The Impact of Speech on Building and Undermining the Family: An Analytical Study in Light of Surat al-Mujādilah

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Abstract

This study analyzes the Qur'anic discourse in Sūrat al-Mujādilah to uncover the profound impact of speech on the stability or disruption of the family. It begins from the premise that the tongue is not merely a tool of communication but an active force capable of establishing affection and mercy or generating alienation and discord. Because the spouses form the core of the family unit, the Qur'an carefully regulates the marital relationship and grounds it in tranquility and mutual affection—values that can only be sustained through wholesome and responsible speech. The incident of *ẓihār*, presented in the surah through the dialogue between Khawla bint Thaʿlabah and the Prophet ﷺ, illustrates the harmful potential of speech in hurting women and threatening the integrity of the family, prompting the Qur'an to reform such verbal practices and correct pre-Islamic norms.

The study also examines other forms of linguistic deviation mentioned in the surah, such as sinful private counsel (*najwā*), mockery, false oaths, and the spreading of discord—phenomena that highlight the central role of speech in shaping relationships within both the family and the wider society. The research is guided by a core question:

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The extent to which Sūrat al-Mujādilah reveals the psychological and social effects of speech on marital relations, and the educational values that can be derived from its discourse.

To address this question, the study analyzes the concepts of speech and the tongue, the legal rulings related to *ẓihār*, and the ethical lessons extracted from the surah, in addition to identifying the characteristics of the Qur'anic method for disciplining speech. The study employs descriptive-analytical and deductive methodologies, supported by classical works of tafsīr and Qur'anic sciences.

The findings conclude that the family is built through speech just as it is built through legal contracts, and that its collapse often begins with hurtful words that erode compassion. Thus, disciplining speech—in accordance with the Qur'anic worldview—is a foundational pillar of familial and social stability.

Keywords: Qur'an; Sūrat al-Mujādilah; Family; Speech; Word; Ẓihār; Marital Relations.

1. Introduction

Since the creation of humankind, God has made the tongue a mirror of the heart, a gateway to the intellect, and an instrument that surpasses the limits of sound to generate meaning and shape worlds. Through speech, covenants and agreements are proclaimed, hearts are mended, and aspirations are inspired. Through speech, as well, a thriving and joyful household may be destroyed, or a flame of affection—kindled for years—may be extinguished. And if the family is the foundational unit of society, then speech is the spirit that either animates this structure or leaves it hollow and collapsing.

The Qur'an accords speech a lofty status, making it a criterion of piety. God says: *"O you who believe, fear God and speak words of integrity. He will rectify your deeds and forgive your sins"* (al-Aḥzāb 70–71).

He also presents good speech as a means to attain tranquility by spreading kindness among people: *"And speak to people in a good manner"* (al-Baqarah 83).

And He makes speech a weapon against falsehood and a means of

calling to the truth: *"Invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in the best manner"* (al-Naḥl 125).

Within the context of the family, Qur'anic discourse does not stop at delineating rights and duties; it penetrates deeper into the subtleties of human interaction—into the impact of utterance, tone, and meaning on cultivating character and preserving affection. The marital home is not merely a documented contract; it is a space whose bonds are woven from kind words, mutual respect, and dignified communication.

Surat al-Mujādilah presents a unique Qur'anic model addressing the impact of speech on family life. It opens with the dialogue of a believing woman with the Prophet ﷺ, as she complains to him of an unjust and hurtful word directed at her—one that placed her and her family before an uncertain fate. The surah thus initiates a deep legislative and reformative process, reshaping social understanding, dismantling pre-Islamic norms, and establishing a just balance between men and women. Through its details, the surah demonstrates that speech is not merely a vehicle of expression but a formative force that produces profound educational and psychological effects within the marital relationship—effects that may endure throughout a lifetime.

Research Problem

To what extent does Surat al-Mujādilah reveal the psychological and social impact of speech as an active force in shaping the marital relationship? What pedagogical and ethical dimensions can be derived from the Qur'anic discourse in this context?

Sub-Questions

• What is the Qur'anic concept of the *tongue* and the *word*?

