

Hasad (Malicious Envy) and Ghibtah (Descent Envy): History, Culture and Philosophy

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Abstract

Hasad, an Arabic word, comes from ḥa-sa-da which is 'to dislike that someone should possess a blessing and/or happiness and to want that blessing and/or happiness to be removed from that individual and/or be transferred from him to oneself'. Its widely accepted substitute, in English, is 'Envy'.

The origin of Hasad can arguably be traced to social comparison, usually of "Aristotle's Potters against Potters" pattern. The classification into malicious envy and Ghibtah (descent envy) is based on the focus of the envier (Subject) on the 'Rival' or the 'good', respectively. The focus on the 'Rival' is the outcome of negative emotions which give rise to destructive energy, culminating in deleterious consequences for the 'Subject', 'pulling him further down'. This morally reproachable approach is 'Hasad' (malicious envy). Conversely, the focus on 'good' is the outcome of constructive emotions which produce pro-active energy making the 'Subject' feel motivated to 'pulling himself up', resulting in self-improvement. This morally laudable approach is Ghibtah (descent envy). Envy is simultaneously a fascinating and a dreadful emotion with positive and negative facets, depending upon the doctrine of Khair (good) and Sharr (evil).

The identification of 'Envy Spot on the Brain' is a great scientific breakthrough. It is quite possible that the surgical procedure 'Deep Brain Stimulation', presently employed successfully to treat a variety of disabling neurological symptoms (mainly of Parkinson's Disease), will be able to treat envy, and the dream of an 'envy free set up' be realized.

Keywords: Envy; Benign envy; Malicious envy; Descent envy; Hasad; Ghibtah; Khair; Sharr; Divine refuge

Introduction

Envy is almost the only vice which is practicable at all times, and in every place; the only passion which can never lie quiet for want of irritation, its effects therefore are everywhere discoverable and its attempts always be dreaded (Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) - English Poet).

Hasad, an Arabic word, comes from ḥa-sa-da which is 'to dislike that someone should possess a blessing and/or happiness and to want that blessing and/or happiness to be removed from that individual and/or be transferred from him to oneself'. Three forms of this root appear 5 times in the Holy Quran, once as Hasad, once as Hasid 3 times as Hasada. Various lexicographers have translated it as "to peel off, to scrape off, to envy, to grudge". Its widely accepted substitute, in English, is 'Envy'. Whereas the word Hasid means 'the one who envies or the one who harms with envy', Mahsud is used for the one envied.

Envy is a complex and puzzling emotion [1], a vampire vice [2], a stubborn weed of mind [3], a gnawing worm of the soul [4] and a passion which views with malignant dislike the superiority of those who are really entitled to the superiority they possess [5]. Unfortunately, the perceived superiority of the envier, at times, results in extreme situations where he desires to destroy his superior. Parrott and Smith [6] have defined it as "when a person lacks another's superior quality, achievement or possession; and either desire it or wish that the other lacked it". Protasi [7], famous emotion anatomist, while summarizing most authoritative psychological and philosophical accounts, concluded "Envy is an aversive reaction to a perceived inferiority to a similar other, with regard to a good that is relevant to the sense of identity of the envier". Ayan Randi (1905-1982 CE), a Russian novelist, described this passion as "hatred of the good for being good".

The word 'envy' has its origin from the Latin 'invidere' which means 'to look at another with malice'. The extreme distress and mental anguish of the envier can only be relieved by taking the coveted item(s) from the envied person. The literal meaning of 'envy' in Greek is 'to boil within'. The Greek word "epichairekakia" (taking pleasure in others' misfortune) and the German word "schadenfreude" (a feeling of joy that comes from seeing or hearing about another person's troubles or failures) reflect the emotional and behavioral attributes of the envier. Whereas Aristotle (384 BC-322 BCE), the Greek philosopher, sees 'envy' as pain at the good fortune of others, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 CE), central figure of modern philosophy, grades it as the nastier cousin of schadenfreude.

Literature Review

It needs to be discussed under following sub-sections.

Stakeholders in envy

It has three parties [1,8]:

1. Envier: The person who envies someone (Subject).
2. Envied: The targeted person/group of persons who is/are envied (Rival).

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3. Desired attribute (some possession), capacity or trait (personal or physical) that the Subject supposes the Rival to have (good).

Envy: A blessing or a curse?

