The sixth commandment says, “Do not kill any soul, which God has made forbidden, except in just cause” (al-Isra’, 17:33). It is absolutely forbidden to take away the life of any person intentionally without a just cause. A human’s life is sacred and may be taken only in the pursuit of justice. This ayah goes on to say, “...and whoever is killed wrongfully, We have certainly given his heir an authority. But let him not commit any excess in killing, for he enjoys the support [of law]” (al-Isra’, 17:33).

In demanding a just retribution, one should not exceed the bounds of equity in retributive killing. For example, one cannot demand that any other person or persons be slain with the murderer. According to the tafsir (exegesis) of Ibn Kathir, it also means that the heir should not go to the extremes when killing the killer, such as mutilating his body. The heir of the murdered will be helped through the due process of justice according to the Islamic law, which entitles him to take recourse to one of the following: (1) demand qisas (law of equality in punishment), (2) accept diya (blood money), or (3) forgive the murderer. According to Islamic law, murder is a personal crime, and it is the family of the murdered who have a say in deciding the fate of the murderer by exercising one of the three legal options. Western law stipulates murder to be a crime against the state, and the family of the murdered has no say in the outcome of the case. It is up to the judge or jury to decide the fate of the murderer. According to Islamic law, murder is a personal crime, and it is the family of the murdered who have a say in deciding the fate of the murderer by exercising one of the three legal options. Western law stipulates murder to be a crime against the state, and the family of the murdered has no say in the outcome of the case. It is up to the judge or jury to decide the fate of the murderer. Ironically, the practice of adultery and fornication by mutual consent is not considered an offence under the Western laws whereas under the Islamic law, these acts are offences against the State, and parties involved in the act are subject to heavy corporal punishments, as has been mentioned under the fifth commandment.

There are some important lessons that can be drawn from the sixth commandment. The human soul is created sacred and it must remain so. In no way and under no circumstance, regardless of the motive or reason other than what is applicable by Islamic law can a human life be taken away. There are a number of verses in the Qur’an which testifies to this, for example, ‘If anyone slew a person unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land—it would be as if he slew all mankind. And if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind”(al-Ma‘idah, 5:32). There is another ayah which says, “Do not take the life God has made sacred, except by right. This is what He commands you to do: perhaps you will use your reason” (al-An’am, 6:151).

The first murder in human history was committed by Qabeel, when he killed his brother Habeel. Both of them were Prophet Adam’s two sons. This incidence is mentioned in the Qur’an: “Recite to them the true report of Adam’s two sons when they offered a sacrifice and it was accepted from one of them but not accepted from the other. The one said, ‘I shall kill you.’ The other said, ‘Allah only accepts from people who have taqwa. Even if
you do raise your hand against me to kill me, I am not going to raise my hand against you to kill you. Truly I fear Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. I want you to take on both my wrongdoing and your wrongdoing and so become one of the Companions of the Fire. That is the repayment of the wrongdoers. So his lower self persuaded him to kill his brother, and he killed him and became one of the lost. So his lower self persuaded him to kill his brother, and he killed him and became one of the losers” (al-Ma’idah, 5:27-30). Indeed, Qabeel set a very bad precedence. We understand from a hadith that any soul that is unjustly killed, then the first son of Adam will carry a burden of its shedding, for he was the first to practice the crime of murder. Another hadith says, "The son of Adam, who killed his brother, will be the most miserable among men. There is no bloodshed on earth since he killed his brother, until the Day of Resurrection, but he will carry a burden from it, for he was the first person to establish murder."

The life of a person can be taken away under four circumstances only. (1) In times of war, it is permitted to kill one’s enemy while defending one’s life, faith, honor, and family. “Do not fight them in the Masjid al-Haram until they fight you there. But if they do fight you, then kill them. That is how the kuffar (disbelievers) should be repaid” (al-Baqarah, 2:191). (2) Adultery is punishable by stoning to death. (3) A murderer’s life can be taken away if the family of the murdered demands so under the law of qisas (law of equality in punishment). (4) A murtad or a person who denounces Islam and is guilty of treason can be killed. This, however, is a debatable and controversial issue till this day. Killing a fellow Muslim intentionally is a grave sin. In a hadith, the Prophet (SAW) said, "The destruction of the entire world is lighter in the sight of Allah than the unjust killing of a believer."

