

Anger Management: A Psychotherapy Sufistic Approach

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Abstract: Anger is a natural emotion of a normal human being. It arises from the inner soul and it is usually expressed in 2 major forms: Through speech and action. Angry speech can be detected in the form of conversation such as slandering, verbal abuse, gossip and other dirty talk. Anger in action is expressed through the physical acts of violence. Feelings of anger cannot be excluded from the human soul at all. Without anger the struggle against evil will not happen. The existence of anger is very important in an individual. To the sufis it is like a hunting dog, it needs a particular command and is guided by the owner. It goes to show that the right knowledge of anger is paramount to the avoidance of its misuse. As such, the attribute of anger should be harmonized and regulated by laws of God in order to guide the soul towards divine. Anger may be regarded as a function of the defence of truth and the fight against evil. This study attempts to analyze the attribute of anger from the perspective of Islamic sufism. The thoughts of Al-Ghazali, Al-Maqdisi and Al-Sulami in relation to anger management will be studied.

Key words: Anger, Islamic sufism, Al-Gazali, Al-Maqdisi, Al-Sulami

INTRODUCTION

Anger is an emotion which emanates from the heart. A person's response to anger may be expressed in destructive behaviours such as hitting, slapping, punching, scolding, cursing and in more severe cases murder (Chamberlain, 1895). Hearts filled with anger contains resentment, feelings of envy and irritation, tendencies to grumble, gripe, complain and backbiting. The Malay Lexicon defines anger as: Flaring up furious, angry, wrath.

Al-Ghazali likens anger as a flame of fire from hell which comes from the heart. Those who are unable to control their anger behave like the devil that is created from fire because anger is a spark ignited by the devil. Thus, the ability to handle anger is a virtue in Islam (Al-Ghazzali and Abu Hamid, 1970). He quotes the hadith:

It is not the strong man because of his ability in wrestling but the strong man is one who can control his lust when angry (Malik, Al-Muwatta, No. 1409; Al-Bukhari, Sahih, no. 5649; Muslim, Sahih, No. 4722; Abu Dawud, Sunan, No. 4148).

NAFS AMMARAH AND ANGER

The term of nafs ammarah is mentioned by the Quran and it refers to the desire or base instinct (ego) that leads to evil. The prophet of Allah Joseph says, as mentioned by the Quran:

Nor do I absolve my own self; indeed, the human desire (nafs) is very prone to evil, except those who have been blessed by my Lord. Verily, my Lord is oft-forgiving, most merciful (QS, 12:53).

Anger is an emotion arising from lust ammarah which is triggered by one's psychological interpretation of having been offended or wronged (Hall, 1899). It is a disease of the inner heart. Although, it emanates from the soul, anger causes physiological changes in the body, such as an increased in heart beat and an increased in blood pressure. An angry person becomes red in the face and the body trembles. The external expressions of anger can be seen through facial expressions and aggressive and hurtful behaviours. The most severe consequence of anger is death. As the Quran says (3:119): Died with rage. This verse shows that extreme anger may lead to death.

Al-Asfahani mentions that anger is seething blood in the heart as a reaction of a perceived wrong to one's self. In fact, anger is blood boiling in the heart which is finding its release. As long as a person is angry, his anger is like a blazing fire and which makes his blood boil and spread throughout the whole body. Hence, the face and eyes become flushed. The seething blood begins to subside if anger is released and calm returns (Al-Maqdisi and Ibn Qudamah, 1978).

CAUSES OF ANGER

Anger is a natural emotion experienced by any normal human which emerges from the heart and results from a reaction towards a perceived threat. In Islam, anger can be lawful or unlawful. Lawful anger is anger which arises when religious affairs or honour are at stake. It can be positive and healthy if applied appropriately and in due proportion. For example, a person's anger is aroused when hearing or seeing evil or immoral activities or an injustice is done. This kind of anger is permitted and even required by God because it is an anger which arises from ethical virtues produced by courage. Unlawful anger is extreme, uncontrollable anger beyond the bounds of religion.

SITUATION INVOKING ANGER

Situations that trigger feelings of anger is dependent on the values upheld by a person and is controlled by the heart. An evaluation is made on the situation and a person reacts according to the way the situation is perceived. Among the situations that can cause anger to someone who obstructed needs or desires that is person whose needs or desires are obstructed may cause anger. Secondly, it is related to physical or emotional pain. Physical or emotional pain inflicted by another either by speech or acts could cause feelings of anger within an individual. Anger will induce a person to get even with that is to take revenge on the cause of the hurt. Furthermore, feeling challenged also may lead to anger. Feelings of inadequacy triggered by jealousy could create anger. A person feels challenged and threatened when faced with situations where he perceive others have what he does not have in terms of material possessions or even skills. To diffuse anger, the angry person response by trying to remove advantages possessed by his object of jealousy. Then, disagreement also played a role in anger.

Disagreement over an issue can cause anger. Uncontrolled anger results in aggressive behaviour and trading of insults. Ibn Qudamah Al-Maqdisi mentioned among the causes which may spark anger is joke, prank, animosity, betrayal, competition for wealth and rank (Al-Maqdisi and Ibn Qudamah, 1978).

ANGER MANAGEMENT

According to the sufis, basically there are 2 ways to manage anger: Knowledge and practice. Human beings consist of 2 main components. Muhammad Abdul Rauf mentions that humans are made up of 2 components: A tangible physical part; the body and an intangible part the spirit. Without this second element called soul or spirit

the individual is merely a lump of flesh, bone and blood. (Abdul Rauf, 1995). So these 2 elements must be taken into consideration in managing anger. Knowledge manages the soul while practice manages the body.

