

Benevolence and Sympathy in Social Interactions

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One of the first steps in purification of the soul is treating people kindly and having proper interactions with them. The holy Prophet (s) said, “Best of you are those that are the best in their conduct; those who are ready to serve [others]; those who give and receive affection” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:102).

Islam has provided us with a comprehensive set of moral instructions in all spheres of our individual and social lives. The majority of these instructions have been considered as non-obligatory because of their ethical nature. However, not all moral and ethical instructions are dispensable. For example, some virtues, such as fulfilling promises, altruism, beneficence, etc., are at some levels obligatory.

In the Quran, we read that “Indeed Allah enjoins justice and kindness ...” (Quran 16:90). Thus, justice and kindness have been considered as having the same importance and have been called for using the same verb (i.e. “enjoins”). Even if it may be rationally possible that one word could convey two senses at a time, the common understanding would not accept it. Therefore, it is difficult to accept that the word

“enjoins” in this verse could convey two different senses of “obligation” and “recommendation” at the same time. If a person is not benevolent, he will not accept justice, since it confronts with his selfishness, shortsightedness, and monopolization; such a person will disregard other people’s rights and violate justice. Thus, benevolence is the basis for justice. Generally, we can say that every legal ruling has a moral basis. The difference between them is that legal rulings can be sued, but moral matters are not. However, the main factor for the perfection of a person is the purity of his soul which is mainly a matter of morality. The holy Quran teaches us that the Day of Judgment is “the day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart” (Quran 26:88-9).

Many moral codes may be non-obligatory in the individual sphere, but they become obligatory when considered in the light of their social and cultural impacts. In order to have a prospering Islamic society, it is necessary to comply with such codes and conducts in practice.

Among Islamic moral codes that have significant social impacts is treating people kindly; it is reflected in Quranic verses and Islamic traditions and is related to the high status of mankind in Islam. God says in the holy Quran:

Certainly, We have honoured the Children of Adam,
and carried them over land and sea, and provided
them with all the good things, and given them an
advantage over many of those We have created with a
complete preference. (Quran 17:70)

Although, in Islamic ethics, purification of the soul receives the greatest emphasis, Islam provides a broader look towards purification. In the Islamic viewpoint, all aspects of human life are connected to edification of the soul, and, therefore, it a mistake to separate these aspects from each other. Because of this, Islam does not leave humans

on their own in their social lives, and it could be argued that all rulings in Islam have two types of functions: spiritual and social. Thus, social laws have spiritual and emotional functions as well; e.g. a Muslim who initiates saying *Salam* to other people, not only shows respect to them and strengthens his social bonds with them, but also purifies his soul from arrogance by being humble. By doing this, he strengthens social bonds and at the same time destroys his self-conceit; thus, both types of functions can be considered in all social manners and traditions.

However, one must observe certain conditions. Since social rulings of Islam are so detailed and found in every corner of Islamic law and ethics, a comprehensive study of them will not be possible for us here. So, we will focus here on one of them, which are especially important:

- a. The rights of relatives (*Silah Rahim*)
- b. Visiting the sick and its manners

SILAH RAHIM¹

Caring for the relatives and preserving the bonds with them is a moral virtue and a sign of propriety of behavior.

The following sub-topics will be discussed here:

1. What is the meaning of “*Rahim*” and who are “*Arham*”?
2. What does “*Silah Rahim*” mean?
3. *Silah rahim* in the Quran
4. *Silah rahim* in Hadiths

¹ This means “Caring for the Kin”

5. Fruits of *Silah Rahim***What is the meaning of “RAHIM” and who are “ARHAM”?**

There are two kinds of relatives:

- 1) By blood: Family relation by blood is the one which exists in ancestry relation between a person and his father or his mother, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, grandparents and children. In Arabic, these people are called *Arham* (pl. of *rahim*).
- 2) By Marriage: Family relation by marriage such as the relation between a husband and wife and the relations among the family of them.

What does “SILAH RAHIM” mean?

Every person must keep his connections with his blood relatives, i.e., care for them and try to fulfil their needs, which are different with each person. Some of our relatives may have financial needs, but others may just need emotional support which could be fulfilled by talking to them over the phone. Cutting the connection with blood relatives completely is among the major sins. So, “*Silah Rahim*” means one’s proper care for relatives who have more rights than others upon him.

In *fiqh*, great attention is paid to relatives by blood. For instance, when there are needy people among the relatives, one should give his donations to them before other people. Such cases are among the social issues on which Islam stresses greatly. Allah says in the Quran ,

Give the relatives their [due] right, and the needy and
the traveller [as well], but do not squander wastefully.
(Quran 17:26)

Give the relative his right, and the needy and the traveller [as well]. That is better for those who seek Allah's pleasure, and it is they who are the felicitous. (Quran 30:38)

In addition, regarding the qualities of righteous people, the Quran says,

...who give their wealth, for the love of Him, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller and the beggar... (Quran 2:177)

Caring for relatives and keeping in touch with them will truly happen only when one fulfils the needs of his relatives as much as he can; this is the real meaning of *Silah Rahim*, not just going to visit the relatives, as many people think. By performing *Silah Rahim*, one's relationships with his relatives remain healthy, happy, stable, and strong.

