

Managing Anger in Islam

Anger is such a destructive energy that commonly ruins relationships and leads to animosity between people. To the point that a man asked prophet Muhammad (PBUH) many times to give him an advice and prophet Muhammad (PUBH) kept saying “do not get angry” (Bukhari).

Yes there are times when anger is needed and that are when the orders of Allah SWT are disobeyed grossly. When Allah SWT told Musa (PUBH) that his people worshiped the calf, “Musa went back angry and disappointed”.

Anger is a natural human feeling but it is what we do when we become angry as well as the reason we are angry is the issue. Allah SWT says in Surah Al-Shura (in translation) praising the believers:

“And when they get angry, they forgive”.

Forms of Anger

1. Outward Anger

This is the easiest one to spot as it is accompanied by raising ones voice (sometimes even yelling and screaming), use of negative and hurtful language, and may be even physical altercation.

One only has to remember the words of Allah SWT in Surah Luqman (in translation) to be turned off loud, screaming angry yelling:

“Lower your voice. Indeed the worst sounds are those of the donkeys”.

This type of anger is generally accompanied by loss of logic and ones’ ability to disseminate and analyze information correctly. It may even leads to saying things that are unacceptable in the strongest Islamic terms. Allah SWT says in Surah Al Baqarah (in translation):

“And when he is told to fear Allah, [his] ego takes him into sin”.

In a Hadith narrated by Bukhari that two men argued in front of the prophet (PBUH). One of the men’s face became red and prophet Muhamad (PBUH) said “I know a word that if “that man” said it, his anger will go away:

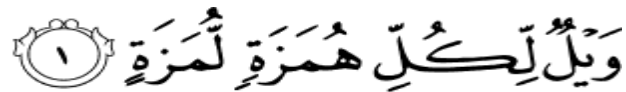
“أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ”

When the man was told of the prophet (PBUH) said, his response was: “I am not crazy”.

2. Passive-Aggressive Behavior

This is, in my opinion, is more destructive than outwardly anger as it lasts years and the cycle continues to feed itself.

Rather than confronting the unpleasant issue with the affected person, the passive-aggressive person finds way to retaliate and antagonize the other person whenever the chance presents itself. This manifests itself by saying hurtful words but in a joking manner, making off yet derogatory remarks in the presence of others and so on. This “zinging” of others is frowned upon Islamically. Allah SWT named a Surah “Humazah” to this type of person:



“Woe to every scorner and mocker”.

Identifying passive-aggressive behavior can be challenging. It may be a child not doing well in school being angry with her parent, a woman not doing the things she knows her husband like, a husband procrastinating in doing the house chores to upset his wife, and so on.

I am going to include two examples of passive-aggressive behavior: one that I read and one about me personally.

A story I read online of a cashier at a department store seeing a woman fumbling in her purse looking for the credit card only for the cashier to notice a TV remote control in her purse. The cashier asks the woman why she had the remote control with her and she replied:

“My husband refused to go shopping with me so I hid the remote control as that is the most “legal” evil thing I could do”.

In my own way of passive-aggressive behavior I tend to quit work or even personal relationships when I get angry (I am told this by my wife). Indeed, I had quit more than one job within a month because my boss may have something to my dislike. This bad behavior may have seeped into my personal life. This is not acceptable when dealing with Muslims as severing relationships with my fellow Muslims is not acceptable. All I need to do is remember the words of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as narrated by both Bukhari and Muslim:

“Do not hate each other, be jealous of one another, turn your backs on yourself, and do anger one another. Be brothers O Salves of Allah. It is not allowed for a Muslim to sever ties with his Muslim brother more than 3 [days]”.

3. Holding a Grudge

The worst part of anger is the one that lasts years sometimes indicating a most unforgiving nature of the person holding the grudge.

This person can easily identify this trait in him/her by noticing how they react when they see the person they are begrudging or even the mere mention of that person’s name. A bad feeling and ill will completely takes over. Allah SWT describes this behavior (in translation):

“If something good happens to you, they hate it and when something bad befalls you, they are happy with it”.

All one needs to do is to recite Surah Al-Noor where Allah SWT says to (in translation):

“Forgive and forget, do you not want Allah to forgive you”.