• What are the manifestations of the positive and negative uses of speech in Surat al-Mujādilah?

• What educational and social insights does the surah provide for regulating family discourse and preventing speech from slipping into forms that threaten the structure and stability of the family?

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to:

- Analyze the Qur'anic discourse in Surat al-Mujādilah to uncover the role of speech in constructing or undermining the family.
- Derive the educational and ethical values related to speech and its regulation within the family context.
- Present an applied reading of the case of *ẓihār* as a legislative model addressing the misuse of speech.
- Highlight the role of Khawla bint Thaʿlabah as a model for managing marital conflict through dialogue and constructive speech.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its ability to connect the Qur'anic text with the lived reality of the Muslim family, demonstrating that reforming family discourse and disciplining speech are foundational to tranquility and stability. It enriches Qur'anic studies with psychological and sociological dimensions and offers an educational framework capable of correcting contemporary marital communication practices.

Methodology

The study employs the descriptive-analytical method by tracing and examining the relevant Qur'anic passages, alongside the deductive method to extract the educational and legislative values embedded in the surah. It is guided by classical works of tafsīr, Qur'anic sciences, and contemporary studies in family education within the Qur'anic framework.

Previous Studies

Several studies have addressed the impact of speech on social relationships, while others have examined family-related issues in the Qur'an. However, research that specifically connects Surat al-Mujādilah with the concept of the tongue and its role in constructing or destabilizing family life remains limited—giving this study added scholarly value. Among the relevant works are:

1. **"Legal and Ethical Rulings in Surat al-Mujādilah – A Thematic Study" (2022), published in Arab Studies Journal, Egypt.**

This study explores the legislative and ethical dimensions presented in Surat al-Mujādilah, focusing on the rulings of *ẓihār*, the etiquette of private consultation (*najwā*), and the manners of gathering. The researcher offers a thematic analysis based on compiling relevant Qur'anic verses, classifying them, and clarifying their meanings while emphasizing the importance of ethical speech.

Despite the value of this work in highlighting the surah's moral framework, its treatment of the concept of "speech" remained general and limited. It centered on legal aspects and behavioral etiquette without offering an in-depth analysis of the psychological and social impact of speech within the family, nor did it adequately link the concept to the long-term pedagogical dimensions of the marital relationship.

2. **"Educational Indications in Surat al-Mujādilah: Instructional Methods" (2021), by Prof. Ashyar Zain and others, published in the Journal of Educational Research, Indonesia.**

This study surveyed the instructional methods derived from Surat al-Mujādilah—such as dialogue, confidential consultation, and guided discussion—considering them effective pedagogical tools for transmitting values. The authors skillfully demonstrated the significance of these methods in cultivating character and instilling ethical principles, drawing on textual examples from the surah.

However, the study did not sufficiently highlight "speech" as a central concept in its own right. Rather, it treated speech implicitly as part of broader educational methods. As a result, the analysis did not directly address the positive or negative effects of speech on family stability or breakdown—a crucial dimension that remained insufficiently explored.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework:

2.1 Al-Lisān (The Tongue):

Linguistically:

The tongue is the well-known organ in the mouth and the instrument of articulation and speech. *Lisān al-ʿArab* states: "*Al-lisān*: the organ of speech, through which utterance occurs."[1]

Al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ defines it as: "The tongue: the organ of articulation, and it is used metaphorically to mean language and speech."[2]

Technically:

In the terminology of scholars of Sharīʿah and Arabic linguistics, *al-lisān* refers to speech itself and the meanings and expressions that convey one's intents, whether spoken or written.[3]

It is also used metaphorically to denote the language spoken by a people, as in the verse:*"We sent no messenger except with the language of his people."* (Ibrāhīm 4)

In the Qur'anic context: The tongue is the instrument accountable for every utterance, as in God's saying: *"No word does he utter except that with him is an observer ready (to record)."* (Qāf 18) Al-Ṭabarī comments: "God informs that every utterance is recorded by the two angels."[4]

The Qur'an employs the term *lisān* with multiple meanings, including:

- The physical organ of speech: *"Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it."* (al-Qiyāmah 16)
- Language and cultural identity: *"We sent no messenger except with the language of his people."* (Ibrāhīm 4)
- Speech and eloquent expression: *"Grant me a reputation of truth among later generations."* (al-Shuʿarāʾ 84)

In the Qur'anic worldview, the tongue is a powerful instrument for good or evil, and believers are commanded to discipline and guard it.

