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Silat Al-Rahm And Its Role In Preventing Sins

Alireza Maktabdar¹

Translated by Mahboobeh Morshedian

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Abstract: *Silat al-Rahm*, or “keeping good relations with family and relatives,” is one of the factors, and indeed, mandatory practices in Islam to help people attain wellbeing in this world and salvation in the next. Moreover, sin is anything against the natural course of creation, that which has harmful effects on both individuals and society.

This article tackles the importance of keeping good relations with family and relatives as that which can assist people in preventing sinful actions, hence providing an effective solution to prevent mental health issues, wrongdoing, and corruption. The terms *Silat al-rahm* and *sin* and its importance in the Qur'an and hadith, as well as the relationship between Silat al-rahm and abandoning sins will be explored.

Introduction

Sin, a movement against the natural course of the creation from the religious perspective, has numerous devastating and harmful effects on both individuals and society. Man's salvation is an ongoing concern in Divine religions and various schools of thought, each attempting to find solutions to prevent the dangerous consequences of sins and crimes in society. From a religious perspective, an effective solution to prevent man from and to protect him against sins is to strengthen kinship relationships, or *Silat al-rahm* (lit. keeping good relationships with relatives), which is significant from the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an and hadiths of the Infallibles.

Strong and firm kinship ties based on empathy and benevolence are an effective solution to prevent sins and crimes because, on the one hand, they pave the way for the public monitoring by people who are linked to each other, and on the other, they give the individuals an identity, personality, security, and peace of mind. This important role of *Silat al-Rahm* is referred to in a hadith by Imam Sadiq.[2](#)

The Meaning Of Silat Al-Rahm

The Meaning Of Silat Al-Rahm (Lit. Keeping Good Relationships With Relatives)

Silah means bond and link, and *rahm*[3](#) means one's blood relatives and the relatives by marriage or milk-relationship.[4](#) There are two types of relationship: 1) by blood and by marriage or 2) milk-relationship, and God has pointed them out explicitly in verse no. 54 of the chapter al-Furqan, saying,

"It is He who created the human being from water, then invested him with ties of blood and marriage, and your Lord is all-powerful" (25:54)

Parents are the closest relatives, followed by sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, and other relatives by blood and marriage or milk- relationship.

According to Tabarsi, *Silat al-Rahm* means that a person is responsive to his relatives or gives them financial assistance or other types of help.[5](#)

In terms of its instances, *silah* includes a wide and indefinite variety of physical and non-physical actions and positive value orientations that are taken with these motives behind them: reverence, benevolence, easing one's conscience, satisfying primary and secondary needs of one's relatives, the fulfilment of one's social duties and expectations, and in short, observing one's moral, legal, and customary rights and duties resulting from kinship ties. *Silat al-Rahm* is meant to strengthen natural and social ties.

On the contrary, not complying with ethical, legal, and customary duties; neglecting legitimate demands, and committing acts contrary to kinship rights, knowingly and unknowingly, all which cause dissatisfaction, displeasure, and psychological and social distance among relatives are examples of *qat' rahim* (or "breaking off relationships with relatives"). Of course, in religious sources, not respecting the

legal and moral parents' rights is called '*aq-i walidayn* (meaning "being cursed by one's parents"), and not observing other relatives' rights is called "breaking off relationships with relatives."⁶

From an Islamic perspective, kinship has a wide range and is not limited to close relatives. In addition, it is necessary and praiseworthy to establish the above-mentioned kinship ties both during the relatives' lives and after their deaths. In what follows, some hadiths referring to the wide range of relatives and the necessity of establishing kinship ties are addressed.

