Manners of a Muslim Child

Adab and Akhlaq for Everyday Life



Aisha Khan

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by Aisha Khan

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CHAPTER I

The Golden Hello: Greeting with

Yusuf's stomach felt like a washing machine on its fastest spin.

New classroom. New chairs. Twenty-three faces he had never seen before. He slid into the seat closest to the door — just in case — and stared very hard at the empty desk in front of him.

The boy next to him had a red pencil case and shiny blue trainers. He was drawing a rocket ship in the margin of his notebook and did not look up.

Say something, Yusuf told himself. Say anything.

But his tongue sat in his mouth like a stone.

Then something floated back — a hadith his mother had read to him the night before, while he lay in bed worrying about exactly this moment. The Prophet Muhammad ýú had said: "Sp — and when people share that greeting of peace, love grows between them. (Sahih Muslim, 54)

He had also said something else. A man once asked the Prophet ýú which act o answered: "Feeding the hungry, and greeting with sal m those you know and t al-Bukhari, 12)

Those you do not know.

Like the boy with the rocket ship.

Yusuf took a breath so deep his shoulders rose all the way to his ears. Then he let it out — slowly, slowly. He turned.

"As-sal mu ¿alaykum."

It came out quieter than he planned. Almost a whisper.

The boy looked up. For one terrible second, Yusuf was sure he had made a mistake.

Then the boy grinned — a wide, gap-toothed grin — and said, "Wa ¿alaykumu like space?"

That was it. That was the whole door, swinging wide open.

By the time their teacher called the class to order, Kareem had already promised to lend Yusuf his book about Jupiter, and Yusuf had forgotten that his stomach had ever felt like a washing machine at all.

Sal m means peace be upon you. It is not just a hello. It is a gift — a prayer hands the very moment you see them. The scholars tell us that the better of two people meeting is the one who speaks first. (Riyad as-Salihin) That takes a little courage. But only a little.

You might be shy. Yusuf was shy too.

One breath. One greeting. One door opening.

CHAPTER II

The Magic Word Before Eating: Sayi

The porridge was warm. It smelled of cinnamon and honey. And Fatima had already picked up her spoon.

Her hand was halfway to the bowl when she felt it — a gentle, quiet smile aimed straight at her from across the table. Bibi. Grandmother. Eyes soft, eyebrows raised just a tiny bit, saying nothing at all.

Fatima put the spoon down.

She closed her eyes, took a small breath, and said it.

"Bismill h."

In the name of Allah.

Three words. Barely a whisper. But Bibi's whole face lit up like someone had switched a lamp on behind her eyes.

"Now you may eat," Bibi said, and she said it like Fatima had done something wonderful.

Fatima took her first spoonful — and it really did taste better. She wasn't sure why. Maybe it was the honey. Maybe it was something else.

"Bibi," she said, mouth slightly full, "why does Bismill h matter? It's just w

Her grandmother set down her own spoon. This was how Bibi looked when a good explanation was coming.

"The Prophet Muhammad ýú," she said, "once sat with a young boy — a boy nc boy was reaching all over his plate, grabbing food from here, grabbing food at him kindly and said: 'O young boy, mention the name of Allah, eat with your right hand, and eat from what is nearest to you.'" She paused. "That boy never forgot those words for the rest of his life. We know because he told people, and people wrote it down, and now — centuries later — you and I still follow the same lesson at this very table."

Fatima looked at her bowl of oats. Ordinary oats. Ordinary kitchen. And yet.

"So Bismill h is like... telling Allah the meal is from Him?"

"Exactly that," Bibi said. "Every bite of food is a gift. Bismill h is how we s begin."

This is something you can try today. Before lunch, before a snack, even before a sip of juice — just pause. One breath. Three words. Bismill h. It takes less than a second, and it turns something that belongs to Allah.

The porridge was still warm. Fatima picked up her spoon — right hand this time, starting from the side closest to her — and finished every last drop.

The Prophet ýú said: "O young boy, mention the name of Allah, eat with your in front of you." (Sahih al-Bukhari, 5376; Sahih Muslim, 2022)

CHAPTER III

The Right Way Round: Eating with the Right Hand

The grass was still a little damp from the morning, but Hamza did not care one bit. He had found the perfect picnic spot — flat enough for the blanket, shady enough for Baba, and close enough to the pond to hear the ducks arguing with each other.

Mama had packed his favourite: cheese sandwiches, cut into triangles.

He grabbed one and took a big, happy bite. Then he reached for another. His left hand shot out first, the way it always did when he was not paying attention, and he held the sandwich there, munching away, watching a pigeon wobble along the path.

Baba noticed.

"Hamza," he said softly. Not a telling-off. More like a quiet question. "Which hand are you using?"

Hamza looked down. Left hand. He switched it quickly and shrugged, a little pink in the cheeks.

"I keep forgetting," he said.

Baba smiled and stretched out on the blanket. "I used to forget too. Want to know the thing that helped me remember?"

Hamza nodded, still chewing.

"The Prophet ﷺ said — and this is recorded in Sahih Muslim — 'None of you drink with it, for Shaytan eats with his left hand and drinks with it.'"

Hamza stopped chewing for a moment. "Shaytan eats?"