Qat' rahim, on the other hand, means bothering one's relatives by action or speech or refusing to help them when they need help, e.g. for shelter, clothes, or food, etc. Other instances of *qat' rahim* include refusing to stop others from abusing his relative when he can, keeping away from his relative, or not visiting the relative when he is sick or when he returns from a journey, out of hatred or envy.

There is a middle state between *silah rahim* and *qat' rahim* which is when one gives his relatives gifts or offers them assistance that they do not necessarily need. These generous actions are also considered *silah rahim*, however not choosing to do them is not considered as *qat' rahim*.

Some people may think that such emphasis on *silah rahim* is for those who are wealthy and can help others financially, but those who are financially weak and not able to help others are not required to do *silah rahim*. But this understanding is wrong; one does not need to be

rich to do silah rahim. The goal of silah rahim is to care for the relatives and to be in contact with them, even by giving them a glass of water or saying something nice to them. Accordingly, the noble Prophet (s) stated, “Observe silah rahim even by giving them a glass of water. The best [i.e. the most important; the most essential] way to observe silah rahim is not bothering your relatives” (Muhaddith Nuri 1987, 15:255). Elsewhere, he (s) stated: “Observe silah rahim, even by saying salam to them” (Majlisi 1982, 74:165). Also, Imam Sadiq (a) said: “Silah rahim and doing good make the Judgment [in the hereafter] easy and keep one away from sins, so observe silah rahim and do good to your brothers even by saying salam in a good way or by answering it” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:157).

3) *Silah Rahim* in the Quran

Silah rahim is so important that it has been mentioned alongside God’s worship. Allah says in the Quran:

And when We took a pledge from the Children of Israel: “Worship no one but Allah, do good to parents, relatives, orphans, and the needy, and speak kindly to people ...” (Quran 2:83)

Worship Allah and do not ascribe any partners to Him, and be good to parents, the relatives, the orphans, the needy ... (Quran 4:36)

...Be wary of Allah, in whose Name you adjure one another, and the *arham*. Indeed Allah is watchful over you. (Quran, 4:1)

So much emphasis on *silah rahim* in the Quran is a reminder of the importance of caring for relatives in Islam, and a warning against abandoning this obligation.

4) Silah Rahim in Hadiths

Islamic traditions also contain great emphasis and encouragement regarding this blessed task. Below are some examples of these traditions:

b. Darraj reports that he “asked Imam Sadiq (a) about the word “*arham*” in Quran 4:1, and the Imam (a) said, “It means the *arham* of people, who God Almighty has commanded to care for and has honored. Do not you see that He has mentioned *arham* after His name?” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:150).

Imam Sadiq (a) quoted from the Prophet (s) that “the good deed whose reward is given the soonest is *Silah Rahim*” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:152).

It is quoted in another *hadith* that “Some people, who are impious and not righteous, practice *silah rahim* and, as a result, their wealth will increase and their lives will be prolonged. How would it be if they were righteous?!” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:155).

It is also quoted that in another *hadith*, we learn, “The best moral traits in this world and the hereafter are caring for the one who has cut his contact with you and giving [gifts, assistance, etc] to the one who has deprived you and forgiving the one who has done injustice to you” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:107).

Also, it is reported from the Prophet (s) that he said, “One who would be glad if God prolonged his life and expanded his sustenance must observe *silah rahim*, because, on the Day of Judgment, the *rahim* will fluently say, ‘O Lord! Befriend those who befriended me, and leave those who left me!’ A man may seem to be righteous, but then a relative of his, with whom he had cut his relation, will come and will throw him to the bottom of the Hell” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:156).

Also, Imam Ali (a) said, “Observe *Silah Rahim*, even if only by saying *salam*; God Almighty says, ‘...Be wary of Allah, in whose Name you

adjure one another, and the *rahim*. Indeed Allah is watchful over you.’ [(Quran 4:1)]” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:155).

And Imam Baqir (a) said, “On the Day of Judgment, the *rahim* will be hanging from the Throne saying, ‘O God! Befriend those who befriended me and leave those who left me!’” (‘Amili 1988, 21:535). In this *hadith*, “hanging from the Throne” is an analogy referring to the *rahim*’s request from God.

Imam Baqir (a) is also quoted as saying, “*Silah rahim* rectifies a person’s moral traits, makes him generous, cleanses his soul, increases his sustenance, and postpones his death” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:151).

It is reported that someone asked the Prophet (s), “Let me know what is the best in Islam?” The Prophet (s) answered, “Having faith in God.” The person asked, “Then what?” The Prophet (s) replied, “Observing *silah rahim*.” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 5:58).

5) *Silah Rahim* and its Fruits

a. Prolonging life

Silah rahim Prolongs one’s life. The following *hadiths* attest to this fact:

Imam Rida (a) stated, “A man may have only three years to live, but because of practicing *silah rahim* God prolongs his life to thirty years, and God does whatever He wishes” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:150).

