

Goodness to Parents and Relatives: A Fortification of the Bonds of Kinsfolk (*Rahim*) in the Light of Islam

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Abstract

The paper features on the position of Islam on family tie or filial relationship. It examined the various *Qur'anic* injunctions and prophetic traditions on kinsfolk's relationship. Specifically, the paper looks into bond of kinsfolk which has to do with the act of goodness to parents and the one established through the acts of kindness to all other family members. The paper dwelled on the grammatical and historical origin of the word *Rahim* (kinsfolk) and the nature of bonds of kinsfolk in pre-Islamic era. While elaborating the first category, the paper explicated the constituents of the act of kindness to parents, rewards for its promotion and punishment for its dereliction. On the second segment of bonds of kinsfolk, the paper elucidated the fundamental features of good family relationship, and discussed the reward for its promotion punishment behind its negligence. The paper recommends that scholars should enlighten people more about their obligations with regards to their parents in particular and other family members in general. In addition, parents should promote the spirit of family tie so as to leave behind good precedence for their children.

Keywords: Goodness, Parents Relatives, Islam

1.0 Introduction

According to Fergusson (1992) the term kinsfolk is synonymous with family, kindred, relations, kinship, family connection, blood, or consanguinity. Hornby (2001) defines kinsfolk as a person's blood relation. By implication, the bond of kinsfolk entails family tie. The paper conceived that the bond of family is fortified through the acts of goodness to parents and family relation in Islam. Barakat (2008) explains that this bond could be fortified by means of rendering

physical service or intermittent visit to family members or through financial aid to them. On a general note, the rendering of acts of kindness to the best of one's ability and abstaining from all forms of harmful deeds, no matter how small such, is considered as a way of strengthening the bond of family or blood relation.

However, since family relation is wide and extensive, and sometimes it proves difficult to extend hands of fellowship to all, it is highly imperative to stress that parents are the most desirable of child's kindness in Islam. In the following paragraph, the Islamic legal status of kinsfolk's relation is discussed and the position of parents in this relation is buttressed.

2.0 The legal status of kinsfolk's relationship in Islam

Many verses of the Glorious Qur'an and numerous prophetic traditions buttress the legal status of kinsfolk's relation in Islam. For example, Allah says:

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. Q: (17:23).

Q: 4: 36: *Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good- to parents, kinsfolk.*

Q: (47: 22-23) Then, is it to be expected of you, if ye were put in authority, that ye will do mischief in the land, and break your ties of kith and kin? Such are the men whom Allah has cursed for He has made them deaf and blinded their sight.

In line with the teachings of the above Qur'anic quotations, kinsfolk relationship in Islam is fragmented into two. The first means of fortifying kinsfolk's relationship in Islam is through the acts of goodness to parents and among the parents, the mother deserves the best treatment. In

the following Qur'anic illustration, the lassitude and apathy which women often pass through is specifically mentioned as a reason for desirability of special attention to them.

Q: (31:14) And We have enjoined on man [to be good] to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: [hear the command], "Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is [thy final] Goal.

Q: (46:15) We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying of the [child] to his weaning is [a period of] thirty months.

In one of the hadith, Bahz bin Hakim narrated from his father who also narrated that his grandfather said:

"I said: 'O Messenger of Allah, to whom should I show kindness?' He said: 'Your mother, then your mother, then your mother, then your father, then the next closest and the next - closest.' Dawud (2008:Vol. 5 No. 5139 p428).

The second means of strengthening the bond kinsfolk is through the act of kindness to the immediate family members in terms of brothers, sisters and the emerging generations from them and so on and so forth. The relatives from the two parents such as uncles' aunts and the rest are inclusive. Kulayb ibn Manfa'a reported that his grandfather once asked, the Prophet as to whom should man be dutiful?" The Prophet replied saying:

Your mother, your father, your sister and your brother. Then your *mawla* (client) has the next right against you and then your relatives who are connected. Bukhari (2007: No 47, p15)

It is important to note that Islam gives preference to protection of human rights irrespective of the religious affiliation of the party. To this effect, the rights of kinsfolk are secured even when the party involved is a non-Muslim. This is discernible in the following prophetic tradition narrated by Asma'bint Abu- Bakr who said:

My mother came to me, hoping (for my favour) during the lifetime of the Prophet I asked the Prophet, "May I treat her kindly?" He replied, "Yes." Ibn 'Uyaina said, "Then Allah revealed: 'Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion, nor drove you out of your homes.'" (V.60:8) Bukhari (1997: Vol. 8, No. 5978, p 22).

