

## Prelude

### Definition of Social Relations

In Islam, the general system of social relations, along with the duties and rights ensuing from it, is one of the crucial and basic pillars on which human society relies.

The social relations system can be defined as a set of duties, traditions, etiquette, rights, and obligations that organize the common relations between people in general with individuals of the virtuous community, and the correlation and behavior of the individuals of this virtuous community with one another.

Of course, this social relations system is different from the systems that organize the relations ensuing from special promises, covenants, and contracts such as contracts of matrimony, sale, lease, allegiance, and others. These naturally produce certain sorts of rights, duties, and other obligations. Certain persons undertake other sorts of rights, duties, and responsibilities because of certain positions and offices, such as Imamate, religious authority, management, or surety.

In conclusion, the system of social relations is a set of regulations that define man's social life and his personal responsibility towards the virtuous community. This system represents the foundation on which the other systems, which ensue from private contracts and obligations, rest so that these private systems may play their required roles in life and contribute to the attainment of perfection, because the social relations system deals with the root of social associations and human ties.

### Family and the Social Relations System

The historical root of the system of social relations is marriage and the family unit. These expanded to form clans, tribes, and peoples, as is maintained by the Holy Qur'an that reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ

***O people! Surely, We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely, the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful of his duty. Surely, Allah is Knowing, Aware. (49: 13)***

{يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً} 1

***O people! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same kind and spread from these two many men and women. (4: 1)***

In the same fashion, family stands for the primary and fundamental brick in the Islamic structure and the Ahl al-Bayt's vision of a virtuous human community. For that reason, Islam has taken much interest in family, and established an exact, firm, and all-inclusive system to organize all family relations and affairs in their most exact details and various domains.

The Ahl al-Bayt's concept about family and matrimonial relations has particularities that enable it to face all social problems and coexist with all social developments.

However, here we will deal with the topic of family for the following two reasons:

**First:** This topic is of social and human importance. It is also so comprehensive and broad that it is worth studying thoroughly and meticulously, just like the economic system, the system of contracts and transactions, the system of acts of worship, and the other systems whose details require independent discussions.

**Second:** Because the main topic of this series of books is the building of the virtuous community, our discussion will be dedicated to the system of social relations of this community exclusively. Hence, we will deal with the general aspects of the virtuous community without discussions on the private relations that ensue from contracts and pledges.

We will highlight the foundations and vital rules of this system, its commitment to covenants, obligations, and reciprocal rights. We will also touch upon the principle of private behavior in social relations. This principle involves behavior arising from typical human situations, such as fatherhood, brotherhood, old age; comprehension, self-strife or self-purification; or contracts and obligations, such as matrimony.

Islam has conferred an advanced formula upon family through the many laws in this respect and released it from its naïve and primitive state. Constructing and firmly strengthening the family in virtue and uprightness plays a significant role in strengthening and developing the structure of general social relations.

## Morality in Social Relations

It is true that the system of social relations is a set of laws, legislations, obligations, rights, activities, regulations, manners, and rituals; however, at the same time, it expresses a moral prospect of social behavior and a doctrine-based understanding of the cosmos, life, man, the beginning of creation, and the finale.

This is why books on ethics have discussed this aspect of the social relations system. However, this system is more comprehensive and involves commitments and obligations related to other important topics in Islamic legislation.

## Method of Research in Social Relations

We will only discuss the general concept of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) with regard to some aspects of the Islamic concept of social relations, its rules and general foundations, and some of its special items, applications, and superstructure.

Through this discussion, we will discover the differences between the common Islamic frames and the distinctive features of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in the social construction of the virtuous community.

Differences are to be expected because the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) wanted the virtuous community to act as an excellent example, pattern, and model for the Muslims. In addition, the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) depended upon the genuine and perfect Islam that they had inherited and recognized from the Glorious Qur'an and from their ancestor, the Holy Prophet—peace be upon him and them.

From time to time, we will refer to such distinctive particularities and features.

The discussion of this topic is divided into two chief parts; the first deals with features and foundations of social relations in the light of Islam, while the second deals with the superstructure and details of the forms and components of these social relations.

The first part is divided into two chapters, the first of which deals with the identification and definition of social relations in content, objectives, and scope. The second deals with the rules and general principles that identify these relations and control their progress and activities.

The second part includes the superstructure of social relations, which incorporates legislations dealing with the details of social relations and identifies various sorts of behavior that accomplish the objectives, embody the rules, and portray its numerous features.

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