

Abu Hurayrah

"An Abi Hurayrata, radiyallahu anhu, qal.' qala rasul Allahi, sallallahu alayhi wa sailam..."

Through this phrase millions of Muslims from the early history of Islam to the present have come to be familiar with the name Abu Hurayrah. In speeches and lectures, in Friday khutbahs and seminars, in the books of hadith and sirah, fiqh and ibadah, the name Abu Hurayrah is mentioned in this fashion: "On the authority of Abu Hurayrah, may God be pleased with him who said: The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said...".

Through his prodigious efforts, hundreds of ahadith or sayings of the Prophet were transmitted to later generations. His is the foremost name in the roll of hadith transmitters. Next to him come the names of such companions as Abdullah the son of Umar, Anas the son of Malik, Umm al-Muminin Aishah, Jabir ibn Abdullah and Abu Said al-Khudri all of whom transmitted over a thousand sayings of the Prophet.

Abu Hurayrah became a Muslim at the hands of at-Tufayl ibn Amr the chieftain of the Daws tribe to which he belonged. The Daws lived in the region of Tihamah which stretches along the coast of the Red Sea in southern Arabia. When at-Tufayl returned to his village after meeting the Prophet and becoming a Muslim in the early years of his mission, Abu Hurayrah was one of the first to respond to his call. He was unlike the majority of the Daws who remained stubborn in their old beliefs for a long time.

When at-Tufayl visited Makkah again, Abu Hurayrah accompanied him. There he had the honor and privilege of meeting the noble Prophet who asked him: "What is your name?" "Abdu Shams - Servant of a Sun," he replied.

"Instead, let it be Abdur-Rahman - the Servant of the Beneficent Lord," said the Prophet.

"Yes, Abdur-Rahman (it shall be) O Messenger of God," he replied. However, he continued to be known as Abu Hurayrah, "the kitten man", literally "the father of a kitten" because like the Prophet he was fond of cats and since his childhood often had a cat to play with.

Abu Hurayrah stayed in Tihamah for several years and it was only at the beginning of the seventh year of the Hijrah that he arrived in Madinah with others of his tribe. The Prophet had gone on a campaign to Khaybar. Being destitute, Abu Hurayrah took up his place in the Masjid with other of the Ahl as-Suffah. He was single, without wife or child. With him however was his mother who was still a mushrik. He longed, and prayed, for her to become a Muslim but she adamantly refused. One day, he invited her to have faith in God alone and follow His Prophet but she uttered some words about the Prophet which saddened him greatly. With tears in

his eyes, he went to the noble Prophet who said to him: "What makes you cry, O Abu Hurayrah?" "I have not let up in inviting my mother to Islam but she has always rebuffed me. Today, I invited her again and I heard words from her which I do not like. Do make supplication to God Almighty to make the heart of Abu Hurayrah's mother incline to Islam."

The Prophet responded to Abu Hurayrah's request and prayed for his mother. Abu Hurayrah said: "I went home and found the door closed. I heard the splashing of water and when I tried to enter my mother said: "Stay where you are, O Abu Hurayrah." And after putting on her clothes, she said, "Enter!" I entered and she said: "I testify that there is no god but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is His Servant and His Messenger."

"I returned to the Prophet, peace be on him, weeping with joy just as an hour before I had gone weeping

from sadness and said: "I have good news, O Messenger of Allah. God has responded to your prayer and guided the mother of Abu Hurayrah to Islam."

Abu Hurayrah loved the Prophet a great deal and found favor with him. He was never tired of looking at the Prophet whose face appeared to him as having all the radiance of the sun and he was never tired of listening to him. Often he would praise God for his good fortune and say: "Praise be to God Who has guided Abu Hurayrah to Islam." Praise be to God Who has taught Abu Hurayrah the Quran."

"Praise be to God who has bestowed on Abu Hurayrah the companionship of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace." On reaching Madinah, Abu Hurayrah set his heart on attaining knowledge. Zayd ibn Thabit the notable companion of the Prophet reported: "While Abu Hurayrah and I and another friend of mine were in the Masjid praying to God Almighty and performing dhikr to Him, the Messenger of God appeared. He came towards us and sat among us. We became silent and he said: "Carry on with what you were doing."

"So my friend and I made a supplication to God before Abu Hurayrah did and the Prophet began to say Ameen to our dua.

"Then Abu Hurayrah made a supplication saying: "O Lord, I ask You for what my two companions have asked and I ask You for knowledge which will not be forgotten."

"The Prophet, peace be on him, said: 'Ameen.' "We then said: 'And we ask Allah for knowledge which will not be forgotten, and the Prophet replied: 'The Dawsy youth has asked for this before you.'" "With his formidable memory, Abu Hurayrah set out to memorize in the four years that he spent with the Prophet, the gems of wisdom that emanated from his lips. He realized that he had a great gift and he set about to use it to the full in the service of Islam.

He had free time at his disposal. Unlike many of the Muhajirin he did not busy himself in the market-places, with buying and selling. Unlike many of the Ansar, he had no land to cultivate nor crops to tend. He stayed with the Prophet in Madinah and went with him on journeys and expeditions.

Many companions were amazed at the number of hadith he had memorized and often questioned him on when he had heard a certain hadith and under what circumstances.