3.0 Grammatical and historical origin of the word *Ar-Rahim* (kinsfolk's relationship)

The term kinsfolk is an English word which in Arabic is equivalent to the word *Rahim*. The grammatical interpretation of a term and its historical antecedent are paramount towards explanation of what the term stands for. With regards to the grammatical analysis of the word *Ar-Rahim* kinsfolk Abdu'r-Rahman ibn 'Awf narrates that:

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, "Allah, the Almighty and Exalted, said, 'I am the Merciful (*ar-Rahman*). I have created ties of kinship and derive a name for it from My Name. If anyone maintains ties of kinship, I maintain connection with him, and I shall cut off anyone who cuts them off.' Bukhari (2007: No. 53. p17).

Going by the teachings of the above hadith, it is apt to say that the Prophet affirms that *Ar-Rahim* (kinsfolk) originated from the name of Allah the Most Gracious". By its grammatical implication, the term kinsfolk is related to the Grace and Mercy of Allah and as such is full of blessing for whosoever braced up positively to it. But whosoever cuts away from it would be deflated from the special mercy of Allah.

On the historical origin of kinsfolk (*Ar-Rahim*), the following prophetic tradition by Abu-Hurayrah, elucidates further:

"The Messenger of Allah said: 'Allah created the creation, and when He had finished, *Ar-Razm* (the womb; kinship) stood up and aid: "I seek refuge from those who serve the ties of kith and kin." Allah said: "Yes, would it please you if I were to take care of those who take care of you and cut off those who cut you off?" It said: "Of course." Allah said: "Then your prayer is granted." Muslim (2007: No.65118, Vol. 6, p424)

To express the significance of this relation, the above hadith underscores kinsfolk relationship as being enshrined in Islam from the beginning, after the creation of the universe. In addition, those who take care of blood relations are under the care (special Mercy) of Allah while those who cut off from them are also cut off from the special Mercy of Allah.

4.0 Kinsfolk's relation in the Pre-Islamic era

Prior to the advent of Islam, the Pagan and non-Pagan Arabs held in high esteem relationship by blood. For example, Hamdu (2004) recounts how Khansau eulogises his late brother Sakhru on account of his benevolent attitude to him, their parents, family relation and the Arabs in general. Gleanings from the first encounter of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) with arch angel Jibril (AS), shows that Prophet was highly terrified and frightened. In an attempt to fortify the bond of kinsfolk in the pre-Islamic era, Ibn Hisham (2000) states that Aminah the mother of the Prophet embarked on a journey with the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah in order to visit his maternal uncle of Banu Adiyy. On their way back, she died at a place called Abwa. This explains how the pre-Islamic Arabs gave credence to fortification of family tie.

After the angel had appeared to him, he felt he had been possessed by one of the jinn because the incident was very strange to him. He quickly came out of the cave and headed home to relate his experience to his beloved wife. After listening attentively to her husband's narration, Khadijah as quoted by Sibaii (2004:48) made this reply: *By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you.*

You uphold the ties of kinship, help the poor and destitute, honour your guest, and assist the deserted calamity affected ones.

Kinsfolk's relationship is a natural law which with or without religious consciousness, people strongly believe that it plays a fundamental role on man's life. The reply of Khadijah as mentioned above clearly shows that the pre-Islamic Arabs believed that one who did well to family members would not be harmed.

5.0 Constituents of goodness to one's parents

In a bid to ensure the fortification of the bond of kinsfolk through the parents, Islam stipulates that some acts of goodness must be exhibited by children in their relationship with their parents. These acts are generally referred to as acts of goodness and are discussed one after the other in the next paragraphs.

5.1 Kindness

Islam stipulates that parents must be treated with utmost form of kindness by children. This treatment must be done from the depth of their being. This is emphasized in many Qur'anic injunctions and prophetic traditions in the following examples below:

Q: (2:83) And remember We took a covenant from the Children of Israel [to this effect]: Worship none but Allah; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; speak fair to the people; be steadfast in prayer; and practice regular charity. Then did ye turn back, except a few among you, and ye backslide [even now].

Q: (6:151) Say: "Come, I will rehearse what Allah hath [really] prohibited you from": Join not anything as equal with Him; be good to your parents;.

The hadith of Bahz bin Hakim earlier narrated also stresses that parents are the most desirable of kindness by their children. Kindness to parents is multidimensional but this decisively applies to attending to them in a way to assist in making life easier for them. At old age, they must not be neglected or dejected. Kindness to parents in Islam takes all forms so long as it does not constitute a form of worship to them. The Qur'an says:

We have enjoined on man kindness to parents: but if they [either of them] strive [to force] thee to join with Me [in worship] anything of which thou hast no knowledge, obey them not. Ye have [all] to return to me, and I will tell you [the truth] of all that ye did. Q: (29:8)

So great is the high reverence Islam accords to parents such that it gives them right to take from the wealth of their children in order to satisfy their demand with or without the permission of the children. This is discernible in the following prophetic tradition.