The story about the man forgiving people each night is too famous to tell again here.

In a Hadith narrated by Muslim prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

“The doors of heaven open up on Mondays and Thursdays. Allah will (or may) forgive those who do not associate partners with Him except a man who has an animosity toward another. Allah SWT will say [to the Angels]: wait on these two till they make up”.

Why Do We Get Angry?

There are many different reasons some are relevant to our own internal insecurities, culture and upbringing. Others deal with the actions of the person with whom we are angry. I will detail examples of both Insha Allah.

1. Our Own: Ego

This is the most common reason is that we feel slighted by someone else’s actions be it a child talking back, a person accusing us falsely or insulting us, etc.

We may think of ourselves as humble and respectful. Unfortunately, we discover our egos only when we are confronted with a hostile issue. You notice that Allah SWT says in Surah Al-Furqan (in translation):

“Slaves of Allah are those that walk on earth humbly and when they are talked to by ignorant people they say Salam (meaning peace and walking away)”.

The association between humility and tolerance in this verse of the Quran is unmistakable and undeniable.

When confronted with someone demeaning us and lobbing all kinds of accusations against us, our egos trigger such anger and such words that often have something like this:

“I am (better terms).. Who are you to... You are a ... You did this and that” and so forth.

2. Our Own: Unrealistic (or Unmet) Expectations

We often expect a lot of others especially those that are close to us. Sometimes our expectations are mixed with our own ego (see part 1) where we expect our child to be an honor student and get angry when that is not met.

Often people who have such high expectations of others do not even meet the criteria they set for others. Like the demanding parent getting angry for less than an A+ when he/she was a B or worse student themselves.

We may be perfecting ourselves and are hard-working and we may feel frustrated when others do not perform to our levels. We get angry asking why I have to work this hard when you do not perform to the same level. This type of frustration is too common in groups where responsibilities are shared but team dynamics reduces accountability.

Anas Bin Malik who served prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from the age of 10 narrates that prophet Muhammad (PBUH) never admonished for something Anas did saying “why did you do that” or something he did not do saying “why did you do that”. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on one occasion sent Anas on a chore and Anas lagged behind playing with kids. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) simply came behind him and told Anas to go where he (PBUH) sent him. Then the prophet (PBUH) sat on the street waiting for Anas to come back.

3. Our Own: Thinking the Worst in People

We may jump to conclusions and we may misinterpret something someone said or even we may hear second hand about something others may have said or done.

Please note that Allah SWT said in Surah Al-Hujurat (in translation):

“O you who have believed, avoid much [negative] assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin”

Allah also said in the same Surah (in translation):

“O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful”

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said as narrated by Muslim:

“Avoid assuming things in other as assumptions are the worst type of lying talk”.

4. External: The Actions of the Ignorant

I am going to narrate only one thing that happened to prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as an example:

Anas Bin Malik narrates (in Bukhari and Muslim) that he was walking with prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who was wearing a thick type of clothes. A man comes to prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and yanks him from his collar to the point it left a mark on the prophet’s neck. The man said” Oh, Muhammad. Give me from the money of Allah that you have. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) turned to the man then laughed and ordered that the man be given money”.

5. External: The Actions of Others trying to get us Angry

There may be those that want us to slip and say the wrong things in anger so they may do certain things to throw us off. They enjoy seeing us in a bad situation or even with our reputation ruined. They may be excellent at pushing our buttons. Yet, we must stay above the fray and not give them this satisfaction.

Another form of instigating anger is when a spouse deprived of intimacy from her spouse tries to get him/her angry simply to feel that the other person still cares. They see anger as a negative attention but attention nonetheless. It is better to them than the deafening silence or being ignored.

The Three Keys to Overcome Anger

Allah SWT gives us the solution in the Quran praising the believers (Al Umran):

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكُظُمِينَ الْغَيْظِ
وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“Who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good;”

Key #1: Suppressing (Restraining) Anger: How to Control Myself When Angry?

1. Recognize that Anger is from Shaitan (Satan)

Allah SWT says (in translation):

“Tell my slaves to say only the best as the Shaitan causes frictions among them”.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said as narrated by Muslim:

“Satan gave up hope to be worshipped by the believers in the Arabian Peninsula so he causes frictions amongst them”.