Once Marwan ibn al-Hakam wanted to test Abu Hurayrah's power of memory. He sat with him in one room and behind a curtain he placed a scribe, unknown to Abu Hurayrah, and ordered him to write down whatever Abu Hurayrah said. A year later, Marwan called Abu Hurayrah again and asked him to recall the same ahadith which the scribe had recorded. It was found that he had forgotten not a single word.

Abu Hurayrah was concerned to teach and transmit the ahadith he had memorized and knowledge of Islam in general. It is reported that one day he passed through the suq of Madinah and naturally saw people engrossed in the business of buying and selling.

"How feeble are you, O people of Madinah!" he said. "What do you see that is feeble in us, Abu Hurayrah?" they asked. "The inheritance of the Messenger of God, peace be on him, is being distributed and you remain here! Won't you go and take your portion?" "Where is this, O Abu Hurayrah?" they asked. "In the Masjid," he replied.

Quickly they left. Abu Hurayrah waited until they returned. When they saw him, they said: "O Abu Hurayrah, we went to the Masjid and entered and we did not see anything being distributed." "Didn't you see anyone in the Masjid?" he asked. "O yes, we saw some people performing Salat, some people reading the Quran and some people discussing about what is halal and what is haram." "Woe unto you," replied Abu Hurayrah," that is the inheritance of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace."

Abu Hurayrah underwent much hardship and difficulties as a result of his dedicated search for knowledge.

He was often hungry and destitute. He said about himself:

"When I was afflicted with severe hunger, I would go to a companion' of the Prophet and asked him about an ayah of the Quran and (stay with him) learning it so that he would take me with him to his house and give food. "One day, my hunger became so severe that I placed a stone on my stomach. I then sat down in the path of the companions. Abu Bakr passed by and I asked him about an ayah of the Book of God. I only asked him so that he would invite me but he didn't.

"Then Umar ibn al-Khattab passed by me and I asked him about an ayah but he also did not invite me. Then the Messenger of God, peace be on him, passed by and realized that I was hungry and said: "Abu Hurayrah!" "At your command" I replied and followed him until we entered his house. He found a bowl of milk and asked his family: "From where did you get this?" "Someone sent it to you" they replied. He then said to me: "O Abu Hurayrah, go to the Ahl as-Suffah and invite them." Abu Hurayrah did as he was told and they all drank from the milk.

The time came of course when the Muslims were blessed with great wealth and material goodness of every description. Abu Hurayrah eventually got his share of wealth. He had a comfortable home, a wife and child. But this turn of fortune did not change his personality. Neither did he forget his days of destitution. He would "I grew up as an orphan and I emigrated as a poor and indigent person. I used to take food for my stomach from Busrah bint Ghazwan. I served people when they returned from journeys and led their camels when they set out. Then God caused me to marry her (Busrah). So praise be to God who has strengthened his religion and made Abu Hurayrah an imam." (This last statement is a reference to the time when he became governor of Madinah.)

Much of Abu Hurayrah's time would be spent in spiritual exercises and devotion to God. Qiyam al-Layl staying up for the night in prayer and devotion - was a regular practice of his family including his wife and his daughter. He would stay up for a third of the night, his wife for another third and his daughter for a third. In this way, in the house of Abu Hurayrah no hour of the night would pass without ibadah, dhikr and Salat.

During the caliphate of Umar, Umar appointed him as governor of Bahrain. Umar was very scrupulous about the type of persons whom he appointed as governors. He was always concerned that his governors should live simply and frugally and not acquire much wealth even though this was through lawful means.

In Bahrain, Abu Hurayrah became quite rich. Umar

heard of this and recalled him to Madinah. Umar thought

he had acquired his wealth through unlawful means and

questioned him about where and how he had acquired

such a fortune. Abu Hurayrah replied: "From breeding horses and gifts which I received." "Hand it over to the treasury of the Muslims," ordered Umar.

Abu Hurayrah did as he was told and raised his hands

to the heavens and prayed: "O Lord, forgive the Amir al-Muminin." Subsequently, Umar asked him to become governor

once again but he declined. Umar asked him why he

refused and he said: "So that my honor would not be besmirched, my wealth taken and my back beaten." And he added: "And I fear to judge without knowledge and speak

without wisdom."

Throughout his life Abu Hurayrah remained kind and

courteous to his mother. Whenever he wanted to leave

home, he would stand at the door of her room and say: As-salaamu alaykum, yaa ummataah, wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu, peace be on you, mother, and the

mercy and blessings of God." She would reply: "Wa alayka-s salaam, yaa bunayya, wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu - And on you be peace, my son, and the mercy and blessings of God." Often, he would also say: "May God have mercy on you as you cared for me when I was small," and she would reply: "May God have mercy on you as you delivered me from error when I was old." Abu Hurayrah always encouraged other people to be

kind and good to their parents. One day he saw two men walking together, one older than the other. He asked the younger one: "What is this man to you?" "My father," the person replied.

"Don't call him by his name. Don't walk in front of him and don't sit before him," advised Abu Hurayrah.

Muslims owe a debt of gratitude to Abu Hurayrah for helping to preserve and transmit the valuable legacy of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. He died in the year 59 AH when he was seventy-eight years old.

[View Page](#)

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