2.2. Al-Kalima (The Word):

Linguistically:

A *kalima* is a single utterance—simple or compound—that conveys meaning. *Lisān al-ʿArab* states: "*Al-kalima*: a single word, which may be simple or composite."[5]

Al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ defines it as: "A single expression that denotes a meaning, or a complete meaningful sentence." [6]

Technically: In the terminology of rhetoric and linguistics, a *kalima* is an expression assigned to a singular or composite meaning.[7]

In the Qur'anic context, the term kalima appears in several meanings, including:

- Divine command or decree: *"The word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and justice."* (al-Anʿām 115)
- Divine promise: *"The word of your Lord has been decreed: I will surely fill Hell…"* (Hūd 119)
- Proof or argument: *"He made the word of those who disbelieved the lowest."* (al-Tawbah 40)
- The foundational creed (kalimat al-tawḥīd): *"And He made it a lasting word among his descendants."* (al-Zukhruf 28)
- Glad tidings or a created being: As in the reference to Jesus (ʿĪsā), peace be upon him: *"The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary,*
- *is the Messenger of God and His Word."* (al-Nisāʾ 171)

2.3. Al-Ẓihār

Linguistically:

The term *ẓihār* is derived from *ẓahr* (the back), which denotes elevation and prominence. It is connected to the pre-Islamic expression used by a man to his wife: "You are to me as the back of my mother," meaning *you are forbidden to me as my mother is.*[8]

Technically: Jurists define *ẓihār* as: "A husband likening his wife, or a woman whose intercourse is lawful to him, to a woman permanently prohibited to him, or likening a part of her to such a woman; and what is attributed to part is attributed to the whole." [9]

In essence, *ẓihār* involves likening one's wife—or a part of her—to a woman permanently prohibited to him due to kinship, such as the mother, sister, aunt, or foster-relatives.[10]

In the Qur'anic context:

The ruling appears in God's statement: *"Those among you who pronounce ẓihār upon their wives—they are not their mothers; their mothers are none but those who gave birth to them. Indeed, they utter an objectionable word and falsehood. Yet God is Pardoning, Forgiving."* (al-Mujādilah 2)

God describes the statement as **munkar** (detestable) and **zūr** (falsehood), underscoring its moral gravity and its destructive effect on marital relations.

2.4. Al-Najwā (Private Counsel / Secret Conversation)

Linguistically:

Derived from *al-najw* or *nājaytuhu*, meaning "I whispered to him" or "I spoke to him secretly." Its root implies seclusion, as one would confide in another in an elevated or secluded place. It is also said to derive from *al-najāh* (deliverance), meaning assisting another toward what brings him relief, or preserving one's secret from being exposed. [11]

Another definition states: *"It is a name for concealed speech exchanged with one's companion, as though raised above the hearing of others, since the root denotes elevation—hence al-najwah meaning a high place of land."* [12]

Technically: *Najwā* refers to discreet speech between two or more individuals, which may be used for good or for harm.

In the Qur'anic context: God says: *"While they are in private counsel."* (al-Isrāʾ 47)

He also says: *"When they scheme at night what displeases Him—and God encompasses what they do. They are those whom God has forbidden from secret counsel…"* (al-Mujādilah 8)

And He states: *"There is no good in much of their secret talks, except those who enjoin charity, kindness, or reconciliation between people."* (al-Nisāʾ 114)

2.5. Al-Ḥiwār (Dialogue)

Linguistically:

From *al-muḥāwarah*, meaning the reciprocal exchange of speech. *Ḥiwār* denotes verbal exchange or mutual conversation. [13]

Al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ defines it as: "The exchange of speech between two or more parties."[14]

Technically: Dialogue is the exchange of speech between two or more individuals with the aim of reaching understanding, clarity, or agreement. [15]

In the Qur'anic context: Dialogue occurs in a praiseworthy context, as in God's statement: *"And God hears your mutual discussion."* (al-Mujādilah: 1)

2.6. Al-Usrah (The Family)

Linguistically:

Lisān al-ʿArab defines *al-usrah* as: "A man's clan and his household."[16]

Al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ states: "The family: a man's household and close kin; a group connected by lineage or kinship."[17]

Technically:

The family is the basic social unit, consisting of husband, wife, and children, and may include extended relatives connected by marriage, lineage, or suckling. It entails reciprocal rights and responsibilities.

