

Saʿīd ibn al-Muʿallā narrated:

- 1 I was praying in the mosque when God's Messenger (peace be upon him) called me, but I did not answer him.
- 2 I said: 'Messenger of God, I was praying'.
- 3 He said: 'Has God not said: "Believers, respond to the call of God and the Messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life?"' (8: 24)
- 4 He then said to me: 'Before you leave the mosque, I shall teach you a surah, which is the greatest surah in the Qur'an'.
- 5 He then took me by the hand. When he was about to go out, I said to him: 'Have you not said: I shall teach you a surah, which is the greatest surah in the Qur'an'.
- 6 He said: 'Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds (1: 2) It is the seven oft-repeated verses and the sublime Qur'an I have been given'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 4474.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Believers, respond to the call of God and the Messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life.﴾ (8: 24)
- ﴿Any revelation We annul or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or similar one.﴾ (2: 106)
- ﴿We have given you seven oft-repeated verses and this sublime Qur'an.﴾ (15: 87)
- ﴿In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful (1) Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds, (2) The Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful, (3) Master of the Day of Judgement. (4) You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help. (5) Guide us on the straight path, (6) the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your favours, not those who have incurred Your wrath, nor those who have gone astray.﴾ (1: 1-7)

The Narrator

Abu Saʿīd ibn al-Muʿallā was a companion of the Prophet best known by his appellation, Abu Saʿīd. According to the best reports, his name was al-Ḥārith ibn Nufay' ibn al-Muʿallā who belonged to Madinah and was one of the Anṣār. He is known among the Prophet's companions by only two hadiths he narrated. He settled in Syria and died in Year 73 AH 693 CE.

Summary

The hadith makes clear that answering the Prophet's call is obligatory even if a person is in the middle of a prayer. It also tells us that the opening surah, *al-Fātiḥah*, is the greatest surah in the Qur'an.



Message and Meaning



1 Abu Sa'īd ibn al-Mu'allā mentions that he was in prayer when the Prophet (peace be upon him) called him, but he did not answer him. Instead he continued with his prayer.



2 When he finished his prayer, he went to the Prophet (peace be upon him) explaining that his delayed response was because he was engaged in prayer, thinking that it was not permissible for him to discontinue his prayer or to speak answering the Prophet. He further thought that an immediate answer to the Prophet's call was obligatory only for one who was not in the middle of a prayer.



3 The Prophet informed him that answering his call immediately was obligatory for everyone, including anyone in prayer, because of God's command: 'Believers, respond to the call of God and the Messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life'. (8: 24). The Prophet (peace be upon him) would not call anyone except for what is important.



4 The Prophet then told him that he would tell him which is the greatest surah in the Qur'an, and this would be done before he left the mosque. This shows that the Qur'anic surahs have different rewards given for their recitation. God says: 'Any revelation We annul or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or similar one'. (2: 106) This is related to what each surah includes of God's names, attributes, confirmation of His oneness, praises, supplication to Him and glorification. Thus, Verse (2: 255), known as the Verse of the Throne, is the greatest verse in the Qur'an, and *al-Fātiḥah*, or the Opening, is the greatest surah, while Surah 112, Purity of Faith, is considered equal to one-third of the Qur'an.



5 The Prophet then took Abu Sa'īd by the hand and was about to leave the mosque. He either forgot his promise that he would tell Abu Sa'īd about the greatest surah, or he was testing him to know how keen he was to learn. Abu Sa'īd reminded him of what he said before he left at the gate.



6 The Prophet told him that the opening surah, *al-Fātiḥah*, was the greatest surah of the Qur'an. It is referred to as *al-sab' al-mathānī*, given this name because of 1) the great praise of God it contains; 2) it is frequently repeated in prayers; and 3) God has honoured the Prophet's community with it. All three reasons are derived from the connotations of the Arabic word *mathānī*. It is also called *al-sab'*, which means 'seven', because it is composed of seven verses. God states that He favoured His Messenger by giving him the greatest surah in the Qur'an, *al-Fātiḥah*, and the full Qur'an, which is His great revelation. He says: 'We have given you seven oft-repeated verses and this sublime Qur'an'. (15: 87)

Implementation



If answering the Prophet's call is obligatory on every Muslim, even when he is engaged in prayer, acting on his orders in all spheres of life is even more so. No one may give priority to his own opinion or desire over the Prophet's orders and his Sunnah. It is important, therefore, to fully understand this and implement it.



God says: 'Believers, respond to the call of God and the Messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life'. (8: 24) This tells us that the proper and fruitful life to which we should aspire to is the life of hearts and souls, not the physical life of the body and desire. It is that fruitful life which ensures happiness in the eternal life to come. Therefore, whoever wants real life should be committed to obeying God and His Messenger. Such commitment to obey is the only way to ensure happiness in both this life and the life to come.



Be mindful to commit yourself to seeking religious knowledge and let nothing distract you from this. Do not hesitate to ask questions, either out of shyness or exaggerated self-esteem. We note that Abu Sa'īd did not hesitate to remind the Prophet of his promise to teach him the greatest surah in the Qur'an, nor did he feel too shy to accompany him as he left the mosque, realizing the Prophet's highly honourable status and the great respect afforded to him by his companions. He was keen to learn.



The hadith tells us of the Prophet's compassion towards his companions and his keenness to teach them what benefits them. Every teacher should emulate the Prophet's manners in teaching. A student should show the same eagerness to learn as Abu Sa'īd shows in this hadith.



Discerning Muslims should not allow a chance to learn what is good and of benefit to pass by. Had Abu Sa'īd left the Prophet when he left the mosque, he would not have learnt this greatly useful lesson.



Since the Qur'anic surahs differ in the reward they earn for their reciter, every Muslim should be keen to gain the greatest honour by reciting often the verses and surahs which are highlighted as superior by authentic hadiths. Better still is to memorize such verses and surahs, reflect on their meaning and understand the reason behind their superiority.



One aspect of the superiority of the opening surah, *al-Fātiḥah*, is that God starts it with praise and glorification before He includes a supplication. This is one of the proper manners everyone should learn to ensure that his prayers are answered. Fuḍālah ibn 'Ubayd narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) heard someone supplicating during his prayer, without glorifying God or praying for the Prophet. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'This man is in haste'. He then called him and said to him, or to someone else: 'When any of you prays to God, he should start by glorifying and praising his Lord, Mighty and Exalted, and he should follow this by praying for the Prophet, and then say whatever supplication he wishes'.⁽¹⁾



Urging Muslims to learn and understand the Qur'an, scholars highlight that it guides to all that is good as also provides reassurance and comfort, both physically and spiritually.

1 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 1481; al-Tirmidhī, 3477; al-Nasā'ī, 1284.