So what do we do when we recognize the work of Satan? Allah SWT says (in translation):

“If you are poked by Satan to do a bad action then seek refuge in Allah”. This is by saying:

“أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ”

Allah SWT also says (in translation):

“Those have fear of Allah (Taqwa) if they are touched by a passing thought from Satan, they remember and see clearly”.

2. Change Position or Make Wudu

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said in a Hadith narrated by Ahmad and Abo Dawood (deemed authentic):

“If one of you got angry while standing then sit down, or if sitting down then lay down. If anger does not go away then do Wudu”.

3. Know that Suppressing Anger does not Lower Your Status

On the contrary, it raises one's status in front of others to hold back the temper. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said in a Hadith narrated by both Bukhari and Muslim:

"The strong is not the one who wrestles others [and wins]. The strong is the one who controls himself in anger".

4. Know that Allah is Mightier than you if you Act on Your Anger

In a Hadith narrated in Muslim, a Sahabi (companion) named Abo Masood Al-Badri said:

"I was hitting a slave of mine and I heard a voice behind me saying: Know Abo Masood, Know Abo Masood. I did not comprehend the words as angry as I was till the voice got very close. I turned around and it was prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saying: Know Abo Masood that Allah is mightier on you than you are o this boy.

Abo Masood replied that the boy is, therefore, a free-man. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said to him that if he did not do just that then he would be touched by the hellfire".

5. Avoid Making Dua'a against Them

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a Hadith narrated by Muslim:

Do not make dua'a on yourselves, do not make dua'a against your children, and do not make dua'a on your money. Lest you find a moment that Allah answers all prayers".

Avoid making dua'a even on your enemy. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when was given an option to make dua'a against those who physically hurt him Tai'f said "Oh Allah, forgive my people as they really do not know".

6. Do Not Take Things Personally

Often someone says or does something in anger to you or in front of you but their anger is really against someone else.

Anas narrates in a Hadith in Bukhari that:

"Prophet Muhammad PBUH was in the house of Aisha (RAA) when one of his wives sent him a plate with food. Aisha (RAT) got angry and broke the dish. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gather the broken pieces and the spilled food saying: "your mother got jealous" and had Aisha give the other a woman a new dish from her".

Key #2: Forgiveness

In an Ayah we quoted above from Surah Al-Noor Allah SWT asks us to forgive and wipe the slate clean if we wish for Allah SWT to forgive us.

Forgiveness brings with it immense rewards that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said in a Hadith narrated by Ahmad and Al-Turmithi (deemed Hasan):

“Whoever suppressed his anger whilst knowing that he could [safely] act on it, Allah SWT will invite him in front of all creations to choose from the Hoor whoever he wants”.

Key #3: Generosity

Allah SWT says in the Quran (in translation):

“Push [a conflict away] by [saying or doing] the best and you will see the one with whom you have animosity becomes a very close friend.”

Generous behavior toward someone who is clearly against you is an act that few can muster. But its nobility generally has a greater impact.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) borrowed money from a Jewish man promising to pay him on a given date. The man came earlier than that date while prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was walking with Omar. The man yanked prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from his collar and shouts:

“Oh, you children of Abdul Muttalib are bad borrowers”. Omar gets angry and threatens the man and prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says to Omar:

“Oh, Omar, we both needed something better from you other than that: you should order me to pay him nicely and you order him to ask nicely”. Then prophet Muhammad (PBUH) asked Omar to give the man extra for having scared him. The Jewish man declares his Islam and that he did all that as a test as he read that prophet Muhammad (PBUH)’s patience is greater than his anger.

A Story that Illustrates All 3 Keys

A slave did something so infuriating and upsetting to his master. Upon seeing the face of the master turn red in anger and before the master could say anything, the slave quoted the first key from the Quran:

وَالْكَاظِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ

“And those that suppress their anger”. The master replied: “OK, I suppressed my anger”. The slave quotes the second part:

وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ

“And those that forgive people”. The master said” You are forgiven”. The slave, being super smart and having done this on purpose, now quotes the third key:

وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“And Allah loves those who are generous”. The master says: “In that case, I am setting you free”.