour or bravery. For example, a dispute over a cheap household item between two neighbors, if coupled by harsh argument, may be perceived as a show of power and a serious insult by one of the parties. Biased thinking such as “mind reading” (to interpret the intention of
another party) and “catastrophizing” (to over-estimate the importance of the threat) may play roles in fabricating these interpretations.

It is likely that additional layers of conflict are added once the meaning attached to an act includes a threat to important cultural values and codes of honour. Additional layers of conflict refer to new conflicts stemming from exchanges of insult or perceived insult and physical violence. These added layers of conflict simply take over and overshadow the original problem. For example, a dispute over a trivial household issue comes to be seen as a power struggle and a threat to dignity. The offended party may react in a defensive manner. An exchange of insults may occur. As soon as insults and threats are traded, a second layer of conflict is being created. Now, if physical violence occurs that will create a third layer of conflict. As the conflict remains unresolved, many other anger-provoking layers may be added by acts such as conveying threats, talking behind each other’s back and anger-driven direct or indirect damages inflicted on one another. The original problem not only remains unresolved, but now the parties have to deal with the consequences of added layers of hostility, which in some cases may seem too complex to resolve.

Poor cultural habits of handling problems not only facilitate the adding of additional layers of hostility but also contribute to a high prevalence of violent, complex and protracted conflicts. Inadequate skills to solve problems peacefully and to everyone’s satisfaction can be a habit transferred across generations.

Role of Prejudice in Hostility:
Prejudice refers to having a pre-judgment about and unrealistic image of an individual or a group. Stereotyped and prejudiced images are mostly distorted, incomplete, false or exaggerated. Unrealistic images are mostly based on disinformation, exaggeration and overgeneralization (the “DEO of prejudice”).

Disinformation can be in the form of poor information or wrong information, which may stem from assumptions about behavior or events (what happened, what was said and what the intentions were behind them). Poor listening, preoccupation and having the habit of distorted thinking play mediating roles in making assumptions.

Exaggerations are made on occasions where the intent behind an event, or the event itself, is misinterpreted or when consequences of an event are mis-predicted. In a war and hostility context, exaggerating negative qualities of the enemy and ignoring, denying or downplaying one’s own weaknesses can be often seen.

Overgeneralization occurs when a historic or recent misbehaviour or act is wrongly generalized to an entire group. Or, responsibility for an action committed by a small group of individuals is wrongly attributed to a larger group. For example, in ethnic hatreds, historic events are one-sidedly interpreted and blame is laid on an entire ethnic group. Dissemination of stereotyped views across groups of people is often used to create myths, spread hatred and legitimize acts of violence, killing and genocide.
Prejudice and intolerance go hand-in-hand. Labeling others without even knowing them and rejecting and labeling others’ perspectives without trying to understand these perspectives are examples of prejudice-driven intolerance. When stereotype is coupled with blaming, anger comes in to make the situation even worse.

Understanding diversity and empathizing with others, on the other hand, create tolerance and acceptance of others the way they are, not the way we want them to be. Accepting others to be different requires empathizing with their needs and rights and understanding the perspective behind their behavior.

What can be done about hostility, enemy images, and prejudice?

1. Become aware.
Nearly everyone can benefit from scanning their thinking for hostility, enemy images, and prejudice. Knowing we all have a tendency towards this style of thinking helps us adjust our thinking repeatedly to more truthful, realistic, and constructive ways of thinking.

2. Check it out.
Sometimes we have the opportunity to interact with those about whom we have formed prejudices. This often sharply corrects our distorted thinking if we are truly open-minded.

3. Do not reinforce social myths and prejudices by accepting propaganda uncritically, on by speaking or joking in terms of negative stereotypes.

4. Try to promote the value of diversity as enriching a society. (Homogeneity impoverishes it.)
What is Anger?
Triggered by an event or a memory, anger is a responsive emotion associated with physiological changes, and a tendency or desire to be aggressive to the source of your anger. Events and situations (external factors) and the meaning attached to them (internal factors) work together to induce anger.

