

Dar al-Turath al-Islami

The 'Our Forgotten Stars' series

Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه

04/06/2013

Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه is one of the most famous companions of the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم. His name is synonymous with prophetic tradition (hadith) and like all the companions, he is known to have been extremely trustworthy, just and completely reliable. He was an outstanding individual and his life speaks of sacrifice, devotion and love for the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم and for the religion of Islam.

- **The meaning of Abu Hurairah** - 'the father of a kitten'

What is famously narrated regarding this honorific is that he said: 'I found it (the kitten) when herding sheep for my family and used to keep it in my sleeve. Since then, I have been called by that name.' (at-Tirmidhi and others)

- **His name:** Abdur-Rahman bin Sakhr ad-Dowski
- **Tribe** - he was from the tribe of Dows in Yemen

His name in Jahiliyyah - 'Abd Shams (it is reported that the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم named him Abdur-Rahman after he embraced Islam.

His mother's name - Maimunah bint Sabih

He is reported to have said: "I grew up as an orphan and I migrated as a poor man." (Siyar A'lam an-Nubala')

- **He embraced Islam in the 7th year after the Hijrah** just after the *Khaibar* expedition. He was in his thirties and he moved around with the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم wherever he went. He followed the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to each of his homes, serving him, fighting by his side, performing the pilgrimage with him and making sure that he prayed all his prayers behind him. (Siyar A'lam an-Nubala')

It is generally said that he accompanied the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam) for 3 years (Musnad Ahmad) but from the expedition of *Khaibar* (Muharram 7H.) until the Prophet's demise was a period of four years and more.

- He had broad shoulders, was fair in complexion and had a reddish beard.

His worship, spirituality and character-

- He pledged his allegiance to the Messenger ﷺ when he embraced Islam. His servant, whom he had lost along the way to Medinah, reappeared and presented himself before them. The Messenger ﷺ asked him: 'Is this your servant, Abu Hurairah?' He replied in the affirmative and added: "He is now free for the sake of Allah!" (al-Bukhari)
- His Mizwad (container) and the dates- He said: 'I came to the Messenger ﷺ with some dates and said: 'O Messenger of Allah ﷺ, pray for me that they be blessed.' He ﷺ then held them, prayed for barakah and told me to place them in a container, to place only my hand in them whenever I needed some and not to spread them out in the open.' Abu Hurairah then said that he ate and shared from it until Uthman's caliphate ☪ and when Uthman ☪ was killed, it stopped. (Ahmad and at-Tirmidhi)

The following narrations are all found in the book *Siyar A'lam an-Nubala'*

- Abu 'Uthman an-Nahdi reports: 'I hosted Abu Hurairah and his family for seven days. It was him, his wife and a servant. They used to divide the night amongst themselves in prayer taking turns between sleeping and praying.
- He had the habit of fasting every Monday and Thursday.
- He used to recite twelve thousand *Tasbeehas* daily. (Musannaf ibn Abi Shaibah as well)
- His daily habit- Maymun bin Maisurah narrates that Abu Hurairah ☪ had the habit of calling out loud every morning: 'The night has gone and the day has come and the family of the pharaoh have been presented to the fire!' (based on the Quranic verse 40:46) He would do so in the evening as well and no-one would hear him except that they would seek protection from the fire.
- There were times when he was overwhelmed with emotion whenever he narrated from the Messenger ﷺ. He would say: "My bosom friend or the Prophet of Allah, Abul Qasim ﷺ has said" and he would start to cry.
- He was once found making Takbir outside in the dark of the night. When he was asked concerning it, he said: "Out of gratitude to Allah!" They asked him for what and he replied: "I was a slave for Busrah bint Ghazwan and her family bearing loads for them and they would see to my food. Wherever they went I had to lead them and when they stopped I had to serve them. Allah has granted me to marry her so she has become my wife."
- Umar ☪ appoint him governor of Bahrain during his Caliphate. He spent some time there and later refused the position. When Umar ☪ inquired as to why he refused, he said: "I fear speaking without knowledge, judging without

compassion, that my back be beaten, that my livelihood be snatched from me and that my honour be attacked.”

- Tha'labah bin Abi Malik reported that Abu Hurairah ؓ used to enter the market place carrying a load of wood on his back at the time when he was the Khalifah of Marwan bin 'Abd al-Hakam and he would say: “Make way for the Amir.”
- Remember the incident with the Jinn when he was made in charge of caring for the dates of Sadaqah. (as-Sunan al-Kubra of al-Imam an-Nasa'i)

He was amongst the people or companions of the *Suffah* (Ahl or *Ashab as-Suffah*) - the companions, seated on a raised platform in *al-Masjid an-Nabawi*, who **dedicated themselves to worship and the attainment of knowledge.**

The Messenger (sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam) would pass dates, milk and other food items on to the companions of the *Suffah* himself whenever he was able to.