In the Qur'anic context:

The Qur'an references the family and its foundational principles in several verses, such as:

"And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves spouses that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy." (al-Rūm 21)

Commentary:

"He created for you from your own kind females who become your spouses *so that you may find repose in them*. As God says: *'It is He who created you from a single soul and made from it its mate so that he might find tranquility in her.'* (al-Aʿrāf 189), This refers to Eve, whom God created from Adam—from his shortest left rib.

Had God created all humans as males and made their mates of a different species—whether jinn or animals—there would be no affinity or harmony between spouses. Rather, aversion would prevail if the spouses were of another kind.

Out of His mercy to humankind, God made their spouses of their own kind and placed between them *affection* (love) and *mercy* (compassion).

A man maintains his bond with his wife either out of love for her or mercy toward her—such as having children from her, her dependence on him for provision, the mutual affinity between them, and other similar reasons."[18]

3. Overview of Sūrat al-Mujādilah and Relevant Discussions:

3.1 Name of the Surah:

The surah is named *al-Mujādilah* (with the letter dāl pronounced either with kasrah or fatḥah, though the latter is preferred).[19]

It was given this name because it opens with the story of the woman who pleaded with the Prophet ﷺ regarding her husband—Khawla bint Thaʿlabah (may God be pleased with her).[20] The surah begins with: *"God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who argues with you concerning her husband…"* (al-Mujādilah 1).

This is the name recorded in all Qur'anic codices and classical tafsīr works, and it is also occasionally referred to as *Sūrat Qad Samiʿa*.[21]

3.2 Its Virtue:

No authentic ḥadīth specifically addressing the virtue of Sūrat al-Mujādilah has been established. However, scholars highlight that the rulings and ethical principles contained in the surah reflect the importance of adhering to the etiquette of speech and the boundaries of discourse in Islam.

Its merit thus falls under the general virtue of reciting and contemplating the Qur'an, as in God's statement:

"[This is] a blessed book We have revealed to you, that they may contemplate its verses." (Ṣād 29)

3.3 Cause of Revelation:

The opening verses were revealed concerning the case of Khawla bint Thaʿlabah and her husband Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit (may God be pleased with them), who pronounced *ẓihār* upon her, saying: "You are to me as the back of my mother." She then went to the Prophet ﷺ, pleading her case and expressing her grief. God revealed: *"God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who argues with you concerning her husband and complains to God…"* (al-Mujādilah 1)

Thus abolishing the pre-Islamic practice of ẓihār and establishing a legal ruling that removes injustice from women and protects the family structure.

Abū Dāwūd narrates, through his chain, the detailed incident from Khuwaylah bint Mālik b. Thaʿlabah. In it, she recounts how the Prophet ﷺ initially advised patience, and how the revelation descended while she stood in his presence, leading to the ruling of expiation: freeing a slave, fasting two consecutive months, or feeding sixty poor persons—depending on one's capacity.

Abū Dāwūd concludes: *"In this report, she performed the expiation on his behalf without seeking his permission."* [22]

3.4 Statements of the Scholars:

These verses confer great honor upon Khawla bint Thaʿlabah, whose complaint God heard from above the seven heavens. They demonstrate His encompassing knowledge and hearing, and they reveal a significant legislative intervention that lifted injustice from women.

Khawla is also the woman whom ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (may God be pleased with him) stood for during his caliphate while surrounded by people and mounted on a donkey. She stopped him and offered him counsel, saying: "You were once called ʿUmayr, then you

were called ʿUmar, then you were called Commander of the Believers. So fear God, O ʿUmar.

