

Other Vices of the Power of Anger

The Power of Anger may be afflicted with seventeen different vices, which we shall now describe in brief.

1. Fear (*khawf*)

Fear is an uneasy expectation that something unpleasant might happen. For example, one may be afraid of boarding a ship or sleeping all alone in a house. It is clear that there is a difference between cowardice and fear.

Fear is of two kinds. Firstly, there is the fear of God and fear of sins and Divine punishment. Secondly, there is the fear of things other than God. The first kind of fear is praiseworthy, and leads man to perfection; whereas the second kind of fear is an undesirable vice brought about by the disease of cowardice.

Inappropriate fear is caused by the possibility that something unpleasant might happen either to oneself or something or someone dear to one. For example, one may be afraid of death, fatal danger, dead bodies, demons, etc. The root cause of these fears is spiritual weakness, which can be removed by self-examination. For example, if one realizes that he can do nothing to avert a certain or probable danger of death and that fear is of no use in averting it, he will gradually lose his fear. If his fear of death is caused by an inordinate love of the world and material things, he must reduce this attachment.

Some fears have imaginary causes, such as the fear of darkness and dead bodies. In such cases, one should put aside one's fancies and strengthen one's soul.

The appropriate and praiseworthy kind of fear is that of the majesty and greatness of God. This fear is also called *khashyah* or *rahbah*. It is also the fear of sins one has committed and their punishment. The greater such fear is, the greater the contribution it can make towards one's spiritual development and perfection. Moreover, the greater and the deeper one's understanding and knowledge of God is, the greater his fear of His power shall be. The Holy Qur'an says:

...Even so only those of His servants fear God who have knowledge (35:28)

Thus in accounts of the lives of saints, we find that occasionally they would faint because of the intensity of their fear of God.

Intense fear of God is the best controlling force over human spirit; because it weakens lustful and selfish desires, keeps the self from rebellion and sin, and tames the human heart into submission to Divine commands. Furthermore, fear of God annihilates all other fears, making one strong in confronting injustice, tyranny, and oppression. Speaking of such people, the Holy Qur'an says:

...theirs is safety; and they are rightly guided. (6:82)

And

...So fear not mankind, but fear Me(5:44)

And

...God is well pleased with them, and they are well pleased with Him; that is for him who fears his Lord. (98:8)

And:

But as for him who feared the Station of his Lord and forbade his soul from lust, surely Paradise shall be the refuge. (79:40-41)

And the Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

من خاف الله أخاف الله منه كل شيء. ومن لم يخف الله أخافه الله من كل شيء.

Whoever fears God, He will make all things fear him; whoever is not afraid of God, He will cause him to be afraid of everything.

There are many Qur'anic verses as well as traditions about the merits of being in fear of God; however, for the sake of brevity, we abstain from mentioning all of them here.

It must be kept in mind that even in fearing God one must be careful to stay within the bonds of moderation, so that it should not make one lose all hope in the mercy of God; since losing one's hope in the mercy and compassion of God is itself a great sin. The Qur'an says:

...And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord save those who are astray? (15:56)

If the fear of God has been taken to such an extreme, then it must be counterbalanced with *raja'* or hope in the mercy of God; for, with the aid of the two wings of hope and fear an individual can ascend to the highest levels of human perfection. The Qur'an refers to this point in these words:

Tell My servants I am the All-Forgiving, the All-Compassionate, and that My chastisement is the painful chastisement. (15:49-50)

2. Self Depreciation or Inferiority Complex

This vice, caused by cowardice, is a condition that results when an individual lacking courage to interfere positively in important matters fails to carry out his social responsibilities such as persuading others to perform righteous action and forbidding them from evil deeds.

Treatment of this disease is the same as that which was described in the case of cowardice. The individual affected by this moral vice should know that a true believer in God is never subjected to disgrace, and that God has bestowed honour and dignity on the believer. The Holy Qur'an says:

...honour belongs to Allah and to His messenger and the believers (63:8)

There is a tradition which says:

إن الله فوض إلى المؤمن كل شيء إلا اذلال نفسه.