Abu Hurairah ؓ **sacrificed a lot** and experienced extreme periods of hunger in his quest for knowledge.

All his efforts proved fruitful as he alone has narrated **more than five thousand prophet narrations/ Ahadith.**

People have an issue with the fact that he has narrated the most prophetic narrations from amongst the companions despite the short period of his companionship.

This has always been the case as he himself states that there were those after the Prophet's demise (sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam) who inquired as to how this was possible.

He stated that when the *Muhajirun* and *Ansar* were either busy with their cattle and sheep or in the market places, he was in the company of the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam). He was present when they were absent and revising when they may have forgotten. When not in the Prophets company, he would seat himself amongst the poor people of the *Suffah*. (al-Bukhari, Muslim and others) He said: ‘What is my sin (i.e. what is the problem) if I have memorised and they have forgotten?’(Siyar)

Talhah bin 'Ubaidillah ؓ said: ‘We were owners of homes, cattle and businesses and only used to go to the Messenger ؐ at the two ends of the day. Whilst he (Abu Hurairah) was one of the poor (amongst us) and a guest sitting at the door of the Messenger ؐ, with his hand in his hand. I have no doubt that he heard what we have not...’(Siyar)

Consider also the following-

1. The Arabs, before the advent of Islam, were an unlettered nation. They **were conditioned to memorise and developed this skill over time**. This is evident in their poetry, history and knowledge of genealogy. At the advent of Islam, they were ready to receive and preserve its message by memory. Abu Hurairah ؓ was from amongst them and it should therefore not be strange that he was able to memorise and preserve to the level which he did.

2. **Allah has guaranteed the preservation of his Prophet's *Sunnah* ﷺ.**

'Verily, We have revealed the Dhikr and we are indeed its protectors.' (15:9) 'And we have revealed the Dhikr to you so that you may clarify to mankind what was revealed to them...' (16:44) 'And he (the Prophet) does not utter (anything) from desire. It is nothing but revelation conveyed to him.' (53:3/4)

Part of the manner of preservation - a) Companions like Abu Hurairah ؓ who were granted the ability to preserve his utterances and practices. b) Scholars with the wisdom, intelligence and insight to analyse, verify and authenticate these utterances as conveyed by later generations via their chains of narrators.

3. **His outstanding memory was enhanced as a result of a prophetic miracle-**

The Prophet (Sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam) once announced that whosoever was to spread out his shawl, allow him to recite some words on it and then wrap himself with the shawl would be able to preserve whatever the Prophet was to say. Abu Hurairah did this and reports that it indeed happened. From that time he never ever forgot anything uttered by the Messenger (sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam) (al-Bukhari, Muslim). Remember also the incident reported by Zaid bin Thabit ؓ of the prayer amongst the three companions and the Messengers ﷺ support of their requests and the prayer of Abu Hurairah ؓ. (A narration reported by al-Imam al-Hakim, an-Nasa'i and at-Tabrani in al-Mu'jam al-Kabir)

4. **He had a rigorous routine.** He did not take any Quranic instruction from the Messenger ﷺ. All that he knew of the Holy Quran, he learnt from Ubaiy bin Ka'b ؓ. He would therefore only focus on the prophetic utterances and practices with the Messenger ﷺ himself. He divided his nights into three- the first third was for the recitation of the Holy Quran, the second for sleep and the last was for revision of all the Ahadith that he knew. (Ghayah an-Nihayah)

5. **The motivational atmosphere in the presence of the Messenger ﷺ was unlike any other.** Its spirituality and blessings are unmatched. The companions were affected and spurred on by this. As a result, Zaid bin Thabit was able to learn the Syriac language in only seventeen days! This was by the Prophet's request ﷺ (at-Tirmidhi, Ahmad, al-Baihaqi in as-Sunan al-Kubra, at-Tabrani in al-Mu'jam al-Kabir and others). It should therefore, once again, not be surprising that Abu Hurairah ؓ was able to accomplish what he had.

6. **We easily accept modern day memorisation feats,** people with eidetic memories, the existence of Griots in West Africa and our own exposure to non-Arabic speaking individuals memorising the Holy Quran.

