

Ubay ibn Ka'b narrated:

1

God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: "Abu al-Mundhir, do you know which is the greatest verse of God's Book that is with you?"

2

I said: "God and His Messenger know best".

3

He said: "Abu al-Mundhir, do you know which is the greatest verse of God's Book that is with you?"

4

I said: "God: there is no deity but Him, the Ever-Living, the Eternal Master of all".

5

He patted me on my chest

6

and said: "By God! Congratulations to you on your knowledge, Abu al-Mundhir".⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Muslim, 810.

From the Qur'an

﴿God: there is no deity but Him, the Ever-Living, the Eternal Master of all. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that can intercede with Him, except by His permission? He knows all that lies open before them and all that lies hidden from them; whereas they cannot attain to anything of His knowledge save as He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Most High, the Most Great.﴾ (2: 255)

﴿Any revelation We annul or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or similar one.﴾ (2: 106)

﴿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)

The Narrator

Abu al-Mundhir Ubay ibn Ka'b belonged to Madinah. He was a master reciter of the Qur'an and an highly distinguished companion of the Prophet. He took part in the second pledge given to the Prophet by the Anṣār at 'Aqabah. He took part in the Battle of Badr and all other military expeditions with the Prophet. He was the first scribe the Prophet employed. He died during 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān's reign, in Year 30 AH 651 CE.

Summary

The hadith makes clear that the Verse of the Throne is the greatest verse of the Qur'an.



Implementation



Ubay ibn Ka'b was once asked by the Prophet whether he knew which is the greatest verse in God's Book, the Qur'an, which means the verse that has the highest status and gives the greatest reward.



Ubay's answer attributed such knowledge to God, the Exalted, and to the Prophet (peace be upon him), despite the fact that he knew the answer. He did so stressing that speaking about religion is very serious. His answer reflected his good manners and humility as he was speaking to the Prophet.

Ubay attributed such knowledge to God first and then to the Prophet (peace be upon him) because this is a matter of religion which God has taught the Prophet. As for matters belonging to the realm beyond the reach of human faculties of perception, their knowledge must be attributed to God alone. God says: 'With Him are the keys to what lies beyond the reach of human perception: none knows them but He. He knows all that the land and sea contain; not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, nor anything fresh or dry but is recorded in a clear book'. (6: 59)



The Prophet (peace be upon him) repeated his question to Ubay, encouraging him to answer, rather than merely attributing its knowledge to God and His Messenger.



When Ubay understood this, he said that the verse in question is the Verse of the Throne. He did not give the answer at first because he knew that the Prophet (peace be upon him) often asked a question to alert his audience and draw their attention. Sometimes he gave an answer that differed with people's normal practice. Ubay considered that the Prophet might have received revelation that a different verse was superior, or stating some additional information. When the Prophet repeated his question, Ubay realized that the Prophet (peace be upon him) wanted him to state what he knew. Hence, he gave his answer.

The Verse of the Throne is the greatest verse of the Qur'an because it states God's oneness, confirms His fine and perfect attributes, mentions some of His fine names and negates whatever suggests any element of weakness as applicable to Him, such as sleep and slumber.



The Prophet (peace be upon him) pats Ubay on the chest, suggesting that his bosom is full of knowledge and wisdom. This is a kind act by the Prophet to reassert his knowledge and to encourage him to seek more knowledge and further insight. It further expresses delight with what he demonstrated of knowledge.



The Prophet congratulated Ubay on his knowledge, praying that it would give him happiness and that he would excel in knowledge. It is a supplication that implies praise and confirmation that he had good knowledge.

The Verse of the Throne is especially important: it is confirmed in this hadith that it is the greatest verse in the Qur'an. Other hadiths state that it protects against Satan. It is recommended to recite this verse after obligatory prayers, at the time when one goes to bed and on other occasions as well.



It is important to address other people by the titles which they love and that are not discouraged by Islam. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to call his companions by the appellations they loved, although his status was very high while they were still young, and were like students speaking to him as their teacher. It behoves every Muslim to follow his example. This particularly applies to scholars, advocates and educators. They need to speak to their students with kind words and fine style, addressing them by their preferred names. To do so is sure to have a good effect on them.



It is extremely helpful to develop the habit of saying, 'God knows best'. Not only is it safer and more appropriate, it is also frequently used by scholars. Ubay ibn Ka'b was well versed with the Qur'an. The Prophet said: 'Learn the Qur'an from four people: Ibn Mas'ūd, Ubay ibn Ka'b, Mu'ādh ibn Jabal and Sālim *mawlā* Abi Ḥudhayfah'.⁽¹⁾ Ubay had the knowledge, or at least near certainty of the right answer to the question about the greatest verse. Nevertheless, he immediately attributed full knowledge to God.



One of the effective methods of teaching for both teacher and student is to put the information across in the form of a question and answer. When one has no answer to a question being put to him, he will be keen to learn the answer. This method is more likely to make the answer easier to remember and less likely to be forgotten than the direct way of giving information.



Some fine manners are associated with the method of question and answer. A person may know the answer to a question being put to him, but does not state it because he holds the questioner with great respect and he is eager to learn the answer from the questioner, as the latter may have greater knowledge than what he himself knows. He may endeavour to have an answer if he knows that his teacher will correct him if he is wrong.



It is important to give full attention to the Verse of the Throne, which is the greatest Qur'anic verse. As such, it is great to learn, memorize, understand and teach, at homes, schools and learning circles.



That the Prophet patted Ubay ibn Ka'b on his chest was a gesture of friendliness aimed to confirm his knowledge. The answer remained alive in his mind and it continued to be learnt by Hadith narrators ever since.



When you find your students, children or friends giving the right answer, pray for them, praise them and tell them that they are correct. It is best not to treat them with arrogance, but rather to give everyone their rights, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) did with Ubay ibn Ka'b.



The hadith indicates that it is permissible for a person to praise another in his presence, if this is of benefit, such as giving that person an incentive to continue to do good and exert proper effort.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 4999; Muslim, 2464.