Situations that provoke anger include frustration (trying to do something without success), abuse (direct and indirect verbal, physical, emotional or sexual), injustice, and unmet expectations from the past (unresolved issues). People become angry when they feel betrayed (when they trusted someone), ignored (the silent treatment), deceived (lied to), degraded (put down) and let down (when they depended on someone). Internal factors can be realistic or based on assumptions, misunderstanding, disinformation, miscommunication, lack of communication, misjudgment or unjustified blaming.

Depending on various combinations of realistic and unrealistic meanings assigned to an event or behavior, individuals may vary in their levels of sensitivity (threshold) and their response to the same anger-provoking event. Some persons may get angry quickly and get over it quickly, while others may be slow to anger but remain angry for a long time. Others may not get angry at all. Expression of anger varies as well, as some people express their anger violently, others in a reasonable and peaceful manner, while some may not express their anger at all. Accumulated tension and a continued high level of arousal make people susceptible to getting angry too easily, too often.

Frustration and anger in children and adults leads to heightened aggressive feelings, which can sometimes be prevented or controlled by a reasonable explanation of what happened. Explanation has been shown to help children (and college students) to empathize with those who cause their anger, thus decreasing their level of aggression.

Health consequences of anger:
Frequent anger and angry exchanges contribute to high blood pressure and increased chances of dying from a heart attack [Cardiology group at Duke University 1998]. On the other hand, reducing hostility and anger, becoming more connected to people, counseling to problem-solve, relaxation training and stress management sessions have been shown to reduce heart attacks in patients with heart problems.

Social consequences of anger:
Anger, which is the most contagious human emotion, prevents clear thinking and is associated with impulse driven behavior. Hostile and angry people affect others around them through their aggressive behaviors. Constantly angry persons often become
isolated from their sources of social support because people would rather avoid than interact with hostile individuals. Isolation, through its adverse impact, may create a vicious cycle of anger, isolation, more anger, more isolation and so forth. Frequent anger, which is often caused by small and meaningless issues, may induce hatred, damage relationships and facilitate violent engagements. Finally, intense anger can lead to decisions that are later regretted.

**Role of Anger in Armed Conflict:**
In a war context, anger plays an important role in the vicious cycle of anxiety, anger, violence, false pride and so on. Feeling threatened, damaged, embarrassed and treated unjustly causes distress. Too often this distress is replaced by anger and retaliation, which convert the feeling of vulnerability to that of power. The role of biased and distorted thoughts can be important in provoking anger and the temptation toward revenge. The vicious cycle of violence can carry on as the punished party sees the punishment as unjustified. Anger can also impede effective dialogue and empathy.

{DOA DIAGRAM OF THE hurt/pain >> anger, retaliation CYCLE.

**Unhelpful and Helpful Ways of Handling Anger:**
Unhelpful ways of dealing with anger, which can cause health problems and social problems, include active aggression, passive aggression, keeping anger inside, over-blaming, over-criticism, sarcasm, denial, avoidance and social withdrawal.

Managing anger properly can prevent or reduce the intensity and frequency of angry episodes (and their health and social consequences). Good methods of dealing with anger include: 1) review the situation, 2) express anger assertively and non-violently, and 3) take action to remedy the situation.

1. Review of a situation must involve weighing the worth of the matter. Even if it is someone’s fault, the situation may be too unimportant to bother with. One should also look for objective evidence to avoid making assumptions and distorted thinking.

2. Anger should be expressed assertively but without aggression through clear communication and empathy. Expressing anger involves assertively talking with the person who is perceived as the cause of anger or with a close friend. Expressive communication should include the following three steps:
   - Specific description of the situation
   - Consequences of the situation to the person (made me feel hurt, caused financial damage)
   - What you want to happen or not to happen

Assertion (as oppose to aggression) invokes asking others to change a special behaviour. The message should be delivered calmly and respectfully. Assertion is a
replacement for giving in (one extreme) or harsh and violent behaviour (another extreme). Examples of assertive speaking to someone who interrupts your talk can be, “Excuse me, please let me finish what I am saying.” Avoid categorical statements such as “You always....” Say for example, “What you did just now annoyed me and I felt insulted.” If nervous, you may do a quick meditation or just take a few slow deep breaths before you speak. Example of assertive response: “Ahmad, you and I agreed not to make decision without consulting each other and here you finalized the deal with the company (description of the situation). I feel left out (how you feel) and would like you not to do this again (what you want) otherwise our collaboration/relationship may be at risk.” (consequences). When talking about the situation or feeling, avoid making general statements such as, “It is disappointing,” but say: “I feel disappointed.” The consequences should be something that you can follow through on.