"That is what the Prophet ﷺ told us." (Sahih Muslim, 2019)

That was enough. Hamza looked at the sandwich triangle sitting in his right hand now — really looked at it — and something small clicked into place. Using his right hand was not just a habit someone wanted him to have. It was a choice. A tiny, quiet way of saying: I am not following Shaytan. I am trying to be better.

He liked that idea very much.

They ate the rest of the picnic together, ducks quacking in the distance, Mama pouring juice into little cups. Hamza picked up a grape with his left hand by accident — then caught himself and laughed out loud. Switched hands. Tried again. Right hand. Got it.

"You do not have to be perfect," Baba told him. "You just have to keep trying."

That is the thing about good manners. Nobody learns them all at once. Every meal is a new chance — every sandwich, every sip, every grape pulled from the bunch.

Even the hand you eat with can be an act of love for Allah.

So next time you sit down to eat — which hand will you use?

CHAPTER IV

Three Sips of Kindness: Drinking Slowly

Maryam had been running for thirty minutes straight. Or at least it felt like thirty minutes. Up and down the garden, chasing the ball, chasing her cousin, then just running because the afternoon air smelled like cut grass and she could not stop herself.

She burst through the back door pink-cheeked and panting, grabbed her water bottle from the counter, tilted her head back, and drank. Big, fast gulps. Water down her chin.

"Whoa." Her older brother Dawud leaned against the doorframe, arms folded, eyebrows up. "Slow down."

"I'm thirsty," she gasped.

"I know. But watch." He picked up his own glass and sat at the kitchen table. "Sit with me."

Maryam sat — mostly because her legs were tired anyway.

Dawud took one slow sip, then lowered the glass and breathed gently out, away from the rim. Then a second sip. Lowered it again. Third sip. Done.

"That's it?" Maryam stared.

"That's it. Three sips. That's how the Prophet ﷺ drank." Dawud set the glass down. "I learned it from the Prophet's own servant, remember — he said the Prophet ﷺ used to breathe Outside the vessel, not into it." He tapped the table. "It's in Sahih Muslim, and Imam al-Nawawi collected it in Riyad as-Salihin too."

Maryam looked at her bottle. "Why outside the vessel?"

"Think about it. Would you want someone blowing their breath into your drink?"

She wrinkled her nose. "No."

"Right. So we breathe away. Three calm sips, and we breathe between each one. That's the Sunnah."

Maryam tried it. One sip — lower the bottle — breathe. The water was cool. Really cool. She hadn't noticed that before. Second sip. Something almost sweet in it, which sounded strange except it was true. Third sip.

She lowered the bottle. "It does taste better."

Dawud grinned. "Because you actually tasted it."

They carried their drinks outside and sat on the back step in the shade of the fence, the garden still bright and warm in front of them. A bee wobbled past a flower. Somewhere down the street a lawnmower hummed.

"Every time we follow the Prophet ﷺ in a small thing," Dawud said quietly, "
worship, even when no one's watching."

Maryam picked up her bottle again. Three sips. Slow ones.

She thought about how many times a day she drank water without thinking. Maybe twenty. Maybe more.

Twenty chances a day to remember the Prophet ﷺ. All you have to do is slow

CHAPTER V

Wait Your Turn: Not Interrupting Elders

Ibrahim could barely feel his feet on the ground.

The cat. The lost stripy cat from next door — the one with one white ear that Mrs. Hanan had been searching for four whole days — was sitting right there in the garden, blinking at the afternoon sun.

He had to tell someone. Now.

He flew through the hallway, burst through the sitting-room door, and opened his mouth wide —

"Baba! Baba, I found —"

But Baba was mid-sentence. His uncle was visiting, and both men turned to look at Ibrahim with calm, surprised faces. The words dried up in Ibrahim's throat.

"Just one moment, hab+bi," Baba said gently. He held up a single finger and

Ibrahim stood there. He fidgeted with the hem of his jumper. He looked at the ceiling. He really, really wanted to speak.

His mother had followed him in. She crouched beside him and placed her hand softly on his arm — like a quiet little press that said: I see you. Wait just a little.

Ibrahim took one big breath. Then another.

He waited.

When Baba finished and turned to him, his eyes were warm. "Now, ya Ibrahim. What was so important?"

The words came tumbling out — the cat, the white ear, the garden. His father laughed with delight and went straight next door to tell Mrs. Hanan himself.

Later, after the happy reunion (Mrs. Hanan cried a little; the cat did not care at all), Ibrahim's mother sat with him on the kitchen step.

"You know what Abdullah ibn Umar did once?" she said. "The Prophet ýú aske which tree is most like a believer? Ibn Umar knew the answer. Straight away. But there were older Companions around him, so he held his tongue and waited. He did not want to speak before them." She smiled at Ibrahim. "The answer was the date palm. And later, Ibn Umar told his father he had known all along — but stayed quiet out of respect."

That story sits in Sahih al-Bukhari. A young boy. He knew. He waited anyway.

Ibrahim turned this over. "Because it wasn't his turn?"

"Because he honoured them," his mother said simply. "Giving someone space to finish speaking — that is a form of love."

She showed him the signal again: a light press on the arm. Not a shout. Not a tug. Just: I'm here, and I can wait.

