

Good anger, bad anger, and *Shirk al-Asbāb*

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The process of degeneration which seems to be predicted by all world religions is marked both by realities that anger us, and by the systematic abuse of anger as an emotion.¹ When Babylon the Great appears, mother of harlots and abominations of the earth, how should the righteous fail to be wrathful with her? Surely the end times will necessarily be times of righteous anger? True religion must always, not least at that extreme point of history, allow anger at the defiance of Heaven and the rule of hubris, which will both intensify as the age wears on. Yet it must also be vigilant against the anger that is born of the desperation and sense of siege which are so common in extreme social and political conditions, and which is often a disguised anger against Allah and His arrangement of history. Success in ‘times of abandonment’ comes from endurance and self-discipline, driven by the certain knowledge that ‘verily with hardship comes ease’ (94:6), and that after the Day of Anger itself, all wrongs will be entirely healed. To achieve this balance the alienation from the times must not be divorced from the alienation from worldliness; on the contrary, it must be its urgently-needed support, lest we become merely another sign of the times.

So a feature of the moral life under modern conditions is a careful distinguishing between decent and demonic anger. The traditional believer may rightly be wrathful, but for God, never for himself; and this is an aspect of prophetic emulation. The prophetically-conformed individual must respond passionately to the misery caused by human error, and therefore, *a fortiori*, to the error itself, but he must also remain at a deep level serenely confident of God’s omnipotence, and uninterested in wrongs which bruise his ego. A discernment between right and wrongful wrath is hence a sign and consequence of faith itself: real faith makes us fear God alone, while a faith in which we fear any other is bogus, and will lead us into the reflex of animal anger.

The Blessed Prophet ﷺ offers a timeless model of this balance. As witness and sharer in the suffering of his people and the agony of the weak and orphaned victims of the rich and powerful, he was certainly capable of anger. Here he was hardly an ‘innovator among the Messengers’. Mūsā ﷺ had been infuriated when the Israelites turned to the Golden Calf (Q 20:86). The Gospels’ Jesus ﷺ was angry with the Pharisees as he forbade the remarriage of divorcees (Mark 10, 5-12); and he is said to have called them

¹ The prediction of final degeneracy is almost universal; see, for instance, the texts assembled in Whithall N. Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (Cambridge, 1991), 464-474.

‘a brood of vipers’ (Matthew 12:34) and ‘hypocrites’ (Matthew 15:7). His anger caused him to act in Zealot fashion, driving the moneychangers out of the Temple with a whip (John 2:15-17). And the Seal of the Prophets, ﷺ crying out against the cruelty of his own people, faithfully consummates the same tradition. ‘I am only a human being,’ he says, ‘I am pleased as humans are; and grow angry as they do.’² Anger is a characteristic modality of Prophethood. But his conforming to God also ensured that *hilm*, forbearance, was his primary trait. Classical treatments of anger cite instances of his righteous wrath, but overwhelmingly focus on his mercy and patience, which are unmistakably more central to the *sunna*. This is why, although anger can be a sign of conformity to God, the overwhelming bulk of hadith on the subject strongly denounce anger. When asked how to avert the anger of God, he replied, ‘Abandon your own anger.’³ And again:

Anger is a red-hot coal in the heart of Adam’s children. Have you not beheld his bloodshot eyes, and his swollen jowls? Whoever detects any part of that should lie down on the ground.⁴

Anger is from Satan, and Satan was created of fire. Since fire is only put out by water, let each of you carry out *wuḍū*’ if he is angry.⁵

This is not a blanket refusal of all anger. The Prophetic counsel is not to become a Stoic, an emotionally cold, impassible robot; but rather to use the emotions as God wishes, rather than, as almost invariably happens, in vengeful obedience to the fearful self. Imām al-Nawawī, commenting on the Prophetic commandment, ‘Be not angry’ (*lā taghdab*), explains that the meaning is ‘do not act in accordance with your anger. The prohibition does not refer to anger itself, for that is part of human nature.’⁶ In the midst of one’s valid anger, one acts in accordance with the Law and maintains good *akhlāq*. Anger may remind us of the need to act, but it is never the motivation or justification of any righteous act. It must not rival the Sharī‘a, which alone legislates and validates.

² Muslim, *Birr*, 95.

³ ‘Alī ibn Abū Bakr al-Haythamī, *Majma‘ al-zawā‘id wa-manba‘ al-fawā‘id* (Cairo, 1352), VIII.69 (from the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal).

⁴ Tirmidhi, *Fitan*, 26; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, IV, 19.

⁵ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*. Mu‘āwiya once descended from the *minbar*, went away to perform the major ablution, and then returned to complete his sermon, citing this hadith. (Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā’* [Cairo, 1351-7/1932-8], II, 130.)

⁶ Sharaf al-Dīn al-Nawawī *Sharḥ al-Arba‘īn*, presented by Louis Pouzet as *Une Herméneutique de la tradition islamique: Le Commentaire des Arba‘ūn al-Nawawīya de Muḥyī al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Nawawī (m. 676/1277)* (Beirut, 1982), 36.