3. In addition to proper expression of anger, one should think of possible remedial actions that can resolve the underlying problem. In situations where something done cannot be undone, forgiveness is the best solution. Forgiveness can be used to release anger caused by a small event such as burned food, spilled milk or a large destructive event such as a burned village and destroyed lives.

Dealing with Anger-provoking Thoughts:
If anger-provoking thoughts keep coming back, one may try to stop them through inner talk. Once negative thinking is stopped it may be replaced by pleasant ones (e.g., something joyful and pleasant). ‘Stop-think techniques’ as described in chapter one have been proven effective in preventing hostilities before they start. To use the ‘Stop-think technique’ one needs to identify the repeating thoughts that cause constant anger. Since humans cannot think about two things at the same time, another approach to get rid of preoccupying thoughts is distracting oneself by doing something else, counting to ten or a hundred or singing along. Once the mind is occupied by alternative non-distressing thoughts the focus shifts from negative thinking. Deep breathing and meditation as described in chapter one are also useful because of their calming effect on the fight-or-flight reaction.

This paragraph and roadmap can be used in an exercise:
Our lives can end any time. When faced with death people tend to pay attention to what is really important to them. Be in a way and do the things you want people to remember you for. If so much of your experience today consists of cynical thoughts, angry feelings and aggressive acts, then this is what you will be remembered for tomorrow. A heart attack patient reported: “Before my heart attack I used to get angry a lot. But since then I decided it’s better to walk away from anger.” Lending a helping hand to others brings positive feelings and emotions. Research has shown that those who give a number of hours to help others have been proved to have better health. You can create a happier future and past at the same time by affirming (instead of tearing down) others’ basic humanity.
You have some control over the kind of life you will look back on in your final hours. Every day and every hour try to prevent anger and cynical thoughts or aggressive action from ruining your joy and achievement.

Anger and humour cannot be in the same mind at the same time. Laughter is the best medicine because it calms down a tense body. Try humour whenever possible and appropriate. You may succeed in defusing angry feelings. Scientific research on humour so far indicates that humour is good for our health and it reduces the likelihood of engaging in overt acts of aggression.

Anger-management roadmap:
Is this matter worth my continued attention >>> No

  v

  v

  Yes >>> Am I justified >>> No

  v

  v

  Yes >>> Do I have an effective action to take >>> No

  Yes (use assertion)

  v

  v

  v

Still angry

v

v

Use anger control strategies

References:
Chapter Five

DEALING WITH GRIEF AND MAJOR LOSSES

Natural Response to a Major Loss:
Feeling shocked, confused, empty, sad and withdrawn subsequent to a major loss is part of the natural response. Grief is an expression of the importance of the loss and a reaction to the gap created by it. Grief over loss of a loved one is a symbol of the quality of the relationship with the person who has died. Since grief is the last act of love, it should not be hidden. Some of the same experience may occur when there is loss of a limb, eyes or other body parts.

Stages of grief:
There are four stages one may go through while in grief. (Not everyone experiences all four, and not everyone experiences them in this order.)

- shock and numbness,
- denial and withdrawal,
- acknowledgment and pain, and
- adapting and renewal.

Recovery

Letting go of the past

Separation/Loss

Hope

Positive changes

Shock

Seeing new realities

Denial

Acknowledging the loss

Fear

Depression

Guilt/Pain

The stage of shock:
After getting the bad news one goes through a state of shock, frozenness or hysteria that may last several days. Some people pass out, others are icy calm. Some fall apart in tears; others become disoriented, uncertain and confused. Feeling exhausted is common. Having close and supportive friends or family members beside one is very helpful. It is important to recognize that it is okay to scream, throw-up, hyperventilate,
cry, be frozen and not know how to respond to others. As long as the death or loss is not denied, the horrible feeling one has at this stage will slowly change. Due to difficulty in clear thinking it is wise not to make big decisions at this stage.