The Meaning Of Sins From The Islamic View

'Sin' which is referred to in the Qur'an as *ithm*,⁷ *dhanb*,⁸ *khati'ah*,⁹ *ma'siyat*,¹⁰ *fujur*,¹¹ etc. means: crime, error, wrongdoing, guilt, and disobedience to God.¹² In other words, it can be said that 'sin' is any act contrary to religious rulings that results in expiation, prescribed punishments, and the like.¹³

Within the framework of natural and social laws, the term 'crime' refers to any action or abandonment of any action for which a punishment is specified under law.¹⁴ From a sociological perspective, a crime is an action contrary to the social order or common social criteria and values. These criteria and values have been derived from that society's thoughts, beliefs, and its cultural and social conditions.¹⁵

Some Islamic jurisprudents use the term 'crime' only for the legally prohibited actions that have worldly punishments and regard the rest of the forbidden acts as '*ma'siyat*' (or 'sin'), '*khati'ah*' ('misdeed') or '*ithm*' (or 'wrongdoing'). This definition of crime is so close to the so-called legal term and is, in fact, its synonym.¹⁶ In the religious framework, whatever is contrary to natural and social rules or conflicts with moral virtues, human dignity, public chastity, and social prosperity is considered a sin, and in some cases the sinner will be punished. Therefore, the religious perspective of sin is wider. In addition to placing importance on man's physical and social health, Islam also pays attention to mental health and peace of mind.

Since the sin or deviation from the right path of life and movement against the natural conventions afflict the sinner with considerable harm, those concerned about their salvation and prosperity should take actions that facilitate attainment to happiness, and should also avoid actions that make it difficult or impossible to reach it in this world and the hereafter.

The Importance Of Silat Al-Rahm In The Qur'an

The importance of the *Silat al-Rahm* is reflected in several verses of the Qur'an:

1. In one verse, *Silat al-Rahm* enjoys the same rank as justice, benevolence, and abandonment of indecency, wrong, and oppression,

"Indeed, Allah enjoins justice and kindness and generosity towards relatives, and He forbids indecency, wrong, and aggression. He advises you, so that you may take admonition" (16:90)

2. In another verse, God referred to severing relations with relatives alongside great sins, such as corruption in the earth, saying,

“May it not be that if you were to wield authority you would cause corruption in the land and ill-treat your blood relations?” (47:22).

3. Likewise, God introduced the ones who sever kinship ties as losers:

“Those who break the covenant made with Allah after having pledged it solemnly, and sever what Allah has commanded to be joined, and cause corruption on the earth - it is they who are the losers” (2:27).

4. Still in another verse, these people are referred to as “cursed and doomed to a bad end”:

“But as for those who break Allah’s compact after having pledged it solemnly, and sever what Allah has commanded to be joined, and cause corruption in the earth - it is such on whom the curse will lie, and for them will be the ills of the [ultimate] abode” (13:25).

On the contrary, those who make effort to maintain kinship relationships are referred to as those who have respectful fear of God and are fearful of the bad end:

“...and those who join what Allah has commanded to be joined, and fear their Lord, and are afraid of an adverse reckoning” (13:21).

In this verse, fear of God’s punishment and reverential fear of His greatness will prevent one from sinning. On the other hand, feeling safe from God’s deceit and retribution or the lack of submissiveness to His majesty also leads one to commit sins.

The Effects Of Both Piety And Silat Al-Rahm

To have a better understanding of the role of *Silat al-Rahm* in preventing sins, it is a good idea to look at the effects of piety (or God wariness and the abandonment of sins) as reflected in some verses and hadiths, and then to compare these effects with those of *Silat al-Rahm* to understand the role of kinship ties in achieving piety.

In the Qur'an and hadiths, the development of cities is considered as an effect of both piety and *Silat al-Rahm*.¹⁷¹⁸ Likewise, in some verses, kinship ties have been introduced as a factor in prolonging one's life.¹⁹ In some hadiths, committing sins accelerates death;²⁰ and on the other hand, the prolonged life in many hadiths is referred to as a positive outcome of the *Silat al-Rahm*.²¹²²²³²⁴²⁵