Envy is the tax which all distinction must pay (Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) - American Poet)

Envy is simultaneously a fascinating and a dreadful emotion with positive and negative facets. On the positive side it may be taken as a motivational force which stimulates people to strive harder to achieve more than they have at the present. It may a contributory factor causing the phenomenon of 'keeping -up-with the Joneses' (the urge to have what one's peers have). On the negative side, it is a dominant cause of unhappiness, undermining our morality to the extent of making our social life miserable. Phenomenologically, it needs to be discussed as two entities; for existence of which van de Ven et al. [9] found empirical evidence.

1. Benign (or Non-malicious, Emulative, Admiring, White). It is a healthy approach which elicits productive and motivational tendencies [1]. In Russia, it is called White Envy.

Some philosophers have coined the term 'Descent Envier' which means one who sincerely believes that he has no desire that the 'Rival' lose the 'good'. Such an envier is free from malice [1], it is a healthy quality which influences attitudes in a positive way and carries with it the seeds of motivation to improve oneself [9]. The Arabic word "Ghibtah", widely used in Arabic literature, appropriately conveys this meaning.

2. Malicious (or Invidious, Destructive, Black, Envy Proper). This is a frustrating negative feeling which arises because someone else is better off than you and you have the feeling that you want what they have [10]. Its objective is to pull down the envied person to one's own level. Whereas it makes the envier feel the pain of deprivation (which is non-existent) it is likely to arouse resentment or anger in envied one. Smith and Kim [11] have argued that only a malicious form of envy, aimed at derogating the envied person, should be considered "Envy Proper".

Sawada and Fujii conducted a study, on 250 university students, to examine the effects of the two traits of envy on academic achievements. Both benign and malicious envy were found to be independent and a high criterion-related validity was revealed by an association with characteristic variables such as dispositional envy and self-esteem. The students with higher levels of benign envy were found to set goals higher and as a result, achieved higher levels of academic performance. In contrast, no such effect was found for malicious envy [12].

Cohen-Charash [13] has described Episodic Envy which is composed of a feeling component and a comparison component. The feeling component is strongly correlated with emotional reactions (anxiety, depression, negative mood, hostility) and behavioral reactions (harming the other, creating a negative work atmosphere). The comparison component relates to behaviours intended to improve one's position in the organisation [13].

In the Holy Quran, the word 'Hasad' has been used, for both the types with different meanings, according to the context. For the purpose of convenience, "Ghibtah" and "Malicious Envy" will be used in the present article. Ghibtah is an Arabic word (also in Persian with similar meanings) used to express rejoicing, delight, lure, a state of happiness and of enjoyment or wellbeing, to be in an enviable position, to wish one's own grace, to be the grace of others so as not to detract from the

owner. It has also been translated as beatitude (supreme blessedness) which it actually is.

Difference between Ghibtah and malicious envy

Envy is the art of counting the other fellow's blessings instead of your own (Harold Coffin (1926-2015), Famous for authoring "Coffin Needle").

Ghibtah is emulative in nature, as seen by Aristotle. The word 'Emulation' means 'effort or desire to equal or excel others, ambitiousness, aspiration, imitation'. Its Arabic equivalents are Munafsta and Muhakat which again mean 'competition' and 'imitation' respectively. Aristotle further distinguishes between Envy and Emulation as "Emulation makes us take steps to secure the good things in question, envy makes us take steps to stop our neighbor having them". Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679 CE), one of the founders of modern political philosophy, has compared the terminology as "emulation is a grief arising from seeing oneself exceeded or excelled by his concurrent, together with hope to equal or exceed him in time to come, by his own ability" while (malicious) envy is "the same grief joined with pleasure conceived in the imagination of some ill-fortune that may befall the envied one" [14]. Blagrave (1652-1698 CE) [15] has made a differentiation between "Wicked Envy" and 'Noble Emulation' as "the former ought to be rooted out and the latter cherished and cultivated as much as is possible".

Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957 CE), renowned English poet and crime writer, has added a beautiful phrase in literature "Envy is the Great Leveller: If it cannot level things Up it will level them Down" [16]. The pulling down motivation ends in Malicious Envy or Hasad whereas the pulling up stimulus results in 'Decent Envy or Ghibtah. Shaykh Mufi Shafi Usmani (1897-1976 CE), a South Asian Islamic Scholar, has defined Ghibtah as "to desire for oneself the same blessing as the other has, without any idea of the latter's losing it. This is not only permissible but also desirable". The permissibility, superiority and persuasion of Ghibtah have been well described in the Holy Quran in the following verses:

- Chapter 83 Al-Mutafifeen, "The seal of it (the drink provided to the near ones to God, in the Life Here-after) is musk. For all this, then, let every aspirant aspire it" {83:26}.
- Chapter 57 Al-Hadeed, "Be foremost in seeking protection from your Lord, and to a Garden as vast as the heavens and earth. It has been readied for those who choose to believe in God and His Messengers. Such is God's bounty that He bestows upon who wills it. God is the Lord of abounding bounty" {57:21}.