You will have moments when your news feels too big to hold inside. A found cat. A gold star. A funny thing from lunch that is going to make everyone laugh. Your news matters.

But so does the person already speaking.

Try the signal. A quiet hand. One slow breath. It costs thirty seconds, and it tells the person you are waiting for something important: you are worth waiting for.

That is not nothing. That is adab.

CHAPTER VI

A Promise Is a Promise: Keeping Our Word

Hana made the promise on a Monday.

"I'll bring The Magical Garden of Noor tomorrow," she told her best friend Salwa, holding up three fingers like a little oath. "I promise."

Salwa's face lit up like she'd just been handed the biggest slice of cake at the party. That book was her absolute favourite — she'd asked to borrow it four times already — and Hana had read it seven times and knew every single word.

Tuesday morning. Hana ate her toast, brushed her teeth, grabbed her school bag, and walked out the door. The book sat quietly on her bedroom shelf. Unaware. Unpacked.

Salwa waited all day.

When home-time came and Hana remembered, a small squirmy feeling settled in her stomach — a bit like accidentally sitting on something cold. "Sorry," she said. "Tomorrow. Definitely tomorrow."

Wednesday came. The book did not.

This time Salwa didn't say much. She just nodded and looked down at her shoes. That was worse, somehow, than any cross word. Way worse.

That evening, Hana sat on the kitchen floor while her mother chopped carrots, and told her what had happened — both days. The squirmy feeling was still there.

Her mother set down the knife and sat beside her.

"Do you know what the Prophet ýú said about promises?" she asked gently.

Hana shook her head.

"He said that one of the signs of a hypocrite — someone whose outside doesn't match their inside — is that when they make a promise, they break it. It's in both Sahih al-Bukh r+ and S thought keeping promises was so important that he placed it right alongside telling the truth and honoring what others trust you with."

Hana picked at the kitchen tiles. She hadn't meant to be like that. She had just forgotten.

"But Mama, I didn't mean to break it."

"I know, habibti." Her mother smiled and stood up. "That's exactly why we do something about it."

Together they found a small piece of paper. Hana wrote in her biggest, roundest letters: SALWA'S BOOK — DON'T FORGET. They taped it right to the cover — the very first thing she'd see in the morning — and tucked the book into her school bag. Right at the top.

The next day, Salwa's face lit up. Just like that Monday.

And the squirmy feeling? Gone. In its place, something warm and solid settled in Hana's chest.

That is what a kept promise feels like. Small on the outside. Big on the inside.

CHAPTER VII

Giving Back What Isn't Ours: Returning Trusts

Tariq borrowed the pencil case on Tuesday morning. Just until lunch, he said — his own had gone missing, and his classmate Omar smiled and slid it across the desk without hesitating.

It was a good pencil case. Blue, with a zip that made a satisfying zzzzt. Inside: two sharpened pencils, a red pen, and — right at the very bottom — the most beautiful eraser Tariq had ever seen. Shaped like a soccer ball. It smelled of strawberries.

He held it in his palm.

Nobody will notice, said a small voice in his head. It's just an eraser.

But another voice, quieter, said something different.

Tariq tucked the eraser back. Then opened the case again. Closed it. He ate his lunch tasting nothing and thought about that eraser all the way through Maths.

That evening, he told his mother.

She did not scold him. She sat beside him on the sofa and recited softly: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due." (Qur'an 4:58). Then she told him something he hadn't known. Long before the Prophet Mu%ammad ýú received any revelation at all, the people o name for him — Al-Am+n. The Trustworthy One. They left their gold and the with him, because they knew, with total certainty, that he would never take a single thing that was not his.

"Before any rules were written down," his mother said, "his heart already knew."

Tariq was quiet for a moment. Then he nodded.

The next morning, he walked straight to Omar's desk and placed the pencil case down with both hands. Properly.

"Jaz kall hu khayran," Omar said, and grinned.

That was it. No hard questions. No suspicion. Just a warm smile and those Arabic words — may Allah reward you with goodness.

Then Omar unzipped the case — zzzzt — and held out the soccer ball eraser.

"You can borrow it today if you want."

Tariq laughed. He felt lighter. Like a small stone had been sitting in his chest all day and had finally, quietly, rolled away.

The Prophet ýú taught that betraying a trust is one of the marks of a hypocrit promises (ba%+% al-Bukh r+; ba%+% Muslim). The opposite is simple. Retur what was placed in your hands in trust.

Al-Am+n. The Trustworthy One.

A clean heart is lighter than any eraser in the world.

CHAPTER VIII

Bless You! Saying Alhamdulill h Aft

Miss Samira was in the middle of the best part.

The dragon had just found the hidden door. Every child in the classroom sat perfectly still, leaning forward, hardly breathing — when Zara felt it. A tingle at the back of her nose. A tickle that would not stop. She pressed her finger under her nose. She scrunched her eyes. She held her breath.

No use.

"AAAA-CHOOOO!"

The sneeze was enormous. Spectacular. The boy next to her actually flinched. Three children giggled. Miss Samira stopped reading and looked up from the book.

Zara went pink.

But Miss Samira was smiling. She waited, quiet and patient, watching Zara with kind eyes.