It was narrated from 'Amr bin Shu'aib, from his father, that his grandfather said: "A man came to the Messenger of and said: 'My father is taking all my wealth.' He said: 'You and your wealth belong to your father.' And the Messenger of said: 'Your children are among the best of your earnings, Ibn Majah (2007:Vol. 3. No. 2292. Vol. p 308)

5.2 Prayerful for one's parents

Among the nature of kindness expected of a child to his parent is the act of being prayerful to them when they are alive or dead. There are quite a number of injunctions on this, for example Allah says:

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: "My Lord! bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood. Q: (17:23-24).

And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: My Lord! bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood. Q: (17:24). After years of suffering in the course

of nurturing the children, parents hardly live long to enjoy proceeds of their effort from their blessed children. Whether or not the parents live long is not of any consequence. A righteous child is expected to seek for Allah's mercy for his living children and forgiveness for his deceased parents. In the following hadith, the record of good deeds of parents is credited with reward on account of the prayer of his righteous child

When a person dies, his deeds are cut off except for three: Continuing charity, knowledge that others benefited from, and a righteous son who supplicates for him." Tirmidhi (2007: No. 1376, pp167-168").

The following hadith narrated by Abu-Hurairah also reveals the proceeds of the prayer of a dutiful child to his parent on the Day of Judgment.

The Prophet said: "*Qintar* is twelve thousand; '*Uqiyah*, each '*Uqiyuh* of which is better than what is between heaven and earth." And the ' ' Messenger of Allah said: "A man will be raised in status in paradise and will say: 'Where did this come from?' And it will be said: 'From your son's praying for forgiveness for you.'" Ibn Majah (2007:Vol. 5, No. 3660, pp. 12-13).

In another tradition, Abu Usayd said:

We were with the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, when a man asked, 'Messenger of Allah, is there any act of dutifulness which I can do for my parents after their death?' He replied, 'Yes. There are four things: Supplication for them, asking forgiveness for them, fulfilling their pledges, and being generous to friends of theirs. You only have ties of kinship through your parents. Bukhari (2007: No. 35,p)

5.3 Tolerance, respect, regard, love and other requisite affections for parents

All humans being need to love and be loved. Naturally, human beings tend to incline to one who treat them well but avoid the one who harms them. Under normal circumstances, there is an instinctive tendency for man to develop love and affection for his parents especially the mother on account of their toil for him. Parents deserve tolerance, respect and regard from their

children. All these must be borne out of love and affection for them (parents). This respect could be either in words or deeds. As a sign of respect to parents, the Qur'an requests children to honour, be soft-spoken and show kindness to their parents. Further as illustration, the Qur'an says:

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. Q: (17:23).

To buttress this further the value and significance of reverence to parents, the following verses of the Qur'an held up for all to see the humility of some Prophets of Allah in their relationship with their parents. With regards to Prophet Isa (AS), the Qur'an says:

He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; "And He hath made me blessed whosoever I be, and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live;. "[He] hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable Q: (19:30-32).

As for Prophet Yahaya, the Qur'an says: Q :(19:14) *And kind to his parents, and he was not overbearing or rebellious.* Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) was a royal Minister in Egypt but he was humble enough to call for his old, poor parents from their distance home and offered them seats on a high platform. Prophet Yusuf knew the position of parents in the sight of Allah, so he did not feel timid nor bashful in according his parents this great honour in the presence of his officials. The Qur'an says:

Then when they entered the presence of (Yusuf) Joseph, he provided a home for his parents with himself, and said: "Enter ye Egypt [all] in safety if it please Allah.". And he raised his parents high on the throne [of dignity], Q: (12:99-100).

