

## **MODULE 5**

**Class Title:** Anger Management – part 3 (3<sup>rd</sup> part of 4 lesson series)

**Aim of Lesson:** Anger Management: The Islamic Perspective

**Lesson Format:** PowerPoint presentation and discussion

Greeting to students) *Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

(*Ta'awwudh*) *Aoodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem*

(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

(*Du'a*) *Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli*

(Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

(Slides 1 – 2)

For the last two weeks, we've been trying to understand anger from the psychological perspective. Today Insha'Allah, we'll look at it from the Islamic angle and see what Islam tells us about this powerful emotion called "anger".

In Islam, generally speaking, anger is considered to be an extremely destructive emotion; it hurts and repels dear ones, frightens children, and most importantly, it consumes our good deeds.

(Slides 3 – 14)

So, who can tell me some of the outward signs of anger?

Yes, swelling of the veins, frowning, bulging and redness of the eyes, an obvious facial expression of bitterness and hatred, tensing of muscles and becoming short of breath.

Now, can you see any difference between these two pictures?

This is exactly how we look when we're angry.

What a pity, what a shame that we stoop to the level of animals, in fact to that of wild beasts, when we are angry! There's hardly any difference at all! Look at this; this is actually how we look sometimes, even worse than animals! Clearly, there's absolutely no doubt that venting our anger can be a very dangerous and destructive road, besides being ugly!

(Slides 15 - 16)

In reality, no one is devoid of anger. Can anyone claim, "I don't have anger in me"? Can anyone claim this, here? No, absolutely not.

So we all become angry when provoked.

But the question is, is it ok to have an angry outburst? Are there instances when anger can be justified? Do you think it can be justified in certain circumstances and with certain people? In some instances, it's inevitable.

Student: Well how about when you want someone to do some work and you repeatedly tell them slowly and calmly five, six, seven times, but they still don't do it?

Teacher: So you think the seventh time losing your cool on that person is absolutely justified? Yes? You think so? Ok.

Who's going to tell all of us how we can decide on our own whether it's ok to lose our cool or not? Remember, we're discussing the Islamic perspective in this class.

Coming back to what she said; that is, the seventh time she's justified in losing her temper.

Now, who will actually decide for her as to when she can lose her temper? Can we all individually decide for ourselves? Has Allah (swt) given you the option that after the 7<sup>th</sup> time, after you've tried your best, you can just go ahead and lose your temper on the person who refuses to budge? Hmm? No? Then how can you say you're justified?

Student: What if someone is doing something wrong? Shouldn't we tell them... like someone whose breaking a law? You can't very well tell them to stop with love and kindness, can you?

Teacher: You're talking about being assertive here, not angry. We have to be assertive at times, but assertiveness isn't anger. You can be effectively assertive only if you have good control over your temper. We are going to talk about this also, that is, what we should say if somebody is doing something wrong, and how we're supposed to say it.

Student: There's a hadith, I don't know the exact words, which teaches if you see something wrong, stop it with your hand or your tongue.

Teacher: That hadith has nothing to do with anger. It talks about stopping somebody who is doing something wrong with one's hand or tongue, or at the very least, to consider that act as bad in our heart. It's not because of anger that you stop the other person, but because the act is wrong in itself, right?

Now getting back to my initial question, how do we know when, and even if, our anger is justified? This is the question. Hmm?

Student: When we have very good reason to be angry?

Teacher: But who, sweetie, who is going to decide what's a good reason?

Student: I know, Allah (swt).

Teacher: So, has Allah (swt) given us the option to lose our temper, to just go ahead and do it whenever we think we're justified?

Slide 17:

The situations when anger are certainly there but those instances are rare,

And for a beginner in anger management, it is difficult to distinguish between those situations at the outset. So ! We need to understand that

Slide 18:

Anger is not to be abolished but trained .It is not suggested that controlling anger means you may never get angry.The aim is always to reach your goal with other, reliable and sane methods, Insha' Allah

Slide 19:

Firstly, it's vital to understand that we can't just eliminate anger from our personality, overnight; it has to be done one step at a time. We need to begin by working on lowering our level of anger; we need to curb it gradually.

Slide 20:

With regards to this practice, the Islamic tradition is very clear.

Slide 21:

According to a well-known hadith:

Abu Huraira (ra) reported Allah's Messenger (pbuh) as saying: The strong-man is not one who wrestles well but the strong man is one who controls himself when he is in a fit of rage. [Muslim]

Slide 22:

Therefore, the strength of character lies in what?

Students: Controlling one's anger.

Teacher: Yes, controlling one's anger.

So, if we really want to have a good strong personality, we need to have good control on our emotions, specially our anger.

