

ANGER AND DEJECTION--AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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When God created human beings, He created many emotions and desires within him, which we call human instincts. These include positive qualities such as recognizing truth and expressing it, love and compassion, pure physiological desires such as being thirsty, hungry and in need of sex.

Then there are some negative qualities such as hate and anger, with resultant violence and dejection. The angels who were the witnesses to Adam's creation knew about some of the negative qualities of man and questioned the creation of this new being who was to create "mischief on earth." (Quran 2:30)

However, at the same time, the Creator also instilled some protective mechanisms for fighting these negative instincts.

"Man was created weak," says the Quran. During the moment of weakness, we succumb to the designs of our enemy, that is, the devil, who "will attack us from front, from behind, from the side," in order to divert us from God consciousness and return to our true animistic nature. Thus anger by itself is not unnatural; it is the expression of anger which if done wrongfully, can lead to problems. The difference between the wild beasts and wild humans is the difference of free will.

When a lion or a wolf is angry, he does not think. When a man becomes angry as a result of provocation, he has a choice to control his anger or to respond to it as he has been taught by the teachings of prophets and saints, or forget all that and become a wild animal. Thus anger takes place when we are not in control of ourselves, but the devil is controlling us.

Anger is a destabilizing thought. It is the most dividing emotion between friends; it takes away judgment, leads to depression, madness and wrong actions that we would repent later on when we are not angry. But why do we get angry to begin with? It is either an unexpected provocation or unexpected situation which leads to frustration and an angry response.

During anger, one can physically or verbally abuse a person that he or she loves, hurt another living being like an animal, or during the dejection phase of anger, one can even hurt him- or herself and even commit suicide.

When anger is directed toward a group of people, then it can manifest in terrorism, whether against people of other faiths or nations, or against even one's own government as is seen in the case of the Oklahoma City bombing. However, all

anger is not of satanic origin. How can we blame Satan for a child who is angry because he does not get his toy or when he is hungry ?

The point I am making is that the natural fulfillment of normal desires, whether in terms of food or sex, is a prerequisite for prevention of anger. There are many chemicals and hormones which affect our moods and behavior. It is well known that hypoglycemia and hyperthyroidism precipitate irritability and anger. We must keep our hormones in balance in addition to facilitate our spiritual well-being.

Prophet Mohammed (Pbuh), who was sent to mankind to teach them good moral conduct, learned to control his anger toward the Unbelievers and teach them appropriate expressions. He constantly spoke against being angry. One companion asked him, Give me some short advice by virtue of which I hope for good in the life hereafter, and he said, "Don't be angry." Another person asked, what will save me from the wrath of God, and he said, "Do not express your anger." A third person asked three times, O Prophet of God, give me an order to do a short good deed, and he said, "Don't be angry." Once he asked a question of his companion, "Who among you do you consider a strong man?" They said, the one who can defeat so-and-so wrestler in a fight, and he said, that is not so. The one who is strong is the one who can control himself at the time of anger. He also said that anger is like fire, which destroys you from within, and it can also lead you to the fire of hell by your own expressions of anger unjustly.

Being angry is like being drunk. In both cases, we do not know what we are doing, hurting ourselves or someone else, and afterwards when the intoxication is over, we repent. Caliph Omar used to say, the one with all its goodn anger gets salvation. Shiekh Hassan Basri said that one of the signs of the Believers is that his anger will not prevail over him.

Anger should be distinguished between the natural response to wrongdoing and disbelief.

A person who has no feelings about oppression, wrongdoing and disbelief is, in fact, an impotent person emotionally. It has been said, "Evil flourishes when a few good people do not do anything to oppose it." Thus response to injustice and operation in a civilized way is the appropriate expression of anger. Being neutral to injustice is equal to contributing to injustice. Sometimes taking arms in order to fight the oppression and injustice, in defense or in off is the basis of "the just war." However, this "just war" is not justified on a personal level.

