(Controlling Anger (Ghadhab

Muhammad ibn Ya'qub (al-Kulayni), from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, from Muhammad ibn 'Isa, from... Yunus, from Dawud ibn Farqad, who reports al 'Imam al-Sadiq (A) to have said, "Anger is the key (that opens the door) to all kinds of vices".

Exposition

The great researcher Ahmad ibn Muhammad, popularly known as Ibn Maskawayh, in his book Taharat al-'a'raq, which is a fine book of rare excellence in beauty of style and orderliness of contents, writes something which can be summarized as follows: Anger, in fact, is an inner psychic movement due to which a state of agitation is produced in the heart's blood, arousing a desire for vengeance. And when this agitation becomes more violent, it intensifies the fire of anger.

A violent commotion in the blood seizes the heart, filling the arteries and the brain with a flurry of dark smoke, on account of which the mind and the intellect lose control and become powerless. At that time, as the hukama' maintain, the inner state of the person resembles a cave where fire has broken out, filling it with flames and suffocating clouds of smoke that leap out of its mouth with intense heat and a fiery howl.

When that happens, it becomes extremely difficult to pacify such a person and to extinguish the fire of his wrath; whatever is thrown in it to cool it down becomes a part of it, adding to its intensity. It is for this reason that such a man becomes blinded to propriety and deaf to guidance. In such a condition, there is no hope for him.

Then Ibn Maskawayh adds: "Hippocrates says that he is more hopeful about a ship encircled by a fierce storm and violent winds which has been knocked away from its course by the sea waves into rocky waters, than about an enraged person. Because, in such conditions, the sailors may somehow manage to save the ship by means of clever maneuvers, but there is no hope of deliverance for the soul engulfed in rage; for all such efforts as counsel, advice, and exhortation fail to appease him. The more one tries to pacify it through humble entreaties and tearful supplications, the more violent it becomes".

Advantages Of Al-Quwwah Al-Ghadabiyyah (The Power Of Anger)

It should be known that the Power of Anger is one of the biggest favors of God conferred upon

His creatures, by means of which they are enabled to pursue activities constructive to their world and Hereafter, are assured the continuity of the species as well as, the safety and survival of the individual and the family.

It also plays a great role in the establishment and maintenance of social order and civic life.' If this noble faculty were not ingrained in the animal's nature, it would not have been able to defend itself against natural adversities, and would have been defenseless against the dangers of destruction and extinction. And if it were absent in the human nature, man would have failed to achieve most of his accomplishments and attainments.

Moreover, even its deficiency and insufficient presence below the moderate level is itself considered a moral weakness and flaw which gives rise to innumerable vices and defects like: fear; timidity; weakness; laxity; laziness; greed; lack of restraint, patience and tolerance; lack of constancy and perseverance when needed; love of comfort; torpor; lethargy; submissiveness to oppression and tyranny; submitting to insults and disgraces to which an individual or his family may be subjected; dastardliness; spiritlessness, etc. Describing the qualities of the believers God Almighty says: (The believers) are hard against the unbelievers and merciful among themselves. (48:29)

The fulfillment of the duty of al-'Amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar (to enjoin good conduct. and forbid indecency), the implementation of hudud (punishment prescribed by the Islamic penal law), ta'zirat (punishments adjudged by a judge), and the carrying out of other policies set forth by religion or guided by reason, would not have been possible without the existence of this noble Power of Anger.

On this basis, those who believe in eradicating the Power of Anger and consider its destruction as an accomplishment and mark of perfection are highly mistaken and in great error, ignorant as they are about the signs of perfection and the bounds of moderation.

Poor fellows, they do not know that God Almighty has not created this noble faculty in vain in all the species belonging to the animal kingdom. To the children of Adam (A) He bestowed this power as the source of securing a good life in this world and the Hereafter, and a vehicle for procuring various blessings and felicities.

The holy jihad with the enemies of the Din; the struggle for the preservation of mankind's social order; the defense and protection of one's own life, property and honor, as well as the Divine values and laws; and above all the combat with one's inner self, which is the biggest enemy of man, none of these could be possible without the existence of this noble faculty.