God has assigned to the believer the duty to [suffer] everything except humiliation of his own self.

The characteristic opposite of self-depreciation is strength of character and self-respect; that is, one should acquire a temperament which is unaffected by anything pleasant or painful, either praise or blame. Imam al-Baqir (A) has been quoted as saying:

المؤمن أصلب من الجبل.

A true believer is firmer than a mountain.

In another tradition, he has been quoted as saying:

إن الله أعطى المؤمن ثلاث خصال:

العز في الدنيا والآخرة, والفلح في الدنيا والآخرة والمهابة في صدور الظالمين.

God has bestowed on the believer three qualities: honour in this world and the Hereafter, salvation in both the worlds, and fear of him in the hearts of the oppressors.

3. Diffidence

It means a feeling of inferiority which results in not making an effort to reach the heights of perfection open to the human being, and being content with lower and rudimentary attainments. This is one of the consequences of self-depreciation.

Its opposite is the trait of confidence, which is willingness to make effort in order to attain felicity in this world and the next and to attain perfection. The virtue of confidence is brought about by spiritual qualities of steadfastness, courage, and self-respect. Its treatment is subsidiary to that of the disease of cowardice, which is the mother of all vices in this class.

4. Lack of the Sense of Dignity

This vice consists of a lack of enough attention and failure to take care of matters which need attention and care, such as faith, honour, children, and property. This vice is caused by weakness of character and an inferiority complex. Its opposite is the sense of honour and zeal for it, which are praiseworthy virtues in man.

In regard to religion, it implies effort to keep it immune from deviations, zeal in its propagation, effort to comply with religious laws oneself, and making others follow them too.

With regard to one's honour, it means safeguarding of one's self respect and effort to preserve one's honour. With regard to one's children, it means that one must attend to their right upbringing and sound ethical and cultural development, so that they receive an early moral training, which becomes a part of their personality. Islam gives great importance to parents' duties in training and upbringing of their children. This is discussed in detail in books on tradition.

In regard to one's property and possessions, it means that one should always consider them as a part of God's blessing and as a trust given to him by God. He must abstain from excessive consumption and waste, discharge his religious duties, and not forget to help the needy.

5. Hastiness

It is a state which impels someone to abrupt decision and action without due thought. This condition is also a consequence of weakness of character and an inferiority complex. Its opposite is the virtue of

thoughtfulness in action and speech. The outcome of haste is detrimental, and accompanied by remorse and repentance. In many cases, the damage caused by hasteful actions may be irreversible.

In order to cure the vice of hastiness, one must understand its dire consequences, and accustom oneself to dignified behaviour and thoughtfulness.

6. Ill-feeling Towards the Creator and His Creation

This is a condition which arises when an individual harbours distrust and cynicism in regard to God, His creatures, and their works, interpreting everything in a negative manner. It is also a consequence of cowardice and product of an inferiority complex; because a weak charactered person acts according to impressions that his imagination may produce. In opposition to this trait is good will and trust with regard to God and men; which means having a favourable attitude towards every thing; unless there is a clear evidence to the contrary. The Qur'an says:

...and you thought evil thoughts, and you were a people worthless. (48:12)

Imam Ali (A) says:

ضع أمر أخيك على أحسنه حتى يأتيك ما يغلبك منه, ولا تظن بكلمة خرجت
من أخيك سوءاً وأنت تجد لها في الخير محملاً.

Think favourably of what your brother does, unless you find something that proves the contrary; don't distrust what he says as long as it is possible for you to consider it right and good.

The way to counteract this vice is to overlook whatever one may see or hear about his brother in faith, and to preserve a favourable opinion of him in one's heart, maintaining a respectful and loving attitude towards him.

7. Anger

Anger is one of the conditions of the soul, and possesses three states.

- The state of excess, which is defined as what would put one outside the bounds of religion and its laws.
- The state of deficiency, which is defined as the state in which one fails to take a violent action even though it is necessary for his self defense.
- The state of moderation, in which anger is stimulated in appropriate and permissible circumstances.

