SAMPLE

Justice: The Scale of Allah

'Adl (عدل) in the Quran

Aira Aurora

Free sample: Introduction & Chapter 1

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Introduction: The Weight of Justice

Justice — 'adl in Arabic — is not merely a virtue in the Quran. It is a command, a divine attribute, a cosmic principle, and a human obligation that sits at the very center of the message. No concept appears more frequently in the Quran's commands, and no value is more consistently upheld across its narratives, its laws, and its descriptions of the divine.

The Quran presents justice as something Allah Himself embodies. He is A'adil — the Just. He created the heavens and the earth with justice (6:73). He sent messengers with the Book and the Scale so that people might establish justice (57:25). He commands justice, excellence, and generosity in a single breath

(16:90). He prohibits injustice to Himself (7:33) and declares that He does not wrong anyone by so much as a speck (4:40).

For the human being, justice is both the highest obligation and the hardest one. The Quran acknowledges this difficulty. It commands justice even when it conflicts with your own interests, your family, your wealth, your alliances. It commands justice even toward those you dislike (5:8). It commands justice in judgment, in speech, in trade, in family, in governance, and in the inner life of the heart. The scope is total. The standard is absolute. The difficulty is real — and the Quran never pretends otherwise.

This book explores the Quranic vision of justice as both command and prohibition — what Allah commands (justice, fairness, equity) and what He forbids (oppression, bias, cheating, corruption). It examines the foundational verses, the contexts of revelation, the narratives that illustrate justice and its absence, the legal rulings that operationalize it, and the spiritual dimension that makes justice not just a social arrangement but a path to nearness with Allah.

The first chapter begins with what many scholars consider the most comprehensive verse in the Quran — a single verse that contains three commands, three prohibitions, and the blueprint for an entire moral civilization.

Chapter 1: The Supreme Command — Surah An-Nahl 16:90

Allah commands justice, excellence, and generosity to relatives. And He forbids immorality, bad conduct, and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you may be reminded. (16:90)

This single verse — known in the tradition as Ayat al-'Adl (the Verse of Justice) — is regarded by many companions and scholars as the most comprehensive verse in the entire Quran. Uthman ibn Affan, the third caliph, is reported to have said: "If this verse were followed, it would suffice as a complete code of life." The reason is evident: in just over twenty words, the verse states three positive commands, three negative prohibitions, and an appeal to remembrance. It is a complete moral framework compressed into a single breath.

The verse opens with inna Allaha ya'muru bil-'adl — "Allah commands justice." The word 'adl carries the root meaning of balance, equilibrium, and proportion. It is the state in which everything is in its proper place, where nothing exceeds its bounds and nothing falls short. Justice, in the Quranic sense, is not merely the absence of injustice — it is an active, positive establishment of balance. It is the state of a scale that has been calibrated, not merely one that has not been tampered with.

The second command is al-ihsan — "excellence" or "beautiful conduct." Ihsan is the higher register of 'adl. Where justice gives each person their due, excellence gives more than what is due. Where justice is the minimum, excellence is the aspiration. The Quran does not stop at commanding fairness; it commands the person to go beyond fairness into generosity of spirit, into beauty of action, into the kind of conduct that exceeds obligation. This pairing — justice and excellence — appears throughout the Quran as a complementary pair. Justice without excellence is cold; excellence without justice is unsystematic. Together, they form the complete moral horizon.

The third command is wa ita'i dhil-qurba — "and generosity to relatives." This is not merely a command to be kind to family; it is a recognition that justice begins at home. The family is the first circle of obligation, and the person who is just in public but unjust in private has not fulfilled the command. The Quran repeatedly places the family at the center of moral obligation — parents, orphans, relatives — because the family is where justice is first learned, first practiced, and first tested.

The verse then turns from commands to prohibitions. Wa yanha 'ani al- fahsha'

— "and He forbids immorality." Fahsha' refers to actions that are morally repugnant — the kind of behavior that any sound human nature would recognize as wrong. The Quran uses the word for sexual immorality, but it also extends it to any action that is shameless, indecent, or destructive of moral boundaries.

The second prohibition is al-munkar — "bad conduct" or "what is rejected." Munkar is the broader category: anything that the sound intellect and the revelation jointly reject. It includes lying, cheating, arrogance, mockery, and every form of behavior that degrades the human being. Where fahsha' is the extreme of immorality, munkar is the everyday erosion of moral standards.

The third prohibition is al-baghy — "oppression" or "transgression." Baghy means to exceed the limits, to encroach on what is not yours, to dominate and exploit. It is the active form of injustice — not merely failing to do justice, but actively preventing it. Baghy is what the powerful do to the weak, what the rich do to the poor, what rulers do to their subjects, and what nations do to other nations.

The structure of 16:90 is architecturally precise. Three commands are followed by three prohibitions, and the prohibitions are arranged in ascending order of severity. Immorality (fahsha') begins in the private life. Bad conduct (munkar) extends into the social life. Oppression (baghy) reaches into the political and institutional life. The progression moves from the personal to the social to the structural — because moral decay moves in that direction. What begins as private immorality eventually corrupts social norms, and corrupted social norms eventually produce systemic oppression.

The commands move in the same direction. Justice ('adl) is the personal commitment to balance. Excellence (ihsan) is the social practice of going beyond balance. Generosity to relatives (ita' dhil-qurba) is the structural commitment to maintaining the bonds that hold society together. The progression from justice to excellence to generosity mirrors the progression from immorality to bad conduct to oppression — but in the opposite direction. The commands build upward; the prohibitions degrade downward.

The verse concludes with ya'idhukum la'allakum tadhakkarun — "He admonishes you that perhaps you may be reminded." The word la'alla in Arabic carries a sense of hope and aspiration. Allah does not say "so that you will be reminded" — He says "perhaps you may be reminded." This phrasing acknowledges human freedom. The command has been given, the prohibition has been stated, the appeal has been made — but the response is yours. The verse does not compel; it invites. It does not force; it reminds. The entire weight of divine authority stands behind the command, but the human being

retains the choice to respond or to ignore.

The word tadhakkarun — "you may be reminded" — comes from the root dh-k-r, the same root as dhikr (remembrance). To be reminded is to recover something you already know. The Quran's approach to morality is not to introduce foreign concepts but to awaken dormant ones. The human being already knows, at some deep level, that justice is right and oppression is wrong. The Quran does not create that knowledge; it reactivates it. The command to justice is not a new imposition; it is a return to the original design.

In the tradition, 16:90 was recited by the imams in the Friday sermon (khutbah) on a regular basis. The companions and the early caliphs would recite this verse at the end of every sermon, ensuring that the community heard it at least once a week. This practice reflects the conviction that justice is not a topic you learn once and remember forever — it is a command you must hear repeatedly because the forces that pull you away from justice are constant. Greed, bias, anger, tribalism, self- interest — all of these are active forces that require an equally active counter-force. The weekly recitation of 16:90 was that counter-force: a regular recalibration of the moral compass.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aira Aurora is an independent researcher and writer specializing in Quranic studies. Her work focuses on close reading of the Quranic text, exploring its themes, narratives, and moral framework with attention to both the original Arabic and the broader human context.

The NurOne master series is her primary project -- a multi-sub-series exploration of the Quran covering prophets, people, places, events, lessons, commands, signs, the unseen, the hereafter, and everyday life. Each book is a close reading of the Quranic verses on a specific topic, presented in clear, accessible language.

Her work is published under the pen name Aira Aurora.

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