Here we may locate one reason why the Qur'ān praises 'those who, when angered, are forgiving' (42:37) and 'those who suppress their rage and forgive people; and God loves the workers of good' (2:134). The last expression is *muḥsinūn*, the people of spiritual excellence, who are, in the famous Hadith of Supererogatory Devotions (*ḥadīth al-nawāfil*), in a love-relationship with their Lord:

And when I love him I become the eye with which he hears, the ear with which he hears, the hand with which he strikes, and the foot on which he walks. If he seeks My protection; I shall surely grant it him; and if he seeks victory from Me, I shall surely grant it him.⁷

This is the degree of the *walī*, the 'friend' of God. He is the true *khalīfa*, His 'representative', and it is he who succeeds the prophet who 'was taught all the names' (2:31). This 'Adamic' archetype is not the one who ignores the relevance of the divine wrath, but is the one who properly discerns between true and false anger. As *khalīfa* he manifests qualities whose ontic root lies in the divine perfection; and anger is clearly one of these. Prophetic scriptures from time to time use the language of divine anger; and those who are close to God by definition share this. As Niffarī's God tells the saint: 'If I appoint thee My *khalīfa*, I will make thy wrath to be from my wrath.'⁸ The anger of the self, the *nafs*, is the mark of the non-caliphal soul.

It is useful to recognise that when compared with the Biblical deity, the Qur'ānic God is not often angry, perhaps because the latter voice is less concrete in its apparent anthropomorphisms than were many of the Bible authors. The Old Testament contains almost four hundred explicit references to God's wrath (*qesep*), with another thirty appearing in the New Testament. By contrast the Qur'ān uses the cognate word *ghaḍab* only eighteen times (fewer, if we exclude rhetorical repetitions), contrasting with two hundred and thirty-three references to mercy (*rahma*). It contains no sustained passages on God's anger comparable to the thirty-five psalms consecrated to the subject, or to St Paul's evocation of God's fury against Jews and gentiles who decline to recognise the Blood Atonement.⁹ There are punishment stories, but they are not accompanied, as they frequently are in the Bible, by long reflections on the divine wrath; instead, they emerge, particularly when received by the *kalām* authors, as reminders of the consequence of defying the merciful teachings of God's messengers. Qur'ānically speaking, then, the true *walī* is theomorphically moved to exhibit forbearance and mercy, which are the basis for the saint's actions, despite the entire

⁷ Bukhārī. See the translation and commentary in Abdal Hakim Murad (tr.), *Selections from the Faḥ al-Bārī* (Bartlow, 1421/2000).

⁸ Muḥammad al-Niffarī, *al-Mawāqif*, ed. A.J. Arberry (London and Cairo, 1934/5), 8 (Arabic).

⁹ Romans, 9:19-29. See Luke T. Johnson, 'The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108/iii (1989), 419-41.

validity of a righteous ‘anger for the Lord’. Moreover, when he or she is required to uphold God’s anger, the outcome is never capricious or excessive, but is reflective of the divine nature. One of the most conspicuous disparities between the biblical and Qur’ānic lives of the Hebrew prophets is that the *herem*, the sacred exterminations of non-Hebrew peoples ordered by God in the Bible, are absent completely from the Qur’ānic text.¹⁰

Al-Ghaḍbān, the Angry, does not, therefore, appear on any list of the divine Names. Neither is it among the hundreds of titles ascribed by tradition to the Blessed Prophet. As liberators, the Prophet and his disciples in all ages share God’s anger against inward and outward cruelty and injustice, and against disobedience to His law; yet in the new dispensation, alert to the weakness of humanity in the final age, anger seems to be in a minor key throughout. He is, pre-eminently, ‘a mercy to the worlds’ (21:107).

Hence human anger is either theomorphic and Prophetic, conforming to God’s judgement of human acts; or it is demonic and fiery. The latter is what it is because it betrays fear of others and frustration with God’s purposes. As Ibrāhīm Ḥaqqī writes:

Choose you what the True God’s chosen
Know He’ll not do otherwise
Watch His acts until you know Him.
Let us see what God shall do
For what He does is good and true.

On the True God place reliance
Peace of mind lies in assent
With His acts be thou well-pleased
Let us see what God shall do
For what He does is good and true.

Question not: Why was this so?
Why was that not in its place?
Be patient and see its outcome!
Let us see what God shall do
For what He does is good and true.¹¹

¹⁰ For the Sacred Exterminations see Gerd Lüdemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scripture* (London: SCM, 1998). Mattias Beier, in his *A Violent God-Image* (London, 2004), has documented the influence of the Biblical images of God’s anger and violence on Christian history.

¹¹ Erzurumlu Ibrahim Hakkı, *Dīvān*, ed. Numan Küleçî (Erzurum, 1997), 123.

This is what Mir Valiuddin calls ‘retrocession of trust’.¹² Anger is sinful, indeed a deadly sin, when it is an implicit challenge to God and His decree. Since we believe that the proximate causes (*asbāb*) have a divine author, then one of the most dangerous forms of idolatry must be *shirk al-asbāb*, to attribute real agency to created things that, in the absolute monotheistic vision of Islam, are in fact directly and utterly subject to His command. So *tawakkul* is the foundation of our revealed ethics, the mother of morals, for it is the virtue that proceeds most surely from *tawhīd*. In Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (vv.38-9) the Blessed Prophet ﷺ is told that despite the immensity of the responsibilities that have been placed upon him, he is not to experience any worry or any inner agitation.

The figure of Ayyūb ؑ symbolises the difference between the two visions. Where the Bible’s Job contends with God, wishing that he had never been born, the Muslim retrieval is the very type of dignified surrender and acceptance. He acknowledges his suffering, but as a saint he does not question God: ‘And Job, when He called to his Lord: “Truly distress has touched me; and You are the most merciful of those that show mercy”’ (21:83). This *islām* yields unimaginable fruits: the miraculous ability to bring healing water from the earth, and a great following, the signs of Divine acceptance: ‘Truly We found him to be patient; how fine a slave, ever turning in penitence’ (38:44).