Zara remembered. She sat up straight. "Alhamdulill h," she said — Praise be

"Yarhamukall h," Miss Samira replied warmly — May Allah have mercy on yo

And Zara answered back, the way she had practised at home: "Yahdikumull hu Allah guide you and set your affairs right.

A few children looked surprised. Layla put her hand up. "Miss, why do we say all that just for a sneeze?"

Miss Samira set the book on her knee. "Because the Prophet ýú taught us to," Allah loves sneezing."

More surprised faces.

"When you sneeze," she explained, "your body is actually doing something good. It is pushing out something that could make you sick. It is a little mercy from Allah — your body protecting itself. So you say Alhamdulill h to thank Him for it."

The Prophet ýú taught the whole exchange: the one who sneezes says Alhamdu reply Yarhamukall h, and the one who sneezed answers Yahdikumull hu wa yu recorded in ba%+% al-Bukh r+.

Three sentences. Three people connected. All from one sneeze.

Think about that. You sneeze, and suddenly you and the person beside you have both remembered Allah together. That is not nothing. That is something beautiful hiding in a very ordinary moment.

Zara looked at the boy who had flinched. He was still watching her, curious now. She smiled at him.

He smiled back.

Miss Samira opened the book again. The dragon was still waiting behind the hidden door.

But Zara had already found something worth remembering.

Try it yourself: Next time you sneeze, say Alhamdulill h before anything els
be the one who says Yarhamukall h first. Watch what happens to their face w

CHAPTER IX

Knock, Knock: Asking Permission Before Entering

The door to Mama and Baba's room was not quite shut. Sana could see a sliver of warm light running along the edge.

She had important news. Really important. Her friend Zainab had just called to say their favourite cartoon was starting in five minutes — five minutes — and Sana needed to tell someone right now.

So she pushed the door open and walked straight in.

Mama was on the bed with papers spread all around her. Baba was on the phone, his voice low and careful, one hand raised slightly — the kind of hand that says wait. Both of them looked up at exactly the same moment.

Two surprised faces. Looking right at her.

Sana's cheeks went hot. She mumbled something that wasn't really a word, and backed out of the room. The five minutes didn't feel so urgent anymore.

Later, after Baba had finished his call, he found Sana sitting quietly in the hallway — knees up, chin down. He sat beside her. Right there on the floor, which is exactly the kind of thing that makes fathers easier to talk to.

"I wasn't cross," he said softly. "But shall we read something together?"

He fetched the Qur'an and opened it to Surah An-Nkr — the twenty-fourth su following the words:

"O you who have believed, do not enter houses other than your own houses until you ascertain welcome and greet their inhabitants." (Qur'an 24:27)

"Even our own home?" Sana asked.

"Even here," Baba said. "Other people's feelings live inside rooms too. When you knock, you are really saying: I see you. I respect whatever might be happening behind this door."

He told her something else. The Prophet ýú taught that permission should be s loud bangs and a shout, but three gentle knocks, and then you wait. If no one answers, you go back. (Sahih Muslim)

They practised together. Sana walked to the door, tapped twice — light and polite — and said, "Baba, may I come in?"

"Come in, habibti," he called.

She opened the door and stepped inside, grinning.

"Again," he said.

She did it four more times. By the fifth, they were both laughing.

A knock is a tiny thing. Barely a second of your day. But inside that second is something big: you are telling the person on the other side that they matter. That their space matters. That you care enough to ask.

That is always worth the knock.

CHAPTER X

The Neighbour Next Door: Kindness to Neighbours

The soup smelled like something warm and golden. Lentils, a little cumin, maybe a bay leaf. Adam watched his mother ladle it carefully into a big blue pot, then press the lid down with both hands.

"Who is that for?" he asked.

"Mrs. Haines. Next door." His mother tied a folded cloth around the handle. "She has a cold, and I don't think she has anyone to cook for her today."

Adam frowned — just a little. "But she's not Muslim, is she?"

His mother turned and looked at him. Not a cross look. A warm one, with a question sitting inside it.

"Does that matter?" she said softly.

Adam thought about it. He wasn't sure.

They carried the pot next door together, knocked, and left it on the step with a small note: Get well soon, from your neighbours. On the way back, Adam slipped his hand into his mother's.

"Mama," he said, "why did Jibr+l care so much about neighbours? I think I h remember it properly."

She smiled. She had been waiting for exactly that question.

"The Prophet ýú told us," she said, settling onto their front step beside him, the angels — kept reminding him, again and again, about the rights of neighbours. He said it so many times, so insistently, that the Prophet ýú began to wonder whether neighbours might inheritance."

Adam's eyes went wide. Inheritance. That was what families gave each other.

"So a neighbour is like family?" he asked.

"Close to it," his mother said. "The Prophet ýú also told us: whoever believes him honour his neighbour." (Sahih al-Bukhari; Sahih Muslim)

Any neighbour. Near or far. Muslim or not. They all carry a right.

Adam thought about Mrs. Haines' face when she opened the door a crack. Her eyes had gone soft and surprised — like someone who hadn't expected kindness that particular afternoon.

Sometimes a pot of soup is just a pot of soup. And sometimes it is a small act of faith.

Here is what you can carry with you: the next time someone near you is cold, or hungry, or sitting alone behind a closed door, you don't need to do anything enormous. A warm meal. A note. A knock.

