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## Religious and Spiritual Implications in Functional Anger

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## **Religious and Spiritual Implications in Functional Anger**

### **Abstract**

The topic of spirituality has been of interest for many years in the helping professions (Matise et al., 2018; Pargament, 2011). Another level of interest is how spirituality may be connected to anger that is culturally informed (Subarimaniam et al., 2020). This writing approaches the topic of functional anger as impacted by the religious and spiritual beliefs with case vignettes pertinent to students, pastoral counselors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, psychotherapists, and other helping professionals.

The topic of spirituality has been of interest for many years in the mental health profession yet is pertinent to all helping professions (Matise et al., 2018; Pargament, 2011). This writing seeks to close the gap between current practices for pastoral helpers, psychologists, clergy, nurses, social workers, and psychotherapists when a client presents with anger that is connected to religious or spiritual beliefs. The context for these topics will be from a spiritually integrated framework that recognizes religious and spirituality as a uniquely held perspective of the client (ACPE, 2019; Jones, 2019; Pargament, 2011). There is no expectation of expertise for any one specific faith tradition and no disrespect intended for religious or spiritual research that has been included in the examples.

### **Spirituality in Helping Professions**

It may be surprising to consider how religious or spiritual beliefs may be potentially connected to client anger. Recent divisive political issues have been recognized as the source of anger due to deeply held religious or spiritual beliefs about “right” behavior (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019), abortion rights, same-sex marriage, and other hot topics (Banks et al., 2019). Americans struggled to ascertain the truth about the pandemic with distrust and populist anger that led to

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protests, riots, and unlawful actions (Reno, 2021). Anger research is often restricted to associated violent and aggressive behaviors and it can be difficult to consider peaceful outcomes without research in positive psychology and viable historical examples. Martin Luther King (Greenfieldboyce, 2019), Jesus Christ (John 2:15; Mark 11:12–14), and Mahatma Gandhi (Perry, 2017) were religious historical men who responded to injustice with peaceful and meaningful anger. Practitioners from a wide variety of helping professions can help clients to approach client anger in the same way, considering how positive outcomes and healthy mental health choices might be imagined within their own system of beliefs.

Spirituality has been defined in many ways by researchers with attention to its function as universal human attribute (Pargament, 2011). Empirical research has led to a professional understanding of spirituality as a positive factor for healing of brain injury (Gillespie, 2019), recovery outcomes in substance use (Ghadirian & Salehian, 2018), and many persistent mental health disorders (Saiz et al., 2021). Intake procedures have been modified to include spiritual assessment (Butts & Gutierrez, 2018) and research in the medical profession have led to a better understanding of spirituality as it may promote healing in the area of nursing (Westera, 2017), cancer treatment (Cipriano-Steffens et al., 2020), and cardiology (Muniz da Silva Bezerra et al., 2018). For this writing, spirituality is defined as “the search for the sacred” (Pargament, 2011, p. 52) which may or may not include the concept of a deity, religion, or recognized community structure.

A new certification in Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy (SIP) is now available through the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE, 2019) that reflects new interest for incorporating spirituality when providing mental health services. This certification is available to licensed mental health practitioners through a 30-h training and 20-h consultation

model overseen by the ACPE Psychotherapy Commission ([www.acpe.edu](http://www.acpe.edu)). Licensed mental health practitioners who obtain this certification understand spirituality as an element of diversity for all clients as an ethical aspect of psychotherapy with assessment as an important starting point for treatment. Similar to multicultural counseling and other specialized approaches, competence for integrating spirituality into psychotherapy requires training and supervision to acquire knowledge, awareness, and skills specific to that practice.

Professional helpers rely on multicultural education and professional development to provide a framework for the incorporation of spirituality as an element of client diversity (Subarimaniam et al., 2020). Because religion and spirituality have been associated with positive physical and mental health outcomes, it is unethical to ignore this aspect of the individual client perspective (Chang et al., 2018; Vaingankar et al., 2021). Conversely, religiosity has also been associated with increased stigma for mental illness diagnoses (Johnson-Kwochka et al., 2020), potential delays in obtaining treatment for medical issues (King et al., 2019), and negative mental health outcomes when harmful beliefs are held by the client (Griffith, 2010; Freeman-Coppadge & Horne, 2019; Magyar-Russell & Griffith, 2016). This writing hopes to shed light on a new way to approach religion and spirituality for angry clients.

