



Anger – The Road to Evil

Perfecting One's Manners as a Muslim

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Fiqh of Hadith 1

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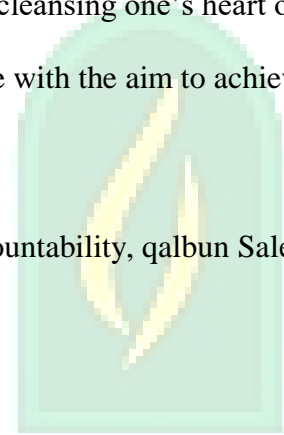
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Abstract

Ja’far ibn Muhammad said, “Anger is the key to every evil.” Someone said to Ibn al-Mubarak, “Bring together good character for us in one phrase.” He said, “Giving up anger.” [1] This paper reflects on how one assumes that anger is a part of one’s nature, that cannot be changed, whereas there is much guidance in the Qur’an and Sunnah on how to refrain from it and hence save oneself from much evil. Understanding the definition of anger as given by prophet (saw) and other scholars, the fact that the origin of anger lies in the heart, learning about the diseases of the heart that bring about anger, one can conclude that it is something that can be repelled. This paper reflects on the harms of anger, the negative outcomes of anger, and the ways and means that are outlined in the Qur’an and Sunnah that can be instrumental in cleansing one’s heart of this disease and hence refraining from the road leading to evil, all done with the aim to achieve success in the hereafter.

Keywords: anger, evil, diseases of the heart, manners, self-accountability, qalbun Saleem

Mishkâh



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This paper discusses the various definitions, causes, effects and outcomes of anger, as well as different remedies for controlling anger in the light of hadith # 16 of Imam An-Nawawi’s 40 Hadith Collection.

The Arabic Text

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ رَجُلًا قَالَ لِلنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَوْصِنِي، قَالَ: لَا تَغْضَبْ. فَرَدَّدَ مِرَارًا؛ قَالَ: لَا تَغْضَبْ - رَوَاهُ الْبُخَارِيُّ.

English Translation

On the authority of Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him): A man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and said, “Advise me.” He [the Prophet (peace be upon him)] said, “Do not become angry.” The man repeated [his request] several times and he [the Prophet (peace be upon him)] said, “Do not become angry.”

Recorded by al-Bukhari. [2]

About the Narrator: Abu Huraira

Abu Huraira (d. 59 A. H.) (Abdul Rahmaan ibn Sakhr ibn al-Dausi), was a famous companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) who was born about 18 years before the Hijrah. He embraced Islam in 7 A. H. and constantly kept the company of the Messenger of Allah (saw) after embracing Islam. He lived in the Prophet’s mosque as one of the people known as ahl al-Suffa.

He related more hadith than any other companion (5374). The Prophet (saw) guided him to an act that would keep him from ever forgetting a hadith again. At night, along with the late-night prayer, he would also study hadith. He was also known to be very cautious when it came to narrating hadith. He was well known for his piety and he did not involve himself in the political strife of his time. He was the governor of Bahrain for some time under Umar ibn al-Khattaab. [3]

Background of the Hadith

This man recognized not only that the Prophet (saw) was the messenger of Allah, but that he was the best person to seek advice from. This shows us that the people used to come to the Prophet (saw) whenever they needed advice, even in personal issues. This time the Prophet’s advice to this man was, “Don’t get angry.” Some scholars say that the Prophet (saw) knew that this man specifically had a problem in controlling anger, hence he gave this advice. However, this view may lead to narrowing the benefit of the hadith to just one individual. Because almost everyone struggles with anger at some time or another in their lives, and so this comprehensive and far-reaching advice should be applied to everyone. [4] In fact, in the narration it is clear that the person himself did not realize how comprehensive and far-reaching this advice is. For that reason, he kept asking the Prophet (saw) to advise him some more, as if what he stated was not enough. He was looking for more. Had he pondered the implications of what the Prophet (saw) had told him, he would have realized that the Prophet (saw) gave him a very comprehensive and important advice.

