

# Islamic Teaching on Anger

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Recently the subject of Muslim “anger” at the injustices suffered by fellow-Muslims elsewhere in the world has very much been in the forefront of news and discussion. This anger is said to foment extremist groups who vent their rage and frustration by wanton violence with disregard for taking lives of innocent people. If indeed anger is fanning these actions, then the most important question for a Muslim to examine is, what are the teachings of the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet Muhammad on how to behave when one is angry. In the Holy Quran the believers are instructed as follows:

“And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden, as wide as the heavens and the earth; it is prepared for those who keep their duty, those who spend (in charity) in ease as well as in adversity and those who suppress anger and pardon people. And Allah loves the doers of good to others.” — 3:133–134.

The words translated as “those who suppress anger and pardon people” (*al-kazimin al-ghaiz wal’af in ‘an-in-nas*) mean literally: “suppressors of anger and pardoners of people”, and the word used for “people” here means mankind in general. This, then, is how Muslims ought to appear in the world, as suppressors of their anger and pardoners of mankind. As the beginning of this passage tells Muslims to rush to seek forgiveness from God, these words indicate that to gain that forgiveness we must suppress our rage against others, forgive them and in fact do good to them. Have we not done things which would make God angry; so do we want Him to display His anger towards us? If not, then we must similarly restrain our anger towards those who have wronged us.

This passage teaches three degrees of response towards those who have wronged us, and we should rise to the level that is most effective in the circumstances. The least which is required is for us to restrain our anger, and that is the minimum that we must do. Any reaction based on anger is bound to be excessive and unjust, and damaging even to the aggrieved party. Therefore our response must be limited to being proportionate and rational. Beyond suppressing anger, we may forgive those who wrong us rather than seek their punishment, if that would make them recognise their injustices and mend their ways. Finally, we may even proceed to returning good for evil, again if it would turn them away from their wrongdoing.

According to this passage, the way to heaven is only through suppressing your anger and forgiving other people.

In another place, describing the good qualities that believers ought to strive for, the Quran says:

“... and whenever they are angry they forgive. ... And those who, when great wrong afflicts them, defend themselves. And the recompense of evil is punishment like it; but whoever forgives and amends, his reward is with Allah. ... And whoever is patient and forgives — that surely is an affair of great resolution.” — 42:37–43.

This also teaches that there can be absolutely no reprisals fuelled by anger, even in the face of “great wrong”. The utmost action can only be “like” or proportionate to the evil, but forgiveness is here recommended three times, including as an antidote to anger. The word translated here as

“amends” in the phrase “whoever forgives and amends” is rendered in various translations of the Quran as “makes reconciliation”, “puts things right”, “makes peace” or “is reconciled”.

### **Justice above hatred**

The Quran instructs Muslims:

“Do not let hatred of a people — because they hindered you from the Sacred Mosque — incite you to transgress.” — 5:2

“O you who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and do not let hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance of duty. And keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is aware of what you do.” — 5:8

There may be understandable reasons that make one feel hatred and anger towards another people, but these verses teach Muslims unequivocally that they must not let such feelings provoke them to commit acts of excess and transgression of moral and legal limits. Not only must they refrain from wrongdoing out of hatred against another people, but what is more, they must strictly adhere to treating them with equity and justice. This is emphasised here as part of the Muslims’ basic duty to God, from Whom our actions cannot be hidden.

### **Hadith on anger**

There are several statements reported from the Holy Prophet Muhammad in all the leading books of Hadith strongly cautioning people against acting out of anger. For example:

1. “A man said to the Prophet, ‘Give me some advice.’ The Prophet said, ‘Do not become angry and furious’. The man asked (the same) again and again, and the Prophet said in each case, ‘Do not become angry and furious’.” — *Bukhari, book: ‘Good Manners’ (Adab)*.
2. “A judge should not judge between two persons while he is in an angry mood.” — Bukhari, book: ‘Judgments’ (*Ahkam*).
3. “The strong man is not the one who can wrestle well but the strong man is one who can control himself when he is enraged.” — *Sahih Muslim, Kitab-ul-Birr*.
4. “Anger is from Satan, and Satan is created from fire. Only water can put out fire, so when any of you is angry, he should perform his ablution.” — *Mishkat, book: ‘Good Manners’ (Adab)*.
5. “He who withholds his anger, Allah will withhold His punishment from him on the Day of Judgment.” — *Mishkat, book: ‘Good Manners’ (Adab)*.

One of his statements relating specifically to war in this context is as follows:

“A man came to the Prophet and asked: ‘O Messenger of Allah, What kind of fighting is in the way of Allah? For some of us fight because of being enraged and angry and some for the sake of one’s pride and haughtiness’. The Prophet ... said: ‘He who fights so that the word of Allah should be uppermost fights in the way of Allah’.” — *Bukhari, book: ‘Knowledge’ (‘Ilm)*.

Thus, fighting out of anger is not fighting in the way of Allah. Note that the only fighting allowed in Islam is fighting in self-defence. Therefore fighting “so that the word of Allah should be uppermost” means fighting to repel the enemy who has the aggressive object of destroying Islam and the Muslims and to make the cause of Islam prevail over their aims.

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