Slide 23-24:

There's also another hadith in which we learn that a person came to the Prophet (pbuh) and said, "Advise me." So the Prophet (pbuh) advised him not to become angry and furious. The man asked the same question again, and again the Prophet (pbuh) advised him not to become angry and furious. [Bukhari Vol.3 No. 137]

Why do you suppose the Prophet (puh) repeatedly advised him not to become angry and

furious? Anyone? Raise your hands please.

Student: It leads to many evils?

Teacher: The Prophet (pbuh) used to repeat certain things when he wanted to emphasize a point. Did you all know this? So, this is how we know that controlling our anger is an important aspect of being a Muslim, and crucial for success in this world as well as the ...

Students: The *Aakhirah*.

(Slide 25 )

Yes and the *Aakhirah*.

Now the first decisive step in fighting anger is to ask yourself “Am I ready to confront it? Go ahead, ask. Are you? Are you? Are you ready to confront it? I’m asking you guys!

Student: What do you mean by “it”?

Anger, of course! Are you all ready to confront the problem called ‘anger?’ We are after all sitting in this class doing anger management! Why?

Student: I used to be an extremely angry person, although over the years I’ve learned to control it.

Student: I think you grow out of it.

Teacher: Do you think so? So how did you start controlling it, over and over and over again?

Student: It happened on its own, I suppose.

Teacher: Do you think so? No, I don’t think it could happen on its own. In fact, I think with age it just gets worse. So, if you feel you have a problem with anger management, then you need to nip it in the bud! As soon as you can! Please don’t be optimistically disillusioned into thinking that you’re going to grow out of it! You can grow out of your clothes but not out of anger, for sure!

Student: As people get older they usually get more irritable.

Teacher: Yes, yes. Usually, people’s level of tolerance keeps dropping as they age.

I want you all to note something very important. Anger management classes aren’t meant to identify people around us who have a problem with managing their tempers. They’re for our own benefit, our own self-analysis and improvement.

Ask yourselves If you’re ready to confront this problem that you might have. Don’t worry about the anger management problem others around you may have. Are you ready to confront your own problem with anger management? That’s within you? Are you ready to face this problem of yours? Are you?

Students: Yes.

(Slide 26)

Yes? *Alhumdulillah*.

The good news is that if you are ready to confront this problem, this evil personal obstacle to success, and, if you consider this as an unwanted aspect of your personality, you will be able to get rid of it, *InshaAllah*.

You need to understand this as an evil problem within yourself that needs to be gotten rid of. By recognizing it, you will have taken the first decisive step towards harnessing, or even obliterating, it.

(Slide 27-30)

To begin with, anger can be beaten by understanding the teachings of our *deen*, of Islam.

Now, I'm going to ask you some questions which I want you to keep answering to yourselves, either yes or no. Please make sure to count the times you say "yes". All right, here are the questions.

Number one: "Do you become angry when things are not going your way?" Yes or no?

Student: Do we have a "maybe"?

Teacher: No, there isn't any "maybe". If you say a "maybe", it'll only prove that you're a very confused person!

So here are the questions.

Number one: Do you become angry when things are not going your way?

Number two: Does it make you angry when something happens contrary to what you expected or wanted?

Number three: When you begin to get angry, are you aware that your emotions are heating up? In other words, do you know when you're becoming angry?

Number four: When you're angry, do you say or do things which you normally wouldn't?

Number five: When you're angry, do you feel you can act in any manner at all, without any self-control?

Number six: After your anger has subsided, do you regret what you said or did, or how you appeared in front of people?

If most of you answered "yes" to most of the questions, then congratulations for you're on your way. You've at least acknowledged that you have a problem. You now recognize you need to find a cure.

In the rest of this series on anger management, we're going to look at the cure that Islam offers us. We all need to understand that anger is a secret disease, and like any other disease, we can only treat it properly with the right cure.

(Slides 31-33)

In Islam, anger is considered a spiritual disease according to Imam Ghazali.

To be able to treat any spiritual disease, we need to know its root cause. Islam believes in working on the root cause of spiritual ailments<sup>1</sup>.

It's for this reason that sometimes its cure differs from what the psychologists prescribe, as they don't focus on the root cause.

Anger itself cannot be the root cause of itself. There is some other root cause because of which anger exists. Are you with me so far?

There must be some kind of spiritual ailment in all of us, and it can be different for each one of us, because of which we're easily provoked into anger. Therefore, it's important to understand that in Islam, anger management focuses on a comprehensive treatment of the heart, to treat anger. Anger cannot be treated in isolation.

There are spiritual diseases of the heart that are manifested as anger, and again, they can be different for each one of us. We're *InshaAllah* going to try to treat these, in order to treat anger. Have you all understood?