İsra Yazıcıoğlu finds in this short account the essence of Islam’s explanation of the ‘problem of evil.’ She cites Said Nursi’s image of a tailor’s poor servant who complains when one beautiful set of clothes is removed from him to make way for the next. As Nursi comments:

in order to display the impresses of His Most Beautiful Names, the All-Glorious Maker, the Peerless Creator, *alters within numerous circumstances the garment of existence He clothes on living creatures, bejewelled with senses and subtle faculties like eyes, ears, the reason, and the heart.* He changes it within very many situations. *Among these are circumstances in the form of suffering and calamity* which show the meanings of some of His Names, and the rays of mercy within flashes of wisdom, and the subtle instances of beauty within those rays of mercy.

Yazıcıoğlu concludes: ‘Thus, whatever befalls humankind, including calamities, serves a great purpose of making Divine art known.’¹³

¹² Mir Valiuddin, ‘The way to control anger – the Qur’anic approach’, *Islamic Culture* 46 (1972), 63-73, p.68.

¹³ İsra Ümeyye Yazıcıoğlu, ‘Affliction, Patience and Prayer: Reading Job (P) in the Qur’an,’ *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 4/I (July 2004); etext.lib.Virginia.EDU/journals/ssr/issues/volume4/number1/ssr04-01-e01.html

Ayyūb can ‘complain’ to God, for otherwise there could be no petitionary prayer and hence no sacred humanity; but as a perfected sage he cannot question Him or be angry with His decree. His simple but subtle language recalls the prayer of Mūsā, standing destitute at the gates of Midian: ‘My Lord, I am without the good things which You have sent down to me’ (28:24), a courteous supplication which seems to be the preface to the unexpected shelter in a prophetic tent, and a blessed marriage. And the Final Prophet ﷺ, who combines real human distress with absolute trust and hope for God’s good decree, continues this prophetic theme. After having been rejected and stoned by the people of Ṭā’if, and finding refuge alone beneath a wayside tree, he offers this heartfelt prayer:

O God, unto Thee do I complain of my weakness, of my helplessness, and of my lowliness before men. O Most Merciful of the Merciful, Thou art lord of the weak. And Thou art my Lord. Into whose hands wilt Thou entrust me? Unto some far-off stranger who will ill-treat me? Or unto a foe whom Thou hast empowered against me? I care not, so long as Thou be not wroth with me. But Thy favouring help – that were for me the broader way and the wider scope!¹⁴

The Holy Prophet’s *tawakkul* does not bring a recession in his humanity. He is not dispassionate and cold. On the contrary, the prayer is infinitely human. Suffering is real, and its cause is sometimes veiled from us; yet it is God’s will, and the faithful monotheist prays only for God’s *riḍā* – His ‘good pleasure’ – and hopes that this will be accompanied by an easing of the way. Only under such theological conditions can our valid anger against oppressors be made just and our egotistic anger against Providence be annihilated. Rage at political or personal humiliation is the way of paganism; monotheism has left it far behind.

There is a further dimension to this. Personal pain is bitter, but to witness the pain of a loved one is, for the saints, far more bitter. In the Qur’ānic account of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام the prophet is ‘tested clearly’ (*balā’ mubīn*, 37:106), not by facing his own death but by contemplating the death of his son, surely a far more grievous trial. By accepting the trial, through his absolute confidence in God’s wisdom, a new and unsuspected door is opened for him, as the son becomes the patriarch of a numberless host. There is a parallel in the suffering of the Final Prophet, ﷺ when his own son, symmetrically named Ibrāhīm, dies in infancy. Deeply distressed, holding the dead child he prays again:

¹⁴ Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life based on the Earliest Sources* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 98-9.

We are stricken indeed with sorrow for thee, O Ibrāhīm. The eye weepeth, and the heart grieveth, nor say we aught that would offend the Lord.¹⁵

‘Those who suffer most grievously are the prophets, then those who are near them in degree,’ says a hadith.¹⁶ The Blessed Prophet suffers immensely, for his mission and migration were the endangering not only of himself but of his loved ones also. Despite the final triumph which God gives him, he appears, pre-eminently, as a poor, endangered, suffering servant.

Suffering, therefore, is prophetically understood as an opportunity for waiting patiently at the door of God’s generosity and demonstrating resignation in the face of His omnipotence. ‘We flourish,’ as Anṣārī says, ‘in the plunder of Your tribulations.’¹⁷ These may be complained of at the surface level, but at the same time are profoundly to be accepted, for ‘if chicory is bitter, it is still of the garden.’¹⁸ This spiritual virtue is simply the proof that the real Muslim has internalised the implications of the acceptance of *qaḍā*, God’s decree, ‘the bitter and the sweet of it.’¹⁹ Every sickness comes from the Physician; and the only possible grounds for anger hence lie in the spectacle of human egotism, which is from the devil’s fire which brings wickedness into the world and into our own souls. Even the contemplation of the Blessed Prophet’s suffering and his renunciatory rank allows us to move forwards to a self-emptying which purifies us. In the word of Hacı Bayram Velī:

Poverty is my pride! Poverty is my pride!
Spake he not thus, of all the worlds the pride?
His poverty recall! His poverty recall!
This soul of mine is noughted deep within that pride!²⁰

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī writes with passion on the need to repent of any anger against God’s decree. Instead of imagining that we have the power to alter His command, we should find in deprivation an opportunity for courtesy, silence, patience, contentment, and conformity to His edicts. ‘Repent of accusing Him,’ he

¹⁵ Lings, 327, citing Ibn Sa‘d.

¹⁶ Bukhārī, Marḍā, 3.