It is under the banner of this noble faculty that aggressions and encroachments upon rights are repelled, borders and frontiers are protected, and other social and individual offences, noxious

practices, and harmful deeds are checked. It is for this very reason that the hukama' have recommended various remedies for treating any deficiency in this Power, and prescribed numerous practical and theoretical remedies for the purpose of its regeneration, like participation in acts of heroism and going to battlefronts on the occasion of war with the enemies of God.

It is even narrated of some sages that they used to visit risky places, stayed there and exposed themselves to great perils and dangers. They would board a ship at a time while the sea was turbulent and stormy, so that they might get rid of fear and overcome their timidity and sluggishness.

In any case, the Power of Anger is ingrained in the nature of human beings and animals, except that in some cases it is dormant and torpid, like a fire smouldering under the ashes. If someone perceives in himself any signs of torpor and lack of the sense of honor, he must try to overcome this condition by means of its antidote, courage, which is a commendable quality and a moral virtue, to return to a normal state. We shall have occasion to refer to it again in due course.

Vice Of Immoderation In Anger

In the same way as the deficiency and lack of moderation is considered a moral vice and source of numerous moral corruptions, the excess and going beyond the upper limits of moderation is also regarded, morally, as a vice and source of countless deviations. The tradition quoted in al-Kafi is sufficient to indicate the dangers of such a state: It is reported on the authority of Imam al-Sadiq (A) that the Apostle of God (S) said, "Anger spoils faith in the same way as vinegar destroys honey."

It may happen that someone gets angry and, in a bout of extreme anger, turns away from the Din of God. The hot flames and the dark fumes of anger not only destroy his faith by consuming his righteous beliefs, they also lead him to apostatize by rejecting God, thus leading him to eternal damnation. And when he becomes aware of it, his remorse is of no avail, as the fire of anger, which was lit by a spark thrown in by Satan, continues to roar in his heart, as Imam al-Baqir (A) has said: Indeed, this anger is the spark lit by Satan in the heart of the son of Adam.

In the next world, this fire will acquire the form of the fire of Divine Wrath, as reported from al-Baqir (A) in al-Kafi: It is recorded in the Torah regarding that which God Almighty confided to Moses (A), saying: "O Moses, control your anger towards those over whom I have given you authority, so that I may spare you from My Wrath."

It must be known that no fire is more painful than the fire of Divine Wrath. It is mentioned in a tradition that Jesus, the son of Mary, was asked by his disciples as to which of the things is the hardest to bear. “The Fury of the Most High God is the hardest thing to bear,” he replied. They questioned him, “How can we save ourselves from it?” “By not getting angry,” Jesus said. Therefore, it must be obvious that God’s Wrath is more painful and severer than any thing else, and the fire of His Fury is most destructive. The Hereafterly form of our anger in this world is the fire of Divine Wrath in the next world. In the same way as anger emanates from the heart, perhaps the fire of Divine Wrath, which is the abode of our anger and all other inner vices, will also emanate from the inner depths of the heart and spread over the external being, and its tormenting flames will emerge from the external sense organs like the eyes, the ears, and the tongue.

Rather, the external senses are themselves the doors which shall be opened to the fire of Hell. The fire of the hell of deeds and the physical hell encompasses the without and travels towards the within. Hence man is tortured from both the sides by these two hells: one emanates from within the heart and its flames enter the body through pia mater of the brain, and the other, which is the result of the vicious deeds, advances towards the inner being from without, and man is subjected to torments and pressures.

What sort of torment and torture it will be? God alone knows what pain and distress it will bring in addition to the burning and melting. You imagine that the topological mode of the Hell’s encompassment is something that you know. Here things are surrounded only externally and outwardly; but in that world, encirclement will occur both externally and internally; it will cover the outer surface of the body as well as the inner depths of the human heart and being.

And if, God forbid, anger becomes permanent part of one’s nature, it will be more catastrophic; for the form that such a one shall acquire in the Barzakh and on the Day of Resurrection will be a beastly form, that too one which has no match in this world; for the brutality of the person in this state cannot be compared with any of the ferocious beasts. In the same way-as none of the creatures can touch this marvel of nature from the aspect of attainment of nobility and perfection, so also from the aspect of his capacity for degeneration and meanness and his leaning towards perverseness, man cannot be compared with any creature. It is about his perverseness that the Holy Quran says: These are as the cattle-nay, they are worse in misguidance. (7:179)

It is about the hardness of the human heart that it says: (Then the hearts of the Jews) became hardened like stones, or even yet harder. (2:74)

All this that you have heard about the evil effects of this consuming fire of anger is merely a

fraction of its danger. It holds true in cases where no other vice and offence spring from it, that is, if this inner fire lies dormant in the inner darkness, having been choked and suffocated, although having extinguished the light of faith by its dense smoke.

