137288 - Which is better, reading a surah with reflection and understanding, or reading the entire Quran without reflection?

the question

Is there a hadith in which the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) says that the one who recites Surat al-`Asr with focus of mind, understanding what it says, is better than one who reads the entire Quran without understanding?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

I.

There is no soundly narrated hadith which speaks of the virtues of al-`Asr except that which says that it is part of al-Mufassal [that portion of the Quran which goes from Surah Qaf to Surat an-Nas]

It says in *Mawsu`at Fada'il Suwar wa Ayat al-Quran (al-qasm as-sahih)*, 2/319):

There is no soundly narrated report concerning it except that which says that it is part of al-Mufassal. End quote.

The researcher Amal Sa`di said:

There is no soundly narrated report from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) about the virtue of Surat al-`Asr; rather there are weak and fabricated reports which speak of its virtue, including the report which says, "Whoever recites Surat al-`Asr, Allah will forgive him and he will be one of those who exhort one another to hold fast to the truth and exhort one another to hold fast to patience."

End quote from *As-Sahih was-Saqim fi Fada'il al-Quran al-Karim*, p. 96.

II.

Some valuable words were narrated from the great scholar Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him), in which he explained the views of the scholars regarding the matter of whether it is better to read a small amount of Quran with reflection and understanding, or to read a large amount of the Quran without reflection and pondering.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The scholars differed as to which is better: reading at a measured pace, covering only a small amount, or reading with haste and covering a large amount. There are two views:

Ibn Mas`ud and Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them) and others were of the view that reading at a measured pace with reflection, covering a small amount, is better than reading with haste and covering a large amount.

Those who hold this view argue that the purpose of reading Quran is to understand, reflect, appreciate the meaning and act upon it, and reading with deliberation and memorising are a way to understand the meanings, as one of the early generations said: The Quran was revealed to be acted upon, but they made its recitation their only action. Hence the people of the Quran are those who have knowledge of it and act upon it, even if they have not memorised it by heart. As for the one who memorises it but does not understand it or act upon it, he is not one of its people, even if he can recite it with excellent pronunciation.

They said: Moreover, having faith is the best of deeds, and understanding the Quran and reflecting on it is what increases faith. As for merely reciting it without understanding and reflecting, it is something that may be done by both righteous and evildoers, believers and hypocrites, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The likeness of the hypocrite who reads the Quran is that of basil (a herb): its scent is good but its taste is bitter.”

In this regard, people are of four levels, of which the first is the people of the Quran and faith, who are the best of people. The second are those who neither read the Quran nor have faith. The third

are those who have knowledge of the Quran but do not have faith. The fourth are those who have faith but do not have knowledge of the Quran.

They said: Just as the one who has faith but has no knowledge of the Quran is better than the one who has knowledge of the Quran but has no faith, by the same token, the one who reflects and understands when he reads it is better than the one who reads a large amount of it with haste but without reflection.

They said: This was the practice of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him); he would recite a surah at a measured pace and it would take longer than a surah that is longer than it, and he spent all night repeating a single verse [in his prayer] until dawn.

But the companions of ash-Shafa`i (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Reading a large amount of the Quran is better, and they quoted as evidence the hadith of Ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever reads one letter of the Book of Allah will have one hasanah (good deed), and a good deed brings a tenfold reward. I do not say that alif-lam-mim is a letter; rather alif is a letter, lam is a letter and mim is a letter.” Narrated and classed as authentic (sahih) by at-Tirmidhi.

They said: Because `Uthman ibn `Affan recited the entire Quran in one rak`ah, and they quoted reports from many of the early generations which say that they recited a great deal.

So the correct view regarding this matter is:

The reward for reading with a measured pace and reflection is superior and better in terms of quality, and the reward for reading a great deal is greater in terms of quantity.

The one who does the former is like the one who gives a huge gemstone in charity or manumits a slave of high value.

The one who does the latter is like one who gives a large number of dirhams in charity or manumits a number of low-value slaves.

In *Sahih al-Bukhari*, it is narrated that Qatadah said: I asked Anas about the Prophet's recitation of Quran and he said: He used to elongate the letters.

Shu`bah said: Abu Jamrah told us: I said to Ibn `Abbas: I am a man who reads with haste, and sometimes I recite the [entire] Quran once or twice in a night. Ibn `Abbas said: Reciting one surah is dearer to me than doing what you do. If you must do that, then you should at least recite so that you can hear yourself and understand it.

Ibrahim said: `Alqamah recited Quran to Ibn Mas`ud – and he [`Alqamah] had a beautiful voice – and he said: Recite it at a measured pace, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you, for it will beautify the Quran.

Ibn Mas`ud said: Do not recite the Quran with haste like poetry and do not recite it carelessly like throwing away bad dates; pause and try to understand its wonders and let it move your hearts; and do not let the main concern of any of you be merely reaching the end of the surah.

`Abdullah also said: If you hear Allah say {O you who believe}, listen attentively, for it is either something good that you are instructed to do or something bad which you are instructed to avoid.

End quote from *Zad al-Ma`ad*, 1/337-340.

See also the answers to questions no. 4040 and 131788.

And Allah knows best.