

# Preservation of Sunnah (part 3 of 4)

**Description:** An introduction to the collection of *hadith*, its preservation and transmission. Part 3: Second stage in the collection of *hadith* and Sahifah of Hammam ibn Munabbih.

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Category: Lessons > [Prophet Muhammad](#) > [Hadith and Sunnah](#)

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## Prerequisite

- Beginners Guide to Hadith & Sunnah.

## Objectives

- Appreciate the efforts and zeal of the companions in preserving and transmitting the *Sunnah*.
- Appreciate traveling in search for *hadith* by early Muslims.
- Understand the significance of *Sahifah* of Hummam ibn Munabbih in conclusively proving the written preservation of *Sunnah* from the earliest times.

## Arabic Terms

- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Hadith* - (plural - *ahadith*) is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad.
- *Fiqh* - Islamic jurisprudence.

## Second Stage in Collection of *Hadith*

With the death of the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, the work of the preservation of *Sunnah* and of the collection of *hadith* entered the second stage.

The Companions imparted knowledge because they felt that people needed it, and were very well aware of the sin of hiding knowledge. Hence, they dedicated much of their time to teaching regularly. To the companions of the Prophet, the religion which he had brought was a priceless jewel; it was a thing which they valued above everything else in the world. For its sake they had given up their relations, their business and their very homes; to defend it they had laid down their very lives; to carry this divine blessing, this

greatest gift of God, to other people was the very object of their lives. Hence a dissemination of its knowledge was their first and foremost concern. In addition to this, the Prophet had laid the duty, on those who saw him and listened to his words, of carrying what they saw and heard to those who came after him. Indeed they were faithful to the great charge which was laid on them.

After the death of the Prophet, his Companions took the mission of carrying the message of Islam to the farthest corners of the world. Whichever direction they went, and to whichever country they went, they carried the Quran and the *Sunnah*. As a result, within a quarter of a century after the noble Prophet's death, the Companions carried the light of Islam to Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Libya. Consequently, those Companions carried the knowledge of the *Sunnah* with them. Hence, not all the knowledge of *Sunnah* remained in Medina. Some Companions who went to Iraq (like Abdullah ibn Masud) or Egypt (like 'Amr Ibn al-Aas) took the knowledge of the *Sunnah* with him. The Companions entrusted the knowledge of *Sunnah* to their students before their death.

Everyone of them, even if he had the knowledge of one incident relating to the Prophet's life, deemed it his duty to deliver it to others. Individuals such as Abu Hurairah, Aisha, 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr, Anas ibn Malik and many others who had made the preservation of *Sunnah* the purpose of their lives, had become focal agents to whom people resorted from different quarters of the Islamic world as a source for their knowledge of the Prophet and his religion.

Abu Hurairah alone had eight hundred disciples. Aisha's house as well was resorted to by hundreds of ardent pupils. The reputation of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas was equally great, and, despite his young age, he had a foremost place among the counselors of 'Umar on account of his knowledge of the Quran and the *Sunnah*. Thus a large number of the companions of the Prophet became the mediums of the dissemination for religious learning.

The zeal of the new generation for the possession of religious knowledge was such that students would travel from one place to another to complete their knowledge of the *Sunnah* and verify the *hadith* of the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him. Some of them would travel long distances to obtain first-hand information about a single *hadith*. For instance, Jabir ibn 'Abdullah traveled from Medina to Syria for the sake of one *hadith*. It was a month's journey, as Jabir himself states.<sup>[1]</sup> Another Companion, Abu Ayoub, traveled all the way to Egypt to ask Uqba bin Amr about a certain *hadith*. He told Uqba that only he and Uqba were left who had heard that particular *hadith* from the Prophet. After hearing the *hadith*, his business was completed in Egypt and he returned to Medina. Saeed ibn Musayyab is reported to have said that he used to travel for days and nights in search of a single *hadith*. Another companion of the Prophet is said to have undertaken a journey to Egypt for the sake of one *hadith*. The zeal of the next generation was equally great. Abul 'Aliya is reported to have said: "We heard of a *hadith* about the Prophet, but we were not satisfied until we went to the companion concerned in person and heard it from him directly."

## Writing of *Hadith: Sahifah* of Hammam ibn Munabbih

It is one of the earliest collections of *hadith*. The written collection of *hadith* of the Companion Abu Hurairah was dictated to his student Hammam. Abu Hurairah himself used to divide the night into 3 parts: one third for sleep, one third for prayer, and one third for recollection of the *hadith* of the Prophet. Since Abu Hurairah died some 48 years after the Prophet (58 A.H.) this *Sahifah* must have been dictated to Hammam sometime before that. Hammam died in 101 A.H. Hammam read these *hadith* to his student Ma'mar (d. 113 A.H.). Ma'mar read it to Abdur-Razzaq ibn Hammam, who transmitted it to two of his students: Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Yusuf al-Sulami.

Imam Ahmad incorporated this entire work, except two *hadith* in his Musnad in almost exactly the same order as they were recorded in *Sahifah*, whereas Yusuf al-Sulami continued to pass on the entire work without amalgamating it into a larger one. It was continually passed on until the 9th century, which is the date of the Berlin manuscript, one of the 4 manuscripts of this work that still exist today.

Imam Ahmad's Musnad is arranged according to the Companion who narrated the *hadith*, it is very easy to find all the *hadith* from Hammam on the authority of Abu Hurairah. Other books, where the *hadith* are arranged according to *fiqh* topics, also incorporate a great deal of the *Sahifa*. Out of the 137 *hadith* in the *Sahifa* of Hammam:

29 are recorded by both Bukhari and Muslim,

22 others are recorded by Bukhari only,

48 others are recorded by Muslim only.

So 99 out of 137 *hadith* can be found in Bukhari and Muslim alone. When one studies the different collections of *hadith* that have been published one sees that the meanings - actually the wordings - of the *hadith* have not been changed from the time of Abu Hurairah to the time of Al-Bukhari (194-256 A.H.). Hamidullah comments:

“Supposing Al-Bukhari cites a *Hadith* on the authority of the above chain of sources (Ahmad - Abdur-Razzak - Mamar - Hammam - Abu Hurairah). So long as these older sources were not available, a skeptic was certainly entitled to harbor doubts and say that perhaps Al-Bukhari had not told the truth, but simply forged either the chain or the contents of both. But now that all the earlier works are at our disposal, there is no possibility of imagining that Al-Bukhari has mentioned anything by way of forging it, or narrating anything heard from forgers... with the discovery in recent times of these earlier works, it is possible for us to verify the truthfulness of each. One is forced to recognize them all as solidly genuine since these traditions have been transmitted not only by Abu Hurairah, but also, independently of him, by other companions of the Prophet, and in each case the chain or isnad has been different. Even after the lapse of more than 13 centuries, there has not crept in a single alteration in the text of the collection. If not for the risk of boring the reader, it would have been easy to show in proper detail, how, in addition to Abu Hurairah, each of the traditions contained in the *sahifah* of Hammam, has been related by various

other Companions. These traditions could never have been forged in the 3rd or 4th century.”[2]

comment

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Endnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari* #???

[2] *Sahifah Hammam ibn Munabbih*, by Muhammad Hamidullah, pp. 79-81.

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