Caliph Ali was once fighting in a war imposed on Muslims, and the chief of the Unbelievers confronted him. During the fight, the Ali was able to overcome him, who fell down on the ground and Ali was about to kill him. This person, knowing

his fate now, had no choice so he spit on the face of Ali. Ali immediately got up and left him alone. The man came running to him and asked, "You had a chance to kill me since I was defeated; how come you didn't use your sword?" Ali said, "I have no personal animosity toward you. I was fighting you because of your disbelief, on behalf of God. If I had killed you after you spat on my face, then it would have become my personal revenge which I do not wish to take." That Unbeliever chief became a Muslim immediately.

When Prophet Mohammed (Pbuh) became angry at someone else's wrong actions or disbeliefs, he never expressed it with his hand or tongue. His companions knew that he was angry by looking at his face, which would be red and with some sweat on his forehead, and he would keep quiet for a moment, trying to control himself.

What happens to us physiologically when we are angry? Our heart rate and blood pressure go up; this is a direct effect of excessive adrenalin in our system. Our physical strength increases although spiritual strength decreases. Our intellect or power to reason goes away, and things we would not justify in a normal state become acceptable. The organs of our body which are otherwise under our control, become out of control. Thus, our tongues become abusive, and we would say words which would hurt someone else. Our hands are out of control, and we will hit someone or sometimes ourselves. Our feet are out of control, and we might kick some one whether a human, an animal or sometimes a broken machine.

How do we control anger? Contrary to other teaching, I believe that to root out anger is impossible and unnatural, and may even be harmful. A person who does not control or redirect the expression of anger may have built up anger within himself, which may hurt him physically. Apart from being depressed and having a feeling of dejection, during the phase of unexpressed anger, his constant, rapid heart rate and high blood pressure may harm his heart and even lead to a heart attack over the long run. Apart from being violent, during the phase of anger since his mind does not work, he may make a wrong decision about his job or personal relationship which will affect his future.

Medicine for Anger

The first preventive medicine is to avoid being too sensitive to provocation and become "deaf, dumb and mute." It may be necessary for some people to engage in something else to divert themselves. For saints, it may be advisable to engage in remembrance of God or meditation, but for common folk, they need some worldly tools. A couple went to Prophet Mohammed and said, We have been fighting each other for many years. Each time she says something to hurt my feelings, I become angry, and then I fight back and this fight comes to such a degree that I am afraid that this verbal fight may, become physical, or we may end up divorced. So please

advise how we can control our anger. He told the husband that when your wife provokes you and makes you angry, take a sip of your water in your mouth and do not swallow it or spit it out, but keep it there until she has calmed down. Well, he practiced that and a few months later, he reported back that it did work.

Since we believe that anger is an expression of satanic control, we must not let this control take over. The Prophet had advised us to say, "During anger, I seek refuge from lead to problemrotection of God." He also advised us that when angry, one should sit down or lie down as it is not easy to hit someone else in those positions. Obviously, the best remedy is to think about God and "ask yourself a question, "are you in control of yourself, or would you allow God to take control of you?" Think of God's anger and punishment. Is God's wrath less than your wrath? And what happens when He expresses His wrath? We humans who seek forgiveness from God must forgive others first. When one forgive someone else, it establishes peace and tranquility in one's heart, but at the same time, the matter of injustice or wrong actions which made one angry, become a dispute between him and God; and if one do not take revenge and forgive, God might act on ones behalf.

The first attribute of God/Allah that we Muslims are reminded (of) is Ar Rahman-Ar Rahim that is, Kind and Merciful. God Himself said, my mercy overtakes my wrath, and He told in one of the hadith qudsi , 'O son of Adam, when you get angry, remember Me." Thus, remembrance of God and meditation will keep us on the right track. One of the meditation words is ya Halim, which is one of the attributes of God, being the Mild One. One can also pray to God to take control of the situation and the person or the people who have caused His anger. We must also think that tone life so dear to us, is a temporary life, and we must not forget our death and destroy the life of eternity at the cost of this life. Washing one's face with cold water or taking a cold shower is also helpful.