### **Religion and Spirituality with Positive Anger**

One area that has been overlooked and underdeveloped in the context of spirituality is the relationship between religion/spirituality and anger. While not the focus of this writing, it is important to note that research in the realm of theology and religion reveal positive as well as negative outcomes for anger with nuanced interpretations from the perspective of the believer. For example, the concept of *righteous indignation* is a perspective of Christian anger that can lead to positive outcomes for the individual as well as society (Bock, 2021). When engaging in

righteous anger appropriately, Bock (2021) proposes that the Christian individual can work for justice and protect others who are vulnerable when evil occurs. Whereas it has been noted that Christian *righteous indignation* has been misused to keep marginalized members of society oppressed (Tessman, 2005), others have found anger as moral motivation to resist and refuse subordination by systemic oppression (Shin, 2020). Shin (2020) argues that the burden of anger can be transformed into a thriving moral virtue that will help the oppressed to flourish when resisting systematic injustice and oppression.

Jewish *righteous indignation* is also understood as a positive emotion when approached from the context of the *tikkun olam* imperative to heal, repair, or mend the world (Rose et al., 2008). Specific ways that anger can be used from a traditional as well as progressive view of Judaism include positive change through Jewish *righteous indignation* toward: reducing toxic waste, combating domestic violence, and developing renewable energy. Jewish comedians have used anger to promote social justice through humor as “superior to violence as an outlet for anger, having already opted for words over swords” (Friedman & Friedman, 2019, p.7). This redirection of anger through mockery of bigots, sexists, racists, White supremacists, and antisemites helps to educate the public by taking people out of their comfort zones to help the oppressed group wrest back control, respect, and self-esteem.

In a similar way, *wrathful compassion and tantric anger* are understood through a Buddhist non-duality perspective to achieve clarity and disrupt the ego when delivered with empathy (Owens, 2019). The author references Emily McRae's work proposing that anger is a virtue that can be transformed into wisdom through six characteristics from two traditional Buddhist stories. These six characteristics of tantric anger were identified as (1) transformation, (2) compassion, (3) reduced attachment to ego, (4) non-compulsive control, (5) benefit to others,

and (6) does not center the self (Owens, 2019, p. 25). Overall, *wrathful compassion and tantric anger* involve expression that is non-violent and a recognition of suffering as a shared state by all human beings.

### **Psychological Research on Spirituality and Anger**

Psychological research on religion/spirituality with anger provides helpful insight into the way these two concepts can be connected. Keep in mind that anger expression is not necessarily “sinful” or out of alignment with devout religious beliefs. It is often the personal interpretation of religious or spiritual dogma that can lead to a perspective of anger as wholly “bad.” While the following study findings are not generalizable to all clients of a particular religious or spiritual orientation they may help to underscore how appropriate assessment can reveal intersectional components for a given presenting problem.

Ariyabuddhiphongs (2014) found that Buddhist clients may view anger as a provoked response that is under the control of the individual. When these responses lead to negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors a Buddhist client may perceive this as a spiritual imbalance that can foster hatred and other unwanted repercussions. This information may be helpful for the practitioner who is working with a Buddhist client who is holding himself responsible for the symptoms of the presenting problem.

### **Buddhist Anger Control Case Example #1: Ravi**

Consider Ravi, 34-year-old Buddhist Japanese-American, cisgender homosexual man who suffers from debilitating self-blame and shame in his anger toward his mother who has embarrassed him during a recent holiday gathering. He berates himself through rumination and a constant inner dialogue for having a lack of control and “giving in” to anger. Ravi is ashamed of the anger he has toward his mother and he has started to abuse alcohol to manage the guilt that

spikes every time he thinks about her. One of Ravi's goals would be to find a way to be angry without blaming his mother. He wants to remove alcohol as his way of coping with the shame and embarrassment that is another unacceptable result of his lack of anger control. Ravi's overall desire is to learn how to control his anger and express it in a way that will not violate his Buddhist beliefs that relate to balance and harmony.

### **Jewish Bereavement**

Religious and spiritual beliefs about reincarnation may also connect with anger in the grieving process. Somer et al. (2011) found that Druze (Muslim) parents were less angry due to positive beliefs about reincarnation and fate than Jewish parents of fallen military sons. The Druze parents reported a stronger belief in reincarnation and the power of fate than that of the Jewish parents which directly impacted the parents' acceptance of their son's death as a justified fact and that his death was meaningful in the view of reincarnation. Overall, the Druze parents experienced significantly less hopelessness, guilt, and anger than the Jewish parents who did not believe in reincarnation or fate. Professional helpers may want to listen for pain of military-related grief and loss that is connected to beliefs about death and the afterlife and invite further discussion as the client may need it.

