SAMPLE

Kindness to Parents: The First Circle

Birr al-Walidayn (بر الوالدين) in the Quran

Aira Aurora

Free sample: Introduction & Chapter 1

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Contents

Disclaimer

Introduction: The Debt That Cannot Be Repaid

Chapter 1: The Supreme Pairing — Worship Allah and Treat Parents Well

Chapter 2: The Mother — Three Times Under the Line

Chapter 3: The Father — The Model of Guidance

Chapter 4: Birr — The Quality of Kindness

Chapter 5: Ihsan — The Excellence of Care

Chapter 6: When Parents Are Wrong — The Test of Disagreement

Chapter 7: The Prophets and Their Parents — Models of Kindness

Chapter 8: The Prohibition — What Allah Forbids

Chapter 9: The Reward — The Garden of the Grateful

Chapter 10: The Prayer for the Parents — The Believer's Standing Dua

Chapter 11: The Two-Direction Prayer — The Parents' Asking for the Child

Chapter 12: The Two Model Sons — Kindness as a Prophetic Attribute

Frequently Asked Questions

Glossary

This free sample contains the Introduction and Chapter 1. The complete book contains the full contents above.

Introduction: The Debt That Cannot Be Repaid

There is a debt that every human being owes and that no human being can repay. It is the debt of existence itself — the fact that you are here, reading this, thinking this, breathing this, because two people came together and brought you into being. The Quran does not let you forget this debt. It places it beside the most fundamental obligation of all — the worship of Allah — and it commands you to pay it, knowing that it can never be fully paid.

Kindness to parents — birr al-walidayn — is one of the most emphasized commands in the Quran. It appears in multiple surahs, in different contexts, with varying degrees of detail, but always with the same urgency. The Quran does not present kindness to parents as an optional virtue or a cultural expectation. It presents it as a divine command, paired with the worship of Allah, placed immediately after the affirmation of God's oneness, and reinforced with warnings and promises.

This book — the third in the Commands & Prohibitions sub-series — explores the Quranic vision of kindness to parents. It examines the foundational verses, the specific treatment of the mother and the father, the qualities of birr (kindness) and ihsan (excellence) that the Quran commands, the difficult case of parents who are wrong or who oppose the faith, the prophetic models of parental kindness, the prohibitions related to parents, and the spiritual reward that the Quran connects to this obligation.

The first chapter begins with the pairing that the Quran uses again and again — the command to worship Allah alone, followed immediately by the command to treat parents with kindness. This pairing is not accidental. It reveals something profound about the structure of Quranic morality: the relationship with the Creator and the relationship with the creators are placed side by side, and the health of one is connected to the health of the other.

Chapter 1: The Supreme Pairing — Worship Allah and Treat Parents Well

And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. (17:23)

This verse is one of the most significant in the entire Quran regarding kindness to parents. It pairs two commands in a single sentence: worship Allah alone, and treat parents with ihsan (excellence). The pairing is not merely a literary device — it is a theological statement. The worship of Allah and the kindness to parents are placed on the same level of obligation, not because they are equal in magnitude (the worship of Allah is the highest duty) but because they are connected in a way that the violation of one affects the other.

The Quran repeatedly places the command to kindness toward parents immediately after the command to worship Allah. This pattern appears in at least four major passages:

- "And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment" (17:23). - "And worship Allah and do not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment" (4:36). - "And We have enjoined upon man the care of his parents. His mother carried him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents" (31:14). - "And We took the covenant from the Children of Israel: Worship none but Allah and be good to parents" (2:83).

In each passage, the structure is the same: affirm the worship of Allah, then immediately command kindness to parents. The placement is not arbitrary. The Quran is teaching that the person who claims to worship Allah but mistreats their parents has a defect in their worship. The two obligations are connected — not identical, but inseparable. You cannot separate your relationship with the Creator from your relationship with those who participated in your creation.

The word qada — "decreed" — in 17:23 carries a sense of finality. It is not a suggestion or a recommendation. It is a decree — a settled, non- negotiable command that has been established and will not be changed. The person who treats the worship of Allah as optional has rejected the decree. The person who treats kindness to parents as optional has rejected the same decree. The Quran does not allow you to accept one and neglect the other.

The verse in 4:36 is particularly rich: "And worship Allah and do not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at

your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are proud and boastful." The verse begins with Allah and then cascades outward in concentric circles: parents first, then relatives, then orphans, then the needy, then neighbors, then companions, then travelers, then those in your care. The order is significant. Parents are the innermost circle — the first recipients of your kindness after Allah Himself. Every other relationship radiates outward from this center. The person who is kind to parents but harsh to neighbors has at least fulfilled the inner circle. The person who is kind to neighbors but harsh to parents has missed the center entirely.

In 2:83, the Quran recalls the covenant given to the Children of Israel: "Worship none but Allah and be good to parents, to relatives, to orphans, and to the needy." The fact that kindness to parents appears in the covenant — the foundational agreement between Allah and a nation — reveals its centrality. This is not a new command given to the Muslims; it is an ancient command, part of the original moral framework that Allah established with humanity through the prophets. The Quran is not inventing the obligation; it is restoring it, reminding a new community of a truth that has always been true.

In 31:14, the Quran connects kindness to parents with gratitude: "Be grateful to Me and to your parents." The verse commands gratitude to Allah and to parents in the same sentence — using the same word (shukr) for both. This is a remarkable pairing. Gratitude to Allah is the recognition that every blessing comes from Him. Gratitude to parents is the recognition that they were the means by which those blessings came. The two are not in competition. The person who is grateful to Allah will naturally be grateful to the people He used to bring them into being. The person who is ungrateful to parents has, in a sense, failed to be grateful to Allah — because the refusal to honor the means is a failure to honor the One who chose the means.

The supreme pairing — worship Allah and treat parents well — teaches three lessons. First, the vertical relationship with Allah and the horizontal relationship with parents are connected. You cannot have one without the other. Second, kindness to parents is not a social custom but a divine command. The person who treats it as optional has misunderstood the structure of Quranic morality. Third, the command to kindness is not conditional on the parents' behavior. The Quran commands kindness even when parents are difficult, even when they are not Muslim, even when they oppose the faith — a reality that later chapters of this book will explore in detail.

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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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