¹⁷ Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, *Munājāt*, in *Ibn Ata’Illah, The Book of Wisdom, Khwaja Abdullah Ansari, Intimate Conversations*, introduction, translation and notes of the *Book of Wisdom* by Victor Danner, and of *Intimate Conversations* by Wheeler M. Thackston (London, 1979), 195.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁹ This standard doxological formula originates in a hadith (Ibn Māja, Muqaddima, 10).

²⁰ Fuat Bayramoğlu, *Hacı Bayram-ı Velī: Yaşamı, Soyı, Vakfı. Cilt II: Belgeler* (Ankara, 1983), 228.

tells us, ‘for He does not sin, nor is there a flaw in His nature as in the case of His creatures when they deal with one another. He alone is pre-existent; He has already created all things, and appointed their benefits and their harm, their beginning and their end; He is wise in His acts, perfect in His deeds; He does nothing idly.’ We are to maintain this *islām* to Him, like a trusting baby in its nurse’s arms, or the ball which submits to the polo-player, in the knowledge that in His good time He will cause night to end with a new day, and the winter to end with spring.²¹

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The consequence of Prophetic patience is the confirmation of *wilāya*, which the *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* understands as the vindication of love. Yet with all humanity seeming to carry Job’s burdens, and with our capacity to bear misfortune drastically reduced by our upbringing in a vapid and pleasure-seeking ‘liquid modernity’, it is inevitable that this degree will not be reached nearly as often as it once was. The mutual perception of madness in the regard of modern and traditional people imposes a psychic suffering which many cannot carry for long; and the result can be the pathological rage which starts the Russian Revolution, or ‘ethnically cleanses’ Bosnia, or flies airliners into office buildings. As our machines grow greater we seem to diminish; as relationships are publicly defined in terms of the framing of material success and the enjoyment of rights, we grow dissatisfied; as secularity encroaches, we panic and lose confidence in prayer. Anger is the condition of the age, with the truly modern beginning with the destructive and resentful mindset depicted by John Osborne, although the entertainment industry works hard to sublimate it into a profitable hatred of screen villains or of rival football teams: the *Panem et circenses* ruse which was a cornerstone of the stability of ancient Rome, the monoculture’s truest ancestor. For many, the catharsis achieved before the credits roll persists; for others, however, it offers merely a false glimpse of a resolution that in the world seems painfully lacking. Teenage dysfunction, rampant Prozac addiction, and religious zealotry are only three of the more recalcitrant symptoms of this essentially single disorder. There is no trust in God, so there is no peace.

Prophetic religion is being challenged to heal anger, not by abolishing it, but by restoring it to its origin in the ego-less nature of God, Who has no fears. Take, for instance, that pungent critic of urban *anomie*, Yahya Parkinson (d.1918):

Pale-faced men and sickly women
On the seething river drifting,
At the mercy of its waters;

²¹ ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* (Cairo, 1330), 78-82 (maqāla 34).

Now engulfed within the vortex,
 Now upborn upon the billows;
 Ever striving, ever struggling,
 To evade the fate before them;
 Prostitution stalking shameless;
 Womanhood in tattered garments,
 Stranded wrecks upon the pavement;
 In the gutter prone and sodden;
 In a tawdry, drunken stupor,
 Face and form no longer human.
 While with heedless eyes averted,
 Fellow-men are by them passing;
 Scarce an arm is raised in helping,
 For to stay them in their falling;
 Not a word of fellow-feeling,
 Voice unheard of mercy pleading;
 While in thousands men are dying,
 Sinking in the social vortex,
 In a hell of lust and passion.
 Why this misery and anguish,
 That the people they are bearing;
 Why this crying, this despairing;
 Are not Nature's bounties spreading
 Wide along the earth so spacious;
 With a lavish hand she's casting
 Food in plenty for the gleaning;
 Why should people grind their brothers,
 Trample them like armies marching
 O'er a field of mangled foemen?²²

Here resounds a properly-aroused prophetic fury, selfless and aligned with God's wrath. The systems of a heartless modernity are wounding our brethren. Characteristically for Parkinson, the poem goes on to urge a resolution for that alienation in nature; and this is what marks him as a Muslim poet. At peace with our bodies and with the majesty and beauty of God's making, we will find a healing from the condition of industrial modernity and its concomitant rage, for we realise that amidst the rigour, there is always beauty; and that true anger, which is God's anger, will always be resolved successfully in final forgiveness or justice. Hence the love of God is identical with an activism collaborating with the simultaneous acceptance of

²² 'Woodnotes Wild,' *The Crescent* xvi, 229.

His omnipotence. A true engagement with our enfolded and political selves yields this mark of true *khilāfa*:

Only they alone are righteous
Who have love for all their brethren,
In this sphere of pain and labour;
And for every moving creature
Living on the world's wide body.²³

Parkinson implies that true anger is a form of love, because it is of Him, 'Who has prescribed compassion upon Himself' (6:12). He also suggests that it is only through complete engagement with creation that we can rise above ego. The condition of the partially-detached, Parnassian individual, neither floating free in space nor fully subject to nature, is the crucible of modern anger. Its satisfaction is sought in sub-pagan projects to reconnect with land, or with national myth, or, more recently, for that story of libertinism inaugurated by the Enlightenment which can only be fully understood as an existential protest, in a sexuality without restraint. Michel Houellebecq's novel *Platform*, reporting on the listlessness of technically-advanced Parisian society in the 1990s, in a series of emblematic confrontations proclaims the superiority of a radical promiscuity over Islam, its only rival alternative to mediocrity.²⁴ The Islam that he rejects, however, is the Islam of the westernised believer who does not believe that he is westernised, with its anger, its Puritanism, its lack of real love, and its indifference to beauty and to nature. The Islam of tradition, by contrast, which Parkinson upholds, fully (and against Christianity), engages with eros and war, but in the name of an acceptance of God's decree, not a revolt against it. What Houellebecq cannot see is the great gulf which separates *futuwwa* from the damaged modern believer, with the West standing somewhere in the middle between the two. Like de Sade, the novelist protests against the mediocrity of the spirit by journeying into the flesh. The moral failure of modern Islamic anger reinforces the hedonistic alternative, and a vicious circle is closed.