### **Jewish Bereavement Case Example #2: Martha**

For example, consider Martha, 64-year-old Jewish cisgender heterosexual grandmother who suffers from Major Depressive Disorder due to the recent death of her 19-year old grandson, Michael, as a result of an improvised explosive device (IED). Michael was serving as a member of a peace-keeping force in an international conflict zone outside his country of origin. Martha reports with uncontrollable anger toward her country and herself in supporting Michael's enlistment. She says, "He had one life to live here on Earth and I robbed him of the opportunity

to live it well by encouraging him to enlist.” Her self-blame for Michael's death has led to continued hopelessness and crying spells that keeps her confined to her bed. Martha continues to grieve far beyond the expected time of her Jewish beliefs and has stopped attending synagogue. One of Martha's goals would be to help her reduce her self-blame for Michaels’ death and to express her anger toward her country more effectively. Martha would be invited to explore ways that her Jewish faith tradition can be a helpful spiritual resource for healing. At her direction, efforts to reconnect her with her Rabbi or other spiritual leaders may help her to make sense of Michael's death. She may find healing support through connection with other grieving Jewish and non-Jewish mothers and grandmothers as an implicit spiritual resource to reduce her isolating self-blame and encourage her to have hope for the future. Martha's overall desire is to connect/reconnect her to religious and spiritual communities as viable resources and to help her learn how to redirect her anger in a healthy way.

### **Anger Toward God**

An interesting religious/spiritual topic to consider is client anger toward God. According to Exline et al. (2011), clients who were angry with God had poorer adjustment with bereavement after a loved one died from cancer. Anger toward God was lower for Protestants and African-Americans in the study with poorer adjustment especially for unresolved anger that continued to persist over one year. This anger was due to a perception of God's role in promoting intentional harm, cruelty, a lack of meaning, or for the client as a victim. Atheists and agnostics also reported anger toward God albeit limited to past experiences and a hypothetical construct of an existing deity. What is particularly important to learn from this research is the finding that anger toward God is measurable and related to negative adjustment for varying contexts and client populations. To add to this bereavement-related research, anger has been a predictor of

complicated grief for clients who have lost loved ones to suicide-related death (Anderson, 2010).

An ethical practitioner will therefore listen for anger toward God regardless of religious or spiritual orientation when clients are in bereavement.

### **Anger Toward God Case Example #3: Stephanie**

Stephanie, a 27-year-old African-American, atheist genderfluid (expression) bisexual woman (identity) has come into counseling for her inability to move past the death of her sister, Amelia, to suicide. Stephanie reports that she is angry with “whatever force there is out there controlling the universe” for this loss and blames society for “creating a poisoned world where Amelia couldn't find beauty.” She continues to grieve the slow death of the planet to pollution and toxic waste that is a constant reminder of Amelia's loss of hope and choice to end her life. Stephanie believes that there is a malevolent force that others think is God undermining nature and “positive vibes” of enlightened human beings. She feels sick to her stomach daily and has difficulty staying focused at work because she misses her sister so much. One of Stephanie's goals is to find a way to be angry without feeling sick “all of the time.” She wants to make a difference in the world so that Amelia's death won't feel like it was in vain. Stephanie's overall desire is to learn how to use her anger for good and find a way to make sense of Amelia's death.

### **Angry Atheist Stereotype**

On the topic of atheism, it may be helpful to explore the stereotype of this orientation as leading to “angrier” clients. Meier et al. (2015) approached atheist clients with measures of belief in God, state anger, and trait anger for a population of 1, 677 participants and determined that atheists are not angrier than believers despite that general presupposition. Because atheist anger may be a factor in marriage, couple, or family relationships, presuppositions that contribute to these conflicts would be worth exploring. Atheist clients who have their anger discounted would

likely welcome the opportunity to be validated and present new opportunities for discussion and reconciliation.

