

ANGER

How to Control it



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ANGER – HOW TO CONTROL IT

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Contents

Becoming Angry is Natural	2
Anger is a Blessing of Allāh ﷻ	2
Two Qualities Needed for Survival	2
Two Great Blessings from Allāh ﷻ	3
Nafs and its Three Levels	4
The Actual Meaning of لَا تَغْضَبْ ﷻ	4
Mujāhadah	5
How to Control Your Anger	5
Making the Heart Dhākir	6
An Incident Illustrating Anger-Control	7
Other Practical Ways of Controlling Anger	8
Two Types of A'māl	10
A Final Piece of Advice	11

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

نَحْمَدُهُ وَنُصَلِّي وَنُسَلِّمُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ الْكَرِيمِ أَمَا بَعْدُ فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ: لَا تَغْضَبْ. أَوْ كَمَا قَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ. رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي وَاحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِّنْ لِّسَانِي يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي. سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ. اللَّهُمَّ انْفَعْنَا بِمَا عَلَّمْتَنَا وَ عَلَّمْنَا مَا يَنْفَعُنَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ وَسَلِّمْ وَبَارِكْ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا وَمَوْلَانَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَأَصْحَابِهِ وَاتَّبَاعِهِ وَأَزْوَاجِهِ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِ

A Ṣaḥābī ؓ came into the company of Rasūlullāh ﷺ and said,

أَوْصِنِي يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ

‘O Rasūlullāh (ﷺ)!’ Advise me.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ responded,

لَا تَغْضَبْ

Do not become angry.

The narrator of this Ḥadīth says that he (the Ṣaḥābī ؓ) repeated his request a few times. However, each time, Rasūlullāh ﷺ replied with the same answer, ‘Do not become angry.’¹

1 Ṣaḥīḥul-Bukhārī, kitāb: al-ḥadīth min al-ghaḍb chapter: al-ḥadīth: 6116

The Ṣaḥābī ؓ was repeating his request because he desired more advice, but Rasūlullāh ﷺ continued to say the same thing. This shows the importance of this advice.

Becoming Angry is Natural

Many people ask, ‘I want to follow this advice of Rasūlullāh ﷺ, but becoming angry is involuntary. How is it possible to refrain from becoming angry when my anger is triggered? If I see something that makes me happy, I automatically become happy and if somebody tells me not to become happy, it would not be possible for me to follow his instruction. Similarly, if I experience something that angers me, I automatically become angry and if somebody instructs me not to become angry, it would not be possible for me to follow his instruction. How then is it possible for me to carry out this command of Rasūlullāh ﷺ?’

Anger is a Blessing of Allāh ﷻ

This question arises because we have not understood the advice of Rasūlullāh ﷺ. The literal translation of لَا تَغْضَبْ is ‘do not become angry’. However, anger is a Blessing of Allāh ﷻ. Without anger a person cannot protect his life, family, wealth or honour. For example, if a person does not become angry at all, thieves will enter his house and take all his belongings and he will just stand and watch. So, لَا تَغْضَبْ here does not mean do not become angry at all, rather it means do not exceed the limits of anger; keep it within the limits and do not follow the unlawful demands of anger.

Two Qualities Needed for Survival

Allāh ﷻ created us and sent us into this world for a fixed period of

time. Allāh ﷻ is Al-‘Alīm (the All-Knowing) and Al-Khabīr (the All-Aware). He knew that whilst in this world, we would require certain things to maintain ourselves: food, drink, clothes, home, medication etc. Allāh ﷻ also knew that there will be some harmful things which we will need to repel and keep away from ourselves. He knew that we would need a tool for acquiring the beneficial things and a tool for repelling the harmful things. If we only had the tool for acquiring those things that we need and did not have the tool for repelling those things that harm us, we would not be able to survive. Similarly, if we only had the tool for repelling those things that harm us, but did not have the tool for acquiring those things which are necessary for our wellbeing and existence, again we would not be able to survive.

Two Great Blessings from Allāh ﷻ

Knowing this, Allāh ﷻ granted us two blessings, both of which He placed in our hearts. One is known as ‘al-quwwatush-shahawiyyah’ (the strength of desire) and the other is known as ‘al-quwwatul-ghaḍabiyyah’ (the strength of anger). People tend to think that desire and anger are blameworthy characteristics, whereas both are blessings from Allāh ﷻ.