Thus it is clear that the first and the second states are amongst the vices of the soul, while the third is amongst ethical virtues produced by courage.

Excessive anger is a fatal disease, which can be considered as a type of temporary madness. When it subsides, it is immediately followed by remorse and repentance, which represent healthy responses of a rational person.

Imam Ali (A) has said:

الحدة ضرب من الجنون, لأن صاحبها يندم, فأن لم يندم فجنونه مستحکم.

Anger is a stroke of madness, since the afflicted later feels remorse and regrets. If someone does not feel any remorse after anger, it means that his madness has become fixed.

Moreover, absolute absence of anger is also a vice, which drags man into humiliation, subjugation and inability to defend his rights. In order to cure excessive anger, one must first remove its causes. These may be pride, selfishness, stubbornness, greed and other such vices. One must also consider how unseemly excessive anger is, and how evil its consequences may be. Secondly, he must examine the benefits of forbearance and self-restraint, and associate with people who possess these qualities.

He must also realize that God's power is supreme, and everything is under His command, which would make him realize his own weakness compared with the infinite power of God. Thirdly, he should know that a person in a state of anger is not loved by God; moreover, he may do something in anger, of which he will be ashamed later on.

The opposite of anger is mildness and forbearance—characteristics which count amongst perfect qualities of the soul. They make a person forgiving and merciful, although he may have complete power to take revenge. The Holy Qur'an says:

Keep to forgiveness, and enjoin what is fair, and turn away from the ignorant. (7:199)

And the Prophet (S) has said:

العفو لا يزيد العبد إلا عزا فاعفوا يعزكم الله.

Forgiveness raises a man's station; forgive so that God may honour you.

8. Violence

Violence consists of use of furious and destructive force either in word or action, and is one of the consequences of anger. Its opposite is the virtue of gentleness, which is a product of patience.

Addressing the Prophet (S), the Holy Qur'an says in regard to this trait:

....for if thou hadst been stern and fierce of heart, they would have dispersed from about thee(3: 159)

And in a tradition attributed to the Prophet (S), it is said:

إذا أحب الله عبداً أعطاه الرفق، ومن يحرم الرفق يحرم الخير كله.

When God loves one of His servants, He blesses him with the trait of friendliness, and whoever lacks this trait, lacks all other blessings.

Elsewhere, in a prophetic tradition, it is said:

المداراة نصف الإيمان

Consideration and kindness for people is half of the faith.

9. Ill-temper

This vice is also caused by anger, and its opposite is good-temperedness. This vice causes people to shun someone who possesses it, and brings him ruin in this world and the next. It also destroys all of one's good works. The Prophet (S) has been quoted as saying:

سوء الخلق يفسد العمل كما يفسد الخل العسل

Ill-temper ruins good works, just as vinegar ruins honey.

Addressing the Prophet (S), the Qur'an says:

Surely thou art of a mighty morality. (68:4)

10. Rancour

Rancour is also caused by anger, and is a complex formed when anger is suppressed. It has evil consequences such as jealousy and severance of relations with someone against whom it is directed, and may result in physical assault, passing of illegitimate remarks about him, spreading of lies, backbiting, slander, divulging of his secrets, etc.

Sometimes rancour comes out into the open and manifests itself as outright hostility, resulting in confrontation, fighting, cursing and name-calling—all of which are fatal vices.

The way to cure this spiritual disease is that the afflicted individual must first understand that the feeling of rancour hurts one who harbours it in his heart more than the person against whom it is directed. Secondly, he must decide to adopt an attitude of friendliness and helpfulness towards the individual towards whom he feels rancorous, do good things for him even though his emotions pull him in the opposite direction, and continue his affectionate attitude towards him until he is rid of this disease.

11. Self-conceit and Vanity

This is another vice of the Power of Anger—a condition in which a man thinks highly of himself on account of some advantage, real or imagined. On the other hand, he fails to acknowledge the attributes of perfection of God, Who is the source of all things. A great number of traditions point out the evilness of this trait. One quotes the Prophet (S) as having said:

لو لم تذبوا لخشيت عليكم ما هو أكبر من ذلك, العجب العجب.