Erich Fromm gets close to this distinction when he speaks of 'benign' versus 'malignant aggression'.²⁵ 'Benign aggression' he defines as a sometimes violent assertiveness which is the natural response to the deprivation of rights. It is rooted in instinct, although by no means enslaved to it, and its purpose is the promotion of life. Malignant aggression, by contrast, is unjust, it is 'necrophiliac', an urge to vengeance and destruction for its own sake, even if a formal ideology be used as a mask. It is the

²³ idem.

²⁴ London, 2002.

²⁵ Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Harmondsworth, 1977), 24, 251-4.

anger of Achilles, who vaunts his victory over Hector by dragging his corpse after his chariot; the polar opposite of the Prophetic model following its victory:

No blood he sheds, no fine exacts,
No prince to prison sends;
Forgives, forgets all injuries past,
Treats enemies as friends.²⁶

Malignant aggression ‘is not phylogenetically programmed and not biologically adaptive; it has no purpose, and its satisfaction is lustful.’²⁷ It is, as we would say, from the fire made possible by the devil’s first disobedience, and in all the orders of nature only man is subject to it. While it has manifested itself in past ages, Fromm sees it as a particular hazard of our times, since it is the fruit of boredom and the alienation and marginalisation of humanity by technology: ‘The Falangist motto “Long Live Death” threatens to become the secret principle of a society in which the conquest of nature by the machine constitutes the very meaning of progress, and where the living person becomes an appendix to the machine.’²⁸

This differentiation allows us to see more clearly the metabolic gulf that separates *futuwwa* from the new *takfirī* ultras (or their no less dreadful and enraged epigones in, say, the Bible Belt or militant Hindutva). *Futuwwa* is the principle of a positive conflict which is fought to preserve the Five Objects of society recognised by our jurisprudence, and whose goal is the upliftment and celebration of human life; indeed, without such aggressiveness, and the anger which fuels it, the prophetic vocation to oppose injustice would be thwarted. It was this anger which fought against the Crusades. It is a true anger, and certainly an ‘aggressive’ one, in Fromm’s language; and without it the justice of the world cannot endure.

In contrast, a reliable sign of the presence of ‘malignant aggression’ in modern *takfirism* is the resort to symbolic, brutal acts of ‘trophy revenge’. Balked of an easy victory against security forces, many Algerian rebels in the 1990s, such as the Salafist Combat Group, quickly turned their ire against soft targets. In 1992, only ten percent of Islamist targets in Algeria were civilians; six years later, this is said to have risen to ninety percent,²⁹ and the methods of slaying those who were considered apostates for

²⁶ Amherst Tyssen, ‘Hymn on the Capture of Mecca’, *The Crescent*, xiv, 250.

²⁷ Fromm, 24.

²⁸ Fromm, 32-3.

²⁹ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder and London, 2003), 164. The figures seek to exclude poorly-documented or ambiguous attacks, given that the security forces have carried out massacres of villagers in an attempt to increase popular revulsion against the extremists. See the GIA’s 1993 declaration:

not joining their *jihād* became more spectacular. In Fromm's terms, this mindset can resemble 'a permanent idolatry of the god of destruction.'³⁰

The alternative is the return to Holy War, that is to say, the twin-bladed struggle against evil that is driven by alignment with God's anger, as an expression of the love which, according to the hadith, exists between God and the *walī*. The inner *jihād* which makes this possible seems far from the concerns of the new urban radical; in fact, malignant aggression is made possible only by the adoption of a pacifism in the war against the ego. The rough Arab is uplifted by love, as Majnūn becomes a model of refined *adab* and subtle diction through his love for Laylā; and, as Ibn al-Dabbāgh tells us, 'if such a lowly person can be so transformed by love, then what must be the potential of those whose natures are already virtuous, and who have completed the processes of self-discipline?'³¹

There is a clue to the healing here. Love cannot exist unless we are fully engaged with God's creation and allow ourselves to be transformed by the contemplation of its beauty. This is the message driven home by Parkinson's poem; but it is also basic Qur'ānic teaching. 'In the way the heavens and the earth are created, and the succession of night and day, are signs for people of understanding' (3:190). The consequent cry, 'You have not created this in vain; glory be to You!' indicates the fullness of the knowledge that this contemplation (*tafakkur*) has yielded. The beauty of creation produces love as well as awe, gratitude as well as fear, softness as well as rigour; and the scriptural disclosure insists that these must be held in balance. The deprivation of beauty common in modern urban worlds pushes the surviving believers towards the *jalāl*, and, when combined with the decline of classical scholarship, the result is a Muslim, a Christian or a Jewish self that tends to restrict or even abolish mercy. The world is currently being tortured by this, precisely at a historical juncture in which it needs religion to be at its most healing and compassionate.