Through al-quwwatush-shahawiyyah, we desire and acquire all those things that are needed to maintain ourselves, and through al-quwwatul-ghaḍabiyyah, we repel all those things that are harmful for us. Whenever we feel hungry or thirsty, al-quwwatush-shahawiyyah comes into action. Whenever we see a snake, scorpion, lion or enemy, al-quwwatul-ghaḍabiyyah comes into action.

Nafs and its Three Levels

Al-Quwwatul-Ghaḍabiyyah and al-quwwatush-shahawiyyah together is what we call nafs. When both remain in moderation, the nafs is an-nafsul-muṭma’innah. This is the best type of nafs; it is refined and finds pleasure in the obedience of Allāh ﷻ. When the two strengths exceed their limits by desiring what is not supposed to be desired and becoming angry when it is not supposed to become angry, then the nafs no longer remains muṭma’innah, it becomes an-nafsul-lawwāmah. This nafs finds pleasure in disobedience to Allāh ﷻ but also feels remorse after committing a sin; it censures itself for engaging in such evil. When al-quwwatul-ghaḍabiyyah and al-quwwatush-shahawiyyah further exceed the limits and reach the peak and extreme level of transgression, then the nafs becomes an-nafsul-ammārah. This is the third and worst type of nafs which continuously encourages towards evil.

The Actual Meaning of لَا تَغْضَبْ

So, the instruction given by Rasūlullāh ﷺ – ‘Do not become angry’ - means do not let al-quwwatul-ghaḍabiyyah exceed the limits. Keep it in moderation so your nafs remains an-nafsul-muṭma’innah. When, out of anger, you feel like doing something which will displease Allāh ﷻ, control your anger i.e. the demands of this anger. Thus, the message of the Ḥadīth is not that we must never become angry. Rather, that we must control our anger when we become angry. Where Allāh ﷻ wishes that we become angry, we should become angry and where Allāh ﷻ wishes that we do not become angry, we should control our anger.

Mujāhadah

In order to control anger, one has to exert mujāhadah (spiritual struggle). Such a person has been praised by Rasūlullāh ﷺ in the following Ḥadīth:

لَيْسَ الشَّدِيدُ بِالصُّرْعَةِ إِنَّمَا الشَّدِيدُ الَّذِي يَمْلِكُ نَفْسَهُ عِنْدَ الْعُضْبِ

A person who knocks out another is not (in reality) powerful. The truly powerful one is he who has control over himself at the time of anger.²

If a person becomes angry due to someone offending him and he desires to harm him, it would not be permissible to follow this urge. We have to control our anger. This controlling of the anger is a great mujāhadah and through this mujāhadah, a person acquires the Nearness of Allāh ﷻ and His Nabī ﷺ.

How to Control Your Anger

In order to make mujāhadah easy, one has to make his heart dhākir. The heart is always either dhākir (aware of Allāh ﷻ) or ghāfil (neglectful of Allāh ﷻ). When the heart is ghāfil, then al-quwwatul-ghaḍabiyah and al-quwwatush-shahawiyah will both exceed their limits. But when the heart is dhākir, the awareness of Allāh ﷻ will keep al-quwwatul-ghaḍabiyah and al-quwwatush-shahawiyah in control and in moderation because a person with such a heart is spiritually alive. Rasūlullāh ﷺ said,

مَثَلُ الَّذِي يَذْكُرُ رَبَّهُ وَالَّذِي لَا يَذْكُرُ رَبَّهُ كَمَثَلِ الْحَيِّ وَالْمَيِّتِ

The one who remembers his Rabb is like a living person, and

2 Ṣaḥīḥul-Bukhārī, kitāb: al-ḥadr min al-ghaḍb chapter: Ḥadīth: 6114

*the one who does not remember his Rabb is like a dead person.*³

The heart that is not dhākir is a spiritually dead heart; thus nafs will exceed the limits. It will fulfil those desires which are not supposed to be fulfilled and it will get angry when and where it is not supposed to. On the other hand, the one whose heart is dhākir, his al-quwwatul-ghaḍabiyyah and al-quwwatush-shahawiyyah will remain in control and in moderation. As a result, he will not fulfil unlawful desires, nor will he become angry on occasions where he should not.