J i b r + l t h o u g h t n e i g h b o u r s m a t t e r e d t h a t m u c h .

So do we.

CHAPTER XI

The Little Bird's Water: Mercy to Animals

The afternoon was fierce. The kind of hot where the pavement shimmers and even the birds go quiet.

Layla was sitting on the back step, eating a frozen lolly, when she saw it — a small striped cat crouched beneath the garden tap. Its sides heaved up and down. Its mouth hung open. It was panting, the way a dog pants, and its pink tongue looked paper-dry.

She had never seen a cat pant before.

Layla forgot about her lolly. She went inside, found an old plastic bowl — the blue one nobody used anymore — filled it right to the brim, and carried it carefully, both hands, water sloshing onto her sandals, all the way to the tap.

The cat drank without even looking up. Long, grateful laps. Again and again.

Layla crouched and watched. Her heart felt large.

Later, she told her baba what she had done, and he smiled the kind of smile that reached his eyes. He asked if she had heard the story — the one the Prophet ýú told about a man who was w far from home, when he found a dog digging at the earth with its paws, biting the dry ground because it was so thirsty. The man climbed down into a nearby well, filled his shoe with water, held it in his teeth as he climbed back up, and gave every drop to the dog.

Allah forgave all of that man's sins. Every single one.

The companions who heard this were amazed. They asked, "O Messenger of Allah — is there a reward for us in caring for animals?" He ýú said: "Yes. There is a reward for serving any li

Layla thought about that for a moment. A shoe full of water. And every sin forgiven.

"But Baba," she said quietly, "I only had a plastic bowl. And the cat wasn't even a dog."

He laughed softly. "Allah sees the mercy in your heart," he told her. "Not the size of the bowl."

She looked back at the garden. The cat was gone now, back to wherever cats disappear to in the afternoon. But the bowl sat there, empty and clean.

Mercy is not complicated. A thirsty creature. A bowl of water. Two hands willing to carry it.

That is enough.

Think about it: Can you spot an animal near your home that might need water or kindness today? What could you do?

CHAPTER XII

Clean Inside and Out: The Adab of Cleanliness

The back door was barely open before Umar shot through it, trainers untied, mind already halfway across the garden.

"Umar."

His grandmother's voice was soft. It always was. But something in it made him stop.

He turned. Teta stood in the kitchen doorway, a small smile on her face, one eyebrow raised just slightly. She nodded toward the bathroom behind him.

Oh.

He had forgotten. Again.

He shuffled back in, and she came with him — not to scold, just to stand beside him at the little sink. She turned the tap on and waited.

"Did you know," she said, as the warm water ran over their hands, "that the P faith?"

Umar rubbed the soap between his fingers the way she had taught him — between each one, around the thumbs, up the wrists. "Half?" he said. "That's a lot."

"It is a lot." She handed him the towel. "Al-muhkru shamr al-+m n — that is Purity is half of iman. Half of everything we believe, sitting right there in a clean pair of hands."

He looked at his hands. They looked exactly the same as before, only wetter for a moment.

"But why hands?" he asked.

Teta dried her own hands slowly. "Because everything starts with them. What we touch. What we give. What we take. Clean hands are a beginning."

She let him splash his face too then — three cool handfuls — even though he hadn't asked. It felt good. Sharp and awake, like the day had restarted.

"Cleanliness is not only about being tidy," she said, passing back the towel. "It is our clothes, our spaces, our bodies. When we keep all of that clean, it reminds our heart to stay clean too. Honest. Kind. Free from what does not belong there."

Umar thought about that for a second. Then, without really deciding to, he folded the towel and hung it neatly on the rail instead of dropping it on the floor.

Teta noticed. She always did.

"Now," she said, "go and play."

He ran. But something was different this time. He felt lighter, somehow. Like he had picked up something good on his way out the door — something small and clean and worth carrying.

The garden had not changed. Umar had.

CHAPTER XIII

Dressing with Pride: Modesty in What We Wear

Noor had been planning her outfit for three whole weeks.

She knew exactly which one. The gold-and-pink lehenga with the tiny mirrors sewn along the hem. The one that caught every light in the room. The one that made people stop and look.

She pulled it out of the wardrobe and held it up, twirling once, twice. Yes. This was the one.

Her mother appeared in the doorway and smiled. "Pretty," she said. "But can I ask — why that one?"

"Because everyone will see me," Noor said simply.

Her mother sat on the edge of the bed. "Hmm. So the dress is not really for you — it's for everyone else to notice you?"

Noor frowned. She had not thought about it that way.

"Come sit with me," said her mother. "Did you know the Prophet ﷺ once said clothes?"

Noor climbed up.

"A man came to him and said, 'What if someone likes to wear fine clothes and fine shoes — is that wrong?' And the Prophet ﷺ answered: 'Allah is beautiful, and He loves beauty.'"

Noor's eyes went wide. "So dressing nicely is good?"

"Yes," said her mother. "But then he explained something important. He said the problem is kibr — arrogance. It means rejecting the truth, or looking down on others, or wanting everyone to envy only you. That is what Allah does not love." (Sahih Muslim, 91)

Noor was quiet for a moment. She thought about how she had imagined walking into the wedding hall with everyone turning to stare. She felt a little hot in her cheeks.