(Slide 34-35)

Some root causes of someone's anger may be being self-conceited, being arrogant, having a habit of mocking others, being argumentative, treacherous, or being plain greedy for excessive wealth, name and fame.

Can you tell me what all these are? These are personality flaws. These may be the hidden secret diseases underlying someone's tendency to anger easily.

Student: How can greed for name and fame cause anger?

Teacher: Sometimes people who want to be popular and famous, and when they can't get what they want, they may become angry at their own selves or others.

Student: I don't understand how greed causes anger.

Teacher: Well, if you're greedy for something and you don't get it, you can become very angry, blaming yourself or others. You see, greed is an emotion that will initially make you sad and bitter. Eventually, these emotions will be manifested as anger directed at those whom you think are the cause of keeping what you want from your reach.

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<sup>1</sup> according to *tazkiyah* scholars like Imam Ghazali.

(Slide 36)

Getting back to personality flaws within us, when these evils-- a few of them or even one, collect in a person, they can make one really, really angry.

So what's the solution to combat these? The solution is that we have to identify the personality flaws, or the spiritual diseases, that are hidden under one's problem with anger management, individually.

The actual solution is to remove these traits by their opposites. For example, you feel that beneath your problem of anger is actually self-admiration and vanity. This is the personality flaw that you have: you expect everyone to admire you also. Then, when you don't get it: you become angry.

Student: How can we identify which disease underlies our tendency to blow up?

You have to look deeply inside yourselves and try to recognize, identify, and understand the things that make you angry. You have to be critically introspective.

We're going to do some exercises on self-analysis, if we get time today *InshaAllah*, which can help you to identify personality, flaws within yourselves. What is the root cause of losing your temper easily? What is the disease inside you that makes you angry?

Usually when we become angry, we focus on the people around us: "Oh, she did this" or "Oh he did that" or "It happened because of this" or "This went wrong". We don't focus on ourselves to see what's wrong with our own thoughts, emotions and behavior.

(Slides 37-38)

Now after we succeed in introspection and identifying personality flaws within ourselves, the next step is to obliterate them.

How? I've already mentioned that we can eliminate these with their opposites. For example, if the flaw is self-admiration or vanity, then it has to be removed with modesty. You will need to actively work towards being modest. Self-admiration is rooted in one's ego and pride; one has to make a conscious effort to be humble and modest, so as to end it. By thinking about our origin—how we were formed, born, etc., and, by constantly reminding ourselves how insignificant we are compared to the world, the universe, all that's in them, and especially Allah (swt), we can humble ourselves and tame our illusionary pride.

(Slide 39)

Now what if the disease is greed? Greed has to be removed by being consciously content and satisfied with whatever Allah (swt) has given us. Moreover, we need to remind ourselves that our *rizq* (sustenance), that whatever Allah (swt) has written for us to acquire, is not going to change just by being greedy. We can be as greedy as we want, but it won't get us anything more than what Allah (swt) has already decided for us to have.

So, if Allah (swt) has decided that you aren't going to get a cell phone or an iPad or an iPhone, you are not going to get it just by being greedy. Just because so many people have it or your best friend has it, and so you also want one, you won't get it unless Allah (swt) has decided for you to have one of these.

Finally, greed can be fought off by reminding ourselves that whatever we have is not going with us to our graves. Our possessions are generally not going to help us in the *Aakhirah*, either. Whatever you have or whatever you want, these aren't going to help you in the *Aakhirah*, as we usually want things for our short pleasure in this world.

(Slides 40-42)

As our last example, what if the disease is miserliness? What do we need to do to cure this disease? The cure to miserliness is giving more and more in charity. Just where are we supposed to give from? Only from our savings? Or from the extra that we have? No, not just from the savings and the extra. In fact, it's more rewarding to give from things that we love;

لَنْ تَتَّالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ

You cannot attain to righteousness unless you spend out of what you love. And what you spend, Allah surely knows it. (Surah al e Imran 3: verse 92)

We have to give from those things that are very near and dear to us.

For example, you've been hoarding a special bar of chocolate all for yourself. What you need to do, then, is to break it in half and give it to some needy person, or even to your sister. On the other hand, if you had many and you gave one, it wouldn't help cure miserliness. Thus, giving from things that you love and when you yourself need them will *InshaAllah* take care of miserliness.

Have you all realized what the cure is? How we're going to eliminate or at least control anger in our lives? What we need to do is purify our hearts of disruptive personality flaws. These are the real culprits, the root causes and hidden diseases underlying our anger. So the first thing that we need to do is identify the personality flaws within ourselves.