Comprehensiveness of This Advice

The comprehensiveness of this hadith can be proved by the fact that Ibn Rajab, one of the commentators of Imam Nawawi’s Forty Hadith, mentioned that this hadith is a foundation of

manners, behavior and etiquette in Islam. Ibn Rajab also quotes Imam Ibn Abi Zayd Al-Qairawani, the famous Maliki scholar, who mentions that there are 4 hadith that are the foundation of good character. If a person implements these 4 hadith, then he will have the foundation and the ‘asl of good character, because all of the good character can be found in these 4 hadith. The first hadith is, “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good things or keep silent..”. The second is, “Part of the perfection of a person’s islam is his leaving that which is of no concern to him.” The third is, “None of you [truly] believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” And the forth is, “لا تغضب” “Do not become angry”. This fourth hadith is very short, yet very comprehensive. [5] Al-Haitami says that one cannot count the amount of good this advice can bring about and the amount of evil that this advice can prevent.[6]

Interpretations of the advice – Do not Become Angry

Scholars have given three interpretations of this hadith. The first view is that the prophet (saw) is ordering that person to follow those means that will keep the person from getting angry. The second view is that one should not act based on one’s anger or one should not act while angry. The third view is a much more literal understanding of the advice, given by Al-Baitaar. He says that when a person is about to get angry, he must remain patient, control himself, calm himself down, not get angry and handle the matter with wisdom. [7]

Definitions of Anger

The opposite of **تغضب** (anger) is **رضا** (to be pleased), and so pleasure is the opposite of anger. Imam Raghīb says, “It’s a burst of fury in the heart with the intention of seeking revenge.” Allama Thanwi says, “Anger is a stirring within the heart and the beginning of it is to seek revenge.” Imam al-Ghazali says, “Ghadhab is the boiling of the blood in the heart with the

intention of seeking revenge.” [8] All these definitions have two things in common; firstly, the venue of anger is the heart and secondly, the intention is to seek revenge. Let’s analyze both these points one by one.

Anger Originates from within The Heart

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, anger is defined as a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism. [9] The venue of all feelings is the heart, and so is that of anger. As we find in a hadith of Abu Sa’id al-Khudri, narrated by Imam Ahmad and at-Tirmidhi that the Prophet (saw) said in his khutbah, “Certainly anger is a burning coal in the son of Adam’s heart. Have you not seen the redness of his eyes and the swelling of his jugular veins? Whoever experiences anything of that, then let him cling to the earth.” [10]

Causes of Anger

In general, the causes of anger have to do with the diseases of the heart. A person is afflicted with anger often when he possesses certain traits that are forbidden or discouraged in Islam. Pride, arrogance, stubbornness, envy, jealousy, joking around, mutual ridiculing, competition over wealth and authority in this world, refusal to submit to the truth are some of the common causes that needlessly lead people to get angry and upset. Hence getting angry often may be a sign that one’s heart is diseased and one’s Emaan is not in the state that it should be in. [11]

Outcome (Harms) of Anger

The harms of anger can be understood in physical, spiritual and practical terms. Scholars say that anger is from the effects of shaytan and when shaytan afflicts anger on a person, he takes the person out of balance, in their character and in their physical features. Their face and eyes turn red and their veins begin to bulge. Allama Ibn Hajar says, “For if an angered person was to take

a picture of himself, and then later on when he is not angry, he would look at his angry picture, he would feel ashamed of looking at his own face.”

