

'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd narrated:

1

I asked God's Messenger (peace be upon him) which action God loves best? He said: "Prayer on time".

2

I asked: Then which? He said: "Dutifulness to parents".

3

I asked: what comes next? He said: "Jihad [i.e. striving] for God's cause".

4

['Abdullāh] said: He mentioned these to me. Had I asked him for more, he would have answered me.⁽¹⁾

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Those of the believers who remain passive, other than the disabled, are not equal to those who strive hard in God's cause with their possessions and their lives. God has exalted those who strive hard with their possessions and their lives far above the ones who remain passive. To each God has promised the ultimate good, yet God has preferred those who strive hard over those who remain passive with a mighty reward.﴾ (4: 95)
- ﴿Indeed, prayer is a time-related duty, binding on all believers.﴾ (4: 103)
- ﴿God has bought of the believers their lives and their property, promising them heaven in return: they fight for the cause of God, kill and be killed. This is a true promise which He has made binding on Himself in the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'an. Who is more true to his promise than God? Rejoice, then, in the bargain you have made with Him. That is the supreme triumph.﴾ (9: 111)
- ﴿Your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him, and that you must be kind to your parents. Should one of them, or both, attain to old age in your care, never say 'Ugh' to them or chide them, but always speak gently and kindly to them, (23) and spread over them humbly the wings of your tenderness, and say, 'My Lord, bestow on them Your grace, even as they reared and nurtured me when I was a child'.﴾ (17: 23-24)

The Narrator

Abu 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd ibn Ghāfil ibn Ḥabīb who belonged to the Hudhayl tribe was one of the very early companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). He migrated to Abyssinia, then to Madinah and took part in the Battle of Badr and all other military expeditions with the Prophet. He took care of the Prophet's sandals, helping him to wear them when he moved, and kept them for him when the Prophet took them off and sat down. He died in Madinah in Year 32 or 33 AH, 654 CE.

Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions that the action God loves best is offering prayers on time. Next comes dutifulness to one's parents, followed by striving for God's cause.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 527; Muslim, 85.



Message and Meaning



'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd puts his question to the Prophet, asking about the deeds God loves best, so that he would do it often, giving it priority over everything else. The Prophet tells him that it is offering prayers on time. Prayer is the most important duty of the religion of Islam and the foundation of the relationship between God and His servant. It is indeed the second of the five pillars of Islam. Therefore, attending to prayers and offering them at the time stated by God is the human deed God loves best.

God highlights the merit of His believing servants, stating that they keep up prayers and offer them as they should be offered. He says: 'Truly, successful shall be the believers, (1) Who humble themselves in their prayer, (2) Who turn away from all that is frivolous, (3) Who are active in deeds of charity, (4) Who refrain from sex (5) except with those joined to them in marriage, or those whom they rightfully possess – for then, they are free of all blame, (6) Whereas those who seek to go beyond that [limit] are indeed transgressors, (7) Who are faithful to their trusts and to their pledges, (8) And who are diligent in their prayers. (9) These shall be the heirs (10) who will inherit Paradise; therein shall they abide'. (23: 1-11) It should be noted that God praises the believers for being humble during their prayers and for diligently attending to prayer.

God warns those who neglect prayers and delay them beyond their right times. He says: 'They were succeeded by generations who neglected their prayers and followed only their lusts; and these will, in time, meet with utter disillusion'. (19: 59) Commentators on the Qur'an say that what such people neglect is the timing of each prayer. Were they to neglect prayers and not offer them, they would land in disbelief.



Ibn Mas'ūd then asks about the action that comes next in being loved by God. The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells him that it is dutifulness to one's parents.

God gives special importance to being kind and dutiful to one's parents. More than once in the Qur'an, He links their kindly treatment to worshipping Him and believing in His oneness. He says, for example: 'Worship God alone and do not associate with Him any partners. Be kind to your parents'. (4: 36) 'Say: 'Come, let me tell you what your Lord has forbidden to you: Do not associate partners with Him; [do not offend against but, rather,] be kind to your parents'. (6: 151)