The Last Messenger, in a Hadith narrated by Al-Bokhari and Al-Muslim, has made it clear that the Hasad (in the meaning of Ghibtah) is permissible only in two cases:

1. Towards a person whom God has granted wisdom, and who rules by this and teaches it to the people.
2. Towards a person whom God has granted wealth and property along with the power to spend it in the cause of the truth.

Ghibtah is different from 'malicious envy' in which the envier has extreme personal discontentment and extreme hatred for the envied one. In Ghibtah the person is fully contented with what the Almighty All-Giver has given him. Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (circa 1058-1111 CE) a medieval Muslim theologian, has beautifully explained it as follows:

“What is destined (for you) will reach you, even if underneath the two mountains. Conversely, what is not destined (for you), will not reach you, even if between two lips”.

According to the philosophical approach of Fadayl ibn Iyad (726-803 CE), a Muslim ascetic, the attribute of Ghibtah is admiration (a feeling of strong approval or delight with regard to someone or something). Admiration is part of faith while (malicious) envy is part of hypocrisy. The believer admires others, and does not (maliciously) envy others. The hypocrite on the other hand (maliciously) envies others and does not admire them. This explains why Islam hates ‘malicious envy’ and appreciates Ghibtah.

Difference between envy and jealousy

Although, popular culture uses both terms as synonymous, there is significant difference between the two. According to lexicological analysis, the Arabic equivalent of Envy is Hasad and that of Jealousy is Ghera which has been translated as “attached to the person of the beloved and a constant anxiety for fear of his tendency that someone else may share his love”. Whereas envy is linked with not having a bounty, jealousy is linked with having it.

Envy is a two person situation while jealousy involves three persons. Modern psychologists notably Richard et al. [17] and Ben-Ze'ev [18] have made a fairly straight forward distinction. Envy stems from wanting from what others have while jealousy occurs when something we already possess (usually a special relationship) is threatened by a third person.

Research Methodology

Whereas the term “principles”, introduced by Somekh [19], justifies the research methods appropriate to a field of study [19], the historic, cultural, psychological and philosophical components of the proposed study were given their due share.

Library immersion, analysis of archives and web search were the mainstay of the sources. For the historic component of the proposed research, Guidelines of Hamilton College for “Writing a Good History Paper” were followed [20]. The written primary sources of information were letters, diaries, memories and speeches of theologians of various schools of thoughts. The secondary sources included scholarly write-ups of “disinterested observers” who were, by any means, connected to the series of events; and also the unbiased historians.

Ontological, epistemological, cross-cultural and theological perspectives got adequate consideration. The most recent research on psychological aspects of envy, with the identification of “Envy Spot on the Brain” was highlighted.

Research Questions:

The following research questions were formulated and addressed.

- Anatomy of Envy
- Theological Consideration
- Effects of Hasad on Hasid
- Effects of Hasad on Mahsud
- The Evil Eye
- Possible harms of envy to a society’s psychological health and well-being?

Results

The research questions, already formulated, were addressed under the following sub-sections:

Anatomy of envy

Envy (malicious) pollutes the mind. There is no greater wealth than the possession of a mind that is free from this malady [Thirukkural (Sacred Couplets) by Saint Thiruvalluvar fl 31 BCE].

As a result of a major scientific breakthrough the “envy spot” on the brain has been identified. A fascinating research paper “When your Gain is my Pain and your Pain is my Gain: Neural Correlates of Envy and Schadenfreude” proposes a neuro-cognitive mechanism of a psychologically rewarding reaction, schadenfreude and its relation to envy [21]. The key findings are:

- Stronger dACC (dorsal Anterior Cingulate Cortex) activation was observed when one felt stronger envy.
- At the behavioural level stronger schadenfreude was related to stronger envy.
- Schadenfreude arose when misfortune occurred to a person who was advantaged and self-relevant.
- Striatal activation was observed when misfortune happened to an envied person but not when it happened to a non-envied one.