A few days after the bad news, especially if all supporting family members leave, there can be a deadly silence. In the face of feeling lonely, visits to or from friends or relatives who are emotionally strong are recommended. If employed, going to work is another option to get away from the pain of loneliness.

The stage of denial:
When the shock leaves, the pain comes. In this stage, some people find it hard to believe and accept the death or loss. Weakness, anger, lack of energy, loss of appetite, poor sleep, dry mouth and body pain prevail in this stage. Concern about grooming diminishes, performance is affected and withdrawal may occur with many people. It is important to remember that these feelings are normal and will pass. Support of confidantes is crucial. However, some may not know how to express support and others may choose to avoid the grieving person.

Acknowledgment and pain:
At this stage one needs to acknowledge that the loss is real and say out loud that (name of the deceased person) is dead and is not coming back. This may cause extremes of emotional pain. That is okay. One may even slip back to the denial and withdrawal stage. Gradually, life should return to normal. It is important to remind oneself that this stage will pass too.

Adapting and renewal:
In this stage the question of “Why me?” still comes to mind. “Why me? I am a good person” or “How should I fill the void created in my life by such a big loss.” It is important to increasingly interact with people, pay attention to nutrition, rest, exercise and intake of sufficient amounts of fluids. It should be clearly understood that the use of substances like drugs or alcohol could only cause ill health. Thinking about the loss and the situation where it happened, at this point in time, is a little less painful.

Recovering from a loss:
Recovering from a loss is not like recovering from flu. It is like recovering from being run over by a very large truck, and it takes time. The more one understands what the process of recovery is, the less it will be frightening. Not sleeping well and eating frequently or poorly is not a good sign of progress toward recovery. If one does not allow oneself to grieve, her or his life will never again be as full as it could be. The pattern of recovery sometimes may be two steps forward and one step back. Research by Dr. Glen Davidsons of Southern Illinois University revealed it takes most people two years to begin returning to a normal life after a major loss. During the first three to four months after a major loss it is normal to be forgetful (forgetting keys, eyeglasses and so on).

Some useful tips for those who face a loss:
Seven actions that can be helpful to a grieving individual:

- If you have a previous health condition, contact a physician right after hearing the news.
- Be careful of what you eat. You may not feel like eating, but you need energy to cope. Caffeine and too much sweet food are not helpful.
- Talk about the deceased person or the body part loss. Talk with anyone and everyone who will listen to you. Talk about the past good times and tell stories that are unique to the one who has died. Talk about the events around the death. Telling the same stories again and again is not only okay but also necessary.
- Be alone with yourself for an hour. Say to yourself out loud that (name of the person) is dead. It is okay to show a reaction to what you hear yourself saying.
- Go to bed at your normal bedtime even if you do not feel like sleeping. Avoid tranquilizing yourself.
- Attend the mosque and allow your people to support you.
- Allow yourself to have angry feelings. It is okay to ask the question, “Why me?”

Meditation helps in recovery:
During recovery or even earlier stages meditation and relaxation can be very helpful.

Examples of relaxation exercises:
- Sit comfortably on the floor with hands laid loosely on your thighs, palms down and eyes closed.
- Gently blow out all the air from your lungs.
- Slowly inhale while counting to eight.
- Hold your breath to count of eight.
- Slowly exhale while counting to eight.
- Repeat this sequence for one to two minutes.
- Picture yourself slowly walking down the stairs one step at a time; count your steps. Pause when you reach ten and then continue descending. You may fall asleep, and that is okay if that is the purpose of your relaxation.