In the Qur'an, increased sustenance and the elimination of poverty are regarded as the fruits of piety.²⁶ Likewise, in some hadiths, the shower of Divine blessings is also considered a fruit of the *Silat al-Rahm*,²⁷ which also protects Divine bounties²⁸ and has been introduced as resulting in increased

wealth.²⁹

In addition, entering Heaven is also regarded as a good outcome of both piety and *Silat al-Rahm* in both the Qur'an³⁰ and the Infallibles' sayings. Influencing others (i.e., winning their trust) is also mentioned among the favourable outcomes of both piety and *Silat al-Rahm* in both the Qur'an³¹ and hadiths.³²³³ Similarly, according to the Qur'an, sins are forgiven as a result of piety,³⁴ and hadiths indicate the role of *Silat al-Rahm* in this as well.³⁵

The above discussion is only a small number of verses and hadiths that point out the close link between piety and *Silat al-Rahm*. Their connection and harmony in Islamic sources should motivate one to give importance to *Silat al-Rahm* to abstain from sins and become pious; the issues which will be discussed below.

Relationship Between Silat Al-Rahm And Abandoning Sins

Given the close link between the effects of *Silat al-Rahm* and piety, the relationship between the two is discussed in the following:

1. Silat Al-Rahm And Paving The Way For Public Monitoring

When knowing all too well there are observers around us, people normally refuse to commit acts that are considered inappropriate from a cultural or religious viewpoint. Others' monitoring one's performance and the importance of their judgement of one's behaviour have always influenced people's orientations and prevents them from committing inappropriate actions in public.

Strong ties among relatives pave the way for this monitoring and prevents slips and committing blameworthy acts. This deterrent effect resulting from close monitoring is referred to as shameful fear (*haya*) in religious culture. *Haya* refers to preventing oneself from immorality.³⁶ Technically, shameful fear is an unfailing state and a spiritual endowment that results in dejection and sadness about the immoral act, as well as one's refusal to act impolitely for fear of being blamed by others.³⁷

Although the closest external observer of man's actions is God, and it is appropriate to be ashamed before Him, as Imam Sajjad said, "Fear God the Almighty because He has power over you, and be ashamed before Him because He's close to you,"³⁸ man usually feels ashamed in the presence of others, especially the closest relatives, and abandons many acts out of shameful fear of relatives. However, in relation with Allah, man does not pay due attention to the Divine monitoring because of the believer's hope in God's mercy and his confidence in His disregard for his many slips. Otherwise, his shameful fear in the presence of God, an aware observer prevents him from committing sins.³⁹

Expanding and strengthening kinship ties can pave the way for such public monitoring and prevent many slips and sins.

2. Self-Value And Self-Esteem

In kinship relationships, each member plays a role in the development and maintenance of this bond. This role gives each relative self-value and self-esteem, and these feelings prevent one from committing sins. As Imam Ali said, “The one who believes in his spiritual honour and dignity does not humiliate himself by committing sins.”[40](#)

Psychologists believe that the main cause of both humiliation and self-importance is the constant rejection by friends and family members, which leads to many psychological abnormalities. Psychologically, social relationships, including kinship ties, play an important role in meeting human needs. The need for emotional attachment is only met through interactions with others. Man seeks after loving and being loved by others. Intimacy, which emanates from having a deep sense of dependence and relationship with others, especially relatives, is the basis of our being.[41](#)

The deeper and more intimate this relationship, the more value it gives to the person and the more worthwhile his abilities seem to him. Undoubtedly, being loved plays an important role in enhancing self-esteem. Likewise, it is only through intimate relationships with others that we can encourage them, and they can contribute considerably to the realization of their talents through our encouragement.

In addition, we can benefit from our relatives' experiences and attitudes in our relationship with them, measuring our abilities and growth, and perfection through comparing ourselves with them. Thus, recognizing and developing our potentials and talents play a major role in enhancing our self-esteem. This is achievable through establishing social relationships with others, especially our relatives.

