SAMPLE

The Prohibition of Extravagance: The

Waste of the Excess Israf (إسراف) and Tabdhir (تبذير) in the Quran

Aira Aurora

Free sample: Introduction & Chapter 1

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

Introduction: The Balance of the Middle Way

The Quran's prohibition of extravagance is part of its broader vision of the middle way — the path between the two extremes of excess and deprivation. The Quran says: "And the believers are those who, when they spend, are neither excessive nor stingy, but are ever, between that, moderate" (25:67). The verse captures the essence of the Quranic ethic of wealth: the believer is the person who spends moderately — not lavishly and not miserly, not in excess and not in deprivation, but in the balance that Allah has established. The middle way is not merely a financial principle; it is a spiritual principle — the principle that every capacity, every resource, and every blessing is to be used in accordance with the measure that Allah has set.

The prohibition of extravagance is established in two key verses. The first: "O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who are excessive" (7:31). The second: "And do not waste, for indeed, He does not like those who waste" (6:141, also 7:31 in some readings). The two prohibitions — israf (excess) and tabdhir (waste) — are related but distinct. Israf is the exceeding of the limit in consumption — eating too much, drinking too much, spending too much. Tabdhir is the squandering of resources — spending on what is useless, wasting what is valuable, throwing away what could benefit. Both are prohibited, and both are aspects of the same problem: the failure to respect the measure that Allah has set.

This book — the tenth and final in the Commands & Prohibitions sub-series — explores the Quranic prohibition of extravagance. It examines the foundational verses (7:31, 6:141, 17:26-27, 25:67), the theological foundation (Allah as the Provider — ar-Razzaq), the nature of extravagance (the exceeding of the limit), the two extremes (extravagance and stinginess), the prophetic models of moderation, the psychology of the hypocrite who wastes, the social and cultural face of extravagance, the scope of the prohibition, and the spiritual reward of the balanced life.

The Quran's treatment of extravagance is not merely about spending less; it is about spending right. The prohibition is not of spending but of excessive spending — the spending that exceeds the measure of need and enters the territory of waste. The person who spends moderately — who eats what is sufficient, who drinks what is adequate, who uses what is necessary, and who gives what is surplus — is the person who has followed the middle way. The person who spends excessively — who eats beyond satiation, who hoards beyond need, who displays beyond purpose, and who wastes beyond reason — is the person who has violated the prohibition.

The first chapter begins with the prohibition itself — the verses that establish the forbidding of israf and tabdhir and the principle of the middle way.

Chapter 1: The Prohibition — What Allah

Forbids

The prohibition of extravagance is established with clarity: "O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who are excessive" (7:31). The verse is remarkable for what it permits before what it prohibits. It permits adornment — the taking of beauty at the place of worship. It permits eating and drinking

— the enjoyment of the provision that Allah has given. And then it prohibits the excess — the exceeding of the measure, the going beyond the limit, the consumption that transforms enjoyment into gluttony and provision into waste. The verse establishes the principle: enjoyment is permitted, excess is forbidden. The believer is not commanded to abstain from the good things of life but to enjoy them within the measure that Allah has set.

The Arabic word for extravagance is israf — from the root sara'a, meaning to exceed, to go beyond, to surpass. The israf is the act of exceeding the limit — any limit, whether the limit of need, the limit of moderation, or the limit of propriety. The person who eats beyond satiation has committed israf. The person who spends beyond need has committed israf. The person who speaks beyond necessity has committed israf. The word is comprehensive — it covers every dimension in which a person can exceed the measure that Allah has set.

The Quran uses a second word for waste: tabdhir — from the root badhara, meaning to scatter, to squander, to dissipate. "And give the relative his right, and the poor and the traveler, and do not waste wastefully. Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord" (17:26-27). The tabdhir is the squandering of resources — the spending on what is useless, the wasting of what is valuable, the throwing away of what could benefit. The tabdhir is related to israf but distinct: israf is the excess in consumption (eating too much, drinking too much), while tabdhir is the waste in spending (buying what is useless, spending on what is pointless).

The Quran says: "And it is He who produces gardens, grapevines and olives and pomegranates, similar and dissimilar. Eat of its fruit when it yields, and give its due on the day of its harvest. And do not waste, for indeed, He does not like those who waste" (6:141). The verse connects the enjoyment of the provision with the obligation of the due — the person who eats the fruit must give the right of the fruit (the zakat, the charity, the share of the poor). And then it prohibits the waste — the person who wastes the fruit has violated both the enjoyment and the due. The prohibition of waste is the protection of the provision — the preservation of what Allah has given for the purpose for which it was given.

The Quran describes the wasteful as "brothers of the devils" (17:27). The description is one of the most severe in the Quran — the person who wastes is not merely a sinner but a brother of Shaytan. The reason is given: "Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord" (17:27). The connection between waste and ingratitude is the key: the person who wastes what Allah has given has failed to recognize the giver. The fruit that is wasted, the wealth that is squandered, the food that is thrown away — all are provisions from Allah, and the waste of the provision is the ingratitude of the receiver. The brother of the devil is the person who, like Shaytan, refuses to acknowledge the source of what they have.

The Quran describes the believers: "And those who, when they spend, are neither excessive nor stingy, but are ever, between that, moderate" (25:67). The verse is the positive counterpart to the prohibition — the description of the balanced life. The believer is not the person who does not spend; the believer is the person who spends moderately. The moderation is the middle — between the israf of excess and the taqtir (stinginess) of deprivation. The middle is not a compromise between two vices but a virtue in itself — the virtue of qasd (moderation), the intentional, deliberate, measured use of what Allah has given.

The prohibition of extravagance is comprehensive — it covers every dimension of consumption and spending. The person who eats beyond satiation, who drinks beyond sobriety, who spends beyond need, who displays beyond purpose, who builds beyond use, who travels beyond necessity, who acquires beyond benefit — each has committed israf or tabdhir. The prohibition is not of a specific act but of a principle: do not exceed the measure. The measure is set by need, by moderation, and by the purpose for which the provision was given. The person who respects the measure has honored the Giver, and the person who exceeds it has violated both the measure and the Giver.

The verse "O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid" (7:31) was revealed in a context where the pre-Islamic Arabs had specific practices related to the pilgrimage. Some would circumambulate the Ka'bah naked, believing that their garments were contaminated by their sins and that the only way to purify themselves was to shed them. The Quran corrects this: take your adornment — wear your clothing — at every masjid. The correction is the rejection of the extreme of deprivation in the same verse that prohibits the extreme of excess. The believer is not the person who strips off the good things of life, and the believer is not the person who indulges in them. The believer is the person who takes the adornment and eats and drinks — all within the measure that Allah has set.

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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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