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Say a little prayer to control anger

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NEW YORK (Reuters Life!) - Furious about an unkind comment? Angry about a social snub? Say a prayer, even if you're not religious.

New research from American and Dutch scientists shows praying can help ease anger, lower aggression and lessen the impact of provocation.

"People often turn to prayer when they're feeling negative emotions, including anger," said Brad Bushman, a professor of communications and psychology at Ohio State University and a co-author of the study.

"We found that prayer really can help people cope with their anger, probably by helping them change how they view the events that angered them and helping them take it less personally."

In research published online in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Bushman and his colleagues found that prayer helped to control anger regardless of the person's religious affiliation, or if they attended church or prayed regularly.

In the first study they asked 53 U.S. college students to complete a questionnaire that measured levels of emotions such as anger, depression, tension, fatigue and vigor and then put them in a situation that could elicit an angry response.

Then the students were told to read a newspaper report about a cancer patient and randomly assigned to pray for her or to just think about her. Students who prayed for the patient had lower self-reported anger levels.

In other studies Bushman, Ryan Bremner of the University of Michigan, and Sander Koole, of UV University in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, found similar results about the power of prayer in dealing with anger, aggression and provocation.

"The effects we found in these experiments were quite large, which suggests that prayer may really be an effective way to calm anger and aggression," Bushman said.

But he stressed that the benefits were related to benevolent prayer.

"When people are confronting their own anger, they may want to consider the old advice of praying for one's enemies," Bremner said. "It may not benefit their enemies, but it may help them deal with the negative emotions."

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