"So how do I know the difference?" she asked.

Her mother tucked a strand of hair behind Noor's ear. "Ask your heart. Are you dressing to feel clean, neat, and thankful to Allah? Or are you dressing so people feel less than you?"

They went to the wardrobe together. They pulled out the deep-green dress — the one with the tiny gold trim at the collar — and laid it beside the lehenga. Noor looked at both for a long time.

She chose the green.

It was beautiful. And when she put it on, she thought something she had never thought before about clothes: This is for Allah.

At the wedding, three aunties called her a little gem. She smiled — and it felt different from what she had imagined. Quieter. Warmer. More like her.

That is the secret of dressing with pride. The shine that matters most is the one nobody else can see.

CHAPTER XIV

The Broken Vase: Honesty in Small Things

The vase wobbled. Then it fell.

It hit the floor with a sharp crack — the kind of sound that turns a stomach — and Bilal stood perfectly still, staring at three white pieces of his mother's favourite vase. The blue one. With painted flowers. The one that always sat on the shelf by the window.

His heart banged loud.

He looked at the cat. Biscuit was curled on the sofa, blinking slowly, completely innocent.

Biscuit knocked it, said a small voice inside his head. You could say it was Biscuit. She was right there.

Bilal's eyes went to the shelf. Then to the pieces. Then back to Biscuit, who yawned.

He knelt and picked up the three pieces very carefully. He could hear his mother humming in the kitchen — she always hummed when she was making tea. Any second she would walk in. His hands felt hot. His face felt hotter.

Here is the moment — right here — when the choice lives. You have told a small lie before, haven't you? Maybe about who left the back door open or who finished the last biscuit. It never feels like much. But something in you always knows. A tight little feeling, right in the middle of your chest, like a knot pulled one loop too many.

Bilal felt it now.

He stood up. "Mama." His voice came out much smaller than he planned.

His mother appeared in the doorway, tea towel in her hands. She saw the pieces. Her face did something complicated.

"I was spinning around," Bilal said quickly, "and my arm hit the shelf. I didn't mean to. It was me. Not Biscuit."

Silence. Long enough for Bilal to look at the floor.

Then his mother knelt beside him — she always did that, got down to his level — and she took the pieces gently and set them on the table. She looked at him for a long moment.

"Thank you for telling me the truth," she said. Quietly. Like it was the most important sentence in the room.

She did not shout. She did not cry. She looked at him with that look which is better than any prize and harder to earn: quiet pride.

Later, she told him what the Prophet ýú had said: "Truthfulness leads to right
to Paradise." (Sahih al-Bukhari, 6094; Sahih Muslim, 2607)

"Every time you choose truth in a small thing," she said, "you are growing strong for the big things."

The vase was broken. But something inside Bilal felt whole.

CHAPTER XV

I Made a Mistake: Owning Up Bravely

Rania knew exactly when it happened.

She had tucked the library book — The Amazing Atlas of Animals — carefully into her backpack on Friday afternoon. She was sure of it. By Saturday morning, it was gone. She tipped the whole bag upside down on her bedroom floor, piece by piece. Pencils, a broken ruler, three stickers, her PE kit, one sock. No book.

Her stomach dropped.

The school library had a rule. Lose a book, tell the teacher. Simple. Except it didn't feel simple at all. It felt like standing at the very edge of a cold swimming pool, knowing you had to jump.

So Rania decided not to think about it.

At breakfast, she thought about pancakes. At the park, she thought about swings. At dinner, she talked very loudly and very quickly about everything except the book — school, her friend Dina's new rabbit, a funny cloud she had seen. She was almost convincing herself.

Almost.

But the blue cover kept reappearing in her mind — the red-eyed tree frog on the front, staring at her. The more she tried to push the thought away, the heavier it got. By bedtime, it sat on her chest like a stone she couldn't put down.

Her mama noticed. Mamas always notice.

"You've been carrying something all day," Mama said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "What is it?"

And then it all poured out — the backpack, the atlas, the whole long day of pretending everything was fine.

Her mama was quiet for a moment. "Do you know what the Prophet ýú was fam described how whenever he was faced with a choice — the easy path or the right path — he always chose what was right. He never took the wrong path just to make things easier for himself."

(Sahih al-Bukhari)

"Telling the truth about something we did wrong is never easy," Mama said gently. "But that is exactly what makes it brave."

Rania went to school on Monday with her hands shaking a little. She waited until the classroom was quiet, walked up to her teacher, and said: "Miss, I lost the library book. I'm sorry. I'll use my pocket money to help pay for it."

Her teacher looked at her for a long, still moment. Then she smiled — a warm, real smile. "Thank you for telling me, Rania. That took real courage."

Rania walked back to her seat feeling something she hadn't expected. Lighter. Like she'd been carrying a heavy bag all weekend and had finally, finally, put it down.

Telling the truth about a mistake won't always make the trouble go away. But it will always make you bigger than the mistake.

CHAPTER XVI

Half for You: The Joy of Sharing

The orange was perfectly round and heavy in Khalid's hand. It smelled like sunshine.

He'd been looking forward to it all morning — through maths, through the long spelling test, through the corridor stampede to the lunch hall. And now, finally, here it was.

He pulled the cap off his lunchbox and set the orange on the table.