However, it is very rare, or rather impossible, that in a fit of its intense conflagration one should remain immune from committing other, even mortal, sins. It happens that in a brief outburst of anger, this cursed firebrand thrown by the Devil, man falls over the precipice of destruction and doom. He may even, God be our refuge, abuse the prophets of God and saints, assassinate an innocent person, or desecrate something holy, thus bringing about his own destruction in the world as well as in the Hereafter, as is mentioned in a hadith of al-Kafi: It is reported from Imam al-Sadiq (A) that he said that his father used to say: "Is there anything more violent than anger? Verily, a man gets angry and kills someone whose blood has been forbidden by God, or slanders a married woman."

Many atrocious deeds have been committed under a spell of anger and its agitation. Therefore, one, while in a state of tranquility of mind, should be apprehensive of his own anger if he is in a habit of often getting angry. He should contemplate upon its cure, when in a state of mental composure, and think about its causes, its bad consequences and repercussions, and he should strive to get rid of it.

He should consider that a faculty which was granted by God Almighty for the sake of the preservation of the world's order, for the continuity and survival of human species and individual, for the discipline and order of the family system, for the advancement and progress of humankind, and for protecting human rights and safeguarding Divine laws, a faculty under whose shadow the visible as well as the invisible system of the visible world and the hidden world is to be reformed and maintained, if he acts contrary to this purpose and makes use of this power against the Divine design, it will be a breach of trust of a severe kind that deserves censure and punishment.

What an act of ignorance and injustice it is not to fulfill the Divine trust, by employing what could be easily employed for the purposes of justice in incurring His Wrath. It is clear that such a person will not be sheltered from the Divine Wrath. Hence it is in order to think seriously about the moral vices and vicious deeds that are the outcome of anger, and to try to remove the effects of this crooked quality, each one of which is capable of afflicting a person till eternity, causing many a calamity in this world as well as chastisement and damnation in the Hereafter.

Moral Hazards Of Anger

As to the moral hazards, it may cause malice towards creatures of God, leading sometimes even to the enmity not only of prophets and awliya', but also of the Holy Essence of the Necessary Being and the Nourisher. This shows how dangerous and disgraceful its consequences may be. I seek refuge in God from the evil of the rebellious self, which, if left reinless for a moment, throws one down rolling in the dust of ignominy or dashes with him towards eternal damnation. It may also give rise to other vices, like hasad, about whose evils .you have read in the exposition of the fifth tradition, and many more besides it

Its Behavioral Hazards

There is no limit to the behavioral hazards that are products of this vice. Perhaps, it may lead one, God save us, to use abusive language or revile the prophets of God and awliya'. Or he may desecrate sanctities and utter slanders about venerable persons. He may murder a pious soul, wreck the lives of innocent creatures, wreck a family, or reveal the secrets of others tearing up the veils that cover them. There seems to be no limit to such monstrous acts that man may commit at the time of outbreak of this faith-consuming fire that also destroys many homes. As such, it can be said that this habit is the mother of all spiritual maladies and the key to each and every evil action. As opposed to this vice is the ability to restrain one's anger. This ability to extinguish the fire of anger has been considered the essence of wisdom and the focus of all virtues and noble qualities, as stated in this tradition of al-Kafi: (Al-Kulayni says) From a number of our (i.e. al-Kulayni's) companions, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid (al-Barqi), who narrates on the authority of a chain of narrators from Imam al-Sadiq (A) that he heard his father (Imam al-Baqir [A]) as saying: "A Bedouin came to the Prophet (S) and said: 'I live in the desert. Teach me the essence of wisdom.' Thereupon the Prophet (S) said to him: 'I command you not to get angry' After repeating his question thrice (and hearing the same reply from the Prophet every time) the Bedouin said to himself: 'After this I will not ask any question, since the Apostle of God (S) does not command anything but good'." Imam al-Sadiq (A) says, "My father used to say, 'Is there anything more violent than anger? Verily, a man gets angry and kills someone whose blood has been forbidden by God, or slanders a married woman." After that a wise person coolly ponders upon its evil consequences and the benefits of restraint, he should make it incumbent upon himself to put out this fire in the region of his heart with every possible effort and to clear from his heart the black soot of its smoke. This is something which is not very difficult when one resolves to act against one's inner self and its desires, after having reflected upon their evil effects and by admonishing one's self. In fact, one may get rid of all moral evils and ugly spiritual traits and acquire all good qualities and .excellences of character and soul whenever he resolves to improve his spiritual condition

