

Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī narrated from 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

1

'The best of you is the one who learns the Qur'an and teaches it'.

2

Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān taught the recitation of the Qur'an during 'Uthmān's reign, up to al-Ḥajjāj's time.

3

He said: This is what has placed me in this position of mine.⁽¹⁾

From the Qur'an

﴿This [Qur'an] consists of verses that are clear to the hearts of those gifted with real knowledge. None knowingly rejects Our revelations other than the wrongdoers.﴾ (29: 49)

﴿Those who recite God's Book, attend regularly to prayer, and give in charity, secretly and openly, from what We have provided for them, look forward to a bargain that can never fail, (29) for He will grant them their just rewards, and give them yet more out of His bounty. He is indeed much-forgiving, most-thankful. (30) The Book that We have revealed to you is the truth confirming previous scriptures. Of His servants God is well-aware, all-seeing. (31) We have given this Book to such of Our servants as We choose: among them are some who wrong their own souls, some follow a middle course; and some who, by God's leave, are foremost in deeds of goodness. That is the greatest favour.﴾ (35: 29-32)

﴿God has bestowed from on high the best of all teachings: a Book that is consistent within itself, repeating its statements [of the truth] in manifold forms. It causes the skins of those who stand in awe of their Lord to shiver, but then their skins and hearts soften at the mention of God. Such is God's guidance: He guides with it him that wills, whereas the one whom God lets go astray can never find any guide.﴾ (39: 23)

﴿Be devoted servants of God, by virtue of spreading the knowledge of the Scriptures and your constant study of them.﴾ (3: 79)

The Narrator

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us in this hadith that the best of people is a person who learns the Qur'an, memorizing it, learns its recitation and interpretation, etc. then teaches it to other people.

Summary

Abu 'Amr, or Abu 'Abdullāh, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān ibn Abi al-'Āṣ ibn Umayyah, of the Quraysh tribe was the third caliph and known by his nickname Dhul-Nūrayn (i.e. the one with two lights). He was born six years after the Year of the Elephant. He was one of the earliest people to embrace Islam, and one of the ten companions of the Prophet given the happy news that they were certain to go to Heaven. He went on the two migrations to Abyssinia. He was married to two of the Prophet's daughters: Ruqayyah, and later Umm Kulthūm. He did not take part in the Battle of Badr, as the Prophet gave him permission to stay in Madinah to nurse his wife Ruqayyah during her last illness. He became the third caliph after the martyrdom of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb in Year 24 AH 645 CE. He was assassinated in Madinah and became a martyr in Year 35 AH 656 CE.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 5027.



Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us that the best of people who gain the highest grade with God is any person who dedicates himself to learning the recitation, memorization and implementation of the Qur'an. He, thus, learns the meanings and rulings of the Qur'an, then starts to teach it to people. He earns the rank of learners as he learns it, and then gains the rank of scholars through teaching the Qur'an.

It is a condition that learning and teaching should be combined with implementing what one has learned. It is stated that Jesus (peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever learns, implements and teaches is honoured in the Highest kingdom'.⁽¹⁾

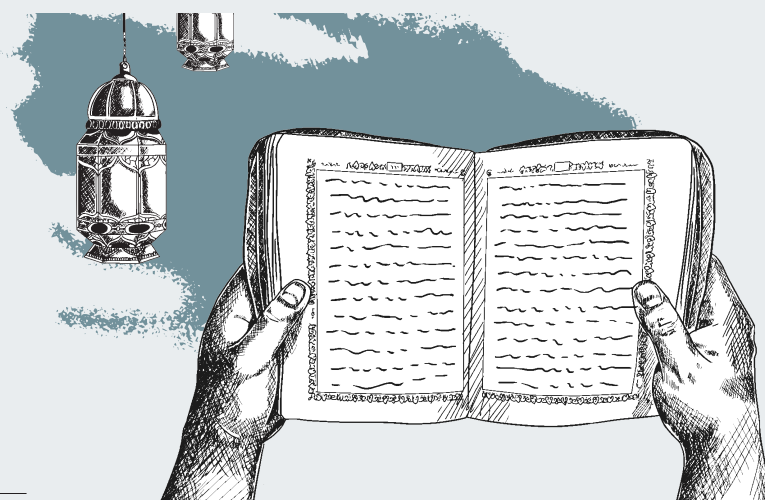
2

The *tābi'in* followed the Prophet's companions in memorizing the Qur'an and learning its rulings and meanings, then teaching it to people. Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, who narrates this hadith from 'Uthmān, belonged to the *tābi'in* generation which succeeded the Prophet's companions. He continued to teach the Qur'an from the time when 'Uthmān was the caliph to the time when al-Ḥajjāj was governor of Iraq. This was a period close to forty years.

Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī's name was 'Abdullāh ibn Ḥabīb ibn Rabī'ah. He belonged to Madinah, then to Kufah. His father was a companion of the Prophet and he was born during the Prophet's lifetime. Abu 'Amr al-Dānī said that he learnt the Qur'an, reciting it to his teachers who were 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib, Zayd ibn Thābit, Ubay ibn Ka'b and 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd. His students included 'Āṣim ibn Abi al-Najūd who taught Ḥaḥḥ. Today, most of the Muslim world follows the method of recitation of 'Ḥaḥḥ from 'Āṣim'. Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī died in Year 74 AH, 694 CE.

3

Al-Sulamī said: 'This is what has placed me in this position of mine'. He meant that the reason that made him continue to teach the Qur'an for this long period is what this hadith says. He was eager to be included among those the Prophet describes as 'the best of you'.



1 Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī, *Mirqāt al-Mafāṭīḥ*, Vol. 4, pp. 1453-1452.

Implementation

1

It is important to reflect on this hadith and make a sustained effort to learn the Qur'an and its message, proper and accurate recitation, the meanings of its vocabulary and verses, and then to spread such knowledge to others. The person who is too lazy to be one of the best of people is nothing short of being a loser.

2

People compete to possess what is best: one loves to have the best house, another the best car, a third the best clothes, and some others compete for the best position. The Prophet (peace be upon him), however, tells us that the best of people are those who learn and teach the Qur'an. Let your evaluation of yourself and others be by the standard stated by God's Messenger (peace be upon him), who only spoke as was revealed to him.

3

Whoever wants the best in this life should focus on the Qur'an; and whoever wants the best in the life to come should focus on the Qur'an; and whoever wants the best in both should focus on the Qur'an.

4

Scholarship is perfected by implementation and teaching. An educator should do his best to teach his students, begrudging them nothing. A student should teach his friends what he has been taught by his teacher.

5

A scholar who teaches does not achieve the status of 'best of people' unless he implements what he has learnt. God says: 'How can you bid others to be righteous and forget yourselves, even when you read the Scriptures? Do you not understand?' (2: 44) He should implement the values the Qur'an teaches, so that he will become a role model for others, motivating them to learn the Qur'an. 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd said: 'A person who has learnt the Qur'an by heart should be known by his [wakeful] night while other people are asleep; by his [fasting] days while people eat; by his sadness while others are in mirth; by his weeping while others are laughing; by being silent while people are gossiping; by his humility while other people move proudly. Having learnt the Qur'an by heart, a person should be tearful, sorrowful, wise, forbearing, knowledgeable and saying little. He should not be overbearing, unmindful, quarrelsome, shouting or hard in treating others'.⁽¹⁾

6

When you meet a person who has learnt, implemented and taught the Qur'an, be friendly with him, love him and treat him with kindness, even though he may be a poor old person who is rarely treated with respect. He may be one of the best of mankind, according to the Prophet's definition. This is particularly applicable, if he has taught you some of the Qur'an. To such a teacher you owe a duty.

7

We should say to Qur'anic teachers that they should persevere in what they do. They should continue to spend long hours in a mosque, an institute or on social media. No such person should ever think that he no longer needs to do such teaching. Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī continued to do so for forty years, pursuing the grade God grants to teachers of the Qur'an.

8

A person who does not teach the Qur'an directly should try to teach it in some other way, such as encouraging this by writing articles and giving speeches to encourage this. Other ways include publishing books and computer programmes, establishing Qur'anic circles, remunerating both teachers and students at such circles, publishing podcasts, etc.

1 Abu Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā' wa Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣṭiyā'*, Vol. 1, p. 130.