In case the killing of a believer takes place unintentionally, then the ruling of kaffarah (expiation) comes into force. This is explained to us in the ayah of Surat al-Nisa’. “A mu’min (believer) should never kill another mu’min unless it is by mistake. Anyone who kills a mu’min by mistake should free a mu’min slave and pay blood-money to his family unless they forgo it as a sadaqa (charity). If he is from a people who are your enemies and is a mu’min, you should free a mu’min slave. If he is from a people you have a treaty with, blood money should be paid to his family and you should free a mu’min slave. Anyone who cannot find the means should fast two consecutive months. This is a concession from Allah. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise” (al-Nisa’, 4:92).

Those who commit a murder deliberately and intentionally incur the wrath and curse of Allah (SWT) and are doomed to Hell forever. “As for anyone who kills a mu’min deliberately, his repayment is Hell, remaining in it for ever. Allah is angry with him and has cursed him, and has prepared for him a terrible punishment” (al-Nisa’, 4:93). According to a hadith recorded in both the Sahi’s (Bukhari and Muslim), “If two Muslims take out their swords to fight each other, then both of them will be from amongst the people of the Hell-Fire." It was said to the Prophet, 'It is alright for the killer but what about the killed one?' He replied, 'The killed one had the intention to kill his opponent."

As mentioned earlier, the defender of the right of the murdered can only demand the life of the murderer and no one else even though he had others beside with him who plotted against the murdered. This is made clear through the ayah, "We prescribed for them in it: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and retaliation for wounds” (al-Ma’idah, 5:45).

What are the reasons that compel someone to commit acts of violence that may even sometimes lead to murder? Intoxication, gambling, jealousy, distrust, suspicion, enmity, not to speak of bigotry are among some of the motives. In all cases, anger and rage play an important role in pushing one to commit such atrocities. The offender usually allows his conscience to convince himself that whatever he is doing is justified, when in reality it is only a trick of Satan who instigates the person to commit the crime.

Iblees (Satan) means the most frustrated one. Satan has developed anger and enmity towards Adam and his progeny because he thinks that it was Adam who deprived him from paradise forever. So, in his anger and frustration, he wants to make everyone go with him in hell. We learn from the Qur’an that Musa (AS), when he had
unintentionally killed a person, he immediately realized that what he did was a part of Satan’s handiwork, and turned to Allah (SWT), seeking His forgiveness. “He entered the city at a time when its inhabitants were unaware and found two men fighting there — one from his party and the other from his enemy. The one from his party asked for his support against the other from his enemy. So Musa hit him, dealing him a fatal blow. He said, ‘This is part of Shaytan’s handiwork. He truly is an outright and misleading enemy. He said, ‘My Lord, I have wronged myself. Forgive me.’ So He forgave him. He is the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful” (al-Qasas, 28:15-16).

It is established that anger leading to violence comes from Satan. How should anger be controlled? In the first place, the best remedy is not to get angry. Generally, people of taqwa tend to be less angry compared to those who are far away from deen. Anger is a natural human trait but if it is not properly controlled it becomes very destructive. In one hadith, it is called “fire.” The Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said that in a state of anger, one should change one’s environment, one’s position, and drink some water. He repeatedly advised a person who kept asking him for an advice by saying, “Do not get angry.” He also advised the angry person to seek Allah’s refuge from Satan. He also said, “The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger.”

We also have to learn to be patient, however adverse the circumstances may be. “O you who believe, seek help through patience and prayer, for God is with the patient” (al-Baqarah, 2:153). Prayer (salah) as we learn from the Qur’an prevents us from indecencies and wrongs. “Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs, and the remembrance of Allah is surely greater. And Allah knows whatever [deeds] you do” (al-‘Ankabut, 29:45).

Prepared by Dr. Munawar Haque
IONA Research & Publications
publications@ionaonline.org
www.ionaonline.org