#### **Atheist Anger Case Example #4: Call**

For example, consider Call, 24-year old German-American, atheist nonbinary individual who has come into counseling with their family that is struggling with conflict related to the impending release of the father, Charles, from prison. Charles, 64, was convicted of embezzlement and fraud several years ago which left the family financially ruined. Call's mother, Ruth, 62, sister, Gwen, 30, and younger brother David, 22, identify as cisgender and Lutheran. Call's family is angry with Charles for the loss of their home and security which led to the hardship of Ruth having to find a job as a waitress and apartment living which was a major change in lifestyle. Call's anger has been discounted due to this status as an atheist with comments from Charles, Ruth, Gwen, and David that “anyone who rejects God has no say about what is right or wrong.” One of Call's goals would be to improve the family dynamic so that “all members can be validated.” Call's overall vision is to have a voice about their anger and be a fully participating member in the decision-making related to Charles’ release from prison.

#### **Anger and Christian Ostracism**

Research on ostracism has helped to identify anger as a part of the process for the person who has been shunned (Donate et al., 2017; Williams & Nida, 2011). For many Christian families, ostracism has been used to manage conflict when family rules have been ignored or broken (McGinnis, 2015). Professional helpers may find it helpful to listen for ostracism as it may be connected to religious or spiritual beliefs and determine what, if any, norms for reconciliation processes may exist in their faith tradition. Anger has been correlated with increased risk-taking which can lead to unnecessary danger for the compromised client (Svetieva

et al., 2016) and can aggravate the situation instead of promoting reconciliation when the ostracized person approaches the ostracizer. This latter discovery is important because the desire to break through an existing wall of isolation can be overwhelming for the ostracized client and using anger for his purpose will perpetuate the suffering of all persons involved.

### **Christian Ostracism Case Example #5: Darla**

For example, consider Darla, 28-year-old European-American, non-practicing Roman Catholic cisgender heterosexual woman who has been ostracized by her family for marrying a Haitian agnostic transgendered man, Oscar at the courthouse. Darla suffers from life-threatening Bulimia that developed over the two years since her marriage and struggles with intense anger toward her family. She was told by her mother, Carol, 72, that she is no longer her daughter because of the biblical principle of “cutting off her own hand that has offended her.” Darla's father, Bob, 80, is also in agreement with this step and told Carol to relay the message that Darla and her “God-hating partner” are never to contact them or her siblings again. Darla can't believe that her family doesn't care that she is struggling in the hospital due to the ramifications of her bulimia and is angry “beyond belief” that God hasn't fixed this yet. Oscar continues to send letters of invitation to Carol and the family despite their ruling on communication as prohibited and encourages Darla however he can. One of Darla's goals is to find a way to break through the ostracism of her family “before she dies.” Her overall vision is to learn how to be angry in a way that doesn't hurt so she can focus on getting healthy again.

### **Hindu Anger as Physical Pain**

An interesting study on Gujarati mothers in India (Raval et al., 2013) found that anger expression was less acceptable than physical pain for their children. This perspective of anger as more aversive than physical pain was connected to the mother's collectivistic culture, Hindu

beliefs, and societal norms. Professional helpers need to understand that physical pain may be an expression of unresolved anger and assess for this practice within the context of religious or spiritual beliefs. Psychosomatic symptoms can be difficult to “tease out” without ethical spiritual assessment that honors the client's perspective and needs to be approached with respect and sensitivity (Raval et al., 2013).

### **Hindu Physical Pain Case Example #6: Thomas**

For example, consider Thomas, 35-year-old Indian-American, Hindu cisgender heterosexual man who suffers from periodic stress headaches and chronic stomach pain despite a clean bill of health from his primary care physician. His wife and doctor have both recommended that he seek help for stress and frustration that seems to be contributing to these medical issues. Thomas reports that he wants to make changes in his career since he completed his doctorate in chemical engineering four years ago. He had high hopes for working as a full-time tenure-track faculty member at a local university yet cannot seem to break through the adjunct part-time work that continues to be his only source of employment. Thomas denies being angry about this situation yet continually reports with long explanations about how this career circumstance is unfair and unjust given his experience and academic success. He notes that both his headaches and stomach pain intensify when he applies for full-time faculty jobs and every time he has to accept another adjunct class. Thomas clenches his fists when he talks about his thwarted attempts to find “more appropriate” work and agrees to consider new ways to approach that process. One of Thomas's goals is to find a way to acknowledge and express emotion without increasing his headaches or stomach pain. His overall vision is to find work without having so much stress and frustration.

### **Pertinent Professional Ethical Codes**

For the topic of anger and spirituality, the application of several ethical codes within a multicultural lens for spiritual content was discovered using the Cultural Formation Interview (Pearton & van Staden, 2021). As a culturally informed emotion, anger can be approached as a part of ethical standards for approaching diversity. Ethical codes for several professions are noted yet is not a comprehensive list for all that may be impacted by client beliefs and anger as a culturally-informed process. Review of specific professional codes and standards not listed here is recommended.