Al-Ghazzali and Abu Hamid (1970) says that the potential of anger is like a hunting dog. It needs to be trained continuously, sensibly and in accordance to the shariah. Showing of anger must always be controlled and be within the limits of religion just as a hunting dog who acts under its master's commands. Anger is controlled through mujahadah, i.e., practising forbearance humility and patience. As asserted by Abu Laith Al-Samarqandi, a faqih and sufi, a good muslim must be patient because that is the sign of the fearful. Allah praises those who are patient. He says: But indeed if any show patience and forgive (QS: 42:43) for those who look on iniquity and matters beyond the upper limits to him and forgiveness to others (Al-Samarqandi). Abd Rahman Al-Sulami, a renowned Sufi agrees with the views of Al-Samarqandi. He says:

And the way to reduce anger should be done by practicing attitude of redha and accept what is determined by God (Al-Sulami, n.d.: 96).

Feeling of anger is a natural emotion in man. Therefore, it cannot be entirely eliminated and if feelings of anger disappear in a person, he must find a way to raise it again (Al-Ghazzali and Abu Hamid, 1970). This statement shows that there are instances when anger is required but it should be correctly managed to obtain benefits and reject harm.

Ibn Qudamah Al-Maqdisi and Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali give 2 suggestions to overcome anger, i.e., knowledge and practice.

KNOWLEDGE

The angry person should think about being patient and appease his anger have an open mind have forgiveness, gentleness and self-control (Al-Maqdisi, n.d.: 180). He should not be hasty in reacting to any situations but take precautions in facing whatever circumstances including situations which trigger anger. This point be strengthened by a hadith which says:

Haste is from the devil and caution is from Allah (Al-Tirmidhi, Sunan, no. 1935).

Reminding oneself of the threat from Allah regarding anger. He reminds himself that the reign of God over me is greater than my might over these people. Therefore, if I continue to vent my anger, I will not find peace if God is angry to me on the day which I am extremely in need of his forgiveness. Reminding oneself of the dire consequences of hostility, envy and evil of others against

himself and the joy felt by his enemies in his misfortune and realising that they will face the consequences in the afterlife. Negative feeling does not lead to any good in the hereafter.

Remind oneself of the ugly face of a man feeling anger. He is no different from a wild contemptible beast or a wild raging animal. An angry man does not emulate the noble characters shown by the prophets and his followers. Therefore, he reminds himself to refrain from anger and subject his soul to emulate the noble characters of the prophets and his followers. Finally to think about the reasons that cause the anger and wanting revenge. Are the causes of anger valid and permissible by religion or does it stem from the devil? Is the anger aroused by the obligation to protect the religion as commanded by the law of sharia such as preventing evil things (Al-Maqdisi and Ibn Qudamah, 1978; Al-Ghazali and Abu Hamid, 1970).

PRACTICE

Both Al-Ghazali and Al-Maqdisi proposed several measures to be practiced to curb anger. First is to recite the ta'awwudh, I seek refuge with Allah from the satan the accursed one. This is because anger comes from the satan. Second to follow certain steps: When consumed by anger, sit down if you standing, lie down if you were sitting. Changing positions can induce calmness (Al-Ghazali and Abu Hamid, 1970). Then to take ablutions. If changing positions do not relieve anger, perform ablutions. According to the Sufis (Al-Maqdisi and Ibn Qudamah, 1978; Al-Ghazali and Abu Hamid, 1970), the hadith says:

Satan was created from fire and fire can be extinguished with water. So perform ablution when angry (Abu Dawud, Sunan, No. 4152; Musnad Ahmad, No. 17302; Al-Tabarani, No. 13881).

Also the Prophet says:

Know, therefore that the anger is the burning coals in the hearts of the son of Adam, do not you see that his eyes flushed and his blustery breath when angry? So, whoever it happened to all of you should you put your cheek to the ground (Al-Tirmidhi, Sunan, No. 2117; Musnad Ahmad, No. 11158).

Anger is often associated with arrogance. Putting one's cheek to the ground is a signal to rid oneself of arrogance because the ground is the lowest place on which the feet steps. This action reminds a person of his real identity that he was created from soil and he not entitled to feel proud (Al-Ghazali and Abu Hamid, 1970).

CONSEQUENCES OF ANGER

There are many repercussion of anger on one's self and to the community. Among them are enmity between the 2 parties, divorce between husband and wife, disputes between co-workers or friends, quarrels between brothers and sisters or in the community, conflicts between neighbours, hatred for each other, pained remarks to others, deception, spread of slander, animosity, underestimating and degrading others, as well as war and killing.

CONCLUSION

In Islamic tradition, especially in the view of sufism efforts to educate soul to manage anger is very much a concern. This is because anger is viewed as a defect of the inner self and every defect should be treated in order to secure prosperous life.

Based on the the tradition, the sufis recommend specific measures to manage anger within an individual. To be able to manage anger is a virtue. Likewise, a person who vents his anger on the things that annoy for Allah is also admirable. The Prophet says:

Anyone who restrain anger while he is capable of anger, Allah will call him on that day in front of a lot of people to be given a choice of any reward he wants (Al-Tirmidhi, Sunan, No. 1944).

Also the Prophet says:

Anyone who restrain anger and if he wishes, he can release the rage, God will fill his heart with peace in the hereafter (Al-Tabarani, Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir, No. 665).

And he says: The very best patience in the sight of Allah is patience from someone who restrains his anger (Al-Bayhaqi, Shua'ab Al-Iman, No. 8077).

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