Dr. Takahashi, the principal investigator of the above study, has referred to a famous Japanese quotation: “The misfortune of others taste (sweet) like honey”. He, with his team, have identified the ventral striatum as the producer of that ‘honey’ [21].

Deep brain stimulation (DBS) is a surgical procedure, with a very high success rate, used to treat a variety of disabling neurological symptoms-most commonly the debilitating symptoms of Parkinson’s disease (PD), such as tremor, rigidity, stiffness, slowed movement and walking problems.

After having identified the ‘envy spot’ in the brain, it is quite possible that with a similar surgical intervention, in the near future, we may be able to treat envy. And the dreams of John Tinbergen, in 1956 and of Foley, in 1967, of an envy free setup could be realized [8].

Theological considerations

Envy is the religion of the mediocre. It comforts them, it soothes their worries and finally it rots their souls, allowing them to justify their meanness and their greed until they believe these to be virtues – Carlon Ruiz Zafon (Spanish novelist).

According to the teachings of Bhagavad Gita (Hindu Religious Text), malicious envy is included in the six major ways in which the Mind (control key of spiritual advancement) blocks spiritual progress. The remaining five are: Lust, Anger, Greed, Illusion and Madness. The most credible example, in their literature, is of Lord Ram (also known as Ramchandra), a major deity in Hinduism. He fell victim to malicious envy of his stepmother and had to be exiled for 14 years. This happened on January 5, 5089 BCE, according to planetary configuration.

The Seven Detestable Sins or Vices, enumerated by Pope Gregory the Great (Pope 590-604 CE), were represented by animals around the human heart:

1. Toad=Avarice (extreme greed)

2. Snake=Envy
3. Lion=Wrath
4. Snail=Sloth (habitual disinclination to exertion)
5. Pig=Gluttony
6. Goat=Lust
7. Peacock=Pride

The book of Proverbs, examples of traditional Biblical Wisdom, has an elevating influence on the intellect of the readers:

1. "Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous, but who is able to stand before Envy?"---Proverb 27:4 AKJ Version
2. "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but Envy rots the bones"---Proverb 14:30 NI Version

Robert South DD (1634-1716 CE), an English Churchman, has described envy as "a depraved affection or passion of the mind disposing a man to hate or malign another for some good or excellent belonging to him for which the envious person judges him unworthy, and which for the most part he wants himself".

Irving Karchmar, the author of "Master of the Jinn: A Sufi Novel", tells us the tale of a demon having all the limbs of a man, but without a head saying "I am called Envy, for I delight in devouring heads but I hunger always and desire your head now". The Master smiled and said "Indeed Envy is the prison of the spirit".

Traditional Judaism condemns envy and jealousy because these emotions amount to idolatry. German novelist Theodor Fontane (1819-1898 CE), in his novel "De Stechlin", marvelously expressed the connection between idolatry and envy. Although, The Oxford Living Dictionaries define idolatry as "an image or representative of a god as object of worship", it would be appropriate not to restrict its meaning to worship of idols, statues and dead saints. This has been made clear, by the Holy Quran, in Chapter 25 al-Furqan as "Have you seen the one who has taken as god his own desires (passion, impulse, lust)? Could you be an advocate for him?" {25:43}.

It is a historic fact that envy is the first sin to be committed in heaven and also the first one on the face of earth. The Holy Quran tells us four stories which are linked to envy. In 'Chapter 2 al-Baqara' {2:34} we have been introduced to the story of Satan who, because of arrogance, refused to obey the command of the Almighty to prostrate himself before Adam. 'Chapter-7 al-Aeyraaf' {7:20} and 'Chapter -20 Taha' {20:120} narrate the malicious act of Satan who beguiled Adam and his wife while they were in paradise. The third story is about the murder of one son of Adam by the other, as narrated in 'Chapter 5 al-Ma'eda', because of malicious envy {5:27-31}. The fourth story is of Prophet Yousaf (Joseph) who was victim of malice by his step brothers, as detailed in 'Chapter-12 Yousaf' {12:9}. Whereas the distribution of bounty is entirely at the discretion of The Supreme Bestower, the 'Chapter 16- al-Nahal' explains it as "God has caused some of you to excel in earning livelihood over others" {16:71}. The envier, by protesting against the divine distribution, in practice refutes the Decision-Making Attribute of The Almighty, The All-Giver and The All-Wise.