Whoever is certain of death fears loss, and whoever is certain of reckoning fears punishment." ʿUmar listened attentively. Someone asked him: "O Commander of the Believers, will you stand this long for this old woman?" He replied: "By God, if she held me from the beginning of the day until its end, I would not move except for the prescribed prayer. Do you know who this woman is? She is Khawla bint Thaʿlabah. God heard her words from above the seven heavens—shall ʿUmar not hear them?" [23]

3.5 Place of Revelation and Number of Verses:

Sūrat al-Mujādilah is unanimously considered Madinan by classical exegetes, except for a report from ʿAṭāʾ stating that its first ten verses are Madinan and the remainder Makkan. Al-Kalbī held that the entire surah was revealed in Madinah except the verse: *"No private conversation among three occurs but that He is the fourth of them…"* (al-Mujādilah 7), which he claimed to be Makkan. The surah contains 22 verses and is the fifty-eighth surah in the arrangement of the muṣḥaf.[24]

4.The Tongue as an Instrument of Destruction :

God opens Sūrat al-Mujādilah with a profoundly human scene: a wronged woman complaining about the harm inflicted upon her by a single word spoken in the intimacy of marriage—*"You are to me as the back of my mother."* God hears her plea from above the seven heavens. He says: *"God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who argues with you concerning her husband and complains to God; and God hears your mutual discussion."* (al-Mujādilah 1).

Ibn Kathīr notes that this verse confers honor upon Khawla bint Thaʿlabah, as God heard her complaint and made it the cause for revealing a new legal ruling that lifted injustice from women. Her story is well known in the Sunnah. She narrated: "Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit pronounced ẓihār upon me, so I came to the Messenger of God ﷺ complaining to him. The Messenger of God ﷺ argued with me concerning him and said: *'Fear God; he is your cousin.'* I did not stop until the Qur'an was revealed: *'God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who argues with you concerning her husband…'* until the verse of the ruling.

He (the Prophet) said: *'He must free a slave.'*

She said: 'He does not have the means.'

He said: *'Then he must fast two consecutive months.'*

She said: 'He is an elderly man incapable of fasting.'

He said: *'Then he must feed sixty poor persons.'*

She said: 'He has nothing with which to give charity.'

She added: 'At that moment a basket of dates was brought. I said: O Messenger of God, I will assist him with another basket.'

He said: *'You have done well. Go and distribute them on his behalf to sixty poor persons, then return to your cousin.'*" [25]

The Qur'an describes the utterance of ẓihār—when a man says to his wife "You are to me as the back of my mother"—as: *"They utter an objectionable word and falsehood."* (al-Mujādilah 2)

Al-Qurṭubī explains that *al-munkar* is anything rejected by the Sharīʿah and sound human nature, while *al-zūr* denotes falsehood and distortion of truth. The Qur'an treats speech not as a trivial utterance but as a moral act with weight and consequence. It is enough that the Qur'an labels it *munkar* and *zūr* to signal its grave impact. Al-Saʿdī comments that God condemned the statement of ẓihār and described it as detestable and false: how can men say something they know has no

truth—likening their wives to the mothers who bore them? Such speech is reprehensible and untrue, and the Qur'an censures them for uttering such words and alerts believers that a single word may necessitate expiation and legal consequences.[26]

The Qur'an does not merely diagnose the problem but provides a reformative legal remedy linking speech to action. It legislates a tiered expiation for ẓihār: freeing a slave; if unable, fasting two consecutive months; if incapable, feeding sixty poor persons. This graduated process is not only meant to rectify the harm caused by the utterance but also to deter tongues from pronouncing such words thoughtlessly. The tongue becomes tied to concrete moral responsibility. A hurtful word is transformed from a passing sound into a consequential act obligating its speaker to repair himself, his relationship, and the social impact of his wrongdoing.