While substantiating the above narration, the Prophet says:



"I enjoin each one to honor his mother, I enjoin each one to honor his mother, I enjoin each one to honor his mother (three times), I enjoin, each one to honor his father, I enjoin each one to honor his guardian who is taking care of him, even if he is causing him some annoyance." Ibn Majah (2007: Vol 5. No 3657, p11)

5.4 Appreciation

In Islam, children forever remain indebted to their parents. While adducing the reason why parents need to be appreciated by children, the Qur'an says: *Q: (46:15) We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: In pain did his mother bear him.*

And We have enjoined on man [to be good] to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: [hear the command], "Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is [thy final] Goal. Q: (31:14)

We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents: In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying of the [child] to his weaning is [a period of] thirty months. At length, when he reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years, he says, "O my Lord! Grant me that I may be grateful for Thy favour which Thou has bestowed upon me, and upon both my parents, and that I may work righteousness Q: (46:15)

In one of the hadiths narrated from Abu Hurairah, the Prophet says: *No child can compensate his father unless he finds him a slave, and buys him and sets him free.* Ibn Majah (2007: Vol. No. 3659, Vol. 5, p12). In another tradition:

Sa'id ibn Abi Burda said, "I heard my father say that Ibn 'Umar saw a Yamani man going around the House while carrying his mother on his back, saying, 'I am your humble camel. If her mount is frightened, I am not frightened.' Then he asked, 'Ibn 'Umar? Do you think that I have repaid her?' He replied, 'No, not even for a single groan. Bukhari (2007: No. 11, p).

5.5 Being dutiful to their friends

Extending the cord of kindness and friendship to the friends of parents is a way of being good to parents. In one of the hadiths of the noble Prophet, Abdullâh bin Dinâr said that a Bedouin man met 'Abdullâh bin 'Umar on the road to Makkah, and 'Abdullâh bin. 'Umar greeted him, and as well mounted him on the donkey which he was riding. In addition, he gave him a turban that was on his head. On seeing this, Ibn Dinâr said:

"We said to him: 'May Allah guide you. They are Bedouin and they are content with little.' 'Abdullâh (Ibn 'Umar) said: 'The father of this man was a friend of 'Umar bin Al-Khattâb, and I heard the Messenger of Allah say: The best act of Birr is for a child to uphold ties with the friends of his father. Muslim (2007: Vol. 6, No. 6513, p421)

5.6 Fulfilling their oath and paying off their debt

As part of the responsibility of a child to his parents in Islam is fulfillment of the oath made during the parents' life and paying off the debt incurred by them. The following prophetic traditions shed more illumination:

A woman came to the Prophet and said, "My mother vowed to perform the *Hajj* but she died before performing it. Should I perform the *Hajj* on her behalf?" He said, "Yes! Perform the *Hajj* on her behalf. See, if your mother had been in debt, would you have paid her debt?" She said, "Yes." He said, "So you should pay what is for Him as Allah has more right that one should fulfill one's obligations to Him." Bukhari (1997:No. 7315, pp257).

Abu said Mâlik bin Rabi'ah As-Sâ'idi said: "While we were with the Messenger of Allah, a man from Banu Salamah came to him and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, is there anything left that I can do to honor my parents after they die?' He said: 'Yes. Pray for them, ask for forgiveness for them, carry out their last wishes, uphold the ties of kinship that you would not have were it not for them, and honor their friends.'" Dawud (2008: Vol. 5 No. 5142, p430).

When children adequately exhibit the above behavior in their relationship with their parents, the bond of kinsfolk is enhanced. To encourage children towards the exhibiting goodness to their parents so as to fortify the bond of kinsfolk, Islam sets aside rewards for the acts of goodness to parents and the reverse equally attracts great penalty. This is appropriately discussed in the next paragraphs.

6.0 Reward for goodness to parent and consequences for its dereliction.

The reward of goodness to parents are enormous and the punishment for its dereliction are equally numerous. For example, kindness to parents is considered as second only to the worship of the creator. Q: (17:23). In Bukhari (1997: Vol. 1, No.527 p323), observance of prayer is considered as the most desirable acts to Allah, followed by goodness to parents, while *Jihad* (fighting in the cause of Allah) follows. There are many prophetic traditions that highlight the significance of a child goodness to his parents' vis-à-vis his admittance to paradise. Ibn Majah (2007:Vol. 5. No. 3663,pp 13-14). Among the three supplications which are quickly answered by Allah is the supplication of parents for their children Bukhari, (2007: No. 32)

Having seen some of the rewards for being good to parents, it is highly imperative to also examine some of the consequences for its negligence or dereliction of duty. In Bukhari, (2007: No. 29, p), it is clearly stated that: *There is no wrong action more likely to bring punishment in this world in addition to what is stored up in the Next World than oppression and severing ties of kinship. The Lord's pleasure is in the parent's pleasure, and the Lord's anger is in the parent's anger. Tirmidhi* (2007:Vol.4. No. 1899, p23). At one occasion, the companions asked the

Prophet to identify the major sins that must be avoided. He said: *To join partners with Allah, and disobeying one's: parents.*" Tirmidhi (2007:Vol.4. pp24-25)