Telling children about the death or loss:

- Let children ask questions and express their own thoughts and feelings.
- Assure them that they will be looked after and loved.
- Give the attention required.
- Try to explain what death or loss is and that the dead loved one is not going to come back. Let them see the dead and touch if they want to.
- Sit with them and ask them to draw how they feel and how they see what happened.
- Take them to the grave and let them pray with you.
- If you are dealing with loss of a body part, explain this to children. Tell them what the rehabilitation process is and what you will be able to do in future. Let them ask questions.
Responding to other losses (property, social network/status or even a source of income, or job):

- To avoid over-reaction, identify what exactly you have lost and make a list
- Express how you feel and what your thoughts and feelings are about the exact losses
- Plan and identify where you need help and whom should you go to
- Talk about your loss to whoever will listen
- Remind yourself that everyone experiences the feelings and thoughts that you have when facing a loss. It is okay to feel that way and this feeling will eventually go away

References:
Chapter Six

DEALING WITH SHOCKING EXPERIENCES

In situations of war, both adults and children may have to deal with very shocking (traumatic) experiences. These may include being bombed, shelled or shot at, being beaten up or raped, being interrogated, tortured or imprisoned, seeing others killed or severely injured, having to deal with dead bodies or injured people.

Apart from the other effects of grief, anger and severe stress, some shocking experiences become imprinted on the mind in memories, which are difficult to erase. The person who has had a very bad experience may live in a state of long-lasting anxiety, as if the experience may happen again at any time. Certain things will act as reminders to set off memories and extreme anxiety and the person may try hard to avoid such reminders. It may be hard to carry on a normal life. The memories flash into the mind and it may feel as if the person is reliving the terrible situation.

If a person has suffered many, or repeated shocking experiences, their ability to cope may be quite overwhelmed. Sleep becomes disturbed by nightmares about the events, and fatigue further diminishes coping ability.

It may be useful to know that this is a well-recognized problem of people in all parts of the world and is called by some “post-traumatic stress disorder” or PTSD for short.

There are many ways of dealing with it, but all the methods of proven success have one thing in common – the person must dwell on or remain with the painful memories for controlled periods of time, allowing their mind to get used to the painful “images”, and eventually to respond with no or lower anxiety. This takes courage, and may benefit from the presence of a supportive friend or relative.

It might be done as follows:
1. Breathe in courage and calmness and fix your mind on the painful image.

2. Breathe slowly out, letting it go.

3. Try then to hold it in your mind for two breaths in and out, then let it go, being aware of your anxiety level, which may be high.

4. Repeat this for as long as you can tolerate, lengthening the time you hold the painful memory in your mind.

With repetition, the anxiety you experience during the memory should steadily go down.

When you are overtaken by terrible memories, or when you need to recover from a session such as described above, do things to remind you that you are here in your
present life, and not in the time of the bad memories. Being with someone supportive, sharing a cup of tea, doing some ordinary household task may be ways of accomplishing this (See "Positive Thoughts and Activities" in Chapter One.) Some people find that carrying around a special object, such as a pebble or a ring, may help remind them of being in the here and now.

For some people, exercises such as the one described above may help speedily, for others recovery may take much longer. Some people recover spontaneously, with no special work on the problem. Recovering means that these memories become like other memories – they are stored in your mind and can be referred to, but they no longer spring out and take over your life. The constant anxiety diminishes, and the things that used to “trigger” the memories no longer do. You no longer have to avoid such things.
Chapter Seven

RESOLVING CONFLICTS NONVIOLENTLY

Conflict occurs when people or groups have goals that seem incompatible.

Conflict is a normal part of life. Conflict and violence are not the same.

Most conflicts, if handled skillfully, can foster growth and development in people, groups, and communities. Conflicts are caused by such important factors as difference in needs, interests, values and goals. There may be difference in perspectives, misinformation, biased thinking, poor communication, inadequate problem-solving skills and stubbornness. Ignoring others' rights and needs, blaming others for every problem, and persistence in one's own needs are characteristics of many conflicting groups in today's civil wars.

Conflicts, if unresolved or violent, are disruptive and can be very destructive. In a long-lasting conflict additional contributing factors overshadow the original problem and in some cases the conflict goes for such a long time that the original cause becomes irrelevant. Rigid thinking, win-lose mentality, anger, hatred and prejudice, lack of empathy, unwillingness to share and intolerance, are contributing factors to protracted violent conflicts. Many violent conflicts are unnecessary, preventable and resolvable. The least necessary conflicts are the ones stemming from ignorance, error, historical or cultural habits, poor cooperation, biased perceptions, prejudice, win/lose competition (power struggle) and use of conflict as a way of coping.