There are also several practical and theoretical remedies for curing anger when it has flared up. The theoretical remedy involves reflecting upon the matters mentioned above, which is also a kind of practical remedy in this case. But among the practical remedies the important ones involve withholding of the self in the initial stages of anger. This is because it is ignited little by little, becoming more intense until its furnace is set burning fiercely and its flame becomes violent and furious. When that happens, it gets completely out of control and shuts off the lights of one's faith and intellect. Blowing off the lamp of guidance, it reduces man to an utterly wretched state.

Therefore, one should be on one's guard so as to dissociate oneself by some means before its fierceness mounts and its fire becomes more violent. He should either leave the place where his anger may be provoked, or change his posture: that is, if seated, he should stand up, and if standing sit down, or engage his mind in the remembrance of God (some people consider it even obligatory), or he should make himself busy in some other activity to divert his attention. In any case, it is easier to put a curb on it in the beginning. It has two results. Firstly, he will be able to pacify his self at that early stage and the flames of anger will be put out. Secondly, the experience will always remain with one as a primary cure for treating one's self. If one always pays attention to one's condition and treats one's self in this way, one will undergo a complete transformation as one's inner state moves towards the point of moderation. An allusion to this matter is made in the following traditions from al-Kafi: It is reported from al 'Imam al-Baqir (A) that he said, "Verily, anger is a spark ignited by the Devil in the human heart. Indeed, when anyone of you gets angry, his eyes become red, the veins of his neck become swollen and Satan enters them. Therefore, whosoever among you is concerned about himself on account of it, he should lie down for a while so that the filth of Satan may be removed from him at the time."

And: Maysir reports that once anger was discussed in the presence of Imam al Baqir (A). He said, "Verily, it happens that an angry person would not be satisfied until he enters the Fire (i.e. his anger does not subside unless it drags him into the hellfire). Therefore, whoever is angry with someone let him sit down immediately if he is standing; for, indeed, it would repel from him the uncleanliness of Satan. And whoever gets angry with his kinsman, let him approach him and pat him; for the feeling of consanguinity, when stimulated by touch, induces calmness."

These two traditions suggest two practical remedies of anger in its initial stage. One is general and recommends sitting down and bringing about a change in posture (according to another

tradition, if somebody be seated at the time of getting angry, he should stand up). It is reported by Sunni sources that the Apostle of God (S), if he ever got angry while standing, would sit down, and if seated, would recline, and his anger would subside. The other remedy which is particular is concerned with blood relations and suggests that if anybody gets angry with someone related to him by blood, if he touches him with his hand his anger will cool down. These are the methods of curing oneself of one's anger; but if others want to treat an enraged person, if his anger is in the initial stage, any one of the methods from among the various practical and theoretical ones suggested may be useful. But if he is in extreme anger, advice and counsel give opposite results, and it becomes very difficult to treat him in this stage, except by being put in a state of alarm by someone whom he holds in high esteem; for anger vents itself on those whom one deems weaker and inferior to oneself or at least as equal in power and position. But in front of those persons with whom he is impressed, his anger is never provoked.

Rather his outer excitement and agitation will be transformed into an internal fury confined to his inner self. Not finding any outlet, it will change into a grief within the heart. Hence, it is not at all an easy task to appease a person undergoing outbursts of extreme rage. We seek refuge in God from it.