#### **American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014)**

Definitions of anger related to perceived injustice (Carriere et al., 2018; McGinnis, 2008; Zitek & Jordan, 2021) help to make a connection between the ethical principle of justice noted in the preamble of the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014). This attention to justice may also apply in the core professional values of “diversity and embracing a multicultural approach” (p. 3) and “promoting social justice” (p. 3) when we consider how anger and spirituality may connect for a given client. Other ACA codes pertinent to anger and spirituality in counseling include A.2.c. Developmental and Cultural Sensitivity, A.4. Avoiding Harm and Imposing Values, and C.5. Nondiscrimination (ACA, 2014).

#### **Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling Competencies (ASERVIC, 2021)**

Competencies from the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2021) also apply to the connection between anger and spirituality. Competency #2 recognizes that religion/spirituality is central to the client's worldview and can influence psychosocial functioning which may include the unique beliefs of the client about anger. In a more direct way, competencies #3–5 highlight the need to explore practitioner

religious/spiritual beliefs to obtain self-awareness on how they may influence the therapeutic process. Counselors are also required to understand their limitations, build resources, engage in consultation, and provide a referral when necessary to maintain an ethical practice – even when spirituality may be the only counselor-client conflict.

### **Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapist (SIP) Competencies (ACPE, 2020b)**

Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapist (SIP) competencies (ACPE, 2020b) also provide guidance on spirituality in psychotherapy that can include anger as a cultural factor. Competency #1 provides direction for appreciation of religious/spiritual diversity and the need for practitioners to have the ability to work with a variety of differences in client beliefs. Because religious and spiritual beliefs about anger may vary from client to client, SIP practitioners need to be aware of how that emotional state may present uniquely as a factor in the presenting problem. SIP practitioners need to be aware of their own beliefs about anger that may need to be bracketed to ensure that value imposition does not occur (Kocet & Herlihy, 2014). Competency #3 requires the practitioner to integrate spirituality in an ethical manner which infers appropriate spiritual assessment. To approach anger within the religious and spiritual context, appropriate spiritual assessments have been noted later in this writing.

### **Anger as a Psychological Issue**

As an emotion that is often associated with criteria for psychological diagnosis, anger is frequently encountered as a negative state yet can be conceptualized as functional or dysfunctional from an anger management perspective (Tafrate & Kassinove, 2019). This research can be helpful to other professional helpers who need to discern whether or not a mental health practitioner is needed to provide additional services for their angry client. Understanding

the difference between dysfunctional and functional anger can be an important step for meeting unique client needs as they arise.

### **Dysfunctional Anger**

Many DSM-5-TR (APA, 2022) disorders reference anger as a negative emotional state in the criteria needed for diagnosis. Some of these disorders include PTSD (Van Voorhees et al., 2021), Major Depressive Disorder (Kim, 2017), and Intermittent Explosive Disorder (Costa et al., 2018). Dysfunctional anger has also been associated with 21st-century mass shootings (Fernandez et al., 2020) and intimate partner aggression (Godfrey et al., 2021). Professional helpers often hear about anger in client stories related to betrayal (Wills et al., 2022), employment (Nguyen et al., 2019), and child-rearing (Rodriguez, 2018) due to perceived injustice and inequity. Traumatized clients often blame themselves or others for their debilitated state and report anger mediated by rumination (Christ et al., 2020). These descriptions of anger are pathological, dysfunctional, and unhealthy.

In some circumstances, anger may be reported as unhealthy yet functional in helping the client to express suppressed anger. For example, clients who engage in non-suicidal self-injury often describe that behavior as a way to release or express anger that otherwise remains repressed, toxic, or dysregulated (Cipriano et al., 2020). Veterans who engaged in non-suicidal self-injury (NIIS) reported that the negative behavior of cutting helped them to achieve a level of feeling, control, and understanding that was unavailable to them due to trauma and unexpressed pain (Cassello-Robbins et al., 2021). Clearly more research needs to be done to understand the complex nature of anger that has functional as well as dysfunctional characteristics.

### **Functional Anger**

Anger research has been associated with positive as well as negative political change in the United States due to strongly held religious/spiritual beliefs. What is interesting to note is how often anger is expressed on both sides of a topic for citizenry who care about injustice that is represented by inequality, amendment rights, and civil liberties. Negative outcomes for that same anger have included violent protests, hostility, shootings, and death. Research supports anger as a powerful emotion with energy that can be harnessed for positive use (Abblett, 2019). This understanding of anger as a “charged” emotion helps the client to approach it for positive versus negative change.

