

The Difficulty of Narrating by Memory

http://www.muftisays.com/blog/Seifeddine-M/551_09-11-2010/the-difficulty-of-narrating-by-memory.html

On one occasion Makhul asked Wāthila ibn al-Asqa to narrate a hadith that he heard from Allah's Messenger (saw) without adding or subtracting any words and without a doubt or error in the text of the hadith. Wāthila asked him, **"Does any one of you know the Qur'an by heart?"** Makhūl replied, **"We do not know the Qur'an so well that we would not make any mistakes whatsoever."** Upon this Wathila commented, **"The Holy Qur'an is written out and preserved in its original form. In spite of this, you tend to make errors in the letter "fa" and "wāw" (i.e. they are sometimes interchanged), etc. So how can I narrate a hadith in the manner you have requested? In fact, some of the hadiths I have only heard once. When it comes to narrating the hadiths of Allah's Messenger (saw) consider the narration of the meaning as sufficient (and do not be overly concerned with the actual text)."**

Waki' (ra) said, **"If there were no (allowance for) narrating the meaning of the hadiths instead of the actual text, the entire nation of Muslims would have been destroyed."**

According to Ibn al-Arabi, narrating the meaning of the hadiths rather than their text was permissible only for the Companions, and not for anybody else. However, other hadith scholars [muhaddithin] like Qasim ibn Muhammad, Ibn Sirin, Zuhri, Ibrāhim (al-Nakh'ay), Sha'bi, among others have permitted this for all narrators, albeit with certain conditions.

'This was one of the main reasons why a great multitude of the Followers [tabi'in] abstained from attributing a hadith directly to the Messenger of Allah (saw). Instead, they used to narrate the hadith in the form of an injunction.

This is one the chief reasons (among others) why Imam Abū Hanifa (ra) refrained from attributing the hadiths directly to Allah's Messenger (saw) , along with the fact that it is dangerous to attribute (a hadith) directly to him. It is possible that in narrating the meaning instead of the actual text, one may attribute something incorrectly to him and consequently become liable to severe punishment.