

Resolving Conflicts and Caring for Orphans

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Resolving the conflicts that arise between people and reconciling them together is a great righteous deed. Caring for orphans and helping them cope with the difficulties of life is also an excellent virtuous work. Both these acts are highly emphasized and encouraged in Islamic tradition. Below we will have a short survey of what the Qur'an and *hadith* sources have to say in this regard.

Qur'anic Verses About Reconciliation

We read in the holy Qur'an that,

“The faithful are indeed brothers. Therefore make peace between your brothers and be wary of Allah, so that you may receive [His] mercy” (Qur'an 49:10).

Elsewhere, we read that

“... and reconciliation is better.” (Qur'an 4:128)

Hadiths About Reconciliation

Because of its importance, reconciliation is encouraged in the hadiths in various ways: some hadiths introduce it as the best “charity,” some regard it as the best act of worship, and so forth. In his commentary on the above-mentioned verse (Qur’an 49:10), Mulla Muhsin Fayd quotes the following hadith from Imam Sadiq (a): “The charity that God loves is reconciling people when they are in conflict and bringing them together when they are getting away from one another” (Kulayni 1986, 2:209; Tabarsi, 1965:176).

In another hadith, the Imam (a) stated, “Surely, reconciling two people is dearer to me than giving two dinars in charity” (Kulayni 1986, 2:209). The Prophet (s) also said, “The best charity is making peace between people” (Muttaqi al-Hindi 1989, 3:58).

Reconciliation between the believers was so important to Imam Sadiq (a) that he allocated a special budget from his own possessions to resolving financial disputes between the Shiites. He (a) ordered Mufaddal, one of his companions, “When you see a [financial] dispute between two of our Shiites [i.e., our follower], resolve it with my money” (Kulayni 1986, 2:209). Because of this order, we read in another hadith,

My son-in-law and I were arguing over an inheritance when Mufaddal came across. He stayed for a while, then told us, “Come to the house!” When we went to him, he resolved our argument with four hundred dirhams, which he paid us from his money. When each of us got a document from the other, he said, “This was not from my money, but Abu Abdullah [i.e., Imam Sadiq (a)] – Peace be upon him! – has ordered me that when two of our followers dispute

about something, I reconcile them and reimburse [the disputed amount] from his money.” So, this was from Abu Abdullah’s money.” (Kulayni 1986, 2:209)

Best Act of Worship

Imam Ali (a) regarded resolving conflicts as the best act of worship and commended it to his children in the last moments of his earthly life:

I heard your grandfather (s) saying, “Allah regards making peace between two people more valuable than all praying and fasting” [probably meaning more valuable than ordinary praying and fasting].” (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Letter 47)

Lying for the Sake of Reconciliation

Although lying has been frequently disapproved in the Qur’an and *hadiths* and is considered a grave sin, it becomes permissible if necessary in conflict resolution. Imam Sadiq (a) told one of his companions, “Surly, the one who reconciles [people through lying] is not a liar; it is reconciliation, not lying” (Kulayni 1986, 2:210). In another *hadith*, Imam Ali (a) quotes the Prophet (s) as saying, “Lying is not permissible except in three places ... one is when a person lies to reconcile two people” (Ibn Ash‘ath n.d., 171).

Impact of Cutting off Relationship

Maintaining peace and friendship is so important that if two Muslims cut off their relationship for more than three days, they will no longer be considered Muslims. It is quoted from the Prophet (s) that “If two Muslims cut off their relationship and remain in that state for three days without trying to reconcile, they will be out of

Islam and there will be no bonds between them. Any one of them who tries to talk to his brother first will go to Paradise first in the Day of Judgment” (Kulayni 1986, 2:345).

Satan’s Pleasure

Satan seeks to create enmity between believers, as God states in the Qur’an,

“Indeed Satan seeks to cast enmity and hatred among you...” (Qur’an 5: 91).

Thus, Satan is pleased when two believers argue and get upset with one another, and he tries to keep them in that state. In this regard, Imam Baqir (a) states, “Satan creates enmity between the believers as long as any of them does not leave his faith [i.e., he keeps creating enmity until they all become unbelievers]. When they do [leave their faith], he will lie on his back, stretch out, and say, ‘I won!’” Then, the Imam (a) stated, “May God’s mercy be on the one who reconciles two of our friends. O company of believers! Befriend and be kind to each other” (Kulayni 1986, 2:345). In another *hadith*, Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Satan remains happy as long as two Muslims desert one another. When they reconcile, his knees will tremble, his joints will be dislocated, and he will cry, ‘Woe to me! How destroyed I am!’” (Kulayni 1986, 2:345)

Why All This Emphasis?