The city-dweller's perception of universal ugliness hardens the heart, which in turn renders the perception of beauty more difficult, creating a psychological trap or a vicious circle. Beauty is hardly to be found in a laptop or iPhone; it is to be intuited by the heart by confronting it personally; ideally in virgin nature or a great sacred building. The urbanisation of the world and the desolation of even traditional cities (symbolised in its most extreme form by the 'Doomsday Clock' in Makkah) cuts the soul off from this healing. According to Ibn al-Dabbāgh, 'The human soul finds joy

'... targeting all the symbols of the infidel regime from the head of state through the military, and ending with the last hypocrite working for the regime.'

³⁰ Fromm, 369.

³¹ 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Dabbāgh, *Mashāriq Anwār al-Qulūb wa-Mafātīḥ Asrār al-Ghuyūb* (Beirut, 1379/1959), 105.

when it beholds flowers and the freshness of verdant gardens, and its worries and anxieties are thereby removed. This is caused solely by the effect of the beauty which their Creator bestowed upon them from His sublime Beauty.³² Higher still than the gazing at nature and good architecture and the hearing of harmonies, the supreme object of love in creation is humanity; so that restraining the self from the egotistic and forbidden dimensions of human love is the action of a *mujāhid*, which is why a hadith tells us, astoundingly, that ‘whoever loves, and is chaste, and then dies, dies a martyr.’³³ To understand this hadith is to understand something deeply characteristic about the theology of the Final Religion.

There is another famous hadith which reminds us that ‘God is beautiful; and He loves beauty.’³⁴ The *walī* recognises beauty on earth more fully than others, and loves with the love of God. This love of beauty ‘has an influence on the human heart, producing subtlety, purity, softness, and all the other qualities which perfect it, and which prepare it to rise.’³⁵ The religious zealot, in Texas, Najd or Zion, who typically manifests qualities of discourtesy and hard-heartedness, thus stands at the opposite pole to the *walī*. Unconscious of beauty, and even suspicious when it is mentioned in a religious context, he is a nexus of ugliness (*qubḥ*) in the world. He may even be its most intense manifestation, a prefiguration of Antichrist, whose ‘one eye’ is the most visible sign of his ugly and misleading nature.

Recovering the love of beauty must form part of any Islamic project to defeat zealotry and restore orthodoxy, to take anger from the *nafs* while supporting its balanced presence in the *nūḥ*. The brute ugliness of modernised cities both reflects and intensifies the absence of beauty in the hearts of the powerful who commission architects; and those who live in the hideous ghettos which result, even if they be wealthy, find beauty a disturbing or irrelevant prospect. One recalls Christopher Isherwood, in *Goodbye to Berlin*, denouncing the inhuman modernity of the slums where Hitlerism was germinating; but one remembers also the love felt by many Gulf Arabs, raised now amidst anonymous glass towers, for Damien Hirst, the age’s great artisan of decay and despair. Nothing in the art and architecture of today reminds us of the Causer of causes *Musabbib al-asbāb*: our whole cultural environment panics us with the sense that the universe is a machine without meaning or mercy.

What calming herbal compound could be cast into the modern crucible of anger? Among Muslims, the vanguard would probably champion the revival of moribund

³² Ibn al-Dabbāgh, 111.

³³ Ibn al-Dabbāgh, 120. For the hadith see Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *al-Maqāṣid al-Ḥasana* (Beirut, 1405), 658, who finds only one sound *isnād* for this widely-reported hadith.

³⁴ Muslim, Īmān, 147.

³⁵ Ibn al-Dabbāgh, 105.

traditional arts, with calligraphy and *tajwīd* having pride of place. No less indispensable would be the upliftment of the aural environment, so frequently cacophonous in Third World cities, by means of *samāʿ*. ‘By the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace’ (13:28) is a verse whose immense resonances are reduced and downgraded by zealots fearful of spirituality conceived as escapism. It is ironic that at a time when the ancient Islamic tradition of music therapy is in decay in Arab countries³⁶ that such therapies should now be enjoying increasing respectability in the West, for the treatment not only of psychological imbalances, but of physical disorders as well.³⁷

The corruption or abolition of a *ḥalāl* aural culture among radicals is hardly the prime contributing factor to their volatile emotional life.³⁸ Yet it may be taken as a representative case, for there is something elementally iconic about the replacement of classical Islamic styles of preaching and chanting with the wild, fearful shrieking of the enraged zealot preacher. The destruction of his traditional city and home environment, and their replacement with debased emulations of the worst of European taste (sugary French café paintings, ‘Louis Farouk’ furniture, chandeliers from the Vegas Strip, the ‘Doomsday Clock’) is not separate from his abandonment of Sufism and classical Islamic law in favour of a barren and rancorous puritanism. His quest for identity and authenticity begins in the urban wasteland, and he cannot help interpreting the scriptures with a mind and soul impoverished and made fearful by that context.

³⁶ One of the several reasons for the lack of rage-based radicalism in Turkey might perhaps be sought in the continued liveliness of the country’s musical culture. In Turkey, more than in any other Muslim country, groups maintain the old tradition of music therapy for the mentally and spiritually ill, using ancient texts such as Ṣuʿūfī’s *Taʿdīl al-Anzīja*. Naturally this does not require the use of instrumental varieties of music; what matters is rhythm, tonality and mode.

³⁷ Long after Islamic civilisation recognised its value, music therapy is now an accepted procedure in the West. See Andrea Gilroy and Colin Lee (eds.), *Art and Music: therapy and research* (London and New York, 1995); B. Lindsey and J. Hooper, ‘Music and the Mentally Handicapped: The Effect of Music on Anxiety,’ *Journal of British Music Therapy* 4 (1990), 19-26; Leslie Bunt, *Music therapy: an art beyond words* (London and New York, 1994); for music’s effect on the unborn child, see J. Lind, ‘Music and the Small Human Being,’ *Acta Paediatrica Scandinavica* 69 (1981).