Making the Heart Dhākir

We can make our hearts dhākir by doing the following:

- 1) Excessively remembering Allāh ﷻ.
- 2) Exerting mujāhadah in following the Commands of Allāh ﷻ.
- 3) Abstaining from sinful activities that make our hearts filthy and weak which in turn brings negligence into our hearts.
- 4) Constantly reminding ourselves that Allāh ﷻ is watching us.
- 5) Regularly reciting the Qur'ān.
- 6) Remembering death and visiting the graveyard.
- 7) Sitting in good company and staying away from bad company.
- 8) Taking lessons from Mashāyikh – the experts in the field of tazkiyah.

3 Ṣaḥīḥul-Bukhārī, kitāb: الدّعوَات chapter: عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فضل ذكر الله عز وجل: Ḥadīth: 6407

9) Learning from the ‘Ulamā.

Once the heart becomes dhākir, then it will be very easy to control anger.

An Incident Illustrating Anger-Control

A person with a dhākir heart will obey Allāh ﷻ in all circumstances. ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn ؑ, a very pious servant of Allāh ﷻ, once instructed his maid to bring some water for him so that he may perform wuḍū (ablution). In a moment of neglect the water container slipped from the maid’s hands and fell on his face and wounded him. The maid looked at ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn ؑ only to be greeted by an angry face, whereupon she recited a portion of the Qur’ān:

وَالْكَاظِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ

(Jannah is prepared for) Those who swallow their anger...

‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn ؑ instantly replied, ‘I have swallowed my anger.’ The maid continued with the verse:

وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ

...and forgive people...

‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn ؑ again acted in accordance with the command and said, ‘I have forgiven you.’ The maid seeing her master’s strict adherence to the Word of Allāh ﷻ recited the last portion of the verse:

وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

...and Allāh ﷻ loves those who do good. (3:134)

‘I have granted you freedom for the Pleasure of Allāh ﷻ,’ was the reply.⁴

Other Practical Ways of Controlling Anger

The crux of all of this is that anger can only be truly controlled when the heart is dhākir. Our hearts are filled with love for the world and the thought of Allāh ﷻ seldom enters our hearts. Therefore, we need to exert much effort on dhikr. This is the true remedy. Until the time when our hearts become dhākir, we should adhere to the following guidelines to control our anger:

- 1) Recite **أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ** as anger comes from Shayṭān. It is Shayṭān who incites al-quwwatul-ghaḍabiyyah and al-quwwatush-shahawiyyah. Therefore, one should drive him away by reciting **أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ**. Sayyidunā Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad رضي الله عنه narrates that I was sat with Nabī ﷺ when two men abused each other. The face of one of the men became red and his jugular vein swelled. Nabī ﷺ said, ‘Indeed, I know a sentence which if he was to say, then what he is experiencing, i.e. anger, would go away. He should say **أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ**.’⁵
- 2) Sit down if you are standing, and lie down if you are sitting. This is because anger is from Shayṭān and Shayṭān is made from fire which tends to rise. This is why an extremely angry person is usually seen jumping up and down like fire. Thus, in order to counter the effects of fire, Rasūlullāh ﷺ advised,

4 Al-Bidāyah wan-Nihāyah, part 9, p.107

5 Ṣaḥīḥul-Bukhārī, kitāb: **صفة إبليس وجنوده** chapter: **بدء الخلق** Hadīth: 3282

إِذَا غَضِبَ أَحَدُكُمْ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ فَلْيَجْلِسْ، فَإِنْ ذَهَبَ عَنْهُ الْغَضَبُ
وَالْأَفْلَىٰ فَلْيَضْطَجِعْ

*If any of you becomes angry whilst he is standing, then he should sit down. If his anger goes away then good, otherwise he should lie down.*⁶

- 3) Perform wuḍū. Rasūlullāh ﷺ said,

إِنَّ الْغَضَبَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ، وَإِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ خُلِقَ مِنَ النَّارِ، وَإِنَّمَا تُطْفَأُ
النَّارُ بِالْمَاءِ، فَإِذَا غَضِبَ أَحَدُكُمْ فَلْيَتَوَضَّأْ

*Indeed, anger is from Shayṭān and indeed, Shayṭān was created from fire and fire is only extinguished with water, so whenever any of you become angry, he should perform wuḍū.*⁷