Why does Islam emphasize on conflict resolution so much? Why is this issue so important that, as mentioned above, the holy Prophet (s) does not allow cutting relationship with a fellow-Muslim for more than three days? How do we explain other *hadiths* that consider cutting relationship with one another as bringing about God’s

damnation? Mufaddal quotes Imam Sadiq (a) as saying, “No two people leave one another cutting their relationship, unless one of them deserves damnation. And sometimes both of them deserve it” (Kulayni 1986, 2:344). Also worth reflection is the fact that Imam Sadiq (a) entrusted Mufaddal with his money to resolve conflicts between his followers and the fact that reconciliation between people has a higher value than all recommended prayers and fasts.

Reflecting on these facts, we realize that this great emphasis is to secure the glory and progress of the community of believers by creating a friendly and peaceful atmosphere between them. If such an atmosphere prevails in a nation, its members can overcome all problems together, but if conflicts and disputes permeate a nation, without anyone trying to resolve them, that nation will collapse.

Therefore, when there is a dispute, those involved must do their best to resolve it; each party has to go to the other and seek reconciliation. It is reported in the above-mentioned *hadith* that when Imam Sadiq (a) stated that those who cut their relationship would be damned, one of his companions asked, “This should be the case for the oppressor, but why does the oppressed one deserve damnation?” The Imam (a) answered, “Because he does not call his brother to reconciliation and does not forgive his [offending] words” (Kulayni 1986, 2:344).

Therefore, a person with high morals, not only avoids creating enmity and hatred, but always strives to establish peace and friendship between believers.

Using the example of Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (a), let us ask God and say,

O God, Bless Muhammad and his Household, adorn me with the adornment of the righteous, and clothe

me in the ornaments of the god-fearing, through spreading justice, restraining rage, quenching the flame of hate, bringing together the people of separation. (al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya, Supplication 20)

Caring for Orphans

Caring for orphans is considered a great virtuous deed in Islam. Orphaned children, who have missed their parents for natural or incidental reasons, are part of every society. It is the duty of other members of the society to provide for these children's needs. And it is important to remember that, besides material needs, these children need emotional care. Building orphanages – although very good and necessary – is not an ideal solution, because children usually do not receive perfect emotional care in these places. A better solution is adoption, because adopted children receive, to a great extent, a similar kind of emotional care that they would have received from their parents. The holy Prophet (s), who was “a mercy to all the nations” (Qur'an 21: 107) and who had felt the bitter taste of orphan-hood himself, would repeatedly emphasize the importance of caring for orphans and would encourage his followers to honor them and take the responsibility of their guardianship. In this regard, he reportedly has stated, “The most beloved house is the one in which there is an honored orphan” (Maraghi n.d., 30:149).

Now, let us explore some *hadiths* and Qur'anic verses to further our knowledge of the importance of this moral and religious duty.

Orphans and the Qur'an

There are many verses in the holy Qur'an about orphans. In some of these verses, the Qur'an considers disregarding orphans as a sign of disbelief and hypocrisy:

“Did you see him who denies the Retribution? That is the one who drives away the orphan” (Qur’an 107:1-2).

Elsewhere, we read,

“No indeed! Rather you do not honour the orphan, and do not urge the feeding of the needy” (Qur’an 89:17-8).

In another verse, the Qur’an enjoins doing good to parents, relatives, and orphans immediately after the command to worship God:

“And when We took a pledge from the Children of Israel: ‘Worship no one but Allah, do good to parents, relatives, orphans ...’” (Qur’an 2: 83).

Elsewhere in the Qur’an, doing good to relatives and orphans is stated immediately after believing in God, the Day of Judgment, the Prophets (s), the holy scriptures, and the angels:

“Piety is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather, piety is [personified by] those who have faith in Allah and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets, and who give their wealth, for the love of Him, to relatives, orphans...” (Qur’an 2:177)

God also reminds the Prophet (s) of his orphanhood:

“Did He not find thee an orphan and protect (thee)?” (Qur’an 93:6),

then commands mankind through the Prophet (s),,

“So, as for the orphan, do not oppress him” (Qur’an 93:9).

A Glance at Hadiths

Many *hadiths* have been narrated from the Prophet (s) and the Imams (a) concerning this issue. In these *hadiths*, people are encouraged and enjoined to care for orphans, and those who do so are promised great rewards. Below, we will mention a few of these valuable *hadiths*.

Entering Paradise

The holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said, “Whoever takes the guardianship of an orphan, providing him with his sustenance, he and I will be [together] in Paradise like these two,” referring to his index and middle finger joined together (Himyari 1992, 94). In another *hadith*, he said, “Whoever provides for an orphan until that orphan becomes independent of him, God Almighty will make [entering] Paradise certain for him, as He makes [entering] hellfire certain for the one who usurps an orphan’s possessions” (Kulayni 1986, 7:51).

Imam Sadiq (a) has reportedly stated, “Whoever wants God Almighty to include him in His mercy and admit him in His Paradise must have good manners ... and do good to the orphan” (Shaykh al-Saduq, al-Amali 1983, 389).