Yet harmful speech does not always come in a loud voice; it may seep quietly into the ear. Thus, the surah transitions to warning against sinful *najwā* (secret counsel): *"When you converse privately, do not converse in sin, transgression, and disobedience to the Messenger."* (al-Mujādilah 9)

Ibn Kathīr explains that *najwā* may amount to plotting against truth or sowing suspicion among believers. The Qur'an identifies sinful *najwā* as a tool of Satan: *"Private counsel is only from Satan, to grieve those who believe."* (al-Mujādilah 10) [27]

Satan uses whispered speech to divide hearts and weaken trust. In contrast, the Qur'an directs believers to use *najwā* only for charity, righteousness, and reconciliation. Within households, discord often begins with whispered conversations and hidden speech that breed doubt and suspicion, weakening the family bond. The forbidden *najwā* in this context refers to any secretive talk that causes grief or undermines trust among believers, as indicated by the verse. Scholars differed whether the prohibition is one of prohibition (*taḥrīm*) or

dislike (*karāhah*), and the majority of Mālikīs hold it to be strictly prohibited. [28]

Ibn al-ʿArabī, commenting on the verse: *"There is no good in much of their private conversation except one who enjoins charity, goodness, or reconciliation between people…"* (al-Nisāʾ 114), states: "This verse is unique; I have not encountered an explanation of it by anyone. What occurs to me is that God commands His servants with two great matters: sincerity—meaning that one's inner state matches the outer—and sincere counsel for the Book of God, His Messenger, and the leaders and common people of the Muslims. *Najwā* contradicts these two principles. However, human beings need some matters private to themselves, so God permitted it only when it promotes good, charity, or reconciliation." [29]

The Prophet ﷺ further warned against harmful *najwā*: "When you are three, let not two engage in private conversation excluding the third, for that would distress him." [30]

Thus, Sūrat al-Mujādilah reveals that harmful speech—whether public like ẓihār or hidden like sinful *najwā*—is not a linguistic mistake but a moral, social, and spiritual wound capable of destroying a family or fracturing a community. The Qur'anic method integrates warning, legal discipline, and moral training, restoring the tongue as an instrument of reform rather than destruction. The surah also alludes indirectly to *humz* and *lamz*—mockery, derision, and belittlement—forms of verbal harm that violate human dignity. Although the words themselves do not appear explicitly in the surah, exegetes note that the forbidden *najwā* encompasses backbiting, taunting, and negative insinuation. This is supported by verses such as: *"Do they not know that God knows their secrets and their private counsel? … Those who defame the believers who give charity…"* (al-Tawbah 78–79) God mentions *lamz* after *najwā* because harmful insinuation is one of the destructive forms of hidden speech [31]

The surah also mentions another destructive use of speech: false oaths. God says: *"They have taken their oaths as a shield, thereby barring others from the path of God."* (al-Mujādilah 16)

False oaths serve as a deceptive shield with which the hypocrites hide their corrupt intentions, one of the gravest abuses of speech. The tongue becomes a tool to distort truth, undermine trust, and destroy relationships. Abū al-Suʿūd comments that the verse describes their *preparing* and *readying* their false oaths in advance to escape accountability—not merely their actual use—since *taking the oath as a shield* must precede the act of misleading others, as indicated by the particle *fa* in "*so they barred (others) from God's path*." [32]

The surah closes with a moral purification of allegiance and affection:

"You will not find a people who believe in God… showing affection to those who oppose God and His Messenger." (al-Mujādilah 22)

This is a call to purify speech, loyalty, and emotional bonds from flattering or supporting those who oppose divine guidance, because flattery that compromises creed is nothing but hypocrisy—and hypocrisy strips speech of sincerity and credibility.

5.The Tongue as an Instrument of Construction

If the tongue is capable of destroying a home with a single word, it is likewise capable of building one with a single word. A wholesome word is not merely pleasant speech—it is a seed planted in the heart, growing into harmony and mercy and repairing what has fractured in human relationships. Sūrat al-Mujādilah, which opens with the complaint of a wife wounded by a hurtful utterance that threatened her family life, also presents—within its verses—examples of truthful speech, righteous private counsel, and constructive dialogue, emphasizing that reform begins with the tongue just as it begins with the heart.