That's when he noticed Samir.

Samir was sitting across from him, staring at an empty spot on the table. His lunch bag hadn't come. He'd left it at home, he said quietly. His cheese sandwich, his crisps, his little pot of yoghurt — all sitting on the kitchen counter three streets away.

Khalid looked at the orange. Then he looked at Samir. Then back at the orange.

It's mine, said a small voice inside him. I've been waiting for it all day. Samir will be fine. He can ask a dinner lady.

But another voice — quieter, steadier — said something else.

Would you want someone to share with you?

Khalid already knew the answer.

He picked up the orange, dug his thumb into the top, and began to peel. The smell burst out — sharp and sweet and wonderful. He split it cleanly down the middle: six segments on one side, six on the other.

"Here," he said, sliding half across the table to Samir. "I've got enough."

Samir looked up. "Really?"

"Really."

They ate their orange segments slowly, talking about football, and Khalid noticed something strange: his half tasted sweeter than he expected. Better, somehow, than if he'd eaten the whole thing alone.

That evening, Khalid's mother asked him about his day. He mentioned the orange almost without thinking — it hadn't felt like a big deal.

She put down her tea and smiled at him.

"Do you know what the Prophet ýú said?" she asked. "He said: 'None of you tr
his brother what he loves for himself.'" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 13; Sahih Muslim)

Khalid turned those words over in his mind. Loves for his brother what he loves for himself.

He had wanted the orange. So he'd given Samir half.

It really was that simple.

"Sharing isn't losing something," his mother said softly. "It's doubling it."

The next time you have something good — a biscuit, a turn on the swings, a story you really love — stop for just a second. Look around. Is there someone beside you who might want a taste?

Because sharing is not losing. Not even a little bit.

It is one of the most generous things a heart can do.

CHAPTER XVII

Waiting Without Wriggling: Patience in Line

PE was over, and thirty-two children all had the same idea at exactly the same time.

Water.

Dina sprinted out of the sports hall with her ponytail flying and skidded to a stop. The queue at the water fountain stretched all the way to the blue bench by the window. She counted fast. Twenty-four people. Maybe more.

Her mouth was dry. Her legs ached. And Reem — who had started the lesson standing right next to her — was already fifth in line, chatting away and swinging her bottle.

Dina looked at the gaps. There were plenty. She could slide past Sara, who was looking the other way. She could squeeze in beside Reem and maybe nobody would even notice.

She took one step forward.

Then she stopped.

They were here first, she thought. That's not right.

She walked to the very back of the queue and stood there.

It was not easy. The line moved slowly — drip by drip, person by person. Someone's trainer squeaked on the floor. Two boys argued loudly about a football match. Every minute felt like ten.

Dina looked down at her hands. She remembered what her mother did when things felt slow — she moved her lips quietly and counted on her fingers.

Subh nAll h. One.

Subh nAll h. Two.

Subh nAll h. Three.

She kept going. Softly, just for herself. Something shifted. The noise around her felt smaller somehow. The wait still existed, but it sat differently — lighter, like she was carrying it instead of it carrying her.

By the time she reached twenty, she was at the front.

The water was cold and clean and tasted wonderful. She stepped aside, and the little girl behind her — a year younger, wide-eyed — said, "You're so patient."

Dina blinked. Then she smiled. Properly. All the way to her eyes.

That evening she told her father about it: the long queue, the gap she almost took, the quiet dhikr.

He nodded slowly. "You know what the Prophet ýú said about patience?" He le
diy ¾ — patience is a brightness, a radiance." (Sahih Muslim, Book of Purifi

A brightness. Not just gritting your teeth and standing still. A glow that lives inside the person who practises it.

Dina thought about the way the queue had changed once she started her dhikr. Maybe she had felt that light without ever knowing its name.

The next time you wait — in a queue, for your turn, at the dinner table — try Dina's dhikr. Count quietly on your fingers. See if the wait changes shape.

Because a queue is not just a queue. It is a chance to practise patience. And is a light.

CHAPTER XVIII

Soft Words, Strong Hearts: Speaking Gently

The board game had been going perfectly. Until it wasn't.

Idris and his little sister Hana were playing Snakes and Ladders on the living room rug. Hana landed on a long ladder and shot straight to the top — except she was so excited that she knocked three counters sideways in the process. She giggled. Idris did not.

"Hana! You always ruin it! Every single time!"

The words came out sharp and fast, like a snap. Hana's giggle stopped. Her lip wobbled. Two fat tears rolled down her cheeks.

Idris felt the heavy feeling settle into his chest straight away. He hadn't meant to make her cry. He'd only wanted her to be careful.

Their father, who had been reading quietly nearby, set his book face-down and looked across the room.

"Come here for a second, Idris."

He patted the sofa cushion beside him. Idris shuffled over, head low.

"You wanted Hana to be more careful, didn't you?" Baba said, gently.

Idris nodded.

"And did your words help her?"

Idris thought about it honestly. He shook his head.

Baba reached for the Qur'an and read aloud — slowly, the way he always did when something mattered. He read from Surah l-¿Imr n, where Allah describes the Prophet ýú Himself:

"It was by a mercy from Allah that you were gentle with them. Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you." (Qur'an, 3:159)

"Even the Prophet ýú," Baba said, "was described this way by Allah. Not beca because a kind voice opens hearts — and a harsh one closes them."