All the necessary ingredients of malicious envy: enmity, pride, arrogance, love of leadership and impurity of soul were collected in the approach of the non-believers of The Last Messenger when they objected to his prophethood. Their mental approach has been described In Chapter-43 'al-Zhkhru'f' - "Why not this Quran sent down to

some great man from (one of) the two towns? Are they the men who distribute your Lord's Grace?" {43:31-32}. In 'Chapter 4- al-Nissa', it is said about the enviers "Do they envy other people whom God has given of His bounty? {4:54}". Another reference is from Chapter 2-al-Baqra "Out of envy, many among the People of the Book wish to make you (believers) revert back to denying the truth after you have attained the belief, even though the truth has become clear to them {2:109}." The negative approach of enviers against the envied ones "When your Gain is my Pain and your Pain is my Gain" has been mentioned in Chapter-3 'al-Imran' ----"If you (believers) are blessed with good future, it grieves them (non-believers), and if a calamity befalls you (believers) they (non-believers) rejoice in it" {3:120}.

In a Hadith (Sayings of The Last Messenger), the envy has been condemned as following:

- "Beware of (malicious) envy, for verily it destroys good deeds the way fire destroys wood" (Sunan Abi Dawood-4903).
- "Faith and (malicious) envy are never joined in the heart of the believer" (Sunan Abi Dawood-6099).

It is important to note that both in the Holy Bible (Deut 8:5, Proverb 2:2) and the Holy Quran {2:10}, the word heart has been used as a synonym for mind. The Holy Quran has used the term 'blinded heart' or 'veiled heart' for inability to recognize the difference between right and wrong {7:179, 22:46}. Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali has described it as "Beware that the (malicious) envy is one of the most dangerous diseases of heart". Dr Maurice Bucaille has described heart as "the abode of faith and source of eternal light".

It is evident that the Holy Quran, Hadith and Muslim theologians have condemned malicious envy. The last verse of Chapter-113 'al-Falaq' merits special mention. While interpreting part of the verse "when he (the envier) envies" {113:5}, Shaykh Mufti Shafi Usmani comments 'Envy may not cause harm to the object until the envier takes a practical step with word or deed to satisfy his heart'. This practical step, in the opinion of Khan [22], is "through the evil eye" [22].

Effects of hasad (malicious envy) on hasid (envier) himself

Envy is a gun with a faulty breech-lock which flares back and burns the gunner. Austin O'Malley (1858-1932) - Author of "Medical Homicide and Mutilation".

In a Sermon preached before the Queen on August 20, 1693, Blagrove [15] concluded "Envy is its own punishment, a punishment so great, that when a man becomes extremely envious, it even pines him away, it wastes his flesh, consumes his bones, eats his very heart so that no man can find a greater torment for a very envious man, than he inflicts upon himself". What is the chain of events? To begin with, the envier (Subject) targets the envied (Rival) to destructively spoil his goodness (good) to suppress his own sense of deprivation. Long continued attempts, most of them being futile, result in impairment of his own competency to appreciate goodness. The resultant perceived resentment is a negative emotion which the Subject cultivates to annihilate the Rival. According to Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (1918-2013 CE), renowned politician, "resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies". This is how the envy of the envier, although unintentional, ultimately turns against its own self. Famous Muslim scholars have taken serious note of this disease of the soul which has significant psychological, moral and social consequences. While discussing the negative impact of envy on the envier himself, Amir Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan (602-680 CE), the

Founder of Ummayyad Dynasty Caliphate, said "O my son! Beware of (malicious) envy because it affects you before it affects your enemy". This is true because the agony and pungency of the former literally consume him, with physical and mental problems such as deteriorating health, depression and anxiety. Umar Bin Abdul Aziz (682-720 CE), the 5th Rightly Guided Muslim Caliph, was right in asserting "I cannot think of any wrong-doer who is more likely to be wronged than he who (maliciously) envies another". Shaykh al-Islam Imam Shafi'i (767-820 CE) rightly said "inside the envier a fire burns constantly". The depth of enmity has been well described in a famous Arabic Quote "All kind of enmities may perish except that of the envier". The agony of 'Instagram Envy', a negative effect of Facebook, could be an example in the modern internet age.