Softening of Hearts and Fulfilment of Prayers

Caring for orphans causes our hearts to soften and our prayers to be fulfilled. The holy Prophet (s) asked a person, “Do you like your heart to soften and your needs to be met? Have mercy on the orphan, stroke his head, and give him from your food” (Muttaqi al-Hindi 1989, 3:169).

Elevation of the Soul and Forgiveness of Sins

In a *hadith*, the holy Prophet (s) states,

By the one in whose hand is my life, every Muslim who takes the guardianship of an orphan and is a good guardian, putting his hand on the orphan's head [i.e., providing him with protection and support], for every single hair [of the orphan], God Almighty elevates him one level, records for him a good deed, and removes from him one sin. (Muttaqi al-Hindi 1989, 175)

In another *hadith*, Ibn Abi Awfa, a companion of the Prophet's (s), says,

We were sitting before the Prophet (s) when a boy came to him and said, "I am an orphan and have a sister and a widowed mother. Feed us from what God has fed you with. May God give you from what is with Him until you become pleased!" The Prophet (s) replied, "How beautiful was what you said, O boy!" [Then, addressing Bilal, he said,] "Go Bilal and bring us what we have [at home]!" Bilal went and brought twenty one dates with him. The Prophet (s) then told the boy, "Seven [dates] for you, seven for your sister, and seven for your mother." Mu'adh b. Jabal went to the boy, stroked his head, and said, "May God compensate for your orphanhood and make you a good successor for your father." (His father was one of the Emigrants.) The holy Prophet (s) turned to Mu'adh and told him, "I saw you, O Mu'adh, and what you did." Mu'adh said, "I had compassion on him." The Prophet (s) then stated, "Whoever of you takes the guardianship of an orphan and is a good

guardian, putting his hand on the orphan's head [i.e., providing him with protection and support], for every single hair [of the orphan], God Almighty, records for him a good deed, removes from him one sin, and elevates him one level." (F. Tabarsi 1993, 10:767)

Also, it is reported that the Prophet (s) said, "Whoever strokes an orphan's head will have, on the Day of Judgment, a light for every single hair his hand passes over" (F. Tabarsi 1993, 10:767).

Imam Ali (a), the Commander of the Believers, has also stated, "Any faithful man or woman, who puts his hand on an orphan's head [out of mercy], for every single hair his hand passes over, God records for him a good deed" (Shaykh al-Saduq, *Thawab al-A'mal wa 'Iqab al-A'mal* 1985, 199).

The Reward of Giving Refuge to an Orphan

1. Residing in Paradise

According to our *hadiths*, God will take to Paradise whoever takes in homeless orphans and provides them with what they need. Imam Baqir (a) stated, "Whoever has four characteristics God will build him a house in Paradise: Whoever gives refuge to an orphan, has compassion on the weak, is kind with his parents, and treats his slaves gently" (Shaykh al-Saduq, *al-Khisāl* 1983, 1:223).

2. Exemption from the Torment

Another result of giving refuge to orphans is becoming exempt from the torment of the grave. The holy Prophet (s) stated,

Jesus son of Mary (a) passed by a grave whose dweller was being punished. When he passed by the same grave the next year, [the person buried in that grave] was no longer being punished ... [When Jesus (a) asked God about the reason,] the Almighty revealed to him, “A righteous son of his came of age, who repaired a path and gave refuge to an orphan. So I forgave him because of what his son did.” (Shaykh al-Saduq, al-Amali 1983, 512)

The Reward of Pacifying an Orphan

Pacifying orphaned children is so great in the eyes of God that, according to a *hadith* from the Prophet, “when an orphan cries, his tears fall in the hand of the All-Beneficent and He says, ‘This orphan, whose father I buried in the soil, who made him cry? The Paradise will be for the one who pacifies him’” (Razi 1999, 31:200). In a similar *hadith*, the Prophet (s) states,

When an orphan cries, the Throne of the All-Beneficent shakes because of his cry, and [God] says to His angels, “O My angels! This orphan, whose father was hidden in the soil, who made him cry?” The angels reply, “You know best!” Then God says, “O My angels! I call you to witness that in the Day of Judgment I will satisfy whoever pacifies and satisfies him.” (F. b. Tabarsi 1993, 10:767)

An ethical personal with high morals goes beyond words; he cares for orphaned children and families who have lost their guardians and does not forget Imam Ali’s (a) advice on the verge of his martyrdom, when he (a) said, “(Fear) God in regards to orphans; do not miss feeding them and do not let them perish in your presence” (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 27).

As was mentioned in the beginning of this discussion, orphans must be treated with a warm heart and compassion, so that the missing love and affection of their parents could be made up, to some extent. In other words, their emotional as well as physical needs must be met, so that they do not feel deprived and miserable, and can have a happy and successful future.

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