How To Eradicate The Roots Of Anger: Among the fundamental remedies of anger, one is to exterminate the factors responsible for its provocation. They are many, and here we can mention only a few of them. One of them is self-love, which in 'turn begets the love of wealth, glory, and honor and the desire to impose one's will and expand one's domain of power. These factors are inherently responsible for exciting the fire of anger, as the individual infatuated with these things tends to hold them in high regard and they occupy a high place in his heart. He, improperly, gets angry and excited if any one of these aspired goals is not achieved or when his desire faces any obstacle and loses control over himself. Greed, avarice, and such other vices that take root in his heart as a result of self-love and the love of glory, snatch the reins of reason from his hands, leaving the self to commit deeds that deviate from the path of Divine Law and reason.

But if his love and interest in these things is not intense-and he gives lesser importance to these matters, his inner calm and contentment, obtained by giving up the love of wealth, honor and the like, will not allow his self to act against the demands of justice. Then, he will not find it difficult to maintain his patience in hardships, and will not lose grip of self-restraint. He would not get angry unnecessarily and abnormally. If the love of the world is eradicated from his heart and this vice is completely wiped out, then all other vices also take leave and vanish from it,

vacating the realm of the soul to be taken over by moral virtues.

Another factor that arouses anger is that sometimes anger and its evil manifestations, which are in fact great moral defects and indecencies, are imagined to be merits and accomplishments on account of ignorance and lack of understanding. Some fools reckon those vices as marks of bravery and courage and brag about themselves on account of them. They confuse the virtue of valor, which is a superb attribute of the believer's character and a commendable quality, with this pernicious vice.

However, it should be noted that courage or valor is a different thing, and its source, its causes, effects and characteristics differ totally from those of that injurious vice. Courage originates in the strength of one's spirit, serenity of mind, moderateness, faith, and lack of concern for the vanities of life and indifference to its vicissitudes; whereas anger is the product of spiritual weakness and degeneration, insufficiency of faith, immoderation of character and soul, love of the world and concern for mundane things and the fear of losing the pleasures of life.

Hence this vice is found more frequently in women than in men, more in sick individuals than in healthy people, more in children than in grown ups, more in the elderly than in young people. Valor and courage is its opposite. Those suffering from moral infirmities are more liable to get angry sooner than those who are morally sound. Thus, we often see such people get angry sooner and becoming fiercer if any encroachment is made upon their property than the others.

This was about the origins and motives of anger and courage. However, they are also different as to their effects. The irascible person, when under the spell of anger and its excitement, behaves unreasonably like a lunatic or like an animal which acts without rationally considering the consequences of its actions, and commits ugly and indecent acts. His tongue, limbs, and other parts of the body go out of his control. His eyes, lips and mouth are distorted in such an ugly manner that he will be ashamed of his ugly features if he is shown a mirror at the time.

Some persons who are afflicted with this vice not only do not refrain from venting their anger on innocent animals, but do not spare even inanimate things. They curse air, water, earth, snow, rain and other elements of nature if anything happens against their wish. Sometimes they vent their fury on a book, pen, glass or jug, tearing it up or breaking it into pieces.

But the behavior of a courageous person is different in all these matters. His acts are based on reason and tranquility of soul. He gets angry on the proper occasion and is patient and restrained when required to be so. He is not provoked or incensed by each and every annoyance. He becomes angry on the proper occasion to the proper extent and takes his vengeance with reason and discretion. He knows well as to against whom to take his revenge, on what occasion, to what degree and in what manner, and as to whom he should forgive and

what to overlook and ignore.

In the state of anger, he does not lose control of his reason, and he never makes use of indecent language nor acts indiscreetly. All his acts are based on rational considerations and are in accordance with the norms of justice and Divine Law. He always acts in such a manner so as not to regret later on.

Thus an aware human being should not confuse this quality, which is one of the attributes of prophets, awliya' and true believers and is considered a spiritual accomplishment and achievement, with the vice which is one of the attributes of Satan, a diabolical incitement, a spiritual abomination and a flaw of the heart. Yet, the veils of ignorance and folly and the curtains of self-love and attachment to the world cover man's hearing and blind his vision, rendering him helpless and bringing about his destruction.

Certain other causes of anger have also been pointed out, such as 'ujb, bragging (iftikhar), pride (kibr), disputatiousness (mira'), obstinacy (lajaj), jesting and the like; but to go into their details will prolong this discussion and might be cumbersome. Possibly most or all of them, directly or indirectly, originate in the two sources already discussed. And praise be to God.