³⁸ Diet may sometimes also be a contributing factor. American and Middle Eastern bachelors, and even some married men and women, are increasingly consumers of modern fast-food, processed cheese, and soft drinks, and it would be idle to suggest that this never affects their spiritual and mental equilibrium. See Deborah Seymour Taylor, ‘Handle Hyperactivity with Dietary Measures,’ *Better Nutrition* (August 1989), 23-29; anon., ‘How Foods and Additives Affect the Brain: Pure Facts’ *Newsletter of the Feingold Association, Special Issue on Brain Chemistry* (February, 1995), 12-16. The poor Saudi diet is demonstrated by the very high rate of diabetes in the central province of Saudi Arabia, where 16.8% of the population is affected (*IDF Diabetes Atlas*, Sixth Edition <http://www.idf.org/diabetesatlas/download-book>).

The ear of the zealot has been damaged by the dangerous decibel levels of Third World traffic, exacerbated further by the merciless susurrations of air-conditioning and banal ringtones. It has not known peace. How, then, can it activate Vaughan Williams' definition of music as 'the reaching out towards the utmost realities by means of ordered sound'?³⁹ Such a figure is the victim of a modernity which has cut him off from all primordial normalcy. Here is a medical view:

Music is an essential part of our biological makeup. It is not something artificially added to our behavioral repertoire, nor is it something we do in a genetically prescribed way. Music is a necessary result of our biology and a vital ingredient in that which makes us human. Furthermore, music has broad and pervasive influences on biological aspects of our behaviour.⁴⁰

The atonal quality of the modern city, polluted by the roar of traffic and the violent assault of acid house or supermarket musak, seems to make the quest for authenticity both urgent and almost impossible. The Sufi orders had always, following the preoccupation with beauty enunciated by the likes of Ibn al-Dabbāgh, sought to reconnect believers with their bodies and the ancient norms of humanity through chants and complex musical systems carefully tailored to the subtle needs of the constituent ethnic cultures of the Muslim world. The modal system, in particular, showed the sensitivity of Islamic civilisation to the moral and spiritual power of harmony. Hence, no doubt, the radical's preference for crude and amodal styles of *tajwīd*, over Egyptian, Ottoman and Hijāzī styles, which take the listener on a journey through the *maqāms* in a strict order calculated to uplift and also to heal, coming down again through immaculate modulations to the 'base-*maqām*' of *tajwīd*, *maqām sabā*.⁴¹ For Texas Evangelicals, the traditions of church music are equally foreign, having been replaced by neurotic preaching or sugary 'feelgood' praise songs. In both cases the literalist radical abolishes traditions of the harmony of the voice together with the deep spiritual reintegration which they brought. In their place he brings a nasal drone or childish nashīds, followed by the wild cadences of the activist sermon, both perfect mirrors to the imbalance of his soul.⁴² When he sees other people he does not see them, but only perceives an opportunity to confirm to himself his own rightness.

The fearful rage (*ghayz*) produced by this alienation is easy to distinguish from righteous anger. One mark of this is that Prophetic anger reflects the anger of Allah,

³⁹ Robert L. Tusler, *Music: Catalyst for Healing* (Alkmaar, 1991), 10.

⁴⁰ Donald A. Hodge and Paul A. Haack, 'The Influence of Music on Human Behaviour', pp. 469-555 of Donald A. Hodge (ed.), *Handbook of Music Psychology* (San Antonio, 1996), 472-3.

⁴¹ Kristina Nelson, *The art of reciting the Qur'an* (Cairo and New York, 2001).

⁴² The Prophet (s) forbade the excessive raising of the voice (Muslim, Dhikr, 43).

which is quickly succeeded by forgiveness and has no regard to proportionality. (Allah forgives ‘without reckoning’, *bi-ghayri ḥisāb*.) The ego seeks revenge, to ‘get its own back’; the pure soul seeks to right wrongs committed against others. The anger of the *nafs* tends to the side of excess, the anger of the *nīh* to the side of forgiveness and finding excuses. When only the self is the Other’s target, the *walī* is pure forgiveness.

Take, for instance, the Qur’ānic teaching: ‘Repel the evil deed with one which is better, and then see! He between whom and you there was enmity is like an intimate friend’ (41:34). Ṭabarī (d.923), greatest of Qur’ānic commentators, offers some precious Prophetic commentary to this:

God the Exalted is saying to His prophet Muḥammad, upon whom be blessings and peace: ‘Repel, with your mildness, the ignorance of those who ignorantly abuse you, and with your forgiveness, those who wrong you, and with your patience the things you find unpleasant in them.’

Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه narrates [in his interpretation of this verse] that God commands the believers to exercise patience when angry, and mildness and pardon when wronged; and when they do this He will protect them from the devil, and transform their enemy into their intimate friend.

Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه was once insulted by a man in the presence of God’s Prophet ﷺ and he was forgiving towards him for a while. Then Abū Bakr’s anger overcame him, and he responded to him. At this, the Prophet got up and left. Abū Bakr followed him, and asked, ‘O Messenger of God, when I forgave the man who insulted me, you remained sitting; but when I began to set matters right, you got up.’ And God’s Prophet replied: ‘An angel had been there to reply on your behalf; but when you began to defend yourself, the angel departed, and a devil appeared. And, Abū Bakr, I never sit in the devil’s company.’⁴³

This new Islamic virtue of refusing to be angry for oneself is to be distinguished absolutely from the *jāhili* quality of *ḥamiyya*, tribal passion. ‘It is a violent and terrible passion,’ writes Reinhart Dozy, ‘the first and most sacred duty of all duties; it is the real religion of the desert.’⁴⁴ Fanatical anger, a sensitivity to personal slights and a desire for ‘trophy revenge’ are the hallmark of the Arab returning to his pre-Islamic roots, or another monotheist returning to the rage of paganism (remember the Viking berserkers, or the Malay as he (allegedly) ‘runs amok’). Responding kindly to hostility was one of the Qur’ān’s most radical innovations. As the passage continues: ‘And no-

⁴³ Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* (Cairo, 1388/1968), XXIV, 68-9.