Even if you do not commit any sins, I fear that you may fall into something which is worse: conceit! conceit!

The evil products of self-conceit and vanity are: arrogance; forgetfulness; negligence of one's faults, and, therefore, failure to correct them; falling of the worth of one's deeds in the eyes of men and God; absence of gratitude for God's blessings, and thus risking their loss; failure to ask questions about the things one is ignorant of, and, therefore, remaining in ignorance; and finally, holding and proclaiming of incorrect and unfounded opinions.

In order to cure an individual of this disease, it is necessary for him to turn his attention towards God and to know Him. When he realizes that only the omnipotent Creator deserves worship and praise, and that he is nothing in comparison with the majesty of God, and that there is absolutely nothing which he may call his own, and that even beings far more superior to himself, such as the prophets and angels, are nothing in comparison with God, he shall awake to the fact that it is absurd to be conceited and vain, and

that he must consider himself what, in truth, he is: an insignificant creature of God.

When man contemplates his humble beginnings as a sperm-drop, his certain end as a handful of dust, and the brief interval of his life as a wretched creature prone to disease and dominated and driven by lust and instincts, he will forget not only his vanity but his very self, and devote his entire being to the worship of God. The Qur'an says:

Perish man! How unthankful he is! Of what did He create him? Of a sperm drop. He created him, and proportioned him, then the way eased for him, then makes him to die, and buries him; then, when He wills, He raises him. (80: 17-22)

And we have the following couplet from a Persian poet:

بر مال و جمال خویشتن غره مشو کان را به شبی برند و این را به تبی

Don't boast of your riches, vigour and elegance,

Since one of them can be taken away in one night by thieves, and the other can vanish at a single stroke of fever.

It must be kept in mind that vanity and self-conceit may also be caused when one is favoured with such Divine blessings as knowledge, devotion, piety, faith, courage, generosity, patience, an honourable ancestry, beauty, wealth, strength, high position, intelligence, and so on. In order to avoid such an outcome, one must always remember one's weaknesses and shortcomings; such remembrance will help him to avert conceit.

The opposite of self-conceit and vanity is modesty, which is a most worthy trait that brings about edification of the soul and man's perfection.

12. Arrogance

Arrogance is one of the consequences of vanity and self-conceit. When an individual thinks too highly of himself, it is self-conceit; and when he tends, moreover, to consider others as inferior to-himself, that is arrogance. In contrast to these states, when one thinks of himself as small and insignificant, that is called modesty; and when, in addition to this, he considers others as superior to himself, that is called humility. In any case, arrogance is one of the most fatal of moral vices. This is so because arrogance is a thick veil which hides one's shortcomings from his own view, and thus prevents him from removing them and attaining perfection. The Holy Qur'an says:

...Thus does Allah seal every proud, arrogant heart. (40:35)

And

I shall turn away from My Revelations those who magnify themselves (7:146)

And the Prophet (S) has said:

لا يدخل الجنة من كان في قلبه مثقال حبة من خردل من كبر.

One who has even a particle of pride in his heart, shall not enter paradise.

Jesus (A) has said: "Just as a plant grows in soft ground, not where it is rocky and hard, so also wisdom sprouts and grows in a heart which is humble and soft, not in the hard hearts of the arrogant. Don't you see that the man who keeps his head high bashes it against the roof, while one who holds his head low has the roof as his friend and shelter?"

The cure of arrogance is the same as that prescribed for the vice of self-conceit. Another remedy is to study the various Qur'anic verses and traditions which deal with this vice and condemn it. One must also persevere in the practice of humility towards God and men, associate with the poor and the weak, abstain from ostentatious dressing, put on simple dress, be on equal good terms with the poor and the rich alike, greet everyone regardless of his age, and abstain from seeking a seat at a high place of honour at gatherings. In short, he must resist all those selfish desires which contribute to make him arrogant.