Management and Resolution of a Conflict:
A conflict, if it remains unresolved, can become never-ending chaos. The worst ways of dealing with conflicts are denial, avoidance, capitulation (giving in without struggle) or domination (imposing one's own solution on the other party).

Resolving a conflict means eliminating the original differences or feelings of opposition in a way that is satisfactory to all parties. Control and management of a conflict refers to preventing or decreasing the negative consequences of the conflict. This is done by devoting energy to a joint search for a solution rather than to a search for the guilt of the other side. The first step toward management or resolution of a conflict is to address the emotional component of a conflict.

Handling the emotional component of a conflict:
During high emotions, people, for physiological reasons, cannot clearly think or problem-solve. When feelings remain strong it is better to deal with the emotional aspect of conflict prior to trying to resolve the substantive issues because an open-minded and honest discussion aimed at resolution or management of a conflict is possible only after the throbbing emotions such as, fear, anger, distrust, resentment, hatred, threat, rejection and defensiveness, have subsided.
Here are the three steps toward achieving an emotional climate to favour conflict resolution:

1) Treat other party with respect:
Respect should be conveyed in one's attitude and behaviour. The way one listens, looks, select words or speaks should convey the message that "I do respect you as a person even if I do not approve of some of your behaviour or your positions and I would like to enter a dialogue with you as an equal." Disagreement with another person's beliefs, values or needs should not be allowed to lead to disrespect of the person as a whole. There are always many good things about every person on earth.

Insults, put-downs, sarcasm, blaming and attacking someone's self-worth should be avoided. Words of disrespect, even though often spoken carelessly, block communication and create wounds that may never fully heal.

2) Listen without interrupting:
Reflective listening not only diminishes the possibility of erroneous perceptions but also facilitates understanding and empathy. To pay full attention, distracting behaviours such as scratching oneself, looking in another direction, cleaning nails, looking at your watch, thinking of what to say next and putting words in the mouth of the other party should be avoided. Summarize what you heard and ask for clarifications if you need to. Agree with what you think is correct.

3) State your view, feelings and needs:
Stating one's needs, feelings, and opinions without aggression, accusations, criticism, blaming and attacking is crucial to conflict resolution. Each party should take a turn to describe the situation, state how they feel (or are affected by the situation) and clearly say what they want. It is important to be specific when describing the problem/situation, reporting the impact and stating the wants and needs. (See "Assertive Statement" in Chapter Four.)

It should be borne in mind that the sole purpose of dealing with the emotional layer of the problem was to start two-way communication and learn about both sides of the story. Seeing through the other person's eyes may diminish anger. Empathy prevents laying erroneous blame. Moreover, understanding other people and acknowledging their needs and wants will increase tolerance and sensitivity toward them. Hatred is decreased when one sees similarities in hopes, concerns, needs, wants, shortcomings and fears between self and others. Lack of empathy plays a major role in the distrust among conflicting ethnic groups and nations. Promotion of empathy can play a major role in restoration of trust in these communities.

1 Good communication is being honest and open about one's feelings, needs and ideas. Self-expression involves awareness of innermost thoughts and feelings, and accepting one's needs and feelings and expressing them. We all need acceptance and respect and should give it to one another. The ability to communicate effectively seems to increase self-esteem in many persons. Listening well is also part of good communicating.
Resolving the substantive matters:

Substantive issues can be handled more constructively after resolving the emotional layer of the problem. There should be mutual willingness from parties to acknowledge the problem and see it as solvable. The following steps can be used to achieve a solution satisfactory to all parties:

- Define the problem in terms of needs (not positions)
- Brainstorm together to come up with solutions or combinations of solutions
- Choose the options that best meet the needs of all parties
- Evaluate the solutions and cross out those that may not be acceptable
- Plan who will do what, where and by when and implement the plan

All parties should stick to the ground rules listed above:

- Respect the other party in one’s behaviour and words
- Avoid blaming and accusing language
- Take turns to speak and respect the other’s turn
- Listen with full attention and respect
  - Remain focussed on the current problem when talking

- Follow the three steps of describing the problem, how it affected you and what you want. (One can add the consequences if the problem is not resolved as the fourth step.)