In this perspective, functional anger is “angering well” (Reis-Dennis, 2019) with the outcome of promoting positive, productive, and potentially healing behaviors (McGinnis, 2008). Healthy people express anger in ways that lead to change, encourage peace, and promote new ways to approach a shared problem (Dryden, 2021). In this healthy versus unhealthy anger perspective, we know that strategic anger can be beneficial when used in work relationships (Peralta et al., 2020) and anger can be transitional for learning control in young men (Barber, 2018). Professional helpers intuitively understand anger as a universal human emotion, yet have not been taught how to invite its expression to help a client to achieve personal as well as therapeutic goals and build better coping skills.

Research on functional anger is currently in its infancy with theoretical content being tested in various disciplines. In the political world of activism and social injustice, we have learned that angry voices related to the rights of women, children, and sexual minorities can lead to much needed change (Traister, 2018). Anger that expresses personal value in the face of racism is arguably functional because it represents “eagerness, optimism, and self-belief” for people of color (Cherry, 2021). Professional helpers find themselves working with angry clients

who may not be experiencing pathological symptoms yet may need help to express anger in a more functional, positive way. For these reasons, functional anger is likely to grow as a pertinent area of study for many interdisciplinary topics and fields to promote healthy living within the guidelines of personally held religious and spiritual beliefs and values.

### **Pertinent Assessments**

As indicated throughout this writing, ethical assessment is a requirement for all clients. To accomplish this effort, professional helpers need to acquaint themselves with assessments that represent a best fit for the client. Careful consideration of the operational definitions and purpose of the instrument should be evaluated given the history and self-report of the client prior to administration.

### **Assessing Dysfunctional vs Functional Anger**

Assessment for pathological anger can be conducted using the Anger Disorders Scale (ADS) (DiGiuseppe & Tafrate, 2004), the Clinical Anger Scale (CAS) (Snell et al., 1995), or the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory–2™ (STAXI-2) (Spielberger, 1999). For functional anger, a free online Functional Anger Inventory (FAI) is available for use at [www.anger.works](http://www.anger.works) to help individuals to determine how helpful their anger is for them. These assessments help to determine the extent of functional or dysfunctional anger and promote dialogue between the professional helper and the angry person.

### **Religious and Spiritual Assessment**

Many spiritual assessments exist yet not all inventories should be treated the same. For example, the Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments (ASPIRES) (Piedmont & Piedmont, 2010) measures both *Spiritual Transcendence (ST)* and *Religious Sentiments (RS)* with operational definitions that may not apply to non-Christian or evangelical clients. In this

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same way, the Brief RCOPE (Pargament et al. 2011) measures more broadly defined domains of *Positive* and *Negative Religious Coping* that may not be helpful for a “spiritual-but-not-religious” client. Professional helpers may find the Spiritual Health Inventory (SHI) (Korinek & Arredondo, 2004) helpful to assess *Spiritual Experience*, *Spiritual Locus of Control*, and *Spiritual Well-Being* outside religious beliefs that may be more pertinent.

Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapists (SIP) (ACPE, 2019) engage in spiritual assessment with active listening for explicit as well as implicit spiritual beliefs and resources. Explicit beliefs and resources are likely to include language, practices, or groups that are clearly understood as either religious or spiritual. Rituals that involve prayer beads, clothing, or specific behaviors that immediately identify a particular orientation would be considered explicit beliefs and practices. Whereas implicit beliefs and resources are more subtly presented as thoughts or feelings about sacred events, ideas, groups, awe-inspiring events, and undefined spiritual experiences. For example, clients who talk about the theme of hope or the value of a knitting group, may be describing a potential spiritual belief or resource that could be important to the healing process.

Spiritual themes may also be helpful to assess. For example, a client fixated on forgiveness may benefit from the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) (Thompson et al., 2005) as an appropriate spiritual assessment. The HFS measures forgiveness as a transitional process can change as the client develops a more flexible perception of harm toward a neutral position. The spiritual theme of gratitude may warrant use of the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) (McCullough et al., 2002) for a client who may align with that concept as a “grateful disposition or disposition toward gratitude” (p. 112).

