

The Companions of Prophet Muhammad: Abu Hurayrah

Description: A brief biography of the sahabi known as Abu Hurayrah.

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Objectives:

- To understand that everybody has unique and special gifts.
- To encourage Muslims to use their gifts to benefit Islam and humankind.

Arabic Terms:

- *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 and his companions.
- *Hijrah* - the act of migration from one place to another. In Islam, the Hijrah refers to the Muslims migrating from Mecca to Medina and also marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.
- *Kunya* - it is often the first part of an Arabic name, in theory it refers to the bearer's first-born son or daughter. By extension, it may also have hypothetical or metaphorical references, e.g. a nickname, without literally referring to a son or a daughter. It is expressed with the use of abu or umm, e.g. Umm Muhammad means the mother of Muhammad.
- *Masjid* - the Arabic term for mosque.
- *Sadaqah* - voluntary charity.
- *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.
- *Ummah* - Refers to the whole Muslim community, irrespective of colour, race, language or nationality.

Abu Hurayrah is remembered by many as the man who memorized and transmitted a large number of *ahadith*. While that is indeed a noble trait and Muslims owe him a debt of gratitude for passing on the wealth of the *Sunnah* to the next generation, Abu Hurayrah was much more than a man with a prolific memory.



Abu Hurayrah loved kittens and cats! He was devoted to his mother and even more devoted to Allah and His messenger. He was a member of the group known as Ahl as-Suffah and in the reign of Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab he was appointed governor of Bahrain. Abu Hurayrah died in the year 681 CE at the age of seventy-eight.

Abu Hurayrah was born a member of the Yemeni tribe of Daws from the area known as Tihamah. He embraced Islam at the invitation of the tribe's chieftain and to his credit was one of the first of his tribe to do so. Seven years after the *Hijrah* he went to Madina with a small delegation and met Prophet Muhammad. This was the beginning of a lifelong relationship, a relationship that Muslims today continue to benefit from.

The name Abu Hurayrah was not the name this extraordinary man was given at birth, it was his *kunya*, and means 'father of kitten'. Abu Hurayrah loved cats and kittens very much. The two had a symbiotic relationship of such a degree that even when Prophet Muhammad changed his birth name from Abd ash-Shams to Abd ar-Rahman, the *kunya* remained. The slave of the sun (Abd ash-Shams) became the slave of the Most Merciful (Abd ar-Rahman) and he was devoted to his Prophet. He spent as much time as possible in his company and from the beginning tried to remember every word he spoke.

It is estimated that Abu Hurayrah narrated approximately 5,375 *ahadith*. He has been described as having a phenomenal memory and the reason why can be found in *ahadith*. I (Abu Hurayrah) said to Allah's Messenger "I hear many narrations from you but I forget them." Allah's Messenger said, "Spread your garment." I did accordingly and then he moved his hands as if filling them with something and emptied them in my garment and then said, "Take and wrap this sheet over your body." I did it and after that I never forgot a thing.[\[1\]](#)

When Abu Hurayrah decided to stay in Medina to be close to the Prophet he became a member of a group known as Ahl as-Suffah, the people of the bench. These were the poor and impoverished who took up residence in the *masjid*, until time and circumstance allowed them to be able to support themselves. In the meantime they relied on *sadaqah* and Prophet Muhammad himself would send any *sadaqah* he received to them, as well as any gifts he received. Most, like Abu Hurayrah, were destitute with little more than the clothes on their backs. Abu Hurayrah himself has reported how he lay on the ground or tied a stone to his stomach to quell intense hunger pains.

When Abu Hurayrah arrived in Medina he had his mother with him. He was devoted to her and it saddened him every day that she had chosen to reject the call of Islam. One day

after a particular sad incident in which Abu Hurayrah's mother had insulted the Prophet, he approached Prophet Muhammad with tears in his eyes. Prophet Muhammad asked what made him weep and he replied, "I have not let up in inviting my mother to Islam but she always rebuffed me. Today, I invited her again and I heard words from her I am ashamed of. Please make supplication to Allah Almighty to make her heart incline to Islam."

The Prophet prayed for Abu Hurayrah's mother. Abu Hurayrah concluded his story saying, "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.' Then she said, 'Enter!' I entered and she said, 'I testify that there is no deity but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is His Servant and His Messenger.'"

Abu Hurayrah always encouraged others to be kind and good to their parents. One day he saw two men walking together and enquired of the younger one, "Who is this man to you?" to which the young man replied, "He is my father". Abu Hurayrah advised him by saying, "Do not call him by his name, do not walk in front of him, and do not seat yourself before he does".

When Abu Hurayrah looked back at his life he would say that he witnessed three great tragedies; the death of Prophet Muhammad, the murder of Uthman and the disappearance of the *mizwad*. When asked what the *mizwad* was, he said that on one of the Prophet's excursions he asked if anyone had any food. Someone said he had a *mizwad*, a small bag for keeping provisions and in it were some dates. The Prophet asked for the *mizwad*, he supplicated upon the dates and distributed them to everyone present. Abu Hurayrah explained that he ate from his portion during the lifetime of the Prophet and throughout the caliphates of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman.[\[2\]](#)

Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab appointed Abu Hurayrah as governor of Bahrain but after a short period of time he retired and returned to Medina where he lived out the remainder of his life in seclusion. Times were changing and Abu Hurayrah preferred to live an ascetic life remembering Allah and remembering the birth of the Muslim *Ummah*.

When Abu Hurayrah took the gift that Allah gave him and used it for the benefit of Islam, little did he realize that more than a billion Muslims would one day say his name whenever they were learning about the life and times of Prophet Muhammad and the religion of Islam. "On the authority of Abu Hurayrah, who said, the Messenger of Allah said..." This is a phrase used by all of us at one time or another. The life of Abu Hurayrah is testament to the fact that Allah bestows upon us the abilities and gifts we need to live in this world in the very best way, and to fulfill our destiny.

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[\[2\]](#) Related by al-Baihaqi and Qadi 'Iyad in his *Shifa*

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