3. Fostering A Sense Of Psychological Security

Many emotional and psychological needs, including the need for security and peace, can be met through presence among relatives. Addressing these emotional needs through family relationships prevents their satisfaction outside this framework where there are many dangers threatening the person. Firm kinship ties pave the way for creating a sense of security and peace through satisfying one's emotional needs. Many crimes and sins are caused by the anxieties and inner disquiet, and the healthy relationship among relatives, as reliable supports, can eliminate factors in these problems and alleviate their anxiety and unrest, especially in young people. According to Allamah Ja'fari:

A great deal of our disorders is due to the anxieties and mental disorders, and they ruin our life. Grief, like a hidden axe, is cutting the roots of our life. No factor can contribute to the alleviation of sorrow better than sharing one's feelings with others in hardships and adversities and then enjoying their presence.[42](#)

Thus, establishing and strengthening kinship ties is key in preventing people from committing sins and crimes both individually and socially. The lack or weakness of such ties creates the conditions for committing sins.

The important point in the hadiths of *Silat al-Rahm* is that it is necessary to maintain such ties even with relatives whose beliefs and codes of ethics do not conform to ours; of course, while we respect some terms and conditions which consist in not being influenced by their beliefs and codes of ethics. In other words, these ties should be maintained to influence them positively.

Below are some hadiths on the necessity of establishing such kinship ties:

A person asked Imam Sadiq, “I have some relatives who do not believe in Islam. Do they have any rights on me?” The Imam said, “Yes, nothing can break off kinship ties. If they have the same religion as yours, then they have two rights on you: kinship rights and rights based on Islam.” [43](#)

It is also necessary to have kinship ties with the relatives who aggravate us, if possible. Someone told Prophet Muhammad, “O the Messenger of Allah! I have some relatives with whom I maintain kinship ties but who aggravate me, and I want to abandon them.” Prophet Muhammad told him, “Then Allah will abandon you as well.” He asked, “So what should I do?” The Prophet said:

Grant the one who has deprived you, visit the one who has left you, and forgive the one who has oppressed you. Then, God, the Almighty and Glorious, will help you against them. [44](#)

A servant at Imam Sadiq’s house related:

At the time of the 6th Imam’s martyrdom, I was beside him when he fainted. After he had come around, he said, ‘Give seventy dinars to Hasan ibn Ali ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn, called Aftas.’ He also asked me to give some other sums of money to some other people. I told him, ‘Do you give the one who wanted to attack you with a knife?’ He said, ‘Woe to you! Have not you recited the Qur’an?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ he added, ‘Have not you heard the word of God, the Almighty and Glorious, Who said, **“and those who join what Allah has commanded to be joined, and fear their Lord, and are afraid of an adverse reckoning”** (13:21). [45](#)

Conclusion

Intimate and deep kinship ties considerably reduce factors in many individual and social abnormalities and prevent people from committing sins. Islam emphasizes all the factors helping one attain salvation. Strengthening kinship ties are among these factors.

In the process of establishing firm and sincere kinship ties, relatives monitor each other’s actions, and this is important in preventing one from committing acts that seem inappropriate to others.

Likewise, kinship ties enhance one’s self-esteem and prevent from being trampled with whims through committing sins. Security and tranquillity are the final and most important achievements gained because of healthy kinship ties.

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2. See also, *al-Kafi*, vol.2, p.157.

3. The word “Rahm” literally means “womb”, which essentially means the place where the fetus grows in the mother’s abdomen. The very limb that God has placed in women’s body so that the sperm is grown in it and becomes a full-blown child. This is the main meaning of the word “Rahm”, but it was later used as a metaphor for the liking between the container and the contained in the sense of kinship, since all relatives come out of one womb. Therefore, the word “Rahm” means “relative”, and “Arham” means one’s “relatives”. See also the translation of al-Mizan Qur‘anic Commentary, vol. 4, pp. 219–220.

4. People who are not related by blood are of two types: Sometimes they are related by marriage; for example, the groom is related to his wife’s family, and the bride to her husband’s family. Some other people are also related through fostering and breastfeeding.