Then he shared something the Prophet ýú said: "Allah is gentle, and He loves Muslim)

And one thing more: "Whoever is deprived of gentleness is deprived of all good." (Sahih Muslim)

Idris sat with those words for a moment. They settled slowly, the way dust settles.

"Can I go back?" he said.

Baba smiled. "Go back."

Hana was still on the rug, sniffling softly. Idris sat down beside her.

"Hana. I'm sorry I shouted. Can we start again?"

She looked up — cautious first, then hopeful. "Okay."

They reset the board. This time, when she knocked a counter over, Idris laughed. Just laughed. And Hana laughed with him, and somehow the game went on for another twenty minutes — louder, sillier, and much more fun than before.

Soft words don't cost you anything. But they give everything.

CHAPTER XIX

Please and the Magic in It: Asking for Things Kindly

Huda did not want bedtime to end.

The lamp was warm, the duvet was tucked to her chin, and Mama had just closed the book after one perfect story about a girl who found a door in a garden wall. But Huda wanted more. One more. She could feel the wanting of it all the way down to her toes.

"Another one," she said. Not a question. A command.

Mama's face stayed quiet. "It's late, habibti."

So Huda tried the other way — the long, slow "Maaaaaama, pleeeease, I'm not even a little bit sleeeepy." The whining voice. The one that even she found a tiny bit embarrassing to hear coming out of her own mouth.

Mama looked at the ceiling.

Something shifted in Huda's chest then. She noticed the tired lines at the corners of Mama's eyes. She thought about how Mama had been on her feet since before Fajr. And she thought about the way please really feels — when you say it and actually mean it.

She took a breath.

"Please, Mama," she said, quietly. "If you're not too tired."

Mama looked at her for a long moment. Then her face softened — a real smile, the kind that reaches the eyes — and she reached for the book again.

"That," Mama said, settling back against the pillow, "is the magic."

Huda blinked. "What is?"

"The way you just asked." Mama turned to the first page. "Did you know the Prophet ﷺ had a boy named Anas ibn Malik — who served him for ten whole years? And in all that time, the Prophet never raised his voice at him, never snapped, never commanded harshly. Anas himself said so, recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari."

Ten years. That was more than Huda had been alive.

"He was like that with everyone," Mama continued. "Gentle in his asking. And Allah is gentle and loves gentleness — that gentleness does not enter into anything except that it makes it beautiful." She paused. "That is in Sahih Muslim."

"So asking nicely is actually a Sunnah?" Huda asked.

"Asking nicely," Mama said, "is the adab of the beloved." She kissed Huda's forehead. "And you just did it."

You can try it too. Next time you want something — from Mama, from a friend, even in your du'a to Allah — try the soft voice. Try the real please.

The second story was about a fox who found his way home by following the stars. By the last page, Huda's eyes were heavy and the small word please sat warm in her heart like something worth keeping.

Not weakness. A Sunnah.

CHAPTER XX

Thank You, Allah: Living with Gratitude

Tuesday was not a special day.

No birthday cake. No field trip. No snow piling up outside the window. Just Miss Layla at the whiteboard, blue marker in hand, and a question that seemed very simple at first.

"Class," she said, "I want each of you to name one thing you are grateful for today."

One thing.

Amira chewed the end of her pencil and looked around the room. Fatih said his football. Noura said her new trainers. Bilal said chips, and everyone laughed.

Then it was Amira's turn.

She opened her mouth to say my cat, Zafira — but then the sunlight fell across her desk in a warm stripe and she thought of that too. And then she thought of her lunch box, which had her favourite sandwich inside, the cheese-and-cucumber one her baba made every single Tuesday. And her voice. She had been sick last week and could barely speak above a whisper, so today her voice felt like a gift she had almost forgotten she owned.

"One thing?" Amira said.

Miss Layla smiled. "Try."

Amira could not stop. The list kept rising like dough in a warm bowl — soft, slow, surprising even herself. Zafira's purr. The colour orange. Her grandmother's laugh that bounced off the kitchen walls. The way socks fresh from the dryer felt on cold feet.

After class, she stayed behind. "Miss Layla," she said, "why does being grateful feel so big?"

Miss Layla sat on the edge of her desk. "Allah tells us in the Qur'an: If you are grateful, I will surely increase you in favour (Qur'an 14:7). Gratitude is not just a feeling, Amira. It is a door. And the more you open it, the more comes through."

Amira turned that over in her mind like a smooth stone.

Then Miss Layla said one more thing. "The Prophet ﷺ taught us that whoever truly thank Allah — it is recorded in Riyad as-Salihin. So when you say jaz that sandwich? That is worship."

That evening, Amira sat down to a plate of plain rice and lentil soup. Nothing fancy.

She said Bismillah, took one spoonful, then looked up. "Baba. Thank you for
really good."

Her father's eyes went soft and quiet.

He reached over and squeezed her hand without saying a word.

That squeeze felt like the whole list all over again.

Maybe you have had a day like Amira's — perfectly ordinary on the outside, and somehow full on the inside. That is what gratitude does. It does not change the day. It changes the way you see it.

A heart that has learned to look always finds more.