Thus it is important for one to redirect the energy in engaging in something else. However, the height of sainthood is to do the opposite of the provoking person expects one to do. If he expects you to rebuke him or verbally abuse him back, then one should tell him, I love you, and mention his good qualities. If he expects one to physically attack him, then one embraces him and forgives him.

That is how the saying, "turn the other cheek" came about. One will become a calm person when he makes peace with himself, his Creator and his surroundings. Anger is a costly weed; it costs one his health, life in this world, and the life in the Hereafter.

This weed must be rooted out to allow the healthy plant of righteousness, piety and service to God and His creation nurture and grow.

Dejection

Dejection is a state of sad thought, depression and a feeling of being worthless. This could be a result of anger with self or someone else, unexpressed anger, failure and frustration. Dejection is a deadly disease which can harm the body acutely or on a chronic basis. and can irreversibly destroy one's relationships. It is during this state of dejection that people have suicidal thoughts and sometimes actions. During anger, however, a person tries to manifest his verbal and physical strengthening dejection, he completely gives up, thinking he is no good. Dejection slowly builds up while anger is a more acute manifestation, which is like a moth which slowly eats away the human spirit and body.

Dejection can be the result of losses, financial or of a dear one, or even failure in work, education and business. Many times terminally ill patients, without any hope of getting better, would also be dejected.

Sometimes dejection or depression is due to a chemical imbalance just like anger, whether it is a psychotropic condition with depletion of brain amines, epinephrine, nor epinephrine and dopamine, or hormonal imbalance like hypothyroidism and Addison's disease. Therefore, in all cases of depression, when a physician sees them, he does and he must evaluate them for a treatable organic cause.

The way to fight dejection again is a mind-control phenomenon. We must realize that we are not in control of our destiny. Certain failures and adversity have been designed to teach us certain lessons. We must know that someone else is in control of our past, present and future. This is what believer in God is what Caliph Ali once said, that "what makes me a believer in God is the fact that I realize that after doing everything humanly possible to make certain things go right, it goes wrong unexpectedly, making me believe that someone else was in control of that situation, not me."

When we give good advice to our teenaged children, encouraging them to do good and avoiding something wrong and they don't listen, as a result they get into trouble. It is human to be sad, but it is unnecessary to be dejected, thinking that I am not a good parent. We will be questioned for things we can do that we must do, but we will not be questioned on things that are beyond our control.

The remedy for dejection is hope. God made hopelessness unlawful by saying, "Do not despair of God's mercy." Thus, no matter at what level of despair, depression and frustration we are, whether loss of a loved one or a job, or as the result of anger from someone else, we must not give up hope as there is a ray of hope at the end of the tunnel. The greatest hope is mercy from God.

Thus, whoever has lost worldly possessions, expects and hopes that God will replace his losses in a better way. The person who has lost a dear one hopes to see that dear one in the life hereafter.

Hope is the medicine which keeps one alive and going, which is when we say, hang on, we mean hang onto the thread of hope. It is not unnatural to be sad over situations and events. Even Prophet Mohammed (Pbuh) used to be sad, looking at the plight of Unbelievers and their rejection of his message for oneness of God, and not becoming Muslims. And God reminded him by saying, "It is not your duty to make them Muslims, but just proclaim the truth, and God gives guidance to those whom He wishes."

During dejection, there is darkness, but in hope, there is light. Therefore, one must pray for this light to illuminate the heart so that we can see beyond what is causing the suffering today. If I knew that I would not see tomorrow, I might get depressed, but the fact that I hope I will see tomorrow with all its goodness, the love of my family, my friends, dear ones, the flowers, the music, that I go to sleep in peace, turning myself to God. We must pray for God's mercy and forgiveness so that we can love and forgive ourselves and God's other creations and have peace with ourselves, our Creator and our surroundings.

We Muslims believe that all our suffering, failures and adversities are nothing but a test from God, who has said that "You will not enter Paradise until you are tested." He has also said, "Be sure we will test you with something of fear and hunger, a small loss in wealth and lives and the fruits (of your labors), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, when afflicted with calamities, to God we belong and to Him shall we return." (Chapter 2:15, 5-157).