

Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu)

A Common Household Name

Millions of Muslims from the early history of Islam to the present have come to be familiar with the name Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu). In speeches and lectures, in Friday khutbahs and seminars, in the books of Hadith, seerah and fiqh, the name Abu Hurairah is mentioned in this fashion:

"It has been narrated from Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said..."

Through his remarkable efforts, hundreds of ahadith were transmitted to later generations. His is the foremost name in the roll of Hadith transmitters. Next to him comes the names of such companions as Abdullah ibn Umar, Anas ibn Malik, A'ishah, Jabir ibn Abdullah and Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri, (may Allah Ta`ala be well pleased with all of them) each of whom transmitted over a thousand ahadith of the Prophet.

Acceptance of Islam as a Young Man

Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) became a Muslim as a young man at the hands of At-Tufayl ibn `Amr, the chieftain of the Daws tribe to which he belonged. Abu Hurairah's name was Abdu Shams (Servant of Sun) which changed, after embracing Islam, into Abdur-Rahman (the Servant of the Beneficent Lord). However, he continued to be known as Abu Hurairah, "the kitten man," literally "the father of a kitten" because he was fond of cats and since his childhood often had a cat to play with.

Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) and His Mother

At the beginning of the 7th year of the Hijrah, Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) arrived in Madinah with others of his tribe. The Prophet had gone on a campaign to Khaybar. Being destitute, Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) took up his place in the Prophet's masjid with Ahlus-Suffah (poor Companions who

had no house but the Prophet's masjid). He was single, without wife or child. With him, however, was his mother, who was still non-Muslim. He longed and prayed for her to become a Muslim but she adamantly refused. One day, he invited her to have faith in Allah 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 Hurairah?"**

"I have not let up in inviting my mother to Islam but she has always rejected me. Today, I invited her again and I heard some words from her which I do not like. Do pray to Allah Almighty to make the heart of my mother incline to Islam."

The Prophet responded to Abu Hurairah's request and prayed for his mother. Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) 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, Abu Hurairah." 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 and blessings be upon him) weeping with joy just as an hour before I had gone weeping from sadness and said, 'I have good news, Messenger of Allah. Allah has responded to your prayer and guided the mother of Abu Hurairah to Islam.'"

Four Years of Companionship

With his incredible memory, Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) set out to memorize in the four short 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 Muhajirun (immigrant companions to Madinah) he did not busy himself in the market-places with buying and selling. Unlike many of the Ansar (the Companions from Madinah), 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 ahadith he had memorized and often questioned him on when he had heard a certain hadith and under what circumstances.

Amazing Memory of Abu Hurairah

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

Undergoing Hardships

Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) underwent much hardship and difficulties as a result of his 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 (peace and blessings be upon him) and ask him about a verse of the Qur'an and (stay with him) learning it so that he would take me with him to his house and give me 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 a verse of the Book of Allah. 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 a verse but he also did not invite me. Then the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) passed by and realized that I was hungry and said, "**Abu Hurairah!**"

"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, **"Abu Hurairah, go to the Ahl as-Suffah and invite them."**

Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) did as he was told and they all drank from the milk. He thought to himself that there might be none left for him after all the companions had drunk from that one bowl.

The Prophet (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) said: "Only you and me are left." So the Prophet handed the bowl to Abu Hurairah and told him to drink. So he drank and drank until he could drink no more. The Prophet said, "Drink more." So again he drank to his fill. The Prophet said, "Drink more." Abu Hurairah said, "O Prophet of Allah, I do not have any more room!" So the Prophet took the bowl and finished it.

The Excellent Character of Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu)

Throughout his life, Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) remained kind and courteous to his mother. Whenever he wanted to leave home, he would stand at the door of her room and say, "Peace be on you, mother, and the mercy and blessings of Allah." She would reply, "And on you be peace, my son, and the mercy and blessings of Allah." Often he would also say, "May Allah have mercy on you as you cared for me when I was small," and she would reply, "May Allah have mercy on you as you delivered me from error when I was old." Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) 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 Hurairah.

Muslims owe a debt of gratitude to Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) for helping to preserve and transmit the valuable legacy of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). Abu Hurairah (radhiAllahu anhu) died in the 59th year of Hijrah when he was 78 years old. May Allah Ta`ala be pleased with him.