Just as the surah begins by presenting destructive speech that can tear a household apart, it also provides glimpses of constructive speech capable of restoring affection and rebuilding trust. The same tongue that may ignite conflict can, when guided by truth and sincerity, become a tool of reconciliation.

The first scene of constructive speech is the story of Khawla bint Thaʿlabah (may God be pleased with her). God says: *"God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who argues with you concerning her husband and complains to God; and God hears your mutual discussion."* (al-Mujādilah 1)

This demonstrates that God honors His servants by hearing their pleas and dialogues when they are grounded in sincerity and propriety. Al-Qushayrī comments that because Khawla presented her plea truthfully before God—despairing of any relief except from Him—God revealed concerning her: *"God has indeed heard…"* She poured out her distress before Him, and God responded by granting her relief and transforming her complaint into a lasting concession for the Muslim community regarding the issue of ẓihār.[33]

Al-Ālūsī interprets God's "hearing" here as a metaphor for divine acceptance and response, indicating the removal of hardship. The particle *qad* signifies certainty or expectation—referring to the expected divine intervention to resolve her distress. The Prophet ﷺ anticipated a revelation providing a ruling that would bring relief to the disputing woman, and reports indicate he awaited this outcome.[34]

The *ḥiwār* (dialogue) between Khawla and the Prophet was not a blameworthy dispute but a legitimate pursuit of justice. It teaches the community that presenting grievances through courteous speech is a means of reform. Here, speech transformed from an instrument of harm (ẓihār) into an instrument of legal and social reform, establishing principles of family justice. Al-Baghawī explains: "She argues with you, contends with you, and consults you about her husband, and she complains to God; and God hears your mutual discussion…"—

underscoring that God hears her earnest supplication and sees the injustice done to her, and then condemns the practice of ẓihār. [35]

A second constructive example appears in the Qur'anic guidance toward *righteous* private counsel: *"When you converse privately, do not converse in sin and transgression… but rather converse in righteousness and piety."* (al-Mujādilah 9)

This verse places a moral criterion upon concealed speech: it must serve goodness, not harm. Private counsel used for charity, kindness, or reconciliation is among the greatest virtuous deeds, for it protects relationships from fragmentation and restores bonds of affection. In this context, concealed speech becomes a means of healing, not deepening divisions. Al-Qushayrī notes that sinful *najwā* is condemned because it corrupts relationships, whereas the best deeds are those that restore harmony; the former leads to discord and the latter to reconciliation.[36]

Another manifestation of constructive speech appears in the noble supplication: *"And those who came after them say: 'Our Lord, forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in faith, and place not in our hearts any resentment toward those who believe. Our Lord, You are compassionate and merciful.'"* (al-Ḥashr 10)

This supplication prepares the *inner soil* for genuine brotherhood by cleansing the heart of spite. God praises those who come after the earliest believers for following the creed of the Companions and adhering to the principles of faith upheld by Ahl al-Sunnah. Their words confess human shortcomings, express mutual forgiveness, and strive to purge hearts of malice toward fellow believers. Their supplication implies love, sincerity, and the desire that one's brother receives what one desires for oneself.[37]

This verse outlines a moral and social right among believers—culminating in God's names *Ra'ūf* and *Raḥīm*, which signify divine compassion in guiding them to fulfill their duties toward God and one another.[38]

The surah then offers a practical example of constructive speech through the etiquette of gatherings. God says: *"O you who believe, when it is said to you, 'Make room in assemblies,' then make room; God will make room for you."* (al-Mujādilah 11)

Exegetes state that this teaches believers that even simple courteous expressions—such as "Please come forward" or "Make space"—build mutual respect and reflect humility and good character. Such verbal courtesy becomes an act of worship when it preserves the dignity of others and fosters love. Al-Qushayrī remarks that God, out of His mercy, taught the believers refined manners in everyday matters—making space in gatherings and maintaining order—after they had already fulfilled the core obligations of the religion.[39]