The green eyed monster: "To be green with envy" has been defined as "to feel unhappy because you wish you had something that someone else has". The origin of this phrase has been traced to William Shakespeare's Play "Othello-Act 3 Scene 3. Dr. John Townsend, American psychologist, while discussing the Green Eyed Giant of Envy reminds us of the wisdom of the Holy Bible (Romans 12:15): "Rejoice with those who Rejoice and Weep with those who Weep". He continues by adding that when we envy, the reverse becomes true we rejoice when others weep and weep when others have cause to rejoice.

Effects of hasad (malicious envy) on mahsud (envied) person

An envious person is the worst kind of person because he will kill you (Envied). Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975)-American Religious Leader.

In the "Shades of Quran", a highly influential commentary of the Holy Quran, Shaykh Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966 CE) says "We should not try to deny the psychological effects of (malicious) envy on the envied person just because we cannot ascertain how this takes place by scientific means and methods. Very little is known about the mysteries of envy and the little that is known has often been uncovered by chance and coincidence".

Malicious Envy is arguably injurious to the envied one. It may culminate in mental anguish, physical damages, temporary or lifelong, or may even take his life. The relevant stories described in the Holy Quran testify to its detrimental consequences. Both Adam and his wife, beguiled by Satan, were expelled from paradise. The envied one Habil (Abel), was killed by his envious brother Qabil (Cain). When Yousaf (Joseph) fell victim to the evil eyes of his brothers, he had to face physical and mental miseries for a long period. Abu Abbas Mubarrad (826-898 CE), famous for authoring al-Kamil fial- Adab (The Perfection of Education), has beautifully explained the situation in his poem:

The envier meets you cheerfully, with a smiling face

While his heart conceals his true feelings

The envier's enmity comes without provocation

Yet he accepts no excuses while he attacks

Malicious Envy is a secret emotion, in the sense that the envier conceals it. A Dutch psychologist has explained this attitude as: "when studying (malicious) envy, one has to realize that it is such a widely condemned emotion that we often hide the experience not only from others but also even from ourselves' [23]. Francois Rochefoucauld (1613-1680 CE), French author, has rephrased it as "we can often be vain of our passions, even the guiltiest ones; but (malicious) envy is so sneaking and shameful that we never dare confess it". Helmet Shoeck

(1922-1993 CE), Austrian-German sociologist, has expressed the same philosophy as "the envious man will confess to almost every other sin or emotional impulse before he will confess to his own (malicious) envy".

The evil eye: This was first recorded in Mesopotamia about 5,000 years ago. It has been recognized by Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Buddhist cultures and continues to be a powerful factor influencing the behavior of a countless millions of people on the globe. It is a malevolent glare, which is usually directed towards a person who is unaware of it. It has different names in different languages. In Arabic it is called 'Ayin Hasad' or 'Ayin Harsha'. The three known types are:

1. Unconscious: This harms the people and things without intending to.
2. Intentional: The attempt to harm is intentional.
3. Unseen: This is hidden and most feared.

Verse 51 of the Quranic Chapter -68 'al-Qalam' is usually called "the Verse of Evil Eye". It says "And indeed those who disbelieve would always make you (The Last Messenger) slip with their eyes when they hear the message (Quran)... {68:51}. The story of the Prophet Yousaf (Joseph), who was victimized by the evil eyes of his step brothers, is an irrefutable example. What is the actuating force or the inciting factor? The answer has been given by Alan Dundes (1934-2005 CE), Folklorist at the University of California, as "the victim's good fortune, good health or good look invite or provoke an attack by someone with the evil eye".

Possible harms of envy to a society's psychological health and well-being

In a Working Paper released by University of Warwick, in January 2018, the results of a study on 18,000 randomly selected individuals were summarized. The four main conclusions emerged as:

1. The youngs are especially susceptible to envy. The levels fall as people grow older.
2. Using fixed-effects equations and prospective analysis, the analysis reveals that envy today is a powerful predictor of worse SF-36 mental health and well-being in the future. A change from the lowest to the highest level of envy, for example, is associated with a worsening of SF-36 mental health by approximately half a standard deviation ($p < 0.001$).
3. No evidence is found for the idea that envy acts as a useful motivator. Greater envy is associated with slower -- not higher -- growth of psychological well-being in the future. Nor is envy a predictor of later economic success.
4. The longitudinal decline of envy leaves unaltered a U-shaped age pattern of well-being from age 20 to age 70 [24].

Discussion

Envy has been recognized throughout human civilization as a ubiquitous dynamic interpersonal interaction, even in sophisticated professional settings [25].