Let's just quickly take a little bit of time and think about our own personality flaws. I won't push you into talking about them because it can be very sensitive, and it's very, very personal. However, if anyone would like to discuss their personal issues, she is more than welcome to.

When you try and identify a personality flaw within yourself, please don't say, "Oh my problem is that I'm too tolerant" or "I'm too gentle" or "I'm too sweet" These are not personality flaws. Rather, you're just trying to justify your anger. We need to identify a real flaw within ourselves because of which we usually become angry. Ask yourselves, "What is it that makes me angry? What is that personality flaw within me because of



which I easily become angry?” I’ll give you a minute to think about it.

Student: I think arrogance can be a problem.

For sure; big time! Think some more; reflect, all of you. How many of you have been able to identify at least one personality flaw within yourselves? Raise your hands. How many couldn’t identify any flaws at all? If you can’t pinpoint any, you might not be honest with yourselves. You may be unable to identify any because you may not be willing to. You may be in a state of self-denial; you may not want to recognize and identify, or be ready to accept, that you even have a flaw: “How can I be arrogant? I’m never arrogant, rather I’m so humble.”

However, this is the first step towards curing one’s anger, i.e., identifying the underlying disease. You don’t need to talk about your flaws here. I want you to search deep within yourselves for your own benefit. I want you all to go home and do some serious introspection, ok?

Student: When so you mean by an ‘anger problem’? Do you mean a really serious one where you’re blowing up a lot, or like just losing your temper once in a while?

Teacher: Sweetie, nobody is angry all the time. Most of us blow up once in a while.

Student: I mean, would you call getting slightly angry sometimes an anger problem?

Teacher: Yes, because if a person has a tendency to get slightly angry once in a while, eventually, maybe five years down the line, she’ll have developed a huge anger problem with many and frequent outbursts.

We’re not born with an anger problem; have you ever seen a one year old with one? If we have any kind of anger problem right now, we have to nip it in the bud before it develops and becomes out of control. The more free rein we give to ourselves, to allowing ourselves to losing our temper, the more difficult it’ll become to rein it in. Yes, are you staying something?

Student: Well what about my nephew who screams for no reason? Some children also seem very, very angry, throwing tantrums frequently.

Teacher: Can someone give me a reason why children throw tantrums?

Student: Maybe because they saw someone doing that? Or because they don’t have any other means of communicating?

Teacher: Children, as we’re all aware, are great imitators. In fact, that’s how they pick up a lot of what they do. They have limited means of getting what they want. As a result, they may learn early on that by throwing tantrums, they can get what they want. However, these outbursts are clearly not embedded in personality flaws, just yet.

Let’s just focus on ourselves, and not children. Forget about what’s happening around you; focus keenly on yourself since if you have any control over anyone, it’s yourself.

Let's just go home today and think about our personality flaws, and think about what we're going to do about them. You don't need to tell anyone about them, but you yourself need to accept that you may have them. I can understand why you're so nervous to identify them. For instance, it's extremely hard to accept the flaw of being arrogant. By the way, a lot of us have this destructive flaw of arrogance; for a lot of us the reason behind our anger is arrogance. But it can be something else, also.

Student: Can you please explain how arrogance relates to anger?

Teacher: How does arrogance relate to anger?

You see, when you're arrogant you have certain expectations from people around you because you think you have a certain status amongst them. Then, when they don't meet your expectations, you lose your temper.

Furthermore, you may think you're better than others. When you think you're better than others, you become intolerant of those around you. As a result, you'll tend to lose your temper with your servants, your friends, your siblings, etc. The tendency is to think that since you're perfect and do everything perfectly, why can't others be the same? So this is how arrogance can be the cause of anger.

The goal is to purify the heart, so as to reach the Divine Presence

So if we want to curb our anger it has to start from the root cause hidden behind anger in the form of some personality flaw that needs to be fixed too.

Slide 43:

The first method was that we need to recognize and identify if there's an anger problem within us at all; and if so, more importantly, we have to consider it as a real problem that needs to be dealt with.

The second method is to identify the flaw or flaws within our personality which make us susceptible to anger, to being easily provoked.

Slide 44:

Another method of managing anger, according to Islamic teachings, is to handle/curb our anger at the exact time that we're provoked. This is, however, an instant treatment. For example, if you keep getting recurring migraines, you need to find out the root cause of these. But, until you can do that, you immediately need to take a painkiller to relieve it. Right? You don't wait for the results of a medical test to identify the root cause before taking care of the excruciating pain. A pain killer is, at that moment, the instant treatment.

Similarly, Islam gives us an instant treatment for anger management, if it's needed before we've dealt with the root causes.

Insha'Allah, we're going to continue with this topic next week and talk about that instant pain killer to kill our anger there and then.

(Du'a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*