Through these Qur'anic scenes, it becomes evident that the tongue in Sūrat al-Mujādilah is not merely an instrument of expression, but a tool for shaping a cohesive social reality. Conscious speech—like Khawla's plea—can turn suffering into reform; righteous private counsel can extinguish conflict; courteous speech in gatherings can cultivate affection and brotherhood. Just as the surah warns against destructive speech, it lays down principles for constructive speech, affirming that wholesome words are complete only when joined with sincerity and righteous action—echoing God's statement: *"Unto Him ascends good speech, and righteous action lifts it up."* (Fāṭir 10)

6.The Reformative Educational Method in Sūrat al-Mujādilah

This surah lays the foundation for a comprehensive educational method whose purpose is to discipline the tongue so that it becomes a tool of construction rather than destruction—through cultivating ethical values, strengthening refined dialogue, and upholding respect for the dignity and emotions of others.

To achieve this aim, the Qur'an accords the spiritual dimension priority even above the legal one. This can be outlined as follows:

6.1 Deepening awareness of divine oversight:

God hears every word uttered. This awareness is strengthened in the heart through repeated invocation of the Divine Names connected to knowledge, hearing, and sight—names that recur in the surah: *"God hears your mutual discussion; indeed, God is Hearing and Seeing."* (al-Mujādilah 1)

Constant remembrance of the record in which every deed is preserved reinforces accountability. Ibn al-Jawzī writes: "A word, a glance, a vile thought, and an evil idea—all are recorded in a Book that counts even an atom. Sinners remain intoxicated with heedlessness, yet reap the fruits of what their hands have sown: *'God has enumerated it, while they forgot it.'*" (al-Mujādilah 6)[40].

6.2 Inculcating aversion to harmful speech:

From childhood, one must be trained to find reprehensible speech distasteful and to recognize shameful words. God says: *"Indeed, they utter an objectionable and false word."* (al-Mujādilah 2)

6.3 Instilling fear of God and reverence for His limits:

These limits include prohibitions against hostile debate, sinful private counsel, lies, and other forms of transgression:

"These are the limits set by God, and for the disbelievers there is a painful punishment." (al-Mujādilah 4)

6.4 Encouraging continual repentance and practical expiation:

Controlling the tongue is difficult; humans inevitably slip. Therefore, repentance must be accompanied by corrective action—such as fasting or charity—which helps discipline the soul and restore proper control over speech. This practical moral training is central to re-forming one's inner character.

6.5 Constant remembrance of the Day of Gathering:

Belief in the Day of Judgment strengthens piety—a virtue that beautifies one's speech and conduct in gatherings and social interactions.

6.6 Remembering divine favor and generosity:

Two divine promises are especially important for restraining the tongue during moments of tightness or irritation in gatherings: *"God will make room for you"* and *"God will raise those who believe among you."*

Both appear in His saying: *"O you who believe, when you are told, 'Make room in your assemblies,' then make room—God will make room for you. And when you are told, 'Rise,' then rise. God will raise those who believe among you and those given knowledge in degrees…"* (al-Mujādilah 11)

7. Conclusion:

From the foregoing analysis, it becomes clear that speech is not a mere tool of communication but an act with profound consequences for social and family relationships.

Ẓihār exemplifies destructive speech through which a man illegitimately exerts authority over his wife. God condemned it and prohibited it, emphasizing that addressing ẓihār requires correcting the utterance itself—not only the act—thus highlighting the central role of the tongue in constructing family life.

Sinful *najwā*, when based on wrongdoing, spreads suspicion and instability within both the community and the household.

Conversely, wholesome speech strengthens affection and mercy between spouses and reflects good companionship.

Sūrat al-Mujādilah thus stands as a practical model of the Qur'an's balanced discourse in regulating relationships and training the tongue.

Recommendations:

• The necessity of integrating the topic of "the etiquette of speech and discipline of the tongue" into family and religious education programs.

• Emphasizing in religious discourse that the family is not built upon contracts alone but upon truthful, responsible speech.

• Promoting a culture of transparency and dialogue instead of harmful secretive communication within the family.

• Encouraging researchers to expand studies on the impact of speech in the Qur'an across all domains of human relationships.

• Highlighting influential female figures such as Khawla bint Thaʿlabah to demonstrate the power of truthful speech in confronting injustice within the family system.

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