⁴⁴ Cited in Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’an* (Montreal, 2002), 56.

one is granted this save those who show patience; and no-one is granted it save one of great good fortune' (41:35), which means, in Bayḏāwī's interpretation:

*No-one is granted this, i.e. no-one is given this trait of returning good (iḥsān) for evil save those who show patience, for this holds back the ego from vengeance, and no-one is granted it save one of great good fortune, which means goodness, and perfection of soul.*⁴⁵

Shaykh Zarrūq explains that to requite harm with another harm would lead to still greater harm, which is why we are obliged to respond with *iḥsān*. And as for those who will not accept our gift or our kind word or gesture, the response should not be to return to the exchange of insults, but simply to turn away.⁴⁶

The same Bayḏāwī reflects on a closely-related passage, verse 8 of Sūrat al-Mā'ida:

Oh you who believe, be steadfast for justice; and let not the hatred of a people seduce you away from being just. Be just, that is closer to piety. And fear God, verily He is aware of what you do. Let not the intensity of your hatred for the idolaters cause you to renounce justice towards them, so that you commit forbidden acts, such as mutilating the dead, and cursing, and the killing of women and children, and breaking pledges, simply in order to heal what is in your hearts.

The repetitions towards the close of the verse are for emphasis, in order to 'extinguish the fire of rage,' the rage which can lead false warriors to commit war crimes, and to target the innocent, all of which reflects 'the dictates of passion (*hawā*).'⁴⁷

All this confirms the principle that while anger is sometimes valuable, *ḥiqd*, or rancour, is forbidden. *Ḥiqd* has the quality of permanence, and is not open to forgiveness. It is an anger that has solidified to become an obstacle to reconciliation and human continuance.

Sometimes in our history a Sunnī-Shī'ī divide has also been visible here. Shāh Ṭahmasp's chief inquisitor, 'Alī al-Karakī (d.1534), made rancour the legitimating emotion of his dynasty with his touring bands of 'pious cursers' (*tabarā'iyyān-i dīndār*). These men would tour Iranian cities as part of the state campaign to convert Iran's Sunnī population to the Shah's Shī'ī creed, and would recite long public curses directed against the first three Caliphs. Sunnī scholars never developed a reciprocal

⁴⁵ Bayḏāwī, 635.

⁴⁶ Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq, *Qawā'id al-taṣawwuf*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Ya'qūbī (Tripoli, n.d.), 97 (*qā'ida* 181).

⁴⁷ Bayḏāwī, 142-3.

habit, not only because Sunnī Islam did not attack any Companion of the Prophet, but also, presumably, because of their internalisation of Sufism and the consequent emphasis on forgiveness and courtesy which made such hatred difficult. It is significant that the furious Karakī was concurrently engaged in a campaign to extirpate Sufism.⁴⁸

By contrast the natural believer avoids anger and resentment wherever possible. Deeply secure in the knowledge that the Divine decree is all that operates in the world and is the crystallisation of utter wisdom, he is at peace. Compare Karakī's vengefulness to, for example, a modern Bosnian grandmother, Nana Ajka, who has just reached the age of a hundred. Asked how she had discovered the secret of long life and happiness despite having lived through three terrible wars, she replied, 'Through work, love, and patience', and by avoiding 'envy and anger'. She has said her prayers since being orphaned at the age of three, and has lived a simple life of trust in God and contentment with His decree.⁴⁹ In our age of fearful and ideological trust in the *asbāb*, such serenity seems almost beyond our reach; but it is clear that one does not need outward fortune or an advanced education to be blessed with it. Intellectuals and activists should be humbled by her example.

The solution to our current emotional crisis is a return to a full Qur'ānic commitment in which we try to see the reality of God's agency in all things. Nothing else is likely to calm our spirits. We do not know whether ours are the end-times, but classical wisdom does seem more urgently required today than ever before. Under conditions of extreme entropy and collapse the Qur'ānic model of faith, which stresses patience in the shadow of the direct omnipotence of God more than any other scripture, and the Prophetic teaching of self-restraint and harmony, seem to provide the perfect armour against the incipient desperation, aimlessness and panic of the modern world. We can be as intolerant and furious as Mullah Karakī, or as peaceful as Nana Ajka: it is our choice. Other religions have commended the virtue of *riḍā* but only Islam gives us the healing reassurance of the total monotheistic message, that God is 'over all things Powerful'; and, as the Ottoman proverb had it, 'whoever believes in *qadar*, is protected from *kadar* (misery)': *man āmana bi'l-qadar, amina mina'l-kadar*.

⁴⁸ Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London, 2004), 24-7. For his book refuting Sufism see p.24. The contemporary Ottoman scholarly polemic was not generally against Twelver Shi'ism, still less against Imam 'Alī and his disciples; but was directed against the extremist Kızılbaş nomads.

⁴⁹ <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/nana-ajka-da-do-zivis-100-godina-treba-puno-rada-sevdaha-i-sabura/1405040581>