5. Tabarsi, 1372 AH, vol. 5, p. 8.

6. Sharaf-u-Din, 1394 SAH, p. 92.

7. Refer to the Qur‘an, 2:219.

8. Refer to the Qur‘an, 6: 6.

9. Refer to the Qur‘an, 17: 31, 4: 92.

10. Refer to the Qur‘an, 20: 121.

11. Refer to the Qur‘an, 82: 14.

12. Dihkhuda, 1372 SAH, vol. 11, p. 17006.

13. Anwari, 1382 SAH: vol. 6, p. 6255.

14. Husayni Ahiq, 1385 SAH, vol. 10, p. 205.

15. Husayni Ahiq, 1385 SAH, vol. 10, p. 205.

[16.](#) Husayni Ahiq, 1385 SAH, vol. 10, p. 205.

[17.](#) Refer to the Qur'an, 7: 96.

[18.](#) See also Makarim-ul-Akhlaq, p.388.

[19.](#) Refer to the Qur'an, 71: 3–4. According to Allama Tabataba'i, God considered the postponement of death to the appointed time [i.e., the prolonged life] as the outcome of worship of God, piety, and obedience to the Prophet (Tabataba'i, 1374 AH, vol. 20, p. 42).

[20.](#) See also Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 70, p.354

[21.](#) See also Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 47, p. 163.

[22.](#) See also al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 152.

[23.](#) See also al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 152.

[24.](#) See also al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 150.

[25.](#) In his commentary on Nahj-ul-Balaghah, ibn Miytham wrote on this effect of Silat al-Rahm: it makes relatives help each other and collaborate kindly with one another, and this causes them to be more immune from enemies and death and prolongs their life. Second, kinship ties cause the family members to endeavor and pray for the survival of the ones they have established kinship ties with. Their prayer and attempt are a reason for their prolonged life and postponed death. Thus, kinship ties cause postponed death and a long life. See also the Commentary on Nahj ul-Balaghah, Ibn Miytham, vol. 3, p. 80.

[26.](#) Refer to the Qur'an, 65: 2–3

[27.](#) See also Tasnif-e Ghurar-ul-Hikam, p. 406.

[28.](#) See also Tasnif-e Ghurar-ul-Hikam, p. 406.

[29.](#) See also Nahj-ul-Balaghah Subhi Salih, p. 163. Explaining this effect of Silat al-Rahm, ibē n Miytham Bahrani said, "Silat al-Rahm is a praiseworthy good deed liked by human nature and leads to affability. Thus, the one who strengthens his kinship ties with his relatives is forgiven and shown compassion by others. This makes the benevolent, the powerful, e.g., kings, and others help them, and his wealth will increase as well. See also the Commentary on Nahj-ul-Balaghah, Ibn Miytham, vol. 3, p. 80

[30.](#) Refer to the Qur'an, 5: 65.

[31.](#) Refer to the Qur'an, 19: 96. According to Allamah Tabataba'i in al-Mizan, "The word Wud and Mawaddat mean love, and in this verse, God, the Almighty gave a beautiful promise that, "Indeed those who have faith and do righteous deeds – the All-beneficent will endear them." However, there is no clue as to which hearts, their hearts or others' hearts? In the world, or in the hereafter or in Heaven? As it is not limited, it is not necessary for us, like some people, to limit it to Heaven, or like some others, to limit it to the hearts of all people in the world or something else," (Tabataba'i, 1374 AH, vol. 14, p. 154).

[32.](#) See also al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 151.

[33.](#) See also al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 152.

[34.](#) Refer to the Qur'an, 57: 28.

[35.](#) See also al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 157.

[36.](#) Raghib Isfahani, 1412 SAH: p. 270.

[37.](#) Jurjani, 1412 SAH: p. 42.

[38.](#) See also Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 68, p. 336.

[39.](#) This issue has been reflected in the supplication of Abu Hamzah Thumali, received from Imam Sajjad.

[40.](#) See also Ghurar-ul-Hikam, p.231.

[41.](#) Salarifar, 1389 SAH: p. 346.

[42.](#) Ja'fari, 1359 SAH: vol. 5, p. 87.

[43.](#) See also al-Kafi, vol. 2, p.157.

[44.](#) See also Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 100.

[45.](#) See also Mishkat-ul-Anwar fi Ghurar-ul-Akhbar, p.166.

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