7. One should remember that **there were a lot of companions** (like 'Umar ؓ) **who were hesitant to narrate from the Prophet ﷺ only for fear of doing so incorrectly.** Abu Hurairah ؓ used to ask him ﷺ a lot of questions which others did not ask and he based his willingness to convey all that he knew on the verse of the Holy Quran where the Almighty says: 'Verily, those who conceal what We have revealed of the clear signs and guidance after We have clarified it, those are (the ones) who Allah curses and whom all who are able to curse will curse. Except those who repent, rectify (the situation) and clarify, for those are (the ones) who I turned toward and I am the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.' (2:159/60) Abdullah bin 'Umar ؓ was asked: 'Do you reject anything that Abu Hurairah has narrated?' He replied: 'No! But he was brave (to narrate) whilst we have shown cowardice.' (Siyar)

8. Being from the *Ahlu-s-Suffah* and **not eating to his fill has its benefits** in that his **brain was not deprived from oxygen** due to an overload of food requiring digestion. This was his constant state as opposed to us who fill our bellies and attempt to learn or memorise. A filled belly results in most of the body's oxygen being used for digestion and as a result we become sleepy and lethargic. There was very little that distracted him. Consider his conversation with Sayyidah 'Aishah ؓ when she asked about his narrative abilities, he answered: 'There was no mirror, *Mikhlah* (instrument used to apply Kuhl to the eyes) or oil (for hair and face, etc) that distracted or occupied me from him ﷺ.' (Siyar)

His relationship with the Messenger ﷺ was a special one-

He said: ‘I preserved two containers of knowledge from the Messenger ﷺ. As for the one, I have shared it with people. As for the other, if I were to share it, my neck may be cut.’ (al-Bukhari)

Abu az-Zu’aiza’ah reported that: ‘Marwan bin al-Hakam summoned Abu Hurairah ؓ. He started asking him about some Ahadith and had placed me behind the seat to write all that Abu Hurairah was narrating. A year later, he summoned him again and asked him the exact same questions. Abu Hurairah ؓ did not increase anything that he had previously said and neither did he decrease. He also never mixed any of the words at all.’ (Siyar A’lam an-Nubala’)

He used to say: ‘There is none amongst the companions who have more Ahadith from the Messenger ﷺ than me except for ‘Abdullah bin ‘Amr for he used to write and I did not. (al-Bukhari)

What others have said about him-

Ubaiy bin Ka’b ؓ said: “Abu Hurairah ؓ was more brave than us. He would ask the Prophet ﷺ that which we would never ask him.”

Ash’ath bin Sulaim reports from his father that he entered Madinah and met with Abu Ayyub al-Ansari ؓ and found him to be narrating from Abu Hurairah narrating from the Messenger ﷺ. He said: ‘I then said to him: ‘You are a companion of the Messenger ﷺ and you narrate from Abu Hurairah ؓ? He then answered: ‘Verily he has heard a lot and for me to narrate from him is more beloved to me than narrating directly from the messenger ﷺ.’

Abdullah bin ‘Abbas ؓ used to address him and say: “Give us your *Fatwa* (legal ruling) O Abu Hurairah!”

Al-Imam ash-Shafi’i said: ‘Abu Hurairah had the best memory (was the best at preserving) from amongst the narrators of hadith in his generation. (Siyar)

His demise

Ibn al-Mubarak narrates via a chain of authentic narrators that Abu Hurairah ؓ was found crying on his death bed and was asked as to why he was crying. He answered: “I am not crying over this Dunya of yours but over the length of my journey to come and my lack of provision. I am soon to ascend and my descent is either to a garden or to fire and I have no idea as to which I will be taken!”

He was also heard saying on his deathbed: “O Allah, I would love to meet You so please love to meet me.”

He also made the dua: “O Allah, do not let me reach the 60th year.” And Allah took him away the year before it.

He passed away at the age of seventy-eight and was buried in al-Baqi’ in the City of the Prophet ﷺ’.

Our love for him and his mother

He came to the Messenger ﷺ one day complaining that his mother did not want to embrace Islam and that on that particular day she spoke negatively in regard to the Messenger ﷺ. He conveyed this and he was crying. He requested the Messenger ﷺ to pray for his mother that she be guided. The Messenger ﷺ raised his hands and said: “O Allah, guide the mother of Abu Hurairah.”

Abu Hurairah ؓ raced home to give her the tidings of the Messengers prayer and found the door locked. He heard water splashing inside and his mother called out to him: ‘Stay where you are, Abu Hurairah!’ He waited and she then came out after having clothed herself properly saying: ‘I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger ﷺ!’ “

Abu Hurairah ؓ was overjoyed and ran to the Messenger ﷺ crying once again. This time his tears were of joy informing him that his prayer was answered. He then asked the Messenger ﷺ to pray that he and his mother be loved by the believing males and females. The Messenger ﷺ then prayed: ‘O Allah, make this servant of Yours and his mother loved by every believing male and female.’ (Muslim)

May the Almighty be pleased with him.