Elsewhere, he (a) is quoted as saying, “We know no means for prolonging life but *Silah Rahim*. A man may have only three years to live, but, because of practicing *silah rahim*, God adds thirty years to his life, so his will live for thirty three years. [On the contrary] a man may have thirty three years to live, but, because of *qat’ rahim*, God

decreases thirty years from his life and lessens it to three years” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:152).

Also, there is another *hadith* from either Imam Baqir (a) or Imam Sadiq (a) that the Imam (a) said to someone called Muyassir, “O Muyassir! I assume you do good to your relatives?” The man answered, “Yes! When I was a teenager, I worked for someone in bazaar, and my salary was only two dirhams. I used to give one dirham to my father’s sister and another dirham to my mother’s sister.” Then Imam (a) told him, “By God, death approached you twice, but your *silah rahim* postponed it each time” (Majlisi 1982, 71:100).

b. Increase of Sustenance

The other reward of *silah rahim* is the increase of sustenance. This is reflected in the following *hadiths*:

Imam Sajjad (a) quoted the Prophet (s) as saying, “Anyone who wishes that God prolong his life and increase his sustenance must perform *Silah Rahim*” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:156).

In another *hadith*, the Prophet (s) stated, “*Silah rahim* prolongs life and eliminates poverty” (Muhaddith Nuri 1987, 7:194).

He (s) also said: “One who wishes that his sustenance increase and his death be postponed must practice *silah rahim*” (Tabarsi 1965, 166).

c. Purifying Actions

In some *hadiths*, purification of actions is also mentioned as a benefit of *silah rahim*.

Imam Baqir (a) said, “*Silah rahim* purifies one’s actions, wards off disasters, increases wealth, prolongs his life, expands his sustenance,

and makes him beloved among his family. Thus, everyone must be God-wary and practice *silab rahim*" (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:152).

d. Leinence on Day of Judgment

Imam Sadiq (a) stated, "*Silab rahim* makes the reckoning easy on the Day of Judgment; it prolongs the life and protects from difficult death" (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:157).

e. Development of Lands

There is another hadith from Imam Sadiq (a) in which he has reportedly said, "*Silab rahim* and treating neighbors kindly lead to development of the lands and prolong lives" (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:152).

f. *Silab Rahim* as a Constituent Part of Religion

The noble Prophet (s) stated, "I advise the present and the absent of my *ummah* and those who will be born until the Day of Judgment to practice *silab rahim*, even if there is a one-year distance between them and their relatives, since *silab rahim* is a religious duty." (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:151).

QAT' RAHIM

Qat' rahim is among the major sins that leads to punishment in the Hereafter. The Quran prohibits it and states that *qat' rahim* brings about the curse of God,

"May it not be that if you were to wield authority you would cause corruption in the land and ill-treat your blood relations? They are the ones whom Allah has cursed... (Quran 47:22-23)

Elsewhere, the Quran states,

But as for those who break Allah's compact after having pledged it solemnly, and sever what Allah has commanded to be joined [i.e. commit *qat' rahim*], and cause corruption in the earth —it is such on whom the curse will lie, and for them will be the ill of the [ultimate] abode. (Quran 13:25)

In another verse, those who commit *Qat' Rahim* are introduced as transgressors and losers:

“... those who break the covenant made with Allah after having pledged it solemnly, and sever what Allah has commanded to be joined [i.e. commit *qat' rahim*], and cause corruption on the earth— it is they who are the losers. (Quran 2:27)

QAT' RAHIM in HADITHS

Qat' rahim is severely rebuked in a number of *hadiths*.

QAT' RAHIM Considered Parallel to Polytheism

Once a person asked the Prophet (s), “What is the most hated action in the eyes of God?” The Prophet (s) answered, “Associating [other gods with Him].” The man asked: “Then what?” The Prophet (s) answered, “*Qat' rahim*” (Majlisi 1982, 69:196).

QAT' RAHIM and Becoming Deprived of God's Mercy

In another hadith Imam Sajjad (a) told his son, Imam Muhammad Baqir (a), “[O Son!] Avoid fellowship of one who commits *qat' rahim*, since I found him being cursed in three places in the Book of God Almighty...” and then he recited the following verses 47:22-23, 13:25, and 2:27 from the Quran (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:641).

QAT' RAHIM Prevents Admission to Paradise

“Three groups will not enter Paradise: those drink alcohol, magicians, and those who commit *qat' rahim*” (Majlisi 1982, 76:129).

Conclusion

Therefore, anyone who cares about morality should pay due attention to the important duty of *silah rahim*. Abandoning this vital task will lead to physical and spiritual destruction of the individual and society. Let us finish this article with the following hadith from Imam Sadiq (a) which affirms this point:

Hudhayfah ibn Mansur reports that he heard Imam Sadiq (a) saying, “Beware of *haliqah*, because it kills people!” Hudhayfah asked the Imam (a), “What is Haliqah?” The Imam (a) answered, “*Qat' rahim*.” (Kulayni 1407 A.H, 2:346)