Professional helpers interested in using a digital assessment tool may want to consider the *STAR: Spiritual Themes Assessment and Reflection* app (L&L Programming, 2021). Currently available as a free Apple Store product with no in-app purchases or ads, this app helps to promote awareness of spiritual themes that may be connected to everyday items. It may be surprising for a client to discover a spiritual theme that connects their anger to explicit or implicit beliefs.

### **Psychospiritual Framework with Case Vignette**

It may be helpful to consider a specific psychospiritual case vignette for use of the intertheoretical *Face of Anger Paradigm* from “Amazon” Warrior Theory (McGinnis, 2008). Used in conjunction with the use of respectful inquiry using gentle implicit and explicit questions (ACPE, 2019; Jones, 2019; Pargament, 2011), this paradigm provides a framework for exploring the anger in a safe, nonjudgmental way. Professional helpers are encouraged to consider how client anger may present uniquely in various settings despite the purpose of receiving care – often sharing information that goes beyond what is required in a given intake process.

### **Starting Point – the Activating Anger Event**

Initial evaluation of the *activating anger event* invites the client to consider how justice may have been involved according to their religious or spiritual beliefs. Existential views about justice in context with their “spontaneous and genuine views about human life, relationships, and personal encounters with adversity” (Griffith, 2010, pp. 81–95) can describe how and why this event was anger-producing. If anger is confirmed as the emotional response to that unjust event, the client is invited to go through functional anger steps of *energy*, *identification*, *choices*, *change*, and *resolution*. Each of these steps challenge the client to consider religious or spiritual

beliefs that may inform and guide what is appropriate and fitting. To illustrate this framework, Arsalan's case vignette has been crafted below using Person-centered, Cognitive-Behavioral, Gestalt, and Adlerian approaches and interventions.

### **Arsalan Case Vignette**

Arsalan is a 54-year-old cisgender male who identifies as Iranian-American and Muslim. He is heterosexual and has been married to Farah for 14 years. Together they have five sons ranging from 2 to 13 years of age and would consider themselves middle class with a thriving business renovating and renting apartments. Arsalan came to America as a young child and is fiercely patriotic in the tradition of his father and mother who worked hard to gain citizenship for the entire family. Arsalan attends mosque every week, adhering to Muslim holy days, practices, and prayers daily.

Arsalan has experienced an increase in discrimination toward himself and his family as a part of his everyday work and interaction with people in society. Two of his sons were the victims of bullying recently at school and his wife is afraid to go to the supermarket by herself because of negative comments of “go home terrorist” and “are you carrying a bomb?” that have been directed toward her by both men and women. He has grown to be more and more resentful about the anti-Muslim temperament in the U.S. and is angry “more often than not.” Recently, Arsalan has discovered that his anger is coming out in extreme ways that are now overflowing toward Farah and his children when he is home. He says that “everyone is against me” and “what use am I if I cannot defend my family?” Instead of feeling like a lion that is the literal interpretation of his name – Arsalan feels like “a wet kitten.” As the only son in his original family, Arsalan feels that he is letting his father down by not being as successful as he could be

due to discrimination. He has not lived up to his family expectations and is experiencing symptoms of depression that do not quite meet criteria for Major Depressive Disorder.

**Problem/Objectives/Goals:**

**Problem:** Arsalan is unleashing his anger toward his wife and family where it “doesn't belong”

a. Objective: To learn how to express his anger justly (as a Muslim)

b. Baseline measurement (self-report): 30/100% (100% justly expressed anger)

c. Goal: 70/100%

**2. Problem:** Arsalan feels hopeless and ineffective as a protector of his family

a. Increase his effectiveness as a protector

b. Baseline measurement (self-report): 10/100% (100% effectiveness as protector)

c. Goal: 90/100%

**3. Problem:** Arsalan feels like a “wet kitten” which is against his parents dream for him

a. Feel like a lion again despite the discrimination against his family

b. Baseline measurement (self-report): 0/100% (100% lion)

c. Goal: 90/100%

**Assessment**

Arsalan's explicit and implicit religious and spiritual beliefs were assessed with attention to metaphors of being both a lion and a kitten in his story. He has a strong belief in his identity as a Muslim man with a responsibility to Allah as well as his father, wife, and extended family. The *heart of the matter* for Arsalan is his failure to serve as the protector of his family as central to his identity as a Muslim father and husband. Further assessment of Arsalan's spiritual coping skills were determined as negative using the Brief RCOPE (Pargament, 2011) which indicated

the need to build more positive skills related to his Muslim beliefs about himself as well as the world in general.