One of the outcomes of anger is to seek revenge, and an angry person attempts to do this with his words and his actions. Many forbidden acts originate from that such as damaging someone’s property, homicide, violence, divorcing one’s wife out of anger. Many types of speech that are forbidden like slander, cursing, obscenity, supplicating against oneself are all examples of this. There is in Sahih Muslim that Jabir said, “We travelled with the messenger of Allah on a military expedition. An Ansari man was on his water carrying camel and it became slightly directionless and so he said to it, ‘Move! May Allah curse you!’ The messenger of Allah said, ‘Get down off it, and do not accompany us upon something which has been cursed. Do not supplicate against yourselves, do not supplicate against your children, do not supplicate against your own property [so that you] do not come into accord with a moment in which Allah is asked for something and He responds.” This is what Allah means when he says, “If Allah were to hasten evil for people the way they try to hasten good, their term would already be completed for them.” [Yunus:11] This shows that while not every supplication of that kind is answered, but it may be answered if it coincides with the moment when supplications are answered. [12]

Lastly, the spiritual harms of anger that may lead one to transgress against himself and sometimes even lead to the degree of Kufr, as happened to Jabalah ibn al-Ayham. He was a king who had become Muslim at the time of the Prophet (saw). Then during the caliphate of Omar, a man stepped on his robe during tawaf and Jabalah slapped him. Omar gave the man the option of letting the matter rest or of taking retaliation by slapping him back. The man chose to slap him back. When Jabalah protested that he was a king, Omar said, “You are both the same in Islam.” Jabalah became so enraged by this that he left Islam and became a Christian. [13] It has been

narrated by the prophet (saw) that, He told the story of two men of those who had been before us. One of them had been a worshipper and the other had transgressed against himself. The worshipper used to warn him, but he would not stop. One day he saw him doing a wrong action which he thought was tremendously serious and he said, ‘By Allah! Allah will not forgive you!’ and Allah forgave the wrongdoer and rendered the work of the worshipper void.” [Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawud] This man became angry for the sake of Allah, but then in his anger for the sake of Allah said that which is not permissible, and he made an absolute declaration about Allah of which he did not have knowledge, and so Allah rendered his actions void. [14]

Types of Anger: Praiseworthy and Blameworthy

There are two main types of anger, the blameworthy and the praiseworthy anger. Blameworthy anger is the one in which people get angry over the pettiest matters for which there is no call for a Muslim to get angry about. However, the praiseworthy anger is for reasons that are sanctioned by Shariah. Allah says in the Qur’an, “O Prophet, strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be harsh with them. Their abode is the Hell-Fire and worst indeed is that destination.” [15] This praiseworthy anger is the anger that is for the sake of Allah. This is the anger that comes about when Allah's teachings are ignored or treated with disdain. In fact, if a person has true belief, he must demonstrate this anger. It is inconceivable that a person could witness the words of Allah being ignored, sometimes even ridiculed, and he feels nothing inside. This would once again truly be a sign of a diseased heart. There is a hadith in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) told Abu Dharr that the strongest bond of faith is, “Having loyalty for the sake of Allah, disassociating from others for the sake of Allah, love for the sake of Allah and hatred for the sake of Allah.” [16] This was the state of the prophet (saw) that he would not take

revenge for his own sake. However, if the sacred things of Allah were violated, nothing could stand up to his anger.

Valuable Lessons from the life of Prophet (saw) and his Companions

Anas (ra) says, I served the Prophet (saw) for ten years, and he never said to me, "Uf" (a minor harsh word denoting impatience) and never blamed me by saying, "Why did you do so or why didn't you do so?" [17] However when someone complained to him about the imam who lengthened his prayer for people so much that some of them wanted to hold back from prayer with him, he became extremely angry, and he admonished people and told them to lighten the prayer. [18] And, same was the state of his companions.

We find that once Ali (ra) in the battlefield had overpowered his foes and when he was about to cut off the head of his victim, the desperate man spat on his face. Ali spared his life and released him, saying that if he had killed the man then, his motive will not remain purely for the sake of Allah but due to personal anger. After that Ali ran away from the man that he had just overpowered, afraid that he would be influenced by his personal anger and act upon it. [19] So he started with praiseworthy anger and let the man free, for fear of getting involved in blameworthy anger.