A resolution or transformation of a conflict may be achieved through collaboration or compromise. In a collaborative approach, all parties join together to attack the problem instead of attacking one another. In this case, conflicting parties cooperate, consider and respect each other’s needs and rights and try to find common interests/needs and a common ground where all parties win. In an ideal scenario, parties demonstrate the ability to work with one another and to share the burden of responsibility for achieving a common goal.

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2 Argument is very likely when parties constantly switch the topic or interrupt each other. As many irrelevant issues are brought into discussion, the problems seem too many and too complicated. Listening, reflective listening in particular, and remaining focussed on current problems decreases the likelihood of arguments and increases the chances of reaching a solution.
In a compromise, parties settle for something less than their full needs and desires. Each party sacrifices and gives up something to accommodate the other party’s needs and resolve the problem. Committing to a super-ordinate goal assists conflicting parties to cooperate and be tolerant of others. Transforming the problem is better still. The parties arrive at a creative solution, which may have new benefits not at first foreseen.

**Importance of Communication in Conflict Resolution:**
The worst communication is communication, which obscures mutual understanding. Lack of communication prepares the ground for making assumptions and coming to less informed or misinformed judgments that might lead to negative emotions. Factors that impede effective communication include a tendency to argue and use a discourse of blaming, accusations, labelling and put-downs as well as inadequate expression and poor listening. Bad communications include denial (denying that a problem exists), avoidance (avoiding talking about the problem), active (e.g., none of your business) or passive (e.g., you do poorly at school too), counterattacks, defending and rationalizing the act (e.g., this was the right way of doing it) or playing victim (e.g., it was beyond me and I could not do better).

**Outsider Help**
When the parties in a conflict are tackling a very long-standing, very difficult, complex conflict, with extreme emotions involved, they will benefit from outside help. This person may help them stick to the ground-rules and communicate better. The outsider may need to begin by helping the people in conflict bring to the surface their assumptions, values, and biased thinking, and perhaps gently challenge this. Then people may need help in getting beyond being stuck and moving to creative thinking about solutions. This kind of work is best done one at a time, before bringing people together (see Galtung, J., (2000). Conflict Transformation by Peaceful Means: the TRANSCEND Method. www.transcend.org).
Chapter Eight

RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS

In ordinary life, people hurt each other. In war and other social stress, people may do terrible things to others, as individuals or as groups. When people, as individuals in a village, or as groups in a society or nation, must go on living together, how can they weave together the torn social fabric?

The necessary ingredients are:

1. Seeing the importance of the relationship or of restoring social harmony.

2. Acknowledging the wrongs done. This will mean that the victim must be given a voice to describe the wrongs done and the longer-term effects.

3. The wrong-doer (sometimes both sides) needs to express sincere regret for the wrong done and to apologize. If possible they will offer restitution, while recognizing that some wrongs are tragically irreversible (killing).

4. The victim accepts the apology (or does not).

5. The wrongdoer asks for forgiveness, i.e., to be released from his or her guilt.

6. The victim grants forgiveness (or not).

There are practices in other cultures, which may be very helpful. In the Hawaiian Hoponopono (Setting Straight) and in the Canadian Native People’s Healing Circle, all family, friends, and involved people are part of the circle. Everyone contributes their perception of what happened and their own acknowledged portion of the responsibility. The victim says clearly how they suffered. The wrongdoer apologizes and asks for forgiveness. Everyone takes responsibility for restoring harmony and healing the social wounds. Creative and cooperative solutions emerge. This kind of process is also called “restorative justice”, rather than “punitive justice”.

After a war it seems important that those who have behaved in terribly inhumane ways be brought to justice, but some form of “restorative justice” may achieve more social healing than simply punishing people.

These issues are explored in much more detail in Johan Galtung’s “After Violence: 3Rs: Reconstruction, Reconciliation, Resolution.”