- 4) Drink some water.
- 5) Move away from the person or thing that has made you angry.
- 6) In anger, do not discuss anything with anybody - neither with your student, spouse, child or friend. Speak only when the anger has subsided.
- 7) Think to yourself, ‘Allāh ﷻ has created me. He has granted me everything and He has full authority over me. Despite me making countless mistakes, He tolerates me and does not get angry with me. This person has made just one error and it is possible that he is right and I am wrong. Moreover, I have no

6 Musnad Aḥmad, kitāb: مسند الأنصار Ḥadīth: 21348

7 Sunan Abī Dāwūd, kitāb: الأدب chapter: ما يقال عند الغضب Ḥadīth: 4784

authority over him. What if Allāh ﷻ also decides to punish me for my wrongdoing? Where will I stand?’

Two Types of A‘māl

The a‘māl of Dīn are divided into two parts: outer a‘māl and inner a‘māl. We perform ṣalāh, recite the Qur‘ān and engage in the dhikr of Allāh ﷻ. These are outer a‘māl and we carry them out with much regularity. However, we remain neglectful of the inner a‘māl related to our hearts like tawakkul (reliance upon Allāh ﷻ), ṣabr (patience), shukr (gratefulness), etc.

Similarly, consuming alcohol, adultery and fornication are ḥarām and alḥamdulillāh, we abstain from them. These are outer sins. However, we forget that ḥasad (jealousy), riyā (ostentation) and kibr (pride and arrogance) are also ḥarām. These are inner sins and are all very grave. Rasūlullāh ﷺ has mentioned,

لَا يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ مَنْ كَانَ فِي قَلْبِهِ مِثْقَالُ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ مِنْ كِبْرٍ

That person will not enter Jannah who has a grain’s weight of kibr (pride) in his heart.⁸

إِنَّ أَخْوَفَ مَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ الشِّرْكَ الْأَصْغَرَ قَالُوا: وَمَا الشِّرْكَ الْأَصْغَرُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: الرِّيَاءُ

Indeed, the thing I fear the most upon you is the smaller shirk. They (the Ṣahābah ﷺ) said, ‘What is the smaller shirk, O Rasūlullāh?’ He (ﷺ) said, ‘Riyā.’⁹

- 8 Sunan Abī Dāwūd, kitāb: اللباس chapter: ما جاء في الكبر: Ḥadīth: 4091;
Sunanut-Tirmidhī, kitāb: الصلوة و أبواب البر و الصلاة chapter: ما جاء في الكبر: Ḥadīth: 1998
- 9 Musnad Aḥmad, kitāb: سلم و سلم الله عليه و سلم Ḥadīth: أحاديث رجال من أصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم: 23630

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْحَسَدَ؛ فَإِنَّ الْحَسَدَ يَأْكُلُ الْحَسَنَاتِ كَمَا تَأْكُلُ النَّارُ الْحَطَبَ

*Stay away from jealousy because jealousy eats away good deeds
just as fire eats away dry wood.*¹⁰

Excessive love for wealth, anger, impatience, ungratefulness and miserliness are all a ‘māl of the heart which are from the major sins. They are major sins, yet we pay no attention to them. Let us make a firm resolution that inshā’ allāh, from today, we will learn the Dīn of Allāh ﷻ. We will learn what is required from us. We will learn what is ḥalāl, what is ḥarām and what is necessary and we will practise accordingly.

A Final Piece of Advice

The Hereafter is very important, so I always advise my friends that we should have a notebook in which we note down our weaknesses. For example, ‘I am weak in my ṣalāh. I am weak in controlling my anger. I am weak when it comes to controlling the gaze. I have a habit of backbiting etc.’ We must go through what we have written every week and check whether we have managed to bring any positive change in our lives. If we continue with a genuine concern, inshā’ allāh we will succeed and acquire the everlasting bliss of the Hereafter. May Allāh ﷻ grant us all the tawfīq to act upon these advices.

وَآخِرُ دَعْوَانَا أَنْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ نَبِيِّنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَ
عَلَىٰ آلِهِ وَ صَحْبِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ

10 Sunan Abī Dāwūd, kitāb: الأدب chapter: الحسد Ḥadīth: 4903