It is the worst, the most disgraceful of wicked actions and the root of all evils. The Holy Scriptures have counted it equal to the behavior of savage animals, biting snakes and the tempter Satan. Historically, it is the first sin to be committed in heaven and also the first on the face of earth. According to Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400 CE), known as the Father of English Literature, "all other sins oppose virtue, but envy is against all virtues and all goodness". Despite the apparent darkness

of Envy, it is “one of the most universal and deep seated of human passions” (Bertrand Russell, English philosopher (1872-1970 CE) and “something firmly embedded in the nature of man” (Imam Ibn Rajab Hanbli 1335-1393 CE). Malicious envy is undoubtedly, a reprehensible evil. Discussion on the entities of good and evil has a long and venerable history. Evil, as an absence of good (Latin: privation boni), is a theological doctrine. The statement of the renowned Evangelist Billie Graham “I do not know why God created Evil?” opens the door to an interesting debate. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) asserted that Almighty God, being Himself supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil among His works. He continues that God’s goodness and benevolence remain perfect without any responsibility for evil or suffering. He refuted the idea of the existence of evil in itself, instead regarding it as a corruption of goodness, caused by the abuse of free will by mankind.

Whereas the Quranic Chapter 32- al-Sajdah’ says that “He has created everything in perfect balance {32:7}”, the creation of evil par excellence cannot be (and should not be) attributed to Him. Imam Amin Ahsan Islahi (1904-1997 CE), famous exegete of the Holy Quran, believes that evil is by-product of the objects created by God. Night which provides comfort to man has as a by-product an opportunity for thieves, assassins, enemies and harmful creatures to come out to harm man. Abdul-Baha (1844-1921 CE), the successor of the founder of Bahai’s Faith, says “Evil is imperfection. It has no independent existence, but is rather the absence of good just as darkness is the absence of light”. Ibn Sina (980-1037 CE), the greatest Muslim philosopher-scientist, in his esoteric interpretation of Sura al-Falaq, concludes that evil should be seen as a derivative phenomenon rather than a substantial category of being next to the absolute goodness or generosity, which is the primary purpose of creation [26].

To summarize, there is strong evidence that Sharr (Evil) is not something which has been created as such. It is the opposite of Khair (goodness) as has been made clear in ‘Chapter -99- al-Zilzaal’ [99:7-8]. The Fountain Head of Grace, Beauty and Perfection have placed a physical law and a moral law in the cosmos. Khair is the rule while Sharr is the exception. Everything in His Empire has positive and negative aspects. For example, when water flows within the boundaries of a river bank, it has good results but when it crosses the limits and overflows to cause flooding it has definitely an adverse outcome.

A knife in the hands of a competent surgeon is life-saving (thus good) whereas in the hands of a criminal it is injurious to life (thus evil). Swami Abhedanda Ramakrishna (1866-1939 CE) has beautifully explained it as “the same fire may be called a giver of life and comfort and a bestower of happiness and a producer of good, when it saves the life of a half-frozen man, when it gives warmth in the coldest days of winter or when it cooks our food. But it will be called a producer of evil and a curse of God when it destroys life, inflicts injury on man or property”. The truth of the matter is that utilizing everything under the divine doctrine is Khair but to opt for the otherwise is, undoubtedly, Sharr.

How is this divine doctrine of Khair and Sharr applicable in case of Hasad? To answer this question, we need to analyze the mental state of the Hasid:

1. He does not count his blessings (health, wealth, good fortune and many more) which God Almighty has given him because of His goodness and kindness, rather than because he deserved those.
2. He believes that God is good when he receives all that he

wishes. However, if he fails to get something which he desires (even if undeserving), he puts the goodness of God to debate. He is reluctant to praise Him when, the other one (Mahsud), in some aspects, is blessed and he is not.

3. He, instead of deriving pleasure from what he has, makes unjustified comparison with others (Mahsud) and extracts pain from what they have.
4. He, on occasion, wants that the blessing be snatched from the other one (Mahsud), even if it is not given to him. He gloats over the misfortune of others (Mahsud).

