

SEVEN REASONS TO KILL

Dr. Khalid Sohail



"Man is the only species that is a mass murderer, the only misfit in his own society. Why should this be so?" (N. Tribergen)

When angry human beings act violently and aggressively, other caring and compassionate human beings sometimes tell them that they are acting like animals. Given the level of violence in the contemporary world, I would not be surprised to hear of some kind animals saying to other cruel animals that they were acting like humans. Eric Fromm in his famous book *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* shares his insight that animals express *benign* violence—they kill only in self defense or when they are hungry. Even a lion is peaceful when he is not hungry and does not feel threatened. On the other hand, humans are worse than animals as they exhibit *malignant* violence—they add a series of meanings to their violence. They justify their violent crimes and rationalize their aggressive acts. Such justifications are also presented by social groups, political institutions and religious organizations. In communities, cultures and countries where capital punishment is allowed, when one human kills another human, the entire society commits the same crime by killing the killer. “Do human beings individually or collectively have the right to kill other human beings?” is a vital question for the evolution of humanity. Such killings are usually justified by the age old saying “an eye for an eye”. Over the centuries many wise men and women have observed that if we act on this belief, within a short time half of the village will be blind.

When we study the history of humanity we realize that the intensity and severity of human violence and aggression has increased over the centuries. Only in the 20th century millions of humans have been killed

by other humans by pre-meditated murder, including the use of nuclear weapons. If we review human murders we can classify them into the following seven groups based on emotional, social, religious, economic or political motivation.

1. PERSONAL REVENGE

There are many people in every community who have difficulties controlling their anger. If someone hurts them, rather than forgiving or reporting the matter to the authorities, they take the law into their own hands and kill their enemy. As a psychotherapist I am fascinated by the number of murders that happen within families; people kill those they had loved at one time. Their sense of betrayal transforms their love into hate, and lovers become enemies. Spouses who once vowed eternal love can kill each other because of jealousy. It is sad to see domestic and family violence killing so many people every year, especially children and women.

2. SERIAL KILLERS

While some people kill people that they know intimately, there are others who kill strangers. We call them serial killers and mass murderers. I interviewed Javed Iqbal Mughal who had confessed to killing one hundred children in Pakistan, and reviewing the research on serial killers, I was shocked to discover that the United States had the

highest numbers of serial killings in the world. These serial killers, who were usually physically, emotionally and sexually abused as children, became revengeful against a particular group, be they blacks or women, gays or Hispanics, whom they killed indiscriminately until they were caught by police. Many such serial killers have psychopathic and sociopathic personalities.

3. SOCIAL VIOLENCE OF GANGS

As more and more people move from villages to cities and adopt an urban lifestyle, they face the pains of migration, social alienation and unemployment and some of them become involved in violent gangs to sell drugs to make quick money. Unfortunately, once they enter the drug and gang culture it is difficult for them to leave. It is fascinating how these gangs provide a sense of identity and belonging to young men and women who feel lost, confused and isolated in big cities. When there are violent confrontations between gangs, we see many murders. In some cases the local police themselves become involved in these violent crimes.

4. MENTAL ILLNESS

While the majority of murders are committed by psychopaths who do not suffer from mental illness, there are some murders committed by people who suffer from schizophrenia, manic depressive illness and paranoid psychosis. When these emotionally disturbed people feel

threatened and attacked, they may think they need to kill before they are killed. Such people, rather than going to prison, are sent to hospitals for psychiatric treatment.

5. POLITICAL / NATIONAL VIOLENCE

As the concept of nationalism became popular in the West, states created national armies. Over the centuries, soldiers in the uniform of one country killed only the soldiers of the enemy army. As guerrilla war became popular, both sides have been killing innocent men, women and children. Some call it using human shields while others call it collateral damage. Innocent citizens are being killed with no twinge of conscience on either side.

Human beings can be executed by their own governments, under capital punishment laws ordered by the courts. These are murders committed by legalized state violence.

6. VIOLENCE OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISTS

Over the centuries believers have killed each other in the name of God. In the last few decades there have been a large number of killings between Sunnis and Shiites, Catholics and Protestants, Hindus and Muslims, and Muslims and Jews in different parts of the world. Ironically these violent murders were committed in the name of a merciful God. Some of those killings are done to create theocratic

states. Many such murders are ordered by religious leaders who have charismatic and cultish personalities.

7. INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE

In the recent past, Western governments have been sending their armies to other countries and invading sovereign states in order to topple their governments; they have killed innocent civilians and then rationalized their murders in the name of democracy, human rights and freedom. We are all aware that they are economic wars aimed at establishing the aggressor's military presence all over the world, selling weapons and ensuring access to the conquered countries' resources.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It is sad to realize that violent consciousness is on the rise and that the borders between just and unjust wars have blurred. Even in the 21st century we have not risen above a tribal mentality. I am afraid that if we do not develop peace consciousness and do not feel compassion for all of humanity, we might commit collective suicide and may not evolve to the next stage of human evolution.

It is ironic that in the contemporary world, leaders of religious, spiritual and secular traditions claim that their ideologies and philosophies promote peace, but we see their followers continue to kill

each other. Whether they are followers of Christianity or Islam, Judaism or Hinduism, Communism or Capitalism, they kill innocent human beings and justify their murders.

I think time has come for all of us to learn to communicate better and find ways to resolve our personal, social, religious and political conflicts peacefully and respectfully, and accept that killing one human is like killing all of humanity.

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