The opposite of arrogance is humility, and is one of the most praiseworthy of moral virtues. The Holy Qur'an makes this statement about the virtue of humility:

The (faithful) servants of the All-Merciful are they who walk upon the earth with humility, and when the ignorant address them, answer: Peace. (2.5:63)

And lower thy wing (in kindness) unto those believers who follow thee. (26:215)

It should be noted that humility is the middle ground between arrogance and abjectness, and just as the former is a vice, so is the latter. The difference between abjectness and humility is also clear. Thus while it is praiseworthy for man to be humble, it is a vice to abase oneself.

13. Rebelliousness

A form of arrogance, it is also a fatal vice. It is defined as rebelling against all those to whom it is necessary to be obedient, such as: prophets and their vicegerents, righteous governments, teachers, parents, etc. In a prophetic tradition, we read:

إن أعجل الشر عقوبة البغي.

The sin quickest to be punished is that of rebelliousness.

The Prophet (S) has also said:

حق على الله عز وجل الا يبغي شيء على شيء إلا اذله الله.

It is the right of God to humble anything that rebels against anything else.

Imam Ali (A) has said:

ان البغي يقود اصحابه إلى النار.

Rebelliousness drives the rebellious towards the Fire.

The way to cure the vice of rebelliousness is for the afflicted to meditate upon his spiritual condition and refer to traditions in which rightful obedience is enjoined, and at the same time strive to promote the spirit of humility in himself.

14. Blindness to One's Faults

This is another result of vanity and self-conceit. Its opposite is awareness of one's faults and shortcomings.

15. Fanaticism

Fanaticism is another moral vice which leads to degeneration of the afflicted person's mind and understanding. Prejudice may exist in regard to one's religious beliefs, nation, tribe, family, or other such things, and may be manifested through one's speech or action. When fanaticism is in regard to appropriate things, it is called enthusiasm and zeal, and is most praiseworthy. If, on the other hand, it is in regard to inappropriate things, it would be a vice.

There is a prophetic tradition that says:

من كان في قلبه حبة من خردل من عصبية بعثه الله يوم القيامة مع اعراب

الجاهلية

Whoever has the least amount of fanaticism in his heart shall be raised by God on the Day of Resurrection together with the pagan Arabs of pre-Islamic times.

The way to cure the vice of fanaticism is for the afflicted individual to engage in introspection, and to realize the fact that fanaticism blocks one's development and clouds his understanding of reality. Thus, if he seeks to know the truth, he must set aside blind fanaticism and prejudice, and examine things in an objective and dispassionate manner.

16. Concealing Truth

The vice of misrepresentation and concealment of the truth is caused by fanaticism, cowardice or fear. It may also be caused by the desire for wealth or similar motives. In any case, this vice leads one to deviate from the straight path, and brings about moral degeneration. The opposite is revealing of the truth and steadfastness on the path of truth. There are numerous traditions and Qur'anic verses which condemn concealing of truth and praise the truthful. Some of the verses that most clearly and directly state this matter are the following:

....Why do you confound the truth with falsehood and knowingly conceal the truth? (3:71)

*....And who is more unjust than he who hides a testimony which he hath received from Allah?
....(2:140)*

Those who hide the clear signs and the guidance that We have sent down, after We had made it clear for mankind in the Book—they shall be cursed by God and the cursers. (2:159)

To cure oneself of this disease, one should note the fact that this trait earns Divine anger and may lead to *kufr* (infidelity). Moreover, he should meditate on the benefits of giving expression to truth, and then compel himself to follow it in action.

17. Callousness and Cruelty

When an individual is afflicted by the vice of callousness and cruelty, he is not affected or saddened by the pains and sufferings of his fellow men. Its opposite is the virtue of mercy and compassion. There are a number of Qur'anic verses which reproach this vice, and praise compassion and love.

Treatment and cure of this disease is most difficult, because cruelty and callousness sink into one's character, and become chronic and difficult to cure.

The best treatment for this disease is for the afflicted person to avoid, first of all, cruel actions, which are

outward manifestations of this vice. Next, he should make an effort to share in the sufferings and difficulties faced by others, and consider their problems to be his own. Furthermore, he should try to react in an appropriate manner to such situations, until, gradually, he begins to taste the flavour of compassion, slowly making it permanent within himself.

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