With the available picture, the mental state of the Hasid is a true reflection of Sharr. This is one facet of the coin. Now, we turn to the other facet:

1. The Hasid needs to be taught the lesson of contentment, to be happy with what he has. He should accept gladly, as Taoism preaches that no one has all (youth, vitality, health, wealth, good fortune, peaceful mind).
2. The Hasid needs to understand that our finite minds cannot understand wisdom of The Infinite, The Supreme Bestower of Blessings. The Chassidic Rabbi Yousaf Levin has beautifully explained it in religious terms “If I believe in Divine Providence, that God gives us what we deserve, if I look at another person and what they have, then I am not recognizing that what I have is from God. God wants me to serve Him in my way with whatever He has given me by being a decent human being”.
3. The Hasid needs to understand that malicious envy, being a sneaky and shameful emotion, is its own punishment for the envier, destroying his ability to appreciate goodness and resulting in significant psychological, moral and social consequences. He should be assured of the truth of “Be happy for other people’s (Mahsud) success and at the right time God will bring your dream to pass”. The Verse of the Quranic Chapter-3 al-Imran “Such are the days of fluctuating fortune (days of good and not so good) that We rotate among mankind...{3:140}” is a source of enlightenment to all.
4. The Hasid must be made to understand that no-one has the power to snatch something from the blessed one (Mahsud), without His leave. Moreover, he should be reminded of the lesson contained in the English saying: “Do not ruin other people’s happiness just because you cannot find your own”.
5. The Hasid should be warned not to gloat over the hardship of others (Mahsud) because it has been condemned in a Hadith “Do not rejoice over the misfortune of your brother (Mahsud), lest Almighty God has mercy upon him and subject you to trials” (Sunan Tirmidhi 2506)

Although, no pharmacological preparations are available for treating the Hasid, many tools of ‘how to deal and heal’, in the form of various behaviour modification modalities, aimed at changing the negative attitude are available to help him, at least to a moderate extent. This approach has been favored by the Greek philosopher Epictetus (55-135 CE), well remembered for his “Enchiridion (Handbook) of Stoic Ethical Advice”, who believed that good and evil were exclusively involved in things under our control, not in external events.” Thus, the detestable evil Hasad is manageable, by the Hasid himself.

An important issue, not often discussed, is how the Mahsud (envied one) can be saved from the harmful effects of Hasad (Malicious Envy)?

It is evident that the enmity of the Hasid against the Mahsud comes without provocation from the latter. This has been explained in the Hadith:

“Resort to secrecy for the fulfillment and success of your needs for, verily, everyone who has a blessing is envied.” [Reported by At-Tabaraani, Abu Nu’aym, and Al-Bayhaqi in Ash-Shu’ab; narrated by Mu’aath] [Al-Albaani graded it Saheeh (sound)].

Keeping in view that everyone who is blessed by the Almighty is in some respect envied, the Hadith teaches us that we should not, unnecessarily, expose our divine gifts to unconcerned people because the good fortune of the Mahsud provokes harmful feelings in the Hasid. Consequently, the stealthy devouring Hasad apprehends his victim and depletes his cheerful energy with deleterious effects on his psychological and physical health. There is no immunoprophylaxis or chemoprophylaxis available for the Mahsud. Moreover, there is no curative strategy. He is in a dead-end situation. In the absence of any physical or psychological treatment he only has recourse to seeking divine refuge.

The Quranic Chapter 113 al-Falaq is one of the two Chapters of Refuge (the other being Chapter 114 al-Naas) which deals with all the evils (Sharr) notably darkness, sorcery and Hasad. Imam Amin Ahsan Islahi was right in asserting that “a calamity has no independent existence, it is actually a manifestation of the various creations of God which come out into being by His leave and cast its effect by His directive”. Accepting, in words and spirit, that refuge only be sought with the Creator and not with the creation, God-fearing worshippers seek refuge from what is destructive or obstructive in nature. Seeking refuge denotes that the Mahsud is incapable of dealing with the Hasid and is in dire need of an authoritative power who could be none other than the most exalted the supreme ruler of the cosmos whose limitless authority no one can fight or oppose.

In concluding the discussion, it may be of interest to consider a suggestion. It has been observed that phenomenologically benign envy and malicious envy are distinct entities. However, in Arabic only one term Hasad has been used. It is suggested that two new terms be coined:

1. Hasad Kareem for benign envy. It is identical to Ghibtah .
2. Hasad Khabees for malicious envy.

Conclusion

“The flower which is single need not envy the thorns that are numerous” Ravindranath Tagore (1861-1941)-Nobel Laureate.

Hasad is a two-faced coin depending upon the doctrines of Khair and Sharr. If human passions are controlled by submission to the Will of The Supreme Bestower of bounties, the results are wonderful. Conversely, when one is overpowered by satanic influences, rejecting the authority of The Almighty the All-Giver, the consequences are dreadful.

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