Dutifulness to parents is manifested by being kind to them, associating with them in a goodly manner, giving them sincere counsel, serving them, etc. God says: 'Your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him, and that you must be kind to your parents. Should one of them, or both, attain to old age in your care, never say "Ugh" to them or chide them, but always speak gently and kindly to them, (23) and spread over them humbly the wings of your tenderness, and say, "My Lord, bestow on them Your grace, even as they reared and nurtured me when I was a child"'. (17: 23-24)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) states that undutifulness to parents is one of the gravest sins. Abu Bakr narrated: ‘We were sitting with God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) when he said: “Shall I tell you which the gravest sins are?” (He repeated this three times): “The association of partners with God, undutifulness to parents, and perjury (or stating falsehood)”. God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) was reclining, but he sat up and continued to repeat it until we thought: we wish he would stop’.⁽¹⁾



Ibn Mas‘ūd put his next question, asking which action was loved by God next to prayer on time and dutifulness to parents. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told him that it is striving for God’s cause.

Striving for God’s cause, i.e. jihad, means exerting every effort to subdue unbelief and to ensure that God’s word is supreme, demonstrating all aspects and distinctive characteristics of Islam, sacrificing self and wealth for this cause. Jihad is the highest point of Islam. It is the action that ensures that the banner of Islam is raised high and that the word of truth is upheld until the Day of Judgement. It is the action by which God grants glory to the believers and humiliates His enemies.

God praises those who undertake jihad, striving for God’s cause. He says: ‘God has bought of the believers their lives and their property, promising them heaven in return: they fight for the cause of God, kill and be killed. This is a true promise which He has made binding on Himself in the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur’an. Who is more true to his promise than God? Rejoice, then, in the bargain you have made with Him. That is the supreme triumph’. (9: 111)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions that nothing earns the same reward as jihad for God’s cause. A man came to God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) and said: ‘Point to me an action that is equal to jihad’. The Prophet said: ‘I find none’. He then added: ‘When a fighter starts on his way to take part in jihad, can you go in your mosque and pray non-stop and fast without stopping?’ The man said: ‘Who can do that?’⁽²⁾



‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd then explains that he stopped asking God’s Messenger, considering that these actions were sufficient. Had he continued to ask, the Prophet would have answered him, but he did not wish to trouble the Prophet further.

1 Related by al-Bukhari 2654; Muslim, 87.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 2785; Muslim, 1878.

Implementation

1

The Prophet's companions were keen to use their time in doing what pleases God, and they asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the types of worship that please God most and for which He grants the best reward. They set the example to be emulated by all Muslims.

2

More than one of his companions asked the Prophet about the actions God loved best. Every time the Prophet mentioned something different, as was fitting to the conditions and circumstances of the person putting the question, giving them what suited them best. Advocates of Islam, scholars and educators should always be considerate of people's circumstances and inclinations when they give them rulings or reminders.

3

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was keen to offer prayers on time. When the unbelievers engaged the Muslims in fighting during the siege of Madinah, the Prophet said: 'May God fill their homes and graves with fire, as they withheld us and prevented us from offering the middle prayer until the sun had set'.⁽¹⁾ Yet the Prophet had a full excuse for delaying the prayer on that occasion. How far worse is the condition of one who neglects prayer without any justification?

4

Ibn Mas'ūd asked several questions on the same occasion and the Prophet welcomed his questions. Scholars and advocates of Islam should also treat people kindly.



1 Related by al-Bukhari, 2931; Muslim, 627.

5

Dutifulness to parents is one of the best actions a person may do to earn God's pleasure. A Muslim whose parents, or one of them, is alive should make the best of this situation and strive to enhance his position with God through being dutiful to his parents.

6

Dutifulness to parents wipes away committed sins. Ibn 'Umar narrated that a man came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: 'Messenger of God, I have committed a grave sin. Will God accept my repentance?' The Prophet asked him: 'Is your mother alive?' The man said: No. The Prophet asked him: 'Do you have a maternal aunt?' He said: Yes. The Prophet said: 'Then be kindly and dutiful to her'.⁽¹⁾

7

Jihad, or striving for God's cause, is the greatest of all good actions. Nothing is equal to it. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked who the best of people was. He answered: 'A believer who lays down his life and property striving for God's cause'.

8

One aspect of striving for God's cause is to exert one's effort and spend of one's money in the propagation of God's message and presenting it to people, and also to enjoin people to do what is good and refrain from what is evil.

9

Everyone should be considerate when approaching scholars. They should not tax them with too many questions or seek detailed answers. They should try to put the question briefly and at the right time, when they are active and comfortable.



1 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 1904.