Prophet (saw) said, "The strong person is not the one who is strong in wrestling. But the strong person is the one who is able to restrain himself when he is angry." [Bukhari and Muslim] Once he distributed some wealth and a person said, "This distribution was not done for the sake of Allah," the Prophet's face became red but he (saw) simply said, "May Allah have mercy on Moses. Verily, he was harmed by more than this and he remained patient." [Bukhari]

Subhan'Allah a beautiful manifestation of controlling anger. He (saw) instead of pointing out

this person’s false accusation, reminds himself of the hardships of Musa (as) and how he was patient in those times of hardship.

Treatment of Anger

Treatment of anger can be discussed in three steps, firstly, how to prevent anger, secondly, how to control anger once it sets in, and finally how to reflect and reconcile afterwards. The presumption given by some people that anger is something natural and cannot be prevented is not true. In the same way that a believer must think before he speaks, he must also think before he acts – and getting angry is one of his acts. If he realizes his position and worth on this earth, remembers Allah and thinks about the hereafter, he will not get angry at all. Allah SWT says, *يَا بِيْذِكْرِ اللّٰهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوْبُ* so the remembrance of Allah brings peace to his heart and hence prevents anger. Purifying oneself from the diseases of the heart is also a way of preventing anger. Developing humility, forbearance, modesty, seeking good company and realizing the temporary nature of this world are things that help cure the diseases of the heart, hence preventing anger. Lastly developing the attribute of forgiveness. Allah says, “And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous. Who spend during ease and hardship and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good.” [20]

Prophet (saw) has also guided us on how to control our anger once it sets in. Seeking refuge with Allah SWT. There is in the two sahih books from Sulayman ibn Surad that he said, “Two men abused each other in the presence of the Prophet (saw) while we were sitting with him. One of them would abuse the other [being] so enraged that his face had reddened. So, the Prophet (saw) said, ‘I know a phrase – if he said it – what he experiences of anger would leave him; if he were to say; “I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed shaytan.” [21] Prophet’s (saw) advice to the

one who gets angry used to be, “If one of you gets angry, he should be silent.” [22] Imam Ahmad and Abu Dawud narrated in a hadith from Abu Dharr that prophet (saw) said, “When one of you becomes angry while standing, he should sit down. If the anger leaves him, well and good; otherwise he should lie down.” [23] Reason is that the one who is lying down is the furthest from being able to retaliate. This shows that an angry person will be held responsible for his words and deeds. Prophet (saw) gave another remedy of anger in one of his hadith, “Verily anger is from shaytan, and surely shaytan was created from fire. And only water puts out fire. Therefore, if one of you gets angry, he should make ablution.” [24]

Finally, reconciliation, and the first step towards reconciliation is to reflect on oneself and to do self-accountability, seeking forgiveness from Allah SWT. Repair any wrong that you have done – apologize if possible. Make dua for the person you have wronged. Prophet (saw) used to make dua, "O Allah! If I should ever abuse a believer, please let that be a means of bringing him near to You on the Day of Resurrection." [25] In addition to that give sadaqah on their behalf. Lastly, if you feel that the anger keeps coming back, there is no harm in seeking professional counseling for anger management. It is very possible that Allah will give you the ability to defeat anger and to purify your heart.

Conclusion

In conclusion anger is something that one needs to overcome in order to avoid indulging into evil acts and also to perfect one’s manners as a Muslim. This can be best done by checking the state of one’s heart and gaining the knowledge of the Deen of Allah SWT. The orders and the attributes of Allah SWT play an instrumental role in this regard. This knowledge enables one to strive for what is pleasing to Allah and refrain from what is displeasing to Him SWT. Prophet (saw) said, “There is no act of swallowing more beloved to Allah than swallowing the rage that a

slave suppresses. A slave does not suppress [rage] for the sake of Allah but that Allah fills his heart with Emaan.” [26] Subhan’Allah is there anything else that one could wish for. May Allah SWT grant us the ability to cleanse our hearts from this disease and to meet Him SWT on the day of resurrection with the Qalbun Saleem, Ameen.



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