### **Face of Anger Implementation**

#### **Event/Injustice/Anger Evaluation**

Arsalan shares that he believes the bullying and fear that he and his family are experiencing is unjust and that the only emotion that makes sense to him is anger. He wants to be angry in a way that will effect positive change – in his family as well as in the community and workplace. When he has discussed these difficulties with his Iman, Arsalan has been affirmed in his perspective about these happenings as injustices and want to eliminate the sadness and hopelessness that go against his beliefs about what it means to be a Muslim man. He ranks his anger as the highest number using a 1–10 scale and reports that he goes to a 10 almost immediately – no matter what the impetus may be.

#### **Energy Step**

Arsalan reports that he feels tension in his upper back and neck when he thinks about the bullying that his children are experiencing and often feels flushed when arguing with his wife, Farah. He says that his hands shake as his anger increases, and he finds himself looking for ways to release that energy throughout the day. Gestalt exaggeration techniques invite exploration of his clenched hands which reveals an awareness of his anger as connected to his identity as a “protector.” Arsalan explores alternative ways to be angry, determining that his love of basketball and playing “hoops” with his sons at the local park may be a better way for him to use anger energy. Relaxation strategies that may include progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness, and guided imagery interventions may help Arsalan to achieve immediate relief of negative tension in his upper back and neck.

### **Identification Step**

When invited to consider who or what may be to blame for the bullying of his family, Arsalan notes that he believes it is society that is responsible. “Those children at my son's school are just following their parents’ example,” he says, “and others are ignorant about how difficult it was for me and my family to become American citizens.” When Arsalan is asked to assess his internal thoughts related to these societal failures, he says that he then blames himself for not helping his family to be stronger. “I say to myself ‘Arsalan you are a failure as a father because you have not prepared them adequately’ and feel that they may never learn,” he says shaking his head. Positive self-affirmations may help Arsalan to break these automatic negative thoughts and place the responsibility onto society instead of himself.

### **Choice Step**

Arsalan is invited to consider what choices are available to him when future bullying injustices occur. Cognitively, he is invited to consider what alternative thoughts he would like to have when this bullying occurs and to determine what behavioral responses may work best to utilize that anger energy. The Gestalt empty chair intervention may help Arsalan talk with his future or past self with advice for action that would be helpful to himself and his family. This awareness may lead to action planning and ranking anger in the moment to later expend in activities like playing hoops with his sons or praying when those moments occur. How long might Arsalan have to play with his sons for a 10 out of 10 anger event? These choices would be explored and practiced to help Arsalan build new ways to behave when he is angry.

### **Change Step**

Arsalan would be invited to envision the change that he wants to achieve in his life using Adlerian or another theory. What change would have to occur for this problem to “go away”?

Would his life with Farah be less stressful or more loving because of the change in his angering? How so? Does he need to join a Muslim men's group to promote a stronger community response to discrimination? What changes in the community would need to occur to bring about resolution for Arsalan? How can Arsalan be a part of those changes? What can he do to make changes in himself to promote change that will likely lead to resolution?

### **Resolution Step**

Arsalan would be invited to envision resolution to bullying that he cannot control. How would Arsalan know that his is beyond these feelings of failure? When would he know that he is living in alignment with his beliefs and his parent's expectations? When will he be able to “let go” of this anger and focus on his success as a protector of his family? What does that “typical day” look like – even if a bullying incident occurs?

### **Prognosis for Arsalan**

Prognosis for Arsalan is good because of his strong Muslim beliefs and connection to that religious community as a viable spiritual resource. His explicit love and trust in Allah would be conceptualized as a factor of resilience for functional angering and a positive way forward. Arsalan has many spiritual strengths represented by his desire for resolution with his wife and to promote his own self-image as a good father, husband, and son. He is clear on his religious and spiritual beliefs that guide his self-concept as a Muslim man and how that should be connected to the way he expresses his anger.

### **Conclusions**

The incorporation of spirituality has evolved substantially over the past few decades for many helping professions and is now supported by many helpful assessment tools. By recognizing the potential impact of spirituality as a factor in functional angering, professional

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helpers can be better equipped to assist clients who present with an intersection of these elements. By separating dysfunctional anger from functional anger, we can help clients to receive the help that is needed without pigeon-holing all anger as a dangerous and unwanted state. Future research on the implications of religious and spiritual beliefs in functional angering is needed to guide support that is offered in a wide variety of settings through the effort of many different helping professionals.

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