There is yet another prophetic tradition where it is reported that among the greatest sins is for one to curse his parents. This is contained in the following hadith:

Abdullah bin 'Amr narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: "It is among the greatest of sins that a man should curse his parents." They said: "O Messenger of Allah ! Does a man curse his parents?" He said: "Yes. He verbally abuses the father of a man, who in turn, verbally abuses his father, and he (retaliates and) curses his mother, so he curses his mother " Tirmidhi (2007:No. 1902, Vol.4. p25)

It is a great humiliation and acts of disgrace for a man whose parents, one or both reach old age but could not exhibit acts of kindness to them that would warrant him paradise through such act Muslim (2007:Vol. 6. No. 6510, p420).

7.0 Constituents of goodness to one's relatives

After the mother and father, the closest relatives are to be accorded kind treatment by children Dawud (2007:Vol. 5 No. 5139 p428). The essence of this is to ensure the fortification of the bond of kinsfolk as established by Islam. Murad (2005) explains that this treatment entails, paying visit to them, obeying them, rendering financial assistance to the less privileged among them, and abstaining from doing them any forms of ill treatment. Faisal (2011) concurs with the above assertion but adds that the act of goodness to relatives could be in terms of showing concern about their worries and rejoicing with them during occasions of joy and glee. Guiding members one's relatives to the path of decency, cautioning them against all forms of incivility, and reconciling the warring parties among them all constitute acts of goodness to them.

All the aforementioned benevolent treatment explained with regards to parents is to be extended to relatives. However, no relationship is perfect and as such mistakes are bound to be made by family members. The Qur'an cautions Muslims to persevere, and forgive the offender. Nothing should hinder a Muslim from discharging his duty and responsibility to relatives Q :(24:22).

Upholding the aforesaid righteous conducts by family members no doubt would assist towards the fortification of the bond of kinsfolk in Islam. As a way of encouraging people to embrace the acts of goodness to relatives so as to strengthening the bond of kinsfolk, Islam prepared reward and punishment for goodness to relatives and its negligence respectively.

8.0 Reward for goodness to one's relatives and consequences for its neglect.

Several Qur'anic passages support that maintaining good family relation attracts the blessings of Allah in this life. As well, an eternal reward awaits such a servant in the hereafter. The act of kindness to relatives is ordained by Allah, Q: (2:215), Q: (2:177), Q: (4:1), Q: (4:36), Q: (17:25-26). Compliance with this injunction is submission to Him and attracts a special reward in the eternal life Q: (13:21), Q: (30:37-38). Whosoever strengthens the bond of kith and kin relation receives more blessing of Allah Muslim (2007: Vol. 6. No.6519, pp424-425). In specific terms, the provisions of the one who keeps family tie is increased as also his life span (2007: Vol. 6. No.6523, pp425-426). Sustaining good relationship with family members secures for one the support and assistance of Allah.

In the Glorious Qur'an, severing the tie of kith and kin relations attracts the wrath of Allah, and the worst abode is prepared for such servant in the hereafter Q: (13:25), Q: (47:22-23)



In some hadith narrations, whoever cuts the bond of family relation automatically removes himself away from the mercy of Allah Muslim (2007: Vol. 6. No. 6519, pp424-425). In addition such a person denies himself the possibility of admittance into paradise Muslim (2007: Vol. 6. No. 6521, p425). The Prophet equally stressed anyone who returns his relative's good treatment is like one who feeds himself hot ashes Muslim (2007: Vol. 6. No. 6525, p426). In the Day of Judgment there are three categories of people whom Allah will not look on. The first among them is the one who disobeys his parents. Nasai (2007:Vol 3 No. 2563. p380).

9.0 Conclusion

Islam is a way of life and as such it guides man towards harmonious relationship. The Islamic principles laid down by Islam no doubt promote fortification of the bond of kinsfolk. It is aimed towards providing mutual love, peaceful coexistence and universal brotherhood. Islam advocates the spirit of being responsible and accountable both of which assist towards strengthening family tie. There is a lot of material reward and the spiritual benefit for man when the bond of kinsfolk is fortified in accordance with the teachings of the religion. But equally, great and vicious is the penalty to be paid for its negligence.

10.0 Recommendations

Scholars should enlighten people more about their obligations to their parents in particular and to other family members in general.

Parents should promote the spirit of universal brotherhood through promotion of strong bond of kinsfolk.

The well to do in a family should endeavor to render assistance to the less privileged in the spirit of strengthening the bond of kinsfolk.

Members of family should explore more ways of strengthening the bond of family relation.

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